

Social Change and Conflict Transformation

Edited by
David Bloomfield, Martina Fischer & Beatrix Schmelzle

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Berghof
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Conflict Management
Konfliktbearbeitung

Berghof Handbook
Dialogue Series

Edited by David Bloomfield, Martina
Fischer and Beatrix Schmelzle

Social Change and Conflict Transformation

No. 5

About the Berghof Handbook Dialogue Series:

The Berghof Dialogue Series is an offshoot of the Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation. Each topic in the series is chosen because it is particularly relevant to societies in conflict and the practice of conflict transformation, and because it raises important issues at the present time. In each dialogue, practitioners and scholars critically engage and debate in light of their experience. Typically, a Dialogue includes one lead article from key experts, and four commentaries from practitioners and others. Rather than presenting a single analysis, these practitioner-scholar dialogues stimulate debate, integrating different perspectives, challenging prevailing views, comparing research findings with experiences and insights on the ground. Importantly, Dialogues, as works of broad relevance, are also distributed in print version. We invite readers to respond to the papers (as to all articles). Interesting and original contributions can be added to the web version of the Dialogue.

The editors have initiated up to now four dialogues on **Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA)**, **Security Sector Reform (SSR)**, **Transforming War Economies** and **New Trends in PCIA**.

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Introduction

Approaching Social Change

Beatrix Schmelzle & David Bloomfield

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Conflict transformation can be defined as “... actions and processes which seek to alter the various characteristics and manifestations of 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.” (Austin et al. 2004, 464/465.) In short, it has the theme of “social change” written all over it.

In 2005, a seminar at the Berghof Research Center brought together experts to discuss the state of the art in conflict transformation theory and practice, especially as it relates to social change theories.

“Can we,” we asked ourselves, in the wake of the seminar, “develop a model of social change that usefully reflects, explains and assists the massive and complex challenge of making peace in violent conflicts?” (Dudouet et al. 2006, 44). The intensive debates during this seminar also brought home two main intellectual challenges: First, to continuously question and test the basic assumptions and values of our approaches. And second, to interrogate closely the building blocks of our field that derive mostly from inter-personal and inter-group conflict and environments of roughly symmetric power constellations – yet are increasingly transferred to the international realm and tested in situations of asymmetric conflict. It is in this context that we present this latest issue of the Berghof Handbook Dialogue Series which explores conflict transformers’ approaches to social change.

When we first embarked on this journey, the list of questions appeared endless; the subject matter seemed to have no boundaries. We started with the basics: What scholarly and practice-orientated writing was out there that could help us understand the ways in which change leads to the formation of (violent)

conflict? How could we grapple with the idea that conflict is an opportunity for change? Was there, in particular, any thinking from the field of systemic theory and system dynamics that could help us formulate more appropriate hypotheses about the ways in which changes in one part of a conflict system would reverberate and have consequences in other parts of the system? What could be learned about the entry points, appropriate means and an appropriate timing/sequencing of measures to create change that would help transform violent conflict? We went on to more specific queries: In the context of research projects underway at both the Berghof Research Center and the Berghof Foundation for Peace Support – on understanding and modelling the transition from violence to peace, and on further developing the *systemic* approach to conflict transformation – it seemed particularly important to understand what agents or driving forces of change exist and operate in situations of violent conflict. What could we glean from the literature and from the experience of practitioners about such agents of peaceful change? Could we generalise about their characteristics? About environments and structural preconditions that would be conducive to their impact? What could we learn about useful steps of engagement and support provided by third-party interveners?

We found that within both scholarly inquiry and concrete conflict transformation interventions there were a lot more open questions than guiding answers. This is echoed in the remark of Christopher Mitchell, the lead voice in this Dialogue, that “the literature dealing *systematically* with the connections between change and conflict is hardly extensive, and that directly dealing with *precise* relationships between change and conflict resolution is even more sparse” (Mitchell in this Dialogue, 13, emphasis added). It is also reflected in the assessment of Cheyanne Church and Julie Shouldice that “practitioners’ beliefs about change, which are rarely articulated, underpin key decision-making processes in the development of conflict resolution interventions. Beyond this assertion, however, there [is] minimal discussion about defining the concept... [There are] no dominant typologies that lay out the current theories of change in this field and virtually nothing [is] available at present that purports to define, describe or test such theories” (Church and Shouldice 2003, 30 and 38).

This Berghof Dialogue therefore sets out to assess what we have learned about the intricate relationship between conflict and change, specifically in the context of protracted, ethnopolitical conflict. We have gathered scholars and practitioners in the field to help us work through the current state of affairs and to point to areas of tension and useful next steps in approaching social change in situations of violent conflict. As is customary for the Berghof Handbook Dialogues, we start with a lead article that delineates the current debate and points out pressing questions for both research and practice. We follow that with a diverse set of responses on the concepts, ideas and challenges raised from specific scholarly and practical viewpoints. The Dialogue ends with a brief, concluding reflection by the lead author.

Christopher Mitchell accepted the difficult task of systematising current knowledge on change, conflict and conflict resolution in our lead article. Few would be better positioned to do so: Mitchell is Professor Emeritus of Conflict Analysis and Resolution at the Institute of Conflict Analysis and Resolution (ICAR) of George Mason University in Virginia, USA. The British academic has, over a career that spans more than 40 years, been part of pioneering approaches to conflict resolution and remains one of the most rigorous scholars in the field, who may respectfully be called a “veteran conflict analyst” (Ed Garcia in this Dialogue, 41). Mitchell sets out to make “a small contribution to the development of a general theory of change and conflict – or, more particularly, conflict resolution” and to propose “a starting point for the development of a set of

theories of conflict dynamics as well as a practical set of guidelines concerning modes and timing of ‘resolutionary’ interventions” (Mitchell in this Dialogue, 14). He does so in a stimulating enquiry that explores existing literature along five interrelated questions, in answer to which he is “attempting to produce some general lessons” (ibid., 18):

- 1) What sorts of change create conflict?
- 2) What sorts of change exacerbate conflict?
- 3) What sorts of change diminish the intensity of conflict?
- 4) What sorts of change help to bring about the resolution or transformation of conflict?, and
- 5) What are some of the obstacles to change that themselves need changing before a protracted conflict can begin to move towards a resolution? Who might be able to bring about needed changes, and how?

Focal points of his discussion are the clarification of escalation and de-escalation dynamics, the mechanism of “entrapment” as a major obstacle to change, a systematisation of opportunities to reach moments of “resolutionary change” – prominent among them the idea of creating a learning environment and the distinction between tractable and intractable dimensions – and the elaboration of a set of roles for change agents tailored to the different phases of a violent conflict. He concludes with the proposition that “some clear, detailed and empirically supported answers to three key questions would be of enormous practical help” in providing “practical guidance to anyone seeking to initiate or reinforce resolutionary change processes” (ibid., 32/33). The questions that practitioners and scholars need to explore in Mitchell’s opinion are concerned with *when and how to act*:

- 1) What changes in a conflict will clearly indicate that the adversaries in a protracted conflict are likely to be receptive to suggestions about alternative, nonviolent methods of fulfilling their interests and entering into a new relationship with their adversary?
- 2) How might one best carry out a systematic analysis so as to distinguish those factors which are tractable, in the short or even medium term and given available time and resources, from those which are inherently intractable, so that efforts to change them are most unlikely to succeed?
- 3) If, in order to bring about changes in the minds of key players (decision makers, advisers and opinion leaders), it is necessary to place them in an environment where they can contemplate new ideas, innovative alternatives, potential futures and realistic current options, then how might such an environment be constructed, given the constraints on their time, attention and freedom of action?

The five respondents take different routes from Mitchell’s starting-point: they refine his initial analysis, offer tentative answers to specific questions and challenges, expand the framework of inquiry, critically assess underlying assumptions and question the envisioned end point of the approach, i.e. the objective of creating a general theory of conflict and change.

Ed Garcia, Filipino-born Senior Policy Advisor at the London-based NGO International Alert and a seasoned practitioner in the Asia-Pacific region, moves the discussion to the social and normative aspects of change. Aiming to supplement Mitchell’s initial systematisation on change and conflict, he addresses more specifically the interrelationship of *social* change, conflict and conflict transformation. He argues that all conflict transformers have to address the issue of social change, since a failure to do so, and hence the lack of social justice, lies at the heart of many protracted social conflicts. Four areas of engagement are particularly important in this context: promoting human rights, promoting inclusive governance, catalysing sustainable development and advancing security sector reform. “Profound social change,” he argues, “will come about only by putting pressure on

those unwilling or unable to yield to the needs and aspirations of vulnerable populations” (Garcia in this Dialogue, 40). How such pressure can be applied and supported nonviolently, Garcia elaborates in three steps: by presenting ethical guidelines that would ground the efforts of peace practitioners, by reflecting that the best roles for third parties are those of “enabler” or “facilitator”, and by underlining the importance of building peace constituencies in order to sustain moments of revolutionary change. He bolsters his reflections with examples from his work and travels in the Philippines, Indonesia, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

Chris Spies, Peace and Development Advisor for the UNDP’s Social Cohesion Programme in Guyana, also offers insights from the point of view of (development) practice. He stresses that “change and conflict, like development, are about people, not things” (Spies in this Dialogue, 52), and consequently digs down to the personal aspects of change. He focuses on the centrality of ownership and teases out important principles and methods in creating environments and attitudes that allow people to change, and to sustain such change into the future. He responds directly to Mitchell’s concerns that “members of parties in conflict have to be placed in a position where they can contemplate alternatives” (Mitchell in this Dialogue, 31): “The difficulty, of course, is that conflicts are quite the worst environment for bringing about significant changes in goals, interests and underlying beliefs. In such circumstances, the predominant ideas about learning and changing involve beliefs that it is the other side that has to learn; and that hurting them is the best way of bringing about such learning” (ibid., 28). Spies offers a process to break down this complex and occasionally intimidating challenge and presents it in his framework for developmental change, which ultimately builds on the crucial capacity for respectful listening.

Listening for implicit theories of change used by practitioners is what the next respondent has done. Ilana Shapiro, Acting Director and Assistant Professor for the doctoral programme “The Psychology of Peace and Prevention of Violence” at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, USA, has done extensive research into the theories of change underlying conflict intervention programmes, specifically programmes dealing with racial equity in the US. She shares her insights and presents a useful overview of different levels of analysis – from the individual level of changing perceptions, attitudes/emotions or behaviours, and the inter-personal or inter-group level of changing relationships, to the macro level of changing structures, institutions and systems of conflict. She suggests extending Mitchell’s framework of inquiry: “Explicitly mapping these different theories of change,” she claims, “lays a foundation for future testing and evaluation of divergent approaches and helps revise and refine both theory and practice to the benefit of each” (Shapiro in this Dialogue, 63; echoing a call by Church and Shouldice 2003). She continues: “For scholars, building theories of change from theories in use includes a reciprocal process of developing grounded theory, comparing it with existing research literature, testing emergent hypotheses and dialoguing with practitioners about the findings and new questions. ... For practitioners, examining theories of change implies an intra- [and inter-] organisational process of reflection and dialogue about both espoused theories and theories in use, retrospective analyses of programmes and their impact and more conscious planning, experimentation and evaluation of new programmes” (Shapiro in this Dialogue, 66).

The final two respondents critically review some of the assumptions and values underlying Mitchell’s approach.

Vivienne Jabri, Director of the Centre for International Relations and Senior Lecturer in International Relations in the Department of War Studies at King's College, London, UK, delivers a tightly argued critique of underlying assumptions, both epistemological (how we know things) and ontological (how we believe things to be). She wants explicitly to “delve below the surface, unpacking the various commitments that inform” Mitchell's article (Jabri in this Dialogue, 70). Jabri unearths two main issues: that of positivist vs. constructivist agency, and that of the need for relocating conflict resolution in politics. She argues that practitioners and scholars who undertake interventions into violent conflict need to take into account “the substance of change, the particularity of distinct conflicts, the discourses that surround them, the relations of power that enable some while constraining others, the various practices of legitimisation . . . , all taking place within complex global matrices of power” (ibid., 72). Yet conflict resolution, as a field, is found guilty of “somehow extract[ing] itself from social and political theory, so that its language is rendered neutral, a management consultant's toolkit” (ibid.). Jabri points in particular to the problematic consequences of a generic, almost “formulaic” representation of, for example, the roles of agents of change (Mitchell in this Dialogue, 29-32) that cannot, as she argues, reasonably inform the practice of conflict resolution or transformation as there “is no way that this analysis can . . . inform on the consequences or desirability of these roles and their applications” (Jabri in this Dialogue, 73).

Daniela Körppen, Researcher at the Berghof Foundation for Peace Support in Berlin, Germany, and a PhD candidate specialising in systemic conflict transformation, elaborates on Jabri's critique by calling attention to three aspects of Mitchell's approach which she finds problematic. First, his stance of generalising instead of contextualising will arguably widen the existing gap between conflict transformation theory and practice. Second, his chosen roles for change agents, in her eyes, reveal an implicit overreliance on third-party, external interveners to “fix” conflicts, whereas it can be argued – in line with systemic thinking – that to enable conflict transformation, resources must be mobilised from *within* the conflict system. Third, she warns against a positivist, linear and monocausal approach to conflict interventions, and favours an approach which reflects that every intervention becomes itself part of a conflict system and needs to be analysed and planned accordingly. She concludes: “Given that there is already a large number of different peacebuilding and conflict resolution and transformation theories, which (implicitly at least) address the relationship of peace and change, or conflict and change, the discussion of social change should focus less on developing a new meta-theory, but instead on linking the existing approaches to practice” (Körppen in this Dialogue, 77/78).

Contributors to this Dialogue are reflective practitioners and scholars, and in collecting the responses to Mitchell's article, it was interesting to note what diverse routes they took. One question poses itself: Do practitioners and scholars talk to each other in a language that each can hear and understand? Can we, amidst this critical dialogue, find seeds for a common approach to the challenge of social change?

A number of themes and topics stand out as particularly salient. They have found expression in the various contributions to this Dialogue, some with broad consensus, some remaining controversial.

- First, there is the issue of *individual and social change*, some would even say individual *versus* social change – and the related question of what conflict transformation can hope to influence. Its goals, as we have seen in the beginning, are far-reaching, encompassing individual and structural change. Its instruments, it has repeatedly been argued, are much more suited to interpersonal, small-group conflicts. Mitchell’s approach suggests that whereas there are tractable and intractable dimensions in every conflict, crucial escalation and de-escalation paths are human-made, and can thus be influenced by working with the people involved, particularly at decision-making levels. Garcia approaches the issue more from an advocate’s standpoint, thus asserting that social change is necessary and a goal worth striving for, while not specifying what the nitty-gritty details of this process look like. Spies asserts that processes of learning and change are ultimately about people and that the learning of some key people can create ripple-effects in the larger social fabric. Shapiro shows that conflict interventions indeed start at diverse levels of analysis and assume different levels of influence – it is in her contribution that the issue of what needs to change (first) becomes most tangible and reveals its potentially counterproductive consequences. Jabri and Körppen argue that a positivist way of approaching the challenge of social change necessarily neglects the way in which the individual and social are interwoven, and in which the endeavour of conflict transformation is an inherently socio-political struggle. Thus, while there seems to exist a tentative consensus that both levels – the individual and the social – can and must be influenced, we do not yet understand very clearly how the transfer from one level to the other works, builds up and is sustained.
- A concern that runs through all contributions is the *quality of change processes*. It takes various forms: Mitchell’s emphasis on creating learning environments in order to break patterns of entrapment; Garcia’s proposition of guiding principles; Spies’ framework for the development of “dormant faculties” and emphasis on respectful listening; Jabri’s call that politics – particularly the politics of inclusion and exclusion, of symmetry or asymmetry of power – must enter much more prominently into the equation. They all remind us that the way in which we engage and pursue the objective of social change will have a profound influence on the outputs and outcomes we help to create. This leaves us with the challenge to continue to look closely and critically at our assumptions, analyses and actions in an ever-evolving circle of critical (self-) examination.
- The third prominent issue is the question of how best to *sustain change* after having initiated it, presumably in the direction of a more just and peaceful state. Garcia points out that peace constituencies spanning generations, levels and sectors must be mobilised and certain “pillars” erected, including the adherence to human rights, truly inclusive processes of governance, accountable security forces and economic development. All contributors remind us that these are long-term, and, in all truth, probably never-ending endeavours. Conflict, as Spies formulates a key assumption of conflict transformation, is “a necessary and inevitable dynamic in all human relationships” – which is why “process is as important as outcome” (Spies in this Dialogue, 50/51). And while Körppen confesses some unease related to Mitchell’s outcome-orientated formulation that “solutions can be found”, it can be considered a shared conviction that the transformation of conflict, and the inducement of social change, is a task that will pose itself over and over again.¹

¹ It should be noted that the point on the horizon towards which conflict transformation and social change strive (“justpeace”, in Lederach’s term) relies on a basic assumption that is not a given. As Shapiro notes in passing: “[M]uch literature in the field of conflict resolution tends to eschew theories about inherent aggressive drives, prejudiced personalities, or more Hobbesian views of human nature. ... This focus on external rather than inherent causes of human conflict provides a hopeful view of human capacity for consciously changing themselves and their human environment” (Shapiro in this Dialogue, 63). Even a cursory glance at current events in global politics will serve to remind us that this assumption is not universally shared. This does not, by any means, discredit it.

- A fourth issue taken up by most contributors is the role of *change agents*. More specifically, some debate centres around the question of the relative importance of *third-party* interveners (“outsiders”) versus *insiders*. One of the criticisms concerning Mitchell’s attempt to systematise potential roles of change agents is that there is an implicit overreliance on *external* agents. In contrast, Spies, Garcia, and Körppen explicitly state that there is no replacement for insiders and *internal resources*. While third parties can therefore play a facilitating role when things get stuck, “there is no alternative to local ownership” (Spies in this Dialogue, 51; for a discussion of the problematic aspects of this catchphrase see Reich 2006). How to act in ways that turn this conviction into a reality remains a challenge in most conflict interventions.
- Associated with the insider/outsider issue, and intimately linked with assumptions guiding present analysis and intervention practice, is a final issue that crops up regularly: that of *asymmetry of power*. This entails the searching critique that our intervention repertoires are not well suited to situations in which the parties to a conflict are inherently unequal. Jabri formulates this most pointedly with respect to Mitchell’s generic categories: “All are equalised, when in actuality – and in the conflicts that matter in present-day global politics – there is no such equality” (Jabri in this Dialogue, 71). This leaves us in a position where we need to re-examine and possibly re-align our categories of analysis and modes of engagement (a challenge taken up by Dudouet 2006, forthcoming).

Regarding the *practice, theory* and *politics* of change, the contributions to this Dialogue have shown that these component parts of social change present separate challenges, yet are interwoven in many ways, some of which we are only beginning to understand. Bridging the gap between theory and practice, but also between conflict transformation and politics, is a continuing challenge. A positivist and a constructivist approach, in particular, have come up against each other, suggesting an underlying struggle of paradigms. While there are distinct and relevant advantages to the constructivist stance, such an approach to the practice of conflict transformation which will leave a tangible imprint on the politics of conflict and peace has yet to emerge. If we follow the lead of most contributors to this Dialogue, one thing is clear: the further development of a theory of social change needs to accommodate practice, not simply in providing empirical answers, but by integrating practitioners into the process of generating questions.

As usual with the Berghof Handbook Dialogues, we do not end with certainties or recipes, but rather with a refined set of questions and suggestions of where to focus our attention. After all, the Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation aims to provide a platform for exchange between different experiences, cultures and organisations, and to present diverse perspectives. We hope that this Dialogue has been successful in providing such a forum for “fostering dialogue between scholars and practitioners such that relevant research findings are consistently translated and disseminated to practitioners and practitioners play a key role in shaping research agendas about change and conflict resolution...” (Shapiro in this Dialogue, 66). It has, in our opinion, certainly contributed greatly to mapping and systematising the current state of knowledge about social change and conflict transformation.

We wish to thank all those who have so far shared their thoughts, ideas and experiences and we now encourage readers’ reactions and reflections, which should be addressed to the editors via the Berghof Handbook website (www.berghof-handbook.net).

Finally, we gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Berghof Foundation for Conflict Studies which allows us to continue the Berghof Handbook Dialogue Series, a platform for exchange between scholars and practitioners concerned with conflict transformation, development cooperation, humanitarian aid and human rights work.

Berlin, August 2006

Beatrix Schmelzle & David Bloomfield

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Conflict, Social Change and Conflict Resolution. An Enquiry

Christopher R. Mitchell

1. Introduction

The literature dealing systematically with the connections between change and conflict is hardly extensive, and that directly dealing with precise relationships between change and conflict resolution is even more sparse. In a way, this is surprising, for many writers in the field have made implicit, and in some cases explicit, connections between some form of change and the formation of conflicts, while others discuss conflict “dynamics” as well as those changes that are needed before any kind of resolution of a conflict can realistically be sought. A recent (and admittedly unsystematic) search of one university’s modest library revealed over 420 entries combining the words “change” and “conflict” in their title, while a similar search of a data bank of dissertation abstracts produced over 3,500 such citations.

This relative neglect may, itself, be starting to change and there seems to be renewed interest within the field in the relationship between change and conflict. Partly this seems to be because the world of the late 20th and early 21st centuries itself appears to have become more dynamic. At a macro level, the long drawn out rivalry between the USA and the Soviet Union may have been unpleasant but at least it seemed stable and the relationship helped to “explain” many conflicts throughout the world. One knew where one was. The ending of the “Cold War” affected existing conflicts as distant from one another as those in the Middle East, in South Africa, in South East Asia and even in Northern Ireland; and produced a whole set of ostensibly new and different conflicts – in former Yugoslavia, in Transcaucasia, or in Central Asia – although many of these had been lying suppressed or latent for over sixty years. If the end of the “Cold War” produced a much more uncertain, changing world, then this uncertainty was reinforced by the events of September 11th 2001

and by the declaration of new, but nebulous global struggles involving different kinds of “enemy”; by statements about the need for new and different modes of achieving “security”; and by claims about accelerating changes brought about by the information revolution and various aspects of “globalisation”. Conflict analysts thus had to confront questions about the sources and impacts of major changes, while practitioners had to deal with the practicalities of managing change and conflict, so as to minimise violence and destruction.

In spite of this intellectual and empirical turmoil, there still seem to be few works that focus in general terms on connections between the two concepts, or on the process of conflict resolution as a phenomenon involving change from the relationship of enemies – or adversaries – into something else.¹ Hence, this essay endeavours to make some contribution to filling this gap in the literature by discussing the relationship between “change” and “conflict” in very general terms, rather than focussing on particular changes that have either created conflict between specific communities, societies and countries, or changes that have led towards a resolution of any specific conflict, which had protracted and become violent. It can be considered, therefore, as a small contribution to the development of a general theory of change and conflict – or, more particularly, conflict resolution. An understanding of the dynamics of conflict formation and perpetuation should have implications for methods of resolving (or at least coping with) even the most intractable of conflict relationships. As such, the essay may be a starting point for the development of a set of theories of conflict dynamics as well as a practical set of guidelines concerning modes and timing of “resolutionary” interventions.


The essay, then, starts with an attempt to set out a framework for thinking systematically about the relationship between conflict and change, distinguishing between changes that create conflicts and those which make conflict more intense or which help to ameliorate it. This leads to a discussion of the nature of “change” itself, and the kinds of change that seem relevant to creating or resolving protracted conflict. The latter half of the paper switches focus to consider changes necessary to bring about the resolution (or transformation) of a conflict, once it is thoroughly under way – as well as common obstacles to bringing about such “resolutionary” changes. Finally, I suggest ways of thinking about possible actors that can help to bring about resolutionary change, and what strategies might be necessary to move protracted and intractable conflicts towards some lasting and self supporting solution.

2. A Framework for Enquiry

An enquiry that starts off asking about the general nature of the relationship between change and (protracted) conflict seems doomed to abstract irrelevance from the beginning, so an initial step must be to focus the discussion a little better. If we are trying to develop an understanding of a complex phenomenon such as protracted social conflict, and its relationship to change, then there are at least four aspects that need to engage our attention:

1. Change which produces new conflicts (*Conflict formation*)
2. Change which exacerbates or intensifies an existing conflict (*Conflict exacerbation* or, more commonly, *escalation*)

¹ Exceptions to this generalisation include works by Appelbaum (1970), Rosenau (1990), Holsti et al. (1980) and Bennis et al. (1989).

- 
3. Change which reduces conflict, or makes it less, rather than more intense (Conflict *mitigation*)
 4. Change which produces (or assists in the development of) settlements or solutions (Conflict *resolution* or *transformation*)²

Extending this focus of the broader investigation can enable us to transform the whole exercise into a set of more specific, less ambiguous queries:

1. *What sorts of changes create conflict?*
2. *What changes exacerbate conflict?*
3. *What changes diminish the intensity of conflict?*
4. *What sorts of changes help to bring about the resolution or transformation of conflicts?*

Given that one of the final foci of this essay is on the question of change and conflict resolution, posing the last question raises another related issue. Paradoxically, this arises from a need to understand factors that act against change, particularly change in the direction of the de-escalation or resolution of a conflict. As the label “protracted conflicts” suggests, many complex and deep rooted social conflicts seem, empirically, to reach some kind of “plateau” in their relationship, and become trapped in a repetitive pattern of interaction – usually involving the exchange of violent or coercive behaviours – that seems dynamic, yet stable. Dennis Sandole (1999) has pointed out that the reason for many conflicts continuing becomes less a matter of the original and underlying goal incompatibility, but more a matter of becoming trapped in an extended action-reaction sequence, in which today’s conflict behaviour by one side is a response to yesterday’s by the adversary. The conflict continues today because the conflict was there yesterday, rather in the manner of a classical feud between the Montagues and the Capulets. Systems analysts are familiar with the concept of “dynamic stability”, and there are enough examples of such a pattern of interaction in protracted social conflicts to justify an urgent need to understand the reasons for *conflict perpetuation* and to ask questions about the obstacles to change, once a conflict has reached the stage of a reactive exchange of blows, malevolencies and other bads. Some of the literature on “spoilers” (Stedman 1997) makes a start at answering fundamental questions about obstacles to change in the direction of conflict transformation, but the general problem remains:

What are some of the obstacles to change that themselves need changing before a protracted conflict can begin to move towards a resolution; who might be able to bring about needed changes, and how?

Our argument seems to have come round full circle, so that any examination of change appears also to necessitate at least some enquiry into the nature and impact of obstacles to change, particularly in their role of preventing those involved in a conflict moving towards a solution and a change in their relationship as adversaries. I will return to this issue of obstacles later in the essay, but initially want to discuss the question of changes that lead to conflict rather than factors that prevent change leading towards a conflict’s end.

² There is much current debate in the field about the inadequacy of the term “resolution” to include the fundamental changes deemed necessary to end a conflict once and for all. As I have argued elsewhere (Mitchell 2002), the original interpretation of the term “conflict resolution” certainly involved a process which recognised the probable need for far-reaching structural changes and changes in relationships as part of any durable solution, so I prefer to retain this term rather than the currently fashionable one of conflict “transformation”.

3. Change and Conflict Formation

Most analysts who write about the causes or the sources of social conflict agree that change, particularly extensive and sudden change, has the capacity to create conflict. However, whether the conflict protracts and turns violent depends upon a host of other variables within each type of setting – international, intra-national or local.

3.1 Change, Deprivation and Instability

Writing as early as the 1960s, Mancur Olson pointed out that economic development might actually produce instability and conflict rather than stability and contentment, partly because the “goods” from growth would almost certainly be maldistributed, as would the “bads”. Many individuals and groups, including some that had previously been salient and influential, would become marginalised through such change (Olson 1963). Change would thus frequently be associated with discontent and rivalry, leading to conflict and sometimes to violence. It might well be the case that this last could be avoided if the change were to be gradual and well-managed (arrangements made for redundant workers or newly landless peasants to find alternative roles and resources), but social “cushions” seemed rare in the 1960s and – with the sudden and extensive changes brought about through the globalisation of market capitalism – appear even rarer today. It is noticeable, however, that even in the 1960s and 1970s analysts were linking change with conflict and arguing that conflict *avoidance* (an early precursor of long-term conflict prevention) was a matter of managing change effectively (Thomas and Bennis 1972).

Underlying Olson’s ideas, and those of many others who wrote about the formation or emergence of conflict situations, was the inescapable observation that change tends to create winners and losers and that the latter are hardly likely to be happy with this result. Olson’s extension of this argument involved pointing out that “winners”, too, might be discontented if they did not feel that they had won enough, relative to others, or if the costs of winning on one dimension (economic prosperity) meant losing on others (personal security, social integration or cultural identity). It seems reasonable to extend this approach to the relationship between change and conflict formation a little further, by arguing that, while it is undoubtedly true that much change inevitably creates *winners* and *losers*:

- (a) Past change might also create *restorers*, who wish to return to the status quo or some golden age, (e.g. late 18th Century French aristocrats wishing to turn back the clock on royal financial reforms), and *accelerators*, who want even greater change, as soon as possible, to complete the reform or to catch up with some comparison group (e.g. French radical thinkers and activists bent on turning reform into revolution); and
- (b) Anticipated change might create *supporters* calling for desired change immediately, and *resisters* seeking to block the changes threatening their resources, status or political influence.

It is possible to see many of these assumptions underpinning the ideas of more formal theorists of conflict formation. In much of Johan Galtung’s early work (1964; 1971), for example, the ideas of status disequilibrium and of changing hierarchies of “top dogs” and “bottom dogs” as sources of conflict imply that rapid change on any one of the key dimensions of power, status and wealth “enjoyed” by different individuals and social groups could lead to further efforts to achieve a satisfactory balance among all three. Inevitably, this will lead to further efforts to change, thence

to conflict with those resisting such change and perhaps to the beginnings of one of Sandole's self-perpetuating cycles. Similarly, in the conceptual writings that focus on the process of comparison, and on reference groups as both a source of social stability, but also of potential discontent and resultant violence, a change in those groups with whom one compares one's own lot seems more likely to involve some (much) more fortunate than ourselves. Hence, anger plus a sense of deprivation grow and (conflict) situations involving goal incompatibility arise.

Similar themes involving change leading to conflict formation can be seen in Ted Gurr's classic on civil strife and protracted, intra-state conflict, *Why Men Rebel* (Gurr 1970). Whichever version one espouses of Gurr's basic idea about deprivation, discontent and conflict arising from a growing gap between achievements and aspirations, a central feature of the theory involves a change in aspirations or in achievement or in both.³ On the best-known version of this theory of relative deprivation follows Davies' well known J-Curve model (Davies 1962) in which key changes consist of people's changing beliefs about future achievements and entitlements (aspirations) which are then simply dashed by an abrupt downturn in their actual achievements. Even more simply, the change involves a recognition of the gap between dreams and reality. Other versions involve cases in which people's sense of their just entitlements remains the same but their actual level of "achievement" plunges. (One may think of impoverished aristocracy throughout history, Booth Tarkington's "magnificent" Ambersons, or the French middle class investors who were ruined by the failure of the Panama Canal venture in the 1890s and who lost "everything".) A third version also involves change and a widening "revolutionary gap", this time involving people whose aspirations soar, perhaps through contact with visions of richer societies or because of the promises of political leaders, but whose achievements remain static. Whether situations of high discontent come about through improvements postponed or "revolutions of rising expectations", the central feature of all these models involves change and the contribution of various types of change to conflict formation. How rapidly the change has to take place to escalate a situation of goal incompatibility into a process involving protest, adversaries and violence obviously will vary from situation to situation. However, the central fact remains that anyone seeking the sources of conflict formation would be well advised to look for prior change that disturbs a social hierarchy as a driving force.

3.2 Changes in Scarcity and Abundance

Even if one adopts a relatively unsophisticated approach to the process of conflict formation, the centrality of change remains at the heart of many explanations. Much writing about the nature of protracted social conflicts revolves around the idea of scarcity. Parties indulge in conflict over some good that is in limited supply which both perceive they cannot simultaneously own, possess or enjoy – a piece of territory, a material resource such as oil, a dominating position which increases "security", roles that present the opportunity of making binding decisions for others. "Scarcity models" of conflict formation contain implicit or explicit assumptions about change producing further or more intense conflict, either through changes in demand for increasingly salient goods in dispute, or because of changes in availability, usually involving diminishing supply. Much conflict clearly arises because of what Kenneth Boulding (1962) termed "the Duchess's Law", which is derived from a remark by the Duchess to Alice in Wonderland – "The more there is of yours, the less there is of mine". One implication of this is that, if things change and become even scarcer, the greater the goal incompatibility and the more likely and the more protracted the conflict.

³ The dynamic underpinnings of Gurr's theories are best recognised by examining the coordinate geometric models he uses to describe the different forms that relative deprivation can take (Gurr 1970, 47-53).

This truism has been demonstrated yet again (and more recently than through the comments by Lewis Carroll's Duchess) by the work of scholars such as Thomas Homer Dixon (1991; 1994) and others who have been examining the sources and effects of environmental scarcity in societies in the Third World, especially in Africa. Their basic argument involves the impact of environmental degradation (deforestation, desertification via drought, water impurity, overgrazing caused by population increase) on resource scarcity and the resultant propensity for intra-clan, inter-tribal and intra-national conflict, often resulting in violence. Whatever critiques have been made of Homer Dixon's original work (for instance Kahl and Berejikian 1992), most analysts seem to have retained the original idea that changes in availability of resources and changes in demand arising from population pressures do create situations in which one likely response is the formation and emergence of intense conflict. Once started, this can protract and escalate into self-perpetuating spasms of violence and counter-violence.

The role of increasing scarcity in conflict formation is normally taken to involve a decrease in availability, perhaps accompanied by an increase in desire for that particular commodity. Warnings about "water wars" in the near future (Gleick 1993; Starr 1991) are examples of the intellectual use of scarcity models. It may not be too cynical to argue that the current United States' interest in bringing democracy to the Middle East via regime change in Iraq (and possibly elsewhere) is not entirely unconnected with the forecast decline in world oil production and the growth of China as a major and growing oil consumer.⁴

Others have returned to Olson's original idea and pointed out that changes in the direction of abundance can also bring problems that give rise to conflicts. For example, in the 1990s, the reforming government of President Ramos in the Philippines provided large amounts of funding for some small communities, by declaring seven of the local, grassroots zones of peace to be "Special Development Areas". However, it proved very difficult for some of the seven communities to use these expanded and suddenly granted resources in an appropriate manner. Internal conflicts over the use of the new resources broke out, factions formed and the sudden availability of funds became a source of conflict formation that seemed as disrupting as sudden scarcity might have been (Lee 2000). Clearly, the sudden introduction of an abundant supply of goods can also lead to conflict over who gets what, when and how, although how similar the results of such a change are to those brought about by a sudden introduction of large numbers of bads remains a matter for speculation and systematic investigation.

3.3 Disaggregating "Change"

It would be possible to continue ad infinitum with an anecdotal discussion of the relationship between change and conflict formation, but this essay is attempting to produce some general lessons rather than a stream of anecdotes. What seems to have emerged from the ideas discussed so far is that many of them suggest – indirectly at least – that there are three aspects of the general phenomenon of change that are important in its conflict generating effects:

⁴ Landon Hancock has made the interesting suggestion that a scarcity of (acceptable) identities may be a neglected source of conflict, while making other identities possible may be a process that contributes markedly to a resolution of some conflicts. In Northern Ireland during the 1960s, for example, limited identities were available for people living in the Province. One could feel British and (usually) Protestant-Unionist or Irish and Catholic-Nationalist. This began to alter in the 1980s when people could identify themselves also as "European" as a consequence of British and Irish membership of the EU and the latter's growing impact on both the Irish Republic, the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland (Hancock 2003). One implication of this line of thought is to wonder about the dynamics by which people are forced into thinking of themselves (and being regarded by outsiders) solely as being members of one particular category from among the multiple (group) identities otherwise available to them ("Muslims", as opposed to Gujeratis or Javanese, Sunnis or Alawites, former Kashmiris as opposed to former Ugandans, shopkeepers as opposed to doctors). The dynamics of identity and identification need another full essay in order to consider adequately.

- (a) the *nature* of the change
- (b) the *intensity* of the change and
- (c) the *rapidity* of the change

Returning to the intellectual strategy of advancing by proposing questions that seem answerable (at least in principle) we thus confront the following queries:

1. *What is the nature of the change that gives rise to goal incompatibility?*
2. *How rapidly has the change come about?*
3. *How extensive is the change that confronts those affected?*

A typical social scientist’s answer to such questions will inevitably be, “it depends”. However, posing them and then avoiding them leads to a broader topic which arises from a desire to generalise about change and conflict. This is the question of what kinds of change might one be talking about in a particular case and what, therefore, might be a useful typology of change to help with general explanations about the relationship between conflict, change and conflict resolution. What kinds of change are there – and change in what?

4. Varieties and Impact of Change

A relatively easy way of answering the “Change in what?” question would be to list examples of change that appear to have had some impact on the formation, escalation or resolution of protracted social conflicts: the death of key leaders, the collapse of political systems such as the Somali Republic, the discovery of large supplies of some valued and contested good, a sudden use of violence to attack another. Unfortunately, this inductive approach makes it hard to pick out commonalities that would help in the construction of a typology of change – as well as taking up a great deal of space – so a deductive approach seems to offer an alternative, at least at the start of any classification process.

4.1 Change in the Structure of a Conflict

One approach is to take up the basic model of a conflict developed originally by Johan Galtung, and use this to illuminate the question of what can change in the basic *structure* of any conflict. The model involves four components, linked in the following fashion:

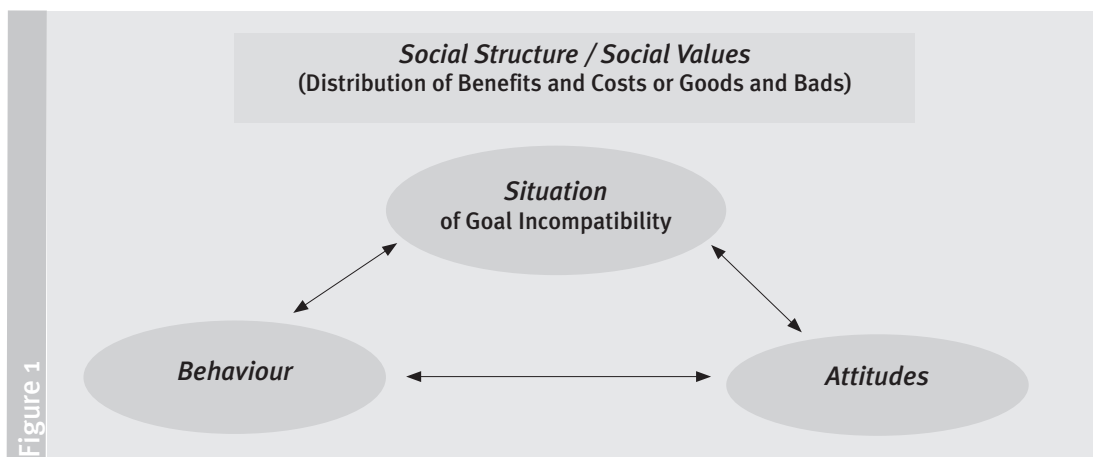


Figure 1

The model suggests that conflict situations arise in societies because of some mismatch between social values and the social structure of that society, particularly the distribution of political, economic and social “goods”. The formation of a situation of goal incompatibility (a conflict *situation*) gives rise to adversaries’ conflict *behaviour* in order to achieve their (apparently incompatible) goals, plus a related set of perceptions and *attitudes* about themselves, the Other(s) and “third” parties affected or affecting the relationship of conflict. All four components interact over time and are changed through this interaction: behaviour affects attitudes (being the target of violence profoundly affects the psychological state of those attacked – and usually causes them to retaliate); attitudes change behaviour (dehumanisation of the Other produces a justification for escalating violence and thus intensifies efforts to harm); and both affect the situation and the underlying social structure (what is in dispute often gets harmed in some way, or even destroyed).

Using this model to help categorise types of change thus leads to the possibility of change in all four components of this structural model. Are we dealing with change in underlying social structures or in generally held values? Is there a change in the goals producing the conflict situation in the first place? (Has one adversary’s major goal shifted from gaining the desired good to punishing, permanently weakening or destroying the Others because they have prevented Us obtaining the good?) Is the change simply one consisting of an increase in violence, a lessening of hostile rhetoric or the offer of some olive branch? Has there been a diminution of mistrust on both sides sufficient to allow some cautious “talks about talks” to take place? Such examples illuminate four types of change – in underlying structure, in situation, in behaviour, in attitudes – that are important for understanding the dynamics of protracted social conflicts. All are potential changes that will impact the formation, escalation, mitigation or resolution of protracted conflicts in a wide variety of (often dimly understood) ways and I will return to using this approach to understanding the effects of change later in this essay.

4.2 Key Qualities of Change

In the discussion of change and conflict formation carried out above there were several clues as to how one might begin to develop a useful typology of change itself to help in thinking about its impact. For example, many writers have talked about the different effects of *sudden* as opposed to *gradual* change, while many years ago Michael Handel wrote revealingly about the impact of *un-anticipated* change as part of his investigation of the political strategy of “surprise”. (Handel 1981). Other scholars have tackled the issue of the size of the change – how *intensive* (the degree to which things are changed) and how *extensive* (the number of things that change). In general, most arguments assume that it is almost always more difficult to adjust to massive as opposed to minor changes, with the implication that intensive and extensive changes are more likely to be resisted – possibly through violence – than adjusted to.

At present, it is only possible to suggest a number of characteristics of change that seem likely to have an impact on the formation of a deep-rooted conflict, on the continuation of that conflict, or alternatively on the resolution of one that has possibly become “protracted” because it has developed a resistance to subsequent change. It seems plausible to propose that changes characterised by the following qualities are likely to have the most effect on generating or modifying protracted conflicts:

1. *Major* changes – large in scope and intensity
2. *Sudden* changes – taking place abruptly
3. *Unexpected* change – with no prior indication, warning or time to prepare

- 4. *Rapid* changes – taking place over a short time period
- 5. *Irreversible* changes – with no way of returning to the status quo

Many propositions that have been unsystematically derived from ideas about types of change appear to have an initial plausibility, if nothing else. Major changes appear more likely to produce massive reactions than minor ones, although many years ago Karl Deutsch (1966) argued that systems in unstable conditions could be pushed into a major change process by an input of information at a crucial point of that system.⁵ Much of the literature on crises and crisis behaviour produced in the 1970s started with the idea that a major, unexpected threat to core values, appearing suddenly and with little time available for thoughtful reaction, produced recognizable, repetitive and dysfunctional patterns of individual and organisational behaviour, as well as standard profiles of interaction between threatener and threatened (for example McClelland 1961; Hermann 1972; Holsti 1972).

In the case of irreversibility, there are studies that indicate that, at a number of social levels, a change from which there is no return can have a major and lasting impact compared with a change that can be rapidly reversed, at low cost. There are major differences between a temporary ceasefire in place and a truce that involves the stockpiling of weapons under third-party supervision. Historically, Caesar could not have pretended that he – and his armies – had crossed the Rubicon by mistake. President Sadat’s visit to Israel in 1977 could only have such a major effect on relations between Israel, Egypt and the Arab world precisely because there was no way of subsequently denying that the visit had (a) occurred and thus (b) publicly and formally acknowledged the existence of Israel as another member of the international community of states.

One of the weaknesses of this present argument is that, theoretically, there are an almost infinite number of ways in which “changes” can be described and characterised. The five qualities suggested above are only one plausible answer to the question, “What kinds of change are important for understanding the formation, escalation, mitigation and resolution of conflicts?” Until we have some unambiguous evidence that persistently links major, sudden, unexpected, rapid and irreversible changes with specific and repeated effects on protracted conflicts or other data that links minor, gradual, anticipated, long drawn out and reversible changes with the opposite effects, we will be no nearer a general theory of conflict and change. However, some generalisations and guidelines might be obtainable by examining commonly observed change processes in protracted conflicts, partly as a preliminary to asking why protracted conflicts actually fail to change but rather remain locked in a paradoxically stable, action-reaction dynamic.

5. The Dynamics of Perpetuation, Exacerbation and Mitigation

Leaving aside the question of what sorts of changes lead to conflict *formation*, any conflict analyst confronts queries about what alters within the conflict system itself, so that one can talk clearly about a conflict *intensifying* or *diminishing*. What is the nature of change that makes a conflict more – or less – intense and what, then, contributes to a conflict’s *perpetuation*?

⁵ This proposition led John Burton (1969) to argue that an infusing of “relevant” knowledge through a problem-solving process could result in the initiation of a major, lasting conflict resolution process.

5.1 “Escalation” as a Basic Dynamic

One way in which the topic of intensification has been discussed in the literature on conflict dynamics has been to use the very broad concept of *escalation* to try to deal with issues of change within a conflict system. Allied to ideas about escalation were others that dealt with the reverse, de-escalation, which was often treated simply as some kind of a mirror image of the former.

In the 1960s and 1970s, it was common for scholars to talk about an escalation “ladder” and to discuss the “rungs” or thresholds on that ladder, as though climbing upwards towards mutual destruction could be reversed simply by re-crossing the same thresholds in a “downwards” direction. (One stopped bombing Haiphong harbour, for example, as a de-escalatory move that was supposed to elicit a positive counter move by the government that was the target of the bombing.) This whole approach ignored one of the basic types of change in the conflict structure that we discussed earlier, which linked the behaviour of one side to the perceptions and emotions of the other. This implied, at least, that increasing coercion on the Other, or crossing some culturally significant threshold (e.g. “first blood”), often profoundly changed the attitudes of those Others and inevitably resulted in a counter escalation on their part (“making them pay”). This “ladder” model’s indiscriminate use also tended to obscure the fact that a wide variety of change processes could be involved in making the conflict more “intense”, or taking it to “a higher level”, and that some of these processes made it much more difficult to reverse direction and bring about change that could lead towards a resolution.

Disaggregating the various processes that actually make up this broad concept of *escalation*, six major types of change seem to occur frequently in protracted conflicts, making them more “intense” or *exacerbating* them, once they had emerged.⁶ Clearly, one of the changes that always occurs in conflicts at some stage is an intensification of each of the adversary’s conflict behaviour directed at the Others and intended to make them abandon their goals and allow the first party to achieve its own objectives. Usually, this process involves an increase in coercive actions that impose costs on the adversary, and ultimately involves violence and physical harm. In this narrow sense, the use of the term “escalation” for this particular process seems more than justified. Moreover, the process often involves thresholds (use of threats, cost-imposing coercion, physical violence) which, once crossed, fundamentally change the basic nature of the conflict.

5.2 Other Intensifying Dynamics

If the label “escalation” is most usefully applied to changes in the intensity and frequency of coercive and violent behaviour directed at the other party, what other changes might be involved in the intensification of protracted conflicts? At least five other dynamics seem commonly to be involved in such intensification processes: *mobilisation*, *enlargement*, *polarisation*, *dissociation* and *entrapment*. The first of these processes, *mobilisation*, refers to the process whereby intra-party changes take place once a group, community or nation finds itself in a relationship of protracted conflict with another. As a result of this relationship, time, effort and resources are devoted to the conflict, and various ways (frequently coercive) are employed to find “an acceptable solution” – defined, at least in the early stages, as one that enables all goals to be achieved and interests defended.

⁶ The actual emergence of a conflict from a latent to a manifest condition is a fascinating process in and of itself, and forms a part of the phenomenon of conflict formation, whereby the parties come to recognise that there exists a goal incompatibility and others that are preventing the achievement of desired goals, so that it is necessary to organise themselves in a manner best calculated to “win”. This particular form of conflict intensification may turn out to have beneficial effects, particularly in the long run, as long as the conflict is managed in a non-destructive way.

Too often, this process ultimately arrives at a point of deciding that the only way of attaining one's goals is "all out war" against the adversary. This can then involve a mobilisation of resources, the sacrifice of which in the course of the struggle often comes to outweigh the value of the goals originally sought. One other aspect of *mobilisation*, as Pruitt and Kim point out in their own study of conflict dynamics (2004), is the frequent change in the balance of decision-making power within embattled parties, which results in much more influence accruing to those in charge of the instruments of coercion at the expense of those in charge of alternative conflict resolution mechanisms. (Ministries of "defence" rather than foreign ministries make policy; warriors replace diplomats in planning councils.)

An equally conflict intensifying process involves the – sometimes gradual, sometimes rapid – "widening" of the conflict in two distinct senses. Firstly, through a process of *enlargement* many conflicts "pull in" other parties to the conflict. The latter become embroiled via the practice of ally-seeking on the part of the main adversaries, or by calculated intervention in order to support one side or the other, to pursue interests of one's own on another's territory or turf, to maintain a local position of advantage, or to indulge in "proxy wars". Whatever the objectives or the means by which *enlargement* occurs, the end result is to make the conflict more complex (more and often widely different interests become involved) and – to anticipate a later argument – change in the direction of resolution becomes much more difficult.

Something similar can be said about the process of *polarisation*, a conflict exacerbating dynamic which involves a "widening" of the issues on which adversaries come to confront one another, beyond the initial goal clash that led to the formation of the conflict situation in the first place. There are both psychological and behavioural aspects of this dynamic, and they are intertwined in a complex fashion. However, the upshot is that, in many conflicts, adversaries come to perceive and believe that they are in opposition to one another over a wider and wider set of issues. This process causes them to "line up" against one another on more and more issues. The crucial factor in this dynamic becomes one of countering any position the Other takes, often rather than any intrinsic merits of the reverse position. Inter-family feuds display elements of this dynamic at work, as do long standing political rivalries and ideological divisions. In international conflicts, this dynamic can lead to the existence of massive and long lasting "confrontations" or "cold wars" such as that involving the USA and USSR between 1945 and 1990, or between Athens and Sparta in the classical world. Again, the process adds further apparent goal incompatibilities to the conflict and tends to make more difficult any move towards a changed relationship.

Prospects for resolution are hardly helped by the fourth dynamic that appears in many protracted conflicts. Often, such conflicts become characterised by a marked decrease of contact between the adversaries as the struggle develops. As with polarisation, there are two aspects to the dynamic of *dissociation*. The first involves a declining frequency of physical contacts between the adversaries. In many cases they simply avoid one another and those meetings that do take place become formal and ritualised, often confined to the exchange of mutual accusations and protests. The opportunities for exploring the situation such adversaries find themselves in, the range of future scenarios likely to transpire, and opportunities or alternatives that might be mutually beneficial become rare and disappear altogether, to be replaced by recriminations and a "dialogue of the deaf". This characterisation already implies the second aspect of *dissociation*, a narrowing and coarsening of communication that takes place as the conflict protracts. This dynamic includes the deliberate closing of communication channels; the avoidance of information that runs counter to the negative images and perceptions of the adversary that inevitably develop, and the reactive devaluation of any

information that runs counter to what one “knows” about one’s adversary, oneself and one’s situation (Ross 1995).

The results of the dynamics of dissociation play a major role in accelerating the last common dynamic of protracted conflicts, that of *entrapment*, which can lead adversaries into a position where they have sacrificed time, effort, resources and lives well beyond what others might consider any possible value of “winning”, yet persist in the continuation of the conflict on the grounds that “there is no alternative”. *Entrapment* is a process by which parties in a conflict (and especially their leaders) become trapped into a course of action that involves continuing or intensifying the conflict with – apparently – no chance of changing policy or “backing away”. There are many reasons for this entrapping dynamic, some of which have to do with “saving face”, not losing intra-party influence and position, or not admitting to an often very costly mistake in policy making. Equally important are factors such as wishing to recover “sunk costs”, or minimising losses by going on to “win”, no matter what additional future costs might be involved, or simply not being able to see any alternative. The dynamic of entrapment is thus a complex one. The end result of the changes that are involved in a party’s becoming entrapped are usually the same: greater difficulty in changing from what Zartman (1985) described as a “winning mentality” to a “negotiating mentality” – and a likely perpetuation of the conflict.

5.3 Diminishing Conflict Intensity

Logically speaking, the changes necessary for moving a conflict away from increasing intensity and towards mitigation and resolution should be clear, at least at an intellectual level. If there are six basic dynamics that change a conflict in the direction of greater intensity – *exacerbate* it, in other words – then the reversal of each of these dynamics, logically, should move the conflict at least some way towards a resolution – towards being “ripe for resolution” in Zartman’s phrase (1985). Clearly, if the process of escalating coercion and violence increases the intensity of a conflict as well as its resistance to finding a solution, then a process of *de-escalation* – of substituting benefit-conferring actions for harmful and damaging ones – should bring about some change in the opposite direction. A similar argument can be made for each of the conflict exacerbating dynamics discussed above. In principle, to set the stage for a successful conflict resolution process, changes amounting to a reversal of each of the exacerbating dynamics need to be started. Other parties and interests that have become involved in the original conflict need to be disentangled (*disengagement*). Contacts (appropriately managed) need to be restored. Inter-party communication channels need to be reopened and the resultant communication made at least more nuanced and complicated than the simple exchange of accusations and justifications (*re-communication*). Each party’s underlying needs and interests need to be revived and reviewed to see what crucial goal incompatibilities still lie at the heart of their conflict and the practice of opposing for the sake of opposition abandoned (*de-isolation*). Intra-party decision making needs to be re-balanced to allow for the input of ideas from those whose immediate task is not tomorrow’s defence against violence or the short term implementation of counter-coercion measures (*de-mobilisation* or *demilitarisation*). Finally, ways have to be found to reverse entrapment processes and to enable policy decisions to be made with an eye to realistic future opportunities and limitations rather than past aims, promises, investments and sacrifices (*decommitment*).

Theoretically speaking, then, for each dynamic that exacerbates conflict there should be another which ameliorates or mitigates it:



Figure 2

| <i>Conflict Exacerbating Dynamics</i> | <i>Conflict Mitigating Dynamics</i> |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Escalation | De-Escalation |
| Mobilisation | De-Mobilisation / Demilitarisation |
| Polarisation | De-Isolation |
| Enlargement | Disengagement |
| Dissociation | Re-Communication |
| Entrapment | Decommitment |

However, speaking theoretically usually allows one to ignore some of the practical problems of implementation, as well as some of the gaps in the theoretical formulations themselves. There may be good reasons for arguing that the conflict mitigating dynamics outlined above can move the conflict systems towards a solution and a changed relationship between the parties, but there will obviously be obstacles to making the change from one exacerbating dynamic to another, mitigating dynamic. This argument returns us to a question that was raised early on:

What are the obstacles to change that impact the search for a resolution?

6. Obstacles to Change and Means of Overcoming Them

In the literature on conflict dynamics there are frequent references to “malign conflict spirals” (an early example is Deutsch 1973) but very little that systematically deals with means of arresting or reversing them. Clearly there are dynamics and other phenomena that encourage conflict *perpetuation* and act as obstacles to change. There is a literature that suggests what these obstacles might be, but in a highly piecemeal fashion, ranging from suggestions that the greater the costs incurred in pursuing a goal, the more highly people value that goal – what Kenneth Boulding calls “the sacrifice principle” – to Roger Marris’ generalisation that almost everyone is psychologically resistant to change (Marris 1986) or Louise Diamond’s interesting but unexplored concept of a “conflict habituated” society (Diamond 1997).

6.1 Four Types of Obstacles to Change

One fruitful way of beginning to lay out a systematic framework for dealing with this general issue of obstacles to change in protracted and violent conflicts might be to adopt the standpoint of the leaders of adversary parties in such a conflict and to ask:

“Confronting the option of continuing (or even escalating) the conflict, or changing to a more conciliatory stance that seeks a nonviolent resolution, but involves the abandonment of the previous strategy, what factors frequently militate against such a change?”

Adapting a framework first suggested by organisation theorists Barry Staw and Jerry Ross (1987), four categories of obstacles to change can be suggested:

1. Policy determinants
2. Psychological determinants
3. Social determinants
4. Political determinants

The first cluster of factors – *policy* determinants – militating against change involves the nature of the conflict itself, and focuses mainly on the centrality of the issues involved and the value ascribed to gaining the goals in contention. In Staw and Ross's terms, we are talking about a project that involves a large pay-off and a perceived "infeasibility of alternatives", especially in the many cases in which conflicts become perceived as involving existential issues (e.g. the physical survival of the community, or the creation of a distinct national political system via separation), or core identity issues (e.g. freedom to practice a religion unencumbered, or the recognition of the existence of "a people", with their own culture and language). If protracted conflicts were not about such salient issues, then they would hardly protract in the first place. Furthermore, protracted and deep-rooted conflicts are also situations which have a high "long-term investment" characteristic, which helps to keep them going. Rewards only come at the very end of the struggle through "victory", so that the investment nature of the process itself becomes a reason for not changing until ultimate success. To employ an analogy, one does not gain the benefits from building a bridge until the structure is finally completed. There is no point to a half finished bridge. Likewise, investment in struggle to a half way point seems sacrifice for nothing, especially when no alternatives to struggle seem feasible.

If factors to do with the nature of the conflict itself often militate against changing course, a number of common *psychological* factors reinforce a tendency not to change. These include a leadership group's direct responsibility for the "investment" in the struggle – the costs, the sacrifices, the lost resources, opportunities and lives – that cannot be lightly abandoned without feelings of responsibility and guilt for having advocated the course of action leading to such sacrifices in the first place.⁷ They also include the ego-committing claims that leaders have made about achieving success in the conflict, and the number of occasions each leader has publicly endorsed the policy and called for the necessary sacrifices in order to achieve what are characterised as "shared, salient and – sometimes – sacred" goals. Another psychological factor is often the degree to which such individual leaders – and their followers – have had drummed into them positive models of "perseverance" and of persistence leading to successful "turn arounds" and ultimately to success.

Many of these ideas are usually subsumed under the title of "misperception and miscalculation", a blanket term which actually covers a wide variety of psychological and socio-psychological factors. These include the widespread tendency of people to link costs and sacrifices both with the value of the goals for which sacrifices have been made and the likelihood of achieving it, together with a number of factors to do with self-justification, avoiding acknowledgement of responsibility, denial of the (possibly increasing) evidence for stalemate or failure, and the different ways prospect theory tells us that people evaluate gains, losses and resultant willingness to take further risks (Kahneman and Tversky 1979). All of them, however, seem to be factors making for continuation rather than change.

Again, another set of *social* factors can also act as obstacles to changing course once a party is thoroughly embroiled in a conflict, some of which link to, and reinforce the effects of psychological influences. Many are subsumed under the blanket label of "face saving", and are particularly powerful when a leader or group of leaders become so thoroughly identified with a course of action in a conflict that abandonment becomes virtually unthinkable. Thus, further costly investments in, and commitment to a strategy become a symbol of the original correctness of that policy and a signal to followers and others of determination to "see it through" rather than admit error and responsibility by a change of course. This tendency to carry on can be, and often is, reinforced

⁷ One reason it seems so difficult for British Prime Minister Tony Blair to admit – probably even to himself – that there is a causal connection between terrorist bombings in London and unequivocal British support for US policy on Iraq is that to make such a connection would lead to Blair himself – and his unpopular policies – bearing at least some of the responsibility for the death and destruction in London – let alone in Baghdad.

by social norms that support consistency rather than flexibility, steadfastness rather than learning from experience, and willingness to sacrifice for the cause rather than accepting that the time has come to cut losses. In many societies, honour is paid to “heroes” – who then become models – who have held fast in the face of adversity and sacrificed for the cause rather than compromise.⁸ In many societies, withdrawal is generally viewed negatively as a sign of weakness, while unwillingness (or inability) to change course is viewed as a sign of strength.

Finally, there are a number of what might best be termed *political* factors arising from the internal structure of each adversary that can and frequently do present obstacles to changing course in the midst of a conflict. At the very least, the factor of internal rivalry and potential challenges to the existing leadership need to be taken into account. As Staw and Ross (1987) emphasise, “job insecurity” is frequently a factor militating against appearing to admit to mistakes by changing a policy long espoused. Even relatively secure leaderships need to be careful of alienating supporters, giving opportunities to rivals, and generally diminishing their internal support. Leaders of parties involved in protracted and violent conflicts have not infrequently “lost their jobs” by assassinations, coups and mass protests, as well as through intra-governmental and electoral defections. Hence, anticipation of such possibilities can act as a major deterrent to considerations of major policy change. As Fred Ikle pointed out many years ago (Ikle 1971), nothing arouses contention and furious opposition as much as a decision to end a war, and the same appears true of many other protracted conflicts, in which major sacrifices have been made in the light of promises of future success.

Furthermore, nowhere are the political obstacles likely to be more immovable than in cases where the very purpose of the entity concerned has been the prosecution of, and success in, the struggle; and where the possible ending of the conflict may involve the disappearance of an organisation or a movement, or at best a difficult transformation into something quite different, needing different skills and leadership qualities and hence a downgrading of the influence of existing leaders. The more the survival and even existence of the organisation is tied to success in the conflict, the greater will be the unwillingness to consider a major change in strategy and a conversion from a winning mind set to one featuring possible negotiation and an outcome that is less than total “success”.

6.2 Entrapment as a Barrier to Change

Apart from the Staw-Ross model, many of the above obstacles have been discussed at one time or another in the literature on *entrapment*, which also addresses *psychological* aspects of this dynamic (sacrifices changing the original goals in conflict to that of making the enemy pay, and the extent of existing sacrifices diminishing the evaluation of anticipated sacrifices); *economic* aspects (the wish and need to reclaim or justify “sunk costs”); and *political* aspects (a threatening intra-party opposition ready to point out and exploit shortcoming in leaders’ repeated public commitments to carry on to “the bitter end”). The overall impression from historical cases and from existing theories is one of the existence of immense obstacles to changing strategies away from coercion and violence towards something more conciliatory.

However, it is undoubtedly also the case that such changes *do* take place, and obstacles *are* overcome or removed. Just as entrapment processes cross key intensifying thresholds – as when the need to reclaim past “investments” becomes a stronger motivation than that of achieving original goals – so parties and their leaders come to mitigating thresholds, and other factors or evaluations become psychologically dominant. For example, past costs can come to be seen as “unacceptable

⁸ Thus Israelis view the suicides of Masada as heroes, rather than as negotiating incompetents.

losses” rather than “investments”. Likely future costs become more certain and hence insupportable. Conflict behaviours do change, interaction patterns alter and even the most protracted and intractable conflicts can be moved towards a resolution. How might such a change come about?

6.3 Overcoming Obstacles and Changing Direction

A number of basic methods for bringing about change that is likely to lead in the direction of conflict resolution or transformation suggest themselves:

1. Changing leaders
2. Changing leaders’ and followers’ minds
3. Changing strategies, policies and behaviour
4. Changing parties’ environments

To suggest that one way of overcoming inherent obstacles to changing the course of a protracted conflict is to *change leaders* is not to be taken as advocating “regime change”, which in any case seems to produce more conflicts than it resolves. Rather, it is simply to acknowledge that the change from one leadership group to another – however accomplished – can bring into positions of power and influence individuals or factions who are not as tied to past policies as their predecessors who might have initiated and hence be seen as responsible for those policies. This is not to say that a new leadership inevitably will change and become more conciliatory – they might be committed by past statements to intensifying the conflict. However, at least the opportunity is there and it is reinforced by the fact that there are likely to be expectations – on the part of the adversaries and other third parties – that, with a new leadership, change could come about. In itself, this belief (even if initially mistaken) can bring about resultant behaviour that leads to some kind of self-fulfilling prophecy. Anticipated change brings about behaviours based on that very anticipation, in turn making the expected change easier to undertake.

Changing people’s minds seems likely to be a more problematical and long drawn out process, especially when the challenge is to change the minds of large numbers – the followers, mass public opinion, the “street”. Moreover, it is hardly an easy task to change the minds of key leaders or their advisers. The great thing to bear in mind when faced with apparently intractable belief systems or apparently closed minds (Rokeach 1960) is that people do learn and change, especially if placed in an appropriate setting that encourages alteration. The difficulty, of course, is that conflicts are quite the worst environment for bringing about significant changes in goals, interests and underlying beliefs. In such circumstances, the predominant ideas about learning and changing involve beliefs that it is the other side that has to learn; and that hurting them is the best way of bringing about such learning. The lesson that there may, indeed, be alternatives to coercion, violence and victory is one that is particularly difficult to absorb when one is oneself on the receiving end of the Other’s effort to make one learn through their coercive techniques. And yet people’s evaluations of their situation, of their goals, of the costs they are suffering and might have to go on suffering, of their futures, of their alternatives, of themselves and of their adversaries can and do change. Hierarchies of goals alter over time (Saaty and Alexander 1989), costs become more salient, alternatives become more attractive, certainties become discredited. For anyone interested in conflict resolution, the key issue becomes how such changes might best be brought about and how the numerous obstacles in the path of change leading to resolution might best be overcome.

Changing people’s minds is intimately linked to *changing their behaviour*, although which change comes first is something of a matter for debate among social psychologists. A common sense approach would hold that until a change has taken place in the perceptions, evaluations or goals

of people in conflict, behavioural change is highly unlikely. On the other hand, some commitment theorists have argued that it is a change of behaviour that leads, through a process of habituation, to new attitudes and beliefs (Kiesler 1971). Whatever the direction of the causal arrow, or the nature of the causal loop, the salient and publicly obvious nature of the behavioural component of a protracted and violent conflict usually makes changing adversaries' behaviour the initial objective of any conflict resolution process. Conciliatory gestures are sought and – perhaps – conveyed, communications channels opened, ceasefires and truces suggested and negotiated, “talks about talks” are initiated. This kind of change often takes centre stage in initial resolution efforts, both bilateral and multilateral.

Lastly, some obstacles will undoubtedly be removed by *major structural changes* in the parties' environment, which make available more of a good in dispute, render that good irrelevant or provide alternatives for it, remove a threat or render other problems more pressing. Such changes are often slow and gradual, as when technological change makes a scarce resource of lesser value or a frontier defence system obsolete. On occasions, a major environmental change can be abrupt and far-reaching. For example, the collapse of the Soviet Union transformed the environment of many conflicts from the Middle East to South America and provided opportunities for moving conflicts in those and many other regions towards a resolution.

This last type of change is undoubtedly the most difficult for third parties to bring about deliberately. While it might be possible – yet difficult – to change leaders' and followers' minds, and possible – yet probably undesirable given the current shambles in Iraq – for leaders to be changed, it seems rare for anyone (especially outsiders) to be able to bring about structural changes in conflicting parties' environments. However, all four “resolutionary” changes – in leaders, in minds, in behaviours and in environments – need to be considered if our final question is to be even partially answered:

What can assist in making changes that help to move a conflict towards resolution?

7. Agents of Change?

Given the existence of such a complex variety of factors that help perpetuate conflicts and the large range of strategies that might be employed to overcome the obstacles that block moves towards a solution and help perpetuate a high level of destruction and damage, the final conundrum discussed in this essay necessarily becomes a question of who can successfully initiate and oversee such strategies.

In one sense, the question deals with the nature of change “agents” (what have been referred to in some cases as “drivers” of change). But given its implications, that term seems somewhat misleading, in the light of our previous discussion about types of “resolutionary” change. “Agent” implies – in some sense – a prime mover, which seems somewhat unrealistic, at least when considering what is involved in bringing about structural or environmental change.

In many situations, it seems most likely that the best any “agents” can accomplish is to take advantage of the opportunities for resolutionary activities afforded by major alterations in the environment or structure of a conflict, rather than bringing about such changes themselves. It may be possible that, on some occasions, a potential change agent possesses enough resources to bring about, for example, alterations in the environment of the conflict sufficient to alter other important elements, but such occasions and such agents seem rare. In 1975, it might have been possible for the

US government to make available resources to replicate Israeli air bases within Israel itself in order to replace those lost through a proposed withdrawal from Sinai, but such possibilities were hardly open to many other interested “agents”. Similarly, the provision of additional resources to change an underlying situation of scarcity is one way in which third parties – acting in the role of an *enhancer* of resources – might be able to alter the environment of a conflict to help bring about a resolution, but this depends on the availability of enough of such needed resources in appropriately interested hands. Again, such occasions seem rare, particularly in the light of the frequently late, inadequate or non delivery of the necessary goods in post-agreement or post-violence phases, once a conflict has slipped from public gaze.

It seems more usual that major environmental changes happen for complex and sometimes distant reasons – an environmental disaster, a major increase in the price of energy, for example – rather than through the actions of any conflict-related change agent. Probably the most such potential agents can do is to *monitor* the conflict and *provide early warning* of the likely effects of such environmental changes on opportunities for removing or circumventing obstacles to resolutionary change. Part of this *monitoring* role obviously involves taking note of any opportunities for conflict resolutionary initiatives afforded by changes that can range from natural catastrophes (such as mutually suffered earthquakes, for example in Greece and Turkey or in Pakistan and India), diversion of resources, or the defection of key patrons to changes in leadership within the parties in conflict. Part of this monitoring role involves continuously maintaining informal channels of contact and communication with all factions within the elites on both sides, a strategy long practised with some success by intermediaries such as the Society of Friends. “The readiness is all,” as Hamlet says – in somewhat different circumstances.

But readiness for what? I want to end by suggesting that the issue of change agents – perhaps better thought of as *enablers* rather than *drivers* – is best tackled by focusing attention on the question of what specific roles or functions change agents might need to fulfil in order to help bring about the kind of change that can move a conflict towards a resolution and overcome the tendency towards perpetuation displayed by many protracted, deep-rooted conflicts. Two have already been mentioned in connection with bringing about environmental change – that of *enhancer* of resources – and in connection with preparing to take advantage of propitious circumstances brought about by fortuitous environmental change – that of *monitor* and provider of early warning that “ripe moments” may be imminent. Others mainly focus on methods for bringing about changes in adversaries’ behaviour and in the beliefs, attitudes and perceptions held by leaders and key followers within the parties.

The other important point about enablers of resolutionary change is that, in order to carry out many of the roles outlined below, they do not necessarily have to be powerful or rich. Many of the tasks involve skills, capabilities, contacts and knowledge, rather than material resources or high status. Nor is it necessary for enablers to be distant from the conflict itself, in the sense of being sufficiently “outside” the conflict as to have no direct interest in its outcome. Lederach and Wehr (1996) have drawn a distinction between intermediaries who are “insider-partials” and those who are “outsider-neutrals”, emphasising that the former have a number of advantages over the latter that can enable them to operate more effectively in cultures that value third parties who have to heart the interests of both adversaries, as well as an existing relationship to both. A similar point can be made about change agents carrying out other tasks at other stages of a conflict resolution process. Civil society and intra-national human rights organisations can work to produce ideas about alternative futures and strategies or to build bridges between local adversaries or hold informal dialogues exploring issues of readiness for talks or underlying interests. Enablers can come from a



variety of backgrounds and do not have to be the diplomatic representatives of outside governments or international governmental organisations.⁹

Whoever carries out enabling tasks, the general principle underlying any list of suggested key functions is the assumption that, in order to bring about changes which overcome a tendency towards perpetuation of a conflict, members of parties in conflict have to be placed in a position where they can contemplate alternatives. In turn, this involves the construction of some kind of learning environment (or at least a process) in which old positions, aims and strategies can be rationally reviewed, new ideas offered or generated, alternative futures (including their relative costs) considered coolly rather than immediately rejected, and “road maps” towards acceptable solutions and future relationships constructed.

I would therefore suggest that the following be regarded as a tentative but basic list of necessary tasks or functions that need to be carried out by appropriate change agents if obstacles to revolutionary change are to be overcome and a conflict is to move in the direction of finding a sustainable and nonviolent solution:

Figure 3

| <i>Stage</i> | <i>Role</i> | <i>Function</i> |
|-------------------|------------------------------|--|
| Pre-Negotiation | <i>Monitor</i> | Tracks developments in the conflict system and its environment |
| | <i>Explorer</i> | Determines adversaries’ readiness for contacts; sketches range of possible solutions |
| | <i>Reassurer</i> | Convinces adversaries the other is not solely or wholly bent on victory |
| | <i>Decoupler</i> | Assists external patrons to withdraw from core conflict; enlists patrons in other positive tasks |
| | <i>Unifier</i> | Repairs intra-party cleavages and encourages consensus on core values, interests and concessions |
| | <i>Enskiller</i> | Develops skills and competencies to enable adversaries to achieve a durable solution |
| | <i>Convener</i> | Initiates talks, provides venue, legitimises contacts |
| | During talks or negotiations | <i>Facilitator</i> |
| <i>Envisioner</i> | | Provides new data, theories, ideas and options for adversaries to adapt; creates fresh thinking |

⁹ Many of those contributing towards the finally successful peace process in Northern Ireland came from within the communities locked in conflict – for example, Father Alec Reid and John Hume, the leaders of the Social Democratic and Labour Party.

| <i>Stage</i> | <i>Role</i> | <i>Function</i> |
|----------------|--------------------|---|
| | <i>Enhancer</i> | Provides new resources to assist in search for a positive sum solution |
| | <i>Guarantor</i> | Provides insurance against talks breaking down and offers to guarantee any durable solution |
| | <i>Legitimiser</i> | Adds prestige and legitimacy to any agreed solution |
| Post-Agreement | | |
| | <i>Verifier</i> | Checks and reassures adversaries that terms of the agreement are being carried out |
| | <i>Implementer</i> | Imposes sanctions for non-performance of agreement |
| | <i>Reconciler</i> | Assists in actions to build new relationships between and within adversaries |

Clearly this is an ambitious list of change agents, but it should be equally obvious that no one person or organisation can fulfil all, or even most, of these roles in order that needed changes in behaviour and attitudes can take place. A number of such organisations or individuals, working in conjunction with one another, would be necessary if all these tasks are to be carried out with the minimum of success needed to overcome the obstacles to change present while protracted and intractable conflicts are at their height. This caveat once again (Mitchell 2003; Nan 1999) emphasises the need for a change agent that will play a final essential role in this whole process – that of a *coordinator* – to bring about a necessary level of order and *complementarity* to the whole conflict resolution process.

A final thought on change and conflict resolution must, therefore, be that, to be successful in steering a protracted and violent conflict towards a resolution, a change process needs to be carefully thought through and managed – which returns the argument and this essay to the old idea of the connections between the management of change in any search for the resolution of a conflict.

8. Conclusion

Our discussion above has revealed once again that part of the problem with our present state of knowledge about the relationship between change, conflict and conflict resolution is that it offers little in the way of practical guidance to anyone seeking to initiate or reinforce revolutionary change processes. Tactically speaking, how does any enabler begin to assist adversaries to begin a process of de-escalation? What methods are available for decommitting a set of leaders that have trapped themselves in a position from which any concession looks like complete surrender? How might it be possible to diminish existing levels of mistrust to the point where some meaningful dialogue might begin? What factors might persuade a dominant community to hear and respond positively to the concerns of a marginalised minority before enough of the latter become convinced

that violence is the only way of drawing attention to those concerns? The list of practical questions about resolutionary changes is a long one and we are only beginning to have some ideas about helpful answers.

In our present state of knowledge I would argue that some clear, detailed and empirically supported answers to three key questions would be of enormous practical help to those seeking to change protracted conflicts towards some solution. The first is dealing with the issue of when to act:

What changes will clearly indicate that the adversaries in a protracted conflict are likely to be receptive to suggestions about alternative, nonviolent methods of fulfilling their interests and entering into a new relationship with their adversary?

At present, the literature on “ripe moments” seems dominated by ideas about stalemate, exhaustion of resources, escalating costs and disappearing probabilities of “victory”. These may be crucial in the last resort, but even the most embattled leadership might also be willing to think about alternatives as a result of changes other than alterations in the balance of advantage in the struggle. What might such changes be and can they be regularly observed in successful peacemaking processes?

The second two questions would be of great help in dealing with the dilemma of *how* to act, if only they could be answered with any degree of confidence. The first takes the following form:

How might one best carry out a systematic analysis of the conflict so as to distinguish those factors which are tractable, in the short or even medium term and given available time and resources; and those which are inherently intractable, so that efforts to change them are most unlikely to succeed?

Clearly, this issue returns us immediately to the question of change and what might be *changeable* in the short run, so that realistic solutions can be sought – rather than admirable, logical but utopian ones suggested and pursued. It seems unlikely that the ethnic make up of a conflict prone province can be altered quickly or without producing further exacerbation of existing conflicts. The solution to conflicts between settled agriculturalists and migrant pastoralists over access to water is not likely to be found in suggestions for changing the pastoralists’ entire way of life – at least for that, and probably the succeeding, generation. Strategically, conflict resolution might best operate on the basis of a clear understanding of those factors *perpetuating* a conflict that are more tractable and those which are far less tractable.

Tactically, the problem then becomes one of how best to work on the more changeable of the conflict perpetuating factors. If – as we noted above – “changing the minds” of key actors is, indeed, one of the less intractable aspects of protracted conflicts, then our third question becomes relevant:

If, in order to bring about changes in the minds of decision makers, advisers and opinion leaders, it is necessary to place them in an environment where they can contemplate new ideas, innovative alternatives, potential futures, and realistic current options, then how might such an environment be constructed, given the constraints on time, attention and freedom of action confronted by key figures in parties in conflict?

As I have suggested above, there are an almost infinite number of more detailed, tactical questions about resolutionary change that can be asked, but this last seems to me to open up a whole series of change related issues connected with moving protracted conflicts towards possible solutions. Moreover, it is based upon one universal factor that can lead to change, even in the most intractable of protracted conflicts – the fact that human beings learn and, through learning, change. The learning can take much time and often depends upon people being placed in circumstances that

encourage and promote learning – of which being in protracted conflict is undoubtedly one of the least conducive. However, we might end by recalling the realistic but ultimately encouraging words of the Israeli statesman Abba Eban: “People usually end up by doing the right thing – having tried everything else first.”

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Responses

Addressing Social Change in Situations of Violent Conflict: A Practitioner's Perspective

Ed Garcia

1. Introduction: The Challenge of *Social Change*

Experience of diverse conflict situations has demonstrated that the practitioners of conflict resolution need to confront the issue of social change if they hope to address the prevention or resolution of violent conflicts, and deter their recurrence.

The compelling images of violent conflicts in the Middle East, Africa, the Americas, Eurasia and Asia have become part of our daily lives. In this brief reflection on Christopher Mitchell's conceptual enquiry, it seems worthwhile to focus on insights gained from particular conflict regions in past years to shed light on the relationship between *social* change and violent conflict, while exploring more effective approaches to building peace.

In situations of violent conflict, social change – or the lack of it – often provides the key to better understanding their protracted character. It also provides a perspective that leads one to address the underlying factors of the conflict and to explore approaches to transform situations of social violence. Those who take up arms often argue that the change they seek is best achieved by the use or threat of force. The deep-rooted causes that give rise to armed struggles are often found in particular contexts where inclusive processes are absent – leading to human rights violations, exclusion from meaningful participation in politics, the lack of respect for minorities or diverse identities and inequality in the distribution of wealth, which are among the factors that fuel armed conflict.

Profound social change, it is argued, will come about only by putting pressure on those unwilling or unable to yield to the needs and aspirations of vulnerable populations. Social change thus involves processes and policies that result in modifications, or the overhaul, of structures or institutions so that they better respond to the needs and aspirations of the sectors of society who seek their transformation. Changes can manifest themselves in the attitudes and behaviours of conflict parties, in the composition of the political leadership and their policies, and in the country's social structures. Moreover, social change is often a process that involves the rebuilding of broken relationships and the crafting of more responsive institutions that need to be sustained over time.

Box 1: Reflecting on Peacebuilding Experiences Related to Social Change

I would like to share the story of some personal encounters that provide a glimpse into why those engaged in building peace – if they are to sustain their effort over time – need to confront the issue of social change, now more than ever.¹

In Aceh, Indonesia...

In December 2005, I met Muhajir Ibrahim (a former university student of engineering who was then driving a United Nations vehicle) in Banda Aceh, Indonesia. He told me the story of the day he saw the waves come in, wave upon giant wave. He rushed to his motorbike to save his mother and sister, and that was all he had. His house destroyed, his dreams devastated, in our quiet conversation we nevertheless pondered a question that seemed almost unreal: After the tragedy of the tsunami, what, then, is your idea of peace in Aceh? “If we can walk safely in the streets at night... If only I can rebuild our home; to have clean drinking water, and electricity. If I have a job, and my sister has access to education; and, if my mother is healthy...but especially a job, because that will give me respect and dignity.”

To realise this dream in Aceh will require new tools in different terrains of struggle – peaceful struggle, but struggle nonetheless. It will require a firm value-base and working against poverty and injustice by empowering people and engaging with social movements, political parties and the media.

As Alejandro Bendana, a former *Sandinista* leader and my co-panelist at a workshop on the peace process in Aceh put it: The aim, in essence, is not really to demobilise but better still to *re-mobilise* people around the core issues that had caused the armed conflict in the first place. To come down from the mountain to the village is not only a physical journey, especially if the “mountain is in your head”. Hence comes the need for a change of mindset and mentality – as occurs, for example, when former combatants begin looking at each other not as “enemies” but as “adversaries or antagonists”. Returning to the village is “return to peace, to terms of coexistence where the possibility of changing the nature of politics and economy exists”.

The peace agreement that was forged in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami has held admirably so far. Now it confronts the harder implementation phase of the process: transforming the armed movement into a vehicle for political participation and designing

¹ This essay builds on the author's involvement in peace processes in the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Nepal and other areas of the world. Regularly updated reflection papers by the author, from which the following stories are drawn, are available on International Alert's website: www.international-alert.org, e.g. “On the Unfinished Struggle for Peace in Nepal: Reflecting on Conversations with a Maoist Leader” (reflection paper June 2003, updated June 2006). Additional sources are: “Building Lasting Peace in Aceh in the Aftermath of the Devastation Caused by the 2004 Tsunami and the Protracted Civil War” (unpublished Alert manuscript, January 2006); “Transforming Humanitarian Crisis into Opportunities for Peace in Kashmir: From Shared Tragedy to Steps Towards Peace” (presentation at the Second International Peace Conference on Kashmir, 15-16 March 2006, London, UK).

an inclusive development programme that addresses the needs of the vulnerable sections of society, while providing a balance between the requirements of central government and the demands of the people living in the outlying province of Aceh.

In Kathmandu, Nepal...

Another encounter took place in 2003 in Kathmandu, Nepal with Dr. Baburam Bhattarai, then the ideologue of the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-M) and leading member of the armed group's negotiating panel.

Bhattarai emphasised that the problem the country faced was primarily political. In his view, the democratic movement of the 1990s had failed the people: The political leadership was inept and corrupt, while the political structures it created were unresponsive to the needs of the rural areas where the majority lived. He spoke of the divisions in society caused by class, caste, clan that were compounded further by discrimination of nationalities, ethnicities, geographical areas, gender, and repressive measures by the central government.

For these reasons, he argued that the Maoist demands in the talks centred mainly on political objectives. To solve deep-seated socio-economic problems and age-old inequalities, he claimed, one needed "to go for the jugular" – that is, to tackle the political questions that had remained unresolved after the inability of the democratic movement and successive parliamentary governments to bring about the social and economic changes required.

Among the issues under discussion, then, were the holding of a National Roundtable Conference which would bring together representatives from the Government, the political parties (including the Maoists), civil society organisations, representing sectors and nationalities, different ethnicities including the castes (like the "dalits" or "untouchables") and women, who generally were under-represented. In turn, this body could constitute an interim government that would then proceed to establish a Constituent Assembly. A package of reforms and constitutional amendments would be studied to pave the way for this sequence of political changes.

2. Raising Questions on Change and Conflict Transformation

Mitchell raises important questions in his comprehensive essay (Mitchell in this Dialogue). The veteran conflict analyst, who pioneered in the field of problem-solving workshops, shares his insights into ways of understanding conflict dynamics and practical modes of "resolutionary intervention", providing a framework for thinking about conflict and change while exploring "change processes in protracted conflicts" and highlighting different phases in the "escalation" and "de-escalation" of conflicts.

For the practitioner, a number of questions are posed: How to overcome the obstacles to change? How to break "vicious cycles" of violence and end the "entrapment" that intensifies violent situations, attitudes and behaviours? How to shift gears and change directions to begin addressing the underlying issues that fuel conflict or the unresolved issues that generate further violence? And, importantly, how to sustain and deepen social change, and involve the people in this critical task?

Attempting to respond to these questions, I want to concentrate on the following themes that are related to the efforts of peace practitioners who, in their work to bring about sustainable peace, need to explore ways of advancing processes of social change. Three interrelated themes in dealing with social change in contexts of violent conflict will be tackled:

- Working for Social Change: Exploring Guidelines for Peace Practitioners
- Rethinking Social Change: The Role of Third-Party Facilitation
- Sustaining Social Change: Building Peace Constituencies

2.1 Working for Social Change: Exploring Guidelines for Peace Practitioners

In order to supplement Mitchell's observations on conflict and change with reflections on social change more specifically, it may be helpful to try and provide a framework for those engaged in building peace in conflict situations.² In my view, it is critical for peace practitioners who seek ways to transform situations of violent conflict to be guided by principles that can render profound yet peaceful social change possible:

- *Putting the People at the Heart of the Process*: The people who live and suffer through the consequences of violence ultimately deserve to be the architects of the changes required to improve their lives on the ground. Enhancing the capacities of local people in their struggle for peaceful social change is crucial. Thus, putting people at the heart of peace processes is a basic tenet for peace practitioners.³
- *Adhering to Human Rights Standards/Traditions and Humanitarian Principles*: The right to life and the respect for others are enshrined in the universal standards of human rights (both civil and political, economic and socio-cultural) and incorporated in diverse cultural traditions. Humanitarian principles are derived from a deep reverence for life. Adhering to these criteria in advancing social change in situations of violence provides an ethical grounding for the often complex task of building peace on different fronts and at the national, regional and global levels.
- *Working in Meaningful Partnerships*: Partnerships are imperative in overcoming obstacles to resolving violent conflicts. Diverse tasks require a diversity of talents and resources, capacities and skills. They also require the ability to supplement, not supplant, the work of others. To complement rather than compete is a critical element in the work of peace practitioners. Social change necessitates not only a change in mind-sets, behaviours and situations but in the ways of doing things and designing alternative futures which involve the next generation, the youth and children. Different sectors of society play a major part in bringing about social change. The role of women in the work for peace has been outstanding, and their strengths must be harnessed. Religious, business and community leaders, and representatives of those in the media and in academia, non-governmental and people's organisations – all have roles to play.
- *Developing Inclusive Processes*: Time and again, experience teaches us how processes of exclusion that humiliate and marginalise people provoke violent reactions. Political and economic processes that permanently alienate significant sectors of society often engender protracted forms of violence. Promoting habits of dialogue, consultative approaches and inclusive processes in the political, economic and cultural spheres is an indispensable ingredient for advancing social change that can address the factors that give rise to systemic violence.

² This section drew inspiration from "Guiding Principles for Conflict Transformation Work", drafted by a team from International Alert in 1998, soon after the first-ever evaluation of a non-governmental organisation working in the field of conflict resolution (Sørbø et al. 1997); see also the presentation of "Guiding Principles" in the organisation's *Annual Review 2003-4* (International Alert 1998, 2004).

³ An earlier formulation of this insight was a lesson learned in the work of accompanying peace advocates in Colombia, "Meterle pueblo al proceso" – roughly translated as "putting people in the process."

- *Ensuring Sustainability*: If peace is to be sustainable, it must address the root causes of violence, not just its symptoms, and it must create changes not only in personnel but in policies – at local, national, regional and global levels. A just and durable peace demands that we invest energies and resources in building institutions and reforming, or overhauling, inadequate systems, employing appropriate means to ensure that direct violence is not only stopped but its recurrence is prevented in the foreseeable future. If peace is to be sustained, ultimately, it must win the commitment of a new generation. Resolving violent conflict is often the task of generations – there are no quick fixes. The culture of peace and acts of reconciliation cannot remain in the realm of token gestures but must become part of everyday practice.

2.2 Rethinking Social Change: The Role of Third-Party Facilitation

Among the different roles of those engaged in peacebuilding during different phases of conflict (Mitchell in this Dialogue, 30ff.), one that is crucial to overcoming obstacles to change is that of enabler or facilitator. Such an enabler or facilitator can help create safe spaces for dialogue, facilitate processes, encourage communication between parties to the conflict, generate ideas and accompany peace advocates and processes, particularly in critical phases of conflict.

Often, it is not a question of either/or (either employing the services of third-party “outsider-neutral” or “insider-partial” interveners) but of identifying the combination and complementarity required at different phases of the conflict and at different stages of peacebuilding. The combined efforts of “outsiders” and “insiders”, borne by their shared analysis or their different strengths, while cognizant of their own limitations, are important.

Overcoming situations of “entrapment”, as described in Mitchell’s rigorous essay, is perhaps one area where third-party facilitation can provide most valuable assistance. Generating creative options, avoiding loss of face, providing alternative venues or fresh approaches, are often best done by those somewhat removed from, yet with the capacity to link up with those intimately involved in, protracted situations of armed conflict. Entrapment is both a state of mind betraying lack of imagination as well as a political reality betraying a lack of will. The task of insiders-partial as well as outsiders-neutral is to combine their collective insights, skills and resources to think and act out of the tried and tired ways “to get to a new place” where it is possible to undertake initiatives that previously could not be conceived of (see also Lederach 2005).

A concrete and recent example is provided by the collaborative efforts in post-tsunami Aceh – involving member states of the European Union, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and non-governmental organisations, in particular the Crisis Management Initiative led by former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari, working hand in hand with the Indonesian government and the forces of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM), as well as members of civil society.

The island province of Aceh was devastated by the post-Christmas tsunami of 2004 which took the lives of countless people. This tragedy provided much-needed momentum to a peace process that had earlier seemed to falter and fail. The Memorandum of Agreement of August 2005 was the handiwork of people who faced the twin tragedy of a natural disaster and protracted human-made war, and required the facilitation capacity of international actors who, in a sense, embodied the solidarity of people worldwide, including those in other parts of the country that suffered a shared trauma.

2.3 Sustaining Social Change: Building Peace Constituencies

Formal or informal negotiations and agreements, however, are but moments in peace processes. They are essential, but they do not cover the totality of what can be understood as processes of peace. Even while negotiations stall or fail, there can be efforts to address the unresolved issues that generate, or lead to the escalation of, violent conflict. It is here where *social* change is most critical, where efforts to raise awareness and mobilise people to work for change are essential. The recent peaceful peoples' power experiences in the Philippines and Nepal have shown that it is even more important to engage people in ensuring that change is deepened and not reversed. It is for this reason that one needs to explore the role of peace constituencies in sustaining change – an element that might complement the approaches indicated by Mitchell's paper.

The work of catalysing peace constituencies refers to the process whereby awareness is raised and people are convened and mobilised across sectors and generations in order to put pressure on political leadership, influence policies or provide support for peace-related efforts, giving priority to issues most relevant to advancing a justpeace. In this regard, the role of youth and peace educators needs to be underscored, for the ground-breaking task of building durable peace necessarily must span generations.

Examples of issues that give rise to concerted public campaigns are manifold: Public pressure can be applied to lobby for changes in electoral laws or procedures (for example, changes in electoral systems that espouse “the first past the post” system which spawns a “winner take all” mentality), or for changes in political representation to include hitherto marginalised communities or vulnerable sectors (for example by electing “party list groups” besides the traditional political parties into parliament). The creation of livelihoods for the unemployed or displaced, and the design of socio-economic development strategies that take into account the rural or urban poor, are examples of economic priorities that trade unionists or peasant organisations can work for.

In essence, the building of peace constituencies involves the work of peace advocates, catalysing the further engagement of significant sectors of society in addressing those factors of the violent conflict that can, in the end, help overcome the obstacles to peace.

The parallel work of peace constituencies in exerting pressure to generate alternatives which address issues that negotiations recognise but fail to resolve adequately, is a step on the way to bring about required and relevant social change.

Moreover, it is critical to bring along a new generation of peace advocates who appreciate the galvanising capacity of an alternative vision to break the patterns of past violence. In areas of armed conflict in Africa, Asia, the Americas and the Middle East, it is the youth who often are the principal protagonists on the ground. Their involvement in promoting peaceful alternatives to age-old problems seems critical to ensuring that new mind-sets give rise to less violent ways of behaviour, thus contributing to the building of more peaceful futures.

The people's power experiences in the Philippines that brought down a repressive dictatorship in 1986, and a corrupt regime in 2001, are examples of public pressure which brought about political change. But they also demonstrate that a just and durable peace does not follow automatically: It requires more concerted work and focused reforms, backed up by functioning institutions, resources that are employed for the intended purposes and people with the resolve and professionalism the tasks require.

The social upheavals in 2006 that brought political changes in Thailand and in Nepal demonstrate the peoples' aspiration to reclaim their country from inept or unresponsive leaders, and their capacity to bring about change. But for the changes to be sustained, people's power may need to learn how to transform itself into peace constituencies that are focused on viable issues

and able to influence or mount effective vehicles for change. The task requires the involvement of communities and sectors of society who have the capacity to sustain their involvement and their vigilance, and who can be imbued with a sense of common purpose and principles that will help create more inclusive structures in political decision-making and the crafting of economic policies, strategies and programmes.⁴

Social change and conflict resolution are intricately linked, not only in the technical aspects involving professional “conflict interveners”, but perhaps more importantly in helping to catalyse or consolidate the sustained engagement of peace constituencies who will advance social change-in-context and who will promote more peaceful ways of resolving differences.

There are no easy answers nor time-tested paths; people confronting a unique set of challenges must time and again learn to move the situation from “theatres of armed conflict” to the realm of negotiating possibilities. It is here that Mitchell’s advice is valuable, “to distinguish those factors which are tractable... and those which are inherently intractable” (Mitchell in this Dialogue, 33). The task is to change what is changeable, given limited resources and capacities, with a sense of realism; and to recognise that what is intractable in the course of time can be addressed under a new set of circumstances or with a new cast of characters.

An example of a tractable factor which can be addressed, *if* the will and the imagination exist, is a deteriorating human rights situation which often results in obstacles to peace negotiations. Human rights violations are tractable factors since there are proven ways in which they can be addressed. The intensifying political killings in the course of 2005 and the first half of 2006 in the Philippines provide a case in point. The deterioration in the human rights situation has undermined trust between the parties in conflict and derailed the peace negotiations. Putting pressure on the political leadership to give priority to stopping the killings, addressing the climate of impunity, protecting witnesses, ensuring that investigations lead to convictions and identifying mechanisms, both internally and internationally, to boost efforts to improve human rights are some of the measures that now need to be undertaken if trust is to be restored and the formal peace talks are to be resumed.

Box 2: Efforts to Address Tractable Factors in Relation to Peace Processes

A relevant illustration of efforts to address a tractable factor in a conflict situation is the experience in the Philippines regarding the work to put a stop to political killings. Human rights groups and peace advocates have documented and denounced increasing human rights violations in the country that have escalated even before the breakdown of peace talks between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the National Democratic Front (NDF) which had been suspended since August 2004 – despite a Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL), signed by the conflict parties in 1998.

Ending political killings, taking place in an apparent “climate of impunity”, had become an imperative – if conditions more conducive to exploring possible talks were to be created. It was clear from consultations with the parties to the conflict and the official facilitators that peace talks could not be resumed under the current conditions.

⁴ A recent debate on the strengths and limitations of people’s power took place on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of people’s power in the Philippines. Randy David, an insightful sociologist from the University of the Philippines, has been a proponent of retrieving the values of people’s power and recognising its capacity to bring about change (see his regular Sunday columns in the Philippine Daily Inquirer prior to the people power commemoration in February 2006).

It was this focus which guided International Alert's (IA) peace missions to the Philippines in 2006, resulting in greater collaboration with human rights organisations and helping to synergise work of peace and human rights advocates. In particular, IA cooperated closely with the Amnesty International team working on the Philippines as well as local human rights groups who had been monitoring compliance with the human rights agreement and the events on the ground.

Amnesty launched a report on 15 August 2006 entitled "Philippines: Political Killings, Human Rights and the Peace Process" with a set of recommendations urging immediate respect for human rights, effective investigations and witness protection, compliance with the human rights agreement and the operation of the joint monitoring committee, and calling for the strengthening of local institutions as well as availing of UN expertise such as the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial executions. The report has received wide coverage and elicited diverse responses; in particular, the NDF has expressed willingness to resume "peace negotiations directed at addressing the social roots of the armed conflict"⁵ while the Government condemned the political killings in the "harshest possible terms" on the eve of the 23rd anniversary of the assassination of the late Senator Benigno Aquino on 21 August.

3. A Long-Term Perspective for Multi-Dimensional Change

Moving a situation that is entrenched in the dynamics of escalation and may lead to entrapment requires perspective, and bringing about social change will definitely require a long-term perspective. The previous reflections have tried to respond to the question not only of how to overcome obstacles to change, but of how to help bring about the kind of profound social change required to address the underlying factors of violent conflict and to prevent its recurrence or intensification – from the perspective of reflective, principled peace practice.


Mitchell observes in his concluding section that "our present state of knowledge about the relationship between change, conflict and conflict resolution is that it offers little in the way of practical guidance to anyone seeking to initiate or reinforce revolutionary change processes" (Mitchell in this Dialogue, 32). I have therefore focused my response on a discussion of issues that would help the reflective peace practitioner navigate a way to better understanding the intricate and necessary relationship of social change and the pursuit of justpeace – a more peaceful place that will be more just and durable, where people are able to settle differences in less conflictive and nonviolent ways.

In a number of violent conflicts that I have closely observed or worked in, it has been made abundantly clear that conflict resolution practices in the end must result in profound changes in attitudes, behaviour or in situations and structures that touch the following four areas: respect for human rights including diverse identities, inclusive governance, sustainable development and the reform of the security sector.

Tackled together, they will have a profound impact. Paying attention to these issues can significantly contribute to the resolution of violent conflicts and foster social change leading to a more just and peaceful society.⁶

⁵ Philippine Daily Inquirer, 17 August 2006.

⁶ *Searching for Peace in Asia Pacific: An Overview of Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Activities* (2004) includes a number of essays that deal with these critical themes. See in particular Garcia 2004.

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- *Protecting Human Rights*: Among the first casualties of war are respect for human rights and the protection of vulnerable civilian populations. The bitterness of violent conflict is often spawned by atrocious behaviour not only in the field of battle but spilling over into the communities. It is imperative to adhere to human rights traditions and norms as well as international humanitarian law and humanitarian principles.
 - *Promoting Inclusive Governance*: At the core of most conflicts is the struggle for political power. The exclusive character of some so-called “democracies” often violates the people’s right to participate in governance, ignoring the role of minorities or vulnerable sectors of society. Electoral, political and constitutional reforms can have far-reaching implications that directly influence the direction of conflicts and can move political systems to a state where differences can be resolved without the resort to arms.
 - *Catalysing Sustainable Development*: A common cry of people who are categorised among the rural and urban poor is for adequate health and housing, clean drinking water, electricity for their homes, roads to transport their goods to market, education for their children, social security for their old age, and meaningful livelihoods in dignified communities: this is what peace ultimately means to the people on the streets or in the villages. Strategies for economic development designed to eradicate or reduce poverty must find a way to relate to this.
 - *Advancing Security Sector Reform*: Conflict tends to escalate precisely in those situations where abuses by the military and police heighten tensions or lead to violations of basic rights. It is even worse when the public forces are manipulated or used to perpetuate the repressive use of political power by corrupt leaders. Ensuring civilian supremacy and oversight over the military and adherence to accepted codes of conduct is of great importance here. It is for this reason that security sector reform can no longer be left to experts alone; peace practitioners, peace advocates and peace constituencies need to be more deeply involved in what perhaps can be called the hard inner core that requires serious change in the work to resolve armed conflicts.

The work for peace in the end is the work of many hands, encompassing the engagement of different people, organisations and even generations. It has different phases, and different levels (local, national, regional and global). Social change is ultimately the people’s prerogative and their continuing challenge – though at times their efforts may require support and the sustained involvement of others. In accompanying peace advocates and the processes they construct, peace practitioners have a modest and limited task – helping to create spaces or facilitate communication to catalyse new initiatives or influence policies; helping to shape the thinking or the acting that eventually could result in diverse changes or profound social change. In the end, such collective efforts help address the issues that give rise to violent conflicts and ultimately transform them into either opportunities or “cornerstones” of more peaceful outcomes.

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Revolutionary Change: The Art of Awakening Dormant Faculties in Others

Chris F. J. Spies

“For you who will to work with he who guides the future of mankind, bring forth spirit potential within yourself and so achieve the power to awaken dormant faculties in others. Cultivate the seed points; foster forces of development; and recognize that which is of the future.” ~ Rudolf Steiner (source unknown)

1. Introduction

The dilemma with change is that everyone likes to talk about it, but very few have insight into their own willingness to change, let alone their ability to influence change. Those who see the need for change often want others to change first. That applies to adversaries and onlookers, but also to analysts and practitioners. Why is this the case? Mitchell rightly points out that our present state of knowledge “offers little in the way of practical guidance to anyone seeking to initiate or reinforce revolutionary change processes” (Mitchell in this Dialogue, 32).

Guiding future discussions in search of “practical guidance”, Mitchell, in his concluding remarks, asks three key questions, which can be summarised as follows:

1. What changes will clearly indicate that the adversaries in a protracted conflict are likely to be receptive to suggestions about alternative, nonviolent methods of fulfilling their interests and entering into a new relationship with their adversary?
2. How to best carry out a systematic analysis to distinguish between tractable and intractable factors in order to focus on effective change efforts?
3. How to construct an environment in which people in conflict can safely explore new ideas towards a better future?


The first question has to do with the question *when* to act and the last two with *how* to act. In an earlier section of his essay Mitchell discusses the question *who* needs to act (29-32).

In this article I will attempt to take up Mitchell's challenge to reflect on lessons from the field that may offer insights into the practical aspects of stimulating social change in developmental ways. In particular, I would like to reflect on the third question and also explore the questions *where* to begin and *how to measure the safeness* of the environment that we seek to construct. I share his belief that people do learn and can change (29, 33) but there has to be an attitude of openness to risk, honest examination of, and applications of, the lessons in practice. Lederach (2002, 99) urges us to pay much more attention to the development of "*process and learning-based* indicators rooted in an *explicit* exploration of the change theory", rather than relying on the rhetoric of peace and gauging change by means of outcome indicators.

This essay starts with stating a few assumptions that are the basis of our approach. It then explores a development framework in an effort to answer the question how to measure the quality of safe spaces and processes that happen in those spaces.

2. Key Assumptions

1. *Conflict is a necessary and inevitable dynamic in all human relationships.* It can have positive outcomes, depending on the ability of adversaries to achieve "dynamic stability" (Mitchell in this Dialogue, 15) – a well-known concept in engineering sciences. It is used to describe the ability to achieve stability amidst various dynamics or forces. Designers of boats, aeroplanes and 4x4 vehicles, for example, anticipate and expect turbulence and friction. Their designs include mechanisms and components that will ensure maximum stability under varying circumstances. Nonviolent conflict, unlike violent conflict, should neither be avoided nor discouraged.
2. *Conflict transformation is a skill and an art.* Successful peacebuilders have developed skills that are strengthened by intuition and imagination in the same way as Amerindians in the Amazon region developed coping mechanisms that cannot simply be taught to outsiders. Amerindians, like many other first peoples, are artists whose intuition, sharpened senses and an ability to "know the forest" inform and shape their survival skills. Having navigated the creeks and rivers for centuries, even children have an ability to read the riverbed under the water by watching the surface. The implication for change processes is that those who seek to intervene will have to learn the art and skill of listening from those who read the forest and the rivers before they attempt to construct an environment for change.
3. *Resolutionary change is as much a matter of attitude as it is of knowledge and skills.* Even if it were possible to know everything about change and conflict – its nature, formation, escalation, mitigation and resolution or transformation – practitioners might still find themselves frustrated by the absence or direction of change, because they are often unaware of their own habits and attitudes. If, for example, agents of change behave as drivers rather than enablers – a point Mitchell alludes to on page 29 – they are most likely contributing to the escalation of conflict. Or, if the prevailing attitude is that people are the problem instead of understanding that people are never the problem, the problem is the problem – a key principle of David Epston and Michael White's Narrative Therapy concept (1990) – interveners will continue to face resistance. Or, if the prevailing perception is that conflict is bad, few will find the courage to get involved in constructive ways.

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4. *It is possible to design and facilitate safe spaces that build mediative capacity* (Lederach 2002). This happens through listening that leads to the development of relationships that can sustain social change. I will return later to how this is to be done.
 5. *There is no substitute for local ownership*. The value of outsider assistance in cases of deep-rooted and protracted conflicts is undisputed, but those who seek to help will find that the extent to which people own the design and outcome of transformation processes from the inception determines the likelihood of sustainability of those efforts. History has shown that peace agreements born as a result of local stakeholders receiving “peace sperms” from foreign donors do not last. The DNA of resolutionary change needs to match the DNA of the primary role players. Those who seek to assist in change processes can, at best, be midwives who assist the parents to give birth to and nurture new life.¹
 6. *Change is in the first place (but not only) a personal or individual matter*. Changed individuals have the potential and responsibility to influence relationships, sub-systems, systems, policies, institutions and transformative processes.
 7. *People in conflict, if given an opportunity and support, have a great deal of resilience and dormant faculties*. Nicaraguan psychologist Martha Cabrera (see references, no date) describes the “multiple wounds phenomenon” that has social, political and personal dimensions. Unhealed hurts of the past cause people to develop an inability to embrace change. Multiply wounded societies have capacities to change, but these capacities will only become active if there are spaces where the wounds of the past are recognised and dealt with. Those who partner with people in pain are often guilty of either ignoring the wounds, or dysfunctional rescuing. Assistance should therefore always aim to awaken those dormant faculties, stimulating imaginative instinct, resilience, commitment and care, in the belief that hope generates energy to take the next step.
 8. *Process is as important as outcome*. Building cohesion, like development, cannot consist of a series of unrelated activities. Activities or content (“the strategic what”) need to be designed and executed with and by key role-players (“the strategic who”) in unison with a unifying vision and empowering process (“the strategic how”).

Let us explore how these assumptions are translated into a framework and from there into practice.

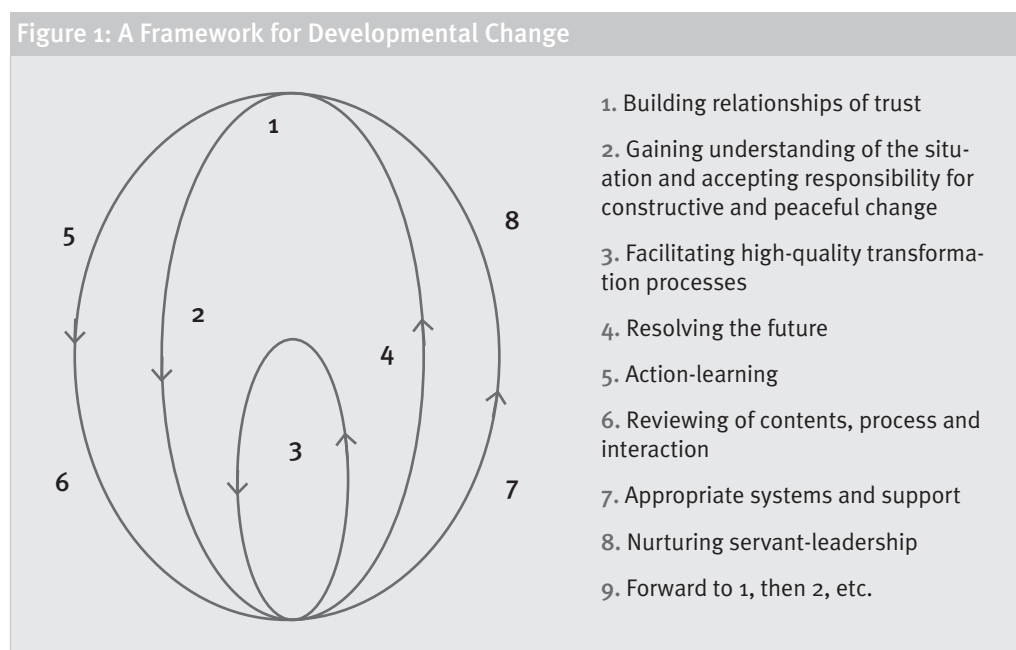
3. A Framework for a Developmental Approach to Change

A developmental approach is one that respects the rights and abilities of people to exercise constructive control and ownership of processes that affect them, and facilitates such control and ownership. Such an approach focuses on supporting people to “cultivate the seeds”; to “recognise that which is of the future”, as Steiner says; and to take incremental steps towards building and guiding one another to a future that will be free from those obstacles that block self-fulfilment.

¹ Compare this approach with what Bishop Paride Taban of Southern Sudan once described to me in the early 1990s as the peaceworkers’ frustration with the “peace vultures” – those organisations and people specialising in conflict that soar the skies in search of conflict on which they feast like vultures on a carcass. Once they spot other vultures circling elsewhere, they fly away to feast on the next conflict, leaving behind dry bones and no capacity.

To initiate change is the easy part. To sustain it is much harder. It requires people to work in partnerships on present challenges in the context of lessons from the past with a view to ensure a better future. It requires comprehensive design and specific processes; a balance between short-term goals and longer-term outcomes; commitment to local ownership of process and contents; genuine consultation and participation; a focus on being a presence instead of bringing new “tools”; a strategic approach instead of ad-hoc tactical interventions; movement towards interdependence as opposed to dependence or independence; and movement beyond awareness to change in behaviour. It also requires attention to mechanisms, management, support and continuous evaluation.

The following framework, in part based on the original development framework designed by the Community Development Resource Association (CDRA 1999/2000), captures these principles in a logical but free-flowing form. It helps us to see change as part of an interconnected circular movement with no beginning and no end. The separate stages are elaborated further below.



3.1 Building Relationships of Trust

Change and conflict, like development, are about people, not things. Every effort, therefore, to effect revolutionary change has to begin with substantial investments in building trust with and between people. Change agents should expect mistrust and should not assume that their role as interveners is understood and welcomed. Building trust is a long process that requires one-on-one discussions with the “strategic who”, consistency, transparency, solid processes, regular feedback, non-partisanship, information and knowledge sharing. Trust generates energy to change. Mistrust closes down the spaces for change.

3.2 Gaining Understanding of the Situation and Accepting Responsibility for Constructive and Peaceful Change

Although there is no question about the value of analysis by outsiders, there is often not enough effort to assist adversaries to share their own analysis and understanding. Too often outsider experts produce reports after “consultations” that cause additional strain on the time and energies

of people who are already over-burdened, and too seldom do they verify their findings with those who provided the information in the first place. Facilitation of change processes requires skilful listening and sharing that will enable those who are affected to gain new perspectives and joint understanding of what needs to change, why, how and when. Adam Kahane (2004, 103) sums it up as follows: “In order to solve tough problems, we need more than shared new ideas. We also need shared commitment. We need a sense of the whole and what it demands of us.”

Once relationships are strong and people understand and own the problems, processes and desired outcomes, they are much more likely to accept responsibility for constructive and peaceful change. It has been said so many times, but it is worth repeating: There is no substitute for commitment and ownership by those who are directly involved in the process.

3.3 Facilitating High-Quality Transformation Processes

In spite of all the knowledge in the field of change, and more specifically of organisational development processes, the issue of poor facilitation is probably the most important barrier that frustrates effective change. It unfortunately happens in so many instances that people who hold power and who are not necessarily the best facilitators are taking on facilitation roles to the detriment of generative dialogue. Based on the work of Otto Scharmer, Steve Waddell (2005), co-director of the Generative Dialogue Project, describes generative dialogue as a “conversation that brings forth creative energy and collective intelligence out of a personal sense of connection to the whole.” This type of dialogue that facilitates change is unlikely to happen when tough leaders lead tough discussions in debating styles. Those who facilitate should know that good facilitation processes result in participants’ co-owning, co-designing and implementing necessary changes to agendas, processes and interactions. In short, facilitation of conflict transformation is about remodelling identity that enables us to replace old patterns with new ones. Conflict transformation is a by-product of new thinking (attitudes, insights and understanding) that results in new behaviour.

3.4 Resolving the Future

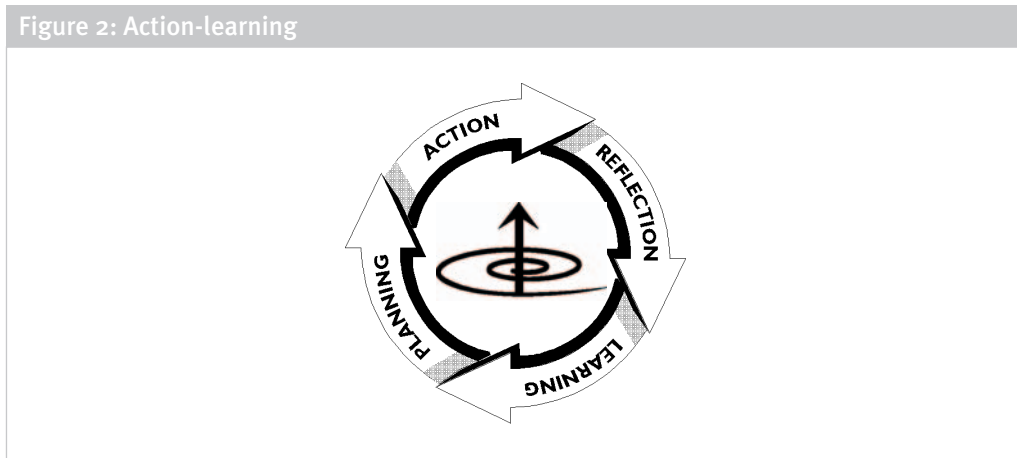
New thinking and new behaviour generate energy to resolve the future. Change is always about the future. But the future holds on to the past, refusing to let go of collective memories that shaped mindsets and behaviours. In a sense the future does not have to let go of the past. It can connect to the past by re-membering the parts into a new wholeness that is characterised by positive peace and justice. The miracle of South Africa’s peaceful transition to democracy was that the same people who were mourning the loss of life, dignity and opportunities were the architects of a common future that promised to protect future generations against human rights abuses. It was only after South Africans reached agreement on the future that they engaged in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings. Facilitation of change processes makes it possible for people to find inspiration in imagining and working together towards a future that connects us to our past in a transformative way.

3.5 Action-learning

The way to improve what we are doing is through continuous action-learning. Action-learning can be described as an “upward spiral of learning and increasingly effective action” (Taylor, Marais and Kaplan 1997, 3). The spiral comprises four elements: action, reflection, learning and planning. The action-learning methodology values the experience and knowledge of participants and develops people’s insights and good judgement. The past cannot be changed, but reflecting on the past is necessary to expand the range of insights that could inform the way we approach the future. Reflecting on the action-learning process in reverse order, one can say that successful

implementation (*action*) is dependent on good *planning*. Good planning draws on *lessons* learned, which is the result of thorough *reflective evaluation* on the *action*.

Figure 2: Action-learning



3.6 Reviewing of Contents, Process and Interaction

As a result of asking the right questions in the action-learning methodology, it is now possible to review the quality of the what (content), the how (process) and the who (the strategic partners) *with* partners instead of *for* them. Typical guiding themes are strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats at the physical, procedural, relationship, cultural and identity levels.

3.7 Appropriate Systems and Support

Facilitation of transformational processes should ensure that developmental change is supported by appropriate systems and mechanisms. Appropriate systems and support would constitute those support systems that enhance self-sufficiency and a sense of interdependence instead of dependency and reliance on outsider inputs and maintenance. Any support needs to enhance sustainable and locally owned systems in coordinated and collaborative manners.

3.8 Nurturing Servant-Leadership

Success of initiatives always depends on the quality of leadership. The paradigm of “good leadership” is culturally bound and should be carefully examined. In some cultures leaders have to be seen to be “strong” and “firm”, while in other settings leadership depends much more on presence and wisdom.

When access to people depends on one or two leaders only, those leaders may use their gate-keeper positions to enhance their own status and power among their followers. It is therefore important to have strong relationships with a number of key leaders in relevant sectors who collectively have the potential to construct “mediative spaces”.

The challenge is to help nurture facilitative and mediative leadership styles instead of dominating styles; leaders who listen first instead of speaking first; visionaries instead of blamers; magnanimous leaders instead of vindictive leaders; empowering leaders instead of “absolute” leaders; and leaders whose aspirations are aligned with the values of justice, peace and nonviolence. They are the “strategic who” that need to drive and implement revolutionary change processes (Lederach 2001).

Servant-leaders – a term coined by Robert Greenleaf – may or may not hold formal leadership positions. They encourage and model collaboration, trust, foresight, listening, and the

ethical use of power and empowerment. Lederach's description of the qualities of "voicewalkers" (2005, 167-168) captures the aspirations of revolutionary change agents:

"They don't confuse their job or activities with who they are as people. They don't confuse getting credit with success, or recognition with self-worth. They don't confuse criticism for an enemy. They don't confuse truth with social or political power. They don't confuse their work with saving the world. They don't confuse guilt with motivation...It is not so much what they do as who they are that makes a difference. They listen in a way that their own agenda does not seem to be in the way. They respond more from love than fear. They laugh at themselves. They cry with others' pain, but never take over their journey. They know when to say no and have the courage to do it. They work hard but are rarely too busy. Their life speaks."

Servant-leaders lead the process to begin another cycle of the framework, starting with a focus on relationships... and so the cycle continues.

But how does one move from this understanding to the practice of constructing spaces safe enough for key role-players to explore and risk new alternatives? This is the essence of Mitchell's last question.

4. Practical Guidance to the Architecture of Safe Spaces

How can knowledge of the need for, and theories of, change help to thaw frozen seeds in hearts and minds so that they germinate into new life? What attitudes, behaviours and skills are necessary to form partnerships that help everyone in the relationship move from a feeling of disempowerment to empowerment; from fear of the unknown to a willingness to let go of the past and present? Who needs to do what in order to help create spaces in which people regain the courage to take steps towards the transformation of relationships and perceptions despite a history of pain and mistrust? While the technical details and taste of each architect may differ from conflict to conflict, there is one common denominator: through respectful listening.

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4.1 Respectful Listening

While mediating a land claim in the Kalahari desert, I once visited a farmer whose farm was far away from the rest. It was a long and hot journey through inhospitable terrain. He was one of the stakeholders who opposed the land claim by the San people. I expected a hostile reception, because everybody in the area knew him as a difficult person. The opposite was true. This man started the conversation by saying: "For twenty five years I tried to tell people our point of view and nobody wants to listen. You go to meetings and all you find is that you are spoken to. You, sir, a stranger, are the first person to come to my place, sit on my veranda, drink my coffee and listen to how we feel." It took almost one year to convene the first multi-stakeholder forum on the claim. Everybody predicted chaos "because this is what normally happens when we discuss land issues". Once again the opposite was true. After the two-day meeting of more than two hundred people, participants were elated. "It was the first time that we were able to engage each other without fighting." The reason for this was that all the stakeholders came to the session knowing that they were well understood and listened to in the preparation phase. They had little anxiety about the agenda and process, because they participated in the design of the forum.

Respectful listening is more than a technique. It is an attitude, a behaviour and a skill that creates safe spaces and mediative capacity. In these generative and nonviolent spaces the heartbeat of the root causes, expressed as unmet needs, is heard and amplified in “contradictory and conflictual relationships” (Clements 2002). Listening satisfies adversaries’ needs for identity, understanding, participation and protection, for example. Listening makes it possible for people to consider exploring mutually satisfying options because they know that their ideas have been heard and form part of the pool of alternatives that will be considered. My idea and your idea now become our ideas. Listening makes it possible to shift dynamics from *I* to *we*, and from *them* to *us*, because people know that they are well understood even though solutions have not been reached.²

Most often efforts to resolve conflicts get stuck at the level of facts (thoughts) and issues, manifesting in power struggles. In an effort to deepen our understanding of listening, I have in recent years developed the Five-Level Listening Model on the basis of the original three-level listening model promoted in the field of organisational development. To the original three levels – the head (*thoughts*), the heart (*emotions*) and the feet (*will/intentions*) – I have added the stomach (*needs* and *satisfiers*) and the clothes (*culture, beliefs* and *values*).



- Listening to the (head) **thoughts**: Can those who listen accurately reflect and paraphrase the thoughts of the others to the satisfaction of the speakers?
- Listening to the (heart) **emotions**: Does the process encourage the naming, recognition and expression of deep-seated emotions without apportioning blame? Can people hear the pain or joy and empathise with one another?
- Listening to the (stomach) **needs** and the chosen **satisfiers**: Do we help people to articulate their needs and the ways these needs are currently met or frustrated?

² A practical example of how adversaries became partners is described in the story about a Guyanese Hindu religious leader of East Indian descent, Pandit Krishna Persaud, who managed to establish relationships with people from African descent in a hostile environment (UNDP 2006).

- Listening to the (feet) **intentions**: Do people express their intentions? Do we know what people want to do about the situation?
- Listening to the (clothes) **culture**: What are the underlying beliefs, shared knowledge and meaning people use to justify their perceptions and behaviour?

Respectful listening – and speaking – at all five levels is the unique feature of safe spaces, regardless of the context and culture. It is therefore possible to measure whether spaces are creative and safe in the same way as it is possible to measure when spaces are not safe.

4.2 Recognising Safe Spaces

Linking listening to needs, on the one hand, and developing a set of indicators that would help us to measure whether our listening has created safe spaces, on the other hand, is important. I find the ground breaking work of Chilean economist Manfred Max-Neef (1991) very helpful. Sharing their “revitalized capacity to dream”, he and his colleagues developed a matrix of fundamental human needs and possible satisfiers. According to Max-Neef, every human being, regardless of age and culture, shares the same finite and classifiable system of interrelated and interactive (as opposed to hierarchical) needs. These needs are *subsistence, protection, affection, participation, understanding, leisure, creation, identity and freedom*. When needs are not met, people experience poverties, and each poverty generates pathologies. For example, poverties of subsistence, protection, understanding, participation, etc. lead to “collective pathologies of frustration”, caused by unemployment, external debt, hyperinflation, fear, violence, marginalisation and exile – the fuel of destructive conflict. Needs do not change, but satisfiers of these needs do. Some satisfiers could actually be destroyers, for example, if war is chosen as a satisfier of the need for protection, freedom and identity. The satisfiers people choose are culturally and time-bound. (Culture is used in a broad sense of “the way we understand and do things around here”.) Cultural change, therefore, is the consequence of exchanging traditional satisfiers for new or different ones. Expanding on Max-Neef’s development concepts, one can argue that bringing about change in the way people respond to conflict requires spaces where people reflect on their needs, their chosen responses and possible alternatives. Those spaces, as we have seen earlier, need to be safe in order to build mediative and generative capacities.

Using Max-Neef’s list of human needs (the first column), I suggest the following matrix as a checklist to measure safeness of the spaces:

| Need | Goal | (Examples of) Indicators |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| <i>Subsistence</i> | Freedom from want | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will this initiative help to secure means for self-fulfilment? • Does fear of losing an income or livelihood play a role in people’s participation? |
| <i>Protection</i> | Freedom from fear and abuse | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do people agree to and respect the principles of engagement (ground rules)? • Does the process protect the weak against the more powerful? |
| <i>Affection</i> | Freedom from hate and rejection | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are people respected and valued? • How does this initiative enhance dignity, teamwork and camaraderie? |

| Need | Goal | (Examples of) Indicators |
|----------------------|--|--|
| <i>Understanding</i> | Freedom from ignorance and uncertainty | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the process encourage transparency and understanding? • Does everyone have equal access to information on contents and process? |
| <i>Participation</i> | Freedom from exclusion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does every affected person feel meaningfully involved in the design, execution and evaluation of the initiative? • Is this initiative non-discriminatory and inclusive? |
| <i>Leisure</i> | Freedom from stress and exhaustion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the initiative renew people's energy or does it make their lives more stressful? • Does this initiative support people to break down complex issues into manageable strategies? |
| <i>Creation</i> | Freedom to be the architect of your own future | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is this initiative building on people's imaginations and dreams? • Is this a collective effort to create something new and constructive? • Are new ideas welcomed without judgement? |
| <i>Identity</i> | Freedom to be proud of who you are | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is everyone treated equally, valued, affirmed and respected for who they are? • Are people free to define themselves according to their own criteria? |
| <i>Freedom</i> | Freedom from coercion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the process reward honest expression of ideas? • Is the process fair and non-partisan? |

One would immediately recognise the interconnectedness of the different needs and indicators. The common denominator is the need for freedom from want and fear.

Returning to the issue of listening for a short moment, it is interesting to note that respectful listening is probably the most synergistic satisfier to all the needs in Max-Neef's list. When listening takes place, people will feel protected, understood, affirmed, less stressed, part of the creation of a new solution, free to be themselves, etc. The opposite is also true. When people do not feel listened to, most, if not all, of the needs are frustrated.

There are obviously many unanswered questions and undiscovered dynamics in so far as essential building blocks for safe spaces are concerned. One of the areas that need a lot of further investigation is Mitchell's first question on page 33: "*What changes will clearly indicate that the adversaries in a protracted conflict are likely to be receptive to suggestions about alternative, nonviolent methods of fulfilling their interests and entering into a new relationship with their adversary?*" In the Guyana experience of bringing parliamentary political parties together in a space that is free from political contest and tension, the metaphor of waiting for the "ripe moments" (Mitchell in this Dialogue, 30) is not helpful. It implies that someone else has to watch to recognise the moment of ripeness while the fruit passively and patiently waits for a process to unfold over which it has little or no control. Or even worse, it blames others for not being ready. Initiating change is more like knocking on doors to see who opens. Outsiders may take initiative by knocking on a closed door, but the owners decide whether to open the door or not. The initiative and the response

are mutual. One only invites others in if it is safe to do so. You only venture to go outside if it is safe. Safeness is therefore determined to a large extent by the purpose of the knocking and quality of the conversation at the door. Those who knock ought to expect suspicion and even enmity. Those who are inside don't know what to expect. Respectful listening and respect for human rights are the key to elicitive (remember that this originally means "to lead out") and generative conversations that lead to a change in attitude, perceptions and behaviour.

5. Conclusion

There is little doubt that the discussion above has not done justice to Mitchell's need for "clear, detailed and empirically supported answers" to his three questions listed at the beginning of this article. What has become clear, however, is that answers to these questions will have to be found in listening spaces that create empowering partnerships with key figures in conflicts. These key figures, as Mitchell rightly points out on page 33, have constraints of time, attention and freedom. These constraints are the surface. Under the surface lie deep needs for subsistence, leisure, affection, protection, participation, creation, understanding, identity and freedom. Only when key figures and support teams are able to recognise and express these needs as shared needs can meaningful progress be expected.

The time has arrived for change agents to wander with their partners, not as initiative takers (see Mitchell's list on page 31/32), but as accompaniers and walking partners whose conversations re-awaken people's energies and imagination. They are partners in the forest – fellow human beings. They will know the forest. They will navigate the rivers. Together they will transform competitive spaces into listening spaces; tactical planning into strategic planning; escalating dynamics into dynamic stability; and resistance to change into risk-taking for change.

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Extending the Framework of Inquiry: Theories of Change in Conflict Interventions

Ilana Shapiro

1. Introduction¹

The framework for inquiry set out by Christopher Mitchell in his article, “Conflict, Social Change and Conflict Resolution”, provides a useful starting point for organising and linking the vast literatures on social change, conflict and conflict resolution. His broad framework, illustrated through the analysis of current and historical conflicts, initiates a much needed discussion about the kinds of change that cause conflict, facilitate its escalation and promote its resolution. Reflecting the focus of existing theory and research on these topics, however, the discussions in his article focus more on the role of change in the formation and perpetuation of conflict, than on the kinds of changes needed to facilitate its resolution.

What sorts of changes help bring about the resolution or transformation of conflicts? Developing new ways to answer this final question posed by Mitchell is the focus of this brief response paper. Research on conflict intervention programmes’ *theories of change* – or the underlying assumptions about what changes are needed to help resolve the conflict and strategies for bringing about such changes – can provide a useful supplement to the discussions in Mitchell’s article. Making the theories of change that guide existing conflict interventions more explicit provides an opportunity to extract and build theories that are grounded in practice. It is also important in evaluating the usefulness of given theories and revising practices when core assumptions

¹ I wish to extend my sincere thanks to Beatrix Schmelzle and David Bloomfield at the Berghof Research Center for raising provocative questions and making excellent suggestions during the editing process that contributed greatly to this paper.

are imprecise or unfounded. In addition, articulating, differentiating and comparing theories of change in conflict interventions can help to:

- Foster reflective practice and conscious choice among practitioners that expands the range and creativity of intervention options.
- Forge stronger links between theory and practice by surfacing the underlying theories of individual, relational and social change that shape practice.
- Identify contradictory or competing theories useful in testing the relative validity of different approaches or in differentiating the conditions under which each might be most useful.
- Recognise the shared or complementary elements of intervention initiatives which can promote cooperation and coordination among programmes.

2. Theories of Change

Beyond the tangled terminology and disputed distinctions of conflict settlement, management, resolution and transformation, efforts to end violent conflicts are inevitably engaged with processes of change.² Questions about what should be changed, how much change is needed, where change should start, when changes are most effective and how change actually happens, drive the strategic choices of conflict interventions – often in quite different directions (Shapiro 2002).

Drawn from the literature on programme evaluation, a *theory of change* (Weiss 1972; Fulbright-Anderson et al. 1998) describes a programme's explicit (espoused theories) and implicit (theories in use) answers to these questions. It refers to how practitioners believe individual, inter-group and social/systemic change happens and how, specifically, their actions will produce positive results. Initial examinations of theories of change in conflict interventions (Shapiro 1999, 2002) suggest that existing programmes employ a wide variety of change theories and strategies to try to end destructive social conflicts.³ This research found that most programme theories have a cohesive internal logic, however they are usually not explicit. Two programmes' theories of change are summarised below to help illustrate how diverse change theories are used within the same context of addressing racial tensions in US communities.

An Anti-Racism Approach. A non-profit organisation rooted in African American neighbourhoods of New Orleans has a theory of change which focuses on shifting the informal policies and practices of public institutions (e.g. criminal justice, health care, education) that maintain racial inequality and foster episodic violence. Through engaging training programmes, this organisation works with institutional gatekeepers and community leaders to provide a structural analysis of racial privilege and oppression in the US. Effectively addressing racialised tensions requires, they suggest, a clear and common analysis of the long-standing systems of inequity, exploitation and injustice for Communities of Color in the US as well as more subtle forms of modern racism. They suggest that a unified problem analysis among both community organisers (i.e. grass roots change) and institutional leaders (i.e. “grass tops” change) provides opportunities for creative and collaborative actions to promote racial equity and inclusion.

² I will avoid defining these terms, and the debates surrounding them, in this short paper because others have done so quite admirably elsewhere (Mitchell 2002; Reimann 2004).

³ See Shapiro 2002 and 2006 for a typology of theories of change that emerged from research on US programmes.

A Prejudice Reduction Approach. Another non-profit organisation addressing racial tensions and episodic violence in the US South focuses on changing explicit and implicit prejudices, internalised oppression and ignorance or intolerance of ethnic group differences in individuals. These deeply personal workshops and dialogue groups attract a wide variety of community members. The programme's theory of change stresses the importance of individual and relational change as precursor for broader social change. Individual change, they suggest, comes from self-awareness, emotional release and new skills and behavioural options. Relationship change comes from hearing people's experiences of oppression, recognising common ground and building alliances and coalitions. Networks of transformed individuals, they suggest, create a ripple effect within their circles of influence that fosters larger social change.

These programmes work from different analyses of the problem, have distinct goals, utilise unique intervention methods and pursue different pathways for changing the conditions that foster conflict. Explicitly mapping these different theories of change lays a foundation for future testing and evaluation of divergent approaches and helps revise and refine both theory and practice to the benefit of each.

3. Conflict and Change – Shared Starting Points

Despite many differences in programmes' change theories, a few common understandings about conflict and change within the field of conflict resolution are worth noting. Most programmes appear rooted in an optimism about the opportunities for positive change inherent in conflict situations, as well as the human capacity for learning and growth. Within the field of conflict resolution, conflict is often described as a vehicle for positive social change (Schellenberg 1996; Pruitt & Kim 2004). If addressed constructively, scholars suggest that conflict can create positive change in individuals' perceptions and behaviours (Bush & Folger 1996; Lederach & Maiese 2003), relationships between parties (Bush & Folger 1996; Assefa 1993) and political, social and economic structures (Dukes 1997; Rupesinghe 1995).

In addition, much literature in the field of conflict resolution tends to eschew theories about inherent aggressive drives, prejudiced personalities, or more Hobbesian views of human nature. Instead, the focus is on external, situational influences such as direct and indirect social learning, cultural narratives and norms, lack of skills, processes or forums for constructively addressing conflicts, and structures and situations that frustrate people's ability to meet their basic needs. This focus on external rather than inherent causes of human conflict provides a hopeful view of human capacity for consciously changing themselves and their social environment.

Conflict resolution practitioners often describe themselves as change agents and are frequently motivated by a broader agenda for social change and social justice (Laue & Cormick 1978; Rubenstein & Blechman 1999). However, Mitchell is justified in questioning the term 'agents of change' and elaborating, instead, a series of roles and functions that are necessary for resolving conflict. When questioned closely, conflict resolution practitioners are quick to admit that it is hard to see the larger social changes they are aiming for in the specific results of their work (Kolb 1994; Shapiro 2002). Some practitioners describe their work as analogous to Sisyphus' task of rolling a large rock up a hill only to have it slide back down again. One practitioner described conflict transformation work as akin to, "trying to dig a tunnel through a mountain using one of those little,

pink Baskin Robbins' [ice cream] taste testing spoons.”

In recent years, conflict resolution practitioners seem to reference *chaos and complexity theory* in understanding the dynamic systems of conflict as a complicated web of mutually influencing relationships rather than more mechanistic models of isolated causes and effects (Davies 2003). Interveners focus on facilitating and fostering conditions that are most conducive to resolutionary change within complex adaptive systems. For the most part, however, intervention programmes utilise a range of planned change strategies where the pathways for individual, relational and structural transformation vary considerably.

4. Levels of Analysis: Changing Individuals, Relationships and Social Structures to Resolve Conflict⁴

Some of the most prevalent distinctions in both the academic and programme literatures about the causes of conflict and theories of change centre around levels-of-analysis – or whether change efforts focus primarily on individuals, on inter-group relationships, or on structures and systems. Using a levels-of-analysis framework, this section draws from these literatures to examine elements that make up theories of change in conflict interventions.

Like Mitchell's framework of examining social change before, during and after a conflict, this levels-of-analysis approach is primarily a heuristic tool for organising a vast and tangled assortment of theories related to change. Most practitioners and programmes recognise the complex and reciprocal effects of changes at different levels-of-analysis. Many theories of change describe a specific relationship between these different levels, and most programmes work at all of these levels to some extent. Yet practitioners inevitably seem to choose one level as the starting point or focus in their efforts to facilitate change.

The following section briefly highlights selected theories that existing programmes either explicitly or implicitly draw from in their efforts to change individuals, inter-group relations and social structures (Shapiro 2002).

Changing individuals involves strategies that shift attitudes and perceptions, feelings, behaviours and motivations of participants in an intervention. Programmes, like the prejudice reduction example described earlier, invoke a wide range of psychological and therapeutic theories in facilitating change during small-group interventions.

Cognitive changes are, among other things, aimed at transforming hostile or prejudicial attitudes toward the other party, providing more hopeful analyses of the conflict and uncovering new possibilities for resolution. Micro-level change strategies include fostering self-reflection and awareness, learning about the Other, critical analyses of social norms and messages related to the conflict or the Other, eliciting an “aha” experience of insight, introducing new information or analysis that is connected to existing knowledge structures, providing ‘safe environments’ and permission to experiment with new ways of thinking and reframing conflictual issues in integrative ways.

Affective change strategies are rarely articulated in conflict interventions. Yet practitioners are quick to acknowledge the important role that emotions such as fear, rage, shame and grief play in preventing resolution and the importance of empathy, hope and compassion in supporting it. Programmes often focus on encouraging emotional control (e.g. anger management) among

⁴ For an outline of more specific theories of change – especially psychological theories related to resolving ethnic conflicts – please see http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/theories_of_change/?nid=1256 or Shapiro 2006.

participants to facilitate rational problem-solving. Alternately, emotional release in contained conditions is sometimes encouraged as a method for “unfreezing” habituated patterns of destructive thought and behaviour. Based on emotional literacy practices, some programmes provide specific opportunities for participants to read and interpret their emotions as a dimension of self-awareness (Fisher & Shapiro 2005).

Behavioural change strategies aim to improve communication, integrative negotiation and problem-solving skills, promote interpersonal cooperation and reduce the use of hostile language, physical violence, discrimination, etc. Programmes foster behavioural change in participants by, among other things, establishing new rules and norms for interaction, modelling more constructive behaviours and providing opportunities for imitation and rehearsal of constructive behaviours in a relatively safe environment. Programmes often encourage participants to adopt new ideas and behaviours by appealing to ‘pioneer’ or ‘leader’ images that participants may value.

Programmes that focus on **changing relationships** often suggest that new networks, coalitions, alliances and other cooperative relationships between members of conflicting groups not only positively change the individuals directly involved, but can be a powerful force for fostering social changes that help resolve conflicts. These meso-level change strategies aim to effect both individuals and social structures.

Conflict interventions often try to improve inter-group relations by establishing conditions for cooperative and meaningful interaction between members of conflicting groups. The processes of learning about the “out-group”, changing behaviours toward out-group members, developing cross-group friendships, reassessing the ‘rightness’ of one’s own group, and, at times, establishing a new, common in-group identity facilitate inter-group cooperation (Pettigrew 1998). In addition, many programmes provide explicit skills in consensus and coalition building, as well as opportunities for parties to plan parallel and joint action initiatives aimed at changing conditions that foster inter-group conflict and violence.

Structural, institutional and systemic changes are the primary focus for some conflict intervention programmes (e.g. the anti-racism programme described earlier). The current trend of “mainstreaming conflict sensitive approaches” into development and humanitarian assistance projects has contributed new peacebuilding strategies to the usual small-group interventions. These efforts are often directly aimed at legislative, electoral and judicial reform, establishing new mediating mechanisms and forums within society, economic development initiatives (e.g. micro-finance, job training) and infra-structure support for basic human necessities (e.g. water, food, health care).

These approaches suggest that meeting basic human needs will change the underlying conditions that foster violence. In addition, they are guided by assumptions that changing social structures and institutions should shift the behaviours and attitudes of people who live and work within them. They imply that individuals’ attitudes and inter-group relations will conform to the new structures and the new normative behaviours required by those structures. This view draws on the old community-organising adage, “where the feet go, the head will follow”.

5. Extending the Framework of Inquiry: Integrating Research and Theory-Building with Practice

Mitchell's discussion about the role of (social) change in creating, perpetuating, mitigating and resolving conflict provides a useful framework for organising current models and guiding future inquiries. This brief response paper suggests that examining the theories of change in existing conflict interventions can build upon Mitchell's preliminary discussions and provide both a *conceptual* and *methodological* extension to the latter part of his framework of inquiry about change and conflict resolution.

Conceptually, this approach recognises the variety of change theories currently guiding conflict resolution efforts. Given the present state of knowledge and dearth of research directly focused on social change and conflict resolution, this multiplicity seems both healthy and necessary. It also suggests that describing theories of change through different levels of analysis may provide a helpful analytical tool for disentangling complex, unexamined theories in use. But these suggestions raise questions that deserve further discussion: Is it possible to derive a theory of change to assist in the resolution of conflict from current theories in use? Must there be one general theory of change in resolving conflicts, or are multiple theories acceptable? How can a theory account for the complex and reciprocal effects between levels of analysis?

Methodologically, this approach suggests that extracting and evaluating current theories in use may provide an opportunity to build theories of change that are grounded in practice.⁵ In contrast to Mitchell's deductive classifications, preliminary typologies of theories of change (Ross 2000; Shapiro 2002) have emerged inductively from examining the theory and practice of existing conflict resolution programmes.

For scholars, building theories of change from theories in use includes a reciprocal process of developing grounded theory, comparing it with existing research literature, testing emergent hypotheses and dialoguing with practitioners about the findings and new questions. It requires tacking back and forth between the complexities of field studies and more controlled conditions of a lab; between applied concerns and more basic principles. For example, it might be useful to distil specific elements of the prejudice-reduction and anti-racism approaches described earlier in order to test their differential impact under more controlled conditions.

This approach adds to Mitchell's call for more practical guidance rooted in empirical evidence by suggesting that conflict resolution practitioners should play an active role in theory-building. It highlights the importance of fostering dialogue between scholars and practitioners such that relevant research findings are consistently translated and disseminated to practitioners and practitioners play a key role in shaping research agendas about change and conflict resolution as well as partnering with scholars to conduct rigorous field studies.

For practitioners, examining theories of change implies an intra-organisational process of reflection and dialogue about both espoused theories and theories in use, retrospective analyses of programmes and their impact and more conscious planning, experimentation and evaluation of new programmes. It also suggests the need for an inter-organisational forum for discussing the variety of current theories of change among programmes and opportunities for coordinating efforts to enhance their collective impact. In 2002, the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies' NABRE (Network of Alliances Bridging Race and Ethnicity) project held such a conference for programmes

⁵ For a more specific discussion about how to conduct a theory of change analysis, see Shapiro 2006.

working on racial and ethnic tensions in the United States. This conference provided an important opportunity for practitioners to discuss the nuanced language and distinct theories, values and ideologies shaping practice that often divided them, as well as some promising practices and common challenges that united them (Potapchuk 2002). Organising a similar meeting for international conflict resolution programmes might be a first step in examining current theories of change.

Mitchell's final question, "what sorts of changes help bring about the resolution or transformation of conflicts?" (Mitchell in this Dialogue, 15), is central to the field of conflict resolution. Yet the research and programmatic literature explicitly addressing it is surprisingly underdeveloped – especially when compared to existing theory and research on social change and conflict. This paper suggests that articulating, differentiating and evaluating conflict interventions' theories of change can provide one new way of addressing this question that supplements the discussions in Mitchell's article and extends his framework of inquiry.

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Revisiting Change and Conflict: On Underlying Assumptions and the De-Politicisation of Conflict Resolution

Vivienne Jabri

1. Introduction

The social sciences have, since their inception as systematic fields of inquiry, sought to somehow capture the notion of change, render it not just subject to explanation, but to predictability and ultimately control. These aspirations of explanation and control come to acquire particular salience when placed in the context of social conflict, for here we see an added impetus, one that seeks to predict the directionality of change in relation to conflict so that some intervention might take place either to facilitate movement towards resolution or to perpetuate or promote conflict. Each of these elements – explanation, control, and the directionality of change in relation to conflict – is subject to controversy and is hence steeped in political contestation. It is this distinctly political aspect of conceptualising the relationship between conflict and change that is missing in Christopher Mitchell's investigation and it is this that forms the subject matter of this response.

The first section focuses on the underlying assumptions informing Mitchell's analysis. This section suggests that while Mitchell's text exemplifies a rendition that is distinctly positivist in its avoidance of what we might refer to as the normative element, it nevertheless reveals certain ontological commitments in relation to knowledge and human agency. The second section draws on the first to reveal the implications of what I want to suggest is a de-politicisation of conflict analysis and resolution. The third section makes the case for bringing politics (and hence also ethics) back into our thinking about conflict resolution and change. The aim

throughout is to show that agency (including that of the conflict analyst) cannot be conceptualised, nor even conceived, without at the same time recognising that agency is implicated in the structural continuities of social and political life, continuities that are both discursive and institutional.

2. Mitchell's Positivist Reading of Conflict and Change

One of Mitchell's major contributions to the field of conflict analysis and resolution is his thoroughly systematic approach to the subject. As a training toolkit, both for the academic engaged in understanding the specificities of any conflict and for the practitioner seeking to analyse prior to engagement, Mitchell's work remains unsurpassed in its clarity of exposition, its logical step-by-step ordering of the complexities of conflict, its separation of dependent and independent variables, and its classifications. Above all else, Mitchell's understanding of conflict is generic, enabling applications to conflicts from the inter-personal to the international, rightly showing that conflict is always a complex set of interactions and relationships that, over time, relate grievance to modes of behaviour and to psychological states of mind, each of which in turn comes to constitute feedback loops that can perpetuate, escalate, or even render possible some movement towards conflict resolution. Mitchell maps conflict like no other, a mapping process that aids analysis just as it provides a crucial tool for agents seeking intervention.

The text that is under scrutiny in this context seeks to provide exactly such a mapping for the relationship between change and conflict. Like any mapping process, it provides the reader with a picture of the directionality of change and how this might influence the dynamics of conflict, seeking ultimately a classification of "agents" of change and how these might impact upon conflict, specifically in relation to its resolution. There is, throughout, a recognition that constraints exist and these may derive from structures of inequality in the distribution of resources and from the relationships that constitute the conflict at hand. The emphasis is on the temporal shift from one point to the next and how each such shift feeds into transformations in relationships of conflict.

One way of responding to the text is hence to engage with its devices, adding here, subtracting there, taking its assumptions as given. Another is to delve below the surface, unpacking the various commitments that inform the text. It is the latter that I suggest is the more useful enterprise, for it reveals elements that have profound consequences for how we understand conflicts in the present-day global context and how we might think about intervention.

Mitchell's rendition on change and conflict is thoroughly inductive in its construction. It is, as Mitchell admits, largely anecdotal, but expressing an objective for correlation even as its primary aspiration is explanation. This last element presents a problem, for it suggests that a social phenomenon such as change, or indeed conflict, can be subject to causal statements; that particular factors when combined in distinct conditions may lead to particular outcomes. Or, framed in relationships of necessity: but for the presence of particular conditions, certain outcomes would not take place. Crucially, Mitchell's preference for the anecdotal prevents him from going down this necessitous path, a path that has always presented dire problems for the entirety of the social sciences. Nevertheless, Mitchell's inductive tendencies preclude the possibility of investigating change in relation to social continuity, namely the discursive and institutional aspects of life and the ways in which these not only constrain, but enable action.

Approaching the subject of change and conflict from a generic perspective again inhibits any thorough investigation into the specific sets of constraint and enablement that impact on interactions in conflict situations and interventions therein. While reducing the complexity of

international conflict to the dynamics of the inter-personal may have its attractions, it nevertheless has the effect of de-historicizing conflict, dislocating it from its specificities in time and place, the differential ways in which institutional practices enable some while constraining others. The institutions of modern existence – the state and the international political economy – have profound implications for the choices available to parties involved in conflict just as they do in determining not just the capacities of potential third parties but the discourses they draw upon in conceptualising a conflict, the grievances involved and the outcomes envisaged.

Despite the generic framing of conflict that Mitchell adopts, there is, just below the inductive surface, a distinct ontological commitment in the text, namely one that places priority on the individual or party in conflict as rational entity, even as this rationality is recognised as being often distorted by the complexities of the conflict situation and its perceptual dynamics. Where structures that, for example, generate deprivation or scarcity are considered, they remain external to agency, so that we cannot see how agency as such emerges or how capacities differ from agent to agent depending on their location in relation to structures of domination, discursive frames, or modes of legitimisation. All are equalised, when in actuality – and in the conflicts that matter in present-day global politics – there is no such equality. Even in considering inter-personal conflicts, agents are enabled and constrained differently, a differentiation that impacts on how others respond and on the parties' own understanding of context, the linguistic and material resources drawn upon, and their capacities to engage with their institutional backdrop. We can but think of the impact of difference relating to class, gender, race, and ethnicity to appreciate how these deeply rooted and structural forces are implicated in knowledge systems and relations of power. Such inequalities are not only of pertinence to parties in conflict, but directly influence the capacities of external others.

Analysing conflict through a generic lens again disables investigation into the specificities of transformations in conflict modes in the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries. The late modern context is distinctly associated with the globalisation of social, economic and political aspects of conflict so that no confrontation can be isolated from its global context, a context that has its own distinctiveness in discourses, resources, and institutions. We can no longer, for example, conceptualise conflict simply in terms of grievance constructed in relation to an enemy Other. As the conflicts of late modernity have indicated, conflicts such as those of the Balkans and sub-Saharan Africa,¹ the violence perpetrated is largely directed against civilian populations, aimed primarily at large-scale intimidation, and connected with criminality and the control of resources. Ethnic difference in these conditions of mass violence cannot be assumed at first hand to constitute a source of grievance, but may also be a vehicle for the perpetuation of control over distinct populations. In such situations where it is not an easy matter to distinguish between conflict and criminality, conflict resolution may not be the appropriate response. Indeed, such a response may perpetuate violence, empowering those responsible for war crimes and the mass violations of human rights. That exploitative practices also serve a wider set of transnational interests, whether such interests are related to the global armaments market, the minerals sector or financial institutions, renders local conflicts of global concern, spreading the net of responsibility (and culpability) ever wider. Any critical response to international conflict and change must hence take such factors into account if it seeks the transformation of conditions that perpetuate violence.

¹ See, for example, Kaldor 1999: *New and Old Wars: Organised Violence in a Global Era*. While Kaldor's use of the term "new" to describe recent conflicts may be questioned, nevertheless her characterisation of the conflicts in the Balkans, for example, is relevant to the context of this discussion.

The conflicts of the late modern context are also global in other respects. We might, for example, consider the invasion of Iraq as representative of a war to establish global hegemony, or indeed, global control.² Some have argued for understanding the present in terms of “network wars”, perhaps best represented by transnational violent organisations and the so-called war against terrorism. How parties are defined in this context, the boundaries drawn, the grievances highlighted, are all situated within a complex set of political choices and contestations so that conflict analysis itself, and more importantly conflict resolution, cannot be subject to the “sanitisation” that positivist approaches confer on the study of conflict. We may easily construct statements relating to the directionality of change and its impact on conflict – that rapid change, for example, may lead to conflict escalation. However, it is the substance of change, the particularity of distinct conflicts, the discourses that surround them, the relations of power that enable some while constraining others, the various practices of legitimisation that differentially confer value to some while rendering others devoid of such, and all taking place within complex global matrices of power, that ultimately matter when we consider choices available for intervention.³

Mitchell makes the assumption that social kinds (agents, groups, communities, institutions, relationships) have an existence that is independent of the discursive frames that render them meaningful. Parties to a conflict, their conflict situation, behaviour and attitudes are rendered an objective existence independent of the discursive framing that the conflict analyst, as well as others on the ground, so to speak, give such constructs substance. As Mitchell well recognises, any change that takes place in parties, issues, mode of conduct is subject to interpretation and cannot be extracted from the world and its contests, the interpretative schemes that are always situated in politics and in relations of power. It is all too easy to assume a dualism between the object world out there and the explanations the epistemic subject confers to the world, the classic positivist subject/object dichotomy. However, when we recognise that analysis is itself implicated in the construction of the world, we begin to recognise that analysis is part and parcel of the signifying practices that come to constitute the discursive frames that confer content to a seemingly contentless classifying process. Parties to a conflict, in this sense, can never simply be parties to a conflict, but are sovereign states, factions in government, clandestine organisations, terrorist groups, criminal gangs, teenage thugs, and so on. Each in turn is imbued with meaning, each contested, each differently situated within global, as well as local, structural continuities.

3. The De-politicisation of Conflict Analysis and Resolution

Conflict analysis has historically sought to somehow extract itself from social and political theory, so that its language is rendered neutral, a management consultant’s toolkit, ready for use in any context wherein conflict might emerge. There is here an underlying assumption of rationality, even as there is a recognition that such rationality might, at times of crisis, be subject to distortion. Nevertheless, the image of the actors involved is one that assumes the capacity for cost/benefit evaluation, even as the agent of conflict resolution might intervene to somehow influence how costs are calculated and what benefits might accrue through suggested courses of action. A third party aiming for the resolution of a protracted conflict, for example, the Israeli-Palestinian, might seek to influence how the parties articulate their identities so these are no longer conceived in zero-sum terms; that mutual recognition accrues mutual benefit. The interaction necessarily relies on a

² For an examination of how war is used as a mode of control in global politics, see Jabri 2006.

³ For a critical exploration of the relationship between war and global politics in the contemporary era, see Jabri, forthcoming.

conception of agency that is rational to the core; it remains reliant upon cost/benefit evaluations and the only problem that concerns the third party is achieving change in how such costs and benefits are defined, or re-defined, by the parties.

There is, at first sight, absolutely nothing that is wrong with the above aspiration; mutual recognition, especially in the example I highlight above, is desirable not just for those immediately involved, but for the world as a whole, given that the world is now experiencing the consequences of the absence of resolution to this conflict. What then is the problem in the above formulation? The problem, as I reiterate here, is not the ambition to achieve mutual recognition. The problem lies in the extraction of the conflict resolution setting from its social and political context. This, in conflict resolution speak, is always portrayed as simply dealing with the constituency problem “back home”. The frames of reference utilised in the conflict resolution process are assumed to be independent of, though possibly constrained by, the context of the conflict, so that the aspiration is to transcend such constraints, enabling the parties thereby to move beyond the present and towards some positive future.

The extraction of conflict from its socio-political setting constitutes the de-politicising move. This happens on a number of fronts. Firstly, the third-party resolutionary is assumed to possess a language that is managerial to the core, aiming to solve the problem at hand, and hence not implicated. However, we know that the language of analysis is not simply a mirror-image of the world “out there”, but actively constructs the world, in its choice of parties to a conflict, its understanding of the issues, the historical trajectory to a conflict, and its conception of desirable interventions and outcomes. Just to return to the above example: mutual recognition is desirable indeed; however, the content of such recognition, its institutional manifestation on the ground, is ultimately what matters. Secondly, the language of conflict analysis is subject itself to the linguistic repertoires that surround and constitute a particular conflict. When the question of identity, for example, is reduced to the “ancient hatreds” formulation, or indeed a majority-minority construction, conflict analysis and resolution do no more than simply reiterate the language of leaderships bent on such exclusionary frameworks and the practices they seek to legitimise.⁴ If the Bosnian conflict, for example, was so represented, as it indeed was, then the language of Milosevic, Karadjic, Mladic, and Tudjman was simply taken as given, interpolating the populations involved in the ethnic terms that these leaders, all in one way or another implicated in war crimes, sought in their efforts to create ethnically defined, supremacist political entities. It is in this sense that conflict analysis, even in its most “sanitised” form, is always somehow implicated, always situated politically, even where it seeks to modify taken-for-granted constructions of a conflict.

A more crucial consequence of the extraction of conflict analysis and resolution from its worldly location is that its conception of agency comes to be limited to that of the rational actor model, wherein complexity is once again reduced to the capacity to be neutral, consistent and systematic. Mitchell’s classification of third parties and their capacities to realise change towards conflict resolution suffers from its conception of agency in terms of role. These range from “monitors” to “enskillers”, “facilitators”, “implementers”, and so on. Each has their designated role, each aiming to transform a conflict in very specific ways. All, however, are assumed to be engaged in a process that culminates in a negotiated outcome. Once again, each is provided with a toolkit from which they might draw as they enact their role. Again, there is no problem with the classification scheme per se. Rather, it is its formulaic representation, one that extracts the substantive content of each role in the specificities of a distinct conflict, that is at issue. There is no way that this analysis can, for example, inform on the consequences or desirability of these roles and their applications.

4 For an excellent investigation into the complicities of diplomatic engagement in the Bosnian conflict, see Campbell 1998.

In the final section of this response, I want to provide a different understanding of agency, one that acknowledges that the agencies involved in conflict analysis and resolution are always located in a mutually constitutive relationship with the structural continuities of social and political life, so that far from seeking the extraction of conflict resolution from politics, it is actively re-located in politics.

4. Re-locating Conflict and Change in Politics (and Ethics)

It is necessary first of all to rethink agency by way of a return to the social sciences, their epistemologies (modes of justification of knowledge) and ontologies (assumptions relating to social entities). As is shown in the hermeneutic tradition (that knowledge is based on interpretative understanding), human action and human society possess their own distinctiveness that cannot be reduced to the terms of the natural sciences. When this tradition is taken further into critical thought, knowledge is understood as always situated in relation to interests (Habermas 1972) and power (Foucault 1980), so that its frameworks of understanding are unavoidably located in society and implicated in the constitution of its relations of power. Understood in this way, knowledge about conflict may be judged, not in terms of the criteria of science, but in terms of the interests that constitute particular frameworks of knowledge and in terms that reveal the complicities of different modes of understanding in relations of power.

The second element relates to conceptions of agency, structure, and their relationship. Drawing on critical social and political thought, Giddens provides a way of thinking about agency that is not dualistically related to structure, but constituted in relation to structure (Giddens 1979). Agency understood in this sense is not simply reduced to particular roles, but is conceived in relation to the discursive and institutional continuities of social systems. These continuities are not simply constraining, but enable actors to make sense of the world.⁵ Agents are hence always positioned in relation to symbolic orders, frameworks of meaning and structures of domination, drawing upon such continuities both consciously and unconsciously in social interaction. Even that most transformative of actions, dissent, is only meaningful in relation to existing linguistic frameworks and relations of power.

The implications for conflict analysis and resolution are profound, for these forms of agency come to be re-located in the social and political context, so that it is no longer possible simply to adhere to a toolkit approach, acknowledging that any intervention in conflict has political as well as ethical consequences, even when these are constructed in discourse in purely managerial and instrumental forms.

Conflict and change must hence be explored in relation to the specificities of context and not in generic terms. These specificities emerge in the distinctiveness of forms of struggle and contestation in relation to the discursive and institutional context of a conflict. Conflicts of the late modern period are no longer isolated occurrences, but take place in a globalised arena, drawing on the resources that this arena provides while being subject in turn to its differential enablements and constraints. Any critical approach to conflict and its resolution takes these differentiations seriously, revealing in turn the exclusionary practices that enable some while constraining the many, inequalities of access that in themselves are at the heart of the most serious and deadly conflicts of our age. Mitchell is aware of all of this; his analysis, however, conceals its political and ethical implications.

⁵ For the application of critical social and political thought, including Giddens's structuration theory, to the analysis of conflict, see Jabri 1996, where the agency-structure problematique in the context of war and peace is explored.

The implications for conflict resolution relate primarily to a shift away from a toolkit approach to the subject. Intervention is understood in political and ethical terms and not simply in terms that seek to divorce the procedural from the substantive. Conflict analysis is recognised as a “practice”, and, in the critical vein, as one that reveals the underlying relationships of power that differentially give voice or confer legitimacy, as well as its own complicity in such relationships. Practices of conflict resolution are themselves subjected to close scrutiny, located in relation to, for example, their complicity in contributing variously towards the pacification of the weaker side, the perpetuation of exclusionary practices, and the legitimisation of discourses and institutions that are the root causes of violence. This re-formulation suggests that practices relating to conflict resolution are always distinctly political practices, and as such, always subject to contestation.

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The Circularity of Conflict Dynamics. A Critical Review

Daniela Körppen

1. Introduction

In his article “Conflict, Social Change and Conflict Resolution”, Mitchell intends to create a useful typology of change in relation to protracted social conflict and provides the reader with an interesting and comprehensive framework for thinking about change processes and conflict dynamics. He argues that to date there are few works that deal systematically and in general terms with the connections between the concepts of change and conflict. With his essay – “discussing the relationship between change and conflict in very general terms” (Mitchell in this Dialogue, 14) – he wants to fill this gap. He raises intriguing questions and aims to contribute to the development of a general theory of change and conflict or conflict resolution (ibid.). His article should, he suggests, be considered as a starting point for the development of a set of theories of conflict dynamics, as well as a practical set of guidelines concerning the modes and the timing of “resolutionary” interventions (ibid.).

Although Mitchell’s essay presents a comprehensive and useful analysis, the purpose of this commentary is to highlight that the endeavour of creating an overarching theory of (social) change must be seen very critically for various reasons. In order to spark a critical and constructive dialogue, I want to concentrate the following discussion on some shortcomings of the approach Mitchell chooses.

Given that there is already a large number of different peacebuilding and conflict resolution and transformation theories, which (implicitly at least) address the relationship of peace and change, or conflict

and change, the discussion of social change should focus less on developing a new meta-theory, but instead on linking the existing approaches to practice.

With his technological¹ top-down approach, Mitchell broadens the already huge gap between theory and practice in the field of peace and conflict research. The contextualisation of peace and conflict theories is crucial since each theoretical analysis contains implicit values and underlying assumptions and thus shapes perceptions and actions in the field (Foucault 1981; Jabri's contribution to this Dialogue). The way in which a conflict situation and the various types of changes are analysed and categorised therefore strongly influences the intervention strategy and the guiding principles one applies, as is shown in sections 2 and 3.

Section 4 argues that Mitchell overemphasises the possibilities of third-party interventions from the outside and neglects to analyse the resources for change lying within the conflict system and the relevant parties in a particular region.

Finally, this commentary's fifth section points out that conflict dynamics and societal processes do not follow linear principles and that a single intervention in a conflict system cannot be regarded as an external, neutral mechanism. An intervention becomes itself part of a conflict system and is influenced by many unpredictable factors. In light of this, the formulation of theoretically derived, generic guiding principles and the planning of intervention strategies as monocausal, linear result-chains seem highly problematic.

2. The De-politicisation of Politics

In his essay Mitchell follows a deductive method, arguing that it seems to offer the best alternative at least at the outset of any classification process. He rejects an inductive approach, because he tries to "pick out commonalities" of different conflict situations that would help in the construction of a typology of change (Mitchell in this Dialogue, 19).

This approach fails to take into account a crucial aspect of almost all protracted ethnopolitical conflicts: the act of identifying key causes of conflict and defining exact obstacles to change is fraught with controversy and therefore cannot be resolved on a theoretical level. Each conflict party follows its own assumptions about the root causes of a conflict and about the ways in which to transform it. So does every conflict analyst.

The situation in Aceh/Indonesia can serve as an example: Defining which stakeholders or which structural causes can be considered as obstacles to change depends very much on the perspective one adopts. For many Acehnese nationalists the conflict is essentially about identity. They argue that it involves the 'rediscovery' of an ancient Acehnese nationhood and the struggle for self-determination. For other observers, including those from the government of Indonesia, the conflict arises out of grievances in the Acehnese society about issues concerning economy, human rights or religion. Acehnese nationalists downplay grievances and emphasise what they see as fundamental incompatibilities between Aceh and the Indonesian state (Aspinall 2005).

It therefore must be highlighted that defining what an obstacle to change is, or what the root causes of a conflict are, is not so much a neutral act – which can be generalised as a fixed category and applied to other conflict situations. It means taking a political stance. By developing neutral, generic types of obstacles to change on a theoretical level, Mitchell de-politicises political processes.

¹ As will be shown in Section 2, the "technologicalisation" – or de-politicisation – of politics neglects the fact that each political concept implies a subjective method of knowledge and truth-production (Foucault 1981). A technological approach to politics fails to take into account the close relationship between knowledge and power-structures and presumes that there is a generic or – with Foucault, neutral – knowledge about politics which can be conceived through linear, monocausal result-chains.

Yet we must take into account that defining obstacles to change always implies certain political actions. Returning to the example of Aceh/Indonesia: When a third party decides that the Acehnese nationalists are an obstacle to change, and therefore supports the activities of the Indonesian government, the third party gets involved politically. This signifies that it downplays the components of the conflict that relate to (political) identity and thus ignores the interests and needs of Acehnese nationalists. Neglecting that the definition of obstacles to change is a highly political act could lead to the situation where a third party might block processes of change which could otherwise satisfy the needs and interests of all relevant conflict parties. Rather than becoming part of the solution, the third party might turn out to be an integral part of the problem.

With Foucault, it can be argued that the development of an overarching typology of change presumes that a neutral knowledge of certain conflict situations exists and that it can be discovered by means of scientific analysis and finally be transformed into theoretical categories. As illustrated by the Indonesian example, though, knowledge about the conflict and an assessment of the situation depend on the point of view of different parties and cannot be considered as technological processes in which all parameters can be fixed and measured.

A conflict situation can only be appraised satisfactorily if it is perceived as a complex social phenomenon in which the diverse perspectives of different stakeholders and their varying assumptions about a specific situation compete against each other. Therefore, it is probably impossible to agree on what the main obstacles to change are. Instead of developing a theoretical categorisation of obstacles to change, then, they should rather be embedded in the respective political and cultural context. Different perceptions of a conflict situation have to be addressed in a joint conflict analysis with all relevant parties. An external conflict analyst is only able to assess the situation from his/her own cultural perspective and might underestimate some stakeholders' needs which are more foreign to his/her own culture.

3. Theories as Social Practices

Against this background, a key issue for peace and conflict research must be seen in the reality-constructing functions of theories. As stated before, each theoretical model of social change contains implicit values and underlying assumptions and thus shapes perceptions and actions in the field. The way in which a conflict situation is analysed and the reasons that are given for the formation of conflicts reflect certain world views and theoretical concepts.

Even if Mitchell develops neutral categories for classifying various types of social change, his analytic view is not as neutral as he proclaims. On the contrary, his arguments reveal a rationalistic and sometimes 'economistic' view of conflicts.

A first indicator can be found in his analysis of conflict formation, in which he predominantly picks out changes in scarcity and abundance as root causes. Furthermore, he focuses his discussion on conflicts of interest which can be 'solved' through negotiations only at a political level. He seems to presume that each human being is a *homo oeconomicus* who calculates his/her actions and is always able to make rational decisions. This becomes evident when Mitchell argues that each party's underlying needs and interests can be "reviewed" and that it is possible for an "outsider party" to see which crucial goal incompatibilities lie at the heart of the conflict (Mitchell in this Dialogue, 24). He furthermore seems to suppose that human beings are always aware of their problems and able to discuss them openly. Mitchell does not pay much attention to components of

identity conflicts, such as intrapersonal fears and resistances, which often cannot be explained in rational discussion. (He mentions the dynamics of identity only in a footnote on page 18.)

This reflects underlying theoretical and normative assumptions and a quite rationalistic view of conflict situations. Mitchell's analytic inquiry downplays the reality that almost all protracted ethnopolitical social conflicts are characterised by a multitude of conflicting factors – from disputes of interest, such as conflicts over resources, to ideological differences and dissension over values and beliefs. He underrates the fact that there is a great need to work on two levels in ethnopolitical conflicts: on the more or less openly negotiated level of political demands and interests, and on the deeper level of collective experiences, stances and attitudes integral to the formation of identity (Ropers 1997).

Mitchell's normative suppositions about relations between human beings are mirrored in the way in which he develops categories for processes of change. His argumentation stems from a linear, rationalistic world view rooted in western societies. Hence his 'neutral' guiding principles have to be qualified, put into perspective and embedded in their specific historical and cultural contexts.

4. The Gap between Theory and Practice and the Overemphasis on the Role of Third Parties

A further danger of developing a technological top-down approach to the challenge of social change that resolves protracted social conflict lies in the widening of the already huge gap between theory and practice, and in overemphasising the role of third parties.

Mitchell argues that conflict analysts have to confront questions about the sources and impact of major changes and that practitioners have to deal with the practicalities of managing change and conflict (Mitchell in this Dialogue, 14). It could be inferred from this statement, that he advocates a separation between the analysis of protracted social conflict and social change and the designing of intervention strategies. This disconnection would imply that a 'solution' in a conflict situation can be developed by an analyst on a theoretical level. The possibilities for conflict transformation lying within the conflict system itself are largely ignored, and the conflicting parties are excluded from the process of designing an intervention strategy.

As already mentioned, I would argue that on the contrary, conflict analysis must be regarded as the first step of an intervention in a conflict situation and thus must be undertaken in cooperation with all relevant stakeholders. A profound conflict analysis should be based on the local perceptions of the conflict. Local actors must define what forms part of the conflict system and what its specific characteristics are.

It is one of the main hypotheses of the systemic approach to conflict transformation currently developed by the Berghof Foundation for Peace Support² that equitable and sustainable peace is only possible if the resources for political and social change inherent in the conflict system itself are activated and supported, and if the basic needs of all sub-systems in a political system are addressed and fulfilled (Wils et al. 2006). The borders of the conflict-system and the respective sub-systems – which can be formed by different identity groups, for example – have to be defined with regard to the specific conflict situation.

² With the systemic conflict transformation (SCT) approach, the Berghof Foundation for Peace Support seeks to provide a conceptual framework in which experiences from theory and practice are combined. SCT builds on the state-of-the-art practice in conflict transformation and combines it with systemic approaches from other disciplines such as change management, psychotherapy and cybernetics. It considers the activation and empowerment of the conflict system's own resources as a key contribution to the transformation of a conflict (Wils et al. 2006).

The necessary change of perspectives can only be obtained if the analysis switches between the overall system and a micro-analysis of the relevant sub-systems. This change between micro- and macro-perspectives is helpful in putting the interests of different sub-systems into a wider context. By regularly alternating between different perspectives, it becomes possible to analyse how the sub-systems relate to each other. Adequate hypotheses on how various sub-systems might affect the overall conflict system can be generated (ibid.).

Moreover, including such conflict analyses in the process of designing an intervention strategy helps bridge the gap between theory and practice by creating a constant feedback loop where each theoretical assumption of an 'external' analyst is tested and verified with the 'realities' in the field. An overemphasis on the potential of a third party will be avoided. Besides, conflict analysis will no longer be regarded as neutral assessment of a situation in which solutions for a conflict situation can be designed on the basis of a theoretically inspired, detached desk study.

That Mitchell overemphasises the role of third parties also becomes obvious in his section on agents of change. Even if he explains that enablers can come from a variety of backgrounds and do not have to be the diplomatic representatives of foreign governments or international organisations, he underestimates the importance of mobilising agents of change, or agents of peaceful change, *within* the conflict parties and instead focuses on the role of "outsiders".

This becomes evident if one takes a closer look at how he defines the tasks of potential agents of change. One of their most important activities, for instance, is seen in their monitoring of the conflict and providing early warning of "likely effects of such environmental changes on opportunities for removing or circumventing obstacles to 'resolutionary' change" (Mitchell in this Dialogue, 30). This kind of work is normally done by international or national organisations and not by the conflicting parties themselves.

It must be stressed here that it is crucial for achieving a long-term and stable peace that, first of all, agents of peaceful change must be mobilised within the conflict system and therefore also from within the conflicting parties. Successful conflict transformation requires key people from *within* who are committed and have powerful visions as individuals or small groups. It could happen that they do not know how to change the dominant relations of violent action and reaction within the conflict system. In this respect, external parties have an important contribution to make: Yet rather than acting as agents of peaceful change themselves, they must help to identify relevant persons and groups within the conflict system and support them with a range of capacity-building measures.

5. Social Change as a Cyclical Process

Even if Mitchell admits that speaking theoretically usually ignores practical problems of implementation, he does not give much advice on how to bridge this gap. Thus it is not very clear how his typology of change should be applied in the field. Apart from the problems of Mitchell's deductive approach which I have discussed above, he also fails to explain which indicators should be applied for measuring "resolutionary" change, how to define what a successful process of (social) change is and how to define failures. How should we deal with the limitations of impact assessment and the impossibility of constructing a causal chain between input and impact in highly complex conflict systems? These questions are particularly relevant as the discussion about social change focuses predominantly on non-material impacts of interventions, which seem almost impossible to prove.

In conclusion, I believe it would be more useful if the discussion about social change switched its focus from theory to practice. Assumptions about processes of social change should be developed together with local stakeholders and must be embedded in the respective conflict contexts. Mitchell remains too wedded to his external, theoretical perspective when he asks in his conclusion how one might best carry out a systematic analysis of a conflict in order to distinguish those factors which are tractable. Questions like these need to be contextualised and answered on the basis of local perceptions.

In addition, it should be underlined that processes of social change must be regarded as a means and not as an end (Sprenger 2005). Mitchell repeatedly argues that “solutions must be found”. This gives the impression that he considers social change not as a process – which possibly also includes setbacks – but more as a definite goal. Rather than functioning by way of monocausal result-chains, however, dynamics in social systems are cyclical and to a certain extent unpredictable. It is impossible to trace linear lines into the past, construct them for the future and define goals on how processes of social change should come about and develop. As systems theory shows, complex social systems are neither connected in linear ways nor can their relationship be characterised by simple cause and effect mechanisms (Wilke 1999).

Furthermore, interventions in social systems are never neutral mechanisms which engineer social change from the outside, but also become a part of the conflict system. When they are applied in the field, they are on the one hand influenced by the dynamics from within the conflict system. On the other hand, they also influence processes in the specific society. This shows once more that it is almost impossible to calculate the results of an intervention by applying theoretical concepts alone. Interventions are dynamic processes which can produce different results in different cultural contexts. As Wilke states, there are different models of societies and each societal model, as it were, anticipates the possibilities and limitations of an intervention (*ibid.*).

The fact that processes of social change within societies are not following linear principles complicates further the discussion about appropriate methods of monitoring and planning conflict transformation and therefore also processes of social change. This raises serious problems for developing theoretical and generalising categories of change and related impact hypotheses. It is an important step in the right direction when Mitchell stresses at the end of his analysis that answers to the questions he raised can be found only in empiricism. It is, however, clearly not enough to answer the questions raised by referring to empirical experiences. As demonstrated before, it is crucial that even the questions are developed with regard to practice. Radically, each classification of what an obstacle to change is, and each category of what might promote the transformation of an ethno-political conflict, must be clarified and created by means of a joint conflict analysis with all relevant stakeholders in the conflict region.

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Conflict Analysis, Conflict Resolution and “Politics”

A Reflection

Christopher R. Mitchell

The set of responses by five of my colleagues to my initial essay on conflict and change are thoughtful, interesting and enjoyable. Each warrants a full, lengthy response but, unfortunately, I confront limitations of time and space, and I can only manage this scarcity conflict by taking up a few salient points that have emerged from the five comments and dealing, first, with some generally shared concerns and then with a few points raised by the individual respondents in their own papers.

One aspect of my original essay that disturbed some of the respondents was an apparent over-emphasis on “rationality” in explaining the causes of conflict or ways of seeking resolution, and also on the way in which people in conflict determine what they perceive as their most effective course of action. Someone even mentioned the dreaded phrase “cost benefit analysis” as a criticism of these assumptions, with their implication of utilising classical “rational actor” models. There were two reasons for my emphasising – perhaps over-emphasising – this factor. The first is that I am simply tired of people seeking to explain intractable and protracted conflicts by reference to the “irrationality” of those involved, as if labelling one side or the other in this manner fully explains why there is a conflict or why it continues. Given different worldviews, different cultures leading to different goals and different beliefs about optimal courses of action, I would argue that the concept of irrational behaviour begins to mean nothing more than “I would not be doing that in their place”, which is less than helpful.

This leads to my other reason, however, namely that, in my experience, people involved in a conflict do try to make reasonably rational – perhaps “sensible” – decisions to try to achieve their goals, always making allowances for lack of information, incomplete and distorting information processing systems, the impact of “groupthink”, the “sunk costs” and investment effects, the impact of risk aversion (which may

or may not be culturally determined) and the host of other variables that undermine the classical rational actor model. Humans – even humans embroiled in a highly stressful conflict – never seem to me to be “irrational”.

Secondly, nobody seems to like my list of suggested conflict resolutionary roles very much. There seem to be two reasons for this. The first is that the idea of a “role” is taken to mean some actor – individual or institution – that “comes in” from the outside but remains apart from the conflict in some way, when in reality, of course, that institution becomes part of the conflict system and intimately affects it and is affected by it. What I originally meant by third-party roles were tasks to be undertaken or “jobs to be done” as part of a dynamic process, and this was partly a reaction to a fairly general assumption that all third parties do is get adversaries round a table and help them devise ingenious solutions to the conflict in which they are engaged.

The second concern seemed to be that this list of “roles” implied outsiders intervening in somebody else’s conflict, but this is not necessarily the case. John Paul Lederach and Paul Wehr have long familiarised us to the concept of insider-partial interveners – a local bishop, a woman’s group, a council of elders, a regional NGO – who are already part of the conflict system but who can carry out all or any of these resolutionary tasks, often to greater effect than parties who are (at least initially) outsiders.

In passing, I should note that I don’t know anybody in the field (myself included but with the possible exception of people who write books with titles like “The Seven Basic Steps to Resolving Your Marital/Workplace/Organisational Conflict”) who believes in “linear, mono-causal-chains”, or who would be unaware of the fact that protracted ethnopolitical conflicts are “characterised by a multitude of conflicting factors – from disputes of interest ... to ideological differences and dissension over values and beliefs...” as argued by Daniela Körppen. If conflicts weren’t like this then they wouldn’t be protracted. The whole point is that conflict systems are complex, multi-party, multi-causal and dynamic, which is the reason why we need to try to understand change systematically – undoubtedly difficult but hardly “impossible”, as Körppen asserts.

A last widely shared concern seems to be about my assumptions regarding “neutrality”, whether this is an implied characteristic of an *analyst* seeking to understand the dynamics of a conflict or an *intervener*, seeking to do something about it. I will leave taking up the argument about the possibilities of “non-politicised analysis” until later. However, I do think that some of my colleagues have performed a service by reminding everyone of something we take so much for granted that we usually ignore it; namely that the practice of conflict resolution is always a political act, especially if we take “political” broadly, to mean value-informed (as well as theory-informed) and with particular ends in view. To attempt to manage, mitigate, settle, resolve or transform a conflict all imply a particular ethical stance and a view of what is an “acceptable” outcome, just as do efforts to create, recognise, prosecute, exacerbate or win a conflict. The only, limited way in which an intervention can claim to be neutral is if the intervener behaves in an even-handed way (and this may, indeed, advantage one side if the conflict is asymmetric) and does not try to impose his wishes or values on an outcome.

Let me turn from the three common concerns to the individual papers themselves, again with apologies for having to deal in a cursory fashion with some highly complex ideas. It is always useful to have theoretical formulations checked out against real world experience and nobody is better qualified to do this than Ed Garcia, long involved in practical conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Asia, in Latin America and elsewhere. His essay performs a great service by reminding us that, in the most fundamental way, solutions to protracted conflicts have actually to take the form of social change – often profound social change that meets the needs of the marginalised and excluded. The

key question is how to bring this about without the use of violence, and Garcia's analysis provides a number of persuasive guidelines about how this might be accomplished. I particularly appreciated his comments about the importance of developing "peace constituencies", a change process which I had quite neglected but which has to be a part of any process leading towards a sustainable solution. Of course, this particular aspect of peacebuilding is usually a long drawn out and fragile process, often undermined or even destroyed by the tendency of protracted conflicts to turn violent. Events recent and less recent seem to have decimated the peace constituencies within Israel and among Palestinians, and they will not be rebuilt easily or quickly.

Then again, there is the question of how – apart from the use of violence – one can change the mindset of status quo elites, dominant majorities, social "top dogs" or those who control "the commanding heights" of politics and economies to the point where they accept that change rather than resistance is called for. What might constitute the intellectual or perceptual equivalent of an actual tsunami to bring about such a realisation?

Using a somewhat similar approach to Ed Garcia, Ilana Shapiro's paper focuses on practical methods of bringing about resolutionary change, but also on the theories or "hunches" that underlie practice. Shapiro notes that most practitioners recognise the fact that, in trying to influence intractable conflicts, they are dealing with complex adaptive systems where nothing is simple or straightforward. However, underlying theories help to determine where in that system one should begin. Like Raimo Vayrynen, she distinguishes between efforts to change people, relationships and structures and for me it has been interesting to watch how, over the years, the focus of writings about conflict resolution has switched somewhat from changing people to changing structures to changing relationships. Shapiro's call for practitioners to make explicit the theories that underpin their practice is a welcome one. Moreover, she is quite right to argue that we need to study conflict resolutionaries' own assumptions about the theories that underlie their practice. Let's hope someone will do this – systematically.

In a third, most interesting paper, Chris Spies outlines a number of useful guidelines for bringing about needed change in conflict systems. Like Ed Garcia, these ideas are based upon the author's profound practical experience of dealing with intractable conflict systems, not least that in South Africa. His point that local people, even in the midst of an intractable conflict, have "...a great deal of resilience and dormant faculties..." is a useful corrective to my apparent propensity to write as though resolution usually depends on outside involvement, and I very much like his conception and characterisation of the role of "servant-leader" as a key player in any resolutionary process. (Equally, his story about "peace vultures" strikes an all too familiar chord, leaving one wondering whether it is necessary to look in a mirror to see if beak, feathers and claws are quietly developing.) Similarly, the whole concept of creating a "safe space" for those in an intractable conflict so that they can search with one another for possible alternatives, seems to me to be central to the idea of reaching – or constructing – a solution that will be durable. The practical implications of this guideline for intractable conflicts involving large numbers of people has troubled me for a while, however. How does one – realistically – construct such a safe space for all the stakeholders when these might number tens of thousands?

I think the one place at which I part company with Chris Spies is over the issue of conflict transformation being "a skill and an art". This resembles too closely statements I used to encounter from senior British diplomats whenever it was suggested to them that some understanding of the theories on which they (implicitly) operated might well be clearly articulated, at least in order to assist in the training of their next generation. There is a lot of skill and art in trying to move conflict systems towards nonviolent interactions, but there are also underlying principles, lessons, guidelines

and theories that can and should be passed on, especially those hard won through experience.

While I enjoyed the papers that improved upon some of the ideas in my original essay, oddly enough the ones that made me think most about what I had written – and how I had written it – were those which took issue with the general approach, with the very idea of being able to construct some general theory of change and with what they termed efforts to de-politicise the practice of conflict analysis and resolution.

The most challenging paper was Daniela Körppen's which took up a number of shortcomings in the original and wrote about these with vigour, although I found some of her assertions quite puzzling – for example the argument that I rejected an inductive approach because I tried to “pick out commonalities from different conflict situations”. Trying to discern general patterns from a variety of specific cases – rather than deducing from general principle – is an inductive approach and, indeed most of the general ideas I have gained over the years have come from my observation of specific instances.

One of Körppen's concerns focuses on the presumption of “neutrality” involved in developing and then presenting general, theoretical ideas about the causes of conflict – or about obstacles to conflict resolution – to parties in a conflict who have their own ideas about these issues. At one level, of course, this cannot be a “neutral” act, at least in the sense of not affecting the parties or the situation in some way. However, Körppen – and Foucault – are mistaken in asserting that a knowledge of conflict situations cannot be gained by analysis (let's leave out the loaded terms “neutral” and “scientific”). Suppose, after being able to observe a large number of protracted conflicts, one comes up with the idea, the hunch – let's even dignify it with the label “theory” – that one of the phenomena one regularly observes in such conflicts, and which will prove a major obstacle to any resolution, is the fact that the adversaries will, indeed, possess widely different explanations of what the conflict is about, what has caused it, what keeps it going and whose fault it all is. Hence, one of the first steps in moving towards a resolution is very likely to be to get them to agree on what the conflict is about, or at least accept that it is perfectly reasonable for those involved to possess different views about this question. Is presenting this idea to the Indonesian Government and to GAM a political act? Maybe. But it is also a theory-informed action and the theory also says that, unless the adversaries can get over this conceptual hurdle, they are likely to remain locked into their protracted conflict for some time to come.

In any case, Körppen herself does not really seem to believe in the argument that one can't develop general theories through analysis when she comes to discuss alternative approaches later in her paper. That, to achieve results (of some sort), conflict analysis “...must be regarded as the first step in an intervention in a conflict situation ... and undertaken in cooperation with relevant stakeholders...” and that “equitable and sustainable peace is only possible if the resources for political and social change inherent in the conflict system itself are activated and supported, and if the basic needs of all subsystems in a political system are addressed and fulfilled...” sound to me pretty much like general hypotheses or even theories – and most conflict resolution practitioners, myself included, would agree with them. But where do they come from? Presumably from some kind of analysis – scientific or not – of cases of protracted conflict.

Körppen is also concerned that my arguments increase the probability of further divorce between the analysis of protracted conflicts and social change and the designing of intervention strategies. I have obviously failed to make myself clear on this point. What I was trying to do was to help systematise some of the things we think we know about the dynamics of protracted conflict so that those designing an intervention strategy would have some guidelines that might be – tentatively – applied to particular cases. I meant to emphasise – but clearly didn't – that one cannot usefully

become part of a conflict (in whatever role) if one enters with a “10 step cook-book” of remedies to be applied irrespective of local conditions, the views, beliefs and sensitivities of stakeholders, the cultural and historical backgrounds of the adversaries or the aspirations of the neglected. Equally, however, it is important not to delude oneself that one is becoming part of a conflict system wholly free from prior theories (whether one is using prospect theory or the Berghof systemic approach to conflict transformation) and will only be learning about the nature and causes of the conflict from those involved. For a start, one has to decide who are the stakeholders from whom one is proposing to learn.

While Vivienne Jabri has serious doubts about my epistemology and ontology, we seem to be able to agree about a great number of issues to do with conflict and change – although I don’t see why a positivist approach should necessarily fail to take normative factors into account in an attempt to understand any conflict; or why (cautiously) using generic/general theories as guides should deny also giving weight to the importance of specific, local and historical factors that are inevitably part of any intractable conflict. Nor am I sure why an inductive approach should render impossible an understanding of continuing, underlying structures that underpin conflicts that protract or re-emerge time and again.

What I do applaud is Jabri’s insistence that those involved in a conflict should not be regarded simply as “parties” – a linguistic device which masks the reality that these are entities with a whole range of other characteristics that will affect their aspirations, attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, capabilities, relationships with other entities in the system (governments, markets, resistance movements, potential intermediaries) and – perhaps most important of all – their ability to change. Link this point to one of her other arguments about those in conflicts frequently having very different capacities, depending upon their place in some “pecking order”, their resources, their degree of recognition by others, the extent to which they are the dominated or the dominating and you have one of the great weaknesses of contemporary conflict analysis – its tendency to ignore asymmetries between the adversaries in a conflict. Much of the literature on conflict analysis pays lip service to the idea that many conflicts are between unequals – often between entities that are highly unequal – but then goes on to treat those relationships as though they can be understood by using what might be termed the “standard model” – as a contest between equals, between “parties”. The implications of this for suggested “solutions” don’t need much emphasis.

I have talked earlier about my reasons for emphasising the aspects of rationality – based mainly on Herbert Simon’s concept of “bounded rationality” – that seem to me to underlie a lot of behaviour in conflict situations. Scholars working on entrapment theory and prospect theory have done a pretty good job of undermining any belief in “rational” choice in its classical sense but they have also raised an issue that reinforces Jabri’s insistence that a full understanding of any individual conflict has to take into account the understandings of those involved – and the latter may change over time. This is one crucial aspect of “change” in relation to conflict and its resolution about which we know far too little – how and why do people involved in conflict change their evaluations of possible outcomes? Why do “things” sought initially as infinitely desirable and worth any sacrifice become, at a later time, of much less worth especially in relation to other things? As Jabri argues – and I don’t disagree with her – one has to take notice of the substance or nature of the change as well as its direction and impact on the conflict in order to fully understand the connection (not, please, the correlation) between this kind of change and conflict – but, again, I am not sure why a positivist approach should necessarily fail to take notice of this particular dimension of change.

I agree with Jabri’s insistence that conflict resolution is a “political” act, based on certain values and with a certain range of goals as desired effects. “Doing something” about a conflict has

an impact – however minor – one way or the other, as does “doing nothing” which usually means the powerful triumph, unencumbered. But surely it should also be a “theory-informed” and cautious intervention, besides being “political”, so that choices are made – for example, about which parties or stakeholders to involve initially in the process – not necessarily on the basis of who is powerful or who is “legitimate” or who is paying, but on the basis of what existing theory tells one about who needs to be included to make it more likely that the outcome will be a durable and generally acceptable solution – and that often means involving so-called “extremists”.

If we can agree about these issues, then where do we disagree? Mainly, I think about some fundamentals of epistemology and the nature of analysis. I do not, for example, agree that – *pace* Habermas and Foucault – knowledge about conflict has to be (Jabri uses “may be”) judged in terms of the interests that constitute (underlie?) particular frames of knowledge. Suppose one’s “interest” is in understanding or getting as accurate a picture of a conflict or of conflicts as a class of phenomena (the “criteria of science” as Jabri terms it) rather than helping to perpetuate – or to undermine – a system of dominance? Nor do I believe that another key criterion is that the analysis should “reveal the complicities of different modes of understanding in relations of power”. Analysis should be able to reveal the nature, extent and reasons for the existence of those relationships of (relative) power and powerlessness, perhaps as a preliminary to doing something about them – or not. Of course, the market for ideas, including ideas about conflict, is a highly imperfect one and who can use knowledge is a matter of power, resources and wealth. But this is a different issue and only warns those in the conflict resolution business that they have to be very, very careful whom they work with, and on what.

Probably our main difference, though, is in our approach to the nature of the “knowable world” and the process of getting to know it. As Jabri emphasises, I am a fairly unregenerate positivist and empiricist, so I do believe (but ultimately can’t prove beyond any shadow of a doubt) that there is a world “out there” full of things, some of which we have agreed to call “conflicts”, worth trying to analyse and understand. Foucault’s idea that we somehow “create” or “construct” this world ourselves seems to me to be fundamentally mistaken and misleading – and also one of the most intellectually arrogant ideas I have yet come across. We do not “construct” the world, or that part of it we are interested in trying to understand. If anything, we inherit it. While we cannot “construct” it, we may – or may not – be able to affect parts of it by our actions, not least by the labels (words, phrases, categorisations) we agree to stick on it. Talk, for example, to any Turkish Cypriot about the Turkish army’s “invasion” of the island in 1974 and he or she will very rapidly inform you that this was not an invasion but an “intervention”, with very different implications for how one thinks about or reacts to that event. This pretty universally observable phenomenon, incidentally, seems to me why one of the central tasks of any third (or thirtieth) party is to help create a set of non-provocative labels that adversaries might accept as descriptors of events. However, this process is still a reaction to, and attempted description of, the inherited part of this particular mini-world of conflict.

So Viv Jabri and I must continue to disagree profoundly and (maybe) protractedly about this. But one of these days one of us may change his or her position, or both of us may change our epistemological understanding – in which case the change may lead towards a resolution of this particular conflict. We will have to wait and see.

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Christopher R. Mitchell is Professor Emeritus of Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University's Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution (ICAR). In the 1960s he was part of the pioneering research team at University College, London which, under the leadership of John Burton, developed the basic ideas of conflict resolution, problem-solving workshops and informal Track Two interventions into protracted conflicts. He has since been involved in numerous such interventions between (among others) Greek and Turkish Cypriots, Israelis and Palestinians, British and Argentinians as well as diverse Liberian factions. Most recently, he headed ICAR's "Local Zones of Peace" project, which analyses local communities' efforts to establish neutral and secure "zones of peace" in countries such as the Philippines and Columbia. His publications include *The Structure of International Conflict*, the *Handbook of Conflict Resolution: The Analytical Problem Solving Approach* and *Gestures of Conciliation: Factors Contributing to Successful Olive Branches*. He is currently working on a textbook that will summarise the current state of knowledge in the overall field of conflict analysis and resolution.

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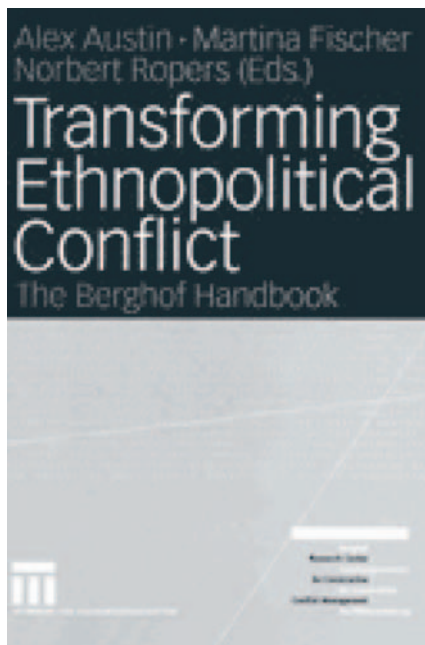
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