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## EDITORIAL

# Taking Stock of the Field: Past, Present and Future. An Introduction

*Michal Alberstein & Jay Rothman\**

The relatively new field of conflict resolution is in some ways flourishing globally. On the one hand, it is gaining popular and media recognition along with ever growing numbers of graduate studies programmes and devoted professionals. On the other hand, it has not yet fully developed into a mature field with its own overarching theories, methods and technologies. It is interdisciplinary in the sense that all the social sciences have much to say about conflict and how to handle it. However, as noted by Kevin Avruch in his article, it is not yet a discipline with its own widely agreed upon and accepted theoretical canon.

This journal aims to contribute to addressing this void by providing a broad academic perspective on the field – combining knowledge from both social sciences and humanities in order to improve our understanding of disputes and the ways to creatively engage them. We have the audacious hope that it can contribute to the development of the discipline and its organizing canon.

In the two foundational issues of this journal we offer a variety of answers to basic questions which are central to the field, and we do so through interdisciplinary lenses which represent diverse epistemologies. We will try to show in this short introduction, after outlining the contributions of the authors in this issue, how the various authors address some common themes. These may be considered initial efforts to define the boundaries of the field. We will also explore here different themes which recur in the various articles in this volume and through such an overview we will extract some commonalities which are unique to our field.

### 1. Synopses of Contributions to this Issue

Kevin Avruch shows that the field's evolving nomenclature reflects "a desire to get deeper into the root causes of the conflict". The field, according to Avruch, is expanding, from the initial goal to regulate conflict to present-day aspirations to influence multi-level structural change. Drawing an analogy from physics, Avruch raises the question: Where is the field expanding from? Does it have a centre? He explores the tension between 'pragmatists' and 'structuralists' and seeks a coherence that would constitute the core of the field.

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Carrie Menkel-Meadow explores the 'historical contingency' of our field, posing the question: Can theories and practice of conflict resolution change our historical conditions and improve our approaches to conflict or does history bend and shape our theory and practice? Going from the field's historical roots to its future possibilities, she sees the field's ultimate challenge as "our need to combine different kinds of discourses into productive engagement with each other". These discourses should take into account "the human brain (head), heart, and yes, 'gut'".

Oliver Ramsbotham deals with linguistic intractability, what he calls 'radical disagreement', which is the verbal aspect of those conflicts that cannot be settled or transformed. This is generally discounted in conflict resolution as positional or adversarial debate – a terminus to dialogue that must from the outset be transformed. In this article he takes radical disagreement seriously and suggests it is at our peril that we fail to accept it at face value. Rather than carrying out conventional efforts to manage or resolve radical disagreement, the call, he asserts, is to learn from it.

Tamra Pearson d'Estree provides insights to the conflict resolution field on its way to becoming a full-fledged profession. She analyzes the expectations of a profession and the specific challenges of our field. The nature of many conflicts, she says, "involves complex issues, relationships and dynamics that may have no clear precedent". What skills must professionals develop to deal with modern complexity? What tools should professional education provide? She sees communities of inquiry as a central asset to be cultivated to strengthen the field.

Peter T. Coleman points to the increase in number of peace agreements in the last few decades alongside the high rate of relapse into conflict and renewed violence. These "roller-coaster peace statistics" indicate numerous new challenges, including increasing complexity, interdependence and technological sophistication. To be more effective, says Coleman, the field must address several dilemmas and internal tensions of the field. He identifies six main challenges and offers ways to deal with internal tensions.

Nikki R.Slocum-Bradley believes the overarching purpose of conflict resolution should be to nurture "relational coordination". The cooperative relationship, she says, is currently treated as a means to peace and not an end in itself. Humans are "mutually interdependent co-constructors", and the formulation of theories and practice should reflect that understanding. She demonstrates the application of this understanding to action research, in a way that could encourage relational coordination and generative discourse.

## 2. Naming the Field

The question of naming the field is central for understanding its essence and boundaries. As authors such as Avruch and Menkel-Meadow show, the various names given to the field throughout the past 50 years reflect its basic characteristic as an ongoing endeavour. This endeavour evolves and transforms to reflect new ideas and theories influencing conflict analysis and applied work. Our own

graduate studies program at Bar-Ilan University, now completing its thirteenth year, has adopted the broad title of *Conflict Management, Resolution and Negotiation*. Underlying these terms is an epistemology pointing to different explanations regarding the nature of conflict, and leading to different theories of practice and means by which it may be constructively engaged. The need for *Management* of conflict is based on a mechanistic and pragmatic understanding that conflict emerges out of competing goals, resources and interests. The pursuit of *Resolution* of conflict is based on early conflict studies that view human conflict as rooted in the real or perceived threat to and frustration of basic human needs for survival, dignity, control and identity. Finally, the notion that conflict requires *Negotiation* across differences is based largely on legal and political constructs about the use of diplomacy to forge a middle ground between opposites (or, in a more polarized expression, as the art of war by other means).

However, although our own programme is diverse and fairly inclusive, it is not exhaustive of the variety of epistemological frames that now make up the young conflict 'field'. *Conflict Transformation* views conflict as a problem of human agency and mutual recognition and *Peace and Justice Advocacy* is yet another strand that holds a critical analysis of society and power structures (as will be seen in an article by Abu-Nimer in the next introductory issue).

To provide a notion of the emerging field as a range of theories and methods, we suggest placing these terms of art under the umbrella framework of "conflict engagement" (Rothman, 1997). That is, we view the field as a diverse body of theoretical and applied approaches to the study of how best to understand and creatively engage conflict. We also think that there are common themes and principles that define the identity of "dispute resolution people" and these principles appear in various models and related movement which are connected with the field (Alberstein, 2011). This inclusive conceptualization reflects a significant strength of the new field, since conflicts, like individuals and groups, are infinitely diverse and thus require different ways of formulation and redress.<sup>1</sup> It also allows us to get out of what has become something of an ideological battle and positional debate between terms and emphases, not really fitting the ethos of our field – each term being used against the other.

Others have also been advocating the use of the term "engagement" and it shows up increasingly in the literature. Two members of our journal executive board, Bernie Mayer and Richard McGuigan, have perhaps been the most outspoken about this new term. Bernie Mayer, in his book *Staying with Conflict* (2009), describes engaging conflict – with the goal of learning from it, growing from it instead of ameliorating or ending it – as the new normal for our field. Richard McGuigan, the former director of the conflict studies program at Antioch University, went so far as to rename the programme "Conflict Analysis and Engagement." The name suggests a contingency approach that both distinguishes and links theory to practice. It suggests a chronological act of conflict analysis to

1 While we advocate for the term conflict engagement, we understand and follow the point made by Ramsbotham that conflict resolution is still the most recognizable term of art and thus we have kept that term in the title of this journal – for now.

determine the type of conflict (*e.g.*, resource, goal or identity-based. Rothman, 2012a and 2012b), followed at times by an intervention design or practice to select the most appropriate “forum to fit the fuss” (Sander *et al.*, 1994). Other namings of the field such as dispute settlement and peace studies, appear in this volume and are discussed from historical and critical perspectives.

### 3. Theory-Practice Nexus

As noted, one of the distinctive features of this journal will be its abiding interest in the nexus between rigorous theory and systematic practice. While most espouse this connection as essential, even fundamental, to this field, few venture into it very deeply. Coleman in his article describes a deeply polarized meeting between conflict resolution theorists and practitioners. Each stood on the side and denigrated the value of the other. Happily, he reports that “after the first of day of grandstanding by the subgroups we were able to come together and, ultimately, learn and advance our thinking considerably. The academics came to appreciate and value the grounded-insights of the practitioners, and the practitioners gained from the precise distinctions offered by the scientists”. Indeed, Slocum-Bradley suggests that theory itself is a kind of practice in conflict engagement and proposes action research as a vehicle for containing both.

While we do not expect mud-slinging in this journal, we do expect different emphases between the worlds of theory and practice and accept that a full bridge between them may be neither possible nor wholly necessary. And yet, the self-conscious exploration of these two – by articulating the differences, and finding the linkages and interdependencies – will mark much of what we do in this journal as we believe it is also much of what we do in the field. And it should be noted that, as an academic journal, there will be an emphasis on, even a bias, for theory as the foundation stone of our field, including theorizing about practice. Indeed, the different authors in the two foundational issues find much interest in connecting the two worlds. D’Estree, for instance, proposes communities of inquiry as a tool to improve the ability to deal with conflict.

While there will never be one right way to analyze or address all conflicts, it is possible, and we believe necessary, to develop a scientifically based contingency model that would move the field well along (*e.g.*, given X definition of conflict Y, the utility of intervention Z is hypothesized). We believe such a systematically developed and tested contingency approach would bring our field from its adolescence into full maturity.

The applied field of conflict engagement has emerged from the ground, and is still very much dominated by practitioners who make their living from resolving everyday disputes (especially divorce mediation and training). Although a gap between practitioners and academics still exists, the need to inform the practice by theory and vice versa is growing. As Kurt Lewin, the father of action research, advised, “there is nothing so practical as a good theory”, and we believe there is nothing so theoretically interesting and worthy of study as good (and bad) practice.

#### 4. Discipline and Interdisciplinarity

Aspiring to establish a journal which will be truly interdisciplinary provides a unique challenge which can be reflected already in the mixture in the first and second issues. We have two social psychologists (Coleman, d'Estree) and one psychologist (Slocum-Bradley), two lawyers (Menkel-Meadow and Alberstein), two political scientists (Ramsbotham and Rothman), and an anthropologist (Avruch). We even have two of the first doctoral graduates in the field of Conflict Resolution (Abu-Nimer and Väyrynen). All of the authors are established experts in conflict engagement and yet their writing reflects first of all their disciplinary training. Speaking about rationality and emotion, mechanistic and holistic approaches, theory and practice, is an acceptable speech within social psychology, yet may seem ideological from other academic perspectives such as trauma studies or linguistics. Understanding law from an activist human rights perspective is different from examining the profession through sociological standards.

One of the challenges of the field is to become its own discipline while keeping the voice and strength of the diverse disciplines and methodologies which nurture it. Indeed, one of the strengths of a new field is when it coalesces new ideas from the margins of various disciplines.

The concept of creative marginality refers to the process through which researchers in academic fields move away from the mainstream and toward the margins of their fields and look toward the margins of other fields that may overlap with and fill in gaps in their fields. This interaction, occurring outside of disciplinary boundaries, promotes intellectual cross-fertilization, and it is often the site of innovation. (Rothman *et al.*, 2001)

We believe this is a promising way forward in continuing to build our field and growing it into its own discipline. We can find in this volume efforts to extract some common features which characterize the field. While no formal conclusions are reached in terms of the core of our field, we believe that such an accumulation of interdisciplinary authors can begin to develop a consensus on some central characteristics. These characteristics would not only distinguish our field but enable it eventually to emerge as a full-fledged discipline with its own canons, research methods, theories, practices and linkages between them. Our next volume (2014) will aspire to develop such an interdisciplinary/disciplinary consensus regarding the definition of a successful academic program in conflict engagement.

#### 5. Critique and Doubts

An important academic phenomenon within the history of the field is the critique and objections it has provoked, and the ways in which such theoretical challenges were incorporated into the discourse, or sometimes dismissed. Menkel-Meadow, for example, points to the ideological critique which was brought by externals to

the field while it was emerging – Owen Fiss, Richrad Able and Trina Grillo, for example. These authors have noticed the inequality and privatization which informal processes might produce. Some of the second and third generation theories of conflict resolution have incorporated responses to these critical claims into their model. Avruch speaks about the critics and proponents of peacebuilding and how the exchanges between them “constitute one of the essential tensions in our field”. Väyrynen discusses criticism of peacebuilding as a theory that relies on technical and expert-driven solutions. Ramsbotham exposes the relevance of various critical approaches as lenses to understanding the phenomenon of radical disagreement.

It is our view that critique and resistance are important elements in the development of the field. No understanding of the field can avoid the challenges which critical theories suggest. Part of the challenges of academia is to encourage more critical thinking and to enrich the field through an overarching meta-analysis.

## 6. Directions and Orientations

Authors in this issue refer differently to the question of where we are going. Avruch speaks about expansion and refers to the numerous new subfields which accompanied the core management focus through the years, such as trauma healing, human rights and transitional justice. Menkel-Meadow, coming from the legal and more domestic perspective, points to the fact that the field has become more public through the years, and that reference to deliberative democracy and restorative justice signifies growth and overcoming of the problem-solving infancy stage. Ramsbotham challenges the idea that radical disagreement is a terminus to dialogue that should from the outset be transformed and not learned from. D’Estree points to milestones to be passed so that conflict resolution may become an established profession with tools to deal with ever-growing complexity. Coleman speaks about six great challenges facing the field as well as possible ways to deal with its inherent paradoxes. Slocum-Bradley emphasizes the shift to relational thinking as a central challenge of the field and a tool for change.

## 7. Our Hopes

With the launch of this new journal, *International Journal of Conflict Engagement and Resolution (IJCER)*, we hope to provide a broad academic perspective of the field, combining knowledge from both social sciences and humanities in order to improve our understanding of disputes and the ways to creatively engage them. By focusing on interdisciplinarity as well as the dialogue between theory and practice, this journal aims to provide a comprehensive framework to deal with the important questions facing our field. We look forward to this journey of discovery and invite you to come with us.



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# Does Our Field Have a Centre?

## Thoughts from the Academy

Kevin Avruch\*

### Abstract

*This article is a personal reflection on the development of the field of conflict resolution/peace and conflict studies from the perspective of the classroom: how what is thought necessary to teach has changed as the field has grown and reacted to often turbulent political change*

**Keywords:** Conflict and Peace studies, peacebuilding, pedagogy, George Mason University, S-CAR.

For almost a century, the Universe has been known to be expanding as a consequence of the Big Bang about 14 billion years ago. However, the discovery that this expansion is accelerating is astounding. If the expansion will continue to speed up, the Universe will end in ice – Saul Perlmutter

I was drawn to this quote by the physicist Saul Perlmutter because lately I have been thinking a lot about how the field of conflict resolution has been expanding in the three decades or so that I have been working – writing, but especially teaching – around or within it. I am ‘thinking the field’, that is, from the perspective of university professor, and also from my particular academic location, the School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason; why I think the site is important I will come to soon.

### 1. What Is in a Name?

One can observe this expansion by looking at the number of topics or areas of concern that over the years have been added to and counted as being ‘in the field’ (see below). But one might perhaps begin more elementally looking for this expansion by asking simply what the *field calls itself* – a not-so-simple question of nomenclature, as it happens, because in this case, nomenclature reflects aspiration: from (mere) conflict *regulation* (Wehr, 1979), to *management* (Sandole

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& Sandole-Staroste, 1987), to *resolution* (Burton, 1990), to *transformation* (Lederach, 1995), and finally, to *peacebuilding* (Schirch, 2005). From 'regulation' on, each change of name reflects, for its proponent, a desire to get deeper into the root causes of the conflict and to induce more profound and sustained changes in the conflict system and the relationship among the conflictant parties. Each change of name is also a subtle critique, if not quite repudiation, of the lesser goals that were seen to attach to the alternative name. The last name, 'peacebuilding', is the most ambitious of all, and the one most fraught with ethical (among other) concerns, partly because peacebuilding entails the most intensive and wide-ranging *intervention* by others into the conflict system (society or culture). In fact, the name 'peacebuilding' is an indication of the way in which the field called *Conflict Resolution* is now perhaps misnamed because the endeavour has so expanded, and the more inclusive label, *Peace and Conflict Studies*, is perhaps a better fit.

I want to underscore my point that these name changes are not idle semantics. Underlying them are deep moral and political assumptions about the nature of people and the world. To 'stop' at regulation or management is to adopt a realist or neorealist position about the nature of conflict and potentials for inducing change. The deep causes are assumed to be beyond our reach, untouchable, located in human nature or the very nature of the conflict system. Thus, one aims to achieve balance, stability or deterrence, and not much more. The notion of *resolution* as opposed to *management* was proposed by John Burton precisely as his critique of traditional state- and power-centred international relations as he found it in the 1960s and 1970s, and as a critique of settlement-oriented Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), particularly mediation, as he found it in the 1980s. Reacting to Burton's influence, later scholar-practitioners such as Lederach argued for *transformation* as going beyond resolution of the conflict to altering the quality of the relationship between the enemy parties, and aiming for *reconciliation*, a far more ambitious goal. And *peacebuilding*, while variously defined, most certainly involves multi-level structural or systemic change, and is thus, as I said, the most intrusive of all the sorts of interventions implied by the other terms. For this reason many of the critics of what has come to be called 'liberal peacebuilding' have pointed to the potentially negative or destabilizing effects of such deep and comprehensive intrusions (Duffield, 2007; Mac Ginty, 2011; Richmond, 2007).

Beyond nomenclature, I will have more to say specifically about the substance of this expansion, but of course the very idea of expansion brings to mind the question of 'expansion from where or what?' If the field is expanding, does it do so from some sort of primordial *centre*? And furthermore, even if there *were* such a centre, does the very nature of expansion mean that ultimately the centre cannot hold, and the field will eventually expand into incoherence (if not an icy demise)? I will argue that there was and is such a centre, though it is not so much a single point as a conglomeration of related propositions, held together by a primordial and perhaps irreconcilable tension at the heart of our field.

## 2. Location, Location, Location ...

Let me be clear that the reason for all this rumination about centres and expansion is that I approach the field as an academic (rather than, like so many of my colleagues, a scholar-practitioner), and more precisely as a *teacher*. Trying to teach the field, particularly in introductory level courses at the master's and doctoral levels (tellingly, undergraduate education in conflict analysis and resolution came *last* to S-CAR, almost 25 years after the masters degree and 17 after the PhD: we needed to be confident that there was a field before we experimented on 18-year-olds), and worrying about such academic matters as programme design, course content, curriculum and, relatedly, the sorts of theory, research, and practice competence of our next and future faculty hires, means that I worry a lot about how well we are preparing our students to go out, find meaningful employment, and contribute to the field's development. Having been in the field as a teacher for several decades, I have had the opportunity first-hand to observe how, as the number of substantive, topical areas that have come to be regarded as (often necessarily) included in our domain increased, the conception of the field as a whole has grown and ramified.

My perspective on all this has been significantly shaped by my having spent my career at S-CAR: the fact that S-CAR itself has been around and educating students since 1981, and that it has pretensions to offer (now reflected in our recent elevation to 'School' status) a fairly comprehensive education in the field. (I should add that we fail: we are not as strong in conflict and development or conflict and economics as we should be, and many of our masters students complain that we do not adequately prepare them for mediation-focused ADR work. The first two are significant shortcomings in my view. As to the third, learning the set of skills needed to be certified as a mediator in court-affiliated mediation programmes can be taught in three full-day workshops. Learning to think critically about mediation – as a social formation or ideology, including its potentially negative or 'hegemonic' aspects, or even beyond its traditional basis in interest-based problem solving to include such emerging forms as transformational, narrative, or Insight mediation – is a different matter.)

So this concern with expansion and centres stems from the mundane matter of keeping curricula up to date and relevant, and the less mundane matter of anticipating what skills, training, methodological orientation and research focus/agenda the next and future faculty hires should possess – in order to remain as comprehensive as we aspire to be, and as the field of Peace and Conflict Studies grows around us. The comprehensive part is important. If, even in an academic setting, one is offering training or a degree focused on 'dispute resolution' or ADR (say, in a law school), then feeling compelled to include courses on human rights, R2P, DDR, or trauma-healing (to pick just four topics now broadly considered to be part of our field), is not a problem. Likewise, the excellent and equally enduring Program on Negotiation (PON), based at Harvard, is acute in its focus on the interest-based and problem solving approach to negotiation (though scholar-practitioners associated with PON have certainly enlarged 'negotiation's' purview since the classic *Getting to Yes* neglected culture, gender, power, and affect) and,

while counting several other universities in consortium and straddling law, business and public policy, faculty there are unlikely to feel compelled to offer a comprehensive curriculum with courses on dialogue, appreciative inquiry or, in fact, other third-party approaches to resolving conflict.<sup>1</sup> It is unsurprising that Herbert Kelman, a pioneering figure in interactive conflict resolution through his many Israeli-Palestinian workshops, also based at Harvard, was not affiliated with PON, but with Harvard's Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, where he directed the Program on International Conflict Analysis and Resolution (PICAR). His conception of practice in the field is a very different one (*see, e.g.*, Kelman, 1972, 1996).<sup>2</sup> The point is that if one's focus is negotiation or ADR, one's conceptual and pedagogical centre of gravity seems clear.

A similar clarity holds for practitioners not operating primarily as academicians. Practitioners have their *technic* – specific forms of mediation, dialogue, interactive problem-solving workshops, collaborative planning, dispute resolution systems design, restorative justice (another relative latecomer to our field) – and that technic constitutes their centre.

Finally, with respect to designing comprehensive curricula and introductory courses, let me emphasize the teaching component, and the need to design a programme of study that seeks to represent the field 'as a whole'. Of course, each faculty member will have his or her own theoretical orientation and research or practice focus or agenda, topically and methodologically, and will offer more specialized courses based on these. These research, theory or practice foci vary quite a bit in a place like S-CAR, where several and very different disciplinary and research cultures can be found. For any of us, with respect to theory, research and practice, these probably prescribe our different intellectual 'centres'. But this raises a different issue I will leave aside for now: the extent to which we at S-CAR (or any other centre of academic research and instruction with claims to comprehensiveness) can find a minimally common centre around 'conflict analysis and resolution', and thus the extent to which we can say with confidence that our *field* coheres into a *discipline*. At present, it does not.

### 3. The First Postgraduate Programme, 1981

Elsewhere, I have written, "there is no fully comprehensive history of our field, much less a critical assessment, as it is too early for either to convey much authority" (Avruch, 2012: 182). Kriesberg (2007) offers a partial account mainly in terms of institutional development, Ramsbotham *et al.* (2011) adopt a chrono-

1 PON itself is not a degree granting entity, though it does sponsor executive education and training certificate programmes.

2 A bit of history. Both Kelman and Roger Fisher were members at one time of John Burton's 'Problem-Solving Workshop', then called 'Controlled Communication' (Burton, 1969): Fisher at the first one, in December 1965, and Kelman in October 1966. Kelman, adopting a loose basic human needs approach followed broadly in Burton's path; Fisher, privileging the rational-choice, utilities-maximizing thinking that underlay 'principled negotiation', decidedly did not (*see* R.J. Fisher, 1997:21-25; Fisher and Ury, 1981; Kelman, 1990; Mitchell, 2005).

logical, indeed, generational, approach oriented around key figures, and one can find partial histories in accounts of particular methodologies, such as workshop-based ‘interactive conflict resolution’ (Fisher, 1997). Making no claims to supplant any of these, here I will narrow the focus on the field’s growth to the perspective of the classroom, and what needs to be in an introductory course syllabus (at any level of instruction). I will then broaden this view by considering the intellectual and sociopolitical contexts and currents that have shaped the concerns and commitments of the field, flowing *into* (reactively, rather than flowing *out of*) the classroom. Behind all this there is a basic tension, alluded to earlier, between two views of how one conceptualizes what the field, as a *normative* undertaking, aims to achieve. This tension has been present from the beginning, at the field’s inception as a self-conscious endeavour, and continues to characterize the field today (Scheinman, 2008).<sup>3</sup>

In 1981 what was then the Center for Conflict Resolution welcomed its first cohort of master’s students in a Master of Science in Conflict *Management* programme, the first postgraduate programme of its kind in North America. The fact that the first iteration of the degree was as ‘Management’ precisely reflected the earlier stages of our field’s aspirations, described at the outset of this essay. The fact that it was a Masters of *Science* rather than *Arts* reflected the design of the founding director, Bryant Wedge, a clinical psychiatrist and peace activist that the programme would *train* professionals in the process-oriented technical skills enabling them to intervene as third parties in conflicts and disputes. His model was the Masters of Social Work (MSW). The ‘Science’ designation of our degree has remained – an anachronism for some of us. ‘Resolution’ replaced ‘Management’ soon after John Burton’s arrival in 1985. Based on his theory of deep conflict being caused by the suppression of Basic Human Needs, Burton sought to differentiate Resolution from ADR-like Management. These needs, he argued, could never be bargained or negotiated away, thus rendering the very popular model of interest-based or principled negotiation, described in Roger Fisher and Bill Ury’s perennial bestseller *Getting to Yes* (1981), misguided or irrelevant for the sorts of deep-rooted identity and needs-based social conflicts Burton engaged in such books as *Deviance, Terrorism, and War* (1979) and *Violence Explained* (1997).<sup>4</sup>

For all this, Fisher and Ury’s book was at the centre of our introductory master’s course for many years, and not only as conceptual foil. In truth, compared to today, the reading list of core texts in conflict resolution that was available was a remarkably short one. Of course one could point to what may be called ‘founding’ books in the field: Rapoport’s *Fights, Games, and Debates* (1960), Boulding’s (1962) *Conflict and Defense*, Coser’s (1956) *Functions of Social Conflict*, Schelling’s (1963), *Strategy of Conflict*, Kriesberg’s *Sociology of Social Conflicts* (1973), among them.<sup>5</sup> All these were taught; but the conflict analysis *and* resolution library was a

3 Indeed, post Iraq and Afghanistan, with the militarization of both development aid and conflict management construed as ‘stability and reconstruction’, perhaps even more so.

4 A longer description of the early years of the Center can be found in Black and Avruch (1993). A description of the earliest curriculum can be found in Wedge and Sandole (1982).

5 And other works, less often taught but part of the then-known universe: Doob (1970), Deutsch (1973), Gulliver (1979), Raiffa (1982).

meagre one until the middle of the 1980s. Pruitt and Rubin's (1986) social psychological treatment (now in its third edition as Pruitt and Kim [2004]), Axelrod's (1984) *Evolution of Cooperation* and Christopher Mitchell's (1981) *Structure of International Conflict* (which already presented a Burtonian view that deviated from classical realist or neorealist IR treatments) – were among the books taught to entering students. More on the practice side, Chris Moore's work on mediation (Moore, 1986) and Wilmot and Hocker's *Interpersonal Conflict* (in its second edition in 1985) – and a Xeroxed prepublication version of Diamond and McDonald's seminal work on multi-track diplomacy – also circulated among students (1991, 1996). When Dennis Sandole came to Mason in 1981 as the first dedicated hire in the Center for Conflict Resolution (its first incarnation; for several years his line was split with International Relations until he moved to the Center fulltime), the first course he taught was a practicum with guest speakers from a very wide variety of approaches and backgrounds. These lectures were transcribed and appeared in the volume *Conflict Management and Problem Solving* (Sandole & Sandole-Staroste, 1987). The title echoes two eras in our development, 1981-1982 – management rather than resolution – and the years of its appearance, 1987, with 'problem-solving' reflecting John Burton's influence ('problem-solving' being the main methodology espoused by Burton in his workshop). This book was the first sustained scholarly 'product' that in some way represented the sensibility of conflict analysis and resolution emerging from George Mason. Given its provenance as a series of lectures by diverse scholars and practitioners, it was, as Sandole put it, a sort of 'convenience sample' of what was going on at the time in an emergent and very multidisciplinary endeavour. A later collection (Sandole & van der Merwe, 1993) was more focused and impactful; many of its chapters are still regularly cited in the literature. But the earlier volume did capture a sense, for many of us, of the excitement of an emerging field. The late Kenneth Boulding felt this as well. He wrote the Foreword to the book. He had been a visiting professor and recalled a class he taught just four years after the programme's inception, in the Fall of 1985:

[I] look back on it as perhaps the most exciting class I ever taught in my more than fifty years of teaching. The age range of students was about twenty to seventy and I think a good deal of internal learning took place between the younger and older members. The variety of life experiences in the class added to the learning process. About a quarter of the class came from something like a military background; another were peace activists; another quarter environmentalists; another quarter, unclassifiable. I think we all learned from each other. (Boulding, 1987: ix)

#### 4. Back to Location, Location, Location ...

Citing Dennis Sandole's two edited volumes as exemplary serves to point out that a faculty charged with instruction in a new and emergent field where the dedicated scholarly literature is thin finds it necessary, individually or collectively, to

write the field into existence. Of course I do not in any way mean to imply that we at S-CAR did this singlehandedly! Colleagues at other universities teaching in the field, on both sides of the Atlantic, have collectively created this library, which by 2013 is quite impressive and, indeed, is indexical of the field's academic 'reality', vigour, and legitimacy. Thinking, for example, about our colleagues in the UK (at Bradford, Kent, Lancaster, among other university-based programmes), I like to point to the three successive editions of Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall's *Contemporary Conflict Resolution* (3rd edn, 2011) as another manifestation of our growth and vigour. Each succeeding version is not only substantially longer, but is substantively longer through the inclusion of entirely new chapters on conflict resolution and the (new) media, art, popular culture, the environment, 'linguistic intractability', critical and post-structural theory and, most importantly an emerging statement by the authors on what they believe to be the future of the field as a 'cosmopolitan' venture.<sup>6</sup>

It is not that we at S-CAR, solo and Prometheus-like, brought the fire of scholarship to the hitherto unilluminated. But we did have a significant institutional advantage in helping to grow the field. Throughout the 1980s the then-Center for Conflict Resolution was housed within the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, and protected from possibilities of hostile take-overs or other machinations of baronial social science department chairs first by the graduate dean (Thomas Rhys Williams, an anthropologist and chair of the faculty group that designed the degree in 1979-1980), and then by the canny chair of Sociology-Anthropology, Joseph Scimecca. In fact, Scimecca became Director when the Center moved from the Department to its own space. Within the Department the fact that we offered a separate master's (from 1981) and (in 1988) doctoral degree in a field *not* sociology or anthropology, also provided a measure of autonomy (as did generally supportive and sympathetic colleagues in those disciplines). However, the most important change occurred in 1990: the Center became the Institute and its leadership negotiated a separation from the College of Arts and Sciences and official university status of 'Local Academic Unit'.<sup>7</sup> This guaranteed our bureaucratic autonomy and meant that we were never buried inside one *disciplinary* department or another. This meant that though we were a tiny faculty (far smaller than almost every academic department in the College of Arts and Sciences), our Director held the status of Dean. All admissions, staff, and academic appointments (including promotion and tenure) were made in-house. The bureaucratic profile of the unit was extremely flat, and the leader of our group (in

6 The first edition came out in 1999. (The order of authorship differed: Miall, Ramsbotham, and Woodhouse.) The first edition was comprised of eight chapters in 270 pages. The third edition features 20 chapters in 507 pages. They are two very different books, reflecting in my view the enormous growth in the number and variety of the field's areas of concern and engagement over a period of a dozen years. I'm not sure how many other academic fields (or, indeed disciplines), can boast of similar growth.

7 The Center for Conflict Resolution became the Center for Conflict Analysis and Resolution immediately subsequent to the arrival on the faculty of John Burton in 1985. Thus, in 1990, CCAR became ICAR.



many ‘demographic’ ways the equivalent of a departmental chair) reported directly to the university’s provost, our chief academic officer.

I cannot begin to emphasize the significance of this attainment of institutional autonomy for enabling our current position in the field as a whole. For one thing, it meant that if we decided we needed someone from social psychology or sociology (or from Peace and Conflict Studies, for that matter), to enhance our strikingly multi-disciplinary faculty, we went out and hired one. Were we in a political science or anthropology or communications department, for example, these sorts of out-of-disciplinary hires would never likely occur. My colleague Solon Simmons has referred to disciplines as being ‘like churches’, with notion of rites of passage, purity, and pollution as strong as any (nowadays embattled) denomination or tribe. Relations in the greater university with other (social science) disciplinary departments are much like Morgenthau’s original vision of international relations among states: protecting your own (departmental) interests comes first, though one may form temporary alliances against outside aggressors or centres of power. This also meant that when we decided that human rights, say, was now to be considered part of the field, we were not constrained by a college dean, sitting above us, telling us, “Hold on, I think there’s someone doing human rights in the Philosophy and Religion Department. I will not approve this search. Redundancy is not economic”.<sup>8</sup>

## 5. A Growing Field: Proliferating Topics and Expanding Ambitions

In one way, we scholars ‘wrote the field’ by recognizing gaps or lacuna in existing theory or research. In my case, the glaring gap was the inattention paid to culture (to *difference*), a result, as I wrote elsewhere, of the origins of the field in IR (even if as a reaction to neorealist, state and power-centred IR) or, for negotiation theory and research, in social psychology. Most practice, on the other hand – particularly in labor-management relations, and leaving aside mostly unnoticed class-based cultural difference – did not take place in culturally diverse settings (Avruch, 2012: 6-9). Peter Black and I, both anthropologists and thus attuned to culture, wrote a series of critiques of this absence (Avruch 1998, 2012; Avruch &

8 Like all evolutionary accidents, however, there are some costs as well. One is that our Ph.D. graduates have a hard time getting academic appointments in social science disciplinary departments. Most of the opportunities for our doctoral graduates who seek a career in the academy have come from the growing number of masters programmes in the field. Some of these are also relatively independent entities and can direct their own hires, while a few remain based in disciplinary departments where, if the student (*market*) demand is strong enough, an exception to the ‘all outsiders are polluted’ rule can be timorously made. In these cases the nature of the candidate’s doctoral research (and his or her committee) – does it smell remotely like a topic in international relations? – is of prime importance. The fact that IR itself has now grown, conceptually and methodologically, and some researchers in it also engage areas familiar to Peace and Conflict Studies – human security, for example – has helped as well to open the market for our graduates, a bit. On the other hand, the academic market even for strong disciplinary based young scholars is so dismal in terms of finding a position with even the possibility of tenure, that few career futures in the university seem bright or secure whatever the academic discipline.

Black, 1987, 1990, 1993), framing it as ‘the culture question’. It is remarkable that for some this has become *the* crucial question facing the field, with culture now construed in ways consonant with post-structural or cosmopolitan theory. For a cosmopolitan conflict resolution ‘the culture question’ is central to matters of recognition and acknowledgment of the Other (Ramsbotham *et al.*, 2011: 425). For many post-structuralists, hyper-attentive to power, the culture question implies a ‘politics of difference’ and is connected to broader critiques of liberal peacebuilding (Brigg, 2008; Jabri, 2012).

Peter Black and I were hardly alone in writing culture into our field. The anthropologists Robert A. Rubinstein and Mary L. Foster (1988) offered a prescient and incisive critique of the absence of culture in conceptions of international security; and Sally Merry (1987) early on cautioned lawyers on the demerits of ‘disputing without culture’. From political science, Marc Howard Ross (1993a, b) theorized culture in symbolic, interpretive, and psychological terms as part of a larger treatment of the sources and management of social conflict. From International Relations, Raymond Cohen first investigated how differences in culture negatively affected diplomatic negotiation between Israel and Egypt – he called it a “dialogue of the deaf” (Cohen, 1990), and then expanded this to investigate culturally based communicational impedances in elite and diplomatic negotiations more generally (Cohen, 1991/1997). Finally, so long as we are noting gaps and lacuna of the early days, we should not pass over gender. Elise Boulding’s work is foundational here (*e.g.*, Boulding, 1976), but also the work called *Conflict and Gender*, coedited by Anita Taylor, who sat on ICAR’s advisory board from its inception (Taylor & Beinstein, 1994). Cynthia Enloe’s (1990) *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* was important critical work from a fellow traveller, more directly aimed at the heart of patriarchal IR.

Besides paying attention to significant, neglected areas like culture or gender, the field grew as a large number of topics came to be considered integral parts of it: I already mentioned, for example, human rights. Consideration of structural sources of conflict meant that class and issues around what many today call ‘globalization’ (others call ‘empire’) were already on the syllabus. Likewise, religious and identity conflicts were to be found. But new topics presented themselves as demanding coverage. Here is a partial list of topics that should be part of a comprehensive introductory course in conflict resolution or transformation, even if a particular topic is to be treated with a critical scepticism – *e.g.*, ‘fragile states’ or ‘stability and reconstruction’. How these topics came to be added I will discuss shortly:

- Transitional justice (including TRCs, tribunals and restorative justice)
- Civil Society
- Fragile states
- Reconciliation
- Environmental conflict and conflict resolution
- Human rights
- Humanitarian interventions
- Human security
- Responsibility to Protect (R2P)

- Peacebuilding
- Peace education
- Sustainable development
- IDP/refugee/combatant reintegration; DDR
- Trauma healing
- Coping with ‘spoilers’
- Post 9/11-US post-invasion ‘stability and reconstruction’ efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan

As an instructor, when I compare this list (and I am sure others would add to it) to the topics covered in our introductory course as taught in the first decade or so of our masters curriculum, I am struck by the fact that the earlier course content was focused on the sources of conflict and conflict dynamics, on basic human needs theory, and on negotiation, para-negotiation, and third party roles (particularly interest-based mediation and, at S-CAR, the Burtonian analytical problem solving workshop). The course focused, that is, precisely on the process of ‘getting to yes’, getting to an agreement or, adopting a contingency approach, transitioning from Track 2 modalities to Track 1 official, ‘peacemaking’ diplomacy. What is striking about the bulleted list, in contrast, is that our focus of concern has shifted significantly from reaching settlement (as a sort of terminus) to ‘post-conflict’ (which is to say, post-settlement) matters. Also striking is that the list has expanded from concerns with the technicalities of reaching agreements (techniques of analytical problem-solving, integrative negotiation, or facilitative, interest-based mediation techniques), to broad-based problems in the psychological and structural requirements for making the settlement sustainable – and humane.

This expansion transformed our field. But unlike culture or gender, where one could argue that scholars and researchers led the way in ‘writing the field’, the latter changes occurred through the imposition of exogenous forces, that is, it reflected the field (as it was being taught in the academy) responding, reactively, to changes in the state of the world. Here we faced the *world writing the field*. The provenance of these exogenous forces matters: The North mostly writes the South; NATO, the IMF and World Bank write and others mostly take dictation. New topics for research and theory were being suggested (often emphatically) by acts and events, by agents or actors through their *practice*. We in the academy played catch-up.<sup>9</sup>

In my view, there were two main exogenous sources for this transformation. The first was the end of the Cold War, and following this the brief moment of optimism represented by Boutros Boutros-Ghali’s *Agenda for Peace* (1992/1995). (The brevity of optimism was perhaps connected to the resumption of many unfinished post-colonial struggles that had been ‘put on ice’ by the Superpowers

9 At S-CAR student impact on course material is also a factor. When I teach the capstone masters course (aspirationally called ‘Integration’) I ask students what topics in their many courses were not discussed that ought to have been. *What is lacking, in their view, in their faculty’s conception of the field?* Because many of our postgraduate students come to us with working experience ‘in the field’, we have learned that they sometimes have things to tell us.

during the Cold War.) The second was the tragedy of 9/11, and the multiple tragedies that have followed bitterly in its wake.

## 6. From Conflict Management to Peacebuilding

In that brief period when it seemed that the era of superpower rivalry, mutual assured destruction, and a UN Security Council perennially gridlocked by veto, had ended, there was great hope that the UN might finally play the role ensuring world peace that its founders had envisaged. Nowhere was this more clearly stated than in Boutros-Ghali's 1992 *Agenda for Peace*. Anticipating that obstructions to Security Council action in this direction were more or less free of East-West veto, a concern with *preventive diplomacy* was vigorously articulated, for one thing. But the most radical thing in the *Agenda* was the addition of *peacebuilding* to the customary UN categories of *peacemaking* and *peacekeeping*. Peacemaking implied diplomatic work with the UN acting as third party to bring hostile parties to a negotiated agreement. Peacekeeping entailed, traditionally, the lightly armed 'blue helmets' intercessionary forces, deployed at the invitation of the parties (*governments*) in support of the ceasefire or agreement reached through peacemaking.<sup>10</sup> But, envisioning a new and expanded role for the UN, peacebuilding implied something else: "action to identify and support structures which will tend to consolidate peace and advance a sense of confidence and well-being among people". This action included "rebuilding the institutions and infrastructure of nations torn by civil war and strife [...]" and addressing "the deepest causes of conflict: economic despair, social injustice, and political oppression" (1992: 32).

This was a radical change for several reasons. First, it aims to achieve 'structural' and institutional change. Second, in speaking of 'nations torn by civil war' it relocates peace from something forged *between* (sovereign) states to something crafted *within* 'nations' torn asunder internally. The parties in conflict, that is, may not be governments or regimes: indeed, in civil wars by definition the very legitimacy of the government is challenged, and *insurgents* are by definition 'non-state actors'. Third, it seeks to address conflict's root causes, and identifies these not with a Realist's focus on the instabilities of a balance of power among states suspended in an amoral international system of states, but with *morally* infused notions of despair, social justice, and oppression. On all three counts – seeking structural change; potentially setting aside sovereignty to act within states; and seeking root causes in the language of morality and, broadly, human development and 'well-being' – peacebuilding promised something very new. (We will engage this idea of 'promise', a little sceptically, later on.)

We all know how quickly this bright optimism faded in the wake of Yugoslavia's demise, Haiti's continuing torments, Somalia's implosion, and genocide in Rwanda. Yugoslavia saw the return of concentration camps to Europe, Rwanda

10 *Peace Enforcement* also featured in this and succeeding documents, pointing the way to recognizing a more coercive or military role for UN peacekeeping operations, something beyond Chapter 6 interventions but not quite Chapter 7, either – what many observers have come to call 'Chapter 6 and a half'. These actions require Security Council approval.

demonstrated how easily new holocausts can belie the world's commitment to 'never again'. Moreover, the performance of the UN – specifically regarding the protection of civilians – in Yugoslavia and especially Rwanda, was deplorable. The later version of the *Agenda for Peace* (1995), less assured or radiantly optimistic, sought to explain this by recognizing and stressing how much greater were the challenges facing peacebuilders intervening in intra- rather than interstate conflict. Such interventions were now called 'complex' and when paired with 'humanitarian' reinforced the moral (as opposed to realist or cost-benefit based) calculus by which they were motivated and assessed.

My concern in this essay is less to encompass the meaning of UN peacebuilding and its fate in general, and more to focus on how the two *Agendas for Peace* affected developments in our field, conflict resolution, and on curriculum and the classroom. For one thing, the immediate effect was to necessitate the inclusion of those new topics bulleted earlier, the whole range of 'post-conflict' activities now covered by the requirements of peacebuilding. The more significant effect was to bring the notion of *peace* more directly into contact (and 'dialogue') with *conflict resolution*. The two were not always so easily consonant in the past.

## 7. American Pragmatists versus European Structuralists: Conflict Resolution or Peace?

The notion of 'peacebuilding' was of course well articulated in our field long before the 1992 *Agenda for Peace* sought to make it UN doctrine. Boutros-Ghali's focus on structures, on seeking root causes of conflict, on economic despair, social injustice and oppression, can be read (in the beginning, at least, with some satisfaction) as a come-lately gloss on Johan Galtung's (1969) seminal idea of positive (deep structural) peace entailing the removal of structural violence (entailing economic inequalities and social injustice). In fact, as traditional 'peacemaking' meant the implementation of ceasefires, truces, and lines of disengagement – the cessation, at least, of ongoing military combat – it could be thought of as aiming to achieve negative peace, the cessation of direct violence. Boutros-Ghali intended 'peacebuilding' to refer to much deeper transformations. The link to Galtung and to the already established school of peace research, mainly in Europe, that he helped to found was clear. But did Galtung ever have in mind what came to be called 'liberal peacebuilding?' The tragedies of 9/11, the Global War on Terror, Iraq and Afghanistan, lead me to think not.

Even before the events of 11 September 2001, however, the emerging field of Peace and Conflict Studies was riven by what some considered a deep fracture between two orientations – a difference that in effect split 'conflict (resolution)' from 'peace' entirely. To some extent this fracture could be characterized on continental grounds: the early conflict researchers based in the United States (and particularly, under Kenneth Boulding and Anatol Rapoport, at the University of Michigan), and those in Europe, particularly in Scandinavia, based around Galtung. Some have characterized this difference as one between a narrow, minimalist, conflict management or pragmatic orientation adopted by the Americans

(in some sense concerned initially with avoiding a nuclear exchange and holocaust), and the broad, maximalist, positive peace and structuralist orientation of the Europeans (aimed at achieving structural change in society and polity writ large; see Avruch, 2012: 24-25; Ramsbotham *et al.*, 2011: 42-49; Scheinman, 2008: 193-200). The *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, established in 1957, and the (European) journal established purposefully as its counterpoint, the *Journal for Peace Research* (JPR, established 1964), exemplify in their articles and tone these differences.<sup>11</sup> Articles published in the latter journal criticized the ‘American’ approach as technocratic and unconcerned with social justice and structural change (Reid & Yanarella, 1976; Schmid, 1968). On the other hand, Kenneth Boulding published in the JPR an extended review essay featuring ‘twelve friendly quarrels with John Galtung’ among which were quarrels with Galtung’s over-emphasis on the normative (as opposed to scientific-empirical) aspects of his work, and the over-generalizing and consequent lack of specificity of such key *ideas* as positive peace and structural violence (Boulding, 1977). Here one can see, palpably feel, the empirically minded economist calling for some conceptual discipline in Galtung’s (over) numerous ‘taxonomies’ such that key *variables* could reasonably be operationalized. Unsurprisingly, Galtung would have none of this, and a decade later published his rejoinder to Boulding as ‘one friendly quarrel’ – choosing in the end to defend his conception of ‘structural violence’ as foundational, indeed as indispensable, both to the ‘science’ as well as the *attainment* of peace (Galtung, 1987).

These quarrels were not carried out simply in the rarefied atmosphere of purely intellectual encounters. The world was intervening to write the field. Scheinman, citing Lawler (1995), recounts how the ‘schism’ within the field “began to crystallize in the aftermath of a 1967 conference on the Vietnam conflict hosted by the Peace Research Society [...] in the United States”. He goes on:

[T]he basic dispute that emerged at the conference was over the question of whether or not American peace researchers (at least those that presented at the conference) were engaging in thinly veiled strategic studies that took as their point of departure the legitimacy of the United States’ military engagement with North Vietnam [...]. There was a sense among the European participants at the conference that science was being used to advance the hegemonic interests of the United States government rather than the interests of the oppressed or less well off (Scheinman, 2008: 192)

The echoes of this in some of the radical critiques of liberal peacebuilding, four decades and several wars later, post 9/11, Iraq and Afghanistan, are striking (see Campbell *et al.*, 2011). They should not be surprising. As in 1971 at the height of the war in Vietnam, some contemporary critics see peacebuilding as a hegemonic

11. One can see these differences echoing in the decision, noted earlier, of Bryant Wedge in 1980 to push for a Master’s of *Science* in *Conflict Management* as our first degree, aiming to train skilled technicians.

practice. Practice drives theory (Avruch, 1991: 4, 1998: 78). The world (some parts of it more than others) writes our field.

## 8. From Peacebuilding to Conflict Management – and Back

The early exchanges between ‘pragmatists’ and ‘structuralists’, phrased in any number of ways, reverberate through the decades and constitute one of the essential tensions in our field. One can see it in the critiques mounted by many in the Law and Society school of sociolegal studies throughout the 1980s and 1990s against what Laura Nader called the ‘somatizing’ effects of ADR (Nader, 1980, 1991).<sup>12</sup> One can also see earnest attempts to relieve or bridge this tension, for example by arguing for the ways in which social justice and ‘system maintenance’ are not in fact binaries but interconnected and mutually dependent processes. The role of conflict resolution, in fact, is to continually ‘reconnect’ these processes. While the ‘ends’ may be those of social justice, Schoeny and Warfield remind us that, absent a ‘when the revolution comes’ imaginary, the institutional ‘means’ by which to achieve those ends will have to operate within existing (if also necessarily democratic) systems. They write:

As distasteful as it may be for some social justice theorists, transformative conflict resolution (in the social justice sense) requires being attentive to the proletarian goings-on of systems maintenance, for it here where the outcomes of a resolutionary agreement will be determined. (Schoeny & Warfield, 2000: 263)

Not everyone agrees with this hopeful, essentially liberal view of the potential for conflict resolution to resolve the binary: it remains our essential tension. Nevertheless the impulse towards this resolution is part of our own history (and curriculum). It is not surprising that the authors of the article just cited, Mara Schoeny and the late Wallace Warfield, are connected to Mason’s S-CAR: Schoeny as MS and PhD graduate, and now faculty colleague, and Wallace as faculty from 1990 until his death in 2010. I say this because once John Burton arrived (in 1985 to what was then ICAR), and ‘conflict management’ was replaced by ‘conflict resolution’, the curriculum here always represented a mix between pragmatic and structuralist (social justice) orientations. Burton, in many ways a consummate pragmatist, at the same time argued that his conception of ‘resolution’ necessarily entailed structural changes in society if those imperious ‘basic human needs’ were to find satisfaction. He wrote several times of conflict resolution as both a political philosophy and a political system (e.g., Burton, 1990: 261-268, 1993: 55-64). In this way, through Burton, the ‘European’ perspective, even if not always self-consciously parsed as ‘peace research’, was represented in the curriculum: certainly Galtung’s ideas were always central ones.

12 A summary of her and others’ critique of ADR as ‘hegemonic’ may be found in Nader (2002:142-167).

Nevertheless the effect of Boutros-Ghali's addition of peacebuilding to peacemaking and peacekeeping, as well as the era of 'complex humanitarian emergencies' and 'post-conflict' interventions of the 1990s (Haiti, Somalia, ex-Yugoslavia), greatly and explicitly broadened the number and range of topics that needed inclusion in our curriculum, and brought conflict resolution as a field closer to development and peace studies. But even more significant, and fraught, was the connection formed between some topics traditional to International Relations and those in Peace Studies. After the *Agenda for Peace* established peacebuilding as UN doctrine, Sabaratnam writes,

[T]he silos that had been established between 'peace studies' and 'security studies' during the 1970s and 1980s had begun to break down. In particular, peace studies was rescued from its political obscurity and engaged in the service of this new international agenda for peace. In particular, theories of human need (Burton, 1987) and social grievances (Azar, 1986) informed these early, Third World friendly readings of conflict held by multinational organizations. These readings of conflict held out the promise of peaceful resolution of conflict along politically emancipatory lines. (Sabaratnam, 2011: 16)

Let us pause to appreciate the tone and diction of Sabaratnam's observation. First, Boutros-Ghali 'rescues' peace studies from its condition of obscurity. It is very clear where status, legitimacy, and authority reside. Nevertheless, 'hitched' to the new agenda of the (momentarily promising) new world order, the marriage of peace and security appears to be a very good one for the side of peace: the obscure and impecunious partner is as fortunate (momentarily) as any Jane Austen heroine – hitherto unmarried and fearfully unmarriageable. But Sabaratnam also hints as to where this relationship is heading, and that the 'promise' of 'emancipation' does not appear to be assured or fulfilled.

And of course it is not. A few pages later, reflecting not on the recent end of the Cold War and the early 1990s but on the aftermath of 9/11, the war on terror and the full-bore military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan (having unsettled and destroyed, the need to 'stabilize and reconstruct'), she writes:

Since 2001, the overt re-configuration of mainstream academic and political discourses in conflict *management* away from peace and reconciliation towards governance and statebuilding has been substantial and systematic, in no small part catalysed by a new security agenda, the substantive political problems faced by the coalition in Iraq and Afghanistan, and changing political discourses about the origins of the conflict. (Sabaratnam, 2011: 24-25; emphasis added)

Early on, the UN's doctrine of peacebuilding as theory and practice promised to bring peace and security together in the same discursive frame. Instead, a decade and two or so wars later, peacebuilding, rather than 'pacifying' security, is itself securitized and militarized. Instead of focusing on economic despair, social injus-



tice, political oppression and the 'well-being' of people, the concerns are now focused on 'fragile' and unruly states and how we – *who? the United States? 'The West'? NATO? the international community?* – ought to set about governing them.

## 9. Whose Peacebuilding? Towards a Critical Pedagogy of Peace and Conflict Studies

Vivienne Jabri, in a public lecture at S-CAR in October, 2012, presenting a familiar critique of 'the liberal peace', remarked that peacebuilding might well have signalled "the end of conflict resolution".<sup>13</sup> One can understand this sentiment, particularly if one considers the sort of 'peacebuilding' carried out, in the case of Iraq or Afghanistan, mainly by outsiders in the aftermath of warfighting, where in retrospect the responsibility to protect civilian populations can be seen as a rationale for invasion and regime change. Yet this is not the only conception of peacebuilding possible, much less desirable. It is now almost two decades since John Paul Lederach wrote of "building peace" as a matter of bringing about "sustainable *reconciliation*", and had us recognize that all levels of the *indigenous* society, from elites and top leadership to the grassroots, must be involved and committed (Lederach, 1997). Lederach understood that peacebuilding is first and foremost a matter for healing a fractured society, and not just for pursuing 'structural adjustments' and insuring a state friendly to foreign direct investment. Recent work, including a series of case studies on how one connects local-level peacebuilding to efforts at achieving peace at the national level, carries this sense of building peace forward (Mitchell & Hancock, 2012). And even work that examines how mainly outsiders can effect peacebuilding, work closer to the more traditional IR view of the process, recognizes that any form of peacebuilding that "does not privilege the local and does not effectively address deep-rooted underlying causes and conditions of a given conflict is bound to fail" (see Hewitt *et al.*, 2010: 1-4; Sandole, 2010).

Looking at this development from the perspective of the classroom – and over three decades or so – my sense of the field is that of an expanding universe: of topics, concerns, engagements, skill-sets and, not least, ethical issues and moral dilemmas. An introductory course to the field or a curriculum that claims to be comprehensive are now no longer about 'getting to yes', about negotiation (or even pre-negotiation or para-negotiation), problem solving, or facilitative, interest-based mediation. Reaching the agreement is now a station on the way to a whole arena of 'post-conflict' (meaning, post-settlement) concerns. But if the field has indeed been expanding at such a rate, then the question I posed at the beginning is germane: do we have a centre? And if we did, 'at the beginning', do we *still* have a centre? I think we do, but that knowing of it demands we keep a critical lens on how others have adopted the field, that we teach it with the lens intact and that we continue to ensure that what we mean by 'peace' is truly something different from *si vis pacem para bellum*.

13 A similar sentiment has been voiced by her in Jabri (2010, 2012).

## 10. A Center for Peace and Conflict Studies and Practice

Observations indicate that the universe is expanding at an ever increasing rate. It will expand forever, getting emptier and darker – Stephen Hawking

Another cosmologist heard from, saying much the same thing as the first, though somehow even more menacingly. Unlike the universe, it's hard to imagine any field of human knowledge or practice expanding indefinitely. So expansion in our domain has its limits and one hesitates to identify the liberal peace with icy darkness, even metaphorically – though, as I intimated, things do get (at least morally) 'darker' as we reach out to those limits: Any sort of 'peacebuilding', even the humanistic sort described by Lederach, involves a great intrusion into the 'target' cultures and societies, and a greater chance for mischief, than a PON sponsored training workshop in principled negotiation. And, as some critics of peacebuilding point out, a 'transitive subject-object split' remains: "We are doing peacebuilding to *them*".<sup>14</sup> Withal, the liberal peace retains its champions, for example, Roland Paris, who writes:

The key principles of liberalism – individual freedoms, representative government and constitutional limits on arbitrary power – offer a broad canvas for institutional design and creative policymaking. (Paris, 2011: 166)

Three decades of teaching the field is a long time but not, of course, cosmologically speaking, and perhaps what I have seen as expansion is better and more modestly characterized as the field's 'emergence'. Then the question becomes, Can the field maintain its coherence in the face of emergence? This depends on the sustaining coherence of its centre, by which I mean a set of principles both analytical and normative. These are broader and more inclusive than any particular 'theory' or skill-set. In fact, I believe they have been well articulated almost 15 years ago, in a review essay examining the state of the field, by Paul Rogers and Oliver Ramsbotham (1999).

Rogers and Ramsbotham discern seven criteria by which the field is fundamentally defined and definable:

- A concern to address the root causes of conflict.
- The realization that an interdisciplinary effort is required.
- A recognition that while conflict per se can serve to bring about pro-social change, and conflict resolution is not a blind defender of the status quo, *violence* need not be an inevitable or necessary companion of conflict or change.
- Analysis is required that overcomes an exclusive focus on level (individual, group, state and interstate).
- The adoption of a 'global and multicultural approach', one that is sensitive to cultural context but attuned to global sources of conflict.
- A commitment to the field as both an analytical and normative enterprise.

14 I owe this phrasing to Richard Rubenstein.

- Respect for the relationship between ‘theory’ and ‘practice’ in research – despite the more marginal position accorded practice in academic settings.

In his critical reading of this essay Oliver Ramsbotham (one of the authors of these principles!) rightly points out that in borrowing them I have still left the reader somewhat ‘in the air’, certainly not resolving what he calls the ‘indeterminateness’ or ambivalence of, for example, approaching the field mainly as ‘conflict resolution’ or ‘peace and conflict studies/research’. I am aware that setting forth these seven borrowed ‘theses’ as providing *me* a sense of coherence is not the same as demonstrating a strong ‘gravitational field’ (his phrase in line with expanding universes) that ensures the field’s coherence or integrity as a whole, or even for others. He points in fact to the challenges that we (will always) face. We are, after all, perpetually *in media res*.

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# The Historical Contingencies of Conflict Resolution

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## Abstract

*This article reviews the historical contingency of theory and practice in conflict engagement. World War II and the Cold War produced adversarial, distributive, competitive, and scarce resources conceptions of negotiation and conflict resolution, as evidenced by game theory and negotiation practice. More recent and more optimistic theory and practice has focused on party needs and interests and hopes for more party-tailored, contingent, flexible, participatory and more integrative and creative solutions for more than two disputants to a conflict. The current challenges of our present history are explored: continued conflict in both domestic and international settings, the challenge of “scaling up” conflict resolution theory and the problematics of developing universal theory in highly contextualized and diverse sets of conflict sites. The limits of “rationality” in conflict resolution is explored where feelings and ethical, religious and other values may be just as important in conflict engagement and handling.*

**Keywords:** History of ADR , consensus building, multi-party dispute resolution, theory development, conflict handling.

## 1 Histories of the Field

### 1.1 *The Contingency of Theories*

To look at the world we live in now, we would wonder where is the field of conflict resolution. At the time of this writing, a murderous civil war rages in Syria; there have been bombing and military hostilities in and out of Gaza; there has been new violence in Kashmir and Northern Ireland; children and young women have been raped, shot at, and murdered on public transportation in several Asian and Middle Eastern countries; with accompanying protests and riots, a dissent rock band of women have been imprisoned in Russia; the United States almost fell off ‘the fiscal cliff’ as Republicans and Democrats could not negotiate a tax and budget plan; labour strikes and economic boycotts continue in many venues; and in many countries (including my own), political factions of left and right have so little in common they can barely scrape together enough votes for coalitions or pass legislation to govern their nations. In arena after arena, we note the absence

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of civil discourse and instead see the continuing rhetoric of adversarial, competitive, and nasty invective used by those who disagree with each other. With so much conflict in the world, where is the 'engagement' and 'resolution' that this new journal seeks to study and reflect on?

In this essay, I explore the *historical contingency* of our field. Can theories and practice of conflict resolution, management, or as I prefer to say 'handling'<sup>1</sup> change our historical conditions and improve our approaches to conflict as human beings, or does history bend and shape our theory and practice? These are, as Dickens (1859) would say, 'the best of times and the worst of times' to test our theories and practices. As conflict resolution theory and practice abound and grow, so does conflict, some of it seemingly intractable. Can we change the world, or do world conditions change us and our theories and practices? Can conflict resolution theorists and practitioners who seek nothing less than to change how we conceive of each other and our human differences reorient human beings away from assumptions of scarcity, competition and unproductive conflict towards more diverse, collaborative and problem solving means of human existence? Is it better/easier to create theories and practice of conflict resolution in more troubled times, or is it easier to imagine methods of conflict engagement in times of (relative) peace? To try to answer these important questions I will examine my own take on where the field of conflict resolution came from (in my own experience) and where it might be going.

I begin with some important caveats. In addition to historical contingency, there is *cultural contingency* in conflict resolution work. My own experience derives initially from American domestic legal ordering (both in theory and practice) and moves out to international conflicts at both private and public levels. And with my work in many countries now, I am exquisitely aware of the different meanings of our words, concepts and practices when 'transplanted' from one field, country or culture to another garden or military battleground. Even legal cultures of similar genealogy (the common law systems of the UK, the US, Canada and Australia, for example) internalize and operationalize the practices of conflict resolution differently. I have often expressed doubts that the American form of psychological pragmatism and narrative problem-solving, based on extraverted conversation and willing self-examination, that informs so much mediation as 'talking cure' might not be appropriate in more reticent (or hierarchical) cultures (Lee, 2009; Menkel-Meadow, 2003, 1995). So, a first question is, can there be any form of '*universal*' conflict resolution theory, or is conflict resolution such a socio-logically embedded practice that it must always be historically, socially and culturally *contextualized* (Menkel-Meadow, 2001a)?

The second problem of contingency is the *locus* of the theory and practice of our field. Derived as an 'applied' social science from the slightly 'older' fields of political science, anthropology, sociology, economics, psychology and more

1 I prefer to use the term 'handling' because it connotes the unlikely full 'resolution' of many conflicts. Conflict is part of life. We engage in conflict all the time. Many conflicts are good and produce change. Some are bad and produce death, injury or social harms. So we must learn to live with conflict and to 'handle' it productively as best we can.

applied game theory, decision sciences and planning, conflict resolution theory takes its concepts derivatively from a number of other disciplines and attempts to unify a theory of conflict resolution that transcends other disciplines (Deutsch & Coleman, 2000; Menkel-Meadow, 2005a, 2009a; Yarn, 1999). Whether those 'trans-disciplinary' concepts have their own integrity, clarity and legitimacy or 'canon' in the world of academic theory is one question; whether those theories have explanatory purchase in practice as 'theories-in-use' (Schön, 1983) is another. So there is a question of where theory comes from and to whom it speaks in its efforts to explain the world.

The third problem of contingency is the *arena or sphere of application* of conflict resolution and engagement. Can the same theory (or practice) be applied to conflicts within families, in lawsuits, between citizens, and between and among nations? Philosophers might call this a 'category mistake' as we attempt to apply theories to different levels of analysis or to different classes of conflicts, or different groupings of participants, beyond the explanatory power of the categories created for analysis, both in the abstract and practically. Most recently within the field of conflict resolution, as I have written elsewhere (Menkel-Meadow, 2012a), this has become a problem of 'numbers' in conflict resolution theory (Raiffa, 1996). If negotiation theory is often based on theories of the *dyad* (two parties to a negotiation over a contested matter or thing) and mediation, arbitration, and adjudication are often based on theories of the *triad* (Shapiro, 1981), what happens to our theories and practices when we have much larger groups of disputants ('multi-party dispute resolution') and many complex issues to be dealt with. Conflict resolution theory is now applied to such varied conflicts and disputes as two party divorces (with children), two party lawsuits (with insurers or other indemnifiers), two nation disputes (North and South Korea, Japan and China, with multiple national and indeed, world-wide effects), two party political systems and multi-party political systems (most of Europe, Israel), to disputes pitting the present against the future (environmental and physical resources issues) and to both unmediated (wars, diplomatic insults, school yard fights) and mediated (some lawsuits, labour and international disputes) conflicts. Do we have theories or concepts (e.g., 'ZOPAs' [zones of possible agreement], BATNA [best alternative to a negotiated agreement] [Fisher *et al.*, 2011], 'reactive devaluation' or even 'consent') that operate in all of these domains or do such conceptual frameworks have to be altered in different settings? Can there be a single 'best' alternative to a negotiated agreement if, in a multi-party setting, some can agree to exclude others and others can go find another 'deal' (Susskind *et al.*, 2005)? Indeed, a focus on more complex negotiation has spawned new concepts and theories (derived from observations of practice) of conflict handling such as the process of commitments, coalition formation, defections, groupthink (Janis, 1982; Sunstein, 2000), holdouts and spoilers, as well as new theories and practices for the more complex management of complex multi-party, multi-issue dispute resolution (Podziba, 2012; Susskind & Cruickshank, 2006; Susskind *et al.*, 1999) and the development of 'dispute system design' (Symposium on Dispute System Design, 2009), for treatment of iterated disputes between repeat players or within organizations. As reviewed more fully below, one important question for

the field is can dispute resolution theories and practices be ‘scaled up’ from dyadic negotiation or triadic mediation to whole polities and complex decision making in deliberative democracies (and elsewhere) (Erdman & Susskind, 2008; Menkel-Meadow, 2011)?

### 1.2 *Where Did It Come from? Conflict Resolution Theory as a Product of Conflicts in Time*

I have suggested in earlier essays on the origins of our field (Menkel-Meadow, 2005a, 2006a, 2009a, 2010) that conflict resolution theory has been a product of the historical conditions of our geo-political international and domestic histories. Both World War II and the Cold War, which followed it, produced decades of important theory development and modeling of decisions made in assumed-to-be bilateral and polarized worlds (Allies/Axis; ‘Free’ World-West/Communist World-East) of competition, scarcity and perceived defeat of the other as a ‘need to survive’. The game theory (Luce & Raiffa, 1957), which emerged from modelling of decision making in these perceived-to-be-hostile worlds, assumed lack of communication between the parties (the classic, ‘prisoner’s dilemma’ game, Baird *et al.*, 1994; Poundstone, 1992), before the ‘red phone’ allowed instant communication between the US President and the Soviet Premier, and assumed conditions of war, domination, and later, ‘deterrence’ through arms build-ups of unprecedented proportions. Although some game theorists also pursued study of cooperative, as well as competitive, games (Brandenburger & Nalebuff, 1996; Nash, 1953), the assumptions of negotiations in this period were how to ‘better’ or ‘defeat’ the other side in either one-shot or iterated ‘games’ (there is nothing game-like about the harsh realities in which these negotiations took place) of interaction, usually transpiring from one crisis to another.

Against this backdrop of geo-political development of conflict resolution theory in international relations and political science, a nascent theory of negotiation in legal negotiation behaviour began in the 1960s and 1970s in the United States, often (as in my own case, Menkel-Meadow, 1984) in the shadow of aggressive and competitive lawyering for the disenfranchised in the early days of the civil rights, anti-poverty, feminist, consumer, environmental (and now gay rights), and clinical legal education movements (Bellow & Moulton, 1978; Meltsner & Schrag, 1974). As early forms of legal negotiation theory focused on using competitive tactics to ‘win’ cases (often on behalf of well deserving and disenfranchised clients) the American legal culture seemed a subset of the cruel, brutish and harsh ‘cold war’. Adversarial models of negotiation taught us how to defeat the other side with a series of tactical and strategic ploys, used to trick, deceive and often manipulate our opponents (*e.g.*, Cohen, 1980), often, but not always, having nothing or little to do with the legal or other merits of the negotiation situation.

My own personal history as a legal services lawyer for the poor ultimately coincided with what ultimately became our ‘ADR movement’ in the United States. As I watched my colleagues fight bitterly contested lawsuits against the state (prison conditions, welfare entitlements, resource allocations, school disputes) and private parties (discrimination, consumer disputes, landlord tenant cases)

and often win (Constitutional, class actions and statutory claims were won on the law in summary judgment motions, often without trials), I noticed we not very often solved the actual problems of our clients. Poverty continued, people were denied benefits on new grounds, rules were amended by more powerful parties (Galanter, 1974) and those without documentation could not win evidence-based lawsuits. My early role model was a lawyer in my office who quietly called offending public officials and private bosses and landlords and negotiated to solve the problems of her individual clients, rather than using more public class action litigation. Just as I transitioned to become a clinical law teacher I began to focus on how to teach young lawyers a new way of conceptualizing legal issues – what about solving the problem, rather than ‘winning the case’? My early studies of negotiation and conflict resolution theory immediately turned to scholarship and practice outside of law (Menkel-Meadow, 1983) – where some other fields were focused on when and how people (and animals) collaborated, cooperated or utilized more ‘mixed’ behaviours to solve their survival problems (e.g., Axelrod, 1984).

The non-technical, but theory-changing, classic, *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement without Giving in* (1981) by Roger Fisher and William Ury began to transform conceptions of both legal and non-legal negotiations in a variety of real-world contexts and educational programmes. By suggesting that underneath the demands or positions of negotiators, there were instead ‘interests’ (or in my work [1984], ‘needs’) of the parties that, if focused on, could lead to ‘integrative’ solutions to problems that used trades of complementary, if not conflicting, interests, to ‘expand the pie’ and increase resources, before dividing them, or to look for other ways to maximize ‘joint gain’ rather than to assume maximization of individual gain as the goal of any negotiation. The classic ideas here were laid on the foundations of earlier work by Mary Parker Follett (in the 1920s), the real ‘mother’ of integrative solutions (Menkel-Meadow, 2000), who suggested that oranges could be divided by peel and fruit, and draughts in libraries could be avoided by opening windows in other rooms (Graham, 1993). Negotiation did not have to be about dividing and competing; it could be about asking deeper questions about preferences and needs and then seeking solutions that were more likely to satisfy both (or all) parties, rather than only one. Relative satisfaction of all sides to a negotiation ensured greater stability of outcomes, and perhaps avoided the desire for revenge, retribution or non-compliance that has characterized so many competitive ‘victories’.

At roughly the same time (late 1970s to early 1980s), a variety of legal commentators and practitioners in the United States, focusing on both ‘quantitative’ (too many cases) (Burger, 1982) and ‘qualitative’ (commanded legal solutions that were too ‘brittle’ and inflexible) deficiencies of the formal court system (Sander, 1976), began to focus legal attention on other ways to process legal disputes, including mediation, arbitration, ombuds and fact-finding, and then hybrids (e.g., med-arb) of these processes. Asking a third party ‘neutral’ to facilitate parties’ own negotiations, whether represented by lawyers or not, became facilitative mediation (Friedman & Himmelstein, 2008; Riskin, 1994) and more active, decision-suggesting or making third parties became either evaluative mediators or

arbitrators. Thus, was a social/legal 'movement' created, naming itself 'alternative' (now 'appropriate') dispute resolution, or called, somewhat more critically, 'informal justice' (Abel, 1982).

As a field of knowledge and practice, this new movement was highly aspirational; claiming it could teach individuals, parties in lawsuits, families, community groups (Merry & Milner, 1993), labour unions (Kochan & Lipsky, 2003; Walton & Mckersie, 1965), public officials and agencies, and even nations, to solve their problems more peaceably and with better outcomes. The ADR movement created its own 'ideology' at many different levels of engagement – legal, neighborhood, community, political, domestic and international. It was criticized by many for failing to take account of structural inequalities among those in conflict (e.g., Delgado *et al.*, 1985 [race, ethnicity and class]; Grillo, 1991 [gender]) or for over valuing 'settlement' as a desirable social and legal practice over more 'principled' and public outcomes (Fiss, 1984; Luban, 1995). The founders of this field, of whom I am one, thought we could change the world, through education, theory development, training, and practice in a wide range of arenas and substantive domains (Menkel-Meadow, 2001b).

For many of us, the teachings of these alternative approaches to problem solving anticipated the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989), in which, for a few brief moments, we could hope that bipolarized demonization of the 'other' was past history (Fukuyama, 1992) and we would learn to peacefully solve problems, even across vast cultural, social, political and economic differences. This optimistic moment of transnational dispute resolution ideology was short-lived, as a spurt of ethnic and civil wars sharply disrupted the hopes of the 'cosmopolitans'. I recall my own personal experience while teaching ADR in Canada and reading Michael Ignatieff's powerful book *Blood and Belonging* (1994), I recognized that peaceful problem solving was not to be, as repressive regimes that had also suppressed conflict gave way to bitter fights about identity, borders, scarce resources and survival, when demands for self-determination emerged from the yokes of oppression. A hope that a more optimistic period of human history would facilitate more collaborative theories and practices of conflict resolution, seemed, once again, to dissolve in the face of more discouraging geo-political realities.

Thus, for me, the challenge of reporting on and evaluating the trajectories of conflict resolution theory, practice and 'engagement' is like the double helix of the mapping of DNA – parallel bonds of upward and downward spirals as conflict resolution theory and practice try to tame the less predictable behaviour of the more conflictual real world and the conflictual real world then asserts its influence on the development of theory and practice. Do we reach greater insights by studying retrospectively what has happened and trying to understand what we could 'have done differently'? Or, should we continue to offer more optimistic prescriptive and aspirational notions of how conflicts (in the present or future) might be resolved? In his classic treatment of negotiation theory Howard Raiffa cautioned against conflating the descriptive and the prescriptive (Raiffa, 1982) and advised that analytic separation of prescription for one set of actors in a conflict from advice for all parties (or the mediator) of a conflict might be very different, depending on one's orienting frame of one-sided or multi-party 'maximization'

strategies. So our theories may be derived from the same descriptions of the past and go off in very different directions for prescriptions for the future, in both theoretical and more practical domains, depending on our own orientations to conflict. One of our greatest practitioners, John Paul Lederach has often reminded us that our field is a long multi-generational process – he can touch the hands of both his grandparents and grandchildren to see a span of over 100 years of human struggle with conflict – perhaps, little by little, each generation will learn from the one that went before (Lederach, 1995).

So our field has different histories if looked at from the perspective of abstract theory development, untethered to any larger history, but a variety of very different histories if linked to the contextual frames in which conflict resolution theory and practice has developed – community, civic, ethnic, legal, labour, political, organizational or international conflict.

### 1.3 *Legal and Jurisprudential Histories of Conflict Handling*

The study of conflict and its significance actually comes initially from sociology (Aubert, 1963; Coser, 1956; Durkheim, 1984; Simmel, 1955), anthropology (Abel, 1973; Avruch, 1998; Gulliver, 1979; Llewellyn *et al.*, 1941; Nader & Todd, 1978), and international relations and peace studies (Boulding, 1962; Burton, 1987; Galtung, 1989), and only later in time from law and legal studies (Alberstein, 2007). Only later in the twentieth century, as a reaction to the devastation of World War II and the Cold War, has a broader and multi-disciplinary field of ‘conflict resolution’ emerged to attempt some systematic understanding of conflict prevention, managing and handling (Kriesberg, 1998; Miall *et al.*, 1999). Much current conflict resolution work is framed by legal and more philosophical theories of jurisprudence and by the functions of ‘process’ in dispute resolution (Hampshire, 2000; Menkel-Meadow, 2006b). In this our intellectual progenitor is Lon Fuller (1981), whom I have often called the ‘jurisprudent of ADR’ (Menkel-Meadow, 2000).

Lon Fuller, Harvard law professor, arbitrator and legal philosopher, in a series of law review articles, based on both theoretical syntheses and speculations, and practical experience, developed the notion of the ‘*integrity*’ of different processes for different purposes. Adjudication is necessary when we need to not only resolve a dispute, but elaborate, through articulated reasons, why a rule or decision is appropriate, not only for the parties in dispute, but to serve (in a common law system) as precedent for others in similar situations (Fuller, 2001). Arbitration is best used when the parties understand the rules that govern them (*e.g.*, though contract, as in a collective bargaining agreement) and want to select their own decision makers and apply the particular rules of their repetitive dealings (‘the law of the shop’), usually, but not always, in a more private setting (Fuller, 1963). Mediation is appropriate when the parties have on-going relations (as in a family or workplace) and want to ‘reorient themselves’ (peaceably) to each other or want to tailor their own future-oriented solutions to problems that do not necessarily lend themselves to more brittle ‘win-lose’ commands (Fuller, 1971). In Fuller’s conception of dispute resolution purity, each of these processes has its own integrity (from a structural-functionalist perspective) because each process

has particular goals (decision or agreement), different categories of parties (one-shotters or repeat players) and different audiences (the disputants alone or the larger public) with different requirements of transparency or privacy. The rigorous conceptualization of such process divisions has led to more modern legal categorization to the claims (originally made by Professor Maurice Rosenberg of Columbia Law School, then by Professors Frank Sander and Stephen Goldberg) that “the forum should fit the fuss” (Sander & Goldberg, 1994). Yet, in fact, more modern practices of dispute resolution have often hybridized those ‘pure’ forms of process, as Goldberg himself notes in arguing for forms of ‘med-arb’ or ‘arb-med’ in labour grievances, and later, in other settings (Ury *et al.*, 1988). Dispute resolution in courts and ancillary to courts for legal problem solving is now called ‘process pluralism’ (Menkel-Meadow, 2006b).

*Hybridization* of dispute resolution processes allows us to seek consensual solutions first (negotiation and mediation) and then to move towards more command and decide choices when the parties cannot resolve their conflicts themselves (evaluative mediation, arbitration and adjudication) and, as it has been argued, in many settings, can reduce the costs of conflict resolution, as the same parties can shift from one role (mediator) to another (arbitrator), even as some cleave to Fuller’s notion of integrity and suggest that such role shifting presents some ethical difficulties (Menkel-Meadow, 2001c; Menkel-Meadow *et al.*, 2011). Hybridization of dispute resolution processes has produced a great variety of legal innovation in processes that range from summary jury trials and early neutral evaluation (in public courts), mini-trials (private settings), ombuds services in organizations (Gadlin, 2000), variations in arbitral types (*e.g.*, ‘baseball’ and final offer), negotiated rule-making in formal governance (Harter, 1982) and a wide variety of grievance and dispute ‘tiered’ processes between and within organizations (‘Internal Dispute Resolution [Edelman *et al.*, 1993], in iterated dispute settings [Symposium on Dispute System Design, 2009]) and now ODR (on-line dispute resolution) (Wahab *et al.*, 2012). In more formal governmental settings (see below) various forms of conflict resolution have been ‘scaled up’ for policy formation and negotiated rule-making and decision-making in such processes as ‘consensus building’ and ‘public policy mediation’, some of which is now formally recognized in law (at least in the United States) (Podziba, 2012). The field of conflict resolution itself is one of creative innovation as new forms of conflicts (in person, on the internet, and between unseen adversaries) spawn new forms of conflict resolution that are ever evolving.

In the legal arena, both pure and hybrid forms have also led to both *institutionalization* and *co-optation* issues, as various form of conflict resolution have been made mandatory in court settings, both to divert cases from time consuming and costly trials, and to encourage more party tailored and flexible solutions to problems. Twenty years ago I warned that the institutionalization of more flexible and voluntary forms of dispute resolution when imported into more conventional and mandatory settings like courts, could alter the very fabric of what ‘ADR was intended to do (allow parties to voluntarily craft their own tailored and preferred outcomes to conflicts where law or court ordered solutions would not suit, Menkel-Meadow, 1991). My predictions have more than come true, as noted

in a wide variety of more modern explorations into what has happened to the aspirational aspects of mediation ideology (party problem-solving and peace-seeking) as it has morphed in mandatory court settings into mere 'efficiency' and lawless case settlement (Menkel-Meadow, 2012b; Mironi, forthcoming). Thus, even those of us who are founders and supporters of the field of less formal methods of conflict resolution believe there is still some purpose to Fuller's separation of form and function – courts and adjudication should still be sites of authoritative decision making, where appropriate, and forms of negotiation and mediation, which are intended to reorient the parties to each other to seek future-oriented solutions and more flexible or contingent or more party tailored solutions, should not necessarily be merged into and distorted by the needs and requirements of other institutions (Resnik, 1995).

The relation of law and legality to different forms of dispute resolution is one of the most interesting challenges currently facing our field and its trajectories may be different as a matter of theoretical and jurisprudential interest, from its practical applications in widely different legal, national and international contexts. Different national and regional legal systems have expanded the use of mediation (see, especially all the recent efforts in the European Union; De Palo and Trevor, 2012; and elsewhere [Hopt & Steffek, 2012]) in court, labour, commercial, familial, criminal and other settings, with great cultural and legal variation. Ironically, as national court systems continue to expand the use of mediation and less formal means of dispute resolution, and increasingly private parties (especially in large commercial trans-border transactions and disputes) encourage them (see promotional activities of the International Mediation Institute, <<http://imimediation.org>>), we seem less successful in the use of mediation and conciliation processes in major international disputes (e.g., Syria, Israel-Palestine, the former Congo, Sudan, North/South Korea). Unlike national courts that now strongly encourage or require mediation as a condition precedent to litigation, the United Nations, the International Court of Justice and even the many new regional and specialty international tribunals cannot 'mandate' the use of more conciliatory forms of conflict resolution before litigation (Merrills, 2010). (This is a slight overstatement. Some of the newer international tribunals, e.g., World Trade Organization, International Tribunal of the Law of the Sea, actually do try to encourage various forms of conciliation and mediation before adjudication.)

So, one interesting question for our field to ask is why conflict resolution theory and practice has been so much more successfully, if somewhat co-optedly, 'nested' in law and courts than in non-legal (more political, national, ethnic, civil) forms of conflict?

## 2. Future(s) of the Field of Conflict Resolution

### 2.1 *Conflict Resolution Process Is Necessary for our Survival: Of Heads, Hearts and Stomachs*

In his Tanner lectures, later published as *Justice Is Conflict* (2000), social philosopher Stuart Hampshire, perhaps unwittingly, has written us a manifesto for the



future of conflict resolution studies and practice in the world. After a lifetime of studying what we should aim for in our search for the 'substantive good', Hampshire concludes that the modern world is filled with too much diversity of life and values for our species to agree on many things. We do seem to be able to agree on the common 'bad' (poverty, disease, war, resource shortages, unkindness, dictatorships and lack of freedom and self-determination), even if we, as human beings, do not always act consistently to eliminate those evils. But, says Hampshire, if we cannot agree on the common good, we must still as individuals, communities, societies, and the human race make decisions about how we will act and govern ourselves and so we must find ways to make decisions together. Building on work like that of Jürgen Habermas (1984) (specifying conditions for deliberative democracy and 'ideal speech conditions'), Hampshire assures us that 'reasoned argument' and 'conflict resolution skills' are among the most noble of human skills. Thus, even a substantive social philosopher now, at the end of his life, has recognized the importance of *process* to human existence and flourishing, and indeed the importance of conflict resolution in particular.

Hampshire lauds the principle of Anglo-American adversary process: *audi alterum partem* ('hear the other side'). In other essays (Menkel-Meadow, 2005b, 2006a, 2011), I have elaborated how Hampshire's recognition of conflict resolution skills must be broadened to acknowledge not just 'the other side', but '*all other sides*' to acknowledge the multiplicity of our modern day conflicts (in terms of both parties and issues) and interactions with each other. 'Hearing the other sides', in my view must include, not only 'reasoned argument' but also the other discourses in which human beings engage with each other – pragmatic and instrumental trades and bargaining (negotiation), and appeals to emotions, ethics, religions and values (the perhaps not so 'rational' things that matter to us).

Thus, for me the ultimate challenge of the future of conflict resolution study and practice is our need to combine different kinds of discourses into productive engagement with each other – the combinations of the human brain (head), heart, and yes, 'gut'. To live together, with productive conflict engagement, we need to think about, feel with, and get along with, tolerate (dare I say 'digest') other human beings, whose land, water and air we must share, even if we do not ultimately share all our values of what is most important in life. The future of conflict engagement and 'handling' in my view, then, is to develop processes, models, ideas and practices that allow us to combine these different levels of engagement with each other. This is not an easy task. There is some evidence, however, that some new forms of process and different forms of engagement are at least suggesting a more hopeful future of where conflict engagement might lead us. Thus, despite the evidence of much conflict in the world, I am hopeful that those of us who engage in field development will continue to forge new ideas, concepts and practices, from the materiel of the conflicts that our times have given us. I will describe a few such efforts below and hope that this new journal will be a source for reports of many more.

## 2.2 *Restorative and Reconciliative Forms of Conflict Resolution*

Much attention to conflict in the legal world has been devoted to civil justice, when in fact some of the most innovative work has been done in criminal and juvenile justice, with various forms of restorative justice, victim-offender mediation, 'healing circles' and other forms of more reconciliative choices around acknowledging and 'correcting' bad behaviour (Menkel-Meadow, 2007; Tullis, 2013). While a few localities and states in the United States, Canada, New Zealand, the Netherlands, and elsewhere have pioneered these processes, which never totally substitute for criminal or civil processes, but often serve as a parallel track for apology, forgiveness, restitution and plans for future reintegration into communities, other parts of the criminal justice system have in fact become more rigid (determinate sentencing). Some empirical work in the United States (before determinate sentencing in the federal system) has demonstrated that more tailored forms of criminal justice, involving individualized treatment of the defendant, the crime and the jurisdiction (Utz, 1978) can actually lead to better outcomes and lower recidivism rates. These innovative efforts to solve problems, rather than just to punish crimes, have also led to 'problem-solving courts', which use a 'treatment' rather than a punishment model, in such areas as drug, vice, family and other social, non-violent crimes (Berman *et al.*, 2005). The alternative court movement has made great headway in many urban areas in the United States, despite objections from more traditional adversarial criminal lawyers, on both the prosecutorial and defense side (Thompson, 2002).

Some models of individual justice system approaches to restorative justice have been successfully 'scaled up' in some nations for public reconciliation processes around formal state actions (*e.g.*, enforced kidnapping, child and sexual abuse, and cultural deprivation in Australia and Canada of indigenous groups). Since the first Truth and Reconciliation process in Bolivia, now over 30 nations have engaged in various forms of 'Truth and Reconciliation' processes (Hayner, 2001) in a variety of different forms of truth and fact-finding, restitution, apologies (yes, amnesties too), and efforts at reconciliation, after civil wars, genocides, and inter-state conflict. Though the TRC process in South Africa is most famous, since the mid-1990s many other countries have used TRC processes in many different ways and for different purposes (Stromseth, 2003). In the most recent variation of this important theme, a group I work with in Israel-Palestine, the Parent's Circle-Family Forum (2012), is seeking to promote reconciliation efforts, even before the formal state actors have created a permanent peace agreement. Building on the work of mediators, conflict resolution trainers, and lay experience, groups of people on either side of the conflict are exploring ways to understand each other's histories and stories, through narrative strategies and storytelling, group activities, empathy exercises, and interpersonal engagement in the context of both individual pain and harm, and the larger group conflicts from which they come. For those of us who work in peace studies and activism, such grassroots efforts raise important issues about whether conflict resolution is most effectively engaged from the 'bottom-up' or 'top-down' (my own views are that both are necessary at the same time, and that conflict professionals may be

key to mediating at the middle levels of engagement between formal negotiation and grassroots efforts) (Menkel-Meadow & Nutenko, 2009).

### 2.3 *Deliberative Democracy and Consensus Building: Conflict Engagement for the Polity*

As the canon of problem solving or principled or ‘interest-based’ negotiation and problem solving concepts and practices moved out from applications of small groups in conflict, to legal disputes, to larger communities, and social and political conflict, a variety of social theorists and practitioners have explored the applications of ADR and conflict resolution strategies to political decision making and deliberative democracy. Consensus building (Susskind *et al.*, 1999) as a structured decision making process has been used to resolve neighborhood, community, budget allocation, environmental, regulatory, and highly contested social issues. Such processes, though often structured with formal ground rules and principled presentations, also allow for the fuller expression of emotional reactions and longer narratives, with fuller party participation than more formal legal or political processes. A few commentators have suggested that the techniques of consensus building can reengage highly conflictual polities and serve as models for more public deliberation in policy formation and citizen engagement (Cohen, 2008; Cohen & Alberstein, 2011). With more flexible formats, allowing greater numbers of parties to participate, and notions of ‘adding value’ and joint gain substituting for binary up and down majority votes, consensus building processes are designed to diminish the adversarial quality, with ‘win-lose’ outcomes of political disputes. Applying processes of deliberation to substantive areas of political conflict has engaged both conflict resolution professionals and political theorists and activists (Bohman, 1996; Guttman & Thompson, 1998, 2012), though others have challenged the idea that all citizens are equally enabled to participate in such time consuming exercises (Young, 2002). Such processes allow ‘multiple truths’ to co-exist, as parties seek pragmatic and contingent understandings and some outcomes, which may be provisional and revisited, and are always informed by a multiplicity of views expressed, and with my own hope that rational arguments are not the only discourse permitted. The claim here is that *process matters* (and that procedural justice is as essential as substantive justice, Welsh, 2004) and an inclusive, party-negotiated set of processes and ground rules, which are designed to maximize party participation and encourage recognition of differences (the group Public Conversations pioneered such protocols for discussion in abortion disputes in the United States, now used for community and political deliberation on a wide range of contested topics, such as gun control, affirmative action, gay marriage, health policy, see <<http://publicconversations.org>>), can also lead to better outcomes and greater acceptability and legitimacy of large group negotiated outcomes (Hollander-Blumoff & Tyler, 2008). If we are to ‘hear all sides’, then all sides need to be able to express their thoughts, reasons and feelings as well. My own view is that contrary to the teaching of the more ‘rational’ political theorists and philosophers, we are just as likely, if not more so, to be persuaded to understand and change our views by *empathy*, than by reason alone (Menkel-Meadow, 1992, 2001e). My version of dispute resolution has always focused on human

*needs*, in addition to the layers of ‘interests’ (instrumental and rational) and ‘demands’ (power and entitlements) (Menkel-Meadow, 1984).

I have argued that our efforts to expand such processes to the larger polity are one example of the legacy and promise of conflict resolution ideas and concepts, but that there is an irony in that, to be successful, such processes require the expertise of skilled process facilitators, schooled in the multi-party concepts of voting theory, dealing with hold-outs, saboteurs and managing multi-issue negotiations and conflicting preferences, raising issues about the ‘democracy principle’ in group deliberations ‘led’ by process experts (Menkel-Meadow, 2011). Democracy theory is one thing; conflict resolution and deliberative democracy practice are other things, and their relationship requires more work at both levels to realize the promise of more engaged public deliberation (Menkel-Meadow, 2006c). In this, parliamentary systems may be better suited to the use of conflict resolution theories and practices in multi-party (literally!) deliberations than the more polarized current system in my own two-party (gridlocked) political democracy. Conflict resolution theory and practice however, in my view, does provide some promise for development of ideas and practices to lead us out of our current crises – in that sense, our bad and conflictual ‘times’ may be the impetus and source of new ideas and applications of conflict resolution. I still hope that ‘necessity will be the mother of invention!’ (Menkel-Meadow, 2001d).

#### 2.4 *Dispute System Design*

If conflict resolution theories and practices are to have some impact on the conflictual times in which we live, we have two additional issues to confront: institutional design and transformative education. How can conflict resolution strategies have more impact on the individuals who have conflicts and the formal and informal settings in which those conflicts occur? As conflict resolution theory and practice has been applied to deliberative democracy, to lawsuit settlements (including large class actions, mass actions), constitutional theory (Cohen & Alberstein, 2011), family life and the workplace, a new segment of our field has professionalized the idea that dispute resolution can be institutionalized and taught in organizational, governmental, corporate, international, and other settings of iterative conflict. The idea that we could actually PLAN for managing disputes is embedded in many earlier articles in our field (*e.g.*, Sander, 1976; Ury *et al.*, 1988), as we founders of the field sought to analyze what kinds of processes in process pluralism might best be allocated to which kinds of disputes. Thus, system design involves the development of many different kinds of dispute and conflict resolution processes (now most often arranged on a continuum of self-help, party control, third-party facilitation or decision-making and consensual or command processes (Menkel-Meadow *et al.*, 2011) ), and then applied to the various kinds of disputes and conflicts that occur in iterative settings.

Courts in many countries now require parties to at least attempt some form of dispute resolution before going to full hearing in what is now known as court-annexed dispute resolution (derived from Frank Sander’s original ‘multi-door courthouse’). Organizations may use one form of dispute resolution for their own employees (tiered counselling, negotiation, mediation, ombuds and arbitration

before any kind of litigation is permitted), and then use another set of processes for outside customers or vendors – online dispute resolution, grievance or complaint panels and processes, customer service lines and another set of tiered dispute resolution processes, as condition precedents to litigation by contract agreement. In the international arena each new treaty providing for agreements among and between countries in a variety of areas (e.g., trade, environment, transnational crime and anti-terrorism efforts, even human rights) now provides for more than one form of dispute resolution – conciliation, negotiation, consultation, mediation, arbitration, ‘amicable settlement’, and only then may more formal use of various tribunals be used. Because so many of our international and regional organizations (e.g., the UN, World Bank, IMF, International Red Cross, OECD, EU, NAFTA) have no formal legal status or enforcement mechanisms in the international legal regime they have created their own internal justice systems (Scharf, 2006), now often employing a full panoply of dispute processes. I have been teaching courses on International Dispute Resolution Tribunals and Processes for over 10 years, looking at many of the processes beyond the formal tribunals such as the International Court of Justice, the European and Inter-American Court of Human Rights, and others.

New professionals in the field now assist for-profit and non-profit organizations, universities, governmental agencies, non-governmental bodies and other institutions in creating processes for conflict education, prevention, handling, management and ‘resolution’, raising a host of questions about for whom this work is conducted – the organization, the users (Menkel-Meadow, 2009b)? These developments may represent the more positive aspects of our field: in designing such programmes both management and labour, supervisors and employees, customers and providers are often trained in basic conflict resolution and communication skills. Though some are critical of such ‘internal justice systems’ that might compromise or privatize the more formal and public justice system (Edelman *et al.*, 1993), there are counterarguments that such systems educate and make more accessible avenues for redress of grievances, and can also have more wide ranging jurisdictional coverage, beyond what legal claims might be allowed in more formal settings. And, a strong argument has been made that with conflict resolution specialization and institutionalization it is still possible, even within the frame of individual confidentiality, to account for more system-wide problems by examining the aggregation of individual claims and then seeking to prevent or correct such systemic problems or issues (Sturm & Gadlin, 2007).

Some industries have taken their ‘system design’ to even earlier stages – prevention and relationship development *before* the work is undertaken. For many years now, the construction industry in the United States (originally spurred by developments in military contracting) has used a process called ‘partnering’ to bring the parties together before work has begun on a project in order to develop relationships and plan for dispute resolution in advance with contract provisions for negotiation and mediation (Carr *et al.*, 1999; ConsensusDocs, <<http://consensusdocs.org>>). I used such a clause myself in a renovation project of my own home and all disputes were resolved with three way negotiations

(architect, owner, and contractor-builder) on the property at the time disputes arose.

Perhaps the newest application of system or conflict prevention techniques is to use mediators in transactional settings, to facilitate the making of deals, and creation of new entities, and to explicitly deal with potential conflicts before they arise, demonstrating the power of having a third party neutral prevent the 'reactive devaluation' that occurs when parties see themselves in opposition when they should be 'on the same side' (Peppet, 2004). System designers, like mediators, know that particular ideas or potential solutions to problems may best be heard when not attached to or labeled by one of the parties to the dispute, such as the use of the 'one-text' negotiation document that was used in the Camp David I peace accords (Fisher, Ury & Patton, 1991).

### 2.5 *Educating for Conflict Resolution*

Exposure to conflict resolution technologies, techniques, concepts and underlying values in a variety of fora, we hope, can 'spread the learning' about more productive ways to handle conflicts in all walks of life. Even school age children are now instructed in 'peer mediation' and 'use your words' to prevent unnecessary violence, bullying in school, and to promote more productive ways to deal with conflict. Many of the newer applications of conflict resolution (consensus building, multi-party dispute resolution, deliberative democracy, system design) have now spawned new courses and texts (e.g., Bingham *et al.*, forthcoming; Carpenter & Kennedy, 2001; Movius & Susskind, 2009; Rogers *et al.*, 2013) to provide for 'advanced' training and knowledge development in organizational conflict resolution. More and more schools at different levels (from primary education to highly specialized graduate schools) and in many different fields (law, business, international relations, social work, public policy, land use and planning) now require or recommend courses in negotiation and conflict resolution.

So, I am hopeful, that as the world delivers up more and more conflicts in both intimate and mass scale, we are also developing more tools for diffusing or preventing conflict, as well as engaging in it productively. Recall that most significant social change has come from conflict – both productive and deadly, including independence struggles, civil wars and protest movements. Theory development and empirical assessment abounds as social scientists debate whether we were better off with gridlocked, but conflict suppressing, polarized enemies during the Cold War (Miller, 2002) or now when conflict is so disaggregated and diffused (even if unseen in its 'viral' forms of communication and terrorism) that we can work at more manageable, if multiple, levels of conflict handling. Conflict resolution professionals (mediators, system designers) are now more often called in for assessment, facilitation, management or advice in highly conflictual settings. And, most importantly, from my perspective, conflict resolution has become the kind of field that works across disciplines, national boundaries and cultures that even within its cultural variations, it may provide a more multi-cultural 'universal' language of conflict engagement and resolution efforts.

Yet, I also worry that we, as a field, are not often enough called on to analyze or facilitate conflict situations and that our culture remains resistant to less

adversarial methods of problem solving. Those who seek collaboration or compromise, such as my own President Obama, are still too often labeled 'weak' (Matthews, 2012), when they are trying to operationalize the teachings of conflict resolution theory. Journalists and the public at large clearly still need more education about our field's concepts, purposes and tools.

We have a long way to go before all conflict is engaged in productively in the world. But despite the daily headlines of conflict, killings and many ways of expressing hostilities or causing harms, I also think we now have so many reasons in our current times for the historical moments we face to create the future of new research, ideas, techniques and technologies to forge a more systematic effort at promoting productive handling of conflict. I hope this new journal will add to the collective grappling we are all engaged in to make this a better world.

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# Is There a Theory of Radical Disagreement?

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## Abstract

*This article concerns linguistic intractability, the verbal aspect of those conflicts that so far cannot be settled or transformed. At its heart lies the phenomenon of radical disagreement. This is generally discounted in conflict resolution as positional or adversarial debate. It is seen as a terminus to dialogue that must from the outset be transformed, not learnt from. In this article the refusal to take radical disagreement seriously is traced back to the way radical disagreement is described and explained in the third party theories that frame attempts at settlement and resolution in the first place.*

*On pp. 58-60 a theory of radical disagreement is contrasted with an example. In the theory radical disagreement is described as a juxtaposition of equivalent subjective narratives that do not 'reflect truth' but merely serve as 'motivational tools' for group survival. In the example, it can be seen that neither speaker is saying that. The Palestinian claim (A) is not about a subjective narrative or motivational tool, but about a lived reality endured for 60 years. And the Israeli claim (B) is not about a juxtaposition of equivalent accounts, but a fierce refutation of faults and misrepresentations in what the other says. This mismatch between third party theory and participant example explains a great deal about why third party interventions based on those theoretical assumptions fail.*

*The rest of the article looks at a range of putative theories invoked in conflict analysis and conflict resolution. This is a search for third party descriptions and explanations that are adequate to examples of what they purport to describe and explain. Surprisingly the net is hauled in empty. The interim conclusion to this article is that there is no adequate theory of radical disagreement.*

*In the first issue of the International Journal of Conflict Engagement and Resolution, this article sets the scene for an exploration of the relationship between engagement and resolution that it is hoped will be developed in future issues. It will be argued there that the practical implication of the discovery that there is no adequate theory of radical disagreement is that in intractable conflicts it is a mistake to ignore this phenomenon. Radical disagreement is not all too familiar but perhaps the least familiar feature of intense political conflict. What is required in the face of linguistic intractability, therefore, is not less radical disagreement but more – namely promotion of a 'strategic engagement of discourses'. Only then is it possible to move from engagement to resolution and to create the space for a future revival of attempts at settlement and transformation in the linguistic sphere.*

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**Keywords:** Radical disagreement, linguistic intractability, agonistic dialogue, conflict engagement.

The question at the head of this article arises from my recent work on *linguistic intractability*. Linguistic intractability is the verbal aspect of those conflicts in which so far conflict resolution fails. At the heart of linguistic intractability lies the phenomenon of *radical disagreement*. As ‘adversarial debate’ or ‘positional debate’ radical disagreement is usually disparaged in conflict resolution as an all too familiar dead end, a terminus to dialogue, that must from the outset be transformed, not learnt from. I have argued elsewhere that this is a mistake (Ramsbotham, 2010). Radical disagreement is not a terminus to dialogue, but a characteristic form of it, namely *agonistic dialogue* or dialogue between enemies.<sup>1</sup> And radical disagreement is not all too familiar, but perhaps the least familiar aspect of intense political conflict.

This article focuses on third party accounts of radical disagreement. Are there adequate descriptions and explanations that can inform efforts to manage linguistic intractability when efforts at settlement or transformation prove premature? In short, is there a theory of radical disagreement?

The article begins with a short section to introduce the challenge of radical disagreement in intractable conflicts. It takes an example from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to illustrate what happens if a theory of radical disagreement on which prescriptions for intervention are based is tested against an example of the radical disagreements that it purports to address. This sets the scene for the examination of some of the main theoretical approaches invoked in conflict resolution that follow.

## 1. Adequacy Tests for Putative Theories of Radical Disagreement

In general, three adequacy tests can be applied to any would-be theory of radical disagreement.

1. Does the theory offer a satisfactory account of radical disagreements in which it is not itself directly involved?
2. Does the theory offer a satisfactory account of its own involvement in radical theoretical disagreements?
3. Does the theory offer a satisfactory account of its own involvement in radical political disagreements?

1 My term *agonistic dialogue* relates to, but is not identical with, Chantal Mouffe’s concept of agonism. In Mouffe’s conception of *agonistic pluralism*, for example, the raw antagonism and violence characteristic of human society in general (the ‘political’) is domesticated and tamed within the democratic *agon*, so that ‘enemies’ become ‘adversaries’, who thereby gain respect for each other as well as for the democratic ‘rules of the game’ that define the space of democratic ‘politics’ (1999:755). Whereas *agonistic dialogue* is verbal exchange between enemies, the war of words, which therefore still includes the antagonistic. Agonistic dialogue is the dialogue of intense political struggle in general without yet trying to distinguish between domesticated and undomesticated varieties.

These three adequacy tests, singly or in combination, will be used to investigate the third party descriptions and explanations of radical disagreement – and prescriptions based on them – that follow.

## 2. Comparison between a Third Party Account and an Example of Radical Disagreement

To set the scene, I offer an example. In *Israeli and Palestinian Narratives of Conflict* (Rotberg, 2006), the editor sums up 'lessons from the book' as follows:

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict for primacy, power, and control encompasses two bitterly contested, competing narratives. Both need to be understood, reckoned with, and analysed side by side in order to help abate violence and possibly propel both protagonists toward peace. This is an immensely tall order. But the first step is to know the narratives, the second to reconcile them to the extent that they can be reconciled or bridged, and the third to help each side to accept, and conceivably to respect, the validity of the competing narrative [...]

Juxtaposing the 'two justifying/rationalizing narratives' helps us to 'understand the roots of the conflict and the differentially distorted prisms that fuel it'. At the core of such narratives lie 'symbolic constructions of shared identity' or 'collective memories', which do not usually so much 'reflect truth' as 'portray a truth that is functional for a group's ongoing existence'. Each 'is "true" in terms of the requirements of collective memory'. Narratives are 'motivational tools'.

What is required is a 'greater appreciation of the separate truths that drive Palestinians and Israelis', because this could 'plausibly contribute to conflict reduction'. The aim is to narrow, not eliminate, the chasm that separates one strongly affirmed reality from another. The lessons of this book are that the gulf between the narratives remains vast, that no simplified efforts at softening the edges of each narrative will work, and that the fundamental task of the present is to expose each side to the narratives of the other in order, gradually, to foster an understanding, if not an acceptance, of their deeply felt importance to each side. (Rotberg, 2006: 1-17, rearranged and editorially linked)

In the body of the text, four strategies emerge for doing this.

1. Ilan Pappé advocates 'bridging the narrative concept' along the lines already initiated by the new 'post-Zionist' revisionist Israeli historians, among whom he is a prominent figure, in order to narrow differences and if possible produce shared historiographical reconstructions.
2. Daniel Bar-Tal and Gavriel Salomon do not think that it is possible to overcome the way rival narratives oppose each other's fundamental truths, and, as psychologists, hope to promote reconciliation by 'building legitimacy through narrative' – fostering mutual acknowledgement of sincerity and

therefore validity by recognizing ‘that there are two (legitimate) narratives of the conflict’.

3. Mordechai Bar-On recommends acceptance of the fact that the Zionist and Palestinian narratives ‘negate the very existence of the foe as a collectivity’ and suggests that the focus should rather be on a critical re-examination of the historical record by each side separately. He sees this as a particular task for the Palestinians.
4. Finally, Dan Bar-On and Sami Adwan aim to promote ‘better dialogue between two separate but interdependent narratives’ that ‘are intertwined like a double helix’ through their work on the production of parallel texts on the Balfour Declaration, the 1948 war, and the 1987 Intifada, including the idea of getting Israeli and Palestinian schoolchildren to fill in intermediate commentaries.

It can be seen that these recommendations, as interpreted by the editor, are based on a theory of radical disagreement made up of *description* in terms of co-existing and equivalent ‘competing narratives’ or ‘separate truths’, and *explanation* in terms of the function that these are seen to play as ‘distorting prisms’ or ‘symbolic constructions of shared identity’ that shore up ‘a group’s ongoing existence’. These are not ‘reflections of truth’ but ‘motivational tools’.

But already this account is at odds with examples of radical disagreement from the book itself. Here is a radical disagreement between two of its authors, Nadim Rouhana and Mordechai Bar-On. As an example of radical disagreement both A and B must be read together.

- A. Israel will have to face at least part of the truth that the country that they settled belonged to another people, that their project was the direct cause of the displacement and dismantling of Palestinian society, and that it could not have been achieved without this displacement. Israel will also have to confront the realities of the occupation and the atrocities it is committing, and will have to accept that Palestinian citizens in Israel are indigenous to the land and entitled to seek the democratic transformation of the state so that they have equal access to power, resources and decision making, and are entitled to rectification of past and present injustices. (Rouhana, 2006: 133)
- B. There are many historiographical faults in the way Rouhana tells the story [...] The main problem with Rouhana’s thesis [...] lies in his sweeping conclusion that ‘from the moment Zionism was conceived, force has been a central component of its relationship with the Palestinians’ [...] Is it not possible for a Palestinian such as Rouhana to understand that, in 1948, the Jews of Palestine, to their chagrin, could not but use force to defend themselves and impose a solution that was legitimated by a majority of nations? [...] [T]here is no chance that I shall ever consider that my father and mother, who immigrated to Palestine as Zionists in 1924, were criminals. Nor do I consider my actions illegitimate when I

gave the order 'Fire!' and perhaps killed or wounded assailants in response to an ambush on the troop that I commanded on the way to Tel Aviv in December 1947 [...] There is hardly any question that, in December 1947, the fire that later spread throughout the country was ignited at that time by the Palestinians [...] The joy with which Arab intellectuals embraced the new [Israeli] narratives betrays a misguided assumption that, at long last, Israelis see the 'truth' and are ready to adopt the Arab narratives of the conflict [...] The lesson Palestinians should learn from Israel's revisionist historiography is not how correct they are in their own narratives but rather how self-critical they, too, must become. (Bar-On, 2006: 147-148, 167-168)

Neither Rouhana nor Bar-On are saying that their discourses are coexisting or equivalent 'separate truths', nor that they are merely 'functional for group identity'. There is no room for this. The fact that they are *not* saying this is what makes it a radical disagreement. That is why Rouhana rejects all four of the recommendations for action listed above. Rouhana claims that nearly all Palestinians would agree with what he says. I think that most Jewish Israelis would agree with Bar-On. So the editorial account of radical disagreement does not engage with the linguistic intractability that lies at the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The editor himself realizes something of this when he comments:

A next stage, too late for this book, would be for Jawad, Porat, Bar-On and others [he does not name Rouhana] to spend necessary hours together attempting to reconcile the discordant narratives, or at least delineating the precise contours of disagreement. (Rotberg, 2006: 8)

This would, indeed, be the next logical step. In other words, what is wanted is not a study of narratives *of* conflict but an exploration with the conflict parties of narratives *in* conflict. But what would happen if this were attempted? Are there in fact third party accounts that do succeed in 'delineating the precise contours of disagreement' in this way? The rest of the article summarizes my own attempt to answer this question (Ramsbotham, 2010: 133-164). In view of the surprisingly negative outcome of the enquiry, the paper ends with two further questions. Why is there no theory of radical disagreement? And does this matter?

### 3. Testing Candidate Theories of Radical Disagreement – A Review

Conflict theory is over-determined. There are too many theories of conflict. Almost all the social, political, psychological, historical, cultural, anthropological and biological sciences are founded on theories of conflict, most of them controversial. What follows is a selective survey.

### 3.1 *Realist Theory*

In realist theory radical disagreement is disregarded as epiphenomenal on the deeper drivers of conflict – interest and power. So there is no motive to take it seriously. Thucydides' Athenian generals dismissed the 'fine phrases' of the Melians as irrelevant. Two and a half millennia later Hans Morgenthau was equally scornful:

It is a characteristic aspect of all politics, domestic as well as international, that frequently its basic manifestations do not appear as what they actually are – manifestations of a struggle for power. Rather, the element of power as the immediate goal of the policy pursued is explained and justified in ethical, legal or biological terms. That is to say: the true nature of the policy is concealed by ideological justifications and rationalizations. (Morgenthau, 1948/1973: 83-84)

Neo-realists are even more forthright in ruling out the relevance of radical disagreement at 'system' level. To take it seriously would be a category-mistake (Waltz, 1979: 112). That politicians nevertheless indulge in 'a moral language of rights and duties in their relations with each other' (Brown, 2007; Risse, 2004) is seen as 'self-deception' (Morgenthau, 1948/1973: 83) or 'hypocrisy' (Walzer, 1977: 20).

I do not think that this is an adequate theory of radical disagreement. Invoking the third adequacy test, the Melian dialogue can itself be read as a radical disagreement where, given the discrepancy in power, it was in the *interest* of the Athenian generals to argue (and no doubt believe) the realist case. Here they use it as a stick with which to beat their main enemies, the Spartans:

Of all the people we know the Spartans are most conspicuous for believing that what they like doing is honourable and what suits their interests is just. (Thucydides, 1954: 363)

Conversely, in his own impassioned republican political polemics, Machiavelli famously parted company from the advice meted out in *The Prince*.

In summary, realism does not pretend to offer a theory of radical disagreement.

### 3.2 *Marxist Theory*

In Marxist theory, radical disagreement is a reflex of class struggle. Underlying changes in the means of production generate both conflict parties (classes) and the struggles between them. So to take radical disagreement seriously as an independent phenomenon is a conceptual error. 'Philosophies of contradiction' like Marxism make no claim to impartiality or to 'ultimate truth' in the way that hegemonial liberal epistemologies do, because they have never claimed to be impartial in the first place. That is why they are revolutionary. In Marxist theory it is a mistake to suppose that anything can be learnt from a study of radical disagreement without first determining the "material, social, political, ideological

and philosophical conditions [that produce] already existing knowledge in the first place” (Althusser, 1970/1971: 141):

No other order, no order which took discourses themselves as a starting-point, could ever begin to indicate how discourses exist materially. (Macdonell, 1986: 95)

I do not think that this is an adequate theory of radical disagreement, among other reasons because – this time invoking the second adequacy test – it does not encompass the radical disagreement between, say, Marxism and Thatcherism. Marxism identifies Thatcherism as mere ideology by exposing its populist appeal to national solidarity as a “veil of equality beneath which the real inequalities of capitalism can carry on” (Fairclough, 1989: 194-195). Marxist theory is not mere ideology in the same sense because it points to material reality – the actual relationship between Thatcherite texts and the “institutional and societal level class struggle that produces them” (Fairclough, 1989: 101). But in the radical disagreement Marxist theory is disparaged as “ideologically, politically and morally bankrupt” (Thatcher, Conservative party conference, 1980), whereas there is stout denial that there is such a thing as populist ‘Thatcherite ideology’ – according to Margaret Thatcher she just called a spade a spade, which is why the ‘ordinary British people’ rallied to her so enthusiastically:

I wouldn’t call this populist. I would say that many of the things which I’ve said strike a chord in the hearts of ordinary people. Why? Because they’re British, because their character IS independent, because they DON’T like to be shoved around, because they ARE prepared to take responsibility, because they DO expect to be loyal to their friends and loyal allies – that’s why you call it populist. I say it strikes a chord in the hearts of people I know, because it struck a chord in my heart many, many years ago. (Thatcher interview BBC Radio 3, 13 December 1985; capitals in the original transcription)

Marxist theory would, of course, repudiate this.

But Marxism does not itself offer a theory of radical disagreement, and does not claim to do so.

### 3.3 *Conflict Resolution Theory*

Moving away from high theory, how is radical disagreement treated in the cluster of theories that make up classical conflict resolution? Here, as noted at the beginning of this article, it has been usual to disparage radical disagreement as ‘competitive debate’ with the aim, not of theorizing it, but of eliminating it. When confronted with radical disagreement the advice is to:

place the disagreements in perspective by identifying common ground and common interests. When there is disagreement, address the issues and refrain from making personal attacks. When there is disagreement, seek to understand the other’s views from his or her perspective; try to feel what it

would be like if you were on the other side [...] Reasonable people understand that their own judgment as well as the judgment of others may be fallible. (Deutsch, 2000: 32, 35)

There is no incentive to enquire what happens when 'reasonable people' do not do this but instead persist in their quarrel, as is characteristic of linguistic intractability.

In negotiation theory radical disagreement is called 'positional debate' and the advice is to move away from it at the earliest opportunity in order to concentrate on the 'interests' that underlie and explain the positions and are more amenable to conflict resolution (Fisher and Ury, 1981; Floyer Acland, 1995).

In controlled communication and problem solving theory, radical disagreement is similarly disparaged as 'adversarial debate':

In brief, the theory equates a constructive process of conflict resolution with an effective cooperative problem-solving process in which the conflict is the mutual problem to be resolved cooperatively. It also equates a destructive process of conflict resolution with a competitive process in which the conflict parties are involved in a competition or struggle to determine who wins and who loses; often the outcome of a struggle is a loss for both parties [...] At the heart of this process is reframing the conflict as a mutual problem to be resolved (or solved) through joint cooperative efforts. (Deutsch, 2000: 31)

Some in the field do advocate taking note of radical disagreement and letting it run its course, as in Jay Rothman's ARIA (Antagonism, Resonance, Invent, Action) methodology, but the aim in doing so is to demonstrate its bankruptcy and then move on:

You have now experienced a very familiar, and I am sure you will all agree, a rather unconstructive approach to dialogue. Each of you stated your position, each of you suggested why the other side is wrong or to blame for the conflict. Few of you listened to anyone else, and, frankly, very little, if anything, new was learned. This is the normal approach that all of you have experienced perhaps every time you have discussed the situation with someone who holds a very different perspective than your own. I invite you now to experiment with a new way. (Rothman, 1997: 170)

In constructive dialogue theory, following David Bohm (1994), a similar pattern is discernible:

A debate is a fight with verbal, not physical weapons (in French *battre* = beat). The victory usually goes to he who can catch the other in more contradictions [...] A dialogue, *dia logos*, through the word, by using words, is something quite different. There is no competition to win a battle of words. The parties are working together to find a solution to a problem. (Galtung, 2004: 38)

If radical disagreements do occur, the recommendation is to:

start touching them, tinkering with them, shaking them, inserting the word 'not', negating them so that everything becomes more flexible. (Galtung, 2004: 80)

It can be seen that in none of these cases does the communicative theory in question have an interest in theorizing radical disagreement.<sup>2</sup>

### 3.4 Habermasian Critical Theory

One of the main criticisms of classical conflict resolution has been that it does not work in asymmetric conflicts, because it assumes a symmetry between the conflict parties that is not there. Habermasian critical theory is sometimes invoked to remedy this (Jabri, 1996: 161-163; Jones, 1999; Rothman, 1992: 72).

In Habermas's theory of communicative action, competing validity claims are to be overcome by appeal to the formal-pragmatic stipulations of argumentation itself. The rules to be applied are those implicit in such claims. An ideal speech situation is thus invoked by the participants that by its nature rules out *force majeure* as a way of formulating communicative action.

But does this amount to an adequate theory of radical disagreement? This is a difficult question to answer because it means following through in detail the complex role that saying 'no' to speech-act offers plays in Habermas's overall scheme. Radical disagreement is in principle central to the enterprise because it generates the need for Habermas's approach in the first place. It is also essential to the key concept of *criticizability* – saying 'no' is inseparable from the possibility of saying 'yes' (or abstaining). But when it comes to *criticism* (actually saying 'no') the symmetry breaks down. Agreement is structurally privileged over disagreement in Habermasian theory. For example Habermas assumes that disagreement maps exactly onto agreement in relation to the 'world relations' around which his theory is constructed (the one objective world, the shared social world, and the separate subjective worlds of the communicative actors) (Habermas, 1984: Vol. I, 99-100). But it does not. In radical disagreement the world relations themselves are also involved. This involvement of the world relations is what *constitutes* the radical disagreement. It is what characterizes linguistic intractability (Ramsbotham, 2010: 125-127, 149-156).

The result of this can be seen in Vivienne Jabri's application of Habermasian theory to conflict resolution in the form of discursive ethics (1996). For example, she appears to acknowledge the role of radical disagreement in cases where the Habermasian search for consensus fails:

2 In addition to Jay Rothman's ARIA methodology, other conflict resolution programmes that do address the issue of radical disagreement include Guy and Heidi Burgess's 'Constructive Confrontation' (1996), Johnson et al.'s 'Constructive Controversy' (2000), Barbara Bradford's 'Managing Disagreement Constructively' (2004), Bernard Mayer's *Staying with Conflict* (2009) and Myrna Lewis's 'Deep Democracy'.



Individuals and groups involved in social relations do not always reach rational consensus. Where disagreement occurs, a variety of options are available. Groups and individuals may adopt strategic behaviour where actors may seek to influence communicative interaction through, for example, the direct manipulation of information on their intentions or the shared external world. Groups may also break off communication and resort to violence [...] A process situated in discursive ethics, however, rejects these options and enters a dialogic relationship of free objection and justification. (Jabri, 1996: 165)

But now it can be seen that the radical disagreement that caused the disruption is once again written out of the script. None of the three options envisaged here relates to it. The first two are merely strategic or forcible options, and the third is a restatement of the Habermasian programme whose failure to find consensus triggered the options in the first place. The option Jabri does not contemplate is the option of taking radical disagreement itself seriously when other alternatives fail. There is no adequate Habermasian theory of radical disagreement.

### 3.5 Foucauldian Theory

Others appeal to Foucault. For example, in her outstanding study of the way in which ‘myths and truths started a war’ in Kosovo, Julie Mertus gathers a remarkable collection of antagonistic Serb and Albanian testimonies. These are juxtaposed and explained in equivalent terms. For Mertus the leaders on both sides knew that much of this was politically motivated propaganda. At the level of the ‘general population’, in contrast, confined as they were within their own communities, it was a case of ‘hidden transcripts of anger, aggression and disguised discourses of dignity’, where neither would ‘understand each other’s transcripts’ even if they could gain access (Mertus, 1999: 10). So Mertus does not follow this up. She has no interest in exploring the radical disagreement itself.

Once again I think that this is mainly a result of her prior theoretical understanding of linguistic intractability:

for those who are interested in understanding and predicting behaviour, what matters is not what is *factually true* but what people believe to be ‘Truth’.

Here she invokes Foucault. Each society has its own ‘regime of truth’ and the “opposite of a Truth is not necessarily a lie, rather it is a competing Truth linked to an alternative self-image” (1999: 9-10).

This theory of verbal disputes as competing Truths that are private to communities and are to be understood as contingent productions of power is another version of the ‘common description’. It renders pointless any idea of taking the radical disagreement itself seriously as a contest over factual truth.

It is worth noting that Mertus does not apply this to her own verbal battle with Serb officials. When she set out on her research her original aim was not to study competing Kosovo Albanian and Serb “Truths”, but the factual truth about

alleged Serb atrocities. She was then side-tracked into the former when the wide disparity between those accounts became apparent to her. But she did not forget her first intention. On Serb atrocities, she is clear that there had indeed been 'years of gross human rights abuses against Albanians by Serbian officials'. This was not just a 'Truth' for Mertus but a factual truth: 'I was right about the abuse'. (Mertus, 1999: 9)

In her radical disagreement with the Serbs Mertus no longer talks about 'Truths' but about truth.

Foucault did the same when he was involved in intense political argument, for example, in relation to Soviet actions in Poland in 1982:

For ethical reasons, we have to raise the problem of Poland in the form of a non-acceptance of what is happening there, and a non-acceptance of the passivity of our own governments. (Foucault, 1989: 377)

This is not a criticism of Foucault because he never claimed to offer a theory of radical disagreement in the first place, whether in his early 'archaeological' research, or in his 'genealogical' homage to Nietzsche, or in his later re-interpretation of his work in terms of 'problematization' (Ramsbotham, 2010: 146-147). His aim was to trace the subtle ways in which intricate eddies of power/knowledge precipitate forms of reification, subjection and exclusion. Things that appear ineluctable happen to have evolved like that, and can therefore evolve differently in future. His concern was to subvert rigid categories – including the crude dialectic of disagreement that reproduces what it opposes in over-simplification and violence – in the interest of emancipation. The solvent for the normalizing deceptions of domination is micro-analysis and hyper-dispersal, not confrontation. Nothing could be further from the mutual refutation and brutal either-or of radical disagreement. For Foucault radical disagreement is at most a superficial moment in the historical evolution of regimes of truth

Returning to Mertus, consequent upon her descriptions and explanations are her prescriptions for preventative action in the communicative sphere. Given the similarity of her analysis to that in *Israeli and Palestinian Narratives of Conflict*, it is not surprising that her recommendations are also similar – although she is one of the few who recognize the limits to dialogue for mutual understanding in times of maximum intractability:

Allowing competing Truths to float through the air in the same space, unjudged and unquestioned, can be a revolutionary act. The Truths may always exist. But the very telling can provoke self-reflection and dismantle the link between Truths and the degrading of an oppositional "other". The telling may narrow the gap between Truths, creating a common bridge toward something else. Yet sometimes the divisions between people are too great, the fear too intense, the desire of some to maintain or gain power too overwhelming. The mere telling is not enough to stem conflict. Thus we cannot stop after the story-telling. We must have the will to think of bold, even

drastic interventions to change the status quo into a more peaceful something else. (Mertus, 1999: 4)

But, because Mertus interprets what is said in terms of subjective Truths, she leaves her examples ‘floating’ separately, and ‘unjudged’, and sees no point in promoting their dynamic engagement or exploring the resulting radical disagreement that lies at the heart of the linguistic intractability. She does not recognize radical disagreement as distinct from what she has already – brilliantly – exposed. So there is no further linguistic recourse after the limits of ‘story-telling’ are reached. The rest is non-verbal intervention or linguistic therapy – or just ‘something else’.

### 3.6 *Gadamerian Hermeneutic Theory*

Gadamerian hermeneutics has been influential among those who want to overcome the damaging effects of cultural difference in violent conflicts. In *Truth and Method* (1960/1975) Gadamer suggested that the interpretation of texts could be seen as analogous to a ‘conversation’. In conflict resolution it works the other way. Dialogue is seen as a mutual interpretation of texts. Gadamer’s idea of understanding as a process of recognizing the prejudices that constitute our ‘horizon’ when they are challenged, and thus ‘attaining a higher universality’ through a never-ending ‘fusion of horizons’ (1960/1975: 272) has inspired many:

[Gadamer’s] single most important insight may turn out to be a conceptual scheme that allows us to overcome cultural conflicts as well as clashes of different forms of life. (Arnsward, 2002: 35)

But how does this relate to linguistic intractability? I have argued elsewhere that Gadamer does not offer a theory of radical disagreement (Ramsbotham, 2010: 156-160). On the contrary, he severely criticises the very idea of the ‘statement’, which he rejects as entirely inimical to the nature of hermeneutics, and instead spends his best energies conceptualizing the idea of the ‘question’ which *prima facie* dissolves radical disagreement from the outset:

[The] concept of the statement, the dialectical accentuation of it to the point of contradiction, is [...] in extreme contrast to the nature of the hermeneutical experience and the linguistic nature of human experience of the world. (Gadamer, 1960/1975: 425)

Here, Charles Taylor applies Gadamer to the challenge of accommodating radically different ‘ways of holding things true’:

For instance, we become aware that there are different ways of believing things, one of which is holding them as a ‘personal opinion’. This was all that we allowed for before, but now we have space for other ways and can therefore accommodate the beliefs of a quite different culture. Our horizon is extended to take in this possibility, which was beyond its limit before.

But this is better seen as a fusion rather than just an extension of horizons, because at the same time we are introducing a language to talk about their beliefs that represents an extension in relation to their language. Presumably, they had no idea of what we speak of a[s]'personal opinions', at least in such areas as religion, for instance. They would have had to see these as rejection, rebellion, and heresy. So the new language used here, which places 'opinions' alongside other modes of believing as possible alternative ways of holding things true, opens a broader horizon, extending beyond both the original ones and in a sense combining them. (Taylor, 2002: 287)

Applying this to radical disagreement between, say, those who want to establish western-style democracy in Afghanistan or Iraq, and those who want to reject it, what does it mean to say, as in the first paragraph, that we Western democrats are expanding our horizon to take in what was before outside it? If we are the only ones making the adjustment, what difference will this make to our actions? Do we now accept that 'believing things' also means obeying what God has revealed whatever our opinion may be? So will we submit to what the other wants and acquiesce in the establishment of Sharia? If not, is the other not likely to reject our self-proclaimed expanded understanding as yet another hypocritical ruse for getting our way? Is this, in fact, not what Islamists do say?

And what of the reciprocal move outlined by Taylor in the second paragraph? For there to be a fusion of horizons must those wanting to impose sharia learn to speak a 'new language' that 'places "opinions" alongside other modes of believing as possible alternative ways of holding things true'? Does this include non-Muslim opinions? What does 'alongside' mean in the context of the struggle between western democracy and sharia? Is there room for this?

Can we Muslims put an issue that has already been decided for us by Allah up for a vote and accept the will of the majority if they vote against the will of Allah? Of course we cannot, so therefore we can never accept democracy as defined, practised and promoted by America. (Abu Musab, 2003)

In ongoing intractable conflict, would not those who want to impose sharia reject the whole idea that this 'opens a broader horizon, extending beyond both the original ones and in a sense combining them'? Would they not see this, too, as yet another way of insidiously indoctrinating Muslims and of undermining Islam from within? Is this not what many Muslims (and not only Muslims) do say about ecumenicism and the interfaith movement, for example? The radical disagreement does not appear in Taylor's version of Gadamer at all.

### 3.7 *Informal Reasoning Theory*

'Informal reasoning' or 'practical reasoning' studies inference and the construction and testing of arguments. The aim is to analyze what reasons are being proposed for believing or acting in certain ways and to assess whether or not these reasons should be accepted. This looks promising, because in the process it might

be supposed that radical disagreement would come up as a particular area of study (Ramsbotham, 2010: 22-25).

But a distinction is usually drawn between factual assessment of the truth of propositions (premises or conclusions) and logical assessment of the validity or force of inductive inference. Factual assessment and logical assessment both contribute to the evaluation of the soundness of an argument – the assessment of whether there are good reasons for accepting the truth of its conclusion(s). But in informal reasoning analysis it is nearly always the latter – logical assessment – that is the main concern. In the factual assessment of the truth of a proposition a hearer may adopt four stances:

- acceptance (believing it)
- rejection (not believing it)
- abstention
- indifference

But the second of these is not usually seen to introduce special complications. Relatively little effort is usually expended on the substance of a dispute – in other words, on whether particular premises are true. The main focus of attention is on the logical assessment of the validity or force of the inference. This is seen to be less contaminated by empirical and speaker-related factors, and therefore to be more amenable to clarity of analysis. For example, in *The Logic of Real Arguments* (1988) Alec Fisher (48-69) puts himself into the shoes of the arguer by asking: “what arguments or evidence would justify me in asserting the conclusion?” He then insists that this does not refer to ‘truth conditionality’ (‘what would have to be true or false for the conclusion to be true or false?’), but only to justified assertion (‘what arguments or evidence would justify me in asserting the conclusion?’). He then identifies justified assertion with subject-dependent belief (‘what would I have to know or believe in to be justified in accepting it?’).

But this is exactly the point where the exploration of agonistic dialogue parts company with informal reasoning analysis. In agonistic dialogue conflict parties do talk about truth conditions and do not translate everything that is said into the language of subject-dependent belief. That is what makes these exchanges radical disagreements. So for a third party analyst to dismiss truth conditionality at the outset in the testing of sound arguing is to beg what is in question in radical disagreement. Watertight distinctions such as that between truth and validity break down in agonistic dialogue and are found to be part of what is disputed (Ramsbotham, 2010: 96-99, 127-130).

### 3.8 *Psycho-Social Constructionist Theory*

In psycho-social constructionist theory, radical disagreement is disparaged as psychological projection or social construction (Ramsbotham, 2010: 26-29):

The idea that there is one version of events that is true (making all others false) is [...] in direct opposition to the central idea of social constructionism, *i.e.* that there exists no ‘truth’ but only numerous constructions of the world,

and which ones receive the stamp of 'truth' depends upon culturally and historically specific factors. (Burr, 1995: 81)

Yet it is precisely characteristic of radical disagreement that conflict parties do appeal to truth, reality and justice, and not just to their own 'constructions'. So for analysts to begin with a third party presumption that there is no 'truth' but only contingent constructions is to beg the main question, and to preclude serious enquiry into the phenomenon being investigated.

Similarly, in terms of methodology the idea that linguistic practices are 'externalizing' is seen to apply to all social activities – that is to say to 'all occasions in which people employ the sense-making interpretative procedures which are embodied in the use of natural language'. From this premise a sweeping conclusion can be reached about social science research in general, and especially about social science research that 'employs people's accounts as investigative resources' – as does the phenomenology of radical disagreement:

when people are asked to provide reports of their social lives in ethnographic research projects, or when people are required to furnish more formal answers to interview questions about attitudes or opinions, they are not merely using language to reflect some overarching social or psychological reality which is independent of their language. Rather, in the very act of reporting or describing, they are actively building the character of the states of affairs in the world to which they are referring. This raises serious questions about the status of findings from social science research projects which trade on the assumption that language merely reflects the properties of an independent social world. (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998: 228)

The exploration of radical disagreement trades on no such assumption. But nor does it trade on the opposite assumption that when people use language to describe, justify, recommend or refer to how things are or should be in the world, they merely construct the states of affairs that they refer to. To make assumptions of either of these kinds is to prejudge what is being investigated, whereas it often turns out that it is these very distinctions that are integral to what is at issue in the disagreement – and that this is the key to linguistic intractability.

### 3.9 *Anthropological Theory*

Comparative anthropological studies provide a rich source of material for conflict analysis (Fry & Bjorkqvist, 1997). To give one example, Marc Ross's *The Culture of Conflict* compares ethnographic data with ninety pre-industrial societies in an attempt to answer the question: "Why are some societies more conflictual than others?" (1993). Drawing on what are in some cases by now venerable studies, he asks why among the Yanomamo of southern Venezuela a "militant ideology and the warfare associated with it are the central reality of daily existence" (Chagnon, 1983), whereas the Mbuti pygmies of the Zaire rain forest are "at peace with themselves and with their environment" (Turnbull, 1978). His general answer is that:

the psychocultural dispositions rooted in a society's early socialization experiences [e.g., childrearing] shape the overall level of conflict, while its specific pattern of social organization [e.g., kinship] determines whether the targets of conflict and aggression are located within a society, outside it, or both. (Ross, 1993: 9)

It can be seen why comparative anthropological conflict theory of this kind discounts radical disagreement as, at most, merely functional for the internal drivers of conflict in different societies.

Similar results are obtained if attention shifts from the comparative analysis of different societies to studies of human nature itself, including the roots of human aggression (Rapoport, 1989; Staub, 1989). Bitter controversy has divided the field, for example between those who see violence as a learnt behaviour rather than an evolutionary predisposition (Groebel *et al.*, 1989; Mead, 1940), and 'evolutionary psychology' (EP), which attacks this as the politically correct "central dogma of a secular faith" (Pinker, 2002: chap. 3). This is in turn furiously denounced by those who see EP as itself politically motivated:

the claims of EP in the fields of biology, psychology, anthropology, sociology, cultural studies and philosophy are for the most part not merely mistaken, but culturally pernicious [...] Like the religious fundamentalists, the fundamentalist Darwinians who wish to colonise the social sciences have political as well as cultural objectives [...] The political agenda of EP is transparently part of a right-wing libertarian attack on collectivity, above all the welfare state. (Rose & Rose, 2001: 3, 8, 125)

Here is an example of radical disagreement from within the heartland of anthropological theory. I do not think that it is adequately dealt with.

Something similar applies to Nietzsche's theoretical dismissal of verbal disagreement as a herd phenomenon located at the most attenuated end of language, itself an attenuation of consciousness, which is in turn "the last and latest development of the organic and hence what is most unfinished and unstrong" (1974: 84-85). For Nietzsche, animal and human action is impelled by unconscious physiological drives: "Every drive is a type of thirst for power; every one has its perspective, which it wants to force on the other drives as a norm." For these perspectives to masquerade as independent deliverances of reason or power-free knowledge is therefore a lie. So to approach them in terms of their own self-articulations would be absurd:

whatever becomes conscious becomes by the same token shallow, thin, relatively stupid, general, sign, herd signal; all becoming conscious involves a great and thorough corruption, falsification, reduction to superficialities, and generalization [...] Man, like every living being, thinks continually without knowing it; the thinking that rises to consciousness is only the smallest part of this – the most superficial and worst part – for only this conscious thinking takes the form of words. (Nietzsche, 1974: 298-300)

Yet nothing was more characteristic of Zarathustra's hammer-blows than the contempt with which he dismissed his opponents in the radical disagreements that marked his tempestuous passage through the world. And it was Nietzsche's own extraordinary polemical power and skill that subsequently made him famous.

### 3.10 *Radical Feminist Theory*

'Difference feminism' mounts a direct challenge to gender-blind universalistic claims that fail to understand their own historical contingency. This includes the whole setting within which radical disagreement is defined (Ramsbotham, 2010: 4-5, 237).

Best known, perhaps, through Carol Gilligan's critique of Laurence Kohlberg's rationalist-universalist assumptions in developmental ethics and her subsequent advocacy of the idea of ethics as inclusive conversation (1982, 2002), the discursive assault extends to the idea of language as a symbolic (thetic) system that is already gendered through its exclusion of the pre-symbolic (semiotic) other. Oppositional thought itself, therefore, (including the construction of sexual identities as opposites) is subverted by the 'semiotic transgression of the thetic' when the gender critique exposes this violence in its very heartland (Kristeva, 1986). In Freudian terms this is the pre-oedipal challenge to the whole of phallogocentric western philosophy (Irigaray, 1977/1985). It is an attempt to liberate repressed voices from outside the symbolic order itself.

Radical disagreements, with their superficial juxtaposition of incompatible truth claims, epitomize male-gendered linguistification, dichotomous simplification, adversarial rationalization, competitiveness, separation from the relational, and the ready physiological antagonism characteristic of those who have a low arousal threshold. In short, radical disagreements, and the conflicts interpreted through them, are seen to be contingent phenomena. And, as such, they can only be dispersed by subversion. To take them seriously on their own terms would be to buy into their delusory universality and to perpetuate the intrinsic violence that they represent.

Can this wholesale dismissal count as an adequate theory of radical disagreement? Not if the term has any traction at all in its own terms – for example, in the radical disagreement between difference feminism and those patriarchal traditions that reject it. Here there is a tension between the 'gender' and 'culture' critiques of positivism inasmuch as the culture-sensitivity of the latter includes acknowledgement of the (contingent) validity of cultures in which feminism is anathematized as western imperialism – the opposite of its own self-understanding. In this radical disagreement – if it is taken seriously at all – the entire conceptual basis of difference feminism can be seen to be already involved. This 'prior involvement of distinctions invoked' is characteristic of radical disagreement in general (Ramsbotham, 2010: chap. 5). And this does not emerge if linguistic intractability is left unexplored. Here is a portentous radical disagreement of global significance that has hardly begun to be developed and is therefore so far ill-understood. A major reason for this is the inadequacy of theoretical accounts of the phenomenon of radical disagreement in the first place.



### 3.11 *Post-structural Theory*

Post-structural theory does not even allow radical disagreement to get going in the first place, because the brutal oppositions and crude binaries that constitute the struggle are already pre-deconstructed (Ramsbotham, 2010: 237-239; Ramsbotham *et al.*, 2011: 406-408). One way to show this is to look at the way in which a field of study that has adopted post-structural theory into its own self-understanding as a discipline describes itself. Here, for example, is a collection of passages from Chris Barker's *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice* that outline the theoretical assumptions on which the field of cultural studies is itself based. Passages are quoted verbatim but breaks between passages are not marked:

Cultural studies is an interdisciplinary or post-disciplinary field of enquiry that explores the production and inculcation of maps of meaning. Representationalist epistemology has largely been displaced within cultural studies by the influence of poststructuralism, postmodernism and other anti-representationalist paradigms. Common sense, and realist epistemology, understands truth to be that which corresponds to or pictures the real in an objective way. Constructionism, of which cultural studies is a manifestation, argues that truth is a social creation. Cultural studies has argued that language is not a neutral medium for the formation of meanings and knowledge about an independent object world 'existing' outside of language. Rather, it is constitutive of those very meanings and knowledge. Thus, we make the switch from a question about truth and representation to one concerning language use. Cultural studies seeks to play a de-mystifying role, that is, to point to the constructed character of cultural texts and to the myths and ideologies which are embedded in them. It has done this in the hope of producing subject positions, and real subjects, who are enabled to oppose subordination. These concepts all stress the instability of meaning, its deferral through the interplay of texts, writing and traces. Consequently, categories do not have essential universal meanings but are social constructions of language. This is the core of the anti-essentialism prevalent in cultural studies. That is, words have no universal meanings and do not refer to objects that possess essential qualities. One way we can understand this approach is by practising the art of deconstructing key binaries of western thinking. Thus, throughout the book, I put forward a particular binary [such as true/false] for students to deconstruct. Either/or binaries are dissolved by denying that the problem is best described in dualistic terms at all. (Barker, 2003: 7, 31, 33, 34, 54, 85)

It is no surprise that the phenomenon of intractable cross-cultural conflicts and the radical disagreements associated with them does not feature in this book. The theoretical space that would allow it has been peremptorily shut down. The prior exclusion of 'representationalist', 'common sense', 'realist' and 'essentialist' epistemologies, and the substitution of 'post-structural', 'postmodern', 'constructionist' and 'deconstructionist' epistemologies, sweeps away the possibility of radical disagreement from the beginning. What is eliminated includes features that are characteristic of radical disagreement – including reference to binaries such as

truth, falsehood, justice, injustice, and to claims about how things are and should be in the external world.

So, for example, the radical disagreement at the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict noted above vanishes in Barker's account of Cultural Studies. Cultural Studies already knows better than Israelis or Palestinians how words can and cannot be used and how they are to be understood. It translates questions of truth, representation (reality) and justice into locutions about language use. It deconstructs 'either/or binaries' and denies that problems can be 'described in dualistic terms at all'. It does not need to listen to what the spokespersons of the cultures in question are actually saying.

But in this self-definition, I suggest, Cultural Studies as a whole finds itself in conflict with most of the world's cultures, for whom uncompromising and didactic secular post-structuralism of this kind is rejected out of hand. But because of its prior theoretical assumptions, it does not recognize this radical disagreement in which it is itself caught up.

### 3.12 *Complex Systems Theory*

David Stroh has described systemic thinking as 'mental models made visible', and Norbert Ropers sees one of the defining characteristics of complex systems thinking as "thinking in mental models yet acknowledging perspective dependency" (2008: 13):

Accepting that all analytical models are a reduction of the complex reality (and are necessarily perspective-dependent) and are therefore only ever a tool and not "the reality" as such.

Mental models are the conceptual frames or cognitive structures, largely unconscious, that shape our tacit knowledge and beliefs and adapt us to conform to prevailing social norms – what Lakoff and Johnson have called 'the metaphors we live by' (1980).

Within these terms, therefore, how are radical disagreements described and analyzed? For example, how do they appear in complex systems perspective maps? It is difficult to demonstrate this in the space available, but I have argued elsewhere that they do not appear at all (Ramsbotham, 2010: 45-51). Radical disagreements are treated as coexisting and distinct 'beliefs, feelings and behaviours' in the dynamical-systems approach (Coleman, 2003), and as 'widely-held beliefs and norms' in systemic conflict analysis maps within the 'attitude' dimension of the SAT model of peacebuilding (Ricigliano, 2001: 2). Individual 'belief clouds' feature in some systems perspective maps, but not the radical disagreement itself. The rest of the map is treated as independent of conflict parties' truth claims or recommendations and justifications for action, even when this clearly begs key issues in the verbal battle. Neither the dynamics of radical disagreement, nor the fusion of fact and emotion so characteristic of it, are shown. Nor is the way linguistic intractability often involves third party analysis itself (the conceptual assumptions on which the mapping is based are themselves contradicted by some – or even all – the conflict parties).

Norbert Ropers describes and explains mental models like this:

all parties have developed their own narratives or 'mental models' of the conflict, as well as options and possibilities of conflict resolution. These narratives and models have had tremendous impact on the way parties communicate and interact with each other. They often develop a life of their own and are deeply ingrained in the attitudes and behaviour of the respective collectives. (Ropers, 2008: 17)

In order to overcome this reductive antagonism, Ropers appeals to the Buddhist 'tetralemma'. Whereas a dilemma confronts two apparently incompatible alternatives, a tetralemma envisages four stances on any controversial issue. Here the tetralemma is applied to the verbal aspect of the Sinhala-Tamil conflict in Sri Lanka:

1. *Position A* – that of the government and mainstream Sinhala parties (e.g., unitary state or moderate devolution only);
2. *Position B* – that of Tamil nationalist parties (e.g., high level of autonomy or separate state);
3. *Neither of these* – the position of civil society groups who say that the 'real problems' are not to do with elite power sharing but with remedying other unsatisfied needs (genuine democracy, development, good local government);
4. *Both of these* – the position of international peacemakers (compromise, genuine power sharing, federalism etc.).

This kind of approach is much needed in the aftermath of the Sri Lankan government's military victory if recurrence is to be avoided. But in intractable conflict it does not yet succeed. And one of the main reasons for this is that the phenomenon of radical disagreement is not represented on the complex systems map at all. It only appears when A and B are taken together in the dynamic clash of horizons that constitutes the war of words itself, as for example here:

- A. This blessed land will forever cherish, protect and value the fruits of the brave and courageous operation conducted by the Sri Lankan Security Forces to bring liberation to the people of the East, who for more than two decades were held hostage by the forces of vicious and violent terrorism. (M. Rajapaksa, President of Sri Lanka, 19 July 2007).
- B. We are at a crossroads in our freedom struggle. Our journey has been long and arduous, and crowded with difficult phases. We are facing challenges and unexpected turns that no other freedom movement had to face. The Sri Lankan government has split the Tamil homeland, set up military camps, bound it with barbed wire, and has converted it into a site of collective torture. (V. Pirapaharan, prominent Tamil Tiger Leader, 27 November 2006)

A radical disagreement is not monological, but polylogical. It is not a series of distinct and static 'positions' within a neutral 'third' space, but a ferocious battle of claim/counter-claim to occupy the whole of conceptual space.

And the same applies to third parties. Even would-be peacemakers also want to occupy the whole of conceptual space. They want to describe, explain – and transform – the discourses of the primary conflict parties so that they become something other than they were before. They want to win.

Radical disagreement does not appear in complex system maps, however subtle they may be. In a sense, this is because radical disagreements are too *simple* to be recognized within the definitions of complexity adopted by systems theory.

#### 4. Why Is There No Theory of Radical Disagreement?

So far my search for an adequate theory of radical disagreement has returned empty-handed. I have yet to find a theory that survives the three adequacy tests. My interim conclusion, therefore, is that there is no such theory. There is no adequate third party account of the chief linguistic feature of intractable political conflict. There is no philosophy of radical disagreement.

Why is this? I have come to the view that the negative outcome of the search is the result of an underlying discrepancy between expert third party accounts in the social and political sciences in general and the nature of the phenomenon to be accounted for. The first is *monological*; the second is *polylogical*. And the monological cannot encompass the polylogical. Within monological theory, radical disagreement looks superficial and simplistic. But this superficiality and naivety can be seen as the trace of a different order of complexity. However great the differences described in monological theory (for example complexity theory), the differences revealed in the phenomenology of radical disagreement are greater than that (which is why they cannot be included in complex conflict maps). Radical disagreement is not a coexistence of equivalent subjectivities or rationalizations within some third or neutral conceptual space, however great the compulsion may be to suppose that it is. The war of words is a struggle to the death to occupy the whole of conceptual space – and act accordingly. It is a singularity in the universe of discourse (Ramsbotham, 2010, chap. 5). Where theory *does* encompass linguistic intractability is when it is itself convulsed by it – in other words when there is radical disagreement among theorists. But then, as the second adequacy test shows, this is not itself adequately described or accounted for in any one theory. The same applies *a fortiori* under the third adequacy test when theory is itself involved in intense political controversy.

As an example of the application of the second adequacy test, here is Michael Kelly's conclusion after studying the intense theoretical disputes between Habermas and Gadamer. On the Habermas/Gadamer disagreement Michael Kelly concludes:

The debate between Hans-Georg Gadamer and Jurgen Habermas had a rather ironic feature in that its path and conclusion seemed to contradict their

notions of philosophical discourse. The path did not conform to Habermas's notion of communicative action oriented to understanding, because Habermas's interest in the dialogue was admittedly to establish his differences with Gadamer and, as a result, his action in the debate was more instrumental than communicative; and the conclusion did not conform to Gadamer's notion of a dialogue that culminates in a fusion of horizons, for the two participants were farther apart at the end of the dialogue than they had been at the start. (Kelly, 1995: 139)

I suggest that this is not just a 'rather ironic feature' of a specific example of theoretical radical disagreement, but a feature of radical disagreement in general. The fact that in agonistic dialogue participants find that they are 'farther apart at the end of the dialogue than they had been at the start' is what exploration of radical disagreement with conflict parties repeatedly shows. Neither Habermas nor Gadamer take adequate discursive account of their own impassioned exchanges.

Turning to the third adequacy test, for Jacques Derrida, radical disagreement was dismissed as a discredited reflex of outmoded binary thinking. He regularly disparaged the clumsy eruptions of conflicting binaries and exposed their prior equivocated self-erasure in the very notion of iteration at the heart of 'writing'. He carried this over into his own ironic and self-concealing exchanges with John Searle, for example. But none of this affected the straightforward language he used when he was himself involved in direct political struggle and radical disagreement. Here, for example, Derrida scornfully refutes Francis Fukuyama's 'end of history' thesis, fiercely rejects the US-led reordering of global priorities after 1989, and calls for the setting up of a 'new International':

For it must be cried out, at a time when some have the audacity to neo-evangelize in the name of the ideal of a liberal democracy that has finally realized itself as the ideal of human history: never have violence, inequality, exclusion, famine, and thus economic oppression affected as many human beings in the history of the earth and of humanity. (Derrida, 1994: 85)

Derrida's theoretical writings do not accommodate this – or even notice it.

## 5. Does This Matter?

In conclusion, does any of this matter? Even if there is no adequate theory of radical disagreement does this make any practical difference? I believe that it does matter and that it does make a difference.

We live in an irredeemably conflictual world. If there is no adequate theory of the chief linguistic feature of our most intense and intractable political conflicts, then we are going blind into our attempts to deal with them. Not only conflict parties, but third parties of all kinds – including would-be peacemakers – are basing their strategies and interventions on inadequate theoretical foundations. What would happen if they realized this? I think that it might induce a measure

of humility all round. But, more than that, I think that it would open up a range of other ways of engaging with intractable conflicts at all levels that are as yet not integrated into the conflict analysis and conflict resolution field. What are these other ways? I have tried to explore some of them elsewhere. But that is another story.

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# Conflict Resolution as a Profession and the Need for Communities of Inquiry

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## Abstract

*Conflict resolution has obtained the markings of a profession, including published journals, professional associations and academic programs. However, professional status also carries with it expectations and obligations upon which conflict resolution as a community should deliberate. Acknowledging conflict resolution as a profession highlights associated responsibilities around knowledge accumulation and ethical practice. Complexities of modern practice call for reuniting theory, research and practice, and updating our professional educational paradigm. Competent modern conflict resolution professionals must be able to innovate and adapt to novel and complex contexts, and must develop communities of inquiry for learning that is public, shared and cumulative. Because of the time constraints facing many professionals, and the lack of structure for reflection, a combination of direct community conversation and periodic journal review would likely be the most realistic for nurturing the needed reflection, continual learning and paradigm critique that results in system learning by the community of conflict resolution professionals.*

**Keywords:** Reflective practice, conflict resolution, professional education, community of inquiry, expertise.

Conflict Resolution<sup>1</sup> has come of age as a profession. In its mission statement, *International Journal of Conflict Engagement and Resolution* notes how “the study of conflict resolution and its creative engagement [...] has led to the establishment of an ever widening array of academic and professional training programmes around the world”. But what does it mean to consider conflict resolution a profession? What are the privileges and obligations that accompany this status? What are the challenges of professions, and how can conflict resolution best overcome these challenges?

## 1. Becoming a Profession

Webster’s dictionary (2012) defines a profession as “a calling requiring specialized knowledge and often long and intensive academic preparation”. Argyris and

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1 I use conflict resolution here to apply generically to activities also including the engagement, management, and transformation of conflict.

Schön (1974/1992) note that professionals evolved from the 'profession' of a faith that certain values, such as justice, truth, or health, would be created through that profession's activities. The professional paradigm historically also included a binding ethic, a set of arts or techniques, a brotherhood of initiates, a status relationship to laypeople, an institutional setting and a worldview. While these emerged in the first 'profession' of the priesthood, this paradigm continued as the professions secularized and differentiated into law, medicine, engineering and the like. As the professions liberalized and rationalized, they each developed and brought along a specialized body of knowledge and standardized ways of training, and became affiliated with universities. The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the rise of technique, with the proliferation of both specializations and discrete bodies of expertise and technique undergirding these specializations. "The professional came to be seen, by himself and others, primarily as a technician who applied his professional knowledge, which was the basis of his authority" (p. 148).

Can conflict resolution be considered a profession? According to Dugan and Carey (1996), conflict resolution has all the requirements: published journals, professional associations and academic programmes. Applying the criteria in the professional paradigm outlined by Argyris and Schön (1974/1992) above, one could make a case that conflict resolution has a binding ethic, a set of arts or techniques, a brotherhood of initiates, a status relationship to laypeople, an institutional setting and a worldview. Yet professional status also carries with it expectations and obligations upon which conflict resolution as a community should deliberate.

## 2. Expectations of a Profession

Probably more important to consider than criteria for professional status is what it implies for conflict resolution to be considered a profession. Following on the work of earlier scholars on the nature of the relationship of the public to the professions (Lieberman, 1970; Schön, 1983; Veblen, 1918/1962), the public expects that conflict resolution professionals have specialized knowledge and expertise, continuing education in new knowledge and techniques, ethical standards and a way to 'police their own'. Is this the case with conflict resolution?

### 2.1 *Specialized Knowledge and Continuing Education*

Conflict resolution as a field has always had ambivalence about whether it represents a set of skills and approaches that are universally applicable and accessible even to every schoolchild, or rather is a set of specialized knowledge and techniques. Perhaps it is both. In an analogous way, schoolchildren can benefit from having their own better health practices, which do not take away from the usefulness of visiting doctors for cases that are beyond their capabilities to address. Similarly, though schoolchildren and the general population can benefit from conflict resolution skills and anger management, more skilled professionals can help with systemic and complex conflict dynamics. The expectation that conflict

resolution professionals engage in continuing professional education may be less supported, however.

### 2.2 *Ethics, Standards and Self-Monitoring*

Regarding ethical standards, conflict resolution as a field has developed its own sets of standards for ethical practice. A code of ethics was put forward by the American Arbitration Association (AAA) in 1977, by the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts (AFCC) in 1984, and by the Society for Professionals In Dispute Resolution (SPIDR) in 1986.<sup>2</sup> However, the expectation by the public that the profession of conflict resolution ‘policing its own’ is less supported. Alternative dispute resolution (ADR) professionals who are lawyers are regulated by their state and national bar associations, while arbitrators are potentially sanctioned by the AAA. Various locations may have state or provincial bodies that credential and thus regulate ethical and professional conduct. However, many conflict resolution professionals, at least in North America, have no official oversight in the form of a credentialing or sanctioning body, and rely more on voluntary and aspirational ‘model’ standards.

### 2.3 *Newer Expectations*

Increasingly what is demanded and expected of professionals in all fields is the ability to deal with novelty and complexity. Because the scale and complexity of problems are increasing on an exponential scale, skilled professionals are those most able to adapt and innovate; in the words of Schein (1972), those most able to learn how to learn. The dilemma was captured decades ago by Brooks (1967):

Both ends of the gap [the professional] is expected to bridge with his profession are changing so rapidly – both the body of knowledge that he must use and the expectations of the society that he must serve. Both these changes have their origin in the same common factor – technological change. Technology has created a race between opportunities and expectations [...] The four professions [...] must bear the brunt of responsibility for generating and managing this change. This places on the professional a requirement for adaptability and versatility that is unprecedented. (p. 89)

Modern professionals are faced both with exponentially expanding knowledge, and increasing societal expectations, such that the heart of their work is managing complexity.

2 SPIDR and other conflict resolution professional organizations were merged into the Association for Conflict Resolution in 2001; its most updated ethical standards, arrived at jointly with the AAA and the American Bar Association’s ADR section, are posted at <[www.acrnet.org/uploaded-Files/Practitioner/ModelStandardsOfConductforMediatorsfinal05\(1\)\(1\).pdf](http://www.acrnet.org/uploaded-Files/Practitioner/ModelStandardsOfConductforMediatorsfinal05(1)(1).pdf)>.

### 3. The Complexity of Modern Practice

In Schön's landmark work, *The Reflective Practitioner* (1983), he describes the contrast between the areas of practice for which answers and actions may be clear and straightforward, and the critical and challenging problems for which answers have not yet been anticipated:

In the varied topography of professional practice, there is a high, hard ground where practitioners can make effective use of research-based theory and technique, and there is a swampy lowland where situations are confusing 'messes' incapable of technical solutions. The difficulty is that the problems of the high ground, however great their technical interest, are often relatively unimportant to clients or to the larger society, while in the swamp are the problems of greatest human concern. (p. 42)

While training in cookbook approaches to conflict resolution may enable the discharge of relative simple cases, the nature of many conflicts involves complex issues, relationships and dynamics that may have no clear precedent. The nature of the practice situation today is characterized by complexity, uncertainty, instability, uniqueness and value conflict (Schön, 1983). The 'artful' practitioner is one who has "the ability to synthesize knowledge and skills in the moment of interaction, to integrate theory and technique into a series of strategies and interventions" (Lang & Taylor, 2000: 9).

[...] Artistry requires more than competence in the performance of the essential skills of professional practice, and more than the capacity to apply theory in a thoughtful and analytic manner. It is how the professional responds to the unique circumstances, the surprising events, that arise in professional practice that separates the artist from the practitioner. (pp. 9-10)

The essence of the task facing the professional today is not one of applying systematic knowledge to predetermined ends. It is the naming and framing of the task, and therefore the appropriate paradigm of practice, that can prove to be the most difficult.

In real-world practice, problems do not present themselves to the practitioner as givens. They must be constructed from the materials of problematic situations which are troubling, puzzling, and uncertain. In order to convert a problematic situation into a problem a practitioner must do a certain kind of work. (Schön, 1983: 40)

The practitioner must set the boundaries of the problem, determine what is wrong and in what direction it must be changed. It is just such situations when the ends desired are unclear that sets them apart from merely technical problems.

A conflict of ends cannot be resolved by the use of techniques derived from applied research. It is rather through the non-technical process of framing the problematic situation that we may organize and clarify both the ends to be achieved and the possible means of achieving them. (p. 41)

To address novelty and complexity, Schön (1983) suggests professionals need to cultivate reflectiveness, both within practice situations as well as subsequently. In his work on experts, he found that competent professionals engaged in both what he calls *reflection-in-action* and *reflection-on-action*. Reflection-in-action is the ability to be reflective in real time, while one is engaged in practice, adjusting to novelty, innovating on the spot and engaging in both single and double-loop learning.<sup>3</sup> Reflection-on-action comes afterward, when the reflective practitioner subsequently considers his framing of the situation, his role in it, the actions taken and the underlying strategies and theories implicit in these actions.

In sum, professionals are expected to be able to apply up-to-date and specialized knowledge and skills to their domain of expertise and be self-regulating in their pursuit of ethical practice. In addition, the most competent professionals not only are able to engage in solving problems they have seen before, but they are also able to parse out uncharted territory and innovate ways to address novel and complex situations. Are we cultivating conflict resolution professionals' ability to reflect, critique, adapt and innovate? What is the system, format and curriculum best suited to producing informed, adaptive, ethical and innovative practitioners?

#### 4. The Nature of Professional Education

The question of how to best educate professionals is not just one with which the field of conflict resolution is struggling. The nature of professional education in general has been undergoing a tectonic shift. After the rapid and increasing reliance on professions collapsed in a crisis of confidence in the latter twentieth century (Schön, 1983), educators of professionals and philosophers of science embarked upon some double-loop learning of their own. How had professionally constructed interventions such as urban renewal, the green revolution in developing countries, fail-safe nuclear power and mechanized warfare in Vietnam failed so miserably? Why had elegant research-based solutions missed their mark? Schön argues that it in large part goes back to how professionals are trained to conceive of problems and the inquiry process for finding answers. Systems with noble beginnings may evolve to produce structures and paradigms with non-

3 Argyris and Schön (1974/1992) consider learning a detection-and-correction process: detecting error and adjusting. They also emphasize the need to learn in a more fundamental way. Much of learning is what they call "single-loop learning", where one seeks feedback to better achieve ones' goals and objectives. However, continuing ineffectiveness may require "double-loop learning" where the goals and operating framework themselves are examined. Here assumptions are publicly examined and hypotheses are publicly tested (Argyris, 1982). Double-loop learning is especially important in situations where conditions are rapidly changing and uncertain.

adaptive results. In the pursuit of grand and generalizable solutions the ability to act responsively in specific contexts may have been lost. In the wake of Positivism's ascendance in epistemology, theory became increasingly decoupled from practice and action in the education of professionals.

The roots of the split between theory and practice can be traced back to the development in America of the multidisciplinary research university (Schön, 1983). Universities traditionally had been places to train professional clergy in intellectual issues, canon law, logic, accounting and administration. With the evolution of science in Germany in the nineteenth century and the rise of Positivism, science was seen not only as philosophical but also as the engine for social and economic progress. And the way to know things had to be through empirical procedures: "Knowledge could be accepted as knowledge only if it rested on empirical evidence" (Shils, 1978: 171). This new university culture took root, and was perhaps best exemplified by America's first research university, Johns Hopkins University. This culture also took pains to specify the 'proper division of labour' between professions and fields of scholarly pursuit. The professional schools would train men to be fit citizens involved in the 'workday world', while universities would fulfill the mission of preparing men for a life of science and scholarship; the two types of schools would interact but remain appropriately separated (Veblen, 1918/1962). The professions would apply and test the scientific knowledge produced by the universities.

Of course this division of labour carried a status implication, and it was not long before professional schools sought to associate themselves with universities. University governance had its own reasons for expanding, or appropriating (Schön, 1983), bodies of knowledge, so that by the mid-twentieth century most professional schools had moved within universities. However, as Schön (1983) describes, they had to pay the price of accepting both the Positivist epistemological framework woven into the fabric of the university, as well as the division of labour whereby university scholars created the theory that then the professions would apply to practice, with its accompanying differential status implications. The professional schools would teach systematic, generalized knowledge for its graduates to apply in practice, producing the now familiar split between theory/research and practice.

A common criticism aimed at professional schools from law to medicine to urban planning beginning in the 1960s was that they did not provide students with the skills needed for professional practice. This likely came from two sources (Schön, 1983). First, professional schools using the normative curricular model of first basic science, then applied science, then skills for practice (Schein, 1972) adopted a view of epistemology that is grounded in technical rationality, where agreement about ends is assumed, and thus training is oriented to transferring generalized, substantive knowledge. At the same time, students began to complain that they were not taught the thinking and skills of how to actually practice in real settings of law or medicine; these remained shrouded in 'mystique' and 'art'. While being taught rules, law graduates were finding that the practice of law more often required navigating bureaucracies and negotiating with other lawyers.



Thus arose the adage that often the development of professional competence occurs outside of professional school.

A second source for the sense of lack of preparation for professional practice lay in the fact that during the twentieth century the role of the professional in society underwent profound change. To function with artistry and wisdom in settings that are increasingly complex and unanticipated, professionals today require a competence that is not merely the mastery of a substantive body of knowledge, nor the initiation into a brotherhood of experts. Professional competence should be based on the capacity to learn how to learn, the ability to create a working theory that is continually modified under real-time conditions (Schein, 1972). Argyris and Schön (1974/1992) describe this as the ability to develop micro-theories of action, reflect on one's actions and then to draw conclusions about effectiveness. Schein (1972) also argues that innovators in professions are needed that can adapt to shifts in skills and technologies, can reexamine and redefine relationships to publics and clients and manage interpersonal relationships. In sum, what is most needed for modern professionals to be adaptive and responsive is practical knowledge.

Schön (1983) felt that what we consider to be practical knowledge actually is "largely tacit knowing-in-action and [...] the capacity of practitioners to respond to surprise in the midst of action through a process of on-the-spot reflection and experimentation". Psychologists would likely term this tacit knowing-in-action as implicit procedural knowledge, an area that has received increased attention in the last three decades (e.g., Stadler, 1989). Professional education needs to marry knowledge of applied science with training in reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Emphasis on the values of openness, continual inquiry and double-loop learning can counter the natural defensiveness raised when examining and transforming one's established patterns of action (Argyris and Schön, 1974/1992).

Some have described these capabilities as 'artistry' (Lang & Taylor, 2000; Schön, 1987). Superior practitioners do not necessarily have more professional knowledge, but have 'wisdom', 'intuition' and the ability to handle novel and complex areas of practice. Rather than focus on making better use of research based knowledge, Schön suggests we should carefully examine artistry, "the competence by which practitioners actually handle indeterminate zones of practice" (p. 13). "In the terrain of professional practice, applied science and research-based technique occupy a critically important though limited territory, bounded on several sides by artistry" (p. 13). These 'arts' include the art of problem framing, the art of implementation and the art of improvisation, which mediate in practice the actual application of science and technique. He goes on to argue for professional education that includes two critical pieces: learning by doing, and good coaching, as one might find in the studio tradition in the arts and design.

In sum, a model for professional education that is based in an educational model that separates theory and practice will be hampered from developing the abilities for complex, context-dependent and ethical problem framing and solving required of modern practitioners. New approaches to professional education are called for.

## 5. Cultivating Professional Artistry

How can the thinking required of modern professionals in conflict resolution best be cultivated? Two components suggested by this more recent thinking in professional education can be identified: supervised field-based reflective practice, and the formation of professional communities of inquiry.

Rather than perpetuate this artificial and restrictive separation of theory and practice, graduate programmes aimed at developing conflict resolution professionals are increasingly recognizing the importance of field-based learning. This field-based learning is not merely the final step of applying theory and research-based substantive knowledge to clinical or field settings. Rather, it involves developing the ability to frame problems 'on your feet', engage in strategic thinking informed by your knowledge and experience, reflect on this performance, and seek adjustments and improvements. Research and practice must be integrated in the act of performing.

The Association for Conflict Resolution's (ACR) Higher Education Model Guidelines Task Force Report (2012) offers guidelines for field experiences.<sup>4</sup> These field experiences may include internships, clinics, shadowing and/or service learning, and will provide both "real-world, real work experience for the student" and quality onsite supervision. The best programmes will help students integrate theory and practice, with this typically more intentionally done through clinics or faculty-supervised practicum programmes than internship programmes. The clinic or practicum structure builds in reflection on experience, as well as connecting literature and coursework in real time with the field experience. The Guidelines suggest that a typical practicum or clinical structure will:

- Provide direct service delivery
- Be course-based
- Include an initial training or teaching component to prepare students for their case involvement
- Include regular meetings with faculty instructor to review and learn from the case experiences
- Directly cultivate reflective practice on the part of the student (ACR Higher Education Guidelines Task Force, 2012: 17)

Lang and Taylor (2000), who focus in particular on mediation, describe the process of cultivating professional artistry as movement along a spiral path, passing from novice to apprentice to practitioner to artist. Those who practice with artistry, go beyond training to incorporate practices of reflection, curiosity and continual learning. "Artistry requires more than an ability to apply techniques skillfully; it also requires a grounding in theory, the discipline of reflective practice, and the purposeful application of interactive process" (p. xvii), the latter being the recognition of the influence of each person's behaviour and choices on the responses and choices of others in the interaction. Continually flowing between

4 These Guidelines are offered for professional rather than research focused graduate programmes.

interaction and reflection allows for artistry in practice. It is equally important for professional development to cultivate not only skills but awareness, described by Lang and Taylor as openness or “beginner’s mind”.

Schön (1987) describes this form of professional education as a “reflective practicum”, one that is particularly aimed at helping students develop the ability to address the messy, complex “indeterminate zones” of practice. Rather than assume there is one set of facts to which an expert can and must relate, the alternative constructivist view considers that through perceptions and beliefs a reality is constructed. Communities of practitioners engage in “worldmaking” (Goodman, 1978) through attention, setting boundaries, framing and applying professional knowledge that matches the frame. Their professional way of seeing the world maintains it. When practitioners encounter indeterminate zones, they engage in “a reflective conversation with the material of their situation” and remake part of their practice world, also revealing the “tacit processes of world-making that underlie all of their practice” (Schön, 1987, p. 36). When someone learns a profession, he or she learns not only its systematic knowledge, but also its procedural knowledge – its ‘patterns of knowing-in-action’. Ideally this will include what to do when your textbook has no clear answer.

Such a practicum is designed for learning a practice. It involves learning by doing, interacting with coaches and fellow students, and gaining background knowledge. Students learn to recognize competent practice. Students ‘practice’ in both senses of the word, engaging in repetition. Students benefit by being coached. As Dewey (1974) stressed, a student

has to *see* on his own behalf and in his own way the relationship between means and methods employed and results achieved. Nobody else can see for him, and he can’t see just by being ‘told’, although the right kind of telling may guide his seeing and thus help him see what he needs to see. (p. 151)

Schön (1987) says students should

learn a kind of reflection-in-action that goes beyond storable rules – not only by devising new methods of reasoning, [...] but also by constructing and testing new categories of understanding, strategies of action, and ways of framing problems. (p. 39)

Once students are comfortable with the familiar, coaches help by focusing in on the complex, the confusing, the novel, and how to have “reflective conversations with the materials of the situation”.

A second critical component for cultivating professional practice is the creation of a community of inquiry. Knowledge must not only be shared, but must be vetted and must accumulate. Community already is core to the notion of a profession, in that it is a community of practitioners with a specialized knowledge that sets them apart. However, a profession also can be seen as similar to a scientific community, in that its knowledge is vetted and verified communally. Philosophers of science have confirmed the transition for scientists from a notion of

objectivity to *intersubjectivity* – the closest approximation to ‘truth’ is knowledge which is held by many and confirmed by a community of inquiry. Knowledge is a community product: “all contemporary accounts of science agree that science is a social enterprise, carried on with communities of inquiry according to practices or rules for distinguishing valid from invalid claims” (Argyris *et al.*, 1985: 11). Learning is public, shared and cumulative.

As with communities of scientists, a community of practitioners can serve this function for each other. However, this means overcoming three inclinations of professionals. The first inclination is to remain unreflective about how and why they engage in dimensions of practice, operating on unexamined and unexpressed tacit knowledge. This leads to the second inclination, the lack of accumulation of new learning and the seeking out of new knowledge. The final inclination is to become proprietary about knowledge that has been made explicit. Thus Argyris and Schön (1974/1992) argue that in contrast to a scientific community’s public, explicit and cumulative approach to developing scientific theory, professionals learning about effective practice is a process that is often private, tacit and ephemeral.<sup>5</sup>

The danger in the lack of reflection is that theories of practice become, in Argyris and Schön’s terms, “self-sealing”. There becomes no way to test their validity and usefulness, because their basic tenets are not examined or questioned. There is little learning and little behavioural change, and the learning is only that which preserves governing variables and the model or approach. This is what they term single-loop learning. Practitioners need to learn to test their assumptions and their theories of action. “Each situation of practice is an opportunity for testing some elements of theory of action. Acting is testing, and the practitioner is an experimenter” (p. 159). However, they must be tested in such a way that guards against withholding or avoiding disconfirming evidence. “There is no way of doing this for ourselves without doing it for and with others” (p. 161).

Haas (1992) describes how communities of professionals may also become *epistemic communities*. He defines these as “[...] a network of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area” (p. 3); epistemic communities in this sense arose particularly through professionalization of government agencies. Members of epistemic communities share (a) a set of normative and principled beliefs, forming the value basis for their actions, (b) causal beliefs derived from analyzing the practices that contribute to the central problems in their domain, that then suggest linkages between actions (particularly policy actions) and outcomes, (c) notions of validity, as internally defined criteria that identify valid knowledge in their domain, and (d) a common enterprise or set of practices associated with the set of problems on which their professional competence is focused, in order to better enhance human welfare. Epistemic communities are also vulnerable to the tendency to be ‘self-sealing’.

5 Argyris and Schön (1974/1992) also observe, however, that “the scientific community has been far more public, explicit, and cumulative in developing scientific theory than in learning about the practice of scientific research” (p. 144).

Critical to effective inquiry is the willingness to reflect on and critique operating assumptions. By considering scientific epistemology/rationality as the social practices of scientific communities (Kuhn, 1962/1970), one sees a connection between science and practical deliberation (Argyris *et al.*, 1985). One also can see a connection between what Argyris and Schön describe as double-loop learning, when operating paradigms are questioned, and what Kuhn calls abnormal or revolutionary science, when common criteria for reaching agreement are themselves in dispute and the role of value conflict becomes more obvious. By blurring the artificial line between research and practice, we see that in the same way that scientific communities operate with some characteristics of social practice, communities of social practice can effectively operate with some of the norms and procedures of knowledge generation and testing used by scientific communities. Argyris *et al.* (1985) argue for creating communities of inquiry in communities of practice. Such communities engage in the search for reliable and valid information, though focused on enhancing practical knowledge rather than generalized and abstract (nomothetic) knowledge, and do so by “creating conditions for public testing and potential disconfirmation of knowledge claims” (p. 34). The degree to which a practice community reflects on its own “rules and norms of inquiry” will determine its capacity for learning.

Critical to this condition is the cultivation and maintenance of forums for sharing of knowledge and ongoing continuing professional education. Various forms of knowing are needed, including substantive knowledge, procedural knowledge or knowing-in-action, and meta-level knowledge that includes the review and critique of the ways of knowing themselves. Learning must include learning-by-doing, with a critical role played by coaching (Dewey, 1974). Where can this type of knowledge cumulation, reflection and learning take place for the profession of conflict resolution?

Opportunities that might serve the purpose of forming real or virtual communities for reflection and continual learning are many. First, professional organizations, having evolved beyond serving as a mere ‘brotherhood of initiates’, also can provide opportunities for reflection, mutual learning, coaching and double-loop learning. Such activities most frequently occur at professional meetings or conferences,<sup>6</sup> but increasingly occur online through webinars, chat rooms, blogs and learning portals.<sup>7</sup>

Second, university-hosted forums and symposia offer a local or regional site for professionals to convene, hear about the newest relevant research, and share their accumulated knowledge-in-action in a way that encourages vetting and evidence/empirical support.

Finally, journals such as this one play a critical role in providing a similar forum that relies on evidence-based reflection and discussion within the profes-

6 Professional conferences focused on various forms of conflict resolution practice include those of the American Arbitration Association, American Bar Association-Alternative Dispute Resolution section, Association for Conflict Resolution and its sections, Alliance for Peacebuilding, International Association for Public Participation, and National Coalition on Dialogue and Deliberation.

7 For example, <[www.dmeformpeace.org](http://www.dmeformpeace.org)> is a location where peacebuilding professionals share knowledge, reflection, and coaching on topics of program design, monitoring, and evaluation.

sional community. Peer review encourages a standard of writing, logic and argumentation. However, discussions in print allow more universal access and participation, regardless of location, time zone, or schedule constraints, when compared to the direct, synchronous convening provided by other forums outlined above. Journals play important roles in scientific communities (Schaffner, 1994), many of which could be constructively replicated in professional communities such as conflict resolution. By extension, the roles for journals in professional communities could include the following:

- Building a collective knowledge base that is comprehensive and up-to-date,
- Communicating information among the community members, despite an increase in online forms of communication,<sup>8</sup>
- Validating the quality of research and inquiry, and setting and maintaining community norms around how knowledge is deemed reliable and valid,
- Distributing rewards, or perhaps more germane here, establishing paternity or maternity for ideas and approaches when credit is the currency for status and/or advancement, and
- Building community – through defining the intellectual territory, providing a place to discuss issues in the field such as findings, implications, training and funding, and alerting the community to new positions and the passing of members. In epistemic communities of professional practice, this role may also include defining shared normative and principled beliefs.

In conclusion, acknowledging conflict resolution as a profession highlights associated responsibilities around knowledge accumulation and ethical practice. Complexities of modern practice call for reuniting theory, research and practice, and updating our professional educational paradigm. Competent modern conflict resolution professionals must be able to innovate and adapt to novel and complex contexts, and must develop communities of inquiry for learning that is public, shared and cumulative. Because of the time constraints facing many professionals, and the lack of structure for reflection, a combination of direct community conversation and periodic journal perusal would likely be the most realistic for nurturing the needed reflection, continual learning and paradigm critique that results in system learning by the community of conflict resolution professionals.

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# Crises and Opportunities:

## Six Contemporary Challenges for Increasing Probabilities for Sustainable Peace

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### Abstract

*The news from the field of peace and conflict studies is mixed. It is evident that the increasing complexity, interdependence and technological sophistication of conflict, violence and war today introduce many new challenges to peace-keeping, making and building. However, it is also likely that these trends present new opportunities for fostering and sustaining peace. If our field is to capitalize on such prospects, it will need to more effectively understand and address several basic dilemmas inherent to how we approach our work. This paper outlines six contemporary challenges, and suggests some options for addressing them.*

**Keywords:** Conflict resolution, peace, evidence-based practice, gender, systems.

Reports from the field suggest that the impact of our scholarship on conflict-resolution and peace practices over the past several decades is producing mixed results. The good news is that the international community recently experienced a dramatic increase in the number of wars ending through negotiation rather than through unilateral military victory (Ricigliano, 2012). In fact, these numbers flipped after the Cold War; by 2006, twice as many wars ended through negotiation than ended through military victory (Mason *et al.*, 2007). From 1988 to 2003, more wars ended through negotiation than had in the previous two centuries (United Nations [UN], 2004), and the introduction of peacekeeping troops after signed treaties has proven to have a substantial positive effect on the duration of peace agreements (Mason *et al.*, 2011; Quinn *et al.*, 2007). After peaking in 1991, the number of civil wars had dropped roughly 40% by 2003 (UN, 2004). This seems to indicate that local, regional and international peacemakers have an increasing positive influence on peaceful relations.

However, the bad news is that over 25% of the wars ending through negotiations relapse into violence within five years (Suhrke and Samset, 2007). In some cases, such as in Rwanda and Angola, more people were harmed and killed after peace agreements were ratified by the parties and then failed than before (Stedman *et al.*, 2002). And these failed-peace states can begin an unprecedented phase of downward spiral. States with civil wars in their history are far more likely to

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experience renewed violence (Mason *et al.*, 2007), and the longer such conflicts last, the greater the chances of recurrence of war (Collier, 2000; Zartman, 2005). Furthermore, after a high annual incidence of signed peace agreements during the 1990s and early 2000s (Harbom *et al.*, 2006), the number dropped dramatically from 10 annually to 1–2 between 2008 and 2011 (Wallensteen, 2011). Such low figures had not been recorded since 1987, before the end of the Cold War.

While it is hard to pinpoint the exact cause of these roller-coaster peace statistics, it is evident that the increasing complexity, interdependence and technological sophistication of conflict, violence and war today introduce many new challenges to peace-keeping, making and building. However, it is also likely that these trends present new opportunities for fostering and sustaining peace. Still, if our field is to capitalize on such prospects, it will need to more effectively understand and address several basic dilemmas inherent to how we approach our work. This paper outlines six contemporary challenges, and suggests some options for addressing them.

## 1. Experience-Based or Evidence-Based?

In 2009, I organized a meeting of 20 conflict-management/peace-building practitioners and 20 complexity scientists (physicists, applied mathematicians, etc.) to discuss systemic approaches to conflict transformation in Nepal. The first day was a near-disaster. The divide between the hard-scientists studying complex systems and the practitioners applying systems-thinking with stakeholders on the ground was vast. The meeting quickly polarized into two equally proud and somewhat condescending groups. The peace-builders championed the use of complex-systems mapping with stakeholders, which the scientists described as uninformed ‘performance art’. The scientists advocated for the use of evidence-based concepts, principles and methods, which the practitioners found overly abstract, obscure and impractical. And the problem was they were both right.

Our field is undergoing a science-practice crisis not unlike what the field of medicine underwent in 1910, when the scandalous Flexner Report revealed a vast drift between clinical science and medical practice (Carey, 2001). In the 1990s, an evaluation of the 18 mostly university-based Hewlett Foundation-funded Theory Centers that conduct research in the area of conflict resolution found that the work of most practitioners surveyed had been largely unaffected by the contributions generated by the various Centers (new theory, tactics, publications, etc.). At the same time, much of the research conducted at these Centers was found to be ‘removed from practice realities and constraints’. Today as a result, many practitioners of conflict resolution dismiss the contributions of theorists and researchers, particularly when research findings challenge their own models or methods. At the same time, scholars often fail to utilize the expertise of skilled practitioners in their development of theory, and research studies often neglect what practitioners and policy makers want or need to know. This means that too few of the models studied systematically today are sufficiently informed by the practical realities of actual conflict, and that current practices employed in the field have

been insufficiently informed by research, which could help determine if they actually do what we think they do and how to make them most effective.

This challenge is a reflection of the fact that scholars and practitioners tend to come from different disciplinary backgrounds, often have divergent goals (scholars tend to seek truths in patterns of data, and practitioners want to know what works now), have had vastly different formative experiences (labs vs. trenches), and therefore often hold widely different worldviews and speak incompatible languages (Deutsch, 2000). So what is a high-stakes field such as ours to do – depend on empirical science or informed practice?

The answer of course is both. It is critical that our field better organize to enhance the opportunities and quality of scholar-practitioner collaboration and dialogue in order to better capitalize on the context-specific process expertise of practitioners, while benefitting from the accumulated knowledge of seventy-plus years of increasingly sophisticated systematic research. How? Here are two examples: one from academia and one from the world of practice.

In response to the growing gap between theory and practice cited in the Hewlett report, our Center, the *International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution* at Columbia University, began convening an informal seminar with academics and practitioners on conflict resolution theory and practice. The lively (and tense) discussions from this seminar extended the thinking of all involved and inspired the development and publication of several editions of *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice* (Deutsch and Coleman, 2000; Deutsch et al., 2006, forthcoming). The chapters of the book each begin by presenting the theoretical ideas derived from empirical research in each substantive area (interdependence, justice, power, etc.), then draw out the implications of these ideas for understanding conflict, and then conclude with the translation of these ideas for educating or training people to manage their conflicts more constructively. Every six to seven years, a new edition is then generated to reflect recent advances in science and practice.

On the practice side, The Mediation Support Unit (MSU) of the United Nations Department of Political Affairs, a system-wide asset that assists mediation initiatives of the UN, member states, regional/sub-regional organizations and NGOs, recently reached out to connect with a select group of Academics to form an Academic Advisory Council on mediation aimed at closing the gap between the academic community and operational support. The intent of the Council is to create a means for the operational support provided by MSU to benefit from the research and analysis of academic institutions on mediation and conflict resolution, and for such institutions to benefit from insights and experience-based knowledge from the ground; insights that could, in turn, help inform and focus research. The Academic Advisory Council was launched in the fall of 2012, and is comprised of select academic institutions from around the globe with established quantitative and qualitative tools related to mediation, conflict and peace processes from different regions reflecting different perspectives.

Theory-practice projects such as these are rarely easy but often critical. Returning to our Nepal meeting, after the first of day of grandstanding by the subgroups we were able to come together and, ultimately, learn and advance our

thinking considerably. The academics came to appreciate and value the grounded-insights of the practitioners, and the practitioners gained from the precise distinctions offered by the scientists.

## 2. Mechanistic or Holistic?

For well over a hundred years, scholars have debated the relative value of two distinct scientific paradigms: The atomistic-mechanistic approach versus the holistic-systems approach. Generally speaking, the first approach, influenced by the likes of Descartes and the maxims of formal logic, emphasized the importance of the analysis or breaking-apart of phenomena like conflict and peace into their micro-component parts and the search for linear, causal mechanisms and relationships. This orientation pinpoints more stable variables – attitudes, structures, policies, etc. – and attempts to identify their direct, typically short-term effects on phenomena of interest. It is evident in such schools as Newtonian physics, structuralism in psychology, and realism in international affairs (Deutsch, 1969).

In contrast, more holistic approaches of Field Theory in physics, Gestalt psychology and multi-level theories of organizational science and international affairs stress the importance of understanding how fields of forces and elements come together and organize to effect phenomena. This ‘systems’ approach has roots in Taoism, dialecticism and Aristotelian holism, and emphasizes how contradictory elements operate in tension to shape and drive systems through non-linear networks of causation. These complex systems can evidence non-linear dynamics such as emergence, self-organization, catastrophic change, and the unintended consequences of actions (Coleman, 2011; Vallacher *et al.*, forthcoming), which are largely inconsistent with linear or mechanistic models.

For instance, mechanistic research on conflict resolution would hypothesize that if we can train mediators to *listen* more carefully (X) in conflict it will lead to better outcomes (Y). It would predict X will lead to Y, a valid hypothesis. However, holistic-researchers would argue that whether social conflicts are resolved effectively rarely depends on one thing causing another to happen. The resolution of most conflicts usually depend on many things: the character of the people involved, their prior relationship, the nature of the issues, the situation, the processes employed, cultural norms, and any number of other background issues. In fact, what the future of these conflicts might *really* depend on is how these many things interact and work together; that is, how the whole puzzle does or does not fit together. This would be especially likely with complicated, long-term conflicts involving many people and many issues, in different situations, which keep changing over time.

Which is the more valid approach? Again, both.

There is a basic value in science called *parsimony*, which means that we seek and prefer the simplest possible explanations of phenomena whenever possible. As worthy as this value is, it has led many scholars to seek out ‘the simple and sovereign theory’ to explain destructive conflict and peace in terms of one over-

arching factor or variable (Fisher, 1990). While this approach has generated important insights into aspects of causal relations inherent to peace and conflict, the relative importance of these components is too often overstated; and the nature of the relationships *among* the many parts is poorly understood. As George Bernard Shaw once said: "For every complex problem there is a simple solution that is wrong."

Alternatively, systems-theorists have sought to identify the universe of variables relevant to conflict, its occurrence, escalation and de-escalation. This has been an important step because it provides some sense of the context of conflict processes. As useful as this development has been, however, it often hits a dead end. The product of these efforts has often been extremely complex, multilevel models featuring a multitude of boxes and variables connected by a web of lines, loops and arrows. These models do provide a sense of context, but it is hard to know what to take away from them other than the fact that everything is related to everything else.

Today, it has become increasingly clear that understanding conflict and peace dynamics requires a combination of both orientations: the mechanistic and systemic. We need to recognize how a few central factors in conflict operate within a force field of many other variables, all pulling and pushing at the same time: *parsimony informed by complexity*. This is no small matter. As Vaclav Havel once said: "Simple answers which lie on this side of life's complexities are cheap. However, simple truths which exist beyond this complexity, and are illuminated by it, are worthy of a lifetime's commitment."

This is an idea reflected in what Andrzej Nowak has termed *dynamical minimalism* (Nowak, 2004). It suggests that very complex things, such as epidemics, hazardous weather patterns or mob behaviour at sporting events, can sometimes be understood by a few simple rules that demonstrate how the basic components of a problem interact over time. The objective of this approach is to see through the complexity of a phenomenon to find the minimal set of mechanisms that can account for that complexity. Its goal is *simplicity informed by complexity*. Obviously, identifying the few mechanisms or processes responsible for something as complex as a protracted social conflict is no small feat. At one level they are immensely complex, involving multiple elements all linked and interacting with one another and changing over time. But at another more basic level, these conflict dynamics may be quite simple.

This is where we have found the worlds of mechanistic science and holistic science meet. The former helps us to identify key parameters from causal, linear research that may account for significant qualitative changes in conflict and peace dynamics. However, the latter allows us to test the effects of these variables in context and over time, to ascertain those parameters whose effects are greatest and most durable.

Ideally, this mechanistic-holistic hybrid approach might provide a platform for addressing a related crisis in our field – the fact that even though many of the peace projects we launch in the field are successful in that they achieve their specified objectives (termed peace writ little – pwl; Chigas and Woodrow, 2009), they often seem to have little visible or measureable impact on sustainable peace

at the macro-level (termed Peace Writ Large – PWL). This challenge goes to the heart of the utility of our field and may very well determine its future viability.

### 3. Conflict or Peace?

Today, we know very little about peace. Why? Because we do not study peace. We study war, violence, aggression and conflict – and peace in the context of those states and processes – but few study peace directly (Fry, 2007).

Here is a cautionary tale. For well over a decade, the noted psychologist and mathematician John Gottman and his colleagues in his ‘Love Lab’ in Seattle, Washington studied married couples and theorized about marriage and divorce (Gottman *et al.*, 2002). Eventually, they developed a robust mathematical model for predicting divorce in married couples, which was 97% predictive. The researchers felt very satisfied about this accomplishment until they realized something odd: their model did not predict happiness in marriage (Gottman and Silver, 1999). They had been able to isolate the basic conditions which predicted divorce (or no divorce), but the opposite of these conditions did not predict marital bliss. When they realized the error of their assumptions they developed a programme of extensive study of happily married couples. After 16 years of studying marital happiness and stability, they came to understand more clearly that the predictors of each, divorce versus happiness, were not opposites, but were in fact qualitatively different conditions.

We believe the same to be true for peace. In a recent set of studies we conducted in Israel and the Palestinian Territories investigating the motives that drive people to support negotiations to end the conflict versus those that motivate them to work actively for improved relations and peace, we found something similar to Gottman. Employing the unique method of *Rule Development Experimentation* to assess motives (see Moskowitz and Goffman, 2007), we found that the reasons Israelis and Palestinians are motivated to end conflict are fundamentally different from and independent of the reasons they are motivated to make and sustain peace (Coleman *et al.*, Working Paper). They are not opposites – the drivers for peace and the drivers for conflict – but are in fact fundamentally different motives. This means that the seventy plus decades of systematic research that has been conducted on the conditions that promote and prevent war, violence, aggression and conflict, although important and useful, are only half the story. It also means we have yet to really understand peace comprehensively.

It is not that psychology, international affairs and related fields have not been concerned with peace; on the contrary. In fact, scholarship on the psychology of peace has been accumulating for decades and several thousand research studies have been conducted in this area since the end of the Cold War. However, this research has been predominantly *problem-focused*. In other words, the approach employed through these decades of research on peace has focused primarily on addressing and preventing the *problems* associated with conflict and violence and not on the *solutions* associated with peace. Even the idea of *positive peace*, first put forth by Johann Galtung (1985) to distinguish it from *negative*

peace or attempts to eliminate overt forms of violence, fundamentally concerns problems of injustice and oppression and the needs for 'a more equitable social order that meets the basic needs and rights of all people'. This work has been necessary and critically important. However, a basic assumption inherent to this approach is that if we can gain a sophisticated enough understanding of the problems of conflict, violence, oppression and war that we will better understand, and be better able to foster and sustain, peace. But will we?

Take the case of The *Global Peace Index* (GPI), a recent attempt by the international community to measure the relative position of nations' and regions' peacefulness. It is the product of the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) and developed in consultation with an international panel of peace experts with data collected and collated by the Economist Intelligence Unit. The list was launched first in May 2007, then again every year from 2008 to 2012, and ranks 158 countries around the world according to their peacefulness. This year the *Global Peace Index* for the first time included a *Positive Peace Index* (PPI), which looks at attitudes, institutions and structures that, when strengthened, can improve a country's peacefulness.

The good news is that the PPI is oriented to societal resilience, measuring eight Pillars of Peace including (1) well-functioning government, (2) sound business environment, (3) equitable distribution of resources, (4) acceptance of the rights of others, (5) good relations with neighbours, (6) free flow of information, (7) high levels of education and (8) low levels of corruption. So the intention to measure positive states is there.

The bad news is that on most social dimensions, the PPI still measures only the absence of problems. For example, the PPI's approach to measuring 'good neighbor relations' and 'acceptance of other's rights' uses two indices from the *Indices of Social Development* from the International Institute of Social Studies. The measure for safety and trust (an index of good neighbour relations) reads:

We measure personal security and trust by using data on general social trust from a wide variety of surveys, indicators of trustworthiness such as reported levels of crime victimisation, survey responses on feelings of safety and security in one's neighbourhood, data on the incidence of homicide, and risk reports on the likelihood of physical attack, extortion, or robbery. (<[www.indsocdev.org/interpersonal-safety-and-trust.html](http://www.indsocdev.org/interpersonal-safety-and-trust.html)>)

Regarding the measure of intergroup cohesion (an index of acceptance of other's rights), it reads:

We measure intergroup cohesion using data on inter-group disparities, perceptions of being discriminated against, and feelings of distrust against members of other groups. ISD also use data on the number of reported incidents of riots, terrorist acts, assassinations, and kidnappings; agency ratings on the likelihood of civil disorder, terrorism and social instability; and reported levels of engagement in violent riots, strikes, and confrontations. (<[www.indsocdev.org/intergroup-cohesion.html](http://www.indsocdev.org/intergroup-cohesion.html)>)

And in a recent study, the PPI was found to be strongly correlated with the GPI, thus questioning the PPI's discriminant validity (Druckman, personal communication).

So why are we stuck on measuring problems despite the recognition of the need to assess positive states? First, as humans, fear is simply more primal and basic than hope (Jarymowicz and Bar-Tal, 2006). Brain research has shown that fear reactions to threat are triggered sooner and in a more primitive place in the brain (amygdala) than experiences of hope and optimism, which are considered secondary emotions experienced more downstream (Damasio, 2003, 2004; Snyder, 2000). So we are in fact hard-wired to focus on problems and threats first.

Second, there are definitional problems with peace. For example, a search of the *Thomson Reuters Web of Knowledge* database on articles published in English since 2000 with 'peace' in the their title reveals over 40 terms distinguishing different types or aspects of peace. This is more than a matter of semantics. Peace can differ in a variety of ways, including by level (interpersonal to international to global peace), direction (internal and external peace), durability (from fragile to enduring peace), source or conditions (peace through coercion, democratic participation, economic incentive, etc.), type (negative, positive and promotive peace) and scope (local to global peace). So even though the PPI is attempting to assess an 'optimal environment for human well-being and potential to flourish' (a decent definition of peace), it is still assuming that the absence of negatives (crime, discrimination, rights violations) is sufficient to create such environments.

Third, it matters who is doing the measuring. Many scholarly disciplines operate on a set of basic, often unquestioned assumptions about cause and effect, the nature of human motivation, and what constitutes ideal, positive states. In economics and political science, a prevention-focus (avoiding harmful problems) is primary. Until recently, this was also true in other areas of the social sciences such as anthropology and psychology when movements to study positive processes and states came more into vogue (Fry, 2006; Gottman *et al.*, 2002; Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

So where do we go from here? Again, in both directions simultaneously. Although most people feel certain that peaceful relations are the opposite of contentious ones, research tells us that they are often *simultaneously present* in our lives. Even though we can usually only attend to one or the other, the underlying potential for both exists in many relationships. In fact, they tend to operate in ways that are mostly independent of one another. In other words, conflict and peace are not opposites. They are two prospective and independent ways of being and relating – the two alternative realities. This suggests that people can be at war and at peace at the same time. Even during periods of intense fighting between divorcing couples, work colleagues, ethnic gangs, or Palestinians and Israelis, there exist hidden potentials in the relationships – latent patterns – that are in fact alternative tendencies for relating to one another (Coleman, 2011; Vallacher *et al.*, 2010, 2013). We see evidence of this when people or groups move

very quickly from caring for each other to despising one another, or when the opposite occurs.

The point is that our actions in a conflict can have very different effects on three distinct aspects of the peace and conflict landscape: on the current situation (the levels of hostility and harmony in relations right now), on the longer-term potential for positive relations (positive potentialities), and on the longer-term potential for negative relations. All three can have a life of their own. This idea suggests that we need to develop separate but complementary strategies for (1) addressing the current state of a conflict, (2) increasing the probabilities for constructive relations between the parties in the future and (3) decreasing the probabilities for destructive future encounters. Most attempts at addressing destructive conflict target numbers one and three, but often neglect to increase the probability for future positive relations. They are aimed at stopping present suffering and avoiding future pain. But without sufficient attention to the bolstering of attractors for positive relations between parties, progress in addressing the conflict and eliminating future conflict will only be temporary.

#### **4. Men or Women?**

In the spring of 2012, I attended a high-level meeting of representatives of the member states of the United Nations organized to launch a new report on UN mediation. In the afternoon, they offered a special eight-person panel session on the importance of the role of women in UN mediation. This was partially in response to UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UN, 2000), passed in 2000, which required that women be involved in all peace negotiations and post-conflict rebuilding strategies at all levels in all conflicts going forward. However, at that afternoon's panel-session, none of the panellists were women.

Unfortunately, this is quite typical in our field. The role of women in peace is championed verbally by our leaders, policy makers, academics, NGOs, and most recently the Nobel Peace Prize Commission, while women, in fact, remain marginalized in our scholarship, leadership and decision-making structures related to peace, particularly in the more elite settings of state and international affairs. On the one hand this makes sense given that men are the primary actors and perpetrators of violence and war, and therefore should perhaps bear the responsibility for its mitigation. However, given that women and girls bare the greatest brunt of wars (Rehn and Sirleaf, 2002; UN, 2000, 2008, 2011; The World Bank, 2011), perhaps it is time they (1) become recognized for the considerable work they do to keep, make and build peace, and (2) be allowed parity in access to formal peace processes.

The extraordinary role that Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Leymah Gbowee and the Women's International Peace Network (WIPN) played in the peace process in Liberia in the early 2000s is a striking example of both the presence and absence of women in peace (see Disney and Gbowee, 2012; Gbowee and Mithers, 2011). Ms. Gbowee helped lead an ordinary group of Christian and Muslim women – mothers, aunts and grandmothers – to organize amid the gruelling, protracted



armed conflict in Liberia, with no formal authority and few 'hard' resources – help mobilize and shepherd the peace process between the Liberian government of strongman Charles Taylor and the armed rebels. When the peace treaty was eventually signed, the women then re-organized to help ensure implementation of the agreement in villages across the country. Eventually, the WIPN became known throughout Liberia as a major force for peace. For example, at one point during the war, UN peacekeepers were stuck in a protracted gun battle with rebel forces in the jungle and could see no way out. They contacted the WIPN, whose members arrived at the scene in their standard white T-shirts and headdresses. The women then entered the jungle with hands raised, dancing and singing. After spending two days there, feeding and speaking with the rebels, the women brought the rebels out of the jungle, ending the stalemate.

But one of the most extraordinary facts about these 'ordinary' women is that, prior to 2008, few members of the international community – beyond Liberia – had ever heard of Ms. Gbowee and the WIPN. Although their feats were legion within Liberia, the story of the Liberian peace process told in the rest of the world somehow – remarkably – omitted the role of the WIPN. This invisible tale was eventually captured and shared on film by a group of documentary filmmakers (who happened to be women) entitled *Pray the Devil Back to Hell* (<[www.praythediavilbacktohell.com/](http://www.praythediavilbacktohell.com/)>), which aired as part of a series on PBS's *Frontline* in 2011 called *Women in War*. Today, the film has been shown to women living in zones of protracted conflict around the world as a stimulus for discussions of the potential role (or existing but unrecognized parts) women can play in realizing peace.

As Disney and Gbowee (2012) wrote,

So what the women accomplished in Liberia may be remarkable, but it is also understandable. It has also been done in many other times and places, most often without having been noted in official accounts of the events. A historical example of such action by African women is the infamous 'Aba women's riot' in October of 1929; when the women of Aba in Eastern Nigeria demonstrated against high taxes and low prices of Nigerian export. This is one of the most poignant examples in West Africa of women using their numerical strength, ability to mobilize and traditional role to advocate for inclusion on an issue affecting their lives [...] Women have a special relationship to peace because peace is necessary for them to do what they need to do in a culture. And whether that relationship is on the second X chromosome or in the way we raise our girls and boys to adulthood, it hardly matters. Women fight for peace because peace is what they must have to do their jobs. (p. 201)

Once again, the choice is a false one. Men and women are allies for peace, and the sooner we recognize this – and actually act on it – the better.

## 5. Rationality or Emotion?

Decades of research on social conflict have championed the importance of cognitive processes like stereotyping, attitudes, schemas, analysis, planning on conflict management, yet paid little attention to the role of emotions (Barry and Oliver, 1996; Coleman *et al.*, 2009). This has resulted in many practical techniques offering recommendations like 'If you become emotional during conflict, wait until it passes before you act' or 'Rise above your emotions and try to get a *rational* perspective on the situation'. This advice may be useful when emotions are a passing anomaly or inconvenience as they are in many low-level conflicts. But not when emotions are basic, not when they are enmeshed within the conflict, not when they *are* the rationale. To really comprehend such conflicts we need research models that place emotions at the center. We need models that not only see emotions as the energy behind the conflicts, but also recognize that they create the context through which we experience conflict.

To be clear, I am not suggesting that emotions are not simply important considerations in conflict. They fundamentally *are the issue* in most conflicts as they often set the stage for destructive or constructive interactions. In fact, research on emotions and decision making with patients suffering from severe brain injuries found that when people lose the capacity to experience emotions, they also lose their ability to make important decisions (Bechara, 2004). Emotions are not only relevant to our decisions in conflict, they are *central* to them.

Fortunately, recent laboratory research on emotions and conflict dynamics tells a consistent tale; it is the ratio that matters (Gottman *et al.*, 2002; Losada and Heaphy, 2004). It is not necessarily how negative or how positive people feel about each other that really matters in conflict; it is the *ratio* of their positivity to negativity *over time*. Studies show that healthy couples and functional, innovative workgroups will have disagreements and experience some degree of negativity in their relationships. That is normal, and in fact people usually need to experience this in order to learn and develop in their relationships. However, these negative encounters must occur within the context of a sufficient amount of positive emotions for the relationships to be functional. And because negative encounters have such an inordinately strong impact on people and relationships, there have to be significantly more positive experiences to offset the negative ones.

Scholars have found that disputants in ongoing relationships need somewhere between three and a half to five positive experiences for every negative one, to keep the negative encounters from becoming harmful (Gottman *et al.*, 2002; Losada and Heaphy, 2004). They need to have enough emotional positivity in reserve. Without this, the negative encounters will accumulate (rapidly), helping to create wide and deep patterns for destructive relations. At the same time, any positive encounters will dissipate and have little effect on future positive relations. This can result in relationships with overwhelming negative attraction. In other words, intractable conflicts (Coleman, 2011).

Once again, it is not that cognitive processes associated with conflict analysis, negotiation planning, integrative problem-solving, and so forth are not crucial to peace and conflict. They are. But they have also been the main story we focus in in

most research and practice. And this story fails to recognize what cognitive science has now been telling us for over 20 years (Bechara, 2004; Lakoff and Johnson, 1999): emotions establish the context for our cognitive processing of information.

## 6. Disciplinary or Multidisciplinary?

Alcoholics Anonymous has a saying that they share with their addicted members that “We are only as sick as our secrets”. When it comes to our professional disciplinary training in peace and conflict, I like to say “We are only as sick (or limited) as our assumptions.” That is, when it comes to conflict and peace, each of us has developed our own preferred metaphors, approaches and models. We may not be aware of them, but we have them, nevertheless. I once interviewed an eminent international peacemaker who said to me, “I don’t have any use for models or theories in my work”. He then went on to describe his model to me, in detail, which involved dealing with every situation anew on its own terms. It was a *non-model* model (a situational-contingency model), but an implicit model nevertheless.

Our implicit models usually come from some combination of our formative personal or professional experiences with conflict (including how we saw our parents, teachers, coaches, politicians, etc. model how to deal with conflict), or else from our formal education – from how we were trained to see problems and solve them. Experience has shown that engineers, physicians, military officers, social workers, teachers, therapists, political scientists, diplomats, economists, union organizers, and so on all see and approach conflicts in distinctly different ways. They all bring to conflict their own *metaphors* and *frames* – ways of seeing and thinking (Goffman, 1974; Morgan, 1997). These frames often highlight certain aspects of conflict situations and ignore others, as they shape our sense of reality and of what is and is not relevant to a solution. Some emphasize power and politics, some relationships, some economics and scarce resources, some trauma, and others stress community rituals, chemical imbalances or childhood experiences. In fact, cognitive scientists tell us that our frames are often stronger determinants of our perceptions and actions in social situations than the facts on the ground are! As the linguist George Lakoff has put it, “frames trump facts”.

Of course, there is no *one* right way to view and solve conflicts. But some ways are certainly better (or at least less consequential) than others, and any one frame or approach, whether political, spiritual, psychological, economic, or otherwise, is unlikely to be sufficient to comprehend and address peace or complex, long-term and volatile conflicts. These require both a mindfulness of our own frames and an ability to work collaboratively with others who see things differently.

This, again (and finally), requires a both-and-approach. It requires that we train students within their disciplines to be the best and most informed psychologists, anthropologists, economists, political scientists, biologists, physicists, lawyers, epidemiologists, etc. they can be, so that they can bring to bear the best their field has to offer to the understanding of peace and conflict. *And* it requires

that we train them to be able to work across disciplines. To be able to problematize, conceptualize, communicate, design, conduct research, and intervene collaboratively with experts from other disciplines – and to learn from one another – in order to bring our best, synthesized understanding to the many social problems and challenges of our time.

## 7. Managing our Dilemmas

The six dilemmas presented here are merely representative of the many tensions that exist at the core of our field. However, it is not simply the presence of these polarities that challenge our work, but rather our human attempts to manage them that generate unintended consequences.

Theoretically, there are five possible responses to such dilemmas (Peng and Nesbitt, 1999). The first is *denial*, a common response which entails ignoring the contradiction or pretending it does not exist. This can have short-term benefits (as in the temporary management of anxiety) and long-term negative consequences (such as intensification of the problem). The second is *discounting*, where people distrust or discount information from one side of the dilemma because of the difficulty of reconciling the contradiction. The third and most common, *differentiation*, involves a comparison of both sides of the dilemma resulting in a polarized decision that, ultimately, one side is right and the other is wrong. Psychologists have suggested that people – and particularly Westerners – often prefer this process as a manner of reducing the cognitive dissonance caused by holding two such contradictory cognitions (Festinger, 1957; Peng and Nesbitt, 1999).

The remaining two responses, dialectical and dialogical thinking, are both attempts at managing these dilemmas by acknowledging the value of both perspectives and retaining basic elements of both. *Dialectics* is a philosophy where phenomena are thought to be defined by and seen as generating their opposite (such as life and death, day and night, war and peace), and are thought to exist in a constantly changing state of tension and balance (see Morgan, 1997). A dialectical course of change is essentially conflictual in that it proposes that all stages or states of being and relating are ‘overcome’ as life proceeds through a “spiral-like ascension defined by the triad thesis/antithesis/synthesis” (Toscano, 1998: 70). Thus, conflicts are seen as driven by oppositional forces that can be overcome, transformed and integrated with each other on an ongoing basis. As such, conflicts are seen as resolvable through a synthesis of the opposing sides of the dilemma. This is a basic assumption of most models of conflict resolution, including integrative negotiation (e.g., win-win solutions), mediation and problem-solving workshops (Toscano, 1998).

The philosophy of *dialogics* takes a similar view of the importance of contradiction in change, but differs in its perspective on the relations and dynamics between opposites. Based on the work of the Russian analyst Bakhtin (Holquist, 1990; Todorov, 1981), the dialogical relation is defined as one “where ‘thesis’ and ‘antithesis’ can never be subsumed into a higher ‘synthesis’, but are instead destined to constitute *the permanent poles of a noneliminable tension*” (Toscano, 1998:

70). Many basic dilemmas are thought to be propelled by these tensions, but this view does not require one side of the equation to be overcome by another in order for change to occur. Constructive change results from the capacity to accept the permanence of the tension, and to find ways to proceed which respect this permanence.

A protracted dialogue process on abortion that occurred in Boston is illustrative of the presence and management of such a non-eliminable tension. In response to a deadly shooting rampage at two abortion clinics in the Boston area in 1994, three 'pro-life' and three 'pro-choice' leader/activists began meeting to have a dialogue about abortion. For six years these six women met together in secret, concerned about the repercussions that meeting with the other side might have on their own safety and on their standing and ability to lead within their own communities. In January 2001 they went public, co-authoring an article in *The Boston Globe* about their experiences of meeting together. They wrote,

We [...] made a commitment that some of us still find agonizingly difficult: to shift our focus away from arguing our cause. From the beginning, I have felt an enormous tension [...] between honoring the agreement to not argue for our position and my deep hope – which I still feel – that these women for whom I have such great respect will change their minds about abortion

The essence of their experience has been paradoxical. They wrote, "Since that first fear-filled meeting, we have experienced a paradox. While learning to treat each other with dignity and respect, we have all become firmer in our views about abortion" (Fowler *et al.*, 2001).

After six years of respectful, articulate, humanizing dialogue, each individual participant became more committed to and more polarized over the central dilemma of women's rights and the rights of the unborn fetus. From a dialogic perspective, this specific issue cannot be resolved, but may result in remedies that respect the oppositional constancy of these differences. This philosophical and practical perspective is viewed by some as a rudimentary requirement for peaceful coexistence between conflicting groups (Toscano, 1998; also Deutsch, 2000; Rawls, 1996), and provides a road map for addressing many of our more challenging core dilemmas.

## 8. Conclusion

Those of us working on peace and conflict around the globe cannot prevent destructive conflicts from occurring and cannot make peace happen. Believing we can reflects linear, cause-and-effect thinking about fostering change in a complex, non-linear world. However, we can do a great deal to reduce the *probabilities* that conflicts will escalate and persist, and increase the probabilities that more people will work to resolve them constructively. In other words, while occasional conflicts cannot be stopped, the tendency for conflicts to evolve over time into stable

destructive patterns that impair our social and physical environments can be mitigated and prevented.

Ironically, the usefulness and impact of our work will ultimately depend on our own abilities as a field to effectively manage, resolve, tolerate or capitalize on the many tensions, divisions and conflicts we experience internally, across science and practice, paradigms, orientations, gender, rationalities, and disciplines. In other words, it depends on whether we take the time to walk our talk and apply our trade to our own multicultural, multidisciplinary, multidimensional collective. I remain optimistic of our chances.

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# Relational Constructionism

## Generative Theory and Practice for Conflict Engagement and Resolution

Nikki R. Slocum-Bradley\*

### Abstract

*This article draws upon relational constructionist ideas to facilitate a meta-theoretical shift in conflict engagement and transformation. Based upon insight into conceptual and relational inter-dependency, two tasks are suggested as key aims for future work: 1) nurturing a profound respect for inter-dependent self/other and appreciation for relationships, and 2) developing skills to construct nurturing, generative relationships. Underscoring that research, theory-building and other aspects of scholarship are in themselves practices, the author encourages the design of these and other practices to facilitate conflict transformation. Exploring the implications of relational constructionist insights, an approach is proposed that merges the boundaries of theory-building, research methodology, and conflict engagement: Action Research for the Transformation of Conflicts (ART-C). While ART-C provides a process that facilitates the construction of cooperative relationships, insights from Positioning Theory illuminate how actors co-construct relationships by evoking meanings and norms that guide action. These concepts are applied to a variety of examples from around the globe that illustrate the transformation of identities, relationships and conflicts.*

**Keywords:** Conflict transformation, conflict resolution, action research, positioning theory, relational constructionism.

*No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite – Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela (1994: 749)*

As a journal that focuses on theory and practice of conflict engagement and resolution, and especially the nexus of the two, IJ CER fills a lacuna not only in the field of peacebuilding but also in social science more generally. This inaugural edition presents a welcomed opportunity to scope future directions of the field, as

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well as to examine some existential assumptions upon which much scholarly work and practice have been based. In order to achieve rigor in both theory and practice, we first need to address what it is, exactly, that we are trying to achieve. Once we have specified our over-arching purpose, we can design practices and theories that will help us achieve it. A useful theory is one that illuminates *how* the goal is achieved, and best practices are those most effective in facilitating that process.

Literature in the field largely converges on the “central goal of transforming potential violence into non-violent change” (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, & Miall, 2011: 425). Concurrent with the focus on non-violent change, Richmond (2008: 147, in Ramsbotham, Woodhouse & Miall, 2011: 407) has advocated that “peace” be “radically re-conceptualized” as a “method and process, and never a final end state”. For him, “this requires the acceptance of difference as a method of peace, rather than an emphasis on sameness or universality” (*ibid.*). In contrast, Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall (2011) conclude their impressive third edition of *Contemporary Conflict Resolution* by tasking the next (‘fifth’) generation of conflict resolution scholars and practitioners with a ‘cosmopolitan’ agenda that is based upon our *common* identity as humans:

In the end, therefore, it is an awareness of shared humanity that underpins the global enterprise of cosmopolitan conflict resolution. And the task of the next generation of workers in the field is to push forward the widening of the circle of recognition towards the culminating point when it is acknowledged in all parts of the world – particularly by young people – that subordinate identities, whether of family, clan, ethnic group, nation, state, class, gender, culture or religion, do not cancel out the deepest identity of all – humanity – even in the most intense political conflicts. (p. 426)

At this point, one might be inclined to ask whether our work in the field of conflict engagement and resolution should be aimed at accepting difference or highlighting our shared humanity. In my view, the answer is ‘both’, and their inseparability is key to appreciating the full significance of the norm of non-violence.

Sameness and difference are two sides of the same coin: without the ‘front’, you cannot have the ‘back’. All concepts are ‘relational’ in that they acquire their significance only in relation to something else – something that is different or ‘other’ (Beck, 2006). Thus, ‘red’ makes sense only because there is something not red. ‘Female’ and ‘male’ depend upon each other for their meaning. The significance of ‘Belgium’ relates to that of other States, as well as to concepts of non-State boundaries (Europe, Wallonia, Flanders, Benelux and so forth). The concept of ‘race’ could not exist without notions of difference, such as ‘Asian’ or ‘Black’. Recognition of these dialogical relationships, and the inter-dependency of opposing concepts, is key to appreciating conflict as an *opportunity* (Rothman, 1997) to think and even perceive (see, hear, smell, taste or feel) something that previously would have been literally inconceivable and imperceptible. Ideas (and opinions, perspectives and convictions) are formulated and advanced in relation to a counter-idea. In ancient Taoist philosophy, this dependency and complementarity of

opposing (not oppositional) forces is symbolized in the taijitu. More profoundly, the taijitu reflects that apparently opposing forces, yin and yang, actually become each other.

These insights have important implications for our understanding of self and other. In particular, they suggest an alternative to the traditional Western notion of the individual as a separate, bounded being (Gergen, 2009). In *Relational Being*, Gergen has illuminated the inter-dependent or relational nature of all that exists and underscored that all meaning is generated from and through relationships. He discusses human relationships as the cradle or birth-place of all that is meaningful, demonstrating how each person becomes him- or herself only with and through others. Violence against an 'other' harms oneself, and the destruction of relationships leads to annihilation. As a consequence of these insights, Gergen (2009: 386) concludes that, "If I am in you and you are in me, then mutual caring should replace antagonism". In my view, this insight and value should constitute the foundation and purpose of future conflict engagement and resolution.

To take this seriously requires a fundamental shift for much theory and practice. It entails moving away from a utilitarian, individualistic mode that advocates cooperating, rather than fighting, *because* it is a more effective strategy for attaining one's (individual) interests and needs. Rather than using cooperative relationships as a means to other ends, the cooperative relationship *is* the end. The concomitant value is a deep respect for self/other, which are understood relationally (different yet the same and mutually inter-dependent). Once this end or value has been taken on, the rest is about learning how to achieve it in practice. This is a skill that can be acquired, as evidenced by Rothman's (2012) observation that,

when groups can themselves surface their internal differences effectively and bridge them, not by closing ranks against outsiders but rather by reaching internal agreement about ways forward that could include the other, they are on their way to intergroup cooperation.

Thus, we can summarize that nurturing "relational coordination" (Gergen, 2009) or honouring relational dignity<sup>1</sup> entails:

1. Nurturing a profound respect for self/other (humanity) and appreciation for relationships; and
2. Developing skills to construct nurturing, generative relationships.

To be most effective, I believe that these should be the aims of future conflict engagement and resolution scholarship and practice. As Ramsbotham and colleagues (2011), Gergen (2009), and others have pointed out, a variety of resources throughout the world cultures can be drawn upon. The challenge is to engage with these discourses and develop theories and practices that facilitate these goals.

1 I would like to thank Barry Hart for sharing this expression with me.

## 1. Scholarship

The first issue we need to address in our scholarship on conflict engagement and resolution is our basic understanding of scholarship. The root of the problematic lacuna between theory and practice is the failure to recognize theory-building and other aspects of scholarship as practices. Like other practices, they have impacts, and they are significantly shaped by the practitioner's (in this case, the scholar's) interests and beliefs. Once we accept scholarship as a subjective practice, we can decide to be more transparent about our beliefs and pro-active towards our aims. Let us look at the implications for two main aspects of scholarship: research and theory-building.

### 1.1 *The Practice of Theory-Building*

Underlying every practice, including research and theory-building, is a model (or theory) of the human being. This model often remains implicit, but it is reflected in the methods we choose for doing research and attempting to engage in and resolve conflicts. The underlying model influences not only the methods we choose, but also the results of our studies or practices, our interpretation of the results, and subsequent impacts. One important subsequent impact is that the model itself is promulgated and reinforced as a model for people to think about themselves, others and relationships.

Underlying a great deal of contemporary social science scholarship is a model of individuals as bounded beings (Gergen, 2009) and, furthermore, as automata. From Realistic Conflict Theory to Social Identity Theory to the multitude of Bio-evolutionary interpretations of human practices, these theories do not merely objectively reflect an independent human reality; their use influences it! As Bruner (1990: 26) has emphasized, rather than merely asking whether a particular theory "gets it right", more "pragmatic, perspectival" questions are in order, such as "What would it be like to believe that?" or "What would I be committing myself to if I believed that?" What Bruner (1990: 23) wrote over two decades ago remains as true today as it was then:

For all our power to construct symbolic cultures and to set in place the institutional forces needed for their execution, we do not seem very adept at steering our creations toward the ends we profess to desire. We do better to question our ingenuity in constructing and reconstructing communal ways of life than to invoke the failure of the human genome. Which is not to say that communal ways of life are easily changed, even in the absence of biological constraints, but only to focus attention where it belongs, not upon our biological limitations, but upon our cultural inventiveness.

What kind of theories and practices can be helpful towards inventing cultures of non-violent conflict engagement and resolution? Most importantly, the theories and practices should be founded upon a model of humans as mutually interdependent co-constructors of our world (who act within evolving constraints). Theories that illuminate the processes of co-construction, the impacts of different

kinds of constructions, and the interplay between contexts, construction processes and impacts would all be useful. Instead of reifying 'culture' and entrenching an automaton model of humans, such theory-building would contribute to the empowerment of people by raising their awareness of their own agency. This awareness makes people less vulnerable to those who manipulate static, naturalized notions of identity and culture to further their political interests and instigate hatred and violence (Rombothsham *et al.*, 2011: 346; Slocum-Bradley, 2008a: 1).

As all meaning is created in relationships through discourse,<sup>2</sup> Gergen (2009: 47) considers '*generative*' those discursive practices that are 'catalytic', 'inject relations with vitality' and through which 'new and enriching potentials are opened through the flow of interchange'. He distinguishes these from '*degenerative*' processes, which are "corrosive and bring co-action to an end". Accordingly, the challenge is to generate practices that facilitate collective dialogue and deliberation. While this conclusion has been reached by many, the crucial aspect here is that it is overtly based upon the value of "relational coordination" (Gergen, 2009). This transparency allows us to "[...] be conscious of how we come to our knowledge and as conscious as we can be about the values that lead us to our perspectives" (Bruner, 1990: 30) and to thereby assume accountability "for how and what we know" (*ibid.*). Furthermore, to be consistent with its own premises, the value requires a welcoming approach towards other perspectives and dialogue that challenges it (Bruner, 1990; Gergen, 2009).

### 1.2 *Research Practices*

The insight that 'how we know', or how we do inquiry, is constitutive of our reality has led many to question the positivist views and practices that have dominated social science endeavour (see, *e.g.*, Beck, 1998; Bruner, 1990; Gergen, 2009; McNamee & Hosking, 2012; Slocum, 2001; Smith *et al.*, 1995; Van Langenhove, 2007). For McNamee and Hosking (2012: 35),

[...] a key issue concerns the kinds of realities that we are a part of and contribute to making, for example, in our (research) work. So what sort of world do we invite each other into when we act as if it is possible to represent the one way things really are? And, in contrast, what sort of world do we invite each other into when we assume realities are community-based local, historical, and cultural co-constructions? Both sorts of inquiry construct local-communal realities – but very different ones. One where there are experts and non-experts versus one where there are multiple and perhaps conflicting realms of expertise.

These authors present an approach to social inquiry that is consistent with, and supportive of, the value of relational coordination. Distinguishing their approach from other veins of 'social constructionism' (such as that depicted by Berger & Luckman, 1966), they refer to it as 'relational constructionism'. Conceiving

2 Here discourse refers to all forms of symbolic speech, action or other forms of communication.

inquiry as ‘engaged unfolding’, McNamee and Hosking present Action Science (Argyris *et al.*, 1985; Reason & Torbert, 2001), Participatory Action Research (PAR) (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991), Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987) and other forms of ‘transformative dialogues’ (Gergen *et al.*, 2001) as ‘potentially transformative orientations to inquiry’. They use the term ‘transformative’ to refer to “change that unfolds ‘from within’, in patterns of relating over time, where the ‘unfolding’ goes on in different but equal (not subject-object) relations [...]” (McNamee & Hosking, 2012: 61).

These ‘orientations to inquiry’ are based upon a model of the human being that respects human agency and acknowledges the relational nature of meaning. Furthermore, the processes they entail are designed to facilitate relational coordination. Yet the success of all of these orientations in nurturing ‘generative’ processes depends upon *how* they are conducted. Key to them all is that they invite and explore multiple voices and emergent self-other relations through dialogue that is based upon respectful listening, questioning and being present; willingness to suspend assumptions and certainties; and reflexive attention to the ongoing process (McNamee & Hosking, 2012: 68).

These insights invite us to transform research on conflict resolution into research that *is* conflict resolution. One option for so-doing is to adopt a PAR approach (see McIntyre, 2008; Wadsworth, 1998) and orient the process towards the aims of ‘relational coordination’, which dovetail nicely with the goals of conflict transformation (CT), as expressed by Lederach (in Weis, 2011: 51): to change “the flow of human interaction in social conflict from cycles of destructive relational violence toward cycles of relational dignity and respectful engagement”. By merging CT theory with a PAR approach that is rooted in the insights of relational constructionism, we can design an iterative process which we can call Action Research for the Transformation of Conflict (ART-C).<sup>3</sup>

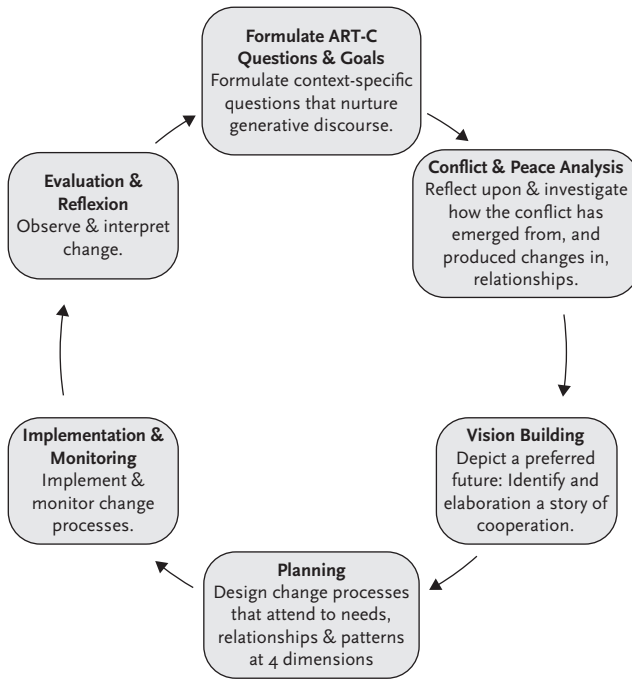
As such, ART-C is a process of inquiry and action that nurtures relational coordination. It entails “a recursive process that involves a spiral of *adaptable* steps” (McIntyre, 2008: 6), which aim to transform the “flow of human interaction in social conflict from cycles of destructive relational violence toward cycles of relational dignity and respectful engagement”. Figure 1 illustrates a template of the emergent process, which comprises six recursive phases:

1. Formulate Action-Research Questions and Goals
2. Conflict and Peace Analyses
3. Vision-Building
4. Planning
5. Implementation and Monitoring
6. Evaluation and Reflection

The phases need not be strictly chronological. In particular, a great deal of thought and work is well invested prior to, or as part of, Phase 1. By explicitly inter-linking the formulation of questions and goals, Bruner’s pragmatic

3 The adjective, participatory, is dropped here in the assumption that it is redundant within this approach to action-research and because it makes for a cuter acronym.

**Figure 1**     *The ART-C Cycle*



approach is adopted. The kinds of questions that are asked largely determine not only the sorts of answers that could be feasibly coherent, but they also position the inquirers in relation to the quest of the answers and to each other. For example, consider the following two formulations: “How can both tribes become wealthier?” compared with, “What can we do to help our community thrive?” The latter formulation not only broadens the scope of possible solutions; it also positions the members of the inquiry team both as unified within a common community and as agents whose active participation is invoked in the process.

Crucially, each of these phases is oriented towards achieving relational transformation through the ART-C cycle itself. Thus, a process-goal can be articulated for each phase of the iterative cycle. The process-goal underscores the importance of *how* each phase of the cycle is approached. In Lederach’s (1995: 22) words:

Process matters more than outcome. [...] At times of heated conflict too little attention is paid to how the issues are to be approached, discussed, and decided. There is a push toward solution and outcome that skips the discipline of creating an adequate and clear process for achieving an acceptable result.

In the heat of conflict, it can be challenging to remember that it is not an illusory final ‘outcome’, but rather successfully transformed ways of relating that make ‘peace’ sustainable.



Conceptualizing the CT process as *joint research* can help nurture the curious and respectful attitude of engagement that is crucial to transformation in relationships (Anderson, 1997; Gergen, 2009; Winslade & Monk, 2008). The metaphor invites participants into positions as a team of investigators with different types of equally-valued knowledge. Each phase of ART-C addresses what Lederach (2003) has described as four dimensions of human experience: personal, relational, structural and cultural. While these distinctions can be helpful, it is important to underscore that all of these dimensions are generated through relationships. Social institutions and cultural norms are produced and re-produced continuously through discourse. Personal experience (including private thought) is enabled by the tools generated discursively in relationships (Harré & Gillet, 1994; Vygotsky, 1978). While they restrict, to an extent, what can be feasibly constructed at a given point in time, they also provide the resources to alter the constraints themselves and to thereby stretch the conceivable.

Different methods, tools and techniques can be used to achieve each process-goal, rendering ART-C a flexible process that can be adapted to the needs and idiosyncrasies of the particular contexts in which it is implemented. Due to their promising potential, techniques developed out of a relational constructionist approach are emphasized in the brief description of the ART-C process that follows.

## 2. The ART-C Cycle: A Facilitative Research Practice

### 2.1 *Formulate Action-Research Questions and Goals*

In ART-C, we acknowledge that the nature of our questions influences how we go about seeking the answers and the kinds of answers that seem plausible. Since how we formulate the questions actually impacts the outcome, formulating research questions and goals is understood as *action*. Thus, participants discuss and formulate context-specific questions that aim to support relational coordination and nurture generative discourse. The questions can be more specific and nuanced variations of the over-arching one: *How can we change the flow of our interactions from cycles of destructive relational violence towards cycles of relational dignity and respectful engagement?* By asking constructive questions, we aim to orient our thoughts towards possibilities, our energy towards hopefulness and benevolence, and our actions towards respectful engagement.

### 2.2 *Conflict and Peace Analyses*

In this phase, we aim to re-humanize 'the other' and ourselves, to understand our own and others' needs, hopes, fears and values, and our inter-connectedness, and to gain confidence in the community's ability to transform constructively. First, participants reflect upon and investigate how the conflict has emerged from, and produced changes in, the dimensions of human experience (Lederach, 2003). This process can be facilitated by providing space for all participants to share their perspective of the 'conflict' or 'problem' using language that focuses on problematic situations or actions, rather than on personal attributes (Winslade & Monk,

2008). The variety of descriptions that emerges highlights that “the facts of what happened can always be viewed from multiple perspectives” (Winslade & Monk, 2008: 234). Participants can share and ‘map’ their experience of the consequences of, or changes resulting from, the conflict or problem. They can also discuss and map how existing patterns in relationships (the dimensions of human experience) have contributed to producing the problem or conflict. What emerges from this dialogue is an elaborated and multi-voiced story about the conflict or problem. However, this is only a fraction of the participants’ experience.

Next, the challenge is to illuminate experiences that were not perceived as problematic or destructive, and when conflict or differences in perspective were used constructively. Also drawing upon insights from Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005), participants can publicly acknowledge these positive experiences and use them as a platform to build upon. What ensues is the development of an alternative story that is just as real and valid as the one of ‘conflict’. It provides a more promising and effective starting point than a principle focus on what is *not* working (Barrett & Cooperrider, 1990).

### 2.3 *Vision Building*

As underscored by Rothman (1992; see also Winslade & Monk, 2008), conflict transformation often entails building a vision or story of cooperation. In this phase, participants have the opportunity to discuss and choose which ‘story’ they want to depict the way forward. Drawing upon the alternative story highlighted earlier, which is based in past experience, participants can depict how they would like to see the story unfold in future. Rather than dominating the entirety of participants’ experience, the ‘conflict’ or ‘problem’ is woven in as a challenge to the community’s story of cooperation – a challenge that they are now constructively engaging and overcoming. “Generative metaphors” (Barrett & Cooperrider, 1990) can be evoked to elaborate stories of collaboration that expand participants’ perceptions and options for action. Furthermore, their ongoing experience of engagement in the ART-C cycle has not only provided participants with a shared story of cooperation; it has also honed their skills to further develop that story (in narrative and deed).

### 2.4 *Planning*

In this phase, participants invite each other to share what they would need to see happen, in order for the Collaboration story line to be not only an empty narrative but a lived reality (Winslade & Monk, 2008). They design change processes that attend to needs, relationships and patterns at all dimensions of human experience. They agree to take responsibility for concrete steps within a specified timeline. The planning phase is an opportunity for participants to acquire and hone skills for constructively discussing options and addressing differences, while working as a team towards a common goal.

### 2.5 *Implementation and Monitoring*

Participants implement and monitor the change processes. Here, it is not only the implementation of an action plan that is monitored, but also the broader context,

the relevance of the community's working assumptions, and intended and unintended impacts. All of these need to be monitored with regard to their impact upon relationships. Collaborating in implementing the action plan can generate a positive team feeling and build the community's common identity. 'Us versus Them' is further transformed into 'We'.

### 2.6 *Evaluation and Reflection*

Participants observe and interpret change. In this phase, participants take a step back to harvest the fruits of their efforts, to celebrate and build upon successes, and to identify challenges as potential new points of inquiry. Acknowledging and appreciating the positive changes that result from collaborative effort can nurture a sense of community belonging and motivate further constructive dialogue and cooperation. The relational skills gained, and the psychological, social, practical and spiritual benefits experienced, throughout the ART-C process can empower and motivate participants to expand respectful engagement and increasingly honour relational dignity. Thus, like the other phases of the ART-C cycle, the process of evaluation is also action (see Ross & Rothman, 1999; Rothman, 1999).

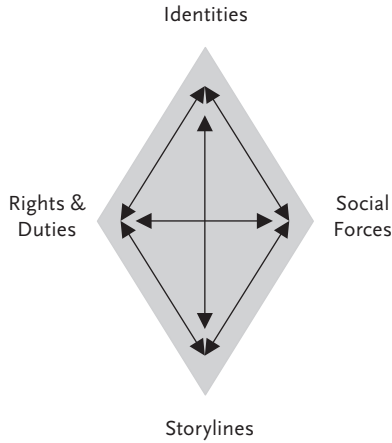
## 3. **Practical Theory**

The efficacy of the ART-C cycle depends largely upon participants' success in building cooperative relationships. To facilitate this, it is crucial to have an understanding of how relationships are co-constructed in and through discourse. To this end, Positioning Theory (Davies & Harré, 1990; Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999) can be particularly helpful. Positioning Theory illuminates how, from moment-to-moment, actors co-construct meaning and invoke norms that guide action. They do this by performing discursive acts that have 'social forces' and evoke (often implicitly) storylines and identities which entail an allocation of sets of rights and duties to the relevant actors. Collectively, these four mutually interdependent 'facets' of meaning – identities, storylines, social forces of discursive acts, and sets of rights and duties – have been referred to as the "Positioning Diamond" (Slocum-Bradley, 2008b, 2010a, 2010b), which is visually depicted in Figure 2. People can conform to, contest, or provide an alternative to acts of positioning and the norms they entail.

Positioning Theory highlights the relational nature of identities. By evoking a particular identity in a given context, I simultaneously evoke an identity of an (often unspoken) other. The 'storyline' provides the context for this relationship and suggests reciprocal sets of rights and duties for the actors, which constitute norms for action. When journalists at Radio Rwanda (RTLM) evoked the 'Hutu' identity and equated it with being 'Rwandan', they implied that 'Tutsis' were foreigners (Slocum-Bradley, 2008c).<sup>4</sup> By accusing (social force) Hutus of attacking

4 Slocum-Bradley (2008b) provides a more comprehensive positioning analysis of RTLM journalists' discourse.

**Figure 2**     *The Positioning Diamond*



Rwanda, a ‘National Security’ storyline was evoked that was used to demand and justify acts of ‘defence’. In other words, it established the norm that Tutsis had not only the right, but even the duty to ‘defend’ themselves. Furthermore, acts of ‘defence’ were interpreted as the action of killing anyone identified as ‘Tutsi’. The analysis illuminates how evoked meanings established norms that provided the rationale for action with devastating consequences. It is crucial not to reify the facets of the Positioning Diamond. They, like all meanings, are only made (temporarily) determinate within a specific context, and they can change as people re-interpret the meanings in subsequent discourse – either a moment or centuries thereafter. This insight into the immediateness of acts of positioning and how they evoke social norms makes Positioning Theory particularly useful in raising awareness and reflexivity that can support social change. This includes fostering constructive relationships and generating new options for action.

For example, Winslade and Monk (2008) describe the transformation of a conflict in which actors shift from claiming positions of entitlement to weaving and living a story of cooperation. Smithey (2012) has discussed how lived and recounted stories in Northern Ireland have been transformed through art and other symbolic forms of discourse. He describes processes of ‘incremental identity change’ facilitated by events such as a lecture series entitled *Remembering the Future: Understanding Our Past, Shaping Our Future*. The series was organized by the Community Relations Council, which “was set up to promote better community relations between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland and, equally, to promote recognition of cultural diversity”.<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, the Rural Women’s Peace Link was created in Kenya when Sarah Lochodo helped transform the conflict between Pokots and Turkanas (see Aker & Noma, 2012). For generations, the villagers lived within a meaning system that interpreted ‘providing for our families’ as a war. Accordingly, Pokot and Turkana

5 <[www.community-relations.org.uk/about-us/](http://www.community-relations.org.uk/about-us/)>.

men assumed the identities of warriors, who raided each other's cows and goats, and killed each other. The accomplishment of these deeds was seen as the mark of a great man. Lochodo persuaded women in the communities that 'providing for our families' could be interpreted very differently – and in a way that was far more effective. To her, 'providing for our families' could be a *collaboration* of the *community* (inclusive of Pokots and Turkanas), rather than a war between Pokots and Turkanas. This collaboration was manifested in practices such as farming, starting businesses and going to school. Similar collaborations were achieved by the Liberian Women Mass Action for Peace, discussed by Aker and Noma (2012), and the Women of Zepce, presented by Hart (2012). In both cases, groups of women formed a transformational platform to overcome the violent and destructive practices that were rationalized by meaning systems characterized by oppositional ethno-religious identities.

#### 4. Conclusion

Given that no “independent unpoliticized conceptual space” is available (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse & Miall, 2011: 406), we can take up Bruner's suggested pragmatic approach by starting with our end and working backwards to craft conducive means. We can start our theoretical and practical work by asking, “*What systems of meaning and practices would nurture 'relational coordination'?*” Seeking answers at all four of Lederach's dimensions of human experience will enable the development of a systemic approach (see Körppen *et al.*, 2011; Ropers, 2011), which is key to understanding and addressing the dynamism and complexity of relationships, whether inter-personal or institutionalized. What systems of meaning and practice could nurture our inextricably intertwined existence as 'I-Thou', as 'Anglophone-Francophone-Nederlandophones', as 'Muslims-Jewish-Christians-agnostics' as 'Europe-USA-Asia', as 'Democrats-Republicans'? It is our difference which allows us to recognize our sameness, and our sameness that enables us to appreciate our differences. Next our task, as humans, is to hone our skills and become “adept at steering our creations toward the ends we profess to desire” (Bruner, 1990: 23). This, in Madiba's<sup>6</sup> words, is learning how to love.

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6 This is the people's affectionate name for Nelson Mandela.

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