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Conflict Transformation: A Multi-Dimensional Task

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1. Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

2. Theories of Conflict Transformation

2.1 Is There a Theory of Conflict Transformation?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.2 Contributions to Theories of Conflict Transformation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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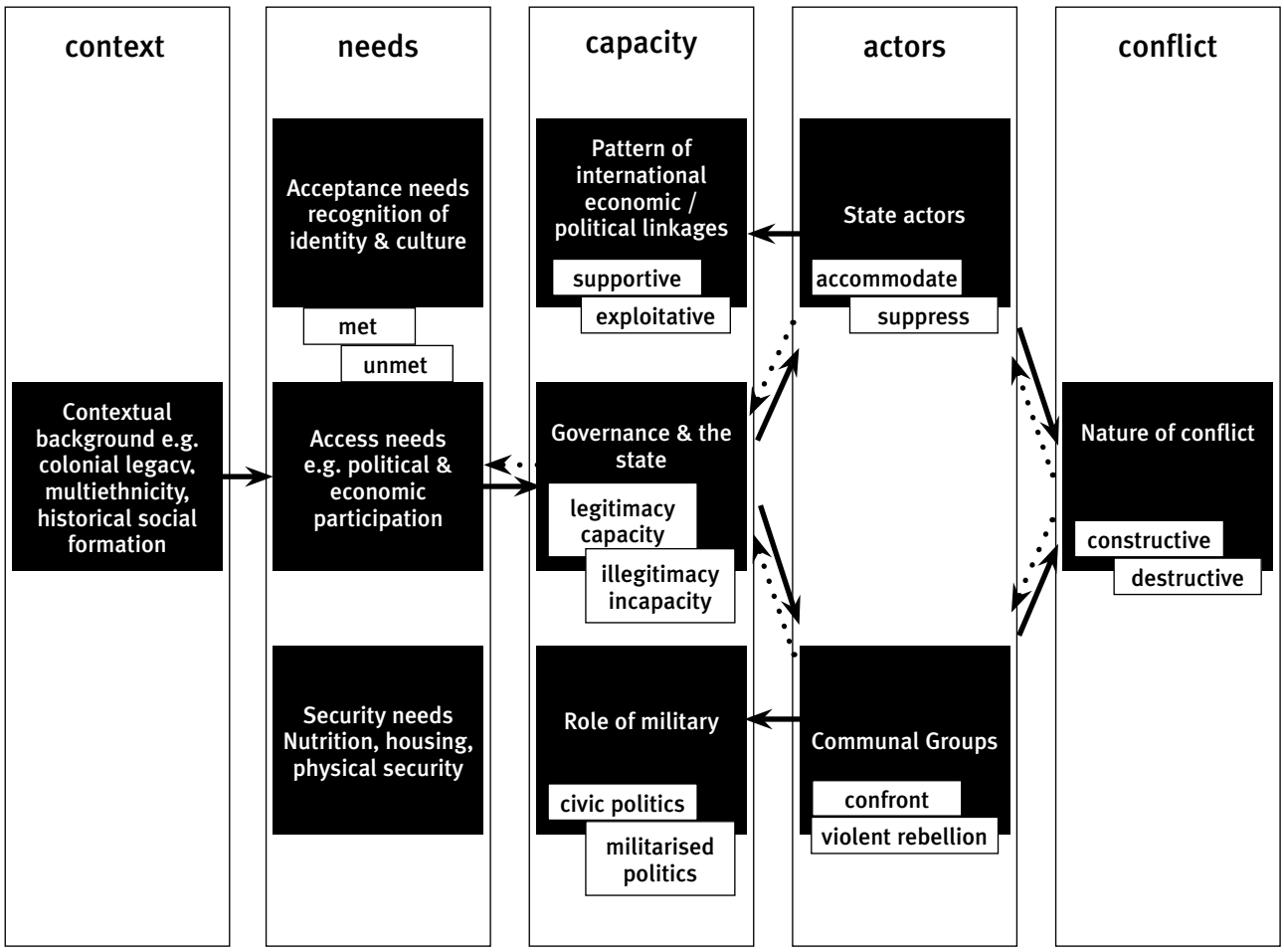
Figure 1: Transformation of Protracted Social Conflicts (adapted from Azar 1990)



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

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

One strength of his model is that it widens its view from the conflict and the conflict parties and indicates the scope for drawing peacebuilding resources from the wider society. A

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weakness is the limited attention it gives to the autonomous processes of change that transpire within the political system of the conflict-affected society.

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

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

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

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

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

Box 1: Factors Exacerbating or Restraining Conflict at Different Phases

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

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

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Box 2: Causes and Preventors of Violent Conflicts at Different Levels		
level	examples of causes	examples of preventors
global	post-colonial legacy	international minority rights
regional	conflict spillover in great lakes	conflict prevention by OSCE
state/society	state capture by ethnic groups	cross-ethnic party voting
conflict party	Hutu hostility towards Tutsi	pragmatic approach of minority
elite/international	Hutu leaders launch genocide	president accepts OSCE advice

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

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

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

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

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

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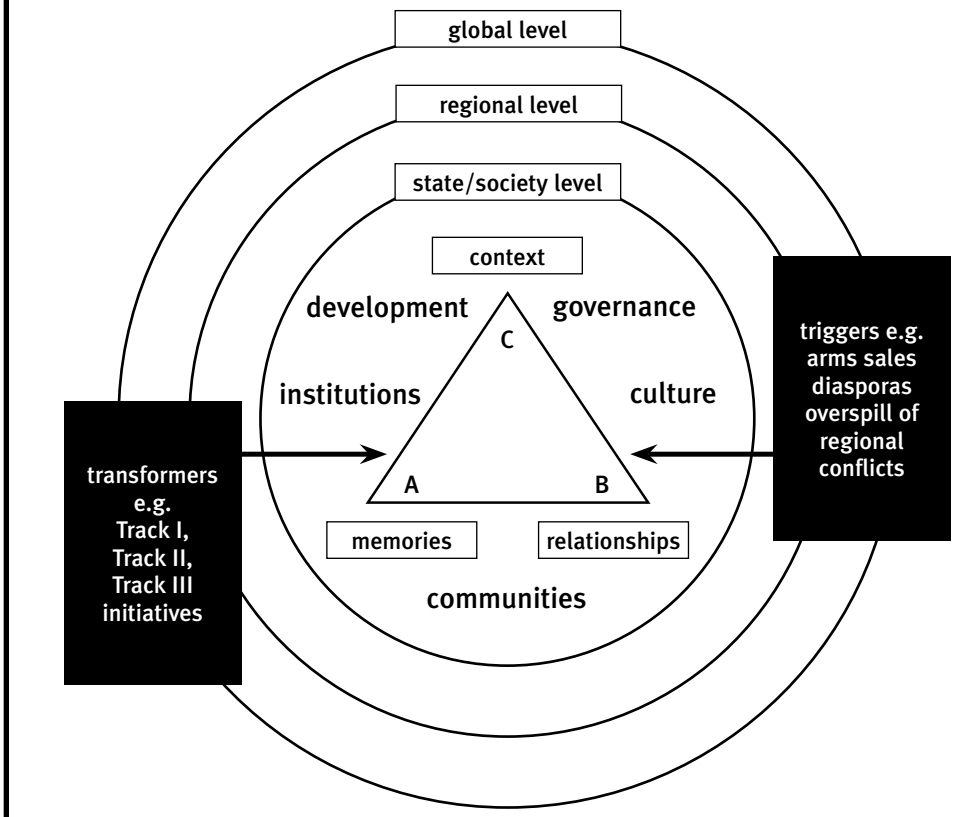
Figure 2: Expanding the Conflict Triangle:
Transformers and Triggers of Conflict at Different System Levels



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The transformation types can also be connected to the different parts of conflict formation,

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whether this is seen in Azar's terms (*see* Figure 1) or in Galtung's (*see* Figure 2). Context, structural and issue transformations all affect the context and contradictions at the heart of the conflict. Actor and personal transformations particularly affect attitudes and memory, behaviour and relationships. These in turn, of course, are interrelated.

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

Box 4: Transformers of the Northern Ireland Conflict

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

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

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

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and peaceful change.

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

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

3. Practices of Conflict Resolution

3.1 Actors of Conflict Transformation

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

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

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

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

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

These high-profile cases, of course, involved imposed settlements, achieved after considerable vacillation on the part of a divided international community. More impressive have been the cases in which conflicts were prevented even before they became violent, and where

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deep or structural and light or operational conflict prevention have worked together. Here, real changes in the context of the conflict and in the structure of the societies have resulted in some impressive transformations.

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

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

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

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

Box 5: Conflict Transformation Work in Northern Kenya

In Northern Kenya, the growing pressure on arid land and the introduction of a Kalashnikov culture into traditional cattle-raiding has led to an increase in both the extent and intensity of conflicts between nomadic pastoral communities, as well as between pastoralists and agriculturalists. Not only historical rivals such as the Turkana and Pokot or Somali and Borana, but also communities which coexisted peacefully in the 1980s are now engulfed in war. The militarisation of these pastoralist communities is severely affecting the security of Kenya and the neighbouring territories, and damaging the affected communities. In response,

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Oxfam facilitated peace talks relying on local elders in the Baragoi Pastoral Project of 1997. A crucial aspect of Oxfam's ongoing work in the area is an effort to appreciate the codes of honour and conduct of these peoples and their understanding of conflict, through lexical and ethnographic analysis (Kona 1999). In this vein, a local committee of women from the affected communities set up the Wajir Peace and Development Committee, a network of 27 governmental organisations and NGOs in north-eastern Kenya. This group conducts training and capacity-building, and contributed to a cease-fire in 1993 and continuing efforts to prevent and resolve local conflicts in the region.

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

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

The methods and tools employed by Track II actors include supporting and sustaining local groups and social movements, building peace constituencies, strengthening capacity, empowering key actors, organisational development and networking and training. A notable example of this kind of work is the programme of the London-based NGO Conciliation Resources (CR) in Fiji, undertaken in coalition with local actors. CR supported the Citizens' Constitutional Forum in Fiji, an organisation which made a significant contribution to the new constitutional settlement in 1996 with the introduction of the alternative-vote system and power-sharing (Conciliation Resources 2000). Unfortunately, the coup in Fiji in May 2000 and the return to a narrowly-based government indicates only too clearly the setbacks confronted by this kind of work.

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

Box 6: Conflict Analysis

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

Finally, and most importantly, the local actors themselves have the greatest responsibility, and the greatest opportunity, for transforming their own conflicts. There are cases of ‚embedded third-parties' who emerge out of conflict parties and play a significant role in opening channels of dialogue and opening political space – such as John Hume in Northern Ireland; cases of groups

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within political parties who can bring about an actor transformation such as the shift towards political forms of struggle in Sinn Féin; and civil society actors and local NGOs who often have an enormous influence on bridge-building between political parties and local communities exemplified by the Clonard monastery in Northern Ireland, and the Corrymeela Community working on respect for cultural traditions thereby addressing the problems of historical memories and reconciliation. The impact of this peacebuilding on the macro level of the conflict is hard to evaluate; but on a small scale, the personal and group transformations that it can achieve are keenly felt.

3.2 Coordination and Multi-Track Diplomacy

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

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

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

Box 7: Cooperative Multi-Track Diplomacy in Macedonia

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

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3.3 Assessing the Impact of Practice

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

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

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

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

Box 8: Transforming the Transformers – Smiling as a Method

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

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

4. Conclusion

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

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

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

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

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

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

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