

PEACE BUILDING AND CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

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The world clearly needs some new ways of thinking about old problems and new ways of acting if we are going to survive into the 21st century. It is vital, therefore, that students of peace and conflict work out ways of harnessing the creative imagination of everyone so that all peoples can envisage a positive future and ways of realizing that future. This imagining cannot be narrow. It has to be broad, inclusive, interdisciplinary and systemic but it has to begin if we are to have a viable future.

In relation to this imagining, peace and conflict theorists need to learn from evolutionary theorists if they are to play a significant part in global survival. In the first place, this means endeavoring to gather the wisdom of many peoples and traditions since without this our understanding of the way the world works will always be partial and our normative prescriptions always biased.

What is missing in most of the social sciences and in much of our work in conflict analysis and resolution are opportunities to hear what the voiceless, the marginalized, the excluded and the victims have to say. Scholars spend too much time listening to each other, which is not good from an evolutionary perspective. We need to tap into deeper wells of wisdom since all human beings have their own survival strategies and everyone has developed some techniques for the peaceful resolution of conflict.

What is also missing are dialogues across the huge social fissures -- those of class, those that exist between persons locked into cultures of violence and those working to build cultures of peace, as well as those that flow from gender and ethnicity. We need some deep dialogues between the so-called learned and unlearned and between ancient and modern wisdom.

In relation to agricultural development strategies, for example, what sort of dialogue might ensue from bringing together peasant rice farmers or fishermen from different parts of the world with Harvard agricultural economists? What problems might surface and what difference might this make to national and global thinking about rural development in Asia, Africa and Latin America? Here I am not thinking about experts visiting peasants in order to help them, but I am talking about inviting these people to our conferences so that we might learn from them and they from us.

If we are not a lot more creative about ways of stimulating imaginative discourse, there is a high probability that much of the world's important adaptive wisdom will not be heard and we (from the industrialized West) will impose our learning in ways that will almost certainly result in accelerated destruction (Faure, 1995).

While the causes of war and violence and the conditions for peace and justice are at the heart of peace and conflict studies, they need to be both understood and addressed in innovative ways if we "conflict resolutionaries" are to make a significant contribution to the survival of the species and develop a deepened awareness of how we can enhance the quality of life for all peoples.

The cessation of the cold war -- despite our fervent hopes -- did not result in stable peaceful relationships within and between all countries. Germany was reunited but the former Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia (before it split into the Czech and Slovak Republics) Sudan, Somalia, Nigeria, Liberia, Ghana, Rwanda, Burundi (to name just a few) are afflicted

by powerful ethno- nationalist and secessionist movements. These movements challenge diverse forms of government and generate particularly virulent and atavistic nationalisms. As Jongman and Schmid note, during the years 1994-95, for example, there were 1.2 million deaths in high intensity conflicts and at least 10,000 others were killed in smaller conflicts. Or to put it another way, there were 22 high intensity conflicts, (wars with more than 1,000 deaths per year) 39 lower intensity conflicts (101-999 deaths) and 40 serious disputes (<than 100 deaths per year) occurring across the world up to July last year (Jongman and Schmid, 1995).

The causes of these conflicts are complex and multi-linear and there is a widespread disillusionment with politics. There are other sorts of conflicts as well, such as those around scarce natural and other resources (e.g., over water and oil), ideological and belief factors and deep seated challenges to identity and belonging. Most of these recent conflicts are internal in nature. All of them result in widespread personal suffering and social and political dislocation. At an attitudinal level these conflicts are inimical to the broad imagination spelled out above. They result, on the part of the protagonists, in an inability to think optimistically, distorted tunnel vision, restricted options, misattribution of motives, stereotyping and polarization. Conflict analysis, therefore, has a continuing task providing attitudinal and behavioral alternatives to these negative processes since they tend to be the breeding grounds for more direct violence. Focussing on some of the old/new problems of direct violence forces us to think afresh about more fundamental social processes underlying structural violence as well. In particular, we need to pay more attention to pre- and post-conflict peacebuilding, creative analytical problem solving processes and conflict transformation. There is some urgency about this because of totalizing and totalitarian tendencies in different societies and the need to start thinking about new ways of doing politics. It is especially vital to think of ways in which the quality of relationships within and between groups, nations and regions may be enhanced, communities made more resilient and power asymmetries reduced.

The challenge facing peace and conflict studies, therefore, is to think of new ways of doing politics and of building moral conventions that will generate safe action spaces for all peoples to begin solving the big problems that afflict the globe. One of the reasons for doing this, which partly explains the disillusionment with contemporary power and politics is the perception that adversarial politics (from the microcosm of the family to the community, national and international levels) are proving more dysfunctional than functional.

Adversarial politics generate more heat than light and stimulate competitive processes that are inimical to rational problem solving. They also tend to generate violent discourse and, when taken to extremes (as they are in an increasing number of societies), dispose parties towards extremely violent behavior. There is a need, therefore, to generate some creative alternatives.

In particular peace and conflict studies needs to articulate some philosophical justification for the development of "collaborative and analytic problem solving processes" as an alternative to more coercive and forceful processes.

What are the ethical and empirical justifications, for example, for assuming "common wisdom" among citizens? What sorts of "moral" and "empirical" justifications are needed to support inclusive and participatory political processes within which parties to conflict can generate their own solutions to problems rather than have solutions imposed upon them? Is there an emerging global bias in favor of civil society and away from the state centric

processes of the past? If so, what shape will this take and what sorts of new institutional forms are needed to give expression to these new ways of doing business?

One thing is very clear: the alternatives to power politics and the development of more stable peaceful relationships between peoples lie in a deepening awareness of the key psychological, social and political processes which generate trusting communities within which individuals can realize their deepest sense of self. In fact, the renewed emphasis on social and psychological processes, conversational styles and the identification of different types of epistemic communities is one of the major hallmarks of modernity/post modernity. While this emphasis on process can sometimes result in a self indulgent quest for personal happiness and an instrumental view of relationship it can also be used to begin the more difficult task of critiquing existing institutions and developing new ones.

Let us identify some general structural trends. The logic of global economic, social and political development is currently leading in two slightly contradictory directions. The first is towards a deepened sense of globalization. Economically, for example, multinational companies are now the norm rather than the exception. Global trade has become more highly integrated than ever before, and there is now something approximating a single global market in finance, commodities, manufacturing and services. This is having both positive and negative consequences. It has severely undermined old concepts of national economic sovereignty and there are few countries able to withstand external and internal currency flows, most of which have nothing to do with trade and everything to do with financial speculation. The fact is, however, that the global economy is now an established reality and this is beginning to pose its own distinctive sets of national, regional and global problems.

There has been a rapid expansion of the intergovernmental sphere as well. The 187 member states of the United Nations try and maintain some sense of their own rights as sovereign political entities, but increasingly the problems that these states confront are regional and global in scope and cannot be dealt with on national terms alone. This is forcing an unprecedented amount of intergovernmental collaborative activity. There are 2,000 plus intergovernmental bodies created to deal with a wide spectrum of interstate problems, such as environmental degradation, currency and population flows (Boulding, 1995). Similarly, there are now roughly 62,000 international treaties providing contextual frameworks within which international politics, trade and commerce can take place. While these developments may have had their origin in the long transition to capitalism, they have really only become significant in the last 20 years. These trends have been accompanied by a strengthening of regional organizations such as the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) the European Community (EC), the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Organization for African Unity (OAU). Since 1989, the United Nations, itself has begun to occupy a much more central position in world affairs although it is currently afflicted by a crisis of overexpectations and under-resourcing.

Accompanying the development of intergovernmental organizations, there has been a most astonishing proliferation of international non-governmental organizations as well. Elise Boulding, for example, calculates as many as 20,000 such organizations now link different parts of the world (Boulding, 1988). Despite the criticism of commentators such as John Mearsheimer (1994-95), who argues that this international institution building offers false promise and we are far better served by placing faith in the continued power and potency of the nation state, this unprecedented emergence of cross cutting and overlapping global networks of governmental and nongovernmental relationships is providing different arenas

for the formation of new transnational identities and placing a major question mark over traditional views of nationalism.

The second major tendency, however, is both a reaction to globalization and a self-propelling dynamic. This is the process of fragmentation sometimes referred to as "retribalization," when different religious, ethnic, communal or nationalist groups desire to reassert their distinctive, separate identities in opposition to the homogenization (Coca-Colonization) of global culture and the world economy. These fragmentary processes are not in themselves negative, particularly if they are linked to the development of a pluralistic global community and the concept of a civic rather than an ethnically based nationalism.¹ Ethnically based belonging and ethno-nationalist processes can be very negative, however, and are the source of some very deep-seated conflicts when they occur in countries with weak or illegitimate political regimes, where the groups concerned have adopted armed strategies or terrorism to assert their collective identities, and where they encounter authoritarian and repressive responses. If these conditions overlay adverse economic and social conditions, there is a very high probability of coercive politics and violent conflict.

These two general tendencies produce conditions which, paradoxically, make some violent conflicts less probable and others more so. International conflicts, for example, the Gulf War notwithstanding, are less likely to occur in the 1990s than internal conflicts. Thus the external justifications for militarism are diminishing.

On the other hand, as demonstrated by the experience of the past two years, there is a high probability of many vulnerable states or societies fracturing and failing, with the prospect of a sharp increase in violent internal conflict. Thus it is possible to identify new zones of conflict and new zones of peace in the world. These zones correspond to North-South divisions to a large extent, but not always so.² The zone of conflict is one where there are fragile economies, weak polities subject to vigorous and unrestrained assertion of ethnic rights leading to secessionist impulses. Over the last three years 92% of the world's most violent conflicts have been internal.³

These two tendencies -- towards globalization and towards fragmentation or retribalization -- provide the world community with both crises and opportunities. The crises are appallingly brutal, whether in Liberia, Rwanda or Bosnia. The opportunities flow from the fact that there is a growing appreciation of the futility of war (civil or international) in resolving any problem. This weariness with war is coupled with a better sense of the positive role of international institutions -- both regional and global -- in peacemaking and conflict transformation. As the External Affairs Committee of the Canadian House of Commons put it, "The world needs a center, and some confidence that the center is holding: the United Nations is the only credible candidate" (cited in Childers and Urqhart, 1994). The problem is that the United Nations itself and many of the regional organizations are overwhelmed by the new demands that have been placed upon them.

What is needed, therefore, is a commitment on the part of peacemakers to nudge states and peoples away from threat based power politics (based on conceptions of hard national sovereignty) towards a more collaborative nonviolent problem solving orientation. What role can peace builders and conflict "resolutionaries" play in this process and how might they ensure that their actions result in changes which remove the sources of violence?

There is a tension within the field captured in Jo Scimecca's (1987) article "Conflict Resolution: The basis for social control or social change?" In this article Scimecca argues that conflict resolvers who expound an unexamined neutrality normally end up becoming agents

of social control and supporting the status quo (which may be either just or unjust but in most of the major conflict zones is normally unjust).

Those who imbed their analysis and practice in conflict and change theory, however, will give more weight to processes of empowerment and liberation from dependent and unequal processes. Understanding the deforming effects of political asymmetries (power and powerlessness) on social relationships will result in different kinds of conflict analyses and prescriptions. Those who understand both politics and economics will be disposed to ensuring that peacebuilding and problem solving are as much about unmasking the powerful and equalizing unequal relationships as they are about solving present problems. This is an important antidote to those who see their role in establishment terms. This advice provides an interesting challenge to the dominant definitions of crisis management and conflict resolution as understood by intergovernmental organizations such as the United Nations.

Construed in a radical way, conflict resolution is aimed at enhancing freedom and justice and maximizing autonomy. This is very worrying to establishment-oriented resolvers concerned more about preserving harmony and political order than about achieving justice and fairness. There is an important new article on the role of justice in negotiation by William Zartmann et al. (1996) on "Negotiation as a Search for Justice." This argues that genuine conflict resolution/problem solving always involves some implicit or explicit agreement about the notion of justice. The writers assert that this agreement will, eventually, govern the disposition of the items in conflict. While they acknowledge the difficulties of defining exactly what is meant by justice they argue that ignoring it will not result in positive or durable agreements.

There is considerable emasculation of the radical and transformative promise within the conflict resolving community in the United States and elsewhere. A rather unseemly commercialization of the profession has numerous conflict resolution experts competing with each other to provide quick fixes to a range of tractable and intractable problems. To do this they devise and design processes ('ten steps to mediation', 'seven steps to happiness') which are then sold to those who are embroiled in conflict of one sort or another. The promises normally offer more than the reality in most instances, although some of the processes may provide helpful additions to negotiators' toolboxes. Very few of these dispute systems are oriented towards non-adversarial politics and the joint construction of macro futures; even fewer emphasize procedural or substantive justice and the structural transformation likely to result in stable peaceful relationships. Also, by a removal of normal stresses and strains (what Talcott Parsons used to call disequilibria), relatively spontaneous adaptations of individual, social and cultural systems might not take place either.

So what is the promise and what are the essential ingredients of peacebuilding and conflict transformation?

(1) It should be aimed at channelling the energy generated by conflict in constructive, nonviolent rather than destructive and violent directions. Its aim is not to eliminate conflict but to utilize conflictual processes for generative and positive change (which may be relatively spontaneous or directed).

(2) Conflict transformation occurs when violent conflict ceases and/or is expressed in nonviolent ways and when the original structural sources (economic, social, political, military, and cultural) of the conflict have been changed in some way or other.

(3) Conflicts can be transformed, by normal socio-political processes (incremental changes through time) by the parties acting alone, by expert third party intervenors and parties acting together and/or by judicious advocacy and political intervention. Conflict transformation should incorporate a wide cross-section of political decision-makers, citizens, aid and development agencies, religious organizations and social movements. Too often, in the past, conflict transformation has been conceptualized largely as a political problem. It has to be cast as a social and economic problem as well if sustainable structural change is to occur.

(4) Such conflict transformation can take place at any stage of the escalatory cycle. If preventive peacebuilding does not take place at the first sign of trouble and problems remain unaddressed, then transformational processes, in the early stages of an evolving conflict, may take the form of early warning and the application of suitable preventive measures. As the conflict escalates (especially if it turns violent), transformation may depend on some kind of crisis management or intervention and later it may require conciliation, mediation, negotiation, arbitration and collaborative problem solving-processes. Finally, of course conflict transformation involves reconstruction and reconciliation.

Peacebuilding strategies, as I understand them and as they were conceptualized in Gareth Evans' (1993) book, are all those processes that seek to address the underlying causes of violent conflicts and crises either to prevent them (to use John Burton's rather infelicitous term) or if they have occurred, to ensure that they will not recur. They have a strong preventive character and are aimed at meeting basic needs for security and order, shelter, food and clothing, and for recognition of identity and worth. Peacebuilding is what most civilized societies do spontaneously -- namely develop effective national and international rule making regimes, dispute resolution mechanisms and cooperative arrangements to meet basic economic, social, cultural and humanitarian needs and to facilitate effective global citizenship.

This is the foundational base of conflict transformation. It occurs at all levels in the home, in the community, nationally and internationally. Putting in place arms control regimes, the International Court of Justice, and increasing numbers of confidence building mechanisms are all attempts to ensure that national and international transactions are cooperative and peaceful. So are in-country initiatives that are aimed at reducing gaps between the rich and the poor, extending basic human rights between all peoples, and building sustainable development processes. In these resilient societies, individuals and collectivities acknowledge the pervasiveness and positive utility of conflict and have developed institutional mechanisms for channelling them in creative directions. This particular element of conflict transformation is key to all the rest.

The Social Policy and Resettlement Division of the World Bank has acknowledged this in a recent report on Post Conflict Reconstruction (Holtzman, 1996). They highlighted the strong correlation between poverty and conflict and note that fifteen of the twenty least developed countries in the world have been involved in major violent conflicts, and over half of all low income countries have been involved in major civil conflicts during the past fifteen years. The Bank identifies six basic elements in a reconstruction post-conflict peacebuilding strategy (Holtzman, 1996):

- Jump starting the national economy;
- Decentralized community based investments;
- Repairing key transport and communications networks;
- Demining (where relevant and linked to other priority investments);
- Demobilization and retraining of ex-combatants;
- Reintegration of displaced populations

Even these minimalist goals are unlikely to reach fruition unless accompanied by processes which restore open and free communications, rebuild trust, help parties understand how to overcome past enmities, enable an accurate diagnosis of problems and generate new kinds of interactive frameworks.

It is in relation to these sorts of issues that there should be a strategic marriage between collaborative (interactive to use Herb Kelman's terms) analytical problem-solving workshops (CAPS) and specific peace building processes -- especially those connected to a wider variety of economic and social development initiatives. I had hopes, for example, that *An Agenda for Peace* and *An Agenda for Development* might be combined in an "Agenda for Human Security" and that the Social Summit might be linked to the Security Council Summit preceding *An Agenda for Peace*. This was not to be, so it is important that CAPS methods be used to make these linkages in order to combine the development and conflict resolution discourses, since these are key to successful peacebuilding and to the transformation of hostile relationships.

The interactive problem-solving approach involves (1) identification and analysis of the problem, (2) joint shaping of ideas for solution, (3) influencing the other side, and (4) creating a supportive political environment (Kelman, 1996). Not only does this provide a critical backdrop to deeper understandings of the dynamics of the conflict itself, or in changing images of one's own party and of the adversaries, but it is essential to the development of a successful peacebuilding strategy as well.

Most problem solving workshops have been overwhelmingly preoccupied with resolution of political conflicts through applying what William Zartmann terms the "formula and details" to the resolution of protracted conflicts (Zartmann et al., 1996). Although economic, developmental and infrastructural elements have often figured within the workshops (especially as leverage in the reaching of a political solution to a military problem) there have been relatively few workshops that have assigned primacy to development issues as a means whereby the parties might establish formula and details for the resolution of the political and military issues in question. Yet the outcome of focusing on the political economy of the conflict must be more imaginative solutions to the needs and fears of all adversaries. If adversaries can identify a wide variety of post-conflict economic and social opportunities, this will generate reassurance and confidence and a willingness to accommodate the interests of the other in relation to the specifics of terminating the violence and seeking some long-term transformations.

Universities, peace-building intervention centers, regional organizations (such as the OAU, the OAS, the EC, and the ASEAN) all have a part to play in relation to peacebuilding, preventive diplomacy, and other early and creative interventions in potentially violent conflicts. The United Nations clearly can play a critical role as a coordinator of a variety of actors and initiatives in the prevention and pre-emption of violent conflict. It is global in

scope and it has a full range of conflict- resolution mechanisms available to it, ranging from good offices through military peacekeeping. As Connie Peck (1996) suggests, the United Nations embodies all approaches to conflict resolution.

[A]n interest based approach, a rights based approach and a power based approach, with each corresponding roughly to the organs of the United Nations -- good offices of the Secretary General and his envoys representing the organization's interest based approach; the judicial functions of the World Court representing its rights based approach; and the Security Council representing its power based approach.

The trick is to work out how to transform conflicts *before* there is any need to invoke the Security Council and its power based tactics. Most recent conflicts suggest that the United Nations conflict transformation/resolution capabilities will be enhanced if there is a willingness to incorporate national and international nongovernmental as well as governmental actors in the process (Track I and Track II actors). To do this effectively, however, involves organizational changes within the United Nations, the harnessing of political will to solve problems in a peaceable fashion as well as the generation of sufficient resources to make peacebuilding, conflict transformation, relationship and community building the top priority for the United Nations and other international organizations. The key question here, is how to shift official and unofficial opinion in favor of security-generating preventive measures -- a focus on good governance, just social and economic conditions and acting early in the solution of problems before they go critical. There is an underlying need for mechanisms which enable potential antagonists to surface problems before they start fighting about them and for institutional mechanisms to provide a quiet and effective response.

What is likely to shift adversaries, third party intervenors, governments, IGOs, NGOs and the UN itself to start adopting a more holistic view of these processes, to combine collaborative problem-solving techniques with the development of just and sustainable social, economic and political systems?

In the first place, we need to start looking for what Elise Boulding (1995, p. 202) calls "signals of peace" or what Jim Wallis (1995, p. 175) calls "Signs of Transformation." These are nonviolent opportunities for creative solutions in moments of tension and in relation to all social and political problems. We need to look for these at home first and then abroad. In Wallis' view these signs of transformation include assigning priority to the poor, highlighting compassion and breaking down divisions between Us and Them, ensuring that Community becomes the moral foundation for economics and a host of other things as well such as reverence for the whole creation, joy and hope (Wallis, 1995, pp. 175-177). This means reinforcing cultures of peace rather than cultures of violence. The creation and enhancement of cultures of peace and structures to give expression to them requires considerable human ingenuity. We have to be sensitive to and nurture them when we see them.

Second, and as a part of the first task, we need to become more comfortable with ambiguity, more accepting of the generative as well as the destructive power of conflict and more aware of how we can utilize conflicts to transform processes and institutions in a constructive fashion. It is how conflicts are dealt with which will determine creative or destructive outcomes.

Third, if we are to counter the pessimism of "realpolitik,"⁴ we need to have a reality based optimism so that we can operate on best rather than worse case assumptions.

Fourth, all parties to conflicts (no matter how powerful/powerless, official or unofficial they are) have a right to be involved in the solutions of their own problems. If they are excluded, there is a strong probability that whatever settlement/solutions might be reached will fail, thereby forcing the imposition of other partial settlements/solutions which will prove equally fragile.

Fifth, it is important to reiterate the moral dimension of problem solving, including equalization of power relations between peoples.

Sixth, it is important to practice civility in relationships -- especially if one is offering oneself as a third party intervenor. There is a long history of such civility by international envoy mediators (Rosergio, 1995).

Seventh, problems/conflicts must be dealt with as early as possible, when they are relatively tractable. We need not only to devote more attention to early warning of potential problems, but to develop the will to start addressing them before they go critical.

Eighth, everyone needs to learn how to resolve conflicts and problems in a nonviolent and creative fashion. This is a major challenge for education but it lies at the heart of the central argument in this paper. There is a strong onus of responsibility on peace and conflict theorists to model a peaceful pedagogy and peaceful research and practice principles so that individuals everywhere develop a critical orientation to orthodox ideas and relationships and deal with their conflicts nonviolently and generatively. Peace and security has to become everyone's business. As Michael Banks (1987) puts it:

People trained in adversarial techniques (lawyers, diplomats, the military) tend to advocate policies which build walls between parties; people trained in problem solving techniques (businessmen, psychologists, technical experts) are more likely to advocate policies which build bridges between parties. Reliance upon a single channel of communication foments misperception; multiple channels give more opportunity to perceive the opponent realistically. Isolationism puts an actor at risk; interdependence, if encouraged, generates a network of criss-crossing relationships which can ultimately become impossible to tear apart.

This is the challenge for peace and conflict studies: how can we develop a web of interdependent relationships which will enable the application of reason to problems and their nonviolent resolution? The answer to this question lies in the enhancement of relationship, community and civil society and in the conversations that make this possible between all sorts of identity groups and epistemic communities.

Endnotes

1. For an excellent analysis of the positive and negative consequences of these two principles see Ignatieff, 1993.

2. For an interesting discussion on the way in which economic growth challenges environmental survival and relegates two thirds of the world's population to second class citizenship or worse see Susan George, 1993. Her central argument is that the reigning "structural adjustment" model may accumulate hard cash for debt repayment, but such programs "devastate the lives of the poor, make those of the middle class more precarious and tend to wreak havoc with the environment."

3. See PIOOM Newsletter, Vol. 6, no. 1 (Summer 1994), pp. 20-21, for an excellent map plotting Wars and Armed Conflicts in 1993.

4. For a particularly gloomy account of the realpolitik position see Gray, 1994. In this article he asserts that there are four broad assumptions to safety in statecraft which are that (1) bad times return, (2) there are thugs out there, (3) military power is trumps, and (4) new world orders come and go and come again.

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