This study focuses on the interplay of human rights and conflict resolution in the practice of civil society organisations and independent state institutions, so as to enhance understanding of the relationship between these fields and contribute to improved practice. It has been recognised that human rights, justice, conflict and peace are closely linked. Yet for many years these bodies of theory and practice have remained surprisingly separate in conceptual and practical terms. Those working on these issues have been known to strongly disagree about the most suitable response in specific instances. At times they may even perceive one another’s actions as hampering their own.

By considering the practical experiences of specific non-governmental organisations and state institutions in South Africa, Northern Ireland, Nepal and Zimbabwe, the study deviates from much of the existing literature; that focuses extensively on the so-called ‘peace versus justice’ debate. As such, it recognises that ‘conflict resolution’ entails more than reaching a settlement to end violence or repression. It also appreciates that efforts to advance ‘human rights’ go beyond pursuing individual criminal accountability for serious abuses.

The study is based on some eighteen years of personal practical experience, a review of relevant literature and key informant interviews.

Michelle Parlevliet (MA Political Science, MA International Peace Studies) has worked on the nexus of human rights and conflict resolution in various capacities since 1997. She has published widely on this theme and related topics, and has provided facilitation, training, research and technical assistance to multiple organisations and networks at grassroots and senior policy-making level in Africa, Asia, and Europe. Between 2010 and 2015, she pursued her PhD at the Faculty of Law at the University of Amsterdam.
Embracing Concurrent Realities

Revisiting the Relationship between Human Rights and Conflict Resolution

Michelle Parlevliet

EXCERPTS
from doctoral dissertation,
submitted to University of Amsterdam
(defence 30 October 2015)

Contains:
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**Embracing Concurrent Realities**  
Revisiting the Relationship between Human Rights and Conflict Resolution  
PhD thesis, University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands

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**Summary**

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2: Excerpt Chapter 1

It is early January 2001. South African residents of Du Noon and Doornbach, two adjacent squatter areas to the north of Cape Town, forcibly evict people of foreign descent living in their midst, ostensibly in retaliation for the killing of a South African squatter. They chase out the ‘makwerekwere’ (a derogatory term used in South Africa to denote migrants from other African countries), threatening them with more violence should they try to return and accusing them of being involved in crime and of stealing jobs, houses, and women. Those evicted, their shacks and other belongings having been destroyed through arson and other means, seek refuge at a local police station. This is poorly equipped to deal with the sudden presence of over a hundred upset, fearful and angry non-nationals. The local municipality steps in to provide food and temporary shelter, erecting tents on the station’s premises. It also contacts a well-known non-governmental conflict resolution organisation in Cape Town, the Centre for Conflict Resolution (CCR), to request assistance in resolving this situation.

Two mediators from CCR contact the informal leaders of the South African squatter residents and those evicted, to check whether they – and the people they represent – agree to CCR facilitating a conflict resolution process to address the issues between them. They engage with the local police and local municipality, both of which are keen to get the matter sorted out as soon as possible. The municipality stresses that it can only provide relief to those expelled for a brief period of time. The mediators also communicate with the local office of the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC), since it too approached CCR for support in relation to this violent eviction, having received a few complaints of human rights violations. As the country’s principal human rights institution, the SAHRC is concerned about violence directed against non-nationals. Unfortunately, this is not a new phenomenon in ‘the new South Africa’, but few incidents of this scale have been recorded until now.¹

For the Centre for Conflict Resolution, this situation was not unlike others the organisation had encountered before. In the 1980s and 1990s, CCR had been one of several Cape Town-based non-governmental organisations (NGOs) actively involved in addressing community-based conflict and containing political violence in cities and townships in the Western Cape province. As such, the organisation had often intervened in conflicts that had already erupted into violence or might do so in future, and in which the pressure was on to deliver results as quickly as possible.

CCR’s practitioners were used to operating in situations where hostility was intense, passions ran high, multiple issues – social, political, economic, cultural – appeared to be at stake, and which involved a range of actors, all with their own concerns and priorities. In this particular instance, the lead mediator was a seasoned practitioner, a long-term lay minister and community activist who had cut his conflict resolution teeth in the first half of the 1990s, when political violence in South Africa was at its

¹ Personal notes, on file with author. Those evicted were mostly Namibians and Angolans; the term ‘non-nationals’ is derived from SAHRC practice. For more discussion and references, see 5.2.3, 7.1.1 and 7.4. A brief discussion of this case was previously published in Galant and Parlevliet (2005).
height. His co-mediator was a former student activist, whose turn to ‘professional’
conflict resolution practice was more recent but no less rooted in concrete life
experience. And yet,

The Centre’s mediators soon find themselves in a bind. The South Africans living in the
two settlements are inflamed by claims – contained in local media reports – that they
have violated the evictees’ human rights, and that xenophobia must have played a role in
their behaviour. As they speak with the mediators, they indicate their willingness to take
part in a facilitated dialogue process, but also say that they will walk out if they are
accused of xenophobia or if their actions are going to be talked about in terms of human
rights.

Meanwhile, those sheltered at the police station tell the mediators that the violence and
destruction inflicted on them can only be talked about in such terms. They insist that, for
them to participate, the abuses committed should be included as ‘human rights
violations’ in any agenda for talks between themselves and their former neighbours. In
their view, not doing so will amount to their further victimisation. Some have lodged a
complaint of human rights violations with the South African Human Rights Commission;
a few have also laid criminal charges for theft and destruction of property.2

At the time, I was working at the Centre for Conflict Resolution, managing a
programme on human rights and conflict management I had helped to establish at the
Centre nearly two years before. While I had read about the expulsion in local
newspapers, I only became aware of CCR’s involvement when the mediators working
on the case invited my programme colleague and myself to join them on the mediation
team. Noting that this case raised some difficult questions, they suggested that it
would be useful if some more ‘human rights’-oriented people assisted the mediation,
given the apparent prominence of human rights issues.

Why was the very use of human rights language considered so contentious – and how
should they deal with that? Another concern related to impartiality: if, as mediators,
they were to raise the alleged human rights violations as issues in the dispute to be
addressed in mediation, the South African residents would perceive them as biased.
Yet not doing so might well make the mediators suspect in the eyes of those who had
been thrown out of the informal settlements. How were they going to avoid alienating
the South Africans without downplaying the treatment meted out to those evicted?
Then there were the complaints lodged with the SAHRC and a criminal case the police
had opened – what did these mean for the intervention process? My mediator
colleagues were quick to point out that, of course, they were well versed in mediation
and we should not think of them being at a loss about how to handle this. Even so, our
knowledge of human rights might be useful as they set out to analyse the conflict,
device an intervention strategy and liaise with the SAHRC.

Until then, much of the work undertaken through the Human Rights and Conflict
Management Programme (HRCMP) I managed at CCR had entailed assisting rights-

2 Personal notes, based on conversations with mediators at the time, on file with author.
focused organisations to explore how they could use conflict resolution methods to enhance their human rights work; this had included a prominent human rights NGO, the South African Human Rights Commission and a network of refugees in Cape Town. The interaction with my mediator colleagues, however, brought to light other facets of the relationship between human rights and conflict resolution.

It showed how conflict resolution practitioners might grapple with human rights questions arising in the course of their work – questions that were impossible to ignore since they could affect the credibility or effectiveness of conflict resolution efforts. It also illustrated the terms in which my colleagues perceived this case, such as ‘the parties’, ‘issues to a dispute’, ‘intervention’ and ‘impartiality’. Yet it could also be talked differently, using human rights terminology – ‘abuses’, ‘violations’, ‘allegations’, ‘victims’ and ‘perpetrators’. Did these alternative ways to view and name the same empirical reality have implications for how to approach the matter and conceive of possible solutions? It further seemed that my mediator colleagues were not very familiar with dealing with the human rights aspects of a case like this. In fact, this rights dimension appeared to generate some discomfort, as if it interfered with my colleagues’ tried and tested conflict resolution process and methodology.

The situation described above is only one example of how questions of human rights and conflict resolution may intersect in the practice of individuals or organisations seeking to advance human rights or ensure the sustainable resolution of conflict. Here, conflict resolution practitioners sought to draw on knowledge of human rights as they set out to facilitate a dialogue to resolve a specific conflict between parties. In addition, a human rights institution sought support from a conflict resolution organisation in dealing with a situation where rights and conflict were entangled. However, in many other situations, no such link between human rights and conflict resolution perspectives or approaches is made. Alternatively, when they do meet, they are often perceived as being at loggerheads, however surprising or counterintuitive that may seem to people unfamiliar with either field or with international relations (Solomon 2006, ix). Practitioners from the two fields may thus be oblivious of one another’s efforts, despite operating in the same context, or they can appear to work at cross-purposes.

This study is about the relationship between human rights and conflict resolution in theory and practice. It considers how the interplay of the two fields manifests in reality and what questions this raises for practitioners working in them. Focusing especially on the work of national or local civil society organisations and independent state institutions, it also considers the implications of this interaction for the relationship between human rights and conflict resolution more generally, in light of a longstanding debate on these fields supposedly being contradictory or complementary in nature.
The study is based on some eighteen years of practical experience working on the nexus of human rights and conflict resolution in various capacities (notably programme manager, trainer, facilitator and adviser) and contexts, supplemented with a review of relevant literature and interviews. [...]3

Outside these periods of formal employment, I have also benefited from insights arising from assignments focusing on human rights and conflict resolution undertaken as an independent consultant. During my work on this study, I became involved in various projects that were directly relevant, including speaking engagements at meetings of practitioners and scholars from the two fields, preparing a joint publication, facilitating training workshops on linking human rights and conflict resolution for practitioners from various organisations, and participating in a few internal UN processes.4 All in all, this study combines insights from practice and theory and constitutes an exercise in reflective practice, as will be explained below.

*****


3 See the curriculum vitae at the back of this book.
4 These include the design and delivery of six training workshops on connecting human rights and conflict transformation (of which four for Swiss development practitioners (2012-2015); two for German practitioners, including coordinators from the German Civil Peace Service (2009, 2012); and one for a Zimbabwean human rights NGO (2012)); preparation of a publication on human rights and conflict transformation in development practice, with staff members from the peace and security and human rights-based approaches sections of German development assistance (Parlevliet 2011a); participation in three Amsterdam Dialogue meetings between high-level human rights advocates and senior mediators (2010-2012, see also fn. 13 below); delivery of keynote address to Annual General Meeting of KOFF Centre for Peacebuilding in Switzerland (2012); assignments with the United Nations (2012-2014, see fn. 14 below); facilitation of a working session on human rights, justice and peacebuilding at international conference hosted by German peacebuilding network Fri-Ent (2014); and facilitation of two learning events about human rights and peacebuilding for international peacebuilding NGO Conciliation Resources (2014).
3: Summary

Embracing Concurrent Realities: Revisiting the Relationship between Human Rights and Conflict Resolution

This study focuses on the interplay of human rights and conflict resolution in the practice of civil society organisations and independent state institutions. It aims to enhance understanding of the relationship between these fields and contribute to improved practice. While it has been recognised for some time that human rights, justice, conflict and peace are closely linked, for many years these two bodies of theory and practice have remained quite separate in conceptual and practical terms. Organisations and people working in these domains do not necessarily consider whether and how their efforts interact, or the implications of operating in the same context. At times, they have been known to perceive one another's actions as hampering their own. Human rights activists and conflict resolution practitioners can disagree vehemently about the most suitable course of action or the ends to be pursued in a given context; tensions arise especially when abuses are widespread and pressure to act is high.

The starting point of the study is that such polarisation detracts attention and resources from what actors in these fields seek to achieve and that the ongoing disconnect between their approaches threatens to undermine efforts in both realms. After all, human rights and conflict are closely linked. Violations of human rights can be both symptoms and causes of violent conflict, suggesting that protecting human rights may help address conflict sustainably. By facilitating greater understanding of the relationship between human rights and conflict resolution – in both theory and practice – the study thus seeks to enhance how human rights and conflict resolution actors work and relate to one another ‘on the ground’. It examines how human rights and conflict resolution thinking and practices have interacted in specific situations experienced by specific actors in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Northern Ireland and Nepal (with some reference to examples from elsewhere). It also explores what this can teach us about the relationship between the two fields generally.

By focusing on the practical experiences of civil society actors and independent state institutions, the study deviates from much of the existing literature. In particular, it sidesteps the ‘peace versus justice’ debate on the challenges of promoting both peace and accountability in countries affected by violent conflict. In doing so, it recognises that ‘conflict resolution’ entails more than reaching a settlement to end violence or repression, and that ‘human rights’ goes beyond pursuing individual criminal accountability for serious abuses. It also recognises that efforts to address conflicts or advance human rights are not undertaken only in times of crisis, and often involve organisations and individuals other than political and military elites. It further
acknowledges that human rights and conflict resolution may both support and be in tension with each other, depending on time and context. To date, the existing literature has devoted relatively little attention to examining the variable and dynamic nature of their relationship.

Methodologically, the study is based on some eighteen years of practical experience; the author has worked on and at the nexus of human rights and conflict resolution in diverse contexts (and continued to do so during the period of this study). This is augmented by a literature review and 26 interviews. The study is an exercise in reflective practice that processes insights, questions and observations arising over time, blending lived experience and social investigation. This implies a qualitative methodology that draws on empirical material gathered by a participant-insider.

Theoretically, the study is grounded in constructivism, which stresses the social construction of reality. Adopting an actor-orientation, it presumes that actors have agency in how they define situations, identify objectives, understand options for action and pursue human rights and/or conflict resolution goals. Finally, the notions of 'field' and 'frame' run through the study. The first implies that 'human rights' and 'conflict resolution' constitute realms of socially patterned activity that can be described; the latter points to the way in which problems are not predetermined but have to be constructed in order to be acted upon.

The study consists of nine chapters and three parts. Chapter 1 explains its focus, aim and rationale, and introduces the theoretical and methodological framework as outlined above. The next three chapters comprise part I, and provide a general overview of each field, followed by a comparison. The purpose of this is twofold: it seeks to embed the later discussion of concrete experiences and challenges in a solid understanding of human rights and conflict resolution and it addresses another gap in the literature, which often describes field actors in simplistic terms and makes little effort to comprehend what the two fields entail in terms of their foundation, evolution, core ideas and practices. The literature also often portrays the two fields as fairly unambiguous while each contains several contradictions. This suggests that human rights and conflict resolution are less straightforward than may seem at first sight, and that they are subject to certain limitations.

Chapter 2 reviews the human rights field, noting how 'human rights' has become the dominant normative vocabulary of our time. The field has a strong legal character, giving primacy to global human rights standards. Yet human rights are more than law; grounded in the notion of inherent human dignity, they also serve as moral principles and inform social and political action. An emphasis on making power accountable and safeguarding individual freedoms has long been central to the field. 'Human rights' spotlight the extent to which the state affords or denies individuals respectful and non-discriminatory treatment, freedom of choice, and participation.
The concept has expanded over time, devoting more attention to fairness and equality in the socioeconomic realm. It also recognises nowadays that groups may be rights-holders and non-state actors duty-bearers. Yet, there is a contradiction between the narrow and legalistic character of much thinking and practice in the field and the expansive nature of the rights concept itself and the field’s ambitions. Other tensions include a tendency to stress redress and individual accountability rather than structural reforms, an ambivalent relation with power, and balancing the universal nature of rights norms with the importance of local application, relevance and ownership.

Chapter 3 considers the conflict resolution field, which has also expanded in scope and ambition since it emerged. Despite considerable heterogeneity, the field has consistently focused on how to address conflict constructively and effectively when it arises, assuming that conflict need not be physically violent. It emphasises preventing violence and generating solutions that are acceptable to the parties, balance their underlying interests, and are reached through dialogue. Over time, conflict resolution has become more concerned with asymmetric conflict in which power is imbalanced, prompting a focus on identity groups as the most relevant unit of analysis. This has also induced a greater emphasis on social justice and long-term change.

In seeking to limit violence, however, conflict resolution risks being used as a tool for pacification, prioritising the manifestations of conflict over its causes and falling short on engaging power imbalances. Tensions thus exist between the field's settlement and transformation sides and its pragmatic and normative impulses. Other tensions relate to its generalising and contextualising tendencies and to the contrast between the notion of conflict resolution in theory and the limited way in which it is often put into practice.

Chapter 4 compares the two fields and challenges the tendency in the literature to pay far more attention to their differences than to their similarities. It does not gloss over such differences, however. At times the fields’ respective emphases and strategies diverge to such an extent that they appear incompatible. Yet striking similarities do exist. Both fields are very normative: they seek to improve the human condition and share a belief in the agency of people to shape their environment. The fields have also evolved similarly over time, expanding steadily in substance and reach within a few decades. Finally, their internal contradictions are surprisingly alike, pointing to how difficult is for both human rights and conflict resolution to live up to their aspirations ‘to do good’.

Overall, the argument put forth in part I is that the two fields offer specific lenses for seeing, being and doing in the world. Coming with priorities, preferences and demands, these lenses highlight certain aspects of reality, downplay or overlook other features, and shape action by encouraging some responses while invalidating others. They are expressed and reinforced through specific imagery, concepts and
vocabularies that are fairly inaccessible to the uninitiated. They also contain certain limitations. Neither field can claim to possess the ultimate wisdom about solving problems and creating the desired future. Part I further shows how rising ambitions, widening conceptions and diversifying practices have reduced the distance between human rights and conflict resolution. This has increased the probability of the fields clashing – while also increasing the prospects for synergy and cross-fertilisation. By and large, part I clarifies how understanding the distinct nature of the two lenses sheds light on how both fields may simultaneously connect and disconnect.

Part II, consisting of chapters 5 and 6, explores how the relationship between human rights and conflict resolution manifests in practice. It does so by discussing practical experiences of two field-specific civil society organisations in South Africa (a human rights NGO and a conflict resolution NGO), one civil society actor not associated with either field (an ecumenical network of churches in Zimbabwe) and a few independent state institutions (notably a number of rights-oriented South African institutions and a conflict resolution-focused institution in Northern Ireland).

The discussion in part II confirms the existence and relevance of the two lenses: distinct frames of reference and ways of engaging with problems can be noted. Yet it also reveals that the boundaries between human rights and conflict resolution are far more permeable than the ‘field’ and ‘lens’ notions imply. Descriptions of practical situations demonstrate that human rights and conflict resolution are deeply interwoven in the daily practice of these actors and that there is considerable fluidity between the fields. This especially comes to the fore as actors seeking to advance rights or address conflict respond to concrete situations on the ground.

Chapter 5 first discusses how and why lawyers from Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR), a South African NGO, started to draw on interest-based conflict resolution methods (mediation and negotiation) in their efforts to ensure the rights of farmworkers in the Western Cape province, a very vulnerable constituency. This was in response to the realisation that adversarial tactics and legal means were insufficient to resolve conflicts around farmworkers’ rights conclusively. The rights practitioners subsequently found that interest-based methods, while very useful, were no panacea. They had to learn when rights- or interest-based methods might be most suitable.

The chapter also discusses how practitioners from another South African NGO, the Centre for Conflict Resolution (CCR), faced human rights questions when intervening in community-level conflict situations. As they were seldom attuned to such rights aspects, they tended to overlook or be frustrated by them, which could negatively affect their interventions. Yet, over time, some practitioners came to appreciate human rights – in both a legal and moral sense – as setting the parameters within which their conflict resolution efforts ought to take place and as a ‘tool’ they could use to address conflict.
The experiences of these organisations highlight how working on conflict and working on human rights prove to be closely related in practice. Human rights and conflict resolution flow into one another in multiple ways, bringing opportunities and challenges for the actors involved. The observed fluidity probably stems from the nature of the work they do, the type of problems they address, and the context in which they operate.

However, many efforts to advance human rights or tackle conflict are pursued by actors that are not professional NGOs in either one or the other field. Chapter 6 hence considers the interplay of human rights and conflict resolution in the practice of a number of other actors, on opposite ends of the organisational spectrum. It first discusses a church network in Zimbabwe's Manicaland province that began to engage in rights advocacy, support to victims of abuses, violence mitigation and dialogue facilitation in response to growing political violence. While not conceiving of itself initially in terms of human rights and/or conflict resolution, it tried to impact on both domains.

The chapter then looks at some independent state institutions charged with protecting human rights, preserving democracy, facilitating dispute settlement or ensuring administrative justice (including the South African Human Rights Commission and the Northern Ireland Parades Commission). These statutory bodies also often have to engage with both human rights and conflict resolution while implementing their mandate, even though their formal title (or mandate) may only emphasise one. The chapter therefore characterises these different actors as operating on the interface of human rights and conflict resolution, since they perform functions and undertake activities associated with both. It is hard to see where 'human rights' and 'conflict resolution' begin and end. The extent to which the actors grasp this and consciously engage with the interface of the two fields varies greatly, however. While the Manicaland churches gradually recognised it and used the insight to reflect on their roles and approach, the independent state institutions referred to seldom seem to give much thought to how human rights and conflict resolution come together in their work – let alone the practical implications.

Together, the chapters comprising part II shed light on what human rights and conflict resolution may bring to one another. Mutual contributions include enhancing analysis and expanding the practical approaches at the disposal of actors, because the fields call attention to different aspects of the same situation and encourage various kinds of action. This suggests that the practice and theory of human rights and conflict resolution have potential to 'fill gaps' in one another's approach to and understanding of reality.

Yet the practical examples also show that experiencing the fluidity of human rights and conflict resolution can be confusing, frustrating and challenging for actors working in and across these fields. Tough questions emerge which cannot be avoided.
The study finds that working ‘around’ the relationship of human rights and conflict resolution – trying to evade or ignore it – is likely to have unfavourable consequences, as important facets of reality that contribute to rights violations and/or conflict dynamics are not taken into account and relevant strategies are overlooked.

**Part III**, consisting of chapters 7 and 8, focuses on the theme of navigating complexity and points to the importance of moving beyond binary framings, i.e. thinking in either/or terms.

**Chapter 7** probes four particular challenges that regularly arise for actors working on human rights and/or conflict resolution. Derived from the examples presented previously, they relate to balancing short- and long-term goals, pursuing confrontation or negotiation in contexts marked by structural injustices and power asymmetry, managing tensions between facilitator and advocate roles and referring to human rights violations and concerns in conflict resolution interventions. It explores what these challenges involve and how actors have sought to approach them, so as to shed further light on the relationship between human rights and conflict resolution. The challenges are often positioned and experienced as dilemmas that involve conflicting, yet equally relevant, objectives and imply various courses of action, each of which potentially has adverse effects. Such dilemma-thinking captures the choices available to practitioners in a simplistic binary frame, as if actors are forced to choose between only two, mutually exclusive, options for action.

The study shows that organisations and individual practitioners navigate the complexity of the social world in various ways. They seldom allowed themselves to be confined by a dualistic frame of reference. Instead, they look for opportunities to combine the evident options for action or to circumvent them by identifying alternatives. In fact, grappling with a particular challenge may bring out the interdependence of different imperatives, strategies, or roles – even ones that seem outright incompatible, like confrontation and cooperation, or facilitation and advocacy.

In addition, binary framing risks simplifying the issues at stake and can jeopardise actors’ ability to act effectively. In reality, the practical approaches identified often involved a process of reframing to create space for manoeuvring. Yet such reframing does not necessarily resolve tensions that may arise in particular situations or at specific times. The chapter finds that it appears to be especially useful when actors are willing to come to grips with such tensions, questions and ambiguities rather than wishing them away. As such, it also points to the importance of processes of reflection to help actors in both fields to figure out how to negotiate the challenges they face.

**Chapter 8** challenges the binary framing that has marked much of the literature on the fields’ relationship to date, which positions them as either contradictory or complementary. Building on the findings of earlier chapters, it argues that human
rights and conflict resolution can support and be in tension with one another, depending on context, time and the actions of organisations and practitioners. By calling attention to the variable and dynamic nature of the relationship between the two fields, the chapter reveals the relevance of examining what factors may affect the way they interact in practice.

It shows the usefulness of this line of enquiry by considering how the following four specific factors affect the relative convergence of human rights and conflict resolution: the conceptualisations of 'human rights' and 'conflict resolution' that prevail in a given context; the political and economic context in which human rights and conflict resolution thinking and practices take place; the strategies used to pursue human rights and conflict resolution goals; and finally, the nature and extent of practitioners’ knowledge of, exposure to and appreciation of 'the other field'.

These four factors highlight that actors working on human rights and conflict resolution do not have unlimited agency in how they deal with the challenges they encounter. For example, while they can chose how to construe the meaning and application of 'human rights' and 'conflict resolution' (at least to a degree), actors can exert far less influence on how political dynamics interact with such conceptualisations. In some contexts, the human rights and conflict resolution agendas end up being associated with different conflict parties, which will probably undermine the scope for convergence. In the same vein, while actors have a choice in deciding whether to engage or work across the fields, their ability to do so may be affected by the way funding is allocated, or how the institutional set-up of their organisation separates human rights and conflict resolution oriented activities.

Chapter 8 hence serves as a salient addition to chapter 7, which highlights agency on the part of actors by focusing on the possibility of combining approaches and creating space for manoeuvring through reframing and reflection. It establishes that matters of structure cannot be ignored when seeking to grasp the interplay of human rights and conflict resolution. It also builds on the finding that seemingly divergent and conflicting approaches may be interdependent and complementary. It observes that divergence can serve another function: it may generate a sense of unease that can, over time, prompt practitioners to venture outside the familiar and start taking the other field seriously. In that sense, part III points to surprising paradoxes, finding that contradiction may still be complementary and that divergence may be part of the movement towards convergence.

In conclusion, chapter 9 summarises the main findings of the study, reflects on larger insights emanating from it, and discusses its implications for practice and further research. It revisits the notion of the human rights and conflict resolution fields clashing, and suggests that their similarities may be as much of a hindrance to greater synergy as their differences. Their strong normative character and actors’ passionate belief in the applicability and rightness of their respective frames impede openness to
other views and approaches. The professionalisation of the fields probably exacerbates this by facilitating tunnel vision, entrenching professional identities and increasing the need to prove their relevance.

The relationship between the fields can thus be seen to contain its own conflict dynamics, to which core tenets of conflict resolution apply – like the importance of enhancing understanding between proponents of human rights and conflict resolution. Even so, some tension is likely to persist, as substantive differences in interpretations and approaches to social reality will not go away. The chapter argues that these can best be appreciated as different perspectives on the world, specialist frames and vocabularies, each of which is more suitable for some purposes, but less so for others. They can also serve as a warning signal to prevent salient features of reality and/or alternative courses of action from being overlooked.

The conclusion further revisits the notion of reframing, explaining that the study points to the risks involved when practitioners merely act from within their own frame without reflecting on it. It suggests that it is possible to ‘remake’ such existing frames, identifying three different ways to do this. Reframing can occur when one frame gains supremacy, or as the result of a process of reflection. In the second instance, practitioners review their prevailing perspectives and approaches after experiencing trouble with their definition of the problem or solution, or when they have been unable to achieve the desired results. This can prompt an interest in experimenting with new frames or lenses in future. A third route to remaking existing frames opens up when these frames are destabilised by practical problems and unforeseen circumstances. Actors’ perspectives and practices then become subject to renegotiation – at least, if they are able and willing to cope with a degree of confusion and vulnerability and resist the temptation to ensure the stability of their beliefs by ‘managing’ empirical evidence or dismissing certain information.

An overall insight emerging from the study is that considering the relationship between human rights and conflict resolution reveals the existence of multiple, concurrent realities. Engaging with this relationship thus means recognising that, even if they conflict at times, these realities are simultaneously valid and interdependent. The study thus emphasises the necessity and the challenge of holding, embracing and acting on the concurrent realities presented by human rights and conflict resolution. This is important for organisations working on human rights or conflict resolution, since the study also makes clear that failing to consider the two in conjunction can jeopardise their efforts. There is, however, no blueprint for linking human rights and conflict resolution in practical efforts, because how they interact will probably look different from case to case. Even so, the study does offer some clues as to what behaviour and attitudes it is best to avoid.
It also has three general implications for future practice:

Firstly, actors working in and across these fields need to recognise that, even though they may be mostly impact on one of the two – be it human rights or conflict – they generally work in contexts where the other is present too, and where the other lens is also relevant. Consequently, they need to reflect on the interaction between their own efforts and the phenomenon that has traditionally been outside their frame of reference. This is not to shy away from initiatives that may be contentious, but to anticipate possible negative effects and critical reactions – and to identify ways of addressing them as much as possible.

Secondly, it is important to adopt a more holistic understanding of human rights and conflict resolution. Narrow, traditional notions of both core concepts fail to do justice to the evolution of thinking and practice in these fields. Furthermore, they do not suit the nature of asymmetric conflict and disregard the close links between human rights, justice, conflict and peace. Instead, it is useful to understand both of these endeavours (and their interface) as having multiple dimensions. Rules, structures and institutions, relationships and processes need to be taken into account when seeking to channel violent and potentially violent conflict into non-violent processes of social and political change and ensure the realisation of human rights.

Thirdly, there is great value in learning more about the ‘other’ field and reflecting on the scope, substance and limitations of one’s own frame. This is not to argue that human rights actors should become conflict resolution experts or vice versa, but to recognise that specialisation carries risks which can jeopardize well-intended efforts to improve rights protection or facilitate durable solutions to conflict. Greater insight into other ways of grasping, being and doing in the world enhances actors’ versatility to probe, observe and act in support of their efforts to improve the human condition and create a better world.

At the core, this study is a call for nuance and for further engagement between people and organisations from different backgrounds concerned with peace, conflict, human rights and justice. It has revealed the relevance and necessity of considering human rights and conflict resolution in conjunction more than has been the case to date, in theory and practice.
4: Curriculum Vitae

Michelle Parlevliet (1971) was born in Almelo, the Netherlands. She obtained an MA in Political Science, specialising in International Relations, from the University of Amsterdam in 1996, cum laude. An edited version of her MA thesis, ‘Considering Truth: Dealing with a Legacy of Human Rights Violations’, was published in the *Netherlands Quarterly of Human Rights*. She also obtained an MA in International Peace Studies from the Joan B. Kroc Institute at the University of Notre Dame, United States, for which she was awarded a full scholarship and tuition waiver (1994-1995).

In the beginning of her career, Michelle worked in the Prosecutor’s Office at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in The Hague (1995-1996; 1998) and as a researcher for the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Cape Town (1997-1998). In 1999, she helped to establish the Human Rights and Conflict Management Programme at the Cape Town-based Centre for Conflict Resolution, managing the programme until early 2005. After short stints as Alumni Visiting Fellow at the University of Notre Dame and as a consultant for the World Bank in Aceh, she moved to Nepal to work as senior conflict transformation adviser for the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. She supported the Ministry-funded Human Rights and Good Governance Programme and several programme partners in the country, and advised the Embassy of Denmark on its support to Nepal’s peace process (2006-2009). Between 2010 and 2015, she pursued her Ph.D. at the Faculty of Law at the University of Amsterdam while still engaging in practical assignments from time to time.

Over the years, Michelle has published widely on human rights and conflict resolution, national human rights institutions, conflict prevention and transitional justice, and has provided facilitation, training, research and technical assistance to multiple organisations and networks at grassroots and senior policy-making level. These include civil society organisations in several African countries and Nepal, development organisations in Europe and various bodies of the United Nations. She is a member of the Board of Trustees of Conciliation Resources (an international peacebuilding NGO based in London) and also serves on the International Advisory Board of the Centre on Human Rights in Conflict (University of East London), the Editorial Board of the Journal of Human Rights Practice (Oxford Journals), and on the Steering Committee of the Cultural Emergency Response Programme of the Prince Claus Fund for Culture and Development. She continues to combine practice and scholarship in her work and lives with her partner Philipp Wolff in Bosch & Duin, the Netherlands.
This study focuses on the interplay of human rights and conflict resolution in the practice of civil society organisations and independent state institutions, so as to enhance understanding of the relationship between these fields and contribute to improved practice. It has been recognised that human rights, justice, conflict and peace are closely linked. Yet for many years these bodies of theory and practice have remained surprisingly separate in conceptual and practical terms. Those working on these issues have been known to strongly disagree about the most suitable response in specific instances. At times they may even perceive one another’s actions as hampering their own.

By considering the practical experiences of specific non-governmental organisations and state institutions in South Africa, Northern Ireland, Nepal and Zimbabwe, the study deviates from much of the existing literature; that focuses extensively on the so-called ‘peace versus justice’ debate. As such, it recognises that ‘conflict resolution’ entails more than reaching a settlement to end violence or repression. It also appreciates that efforts to advance ‘human rights’ go beyond pursuing individual criminal accountability for serious abuses. The study is based on some eighteen years of personal practical experience, a review of relevant literature and key informant interviews.

Michelle Parlevliet (MA Political Science, MA International Peace Studies) has worked on the nexus of human rights and conflict resolution in various capacities since 1997. She has published widely on this theme and related topics, and has provided facilitation, training, research and technical assistance to multiple organisations and networks at grassroots and senior policy-making level in Africa, Asia, and Europe. Between 2010 and 2015, she pursued her PhD at the Faculty of Law at the University of Amsterdam.