Embracing concurrent realities: Revisiting the relationship between human rights and conflict resolution

Parlevliet, M.B.

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
Chapter 3: The Conflict Resolution Field
Chapter 3

This chapter constitutes the equivalent of the previous one, but pertains to conflict resolution. It provides a general overview of the field, and shows how conflict resolution provides a distinct ‘lens’ for perceiving social reality and identifying possible responses to problems faced by people and societies. To facilitate understanding and comparison, this chapter is structured in the same way as the previous one. This means that the primary focus is on conflict resolution in its own right, in terms of how the field has evolved over time and how it has materialised in specific ideas, actors and practices. Little attention is devoted here to the way in which conflict resolution has interacted with the human rights field, aside from a few comments on the field’s notion and assessment of a ‘rights-based approach’ to conflict resolution.1 The next chapter will consider the relationship between the fields in greater detail, in the context of a comparative analytical overview of the two fields.

The discussion here outlines how the conflict resolution field has greatly expanded in scope and ambition since it emerged in the 1950s and 1960s. While noting the diffused and heterogeneous nature of contemporary conflict resolution in theory and practice, the chapter explains how the field has consistently focused on the question of how to address conflict constructively and effectively when it arises. The field is shown to place particular emphasis on the prevention and reduction of violence and on generating solutions that balance the interests of parties in conflict and are arrived at through a (facilitated) process of dialogue and collaboration between opponents. Its evolved understanding of conflict resolution as a long-term process involving fundamental change is noted, resulting from a growing concern with protracted social conflict in which power between parties is imbalanced. The chapter points to the wide variety of actors at international, national and local levels that put these and other ideas into practice, and the main strategies they use in doing so. It also identifies some of the images, metaphors and attitudes prevalent in conflict resolution, and pays attention to contradictions that provide an insight into the field’s limitations.2

Following the structure of the previous chapter, section 3.1 outlines the foundations and development of the conflict resolution field. Section 3.2 presents core concepts and ideas, while section 3.3 discusses actors, categorising them into different types and briefly commenting on their rationale and attitude. Section 3.4 summarises dominant practices in the field, and section 3.5 examines some of the tensions that run through the field. The concluding section, 3.6, reflects on the conflict resolution field in terms of the ‘field and frame’ discussion in the introduction.

1 Conflict resolution’s conception of a ‘rights-based approach’ is different to that applied in the human rights field; see 3.2 for an explanation of the conflict resolution notion and note 24.
2 Several of the chapter’s observations concur with findings from a recently published ethnography of peacebuilding (Autesserre 2014). That study focuses however on expatriate peacebuilders who intervene in conflict zones by taking part in international peace missions. As such, its conception of ‘peacebuilders’ is much broader than the one used here and includes individuals focusing on rule of law, policing, state-building, military, and other functions. This chapter therefore does not draw on that ethnography.
3.1 Foundations and Development

In the course of several decades, conflict resolution has rapidly grown into a “self-contained, vibrant, interdisciplinary field where theory and practice pace real-world events” (Bercovitch, Kremenyuk, and Zartman 2009b, 1). Scholars generally agree that conflict resolution emerged as a discipline in Europe and North America in the 1950s and 1960s, under both this name and others (‘peace studies,’ ‘peace and conflict studies’, etc.). In a context marked by superpower polarisation and threat of nuclear war, people on both sides of the Atlantic started studying conflict as a general phenomenon, with similar features irrespective of the context in which it could occur. In doing so, they drew on numerous disciplines – international relations, political science, sociology, psychology, economics, biology, law, ethics and philosophy – and on practical insights gained from labour relations, diplomacy and community mediation (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall 2011, 4).

The emerging field also built on certain precursors, including ideas about non-violence and pacifism as put forth by Ghandi and religious traditions such as the Quakers and Mennonites. Efforts by peace movements in the context of World War I to mobilise people against war constituted another source of inspiration (Fisher and Zimina 2009a, 18). So too were empirical studies of war and conflict conducted in the 1930s and early 1940s (Kriesberg 2009a, 17-18; Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall 2011, 36-42). Bercovitch and others thus argue that the field began “as a deliberate ideological challenge” to foreign policy practice and conventional international relations teaching, which focused only on realist and institutional perspectives (2009c, 669).

From the outset, conflict resolution was conceived of as a multi-or interdisciplinary field, which would consider all levels of conflict and be analytical as well as normative. It was to bring “insights and concepts to bear on actual conflicts, be they domestic or international” (idem, 1), thus reflecting a “constant mutual interplay between theory and practice” (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall 2011, 8). The field defined itself in relation to the challenge of understanding and addressing violent or destructive conflict, focusing primarily on peaceful ways to wage conflict and on reducing and preventing violence. In this foundational phase in the 1950s/1960s, a ‘minimalist’ and pragmatic agenda focused on preventing war dominated in the United States; in Europe, a more ‘maximalist’ agenda was common, with an emphasis on the content of peace and on critical analysis of structures (idem, 44).

---

3 See also Carayannis and others (2014, 2), Roy and others (2010, 348), Fast (2002, 528-529) and Aall (2001, 372).
4 This included studies on arms races, revolutions, war frequencies, causes of war, and on the social psychology of conflict and collective bargaining.
5 Other authors confirm the interplay between theory and practice as an important feature of the conflict resolution field (e.g. Babitt/Hampson 2011; Kriesberg 2009a, 15; Lederach and others 2007; Fast 2002, 530; Galtung 1985).
6 Compare for example Galtung (1985), and Boulding (1977). In Europe, the field was usually referred to as ‘peace studies’ or ‘peace and conflict studies’, while ‘conflict resolution’ was more common in the United States.
A period of consolidation and institutionalisation followed in the 1970s/1980s, with the establishment of dedicated research groups and institutes, academic journals, training programmes, and civil society organisations in both Europe and the United States. This period also saw a rapid expansion of alternative dispute resolution practices in family matters and labour relations (notably in the US) and more analysis of negotiation and mediation processes, drawing on insights from game theory and social psychology. Ideas about joint problem-solving between political opponents were increasingly applied to actual conflicts in the Middle East, Cyprus and Northern Ireland. The field thus focused on both (potentially violent) societal conflict and on conflict in smaller settings (families, companies, etc.); this bifurcation continues to date.\(^7\) Civil society organisations doing mediation and dialogue facilitation and offering training in conflict resolution methods also started to emerge elsewhere (e.g. South Africa, Kenya).

The end of the Cold War ushered in a “major transformation” of the field (Babbitt 2009b, 539), due to an “explosion of interest in conflict resolution worldwide” (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall 2011, 56). Conflict resolution became central to attempts to redefine a ‘new world order’, yet it also encountered new challenges, notably an increase in intra-state conflict. This brought to the fore issues of systemic complexity, power asymmetry, cultural diversity and intractability (idem, 55-62). A broader ‘peacebuilding’ agenda emerged, stressing the importance of conflict prevention and post-agreement activities related to institution-building, governance reform and reconciliation. Instrumental in this regard was the \textit{Agenda for Peace} issued by UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali (United Nations 1992). It represented “an enormous shift” from the previous emphasis on inter-state relations and superpower negotiating strategies and opened up the conflict resolution agenda practically and conceptually (Babbitt 2009b, 542). According to Ramsbotham and others, actual conflict resolution efforts became more sophisticated as the principles of complementarity and contingency took hold. These called attention to the connection between responses and to the need to match approaches and conflict phases (2011, 56; see also Bloomfield 1995; Fisher and Keashly 1991).

With “internal conflicts, ethnic conflicts, conflicts over succession and power struggles within countries [becoming] the norm in the 1990s” (idem, 5), the role of non-state actors grew as both antagonists and intermediaries in conflict. Unlike governments and intergovernmental institutions, civil society actors could engage with non-state opposition groups and militias without conferring undue legitimacy on them. They were also thought to have other comparative advantages in conflict resolution related to flexibility, accessibility, duration of engagement and technical expertise (e.g. Paffenholz 2010; Bartoli 2009; Simonse, Verkoren, and Junne 2009). Consequently, NGO activity increased remarkably from then on. Meanwhile, conflict resolution thinking began to impact on other spheres of work: there was growing awareness

\(^7\) The remainder of this chapter (and the study as a whole) is concerned with societal and communal conflict only.
The Conflict Resolution Field

about the extent to which development aid or humanitarian relief could exacerbate societal tensions, generating notions of ‘do no harm’ and ‘conflict sensitivity’ (e.g. Uvin 2004; Lange and Quinn 2003; Anderson 1999).8

In addition, international organisations (e.g. the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Organisation of African Unity, and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development), financial institutions like the World Bank, and overseas development ministries (from, for example, Norway, Sweden, Germany, Switzerland and the United Kingdom) started to allocate significant resources to conflict prevention and conflict resolution, influenced by a new policy agenda focused on enhancing human security, human development and, later, state fragility (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall 2011, 56‐57; Kriesberg 2009a, 25‐27; Babbitt 2009b). The significant funding available spurred a rapid expansion, professionalisation and institutionalisation of the field (some now speak of an ‘industry’ or ‘business’).9 An exponential growth of academic and professional programmes in peace and conflict studies added to this, turning conflict resolution into a ‘career choice’ (Austin 2011, 211; also Alliance for Peacebuilding 2012, 21).10

Hence, by 2005, a “once marginal field” had transformed into “an international expertise”, as Timura describes it (2004b, 162; also Zelizer 2013, 31). It is now an extensive and independent field of practice, policy and study involving a broad spectrum of actors across the world, and bringing its insights and tools to bear on other sectors, including business, journalism, environment, policing, development, human rights and justice, and state-building (often under a ‘peacebuilding’ tag.) During this evolution, “the very concept of conflict resolution has been stretched” (Bercovitch, Kremenyuk, and Zartman 2009c, 673), broadening from an initial focus on reaching agreements, modifying parties’ behaviour and stopping violence, “to incorporate the conditions for building peace” (Kriesberg 2009a, 17).

In the process, a bewildering array of terms has emerged to describe various aspects of and approaches to conflict resolution, leading to “terminological chaos” (Fast 2002, 529) and “confusion” (Dudouet 2005, 48). Besides notions noted above, the field’s “archipelago of concepts” (Gunner and Nordquist 2011, 33) includes conflict transformation, conflict settlement and conflict management, to name but a few. In the

---

8 Conflict sensitivity involves, “gaining a sound understanding of the two-way interaction between activities and context and acting to minimise negative impacts and maximise positive impacts of intervention on conflict, within an organisation’s given priorities/objectives (mandate)”, see http://www.conflictsensitivity.org/. A precursor to this concept is the notion of ‘do no harm,’ which highlights that relief and development work, while seeking to alleviate human suffering and support the realisation of sustainable economic and social systems, can fuel or exacerbate societal or communal tensions – but can also aid peace (Anderson 1999).
9 See for example Zelizer (2013, 31) on the business of peacebuilding, and Babbitt/Hampson (2011, 54) on the emergence of a ‘mediation support’ industry, with dedicated units or programmes set up in various agencies.
10 Academic degree and professional training programmes are not confined to Western Europe and North America, but located across the world (including in Sub-Saharan Africa, Eastern Europe, Asia-Pacific, Latin America, etc.)
absence of consensus on terminology and the relationship of concepts,\textsuperscript{11} the terms used by organisations and individuals depend largely on their training and institutional approaches (Zelizer and Oliphant 2013, 7). In fact, the term ‘conflict resolution’ is highly ambiguous as it is used in multiple ways (further explained below). Conflict resolution theory can seem messy, “hardly elegant or parsimonious” (Babbitt and Hampson 2011, 46).\textsuperscript{12} The diffusion and differentiation that has characterised the development of the field from the 1990s onwards means that nowadays, the “conflict resolution field is highly diverse in the kind of work done in an array of conflicts” (Roy, Burdick, and Kriesberg 2010, 349); Timura speaks of the field’s “uncanny ability to contain [...] such heterogeneity” (2004a, 333).

For some, the rise in profile and expertise, and the extension in substance and reach, means that the field is “on the cusp of a true revolution” (Alliance for Peacebuilding 2012, 22). The 2011 World Development Report (The World Bank) also seems to attest to a ‘global momentum’, considering its focus on trust-building and institutional transformation as key to breaking cycles of violence.\textsuperscript{13} Others, however, have come to question the ethics of actors in the field, especially given the way in which conflict resolution practice has become embedded in the global political economy (e.g. Francis 2010; Fisher and Zimina 2009a). The relevance of conflict resolution is also subject to discussion due to geopolitical developments and new forms of violence. In particular, “the lethal combination of ‘rogue’ or ‘failed’ states, trans-border crime, the proliferation of weapons of mass-destruction, and the fanatical ideologues of international terrorism” is of concern (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall 2011, 6). Climate change and developments in international law and information communications technology are also challenging the field’s practice and theory. Other concerns relate to a supposed cultural and ideological bias (ibid; Kriesberg 2009a; Avruch 2003), and the question of impact (Scharbatke-Church 2011; Culbertson 2010; Anderson and Olson 2003).

### 3.2 Key Ideas

The ‘messiness’ of conflict resolution notwithstanding, there is, as noted previously, “a more or less familiar set of references on both theory and practice” (Fisher and Zimina 2008, 11). An integral part of these are specific conceptions of conflict, violence and peace, which reflect and shape conflict resolution’s understanding of and approach to

\textsuperscript{11} For example, some argue that conflict settlement, resolution and transformation represent distinct schools (e.g. Paffenholz 2012; Marchetti/Tocci 2011; Reimann 2004) while others assert that they all form part of one tradition (e.g. Ramsbotham and others 2011). This study follows the latter approach.

\textsuperscript{12} They attribute this to the fact that conflict resolution theory draws on many different disciplines. One of the conflict resolution practitioners interviewed also characterises conflict resolution as ‘messy;’ see further 8.4.3.

the social world. Arguably the field’s fundamental tenet is the idea that conflict is a normal, inevitable and omnipresent part of life. It is understood as an inherent feature of human existence and an intrinsic aspect of social change, which occurs throughout society at multiple levels: within and among individuals, groups, states and/or regions. Consequently, the field posits that conflict, as a social and political phenomenon, cannot and should not be eliminated; what ought to be curbed, however, is the expression of conflict through violence. Conflict resolution thus does not seek to eradicate conflict but to address it effectively when it arises (e.g. Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall 2011, 8-32; Bercovitch, Kremenyuk, and Zartman 2009b, 1-4).

Many definitions of ‘conflict’ in the field – there is no commonly accepted one – focus on the pursuit of incompatible goals by different parties; some include a perceptual element and/or refer to a relationship between parties (ibid; Wilmot and Hocker 2001; Mitchell 1981, 17). A notion that has become widespread is Galtung’s ‘conflict triangle’ (1969), depicting conflict as entailing three interrelated elements: contradiction (what the conflict is about), behaviour (how the parties act), and attitude (parties’ beliefs, emotions, assumptions and perceptions about others and self). Over time, conflicts have thus come to be seen as dynamic processes in which subjective factors (e.g. hostility, misperceptions) and objective ones (e.g. incompatibility of material interests, or unfairness of oppressive structures) interact (Dudouet 2006, 8-9; Reimann 2004, 44; Fisher and Keashly 1991, 34). Much literature presents conflict as going through a series of escalation/de-escalation phases, depicting such ‘conflict dynamics’ in more or less complex diagrams.

As the above implies, the field does not identify violence as a necessary or integral part of conflict but considers it a specific manifestation of conflict or a conflict handling strategy (e.g. Van der Merwe 1989); the presence of violence points to the inadequacy of existing conflict handling mechanisms (Odendaal 2013, 28). In general, the field has embraced a more complex notion of ‘violence’ than is common in the public domain, separating ‘direct’, ‘structural’ and ‘cultural’ violence (Galtung 1969).

---

14 For example, the introduction to the Sage Handbook of Conflict Resolution is titled ‘the nature of conflict and conflict resolution’ (Bercovitch and others 2009b).
15 Conflict resolution asserts in fact that conflict can serve positive functions, such as enhancing group cohesion, redistributing power, making people aware of problems, and creating or modifying rules (e.g. Coser 1956).
16 The goals pursued may relate to concrete matters (material resources, power, land) and/or to intangible ones (symbolic resources, such as values, status or recognition) (e.g. Wallensteen 2002, 16-17; Coser 1956, 6).
17 Simple ones show a linear escalation ‘ladder’ (e.g. Glas 1982, 119-140) or a “wave-like timeline” (Lederach 2005, 43), in which conflict intensity rises and falls over time (also Ramsbotham and others 2011, 13; Lund 2009, 290). More complex diagrams are cyclical or use arrows to reflect that conflicts may ‘jump stages’ or ‘move backwards’ (e.g. Ropers 2011, 116; Dudouet 2006).
18 ‘Direct violence’ refers to physical violence (e.g. a woman is raped). ‘Structural violence’ entails situations where injustice, repression or exploitation are embedded into society’s structures, and where individuals and groups are damaged due to differential access to resources built into a social system (e.g. law enforcement agencies do not take female victims seriously and do not pay attention to sexual crimes, etc.) ‘Cultural violence’ entails beliefs and attitudes that facilitate or condone violent behaviour by justifying it or presenting it as
Chapter 3

It has also adopted a differentiated conception of ‘peace,’ distinguishing between ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ peace, whereby the former refers to the absence of physical violence and the latter contains notions of peaceful co-existence, justice and legitimacy (ibid; Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall 2011, 12). Such field-specific terms – inaccessible without explanation – reflect the idea that conflict resolution seeks not only to address manifest conflict or violent behaviour, but also a conflict’s underlying causes and parties’ attitudes (idem, 11; Bercovitch, Kremenyuk, and Zartman 2009c, 673). Wallensteen thus argues that “conflict resolution finds itself at a bridge between a very narrow concept of peace (no war) and a very broad one (justice)” (2002, 11).

This emphasis on understanding conflict and related phenomena is linked to the prevalent belief that “what we know about conflict affects the way we address it” (Bercovitch, Kremenyuk, and Zartman 2009b, 1). This echoes the field’s self-conception as linking theory and practice noted earlier. Hence, another set of central ideas focuses on what Bercovitch and others consider the field’s basic question: “how best to approach and resolve or manage conflicts?” (idem, 2). In general, conflict resolution prefers parties in conflict to talk rather than fight one another in pursuing their goals (idem, 2-4). It argues that ‘hard power’ (ability to impose, enforce, command) is ineffective if not counter-productive if used on its own (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall 2011, 33, 62). It tries to facilitate greater use of exchange power (linked to bargaining) and, especially, integrative power (associated with persuasion, cooperation and transformative problem-solving (idem, 22-23). While not everyone in the field blankly rejects a resort to coercive force, conflict resolution “tends to stress relying minimally, if at all, on violence in waging and settling conflicts” (Kriesberg 2009a, 16).

Conflict resolution highlights the possibility of generating a solution in which all parties achieve their goals, at least in part; this is referred to, following Deutsch (1973), as a ‘win-win’ solution. Essential in this regard is a distinction made between the positions held by conflicting parties (their formally stated demands) and their interests (underlying concerns and aspirations); interests are considered to be more easily reconciled than positions (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall 2011, 21; Fisher, Ury, and Patton 2012). Conflict resolution thus emphasises exploring and considering the interests and needs of all parties so as to reach an outcome that is acceptable to all. This emphasis on interest-based approaches to conflict stems from an awareness of shared humanity: conflicts are to be pursued in a way that recognises

‘normal’ (ideas such as ‘a proper woman should not go out at night/wear a short skirt’, ‘boys will be boys’ or ‘the police have better things to do than attend to women’s complaints.’)

19 The slogan of INGO International Alert is telling in this regard: ‘Understanding Conflict. Building Peace.’

20 Kriesberg recognises a long-term debate in the field on whether the use of (some kinds of) violence is acceptable in some conditions (2009a, 28). Ramsbotham and others (2011, 278-279) note the field’s struggle with humanitarian intervention/responsibility to protect; see also Wallensteen (2002, 47-48) and Fisher and others (2000, 11).
the humanity of others, including adversaries (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall 2011, 426; Francis 2010, 45).

Conflict resolution has long stressed the role of external intermediaries, known as ‘third-party intervention’ (idem, 21; Kriesberg 2009a). It has traditionally conceived of third parties as being impartial or non-partisan so as to help parties move to joint problem-solving (e.g. Reimann 2004, 44-47; Fast 2002). Impartiality has been “typically defined as the intervener's ability to be even-handed while maintaining an unbiased relationship with each of the disputants” (Lutz, Babbit, and Hannum 2003, 182). Hence, intermediaries usually refrain from assigning “blame to any one party, assuming that all parties are engaging in conflict-perpetuating rhetoric or behaviour” (idem, 179). Roy and others even suggest that conflict resolution actors seek to “accord moral and political legitimacy to all sides in a dispute”, in striving to reach mutually acceptable accommodation through respectful processes (2010, 351). Process matters considerably in the field: how conflict resolution efforts are undertaken is believed to affect the quality and sustainability of their outcomes (ibid; Anderson and Olson 2003, 9; Parlevliet 2002, 22-24).

Due to the increasing concern with ‘asymmetric conflict’, in which power between parties is imbalanced, contemporary conflict resolution focuses much attention on identity groups; these are regarded as the most relevant unit of analysis in relation to protracted social conflict (Reimann 2004, 59; Saunders 2009, 383). Addressing such conflict is thought to entail “a deep transformation in the institutions and discourses that reproduce violence, as well as in the conflict parties themselves and in their relationships” (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall 2011, 31); fundamental change is envisaged in the personal, relational, structural and cultural realm (Lederach 2003). Notions of conflict transformation, social justice and social change have thus come to the fore as patterns of exclusion, and marginalisation and fragmentation are recognised as structural causes of societal tension that can prompt the outbreak of violence (Parlevliet 2011b; Baldwin, Chapman, and Gray 2007).

Overall, conflict resolution is now considered a long-term process, with many actors engaging in various initiatives at multiple levels and with different time frames; reference is made to the need for building ‘an infrastructure for peace’ that combines top-down and bottom-up approaches (e.g. Unger and others 2013; Odendaal 2013; Van Tongeren 2011). As such, there is much emphasis nowadays on the role that people and organisations within a conflict setting should play if conflict resolution is to be relevant and sustainable (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall

---

21 The term ‘neutrality’ has become less common due to recognition that conflict resolution is not neutral in relation to certain values (e.g. Mayer 2004; Kraybill 1992). See further below, as well as sections 4.2.1 and 7.3.

22 Some prefer to use the term ‘multi-partiality’ to refer to “the need for empathizing with all the principal parties, by building trust and personal relationships, and understanding their respective worldviews” (Duduoet 2006, 53).
Outsiders are no longer supposed to serve as main intermediaries, but should support local actors in their efforts to resolve conflicts. This stems from the notion that change must be generated from within rather than being imposed from outside (Babbitt 2009a; Anderson and Olson 2003, 35). What is required, in Siebert’s words (2013), is “strengthening the immune system from within instead of prescribing antibiotics”.

Despite this clear set of ideas about the nature of conflict, peace and violence and the kind of approach preferred, the use of the term ‘conflict resolution’ itself remains variable. Ramsbotham and others explain that the term may denote both a process of addressing conflict and the completion of that process; it may refer to a specialist field; to a particular approach in handling conflict and/or to specific activities undertaken to address conflict (2011, 31). Duduot notes that conflict resolution can mean a goal (overcoming the root causes of conflict) or a specific set of peacemaking techniques (e.g. facilitative mediation) (2005, 11). Field actors also like to characterise conflict resolution as ‘a science and an art’ (e.g. Carlson 2010; Meerts 2009). This reflects the belief that conflict resolution relies on tried and tested analytical models grounded in empirical reality, yet also requires specific aptitudes and attitudes.

The review thus far shows that the conflict resolution field is highly normative. This is further reflected in what Babbitt calls its “core principles”: inclusion, participation, empowerment, trust-building and tolerance (2009b, 554). Even so, the field has long devoted little attention to human rights. ‘Positive peace’ is assumed to contain human rights (e.g. Mertus 2011; Odendaal 2013, 8), but this is seldom discussed in any detail; “human rights are viewed as a by-product of peace, not as a major component of building peace” (Mertus and Helsing 2006, 9). In general terms, conflict resolution recognises the use of standards of justice and fairness to determine the outcome of a conflict. It calls this a ‘rights-based approach’ to conflict, differentiating it from interest-based and power-based approaches (Ury, Brett, and Goldberg 1988, 7-15).24 A rights-based approach – applying adjudication or arbitration – is considered valuable in setting a precedent, clarifying behavioural norms, and protecting a weaker party (e.g. Carlson 2010, 675-677; Parlevliet 2002, 29).

It is also seen to have serious drawbacks: it strains relationships and can generate resentment on the part of the ‘loser’ due to its adversarial character, it takes ownership for resolution away from the parties, and is usually costly and time-

---

23 See also De Coning (2013), Odendaal (2013), Lederach/Appleby (2010), Lederach (2005, 1997). Local capacities for peace entail spaces, systems, attitudes, shared values, interests, common experiences, symbols and occasions that connect people across dividing lines and help prevent overt violence between groups (Anderson 1999, 24-31). For critical comments on how ‘bottom-up approaches’ are conceived, see Carayannis and others (2014, 16-17).

24 Power-based approaches entail the exercise of power over a weaker party (Ury and others 1988). Notably, conflict resolution uses the term ‘rights-based approach’ differently than the human rights field, where it refers to the use of human rights standards and principles to guide the design, implementation and monitoring of development efforts.
The Conflict Resolution Field

consuming.\textsuperscript{25} Moreover, the effective use of the judicial system depends on its legitimacy and capacity, which often cannot be taken for granted in conflict-affected contexts. Consequently, practitioners seldom consider a rights-based approach a suitable first resort in handling conflict; the use of the formal legal system is not mainstream in conflict resolution. The perceived negative influence of human rights advocacy on peace talks and the growing association of human rights with international criminal justice (referred to in chapter 1),\textsuperscript{26} has long added to reluctance to embrace human rights and formal legal approaches. As noted in chapter 1, however, this may be changing. Field scholars and practitioners increasingly concede that “human rights both impede and sustain resolution” (Bercovitch, Kremenyuk, and Zartman 2009c, 673; Babbitt 2009a; Manikkalingam 2008).

Finally, it is worth noting that much of the field’s body of thought is conveyed through visual diagrams and metaphorical images.\textsuperscript{27} Triangular (also referred to as ‘pyramid’ or ‘iceberg’) images are particularly prominent, serving to explain various concepts and analytical models.\textsuperscript{28} This ‘triangulisation’ (Timura 2004a, 150-160) may correlate to a general emphasis in conflict resolution on the need to break out of rigid dualities or binary oppositions and the importance of recognising ambiguity (e.g. Lederach 2005; 2003).\textsuperscript{29} Thinking in ‘threesomes’ is an integral part of the field; conflict resolution often points to the ‘middle’ entity – i.e. a third party, middle-level leadership – and intermediary functions as being key to resolution and transformation (e.g. Ury 2000; Lederach 1997). Field literature also uses the image of ‘being in the middle’ (e.g. Williams and Williams 1994).

Other recurrent metaphors include ‘space’ – as in ‘creating space for dialogue’ (e.g. Vukosavljevic 2011; Spies 2006); ‘healing’ – reflecting concern with the social-psychological features of conflict; ‘table’ – the proverbial one around which parties meet for dialogue (e.g. Roy, Burdick, and Kriesberg 2010, 359); and ‘tools’ or ‘toolkit’ – implying that conflict resolution has tangible instruments to help ‘fix’ a conflict situation (e.g. Zelizer and Oliphant 2013, 12-13; Ricigliano 2012; Lederach, Neufeldt, and Culbertson 2007).

\textsuperscript{26} See sections 1.1.1 and 1.1.2.
\textsuperscript{27} See practitioner handbooks (e.g. Lederach and others 2007; Fisher and others 2000), crossover publications (e.g. Austin and others 2011; Duduoet 2006), and a renowned academic book on contemporary conflict resolution, now in its third edition (Ramsbotham and others 2011).
\textsuperscript{28} Beyond the conflict triangle noted above, examples include: triangles capturing the distinctions between direct, structural and cultural violence and between peacemaking, -keeping and -building (see Ramsbotham and others 2011, 10); an ‘iceberg’ to distinguish between symptoms and causes of conflict (Parlevliet 2010a; Timura 2004a); and the use of a ‘pyramid’ to capture levels of leadership in society (Lederach 1997).
\textsuperscript{29} See also the discussion of four challenges in chapter 7.
Chapter 3

3.3 Key Actors

The actors engaged in conflict resolution are as diverse as the field itself. As mentioned previously, governments and intergovernmental organisations, especially the UN and regional bodies like the African Union, European Union and Organization of American States, have long played an important role, especially with regard to facilitating formal, high-level peace processes and providing funding for conflict resolution and prevention. This also applies to some national government ministries. Here, however, we focus on civil society actors, whose significance for conflict resolution is well-established. The field is rather fragmented in this regard, not just at national and grassroots level but also internationally – where a large number of prominent organisations exists. One can discern four types of international civil society actors based on focus and scope of activity. These are set out here, after which the section considers non-international actors and outlines some general features of civil society actors in conflict resolution in terms of perspective or attitude.

A first group of international civil society actors focus mostly on undertaking or supporting elite-level negotiation processes. This is a relatively small group of professional INGOs, which often draw on former heads of state and/or former senior officials of international bodies to obtain and project credibility and expertise, although one – the Community of Sant’Egidio (founded in 1968) – is a religious organisation with volunteer members conducting its conflict resolution efforts (Bartoli 2009). Examples are The Carter Centre (founded in 1982 by former US President Jimmy Carter), the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (1999), and the Crisis Management Initiative (2002, founded by former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari).

A second group of professional INGOs with global reach focus less exclusively on the world of high politics and engage in a wider range of activities with a wider range of audiences, such as individuals, groups and organisations in civil society and/or at grassroots level within conflict-affected societies. They seek to generate practical and cooperative solutions to conflict and violence, influence policy, change perceptions of and approaches to conflict, bolster local conflict resolution capacities, enhance public

---

30 This section focuses only on actors explicitly seeking to address conflict constructively, and does not consider those whose approach to conflict is inconsistent with conflict resolution principles ideas, and methods. Like chapter 2, this chapter mentions intergovernmental institutions and international NGOs given its overview character, even though the study devotes little attention to them beyond the comments here (and some references in 8.3.1 and 8.4.2).

31 E.g. CDA Collaborative Learning Projects (2012a), Paffenholz (2010), Fischer (2011), Bartoli (2009), Simonse and others (2009); it is however recognized that civil society is also subject to certain limitations.

32 For more information, see the organisations’ websites: www.santegidio.org, www.cartercenter.org, www.cmi.fi and www.hdcentre.org. While not founded by a former head of state, the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue has many associates who previously worked as senior officials for the UN or European Union. Networks of former heads of state, such as the Elders (founded in 2007 by former South African President Nelson Mandela), also fall into this category although their activities are more oriented towards good offices and shuttle diplomacy rather than direct facilitation of peace talks between opponents; see theelders.org.

A third set of INGOs active in conflict resolution consists of large relief and development organisations, whose involvement stems from recognition that aid can exacerbate existing divides or create new ones; examples are Oxfam International, Catholic Relief Services and World Vision International. A fourth group comprises think-tanks, which provide analysis of specific conflict situations and international issues from a conflict resolution perspective and/or offer practical training to civil society practitioners, government officials, etc. Worth noting in this category are the Peace Research Institute Oslo (1959), the Stockholm Peace Research Institute (1966), the Program on Negotiation at Harvard Law School (1983), the United States Institute of Peace (1984) and the International Crisis Group (1995).

The second group is most relevant here for its involvement in a broad range of practical conflict resolution efforts, notably at community and civil society level. With headquarters in European or American cities, these dedicated conflict resolution INGOs work in countries around the world, usually in partnership with local organisations and with funding from West European governments and/or charitable foundations. Their work is often guided by explicit codes of conduct, which tend to emphasise understanding the context, impartiality, local ownership, respect for diversity, long-term commitment, and accountability and trust (e.g. Ropers 2001, 528-529). They usually embark on activities abroad when invited to do so by respected individuals or organisations from within the given context; this stems from the belief that participation in conflict resolution should be voluntary (idem). Little (ethnographic) information is available on the organisational culture and staff composition of such organisations, but they resemble other INGOs in this respect. This means that, although they are culturally diverse, their staff comprises many white, middle-class, university-educated individuals with a cosmopolitan outlook and experience of living and working abroad.

Yet it is incorrect to assume that such North-based INGOs are the sole or even primary civil society actors in the conflict resolution field. For example, the influence of various Africa-based organisations is well established. Some are regional networks, others are NGOs based in specific countries working domestically, and/or across the continent, such as the Centre for Conflict Resolution (1968), the Nairobi Peace Initiative (1984), the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Conflict (1992) and the West

34 No dates are provided since these INGOs’ year of foundation precedes the starting point for their engagement in peace and conflict work. For more information, see www.oxfam.org; crs.org; www.wvi.org.
36 See also the guiding principles on the organisations’ websites, listed in note 33 above.
Chapter 3

Africa Network for Peacebuilding (1998). 37 Such organisations and networks also exist in other regions, including Asia/Pacific, Central and South Asia, and the Middle East. Besides professional NGOs, which are still fairly elite- and urban-based (Paffenholz and Spurk 2006, 17; Orjuela 2005), many other actors are engaged in conflict resolution, including faith-based groups, trade unions, women's associations and other voluntary groups. While not necessarily framing their activities in field terminology, they bring people together across political or ethnic divides, build popular support for peace through education and media campaigns, or monitor violence. Their peace practice is often tied to broader activism around exclusion, democratic reform, social justice and income generation (e.g. Vukosavljevic 2011; Van Leeuwen 2009).

The relevance of such local actors is such that 'civil society' in conflict resolution practice cannot be reduced to professional NGOs only. Hilhorst and Van Leeuwen cite research on “seemingly insignificant women’s groups in post-war Bosnia”, which finds that “they are potentially a social space (and a rare one) in which a genuinely transformative progressive revisioning of the social might happen after catastrophic societal failure” (2005, 540-554; also Orjuela 2005). Local activists may receive support from 'outside' peace practitioners in the form of mentoring, training and/or funding while facilitating access to local communities and insider information(CDA Collaborative Learning Projects 2012b; Van Leeuwen 2009). Meanwhile, several global and regional networks have sprung up and various listservs now exist that facilitate relationships and information exchange around the globe.38 These have helped to narrow a “distinct North-South divide as well as the East-West divide” previously observed to exist (Ropers 2001, 526-527).

In terms of attitudinal features, civil society actors in the field generally “think of themselves as contributing to, or building, peace” (Fisher and Zimina 2008, 11). For many, their involvement in conflict resolution stems from a drive to “fight injustice and violence and […] contribute to creating better societies” (Vukosavljevic 2011, 266). This is rooted in 'various subjective engagements' (Timura 2004a, 166): religious values, a political or moral commitment to social justice or non-violent political change, personal or family experiences of violence, or a “more spiritualised understanding, a kind of Gandhian-like admonition that 'you must be the change you wish to see in the world'” (idem, 169). Conflict resolution may thus constitute a Weltanschauung – a philosophy or conception of the world – that applies irrespective of time and place (Kriesberg 2009a, 15).

38 Examples are the Peace and Collaborative Development Network (www.internationalpeaceandconflict.org), the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (www.gppac.net) and the Alliance for Peacebuilding (www.allianceforpeacebuilding.org).
A three-year civil society-driven project, Reflecting on Peace Practice (RPP), which examined experiences of international, national and local ‘peace agencies’, found that “most practitioners [...] feel the way they act and interact, and the processes which they employ in their work, must reflect and embody the values and ideals that they work for” (Anderson and Olson 2003, 29).39 Thus, ‘being’ and ‘doing’ are closely related, as are ‘means’ and ‘ends’. Notable in this respect is the emphasis placed in academic texts and training manuals on the importance of empathy, self-awareness, reflexivity and humility (Odendaal 2013, 143; Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall 2011, 323; Lederach, Neufeldt, and Culbertson 2007).40 The very existence of RPP – and the high regard for it in the field – suggests that this cannot be dismissed as mere rhetoric.

Despite this strong value-base, observers have questioned the ethics and practices of civil society actors in the field, both international and local. Some express a concern that “many activists [...] no longer own the vision which inspired the first pioneers of this field” (Fisher and Zimina 2008, 3), partly due to increasing professionalisation and commercialisation (Orjuela 2005; Paffenholz and Spurk 2006). The term ‘peace vultures’ has for example emerged (Spies 2006, 51),41 and the influx of funds has led to a proliferation of practitioners and organisations ‘doing conflict resolution’, some of which may be keener on making a quick buck than on making or building peace. Others, who started with “heartfelt idealism and kitchen table activism”, can get “trapped in webs of formality and formalism that stifle passion and creativity”, the more they are recognised for addressing conflict effectively, as the receipt of donor funds necessitates institutionalisation.42 Finally, competition can be rife. Effective coordination – let alone collaboration – is often a distant ideal in conflict settings as actors seek to profile themselves and guard their autonomy in the pursuit of resources (CDA Collaborative Learning Projects 2012b; Simonse, Verkoren, and Junne 2009).

### 3.4 Key Practices

Within the field, practices are often considered in terms of the level at which they take place and the type of actors involved – or put differently, whether they constitute official or unofficial processes. Track I efforts involve high-level political and military leaders, senior government officials and intergovernmental representatives, and are also known as Track I diplomacy; ‘hard power’ often plays a role in these processes. Track II and Track III efforts entail unofficial processes, carried out by actors like NGOs, businesspersons, think-tanks, religious bodies, and academics; these are our

---

39 Between 1999 and early 2003, RPP engaged with over 200 international, national and local (civil society) peace agencies around the world “to learn from experience what has worked and what has not worked, and why” (Anderson/Olson 2003, 1). Since then, it has worked with various partners in different regions to test the application of its findings in practice, and has done in-depth case studies of the cumulative impacts of peacebuilding in 16 countries. See http://www.cdacollaborative.org/programs/reflecting-on-peace-practice/.

40 See for example the questions ‘non official intervenors should be asking themselves’ in Bozicevic (2009, 75).

41 The term stems from a conversation Spies had with Bishop Paride Taban of Southern Sudan.

42 Email correspondence, Undine Whande, 18 April 2014; see also Bozicevic (2009, 71).
Chapter 3

focus here. Track II concerns efforts involving more senior or elite civil society leaders (also referred to as 'middle level leaders') while Track III refers to efforts by local or indigenous actors at grassroots level. In Track II and Track III processes, the actors involved cannot apply 'carrots and sticks', but rely instead on their relationship-building, process skills, moral standing or technical expertise (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall 2011, 28-29; also Bartoli 2009, 396).

As noted, the conflict resolution field is particularly associated with third-party intervention. This can take the form of mediation: a process in which an impartial, independent intervener helps parties in conflict to negotiate with one another (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall 2011, 21-22; Moore 2003). Yet much third-party intervention can better be described as dialogue facilitation.43 This is one of the most commonly used conflict resolution practices, especially amongst civil society actors (Paffenholz and Spurk 2006; Anderson and Olson 2003, 77-78). Dialogues are often combined with other practices, including capacity-building, institution-building or concrete projects like reconstruction or income-generation schemes. They can be one-off events or constitute longer-term open-ended political processes (e.g. Saunders 2009; Ropers 2004).44

Training programmes constitute another dominant practice and have been referred to as "a default activity for peace work" (Anderson and Olson 2003, 89).45 Training is widely used because it is thought to raise awareness of the causes and dynamics of conflict, be non-threatening, assist in relationship-building, and "spread sensitivity and skills to strategically placed people, contributing to creating what is metaphorically referred to as critical mass or critical yeast" (Austin 2011, 209).46 Conflict resolution training is often one aspect of a ‘multi-pronged approach’. It tends to use participatory methodology emphasising reflection on experiences, learning from peers, and skills practice (idem; Meerts 2009), yet the jury is out as to whether training truly prepares people to handle actual conflict situations outside the training space (e.g. Anderson and Olson 2003, 90-95). Another practice, known as ‘imagining the future’, involves bringing groups of people together to create a visual picture of the desired future and identify what they can do in their own life to bring it about (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall 2011, 55).

An important range of practices is geared towards reducing physical violence through actual protection and/or monitoring activities. This can include negotiating violence-free days or areas (‘peace zones’), facilitating ceasefires, deploying unarmed civilians at violence-prone events or locations, or accompanying persons threatened by

---

43 Facilitation allows for more flexibility in the process and the role of the intervener; mediation is more precisely defined (see also 8.3.1). See also Bercovitch (2009) on definitions and approaches to mediation.
44 Dialogue facilitation at Track I level is often geared towards reaching power-sharing agreements.
45 The emphasis here is on training with adults or young people in non-formal, non-academic settings, and does not consider the many academic programmes that provide training or education in conflict resolution.
46 The term ‘critical yeast’ stems from Lederach; see (2005, 91-94) for an explanation.
political violence. Also relevant is the formation of local peace committees in times of transition or widespread political violence. Experiences from diverse contexts suggest that such bodies may have political and symbolic significance beyond their immediate function in de-escalating tension. They can encourage political tolerance and social inclusion, and help to develop a wider constituency for peace and conflict resolution in general and for solving problems through dialogue in particular (Odendaal 2013; Marks 2000). It has been suggested that this also applies to another practice that entails developing a longer-term conflict-handling mechanism, yet is unrelated to political violence: the establishment of community-based mediation programmes providing a low-cost, easy-access avenue for resolving small disputes (Lederach and Thapa 2012).

Furthermore, the use of media has steadily increased in conflict resolution practice. Activities include the development of media campaigns, programs or public service announcements that seek to encourage public discussion, spread messages about non-violence and coexistence, or promote any agreements reached. Even so, negotiations or other forms of dialogue facilitation are often kept out of the limelight so as not to jeopardise delicate discussions and confidence-building measures (Gilboa 2009; Rolt 2005).49

The last key practices noted here relate to analysis and monitoring. These are undertaken to influence policy, enhance conflict prevention through early warning, and improve practice and programming. In general, conflict analysis forms part of most, if not all, practices within the field; it examines a broad range of elements, including the actors directly and indirectly involved, the issues at stake, underlying conflict causes, conflict dynamics over time, and broader contextual factors. A specific type of analysis, peace and conflict impact assessments, has become increasingly common. It appraises the implications of policies, projects and programs (related to development, relief, business interventions, etc.) for structures and processes of peace and violence (e.g. Paffenholz and Reychler 2007; Bloomfield, Fischer, and Schmelzle 2005).

### 3.5 Contradictions and Conundrums

Some tensions emerge when considering the conflict resolution field. For one, reality and ideals do not match: the increased prominence and spread of conflict resolution has not made violent conflict any less rife. As RPP puts it, "all of the good peace work..."
Chapter 3

being done should be adding up to more than it is” (Anderson and Olson 2003, 7). Competition between conflict resolution actors in a given conflict setting is also at odds with the field’s emphasis on joint problem-solving, interest-based engagement and collaboration. Conflict resolution’s normativity generates another contradiction: how can the field’s credo that conflicting parties should own the process and outcome of conflict resolution and that solutions cannot be imposed from the outside be reconciled with its strong normative ideas about how conflict should be addressed? Hug’s observation that actors in the field try “to keep or re-establish ‘good’ norms and to challenge and change ‘bad’ norms” (2012, 39) seems to fly in the face of the notion that a third party has no stake in the outcome.

Without intending to be complete, this sub-section discusses four contradictions within the conflict resolution field that are particularly relevant in light of the empirical material considered later in this study and the next chapter’s comparison of the human rights and conflict resolution fields. Pointing to the field’s limitations, they reveal its shadow-side, so to speak. The first contradiction considered here relates to the technical and non-political nature of (much) conflict resolution practice, while the second involves its tendency to focus on the symptoms of (violent) conflict rather than its causes. The third contradiction relates to the extent to which conflict resolution may reinforce power imbalances and defer to power more generally. The fourth regards the risk of conflict resolution addressing complex and context-specific conflict with generic and relatively simple, if not simplistic, tools. These four contradictions are very interconnected but are discussed in separate sections to facilitate explanation and comprehension.

3.5.1 Comprehensive in Theory, Limited in Practice: Conflict Resolution as Technical and Non-Political

Reviewing the field highlights that conflict resolution scholars and practitioners seek to be comprehensive in their analysis of and approach to conflict. Early conflict mapping guides show as much (e.g. Wehr 1979), as do any of the many elaborate frameworks for conflict analysis and assessment that have emerged since then. The ambition to be comprehensive can also be detected from the way conflict resolution is now envisaged as a long-term, multi-track process involving multiple actors undertaking many efforts with various time frames. It is supposed to be based on the synthesis and integration of many actors and strategies. Yet according to Fisher and Zimina, conflict resolution “practice contrasts with the proclaimed goals and conceptual bases” of the field (2008, 19).

Writing by various authors shows that practice tends to be limited in notably three respects: the strategies used, the partners worked with, and the analysis conducted. In terms of strategies, it has been noted that conflict resolution extensively relies on activities meant to de-escalate tension and facilitate social cohesion and socialisation, such as dialogue projects, peace education or conflict resolution training (Paffenholtz
In terms of partners, practice seems biased towards working with the ‘easy to reach’: persons and groups who are already predisposed to support peace (Anderson and Olson 2003, 51). Urban, elite-based, non-membership NGOs are targeted in particular, disregarding other civil society actors – whether they be faith-based groups, trade unions, professional associations (Paffenholz 2012), or ‘the unlike-minded’ in the form of extremist or (formerly) armed groups (Austin 2011, 221; Bozicevic 2009). Little attention is also devoted to engaging with state systems, despite these being “absolutely indispensable” to addressing conflict and building peace (Clements 2004, 459).

When it comes to analysis, RPP has found that many practitioners “perform only enough conflict analysis to justify their proposals, to affirm that what they know how to do best is needed” (Chigas and Woodrow 2009, 48). They focus on “where, in a given context, the things they know how to do can be useful and on whether their approach to change fits that particular context” (Anderson and Olson 2003, 52). Elements regularly overlooked include a conflict’s international and regional dimensions, the political and economic interests that condone and sustain violence, and the content and outcome of previous interventions (idem, 53-54; Clements 2004). The application of sophisticated analysis methodologies incorporating environmental, economic and other aspects, may fall short too: this tends to produce long lists of factors in fairly general terms – e.g. ‘absence of rule of law,’ ‘corruption,’ ‘discrimination’ – rather than a differentiated analysis showing the interaction and dynamics among the many factors noted, and identifying the most crucial factors in the particular context (Chigas and Woodrow 2009, 49).

This rather limited take on conflict resolution is wrapped up with an increased emphasis on its technical aspects. The proliferation of intricate analysis and assessment tools attests to the field’s ‘technisation’ (Austin 2011, 220). So does the growing emphasis on providing professional services and technical expertise, and the strong focus in conflict resolution training on developing technical process management and conflict analysis skills (Lederach 2005, ix, 174-176). Fisher and Zimina thus claim that many in the field "have settled for a ‘technical’ approach to dealing with conflict” (2008, 3; 2009a). Organisations are “happier to develop strategic plans, funding proposals and risk assessments, than to clarify their ethical stance and draw out rigorously, and realistically, what that means, [...] in the long term [and] in the here and now” (idem, 19). This technical approach is not based on any explicit theory of change; the underlying assumption is that the success of a particular

50 In Clements’ view, conflict resolution practitioners have always been ambivalent towards the state and political systems even though they recognize their importance. He attributes this to “a critique of the state’s monopoly of power and a rejection of threat and coercion as the primary means for generating order and stability” (2004, 445).

51 Accounts of conflict resolution work in Croatia (Bozicevic 2009) and Sri Lanka (Orjuela 2008) echo Fisher and Zimina’s observation; various other authors concur too, to a greater or lesser extent (e.g. Hopp/Unger 2009; Weitsch 2009; Lederach 2005).
programme automatically translates into “[advancing] a bigger vision for peace and wellbeing in the area” (idem, 28; Anderson and Olson 2003, 15).

This orientation towards technique has been associated with conflict resolution’s evolution into a profession and the rise of a ‘peace industry’ (Weitsch 2009, 60) which “bureaucratizes peace work” (Orjuela 2008, 234) and interprets interventions mostly in terms of effectiveness (Van Leeuwen 2009), stressing project cycles, results and limited timeframes. Whatever its causes, the ramifications are twofold, at least. First, important elements of conflict resolution practice, linked to attitude, innovation and creativity, are neglected. As Lederach puts it, “the moral imagination”—that is, “the capacity to imagine something rooted in the challenges of the real world yet capable of giving birth to that which does not yet exist” – is not cultivated (2005, 29). The “art of serendipity in social change” goes missing, which is “the capacity to situate oneself in a changing environment with a sense of direction and purpose and at the same time develop an ability to see and move with the unexpected” (idem, 188).

The second implication is that conflict resolution becomes depoliticised. Practitioners resist “being described as political” (Fisher and Zimina 2008, 11) and conflict resolution language is “rendered neutral, a management consultant’s toolkit, ready for use in any context wherein conflict might emerge” (Jabri 2006, 72; Körppen 2011, 79). The field’s ‘impartiality’ ethos feeds into this: actors often downplay the political dimension of their work to avoid being perceived as biased. Presenting conflict resolution efforts as a-political may thus serve a purpose.52 Nevertheless, as Fisher and Zimina note, “political this field surely is, if anything” (2008, 11), given its normativity, the political choices implicit in analysis and interventions, and the ramifications of efforts.53 A contradiction thus exists between the comprehensive and inherently political notion of conflict resolution in theory – which many in the field endorse – and the limited way in which it may be put into practice.

### 3.5.2 Underlying Causes, Visible Behaviour: Conflict Resolution as Symptoms-Oriented

The conflict resolution field places much emphasis on the importance of addressing the underlying conditions and relationships that generate conflict and may lead to the outbreak of violence. The need “to look beyond the immediate manifestations of conflict” (Francis 2010, 5) emerges clearly from, inter alia, the distinction between positive and negative peace, and the differentiated notion of violence noted earlier.54 Violence, while significant from a humanitarian point of view, is considered the outward manifestation of a fundamental crisis. As long as destructive conditions

---

52 Projecting training as technical skills training in negotiation or mediation can also help conflict resolution actors in bringing together representatives of warring factions who are reluctant to engage in substantive talks as yet.

53 See for example the discussion on the implications of conflict resolution approaches in Northern Ireland and Sri Lanka, chapter 8 (notably 8.1.1, 8.2.1 and 8.2.2).

54 See section 3.2 above.
The Conflict Resolution Field

persist – e.g. the exclusion of identity groups from governance, authoritarian rule, socioeconomic deprivation with inequity, weak states lacking the will or institutional capacity to handle conflicts constructively – the potential for violence remains in a society (Nathan 2001). Thus, “today, one of the central messages of the peacebuilding community is that peace requires more than behavioural change to reduce and eliminate direct violence” (Fisher and Zimina 2008, 19; Clements 2004, 443).

Yet many practices routinely relied upon in the conflict resolution field address the overt manifestations of conflict, whether in the form of destructive behaviour or hostile relationships; they are more geared towards encouraging behavioural and attitudinal change than structural change. This applies, for example, to negotiating local or national settlements, crisis intervention, monitoring and deployment. It also pertains to practices meant to facilitate social cohesion, improve relationships and enhance conflict resolution capacity; these are generally limited in going beyond the surface, partly due to flaws of the ‘workshop-to-action’ model (Francis 2010, 17). Even problem-solving workshops with actors holding different views, meant to address ‘deep-rooted conflict’ by exploring underlying interests and needs, struggle to tackle underlying causes. These processes are rooted in social-psychological principles and encourage adversaries to alter their view of the problem (and others) by seeing the world through other people’s eyes (Dudouet 2005, 62). Hence, as Fast notes, “this type of resolution process does little to address the structures that perpetuate conflict” (2002, 531).

Besides a tendency in the field to emphasise perceptual or psychological dynamics and factors rather than structural ones (Mitchell 2011, 52), other factors hinder conflict resolution in tackling more than the manifestations of conflict. Mechanisms like local peace committees or community mediation teams exemplify this. While they can – as previously noted – address problems at local level and lay a foundation for political tolerance, their ability to deal with underlying causes of conflict is circumscribed, as the experience of South Africa’s peace committees in the early 1990s shows (Odendaal 2013, 44-45; Nathan 1993). This is partly due to their local nature: conditions relating to governance, exclusion or inequity warrant reforms that are part of a wider and more structural peacebuilding process. Moreover, such bodies are usually formed when social-political tension is high and/or when there is little formal institutional capacity for constructive conflict handling. Their main focus then becomes preventing violence and solving short-term problems as they are most urgent.

Thus, the fact that pressure to take action is most easily mobilised at the peak of a problem when it is highly visible, exacerbates the symptom-orientation of conflict resolution, irrespective of the scale of conflict (Dudouet 2005, 64). Furthermore, once efforts to defuse tension and contain destructive behaviour take effect, the commitment to address the underlying issues at stake often wears off. As Bercovitch and others note, “conflict management is the enemy of conflict resolution, as it
removes the pressure to resolve, yet it is frequently the only means to reduce violence” (2009c, 671). Finally, an ‘industry-effect’ may play a role here too, in that ‘fire-fighting’ is often easier to market (and take credit for) than structural prevention, which amounts to exposing and removing the logs that catch fire. It does not help that it is notoriously difficult to prove and quantify the impact of prevention.

Mayer hence speaks of a ‘resolution bias’ among conflict professionals: they “exhibit a strong tendency to ignore the ongoing (or enduring, long-term, or endemic) aspect of conflicts and to focus only on those aspects that can be resolved”, assuming that their role is to bring about resolution (2009, 2). Meanwhile, Fast observes that “few practice strategies have emerged from […] seminal concepts” like structural and cultural violence (2002, 531). Consequently, conflict resolution actors have difficulty addressing the systemic components of conflict. The above-noted flaws in analysis only feed into this. As a result, “many peace programs never address the systems (or individuals) that promote or perpetuate war” (Anderson and Olson 2003, 58).

In sum, there is a contradiction between conflict resolution’s focus on addressing the structural, underlying conditions that give rise to the outbreak of (violent) conflict, and the extent to which its actual practice struggles to go beyond the surface. Its continuing orientation towards dealing with the overt manifestations or symptoms of destructive conflict is problematic as “it leaves aside the situations of ‘latent’ or ‘potential’ conflicts, where structural contradictions are not yet manifested in [the parties’] attitudes and behaviours” (Dudouet 2005, 64). So, while RPP rightly notes that actors in the field work towards two basic goals, “stopping violence and destructive conflict” and “building just and sustainable peace through supporting social change and addressing political, economic, and social grievances that may be driving conflict” (Anderson and Olson 2003, 10), the reality is that the conflict resolution field seems particularly attuned and equipped to doing the first and has difficulty doing the second.

3.5.3 Seeking Social Change, Maintaining the Status Quo: Conflict Resolution as Deferential to Power

The growing emphasis on transformation tallies with the field’s understanding of conflict resolution as an emancipatory venture. As noted, many practitioners are motivated by a broader agenda for social change and social justice (e.g. Lederach and Appleby 2010; Shapiro 2006, 63; Timura 2004a, 186-190), and conflict resolution is touted as a powerful tool for empowerment and the contestation of social stratification (e.g. Roy, Burdick, and Kriesberg 2010, 210; Davidheiser 2006, 294). Yet

---

55 According to Francis, “most major donors will be unwilling to support interventions that lift the lid off conflict, rather than turning down the heat or pressing down the lid” (2010, 103); see also Parlevliet (2002, 20).
56 Emphasis in original. See also 7.2.3.
57 The discussion of this contradiction builds on the previous section but focuses specifically on the implications in terms of power and social change.
The Conflict Resolution Field

the usefulness of conflict resolution for “creating opportunities for emancipatory social transformation” (Fetherstone 2000, 199) has been questioned. This is largely due to the way conflict resolution is prone to ignore power differences in the direct relationship between adversaries and in the larger context when emphasising negotiation techniques, facilitating non-coercive processes, clarifying misunderstandings and improving communication (Mitchell 2006, 89; Dudouet 2005, 59-63). It falls short on engaging “issues of asymmetry and domination” and “tends to lack a deeply integrated analysis of power on the institutional and systemic level” (Roy, Burdick, and Kriesberg 2010, 348, 357).

Traditional conflict resolution methods like mediation and negotiation, problem-solving and dialogue are thought to work effectively when there is relative power parity (e.g. Francis 2010, 6). In contexts of power asymmetry, however, conventional approaches may be “inadequate if not counter-productive” because they will probably reinforce the relative power of the stronger party (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall 2011, 59). The emphasis on ‘impartiality’ exacerbates this: “balanced interventions which treat as equal the oppressor and oppressed can not only be ineffective but also harmful by implicitly siding with the powerful in reinforcing an unjust status quo” when gross inequalities and injustices are embedded into social, political and economic institutions (Dudouet 2006, 54; also 2005, 63-70; Fast 2002, 631-532).

Consequently, conflict resolution practitioners have been criticised for unwittingly generating peaceful illusions on unjust and untenable institutional bases (Clements 2004, 446), being agents of social control rather than of social change (Mayer 2004, 160-167; Scimecca 1987), creating harmony at the expense of justice (Nader 1997; 1991), and preaching pacification rather than peacemaking (Francis 2010; Meijer 1997; Webb 1988). Such claims particularly arise when conflict resolution does not question existing structures, or is pursued by civil society actors at the request of public authorities – for example, to help manage socio-political tension or prevent violence when people protest against poor service delivery or large infrastructure projects. Failure to devote attention to the ways in which the state generates and sometimes escalates socio-political tension and violent conflict (Clements 2004, 445) may turn conflict resolution into “part of an apparatus of power which attempts to discipline and normalize” (Fetherstone 2000, 200). Hence, “peace’ can become a ’dirty’ word when those who work in the name of peace are perceived to be promoting a contested or dominant agenda” (Fisher and Zimina 2009b, 102).

---

58 Nader (1993, 1991) has criticised mediation and other forms of alternative dispute resolution in the US for enabling people to resolve their disputes without challenging underlying structures that possibly contribute to the tension between them, such as, for example, racism or patriarchy. Civil society in Sri Lanka has been criticised for uncritically supporting the Norway-led peace process in the early 2000s, despite the political biases it contained and its neglect of power dynamics related to legitimacy and representation (Orjuela 2008, 230-231; Keenan 2007). See also 8.2.2.

59 See also 5.2.1, on negative connotations attached to ‘conflict resolution’ in South Africa in the 1980s.
Put differently, conflict resolution can be “superficial and irresponsible” by prematurely ending a struggle for justice and social change and institutionalising inequalities instead (Van der Merwe 2000, 217). Some therefore advocate putting ‘the political’ back into conflict resolution (Jabri 2006, 74; Clements 2004, 455). Others argue that ‘courageous confrontation’ and dissent are needed in contexts of power asymmetry, rather than ‘preaching respect and kindness’ (Roy, Burdick, and Kriesberg 2010, 347) or ‘induced harmony’ (Nader 1991).

Yet this brings to light a paradox concerning conflict resolution’s belief in the potential of conflict as an opportunity for development and transformation, and its desire to de-escalate. It relates to the fact that movements for change are by nature destabilising – at least in the short term – while de-escalation seeks to stabilise. As Francis puts it, “despite our theory about conflict and change, we are [...] (properly) wary of action to confront structural violence and bring hidden conflict into the open – afraid that it could make things worse rather than better” (2010, 103). Increased recognition of the relevance of conflict and confrontation in addressing injustice in contexts of asymmetry has therefore “not notably [changed] the practice of most organisations” (idem, 6).

The above reflects the tension that has long existed between conflict resolution’s settlement and transformation dimensions (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall 2011, xvii). It also points to the tension that may arise between its normative and pragmatic sides. As Lutz and others observe, when there is “great loss of life or other high stakes,” normativity often yields to political expediency, especially at Track I level (2003, 183). It has been noted that such tensions between conflict resolution as a tool for change and for pacification may also arise in interactions between conflict resolution actors from within a conflict setting and international agencies and practitioners that opt to become involved in that context (Anderson and Olson 2003, 40). Arguably, ‘insiders’ are often more willing to take a stand, challenge vested interests and resist the powers that be than ‘outsiders’, who tend to be risk-averse so as to not jeopardise relationships with their own governments (by whom they are funded and/or who may well be complicit to the violence in a particular context) (Francis 2010, 60, 103; Fisher and Zimina 2008, 19, 24-25).

In that sense, the tensions relating to challenging power and deferring to it, may have a political economy dimension too, prompting Fisher and Zimina to write scathingly that “the ‘sustainable peace’ being sought [...] seems to amount in practice to little more than ‘patching’ – attempts to create the minimal stability that would allow the current world order, driven by market forces and geopolitical constellations, to step in” (idem, 20). In sum, while seeking social change and transformation, conflict resolution may in practice maintain the status quo.
3.5.4 Complexity and Contextuality of Conflict, Simplicity and Generality of Models: Conflict Resolution as Applying Recipes

The fourth contradiction discussed here concerns the tension between conflict resolution’s contextualising and generalising tendencies. Within the field, conflicts are generally understood to be dynamic, multi-causal, and complex. The complexity of conflict has been particularly stressed in relation to protracted social conflict. These enduring conflicts are seen as chaotic and unpredictable, with an internal momentum that is hard to influence (e.g. Van Leeuwen 2009, 11-12; Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall 2011, 12-13). Causality is difficult to attribute in such dynamic processes, also because the original causes may fade into the background while new reasons for escalation emerge over time (Körppen and Ropers 2011, 11; Sriram, Martin-Ortega, and Herman 2010, 6). Complexity is also thought to reside in the fact that a ‘single’ conflict may actually consist of host of embedded, interlocked, conflicts that manifest features of several escalation or de-escalation stages simultaneously (Kriesberg 2011, 59; Dudouet 2006, 12).

Yet the complexity of such situations “contrasts starkly with the relative simplicity of the core theories we can find in conflict resolution” (Miall 2004, 69). Formal recognition of complexity and non-linearity appears to have barely affected ways of thinking and doing in the field (Körppen and Ropers 2011, 11). Giessman thus notes “an increasingly obvious discrepancy between the high complexity and interdependence of conflict – and a comparably under-complex strategy and toolbox used [...] to handle this complexity properly” (2011, 7). Several factors contribute to this: large-scale, protracted conflicts have seldom been a primary source for ideas and practices in the field; insights from inter-personal and inter-group conflict or based on contexts with well-functioning dispute handling systems are increasingly applied to contexts of fragility and asymmetry (Kriesberg 2011, 63; Schmelzle and Bloomfield 2006, 5). Organisations and practitioners also engage in simplification practices since they need to “develop comprehensible and workable representations of the complexity they are working in” (Van Leeuwen 2009, 12). They must begin somewhere, even if operating in “complex adaptive systems where nothing is simple or straightforward” (Mitchell 2006, 87).

Of course, important parts of reality may get lost or escape attention when simplifying complexity (Van Leeuwen 2009, 13). Context becomes contained and controlled in ways that make the models applicable to all conflicts (Timura 2004a, 158). A related

---

60 Since the early 2000s, conflict resolution scholars and practitioners have increasingly referred to chaos theory and complexity science (e.g. Van Leeuwen 2009; Smith 2008; Shapiro 2006). Systemic thinking is also considered (e.g Ricigliano 2012; Körppen and others 2011; Ropers 2011, 2006; Körppen and others 2008), although some question its added value (e.g. Smith 2008).

61 Autessere’s study of conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (2010) illustrates this point.

62 In a similar vein, Carayannis and others stress the "overwhelming yet under-addressed need to manage conflict complexity” (2014, 3), and speak of “our continued inability to integrate complexity into conflict responses, even when we recognize that such complexity exists” (idem, 29).
contradiction hence concerns the field’s simultaneous emphasis on the context-specificity of conflict (e.g. Lederach 1997) and the development of “universal models and techniques applicable across all social and cultural contexts” (Duffey 2000, 145). The field stresses that every conflict is unique, that solutions from one context do not necessarily work elsewhere, that conflict resolution efforts must be shaped by the specific context, and that peace and change have to originate from within, driven and owned by those affected by destructive conflict (e.g. Siebert 2013; Odendaal 2013; Lederach and Appleby 2010). These are articles of faith that are as much part of conflict resolution’s ‘toolkit’ as dialogue facilitation, process design, conflict analysis, negotiation training, etc. Meanwhile, it also assumes that “rules, norms and understandings” exist that help field actors to treat conflicts in similar ways (Wallensteen 2002, 70) and that suggest “universal patterns of conflict and corresponding intervention strategies” (Windmueller, Wayne, and Botes 2009, 296).

Admittedly, a reasonably coherent conflict resolution field would not exist without generic, broadly applicable models (ibid; Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall 2011, 332). Nevertheless, there is growing concern that conflict resolution practice may have turned into an application of recipes. This claim has particularly been levelled against the ‘liberal peace’ paradigm, memorably described as “Ikea-peacebuilding discourse” (Körppen 2011, 77) for its tendency to set out the components needed irrespective of where assembly takes place. It envisions the UN, outside intervening states, state governments and opposition factions engaging in mediation, state-building, promoting democracy and rule of law, disarmament, and creating free markets and free media.63 This ‘intervention-reconstruction-withdrawal’ approach (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall 2011, 226) has been pervasive since the early 2000s. It has been criticised for trying to impose change top-down; for being linear, naïve, and culturally insensitive; for ignoring context, non-state forms of governance and sub-national conflict dynamics; and for transplanting Western models of social, economic and political organisation on war-ravaged contexts. Boege and others write that, “in effect, locals are supposed to ‘own’ what outsiders tell them to – ‘local ownership clearly means ‘their’ ownership of ‘our’ ideas” (2009, 611).

While the liberal peace paradigm is particularly associated with international institutions and state action, civil society actors working at Track II and Track III level seem not devoid of a recipe-orientation either. Paffenhözl asserts that their initiatives often entail “a predefined set of activities – [...] implemented regardless of their relevance in the context” (2012, 16). RPP echoes this claim, speaking of “‘off-the-shelf’ approaches, with slight variation to adjust to the particular context” (Chigas and

---

63 The literature on liberal peace is vast. For a general discussion of the paradigm, experiences to date, and critiques, see for example Ramsbotham and others (2011, 198-245), Körppen (2011, 77-83), Philpott (2010, 3-9), Richmond (2010), Fischer/ Schmelze (2009), Boege and others (2009). Carayannis and others highlight the failure to interrogate pre-defined notions of key governance and post-conflict reconstruction ‘outputs’ (e.g. security, political stability, economic recovery, good governance) (2014, 14-15). One of the earliest discussions is Paris (2004).
Woodrow 2009, 49). This flies in the face of core beliefs in the field about recognising complexity, supporting change from within, and the importance of context-specificity. It has also been known to lead to unintended consequences, such as reinforcing exclusive identities (Komarova 2011, 152; Orjuela 2008, 240) or disempowering local people and insights – offers of ‘technical expertise’ or reliance on ‘good practices used elsewhere’ easily imply that local knowledge and experience is inferior in addressing conflict or facilitating change (Füst 2007, 10-11; Anderson and Olson 2003, 27).

In sum, there is a contradiction between conflict resolution’s recognition of and emphasis on the contextuality and complexity of conflict and its simplifying and generalising tendencies, which can lead to an uncritical application of recipes and have other negative ramifications. This contradiction interacts with tensions observed earlier. It also relates to the question of whether conflict resolution concepts, ideas, and ‘tools’ apply to diverse cultural and socioeconomic contexts, or are rather embedded in liberal Western cultural and ideological assumptions (e.g. Odendaal 2013, 48; Duffey 2000). Overall, the field may have lost some of its earlier blindness to culture following anthropological critique by Avruch and others (1991), and its general embrace of Lederach’s ‘elicitive’ approach (2003; 1997) – at least conceptually. Yet the above discussion shows that conflict resolution’s grappling with complexity and contextuality has not been resolved as yet.

3.6 Conclusion: The Conflict Resolution Field

This chapter has reviewed the conflict resolution field, considering its foundations and historical development, as well as key ideas, actors and practices. It has also outlined several contradictions that permeate the field which point to its limitations. Many of these suggest some incongruence between conflict resolution theory and the way it is practiced; some draw attention to unintended negative consequences of practical conflict resolution efforts. Clearly, good intentions do not guarantee good outcomes (Anderson and Olson 2003, 28). The contradictions identified here suggest that conflict resolution has a shadow side, highlighting weaknesses in the way thinking and practice in the field has evolved over time. These relate, amongst other things, to its engagement with issues of power and its difficulty in addressing deep-rooted causes of destructive conflict. This last section briefly considers the conflict resolution field in relation to the discussion on fields and frames in chapter 1.

While drawing on many different disciplines, conflict resolution is largely grounded in the social sciences. As such, it contains a wide variety of perspectives and a degree of

---

64 A static and essentialist notion of identity held by conflict resolution actors can deepen communal tension by upholding prejudice about ‘the other’ or by failing to question exclusive notions of ‘community’ (Komarova 2011, 152; Orjuela 2008, 240). Conflict resolution work in Northern Ireland has been criticised for this (see 8.1.1).

65 Some observe that non-Western audiences may be suspicious of ‘conflict resolution’ (e.g. Francis 2004, 98; Abu-Nimer 1998, 102).
Chapter 3

fragmentation is a feature of the field. Nevertheless, a fairly coherent body of thought can be discerned with field-specific categories of judgement and perception. These include differentiated understandings of terms commonly used in the public domain, and various diagrammatic models. Familiarity with the conflict resolution lexicon – in terms of words and imagery, both visual and metaphorical – and the ability to apply it to social reality facilitates interaction and understanding between scholars and practitioners from different contexts and backgrounds. It enables them to capture information about behaviour or a context in specific terminology, typifying for example a particular situation as ‘latent conflict’, or certain practices as ‘local capacities for peace’, or determining that ‘the conflict parties’ engage on the basis of ‘positions’ rather than ‘interests’. Practical experiences of addressing (destructive) conflict constitute another form of capital, which relates, at least in part, to the field’s emphasis on linking theory and practice: conflict resolution is not meant to be an ivory tower exercise but to be firmly rooted in practical action and the challenges of the real world. A third form of capital is probably ‘connectivity’: conflict resolution actors’ webs of relationships matter as they provide access, credibility and legitimacy.

The discussion here supports the claim that conflict resolution constitutes a frame in itself, one that suggests that mutually beneficial outcomes are possible, as is collaboration between opponents. This frame emphasises responsiveness to local conditions, suggesting that change only occurs when actors within a specific context want it and consider it viable, and that change cannot be imposed – although third parties can support or encourage processes of change. The extent to which this frame prioritizes certain courses of action rather than others is exemplified by the slogan of a large conflict resolution INGO: ‘Understanding differences. Acting on commonalities.’

As a frame, conflict resolution thus devotes much attention to facilitating constructive communication and communal interaction, focusing on identity groups as the most relevant unit of analysis. It stresses enhancing relationships, exploring underlying needs and interests, and designing inclusive processes that can open up possibilities for positive and peaceful change. Yet in its emphasis on containing destructive conflict and preventing violence, it risks prioritising symptoms over causes, and emphasising behavioural and attitudinal change at the expense of structural change.

All in all, conflict resolution is a normative frame, although such normativity is grounded in broad moral notions of social justice, fairness, participation, and respect rather than in any formal or legal standards. This normativity also does not manifest in strong notions of right and wrong, or a concern with attributing blame, however strong the field’s focus on identifying and addressing causes of conflict. On the contrary, it has been noted that the field is prone to perceiving the world through a ‘threesome’ or ‘triangular’ filter that resists binary categories and recognises

---

66 This is the slogan of Search for Common Ground, www.sfcg.org.
complexity. Arguably, ambiguity and complexity run through the field itself. The heterogeneity of its ideas and practices speaks to this, as does its terminological minefield, its performance of both conservative and emancipatory functions, and the (uneasy) coexistence of normative and pragmatic tendencies. As such, the conflict resolution field exhibits the ‘messiness’ that is inherent to conflict and which also characterises the very conditions conflict resolution seeks to change for the better.