Reflections on the Field of Conflict Resolution

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Abstract

Compared with other disciplines in the social sciences, conflict resolution is a relatively new, emerging professional and academic field. Many developments have shaped the current reality and boundaries of the field. This article is an attempt to provide a set of reflections on the major issues, challenges and possible future directions facing the field of conflict resolution. By narrating my own personal and professional journey, I hope to capture certain aspects and perspectives of this field. This is not a comprehensive review or 'scientific' charting of the field, nevertheless it attempts to shed light on areas and concepts that are otherwise taken for granted or neglected when the mapping of the field is done through more extensive empirical research. This mapping of conflict resolution after 30 years of practice, teaching and research first involves reflections on the conceptual or so-called theoretical groundings of the field. Second, it examines the various professional practices that have branched out through the last few decades. Third, it identifies some of the current limitations and challenges facing conflict resolution practitioners and scholars in their struggle to position the field in relation to current global realities. The final section discusses possible future directions to address existing gaps and refocus the research agenda of the field.

Keywords: peacebuilding field, culture and conflict resolution, power and conflict resolution, future trends in peacebuilding, critique of peacebuilding.

1. Geneology of the Field

When examining the world today, many observe an increasing number of violent, armed conflicts as well as greater outbursts of social and urban violence.[1] For

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[1] See the *Global Peace Index* (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2012a) for one attempt to measure the relative position of nations' and regions' peacefulness, online at <www.visionof humanity.org/>. IEP has also recently produced a report looking at violence containment spending in the United States, which refers to the size of economic activity devoted to inflicting, preventing or dealing with the consequences of violence. For example, in the United States violence containment costs around 15% of Gross Domestic Product each year making it the largest discrete industry (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2012b).

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many people, when I introduce myself and my profession as a conflict resolution scholar and practitioner, their intuitive response is 'you will never be out of work'.[2] The assumption behind that response is that there are plenty of violent conflict areas and tensions in various parts of the world, and that those conflicts and tensions will continue to exist. The field of conflict resolution emerged to counter this belief.

Emerging as a formal discipline in the early 1970s, the field of conflict resolution asserted various assumptions as foundational principles. They included:

- Conflict is an integral part of life, and conflict of interests and goals is an integral part of human interactions;
- Conflict can be resolved in non-violent ways;
- Cooperation is more effective and less costly than avoidance, competition or accommodation in resolving conflicts;
- Addressing the root causes of a conflict is a necessary step in resolving it;
- Conflict resolution processes should address the asymmetric power relations among parties;
- Conflict resolution can bring structural social and political changes (Abu-Nimer, 1999).

Several major developments marked the evolution of the field of conflict resolution in North America. The first phase followed the end of the World War II, in which an increased focus on human relations studies attempted to explain the reasons, motivations and dynamics of violence that swept European societies and dragged Americans and other countries into that war. These studies focused on understanding stereotypes, prejudice and racism (Allport, 1954). Following the horrors of the Holocaust, they also included attempts to answer the question of how and why large segments of society in Germany would follow Nazi ideology and conform to the brutal killings of many people inside and outside. This phase produced theories of human relations and stereotype reduction processes, such as the 'contact hypothesis' theory, that served as the basis for many current dialogue approaches found in conflict resolution (Amir, 1969; Hewstone and Brown, 1986; Sherif and Sherif, 1973).

A second area of study was motivated by the development of negotiation processes to address disputes between labor unions and corporate managers in North America. Companies realized that cooperation and management of conflicts (in order to avoid labor strikes) were better than competition, and that both strategies could increase the productivity of workers (as opposed to confrontation with workers and their unions). This stream of studies and practices produced interest-based bargaining and labour management procedures and frameworks that affected the business sector in particular (Scimecca, 1991).

A third stream that contributed to the development of the field of conflict resolution was related to the U.S. civil rights movement in the late 1960s. The struggle to achieve equality for various ethnic, racial and gender minorities re-

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2   While distinctions can be and are made in categories and definitions often used in this field, in this paper I will be using the terms 'conflict resolution' and 'peacebuilding' interchangeably.

sulted in a huge wave of civil rights cases that challenged the court system. The legal system was unable to respond to the flood of civil right cases. Judges began referring cases to trained community mediators, leading to the creation of many new community mediation centres. This stream constituted the base for the development of family and community mediation.

Another stream of practice emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s in international relations. Diplomats and scholars of international relations began exploring alternative tracks and processes to negotiate international and inter-ethnic conflicts. Scholars and diplomats John Burton (1969, 1990), Leonard Doob (1971), Herbert Kelman (1972), Christopher Mitchell (1981) and Edward Azar (1990) were among the pioneers who began exploring the controlled communication model and problem solving workshops in resolving international conflicts. Northern Ireland, Israel-Palestine and Cyprus were among the first conflict cases in which these emerging models were put to the test.

By the 1980s, these streams of practice had emerged and were being implemented by various governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). During this period, a growing diplomatic dissatisfaction with existing paradigms of 'power politics' led John McDonald and Joseph Montville to propose the term 'Track Two Diplomacy' (McDonald and Diamond, 1996; Montville, 1987). In 1996, The Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy was launched to implement programs based on the assumption that people from different tracks (*i.e.*, non-state sectors such as religious, education and research, media and other non-governmental organizations) can have roles in resolving their own conflicts.[3]

As a result of these developments, the first graduate-level academic program in conflict resolution was created at George Mason University in 1982. Six years later, having worked for years as a conflict resolution practitioner in Israel-Palestine, I joined the first Ph.D. program at George Mason University, launched in what is today known as their School of Conflict Analysis and Resolution.

Up to this point, the field had two major competing sets of practices and conceptual frameworks. The *conflict resolution* framework was led by scholars who argued that intervention processes must be rooted to the assumption that structural, root causes of conflict need to be addressed in order to fully resolve them. John Burton, a leader of this school, offered a generic framework he called 'human needs theory' to resolve all conflicts (Burton, 1990; Burton and Dukes, 1990; Burton and Sandole, 1986, 1987). Despite the debates that such a theory created among the resolution school, there was a general agreement among scholars and practitioners in this camp that an analytical framework was necessary to understand conflict and devise an intervention plan. Another key assumption of this framework related to the notion was that 'realpolitik' or the power politics of the dominant realist paradigm can be neutralized by a basic human needs approach. If parties are genuinely engaged in analytical processes examining basic human needs, their power differences and asymmetric realities would not affect their capacity to reach common resolutions. Critics of this perspective pointed out its limitations and shortcomings particularly in terms of cultural differences,

3   *See* further publications from the Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy at <www.imtd.org>.

Mohammed Abu-Nimer

the role of emotion and the inescapable impact of power asymmetry (Avruch, 1998; Avruch and Black, 1987; Avruch, Black and Scimecca, 1991).

Several intervention models were developed out of this resolution framework, including the problem solving workshop approach pioneered by Herb Kelman at Harvard University. Having run several of these workshops with Kelman, Chris Mitchell and Jim Laue, I observed an approach heavily rooted in analytical models and focused on deep-rooted conflicts, where participants' emotions were seen as secondary effects of threatened or frustrated human needs in guiding the decision to reach a resolution. In addition, the third-party panel in the workshop was intended to act as an outsider with expertise that serves the conflict analysis exercise. Other models of problem solving processes emerged from the resolution camp, including Ron Fisher's (1997) consultant third-party model and Jay Rothman's (1997, 2012) ARIA model.

A second major camp of scholars and practitioners that developed in the 1970s and 1980s was framed in terms of *conflict management and settlement*. This framework emphasized the need to be tactical and pragmatic over expectations in any intervention to address conflicts, especially in the international arena. The emphasis in this group was on the possibility of utilizing processes of interest-based negotiation and bargaining to reach an agreement between the parties. Reaching the agreement was perceived as an end in itself, regardless of the lack of change in the structural arrangements, or fundamental assumptions, that triggered and perpetuated the conflict in the first place. Since the early 1980s, led by Roger Fisher and William Ury's book *Getting to Yes* (1983), scholars and practitioners have been packaging models and manuals to train mediators, negotiators, and facilitators to manage and settle conflicts on individual, community and state levels. In this context, the third-party mediator is perceived as neutral and has no role in determining or influencing the outcome of the process. The ethical commitment of the third party is to the process of mediation, regardless of the outcome of the process. The practical applications in this branch of the field have been flourishing and have produced a strong sub-field of legal-based practice known as Alternative Dispute Resolution (Scimecca, 1991, 1993; Movius and Susskind, 2009).

When mapping the field of conflict resolution, one should not forget or neglect the third pillar or force that existed during and before the emergence of the above two camps. This path to solve conflicts was represented by scholars and practitioners who advocated *non-violent resistance and advocacy*. The roots of these processes extended into the field of peace studies, an academic discipline at least since the 1930s. Scholars and activists in this area emphasized the need to eradicate structural violence and nurture a culture of peace. Johan Galtung and other European scholars led the research agenda for peace studies as early as the 1950s (Galtung, 1969). Elise Boulding (1988) and Kenneth Boulding (1975) inspired many scholars and activists to develop tools and processes of intervention to promote peace education and cultures of peace as an alternative framework to the power politics paradigm of 'realpolitik' or the realist approach in international relations. Inspired in the United States by the anti-war and civil rights movements, and Martin Luther King's leadership, by the middle of 1970s peace studies

and non-violent action had become a flourishing field of study and practice. Gene Sharp's (1973) three volumes on strategies of non-violent action were published as a guide for activists in confronting power imbalance and oppression.

2. My Own Journey in the Field and Critique of It

After joining the conflict resolution doctoral program at George Mason University in 1989, having worked for years as a dialogue facilitator and peace activist in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it felt somewhat strange to listen to scholars and practitioners debate whether conflict resolution has to be systematically linked with non-violence and social and political change movements. For me, it was clear that conflict resolution tools and frameworks were only one set of techniques and methods to promote certain values of equality, freedom and justice. However, I was surprised to hear the perspective that you can help to solve conflicts by being neutral or without advocating for certain values or taking a stand in supporting justice.

I was not alone in this feeling, and by the early 1990s, a dissatisfaction had grown with both the analytical resolution processes and the temporary management procedures and techniques. This paved the way for the fourth wave (see discussion above on the three earlier phases of CR field conceptual developments: Human Relations, Management, Resolution) of conceptual development in which both resolution and management models were criticized as insufficient to bring about comprehensive change. The *conflict transformation* framework was proposed by scholars and practitioners as a more comprehensive alternative in guiding the field to achieve change on individual, institutional and macro-structural levels. This framework placed the emphasis on transforming relationships between and among individuals and systems. The need for inner individual transformation was proposed as an integral step in the process of not only resolving conflicts but also, as John Paul Lederach (1997) suggests, transforming existing structures to build new relationships based on values of equality, justice, mercy and reconciliation. Spirituality, art and local indigenous methods were among the newly modified ways to analyze and intervene in deep-rooted conflicts.

Another significant development occurred in the early 1990s when Boutros Boutros-Ghali (1992, 1995), the then United Nations Secretary General, issued his conceptual paper distinguishing between peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding. In addition to recognizing and acknowledging the various stages of any conflict and the necessary tools of intervention in each phase, the paper provided an opportunity for the field of conflict resolution to be introduced as an integral part of post-war or post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts. United Nations' development agencies, such as the UN Development Programme (UNDP), began introducing basic conflict resolution frameworks into their operations. Similarly, European development agencies, especially Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, German and British agencies, began utilizing peace and conflict tools and frameworks in their international development programming. By early 2000, the World Bank, the United States Agency for International Develop-

Mohammed Abu-Nimer

ment (USAID) and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) had also established special units to integrate conflict analysis and resolution into their development programs. The majority of these agencies, however, adopted only certain frameworks of intervention from the field, and in particular those conflict resolution frameworks that do not necessarily challenge power imbalances or structures but focus on relational and perceptional aspects of conflict.

Following the Boutros-Ghali paper, scholars and practitioners began using the term *peacebuilding* in at least two major ways. The first one related to activities and processes deployed by parties or outsiders specifically in post-conflict or agreements stages intended to improve and rebuild relationships between warring factions or groups. In the second, another group of scholars (myself included) began using the term peacebuilding as an umbrella, all-inclusive term to relate to all interventions (outsider or insider), regardless of the stage of the conflict (pre-ongoing violence to post-agreement).

Conflict resolution's increase in organizational exposure at governmental and non-governmental levels was also reflected in the Academy. By the early 1990s, new graduate and doctoral programs as well as centres of conflict resolution were being launched across the United States and Europe. For example, in 1994, I was teaching at Guilford College, a small liberal arts institution in a small town in North Carolina. With the support of the college administrators, we launched a conflict resolution resource center to serve both the campus and the surrounding community. Tens of other programs were created during that period for the same purpose. In 1997, I joined the International Peace and Conflict Resolution program (IPCR) at the School of International Service (SIS) at American University. SIS is one of the largest international relations programs in the country. Initially leaders in the school, being heavily influenced by mainstream international relations and political science paradigms, needed to be persuaded of the need for a new program in peace and conflict resolution. But students, staff and pioneer faculty members managed to make a strong case for the creation of new department (to join existing departments such as International Politics, Comparative and Regional Studies, International Development, Foreign Policy, and International Communications), and the IPCR program was launched in 1996. Today, after 16 years, it has evolved and grown to become one of the largest program in SIS as well as a leading academic program in the field.

As a result of rapid conceptual and professional developments, the use of agreed-upon terminology became a major challenge in the conflict resolution field. Scholars and practitioners often use the same terms but intend different meanings. For example, government officials might use the terminology of conflict resolution (including peace, negotiation, mediation and dialogue), but continue to endorse and deploy traditional methods of power politics and realist approaches – perhaps more akin to conventional uses of the term conflict management. On the one hand, the field of conflict resolution has been included in many mainstream academic institutions (at least to some extent) and has been adopted by establishments. On the other hand, governmental and non-governmental organizations utilize the terminology or certain aspects of the methods or techniques to engage in old politics or re-establish their hegemony and power

over underdeveloped societies or communities. For example, in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the terms dialogue, mediation and negotiation have been used by many U.S. and European foreign policy experts and diplomats. They describe the efforts of intervention using terminology of peace and conflict resolution; however, the logic and the ethics of the intervention remain within the existing dominant power paradigm (including threats, rewards, muscle mediation, strategic interest of the third party, etc.). Similar patterns exist when Iranian and Western diplomats exchange statements regarding the conflicts in the region. In fact, the trend of adopting the language of peace and conflict resolution yet continuing to advocate for a 'power or real politik paradigm' can also be seen in the gradual shift in framing research agendas in the field of international relations and political science to security. In the past 10 years, I have been attending the International Studies Association Annual conference, and have observed the increased number of panels and roundtables focusing on security, terrorism and global security. This process of securitization of international relations has also affected the field of conflict resolution. NGOs and even academic programs are being pressured to reframe their agendas in a language and discourse that fit security and defense frameworks.[4]

Obviously, the utilization of the peacebuilding terminology by politicians is an important achievement in the gradual alteration of the realist discourse. However, it is crucial for us, scholars and practitioners, in the field of peace and conflict resolution not to adjust our definitions of the various concepts in order to fit the ways in which hegemonic governments and power elites have manipulated these concepts. Thus, insisting on values such as justice, empowerment and freedom (as suggested by Laue and Cormick, 1978) as guiding principles in measuring and defining our processes has become particularly necessary to maintain the credibility and legitimacy of the field among certain disadvantaged communities.

Having worked in this field for over 20 years, there is no doubt that the demand for conflict resolution has increased considerably and that dozens of academic and professional programs are producing a new generation of graduates who are seeking jobs and employment in various sectors (including government, security, development and civil society). I have witnessed and humbly contributed to many of the above developments, especially the emergence of new concepts and frameworks to organize and conceptualize the field (settlement and management – resolution – transformation). The divisions and fragmentations between these various practices and concepts of the field continue to exist and manifest in various theoretical and professional debates and institutions. The following sec-

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4   A simple survey of the ISA annual conference program can illustrate the trends of securitization and globalization of the international relations field in the USA. In addition, *see:* Caballero-Anthony, M. & Emmers, R. (2006). The dynamics of securitization in Asia. In R. Emmers, M. Caballero-Anthony & A. Acharya, (Eds.), *Studying non-traditional security in Asia: Trends and issues* (pp. 21-35). Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Academic; Wæver, O. (1998). Securitization and desecuritization. In R.D. Lipschutz (Ed.). *On security*. New York: Columbia University Press; Peoples, C., & Vaughan-Williams, N. (2010). *Critical security studies: An introduction*. Abingdon, UK, and New York: Routledge.

Mohammed Abu-Nimer

tion explores the dynamics and implications of such different approaches in shaping and defining the field of peacebuilding and conflict resolution.

3. Areas of Tension

As a result of the rapid professional and academic growth in the field of peacebuilding, there are a number of paradoxes or competing approaches that generate tension on the ground when practitioners or scholars uncover and implement their assumptions or models. The following are five areas of tension that were selected on the basis of my field work in conflict areas such as Sri Lanka, Mindanao (Philippines), Chad, Niger, Israel-Palestine, Kurdistan-Iraq, etc.

3.1 Relational and Perceptional versus Structural

There are a number of theoretical approaches and practices that conceptualize the sources of conflict and its remedies primarily within the individual's cognitive, affective or perceptional frameworks. These theories offer approaches such as non-violent communication, dialogue, problem solving workshops, and mediation and negotiation as tools to resolve conflicts and reduce tension between parties.[5] The unit of analysis and intervention in such cases is the individual's awareness of his or her own perceptions and ways of viewing of the other. Thus, when changing these assumptions and perceptions, by humanizing the 'other', new relationships will be forged between individuals, who will operate in different ways in their own environment, and as a result produce or trigger the desired change. On the other hand, there are processes and conceptualizations that identify structures and systems (political, economic, social, religious, etc.) that generate and cause conflicts.[6] Thus, changing and transforming these structures is the primary objective of intervention methods proposed by these processes.

Looking at these two foci of attention that guide conflict interventions, I can generalize broadly that during my work in Sri Lanka, Philippines (Mindanao), Egypt, Israel-Palestine and the United States, members of minority groups approached the conflict with the expectation to change structures, while members of the majority dominant group expected to form friendships with members of the minority group in hopes of an experience of mutual humanization – such 'differential set of priorities and expectations'.[7] This often results in a tension that is expressed in group dynamics during dialogue, training workshops or actual mediation processes, too.

5   Scholars and practitioners such as Herbert Kelman (1972), Ron Fisher (1997), Jacob Bercovitch (1984, 1996), William Zartman (1985) and Joseph Montville (1987) were among those who framed conflicts through these lenses.
6   Johan Galtung (1969), Ken Boulding (1975), Gene Sharp (1973), Edward Azar (1990), John Burton (1969, 1990) and Christopher Mitchell (1981) were among the leading scholars who framed conflicts through the structural lenses.
7   Differential priorities and expectations between minority and majority participants in dialogue groups is a concept that had been already documented via research on Arab-Jewish encounters as early as 1993 (see Abu-Nimer 1999).

The stark division between the concepts and processes of these frameworks are also reflected in donor support and funding sources. The majority of funding in peacebuilding and conflict resolution is devoted or allocated to models that aim at facilitating perceptional and cognitive changes on the individual levels, rather than challenging political or sociocultural structures that perpetuate the dominance of certain majority or elite groups.[8] Such observation is especially true when funds are allocated to improve relations between Arabs and Jews in Israel-Palestine without challenging the structures that perpetuate the violence (occupation, political ideologies, etc.). Similarly, when donors emphasize the need to improve relations between Sinhalese and Tamil or Muslims in Sri Lanka, without questioning the political structure or powers that continue to generate the violence (corrupt governance, abuse of basic human rights for minorities, etc.).

Of course we cannot mechanically separate the two approaches or processes of intervention, and general wisdom dictates that we combine them. However, there are very few practices in the field that have managed so far to bridge the gap between these two approaches and propose a clear map in how to design and implement intervention programs that link these two different ways of viewing conflicts and their sources[9]

3.2 Cultural Specific versus Generic

After working in Israel-Palestine for 10 years in interethnic dialogue between Arabs and Jews, in 1989 I began my Ph.D., I was shocked to discover that one of the main theoretical and professional questions proposed by scholars and practitioners was about whether and to what extent local cultural traits and attributes influence and guide our intervention and approach to a conflict and its resolution. Both models of conflict resolution and management offered by John Burton and William Ury and Roger Fisher failed to explain or take into consideration the role of cultural differences in conflict settings. Similarly, in the early 1990s, William Zartman debated the role of culture in conflict resolution and diplomacy, but later shifted his position and published several studies exploring the role of culture in African conflict contexts.

Although today, 22 years later, those who argue that culture does matter in designing and implementing conflict resolution have gained significant recognition in the field of peacebuilding, a number of practitioners and scholars continue

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8   Especially funds from governmental sources such as USAID, CIDA, the British Department for International Development (DFID), and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA).

9   Non-violent resistance programs and interventions often target the structures of dominance, and manage to build solidarity among their beneficiaries that transcend the ethnic or religious boundaries (*e.g.* Israeli and Palestinian solidarity groups that carried out programs to challenge the Separation Wall). Other intervention programs in Egypt that challenge infrastructures that discriminate against Coptic Christians, however they do that through relationship building between Muslims and Christians.

Mohammed Abu-Nimer

to promote certain generic and universal methods of conflict resolution which are mainly devised in the North and exported to the Global South.[10]

The lack of consideration of the cultural factor was a limitation among scholars and practitioners in both resolution and management camps. It was only in the middle and late 1990s that Kevin Avruch, Peter Black and other anthropologists and sociologists managed to introduce a clear articulation of how culture affects conflict and resolution processes. The conflict transformation approach that emerged in the late 1990s avoided this trap by placing local cultural practices at the center of its framework. This group, of which I am a part, argued that elicitive models of peacebuilding are more effective than prescriptive models and that local cultural terminology and fit can only be generated by third-party insiders (Abu-Nimer, 1996a,b; Lederach, 1995).

This discussion was instructive insomuch as it revealed that a need-based analysis of conflict with a consideration of 'needs' alone – whether in direct or structural forms – that does not take into account the cultural constitution of those needs and the power differential that exists between the parties, is a short-sighted methodology (Seidel, 2009). The shortcomings and limitations of applying Western models of conflict resolution in non-Western conflict setting became very clear to me when I began conducting international trainings in 1993. One example was an experience I had in Gaza, fresh out of graduate school with my doctoral degree in conflict resolution and equipped with state of art manuals and tools of mediation and conflict resolution. The Palestinian trainees who belonged to various political fractions (Fatah, Popular Front, Communist, etc.) tolerated my training for three days. However, when I insisted on training them in how to draft a written contract to seal a mediation agreement, one of the participants criticized the models by saying: "look we have been doing mediation for at least a couple of thousands years, and we are good at settling individual and even small community conflicts. Our mediation process does not require writing a legal contract, but we use a handshake and invite the community to witness the process." Egyptian and Sri Lankan participants I worked with expressed similar sentiments during conflict resolution trainings.

Following these experiences, I realized that Harvard and George Mason mediation and interest-based negotiation manuals were tools and approaches generated to primarily serve communities and individuals who live in an individualistic, legally oriented, capitalist, Christian and/or secular subcultures (Abu-Nimer, 1996a,b). This realization has guided my work as a scholar-practitioner to develop various ways and methods to elicit local approaches to conflict resolution and follow 'inside-out framing' of interventions (regardless of whether it is a training, mediation, advocacy or assessment). An 'inside-out framing' means that interveners are guided by the perceptions and meaning systems of the participants rather than the opposite 'outside-inside framing' in which the outside consultant or

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10   For example, currently there are several Western NGOs that are conducting conflict resolution trainings in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Yemen using the Roger Fisher 'getting to yes' model.

trainer imposes or manipulates the process to fit the conflict in his or her termi-nology and frame of reference.[11]

The recognition of the role of cultural factors and local actors in conflict reso-lution intervention processes has also provided a space for the acknowledgment of religious approaches to and understandings of conflict. In general, diplomacy and international relations have marginalized religious actors both in theory and practice. Diplomats often negotiate agreements and decide the fate of religious and sacred spaces without the consultation or input of religious leaders. However, in early 1990s the sub-field of religious peacebuilding emerged with a claim to assume a central role in identity-based conflicts (Appleby, 2000; Johnston and Sampson, 1994; Sampson, 1997). International faith-based organizations such as Catholic Relief Services, Mennonite Central Committee, American Friends Service Committee and World Vision began formulating and exploring ways in which concepts of justice and peacebuilding were integral to their faith practices and theological frameworks.[12] Jewish and Islamic scholars and practitioners followed these initiatives with their own inside-out framing of peacebuilding (Abu-Nimer, 2003; Gopin, 2000). Today, two decades later, religious peacebuilding is a vibrant sub-field, which has expanded to include both professional guides and manuals and foundational texts that offer creative ways to escape the traditional and clas-sic hermeneutics of war and defense in each faith tradition (Little, 2007).

3.3 Non-violent Resistance versus Dialogical/Negotiation Tools

At its roots, the field of conflict resolution has emerged as a framework compet-ing with the paradigm of power politics and various realist approaches to conflict. However, historically there has been a longstanding alternative paradigm in peace studies that countered power politics and confronted domination or hegemonic power discourses. As stated previously, the theories of peace studies has offered a wide range of methods to counter and confront existing colonial, imperialist and capitalist market ideologies. Some of these methods have included frameworks such as active non-violent resistance, social justice, culture of peace, development of inner peace and individual harmony.

Conflict resolution methods of mediation, negotiation, facilitation, interest-based bargaining or problem solving workshops are based on the assumptions that third-party interventions need to be impartial and avoid taking any clear position during a conflict analysis or intervention phase. In early days of the field, the ethics of intervention according to most conflict resolution practitioners required the third party to avoid advocating on any side despite apparent power imbalances (Bercovitch, 1984, 1996; Burton, 1969, 1990; Zartman, 1985). Very few scholars and practitioners of conflict resolution endorsed the values of free-dom and justice as did, for example, James Laue (Laue and Cormick, 1978).

11   An 'inside-out framing' reflects an 'emic' approach to culture and conflict resolution as described by Kevin Avruch (1998).
12   Catholic Relief Services (CRS) was a pioneer in this context when it proposed to revise its entire global operation through Catholic social justice lenses. The organization was among the first groups to create a peacebuilding unit aimed at mainstreaming such concepts in its development operations (*see* Abu-Nimer, 2003).

Mohammed Abu-Nimer

When conflict resolution began developing and growing as a professional field of intervention, it moved away from the ethics of peace studies and towards the 'codes of professionalism' of third-party intervention emphasized by graduate schools. When government agencies and international donors such as the World Bank, UNDP or Department of International Development (DFID) adopted conflict resolution frameworks, it became clear that the professionalization of the field meant distancing itself from non-violent resistance, critical theory and hegemonic discourse analysis. The implications of such shifts and developments in the field have been divisive. For example, when an international conflict resolution training team arrives in Israel-Palestine to work with Palestinian civil society groups, the primary focus is typically on teaching and transmitting a set of mechanical skills of mediation, facilitation, negotiation or problem solving, which can be used by individuals or small communities to better manage their relationships. Their framework will not include non-violent resistance training or taking a social justice stand in solidarity with the underprivileged groups in Israeli and Palestinian societies.

Similarly, in processes of intervention to address race relations in the United States, conflict resolution practitioners offer techniques to manage individual and small community conflicts through mediation and problem solving. They neglect or ignore the structure and systems of oppression that have lasted for centuries. Due to what many consider to be the professional ethics of conflict resolution, such third parties are expected to avoid taking a stand against structural racism or other forms of social injustice (Nader,1991; Scimecca, 1993).

Having identified such characteristics in the field of conflict resolution, it is not surprising to discover that in the context of the United States, the overwhelming majority of students, professors and practitioners in conflict resolution programs are not members of ethnic or racial minorities. Very few minority students attend conflict resolution programs. This low rate of diversity in such programs produces a tendency within the field of conflict resolution to pursue a 'harmonizing' agenda of social control rather than an agenda of social change that engages in direct confrontation with hegemonic power systems. Additionally, it has served as a marketing tool among middle and upper class students who grew up sheltered by privileged economic and racial systems, yet they yearn to 'do good' and serve in the world. Conflict resolution field offers a safe path.[13] As a practitioner, you do not have to take a stand for justice, confront structural violence or hegemonic power, and you can work within various governmental agencies and major corporations or international non-governmental organiza-

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13   A safe path means the capacity to work and be accepted in mainstream government jobs. For example, SCAR (School of Conflict Analysis and Resolution) at George Mason University, and IPCR (International Peace and Conflict Resolution) at American University are two leading graduate academic program whose graduates often seek jobs in USA government agencies, mainstream think tanks, or large non-government organizations, who depend on USAID or Department of Defense funding). In fact, there has been several initiatives to 'professionalize' graduate programs in conflict resolution and international relations, in which practitioners and academics argued for teaching skills and tools that government agencies, think tanks, and large NGOs demanded from their employees.

tions (INGOs).[14] Therefore, many of the conflict resolution programs implemented by civil society groups face a major challenge in dealing with donors' dictated methods and ideologies of intervention.

This tension between conflict resolution for social and structural change (as a peace study field) and conflict resolution as a management and settlement approach continues to divide the field and obstruct the emergence of possible social movements capable of offering alternatives to the power politics of dominant cultures. Such schism between the two areas of studies has been documented by Rubenstein and Scimecca in early 1980s (Scimecca, 1987). However, it can be also observed when examining the types of programs and agendas set by their respective professional associations. For example, the annual meetings of PJSA, (Peace And Justice Studies) or IPRA (International Peace Research Association) in peace studies and the gathering of practitioners in the annual meeting of ACR (Association for Conflict Resolution) as one of the most recent organizations of conflict resolution.

3.4 Class versus 'Ethnic and Religious Identity-Based' Labels

Conflict resolution has grown a great deal, especially following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. Similarly, civil society organizations and their role in mediating between governments and the public have become more visible and consistently and aggressively promoted by international donors and northern hemisphere governments (Barnes, 2009; Marchetti and Toccib, 2009; United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, 2009, 2010). In fact, the packaging and exporting of conflict resolution models and frameworks was mainly managed by INGOs who received their funding from government agencies with the general objective of enhancing local capacities for democracy.[15]

When examining these conflict resolution frameworks or exported models to enhance democratic culture in conflict areas, most practitioners identify core issues in identity-based terms. I have often observed that class as a category is rarely identified as a source or organizing framework. Similarly, scholars and aca-

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14   At least one third of the graduates of conflict resolution programs seek governmental or semi-governmental jobs: See Carstarphen, N., Zelizer, C., Harris, R. & Smith, D. J. (2010). *Graduate Education and Professional Practice in International Peace and Conflict* (United States Institute of Peace Special Report 246). Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace. <http://scar.gmu.edu/sites/default/files/Graduate%20Education%20and%20Professional%20Practice%20in%20International%20Peace%20and%20Conflict.pdf>. *Also see*: Zelizer, C. & Johnston, L. (2005). *Skills, networks & knowledge: Developing a career in international peace and conflict resolution*. Alexandria: Alliance for Conflict Transformation (ACT). <http://api.ning.com/files/37XpWCWc3b5PQoMoIJgj3adR6n8VAKgctDxihXgFWaQ=>.

15   For example, Search for Common Ground (SCG) was one of the main INGOs that initiated Soviet-American dialogue projects in the early 1980s as well as conflict resolution trainings and capacity building in the Middle East and Central Europe after 1990 (Abu-Nimer, 1996b). The National Endowment for Democracy (NED) supported a major program to enhance linkages between democracy and conflict resolution through the development of special global and regional networks. See </www.wmd.org/networking/conflict-resolution-and-democracy> (last accessed on 14 November 2012).

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demic courses have adopted theories and professional training models that avoid the introduction and promotion of 'class conflict' as an organizing framework to analyze and explain conflict.

Thus, today, three decades later, the field of conflict resolution has developed with the majority of us, especially scholars and practitioners in USA academic setting, adopting analytical approaches that examine conflict from frameworks that are interest based, communication and perception based, or ethnic/racial/tribal/national identity based. A framework based on economic classes is seldom introduced in conflict resolution schools or in practices, which results in tools and analytical frameworks that correspond with a neoliberal democracy paradigm and has functioned to promote this paradigm in non-Western contexts (Jabri, 1995, 2006, 2010; Nader, 1991).

The implications of such ideological or value based approaches of conflict resolution is that many scholars and practitioners tend to label conflicts in Iraq, Somalia, Afghanistan, Palestine, the United States, Europe and many other societies as primarily identity-based conflicts. The economic class dimensions of the conflict in such areas are absent from the analysis and intervention plans. When we impose exclusive identity-based categories or labels when analyzing these conflicts, without tools for an economic class framework, we reduce the effectiveness and relevance of many of these models. This also contributes to the perpetuation of certain deep-rooted beliefs about the conflict among both outsiders and insiders (particularly among local participants who have been trained in such conflict resolution models). For example in Mindanao, Philippines, Marxist militant groups were active in resisting the government's domination of economic resources and struggled against INGOs and NGOs who were training local poor communities in the art of coexistence and dispute resolution mechanisms based on the sole assumption that the conflict could be understood, analyzed and addressed through an ethnic and religious identity-based framework of Muslim, Christian and indigenous. The fact that the class divide can cut across the three communities regardless of their ethnic affiliation (with a huge gap between economic elites and working classes) is absent from the analytical framework of many INGOs in Mindanao.

In its development as a field, conflict resolution has been adapted to liberal and neoliberal frameworks and deployed by economic, political and educational institutions to solidify and maintain existing cultural and social power paradigms that serve dominant economic interests.

3.5 Ideological versus Scientific

Conflict resolution, and peacebuilding in general, faces another challenge in positioning itself in the social sciences and in academic institutions. Scholars and practitioners of peace studies encountered similar challenges in struggling to assert its standing against or in relation to the two disciplines of political science and international relations. Although the marginalization of conflict resolution in academic institutions is less than peace studies, both suffer from a lack of resources and attention in their local academic and social environment. Having taught and evaluated a number of conflict resolution programs, directors and faculties

always testify that their universities do not provide them with sufficient or proportional allocations when compared with other schools or departments.[16]

Several arguments are often made by traditional and mainstream political scientists or international relation scholars in response to the marginalization of the peace and conflict resolution programs in such academic settings. First, the field is based on set of ideological assumptions and values, which underlie the scholarship and practice of those involved in it. Thus when peacebuilding scholars and practitioners engage in promoting peaceful interactions, advocating for non-violence communication, engaging in rituals and processes of dialogue, they are often perceived and characterized as unscientific and lacking methodological rigor

Second, in general, peacebuilding scholars and studies rely heavily on qualitative methods. Thus when faculty members from these conflict resolution programs are reviewed by their peers in schools or universities for hiring or promotion, their publications, journal or scholarly work is measured against mainstream quantitative scholarly journals only. The majority of existing conflict resolution journals and publishers are not ranked or do not occupy a high ranking within social science standard and recognized lists. In addition, as applied professional experience is an essential part of the conflict resolution field, many scholars are also practitioners and rely heavily on their applied work to develop theoretical propositions or conceptualization processes. Having worked in several institutions and reviewed many files for academic hiring or promotions, it has become clear to me that many schools continue to either totally reject or undervalue such applied experience as an acceptable institutional criteria in promotion or hiring faculty or staff. Engaging in conflict resolution practice is not recognized as a significant contribution to the field of international relations.

Third and finally, conflict resolution scholars and practitioners today are faced with the same realist dismissive arguments cast against peace studies scholars in the early 1950s, namely that they are idealists. Thus the programs and their faculty tend to be labeled as unrealistic, dreamy or naive. These are 'cheap shots' often made by those who does not understand the 'culture' or logic of this field and judge it by external standards that do not fit the context, goals, history or overall epistemology and practice of the field. When I recently presented the non-violence and peacebuilding paradigm in a series of lectures in Jordan (while launching the Arabic version of my 2007 book on: Unity in Diversity: Interfaith Dialogue in the Middle East), there were a number of people in the audience who continued to claim that these are ideals and unrealistic approaches. Similarly, when I lecture in United States on non-violence and peacebuilding in Islam there

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16   The above analysis is based on the experience of working with peace and conflict resolution programs at Guilford College (a liberal art college in North Carolina) and American University (one of the largest peace and conflict resolution programs in the United States), as well as having been affiliated with conflict resolution programs at Antioch University, the University of Notre Dame's Kroc Institute, the Summer Peacebuilding Institute and Center for Justice and Peacebuilding at Eastern Mennonite University, and the School of Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University. I have also conducted a number of academic assessments of peace and conflict resolution programs.

are those who express the same doubts or dismissive arguments against such principles and frameworks.

4. Future Trends in Peacebuilding

The future of the field of peacebuilding and conflict resolution depends in many ways on the manner in which its scholars and practitioners respond to what I believe are the key debates in the above outlined major areas of tension in its historical development. To be coherent and healthy and present a more unified and rigorous field (or something like that) I assert that the following are various areas in which conflict resolution as a field needs to respond.

First, a renewal of attention to the development of generic theories of conflict resolution is needed. Since the development of human needs theory by John Burton in late 1980s, there has been no major effort to explore a comprehensive conflict resolution theoretical framework that addresses causes, process and outcomes of conflicts. Some scholars have proposed new ways to examine conflict dynamics or processes (Kriesberg, 1998), others have attempted to categorize and map existing theoretical approaches to conflict and conflict resolution (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall, 2011). However, these theoretical propositions are mostly rooted in existing theories derived from other disciplines, such as psychology, education, sociology, anthropology or political science. Conflict resolution as a field has yet to articulate a clear distinct set of disciplinary theoretical frameworks.

Conflict resolution practices continue to struggle with ways to link its grassroots interventions to policy and decision making levels. There are tremendous numbers of interventions that take place at community and individual levels. However, fewer initiatives are targeting policy levels and certainly fewer succeed in bridging the gap between these two levels. The challenge of participants and practitioners who initiate problem solving, community mediation, dialogue or negotiation programs is to find systematic ways to transmit their success and outcomes to decision makers at the level of social policy. Similarly, those who continue to organize intervention programs at policy and leadership levels face the challenge of disseminating and creating genuine ownership of their processes at the grassroots level.

Conflict resolution theories, practices and resources (books, articles, etc.) are mostly produced by scholars in the western and northern hemisphere. This knowledge is then packaged and exported through training and civil society groups into Southern and non-Western societies. We rarely see the reverse. Seldom are texts, studies, scholarly work or practices being adopted or integrated as guiding frameworks in the study and application of conflict resolution in Western academic or professional institutions. It is essential that the field intensifies its efforts in generating and disseminating knowledge emerging out of non-Western (*i.e.*, non-European or North American) cultures and paradigms. Scholars and practitioners of conflict resolution can benefit greatly from exposure, as part of their graduate or professional training, to multiple methods of analysis, under-

standing and dealing with conflicts. For example, when training students in how to become effective conflict resolvers, schools or institutions can integrate Chinese cultural traditions of peacemaking, Sufi chanting, Buddhist meditation, African and aboriginal spiritual approaches and frameworks. This can lead to a framing of conflict resolution through sets of knowledge that are generated in Eastern, Middle Eastern or African societies, and potentially to developing new, more collaborative models and frameworks of conflict resolution.

This speaks to another possible direction that would prove fruitful for conflict resolution, namely a deeper engagement with critical theory and postcolonial theory. For one, such a conversation has the potential to lead conflict resolution to an interrogation of standard categories – for example, such as 'religion' and 'secular' – as products of colonialist modernity begging the question of the colonialist legacy latent in contemporary development and peacebuilding theory and practice. And second, such a conversation would begin to acknowledge that peacebuilding and conflict resolution discourse is indeed a discourse – that it is a body of knowledge produced from some place and located in some place (the denial of which aids its hegemonic function).

Such an engagement would introduce a healthy skepticism of any rigid, binary oppositions that may be operative in conflict resolution and peacebuilding (such as civilized/un-civilized, developed/undeveloped, or secular/religious distinctions). To unsettle these distinctions not only opens up productive lines of inquiry into possible forms of engagement in conflict situations that embrace the inherently contingent and fluid identities of the social fabric, but it also begins to recognize the locations from which the theory and practice of peacebuilding and conflict resolution is produced. Indeed, acknowledging the existence of development and peacebuilding discourses, that they have a location, helps us avoid the tendency to universalize those discourses.[17]

It also should continuously bring us back to an interrogation of the ultimate ends of peacebuilding and conflict resolution: What is the goal of our peacebuilding efforts? From where does it emerge, begin and end? And who benefits? Such questions are critical if we are to avoid unreflective assimilation to humanitarian industries where development efforts are too often reduced to simply plugging more people into the global market, or our peacebuilding efforts unwittingly becoming a cover for another *mission civilisatrice*, as Roland Paris has critiqued: "One way of thinking about the actions of peacebuilders is to conceive of liberal market democracy as an internationally-sanctioned model of 'legitimate' domestic governance [...] as the prevailing 'standard of civilization' that states must accept in order to gain full rights and recognition in the international community" (Paris, 2002, p. 650).

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17   By 'discourse', I am thinking in particular of Stuart Hall's description as "a particular way of representing 'the West,' 'the Rest,' and the relation between them. A discourse is a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – i.e., a way of representing – a particular kind of knowledge about a topic in a certain way" with power seen in creating and reinforcing Western dominance, not least by excluding the 'other' from the production of the discourse (Hall, 2007, p. 56).

Mohammed Abu-Nimer

Attention to the potential for 'development', 'peacebuilding' and 'conflict resolution' to operate as totalizing ideologies that are themselves built on binary oppositions that represent the legacy of colonialist modernity is our challenge.[18]

There are additional various areas that are understudied, needing to be explored further, in terms of their contribution to the causes, dynamics and resolutions of conflicts. Some of these areas include media, religion and development. Developing research agendas and practices to systematically explore the structural linkages between conflicts and these areas (including actors, dynamics and issues) is a necessary step in moving the field to a wider audience and increasing its relevance and effectiveness in responding to individuals and community needs.

For example, in the last decade a major link has been initiated between conflict resolution and international aid and humanitarian relief efforts. As a result of this interaction (mostly developed through practitioners and conceptualized by scholars and practitioners) new conflict assessment and mapping frameworks have been constructed for use in international development contexts.[19] Thus, today we have various conflict assessment tools, including the 'Do No Harm' framework that guides practitioners in ways to reduce and avoid doing any damage in conflict areas when delivering humanitarian aid or relief (Anderson, 1999; Bush, 1998). Nevertheless, we continue to observe many socioeconomic development projects implemented and funded by government and non-government donors paying little attention to conflict causes and dynamics. It is essential for conflict resolution scholars and practitioners to engage with these development frameworks and offer ways to integrate peacebuilding mechanisms and frameworks beyond the basic conflict analysis framework. In addition, conflict resolution programs continue to operate with the same tools and techniques despite the cry for economic development from the local communities they are engaging. We do not have advanced integrated frameworks to effectively combine conflict resolution and development.[20]

Similarly the field of conflict resolution has developed a number of basic tools for understanding conflict dynamics and outcomes (conflict analysis, awareness of bias, basic communication techniques, etc.) tailored for media experts. It has also created a great deal of 101 training opportunities in conflict analysis for jour-

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18   This future trend is based on: Seidel, T. (2011). Postcolonialism and a critical approach to development and peacebuilding theory and practice. *Mennonite Central Committee Peace Office Newsletter, 41*(3), 11-12.

19   The *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development* has documented the process of developing and utilizing various tools of peace and conflict assessments; *e.g. see* Vol. 2, No. 2, 2005 on 'Peacebuilding and Development: Integrated Approached to Evaluation'; *also see* Uvin (2002), Fast and Neufeldt (2005), and Lederach, Neufeldt and Culbertson (2007).

20   Erin McCandless and Mohammed Abu-Nimer launched the *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development* in 2003 in order to address this specific gap in the field. The journal publishes articles that examine the intersection between development and peacebuilding with a mission to generate and disseminate knowledge to enhance our understanding of the linkages between these two fields.

nalists.[21] However, the effect, scope and extent of these programs, both in terms of concepts and practice, are still in their inception. Conflict resolution has yet to structurally engage or integrate its methods and frameworks into mainstream media practice. It continues to be on the margins of these major cultural socialization production agencies. Dominant power paradigms continue to frame and dictate the portrayal of conflict and peace in society. Expanding conflict resolution programs to all media agencies and articulating theoretical concepts that lend themselves to media experts are just two necessary means to bringing conflict resolution to the core of media institutions.

Scholars and practitioners in the field of conflict resolution ought to expand the field's research and practice agendas to respond to the above areas of tensions and gaps. Without such expansion, we risk continuing to narrowly define our methods and practices to mechanical and rational analysis, replicating skills and techniques which are deeply rooted in Western, urban, capitalist, and Christian or secular subcultures. Such methods and frameworks might be effective and relevant in specific regions or communities, but they are certainly strange and alienating in other communities around the world.

5. Conclusion

Reflecting on my professional journey of three decades in this field of conflict resolution, I am amazed by the level of growth and expansion that has taken place. From small scattered few graduate programs in early 1980s, today there are tens of graduate and Ph.D. programs attended by bright and well-achieved students. The field is no longer attracting marginalized or lonely voices, but it has gained a seat in the academic institutions and its practitioners have been working in mainstream government agencies and NGOs. However, with such rapid pace of professionalization, new challenges have emerged which in my view pose a threat to the success and effectiveness of conflict resolution frameworks as a vehicle for promoting social justice, empowerment and freedom of all people. As discussed above, scholars and practitioners have to address such competing agendas in order to preserve the vision of social and political change that underlined the creation of this field. Thus, I have proposed that we insist on teaching, researching and practicing conflict resolution methods that take into consideration economic class analysis, voices and frames of reference of local cultural agents, comprehensive structural and institutional change of power dynamics that entrap parties in conflict and spiritual sources. Systematic approaches to address these factors need to be further conceptualized, thus we, scholars, practitioners and graduates of conflict resolution field can enhance our capacities in countering trends of cooptation by dominant power structures or de-legitimization among disadvantaged groups in a conflict context.

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21   Search for Common Ground (SFC) is one NGO that has specialized in media and conflict resolution programming.

Mohammed Abu-Nimer

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