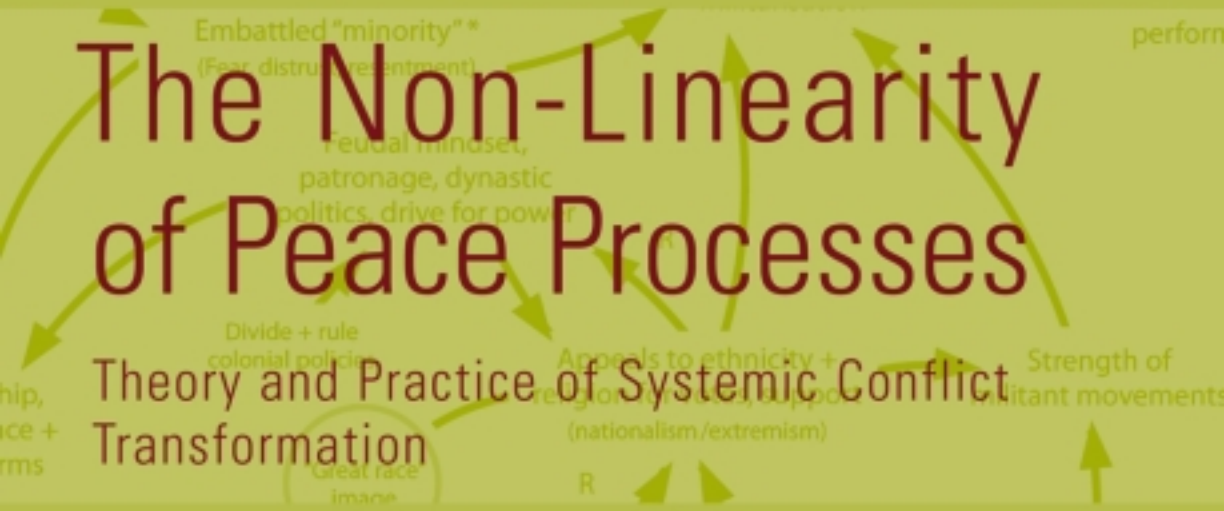
Daniela Körppen / Norbert Ropers / Hans J. Giessmann (eds.)



The Non-Linearity of Peace Processes

Theory and Practice of Systemic Conflict Transformation

Barbara Budrich Publishers

The Non-Linearity of Peace Processes

Daniela Körppen
Norbert Ropers
Hans J. Giessmann (eds.)

The Non-Linearity of Peace Processes

Theory and Practice of Systemic Conflict Transformation

Verlag Barbara Budrich
Opladen & Farmington Hills, MI 2011

This publication project was funded by the Berghof Foundation.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from
Die Deutsche Bibliothek (The German Library)

ISBN 978-3-86649-406-0
eISBN 978-3-86649-634-7

Die Deutsche Bibliothek – CIP-Einheitsaufnahme
Ein Titeldatensatz für die Publikation ist bei Der Deutschen Bibliothek erhältlich.

Verlag Barbara Budrich Barbara Budrich Publishers
Stauffenbergstr. 7. D-51379 Leverkusen Opladen, Germany

28347 Ridgebrook. Farmington Hills, MI 48334. USA
www.barbara-budrich.net

Jacket illustration by disegno, Wuppertal, Germany – www.disenjo.de
Typesetting: R + S Beate Glaubitz, Leverkusen, Germany
Copy editing: Alison Romer, Lancaster, Great Britain
Printed in Europe on acid-free paper by
paper&tinta, Warsaw

Table of Contents

II. Implementing Systemic Thinking

Foreword

This book is about systemic approaches in conflict transformation. In brief, systemic thinking as such is largely about mobilising and utilising epistemology for ontology. Being both a cognitive paradigm and a method, systemic approaches initially entered the realm of conflict studies in the 1950s and 1960s and increasingly captivated related discourses towards the end of the 20th century. In the last few years, they have become very popular in peacebuilding practice as well. How can we explain the growing appeal and spread of systemic analysis and processes in the theory and practice of conflict transformation?

It is hardly surprising that systemic thinking, like many innovative concepts, originally evolved from a crisis. Such a crisis also became apparent in traditional conflict management and conflict studies, mainly constituted by an increasingly obvious discrepancy between the high complexity and interdependency of social conflict – and a comparably under-complex strategy and toolbox used by stakeholders (in the first instance, states), to handle this complexity properly. This dilemma may have contributed to a better understanding that there is no simple and linear path for conflict management where it is dependent less on a negotiated compromise between peers, such as states (even democratic ones), regarding certain issues, but on transforming the system as such. For example, a negotiated compromise among states on mitigating the risks of climate change may still not prevent climate collapse from eventually happening. Nuclear arms control will not necessarily prevent the 'have-nots' from seeking possession of such weapons, as long as the existing nuclear powers are not ready to disarm themselves. 'Peace deals' between or within states which build on the violation of human and minority rights will hardly be sustained. Unlike simple problem-solving ('silver-bullet') approaches, systemic thinking seeks to explore the deeper construction of conflicts and their dynamics, and tries to better understand the inter-linkages and interdependencies of their components, and the underlying interests and the driving actors, as well as intervening and interfering processes. In addition, the progress of systemic studies in the 1980s and 1990s has fostered skills for better comprehending the non-linearity of social interactions in the social sciences, in organizational development and in family therapy. In the last ten years, systemic thinking has started to shape peace and conflict research as well.

Various strands of schools have since developed. The more traditional, ontology-based, goal-seeking conflict management school first came to be increasingly chal-

lenged by the conflict resolution school, which in comparison pays more attention to the role of stakeholders in conflict, their interests and relations. But both lack the epistemology-based approach which has been inspiring emerging conflict transformation discourse since the early 1990s. The various conflict management and conflict resolution approaches usually start from the underlying assumption that sound and rational proposals can be made in order to mitigate tensions between conflict stakeholders in order to 'resolve' their conflicts. Conflict transformation, against the background of conflict asymmetries, addresses the structural dimension of – and aims at changing the *character* of – the relations between the actors in conflict, by encouraging them to deal with each other constructively.

Conflict transformation understands social conflict as a natural form of human existence, i.e. not as a something negative *per se* but as a potential catalyst of change of systems, and thus something that is indispensable for any civilized development. In fact, conflicts as such do not alienate human beings from each other. On the contrary, it is human beings – with all their knowledge, experience, wisdom, aspirations and emotions – who are responsible for choosing the manner of coping with competitive interests in their mutual relations. Social conflicts may not necessarily escalate into violence, but neither can they always be 'resolved'. That is why they should not be simplistically looked upon as linear phenomena. They definitely should be comprehended in their interdependent dimensions and dynamic nature.

The inter-linkages of causes, intervening variables and consequences of conflict dynamics are still widely under-researched. In complex conflict scenarios it can be hard to distinguish between causes and consequences, and the borders between both become fuzzy, if not blurred. Goal-seeking, linear approaches will most likely fail in such scenarios, since they tend to aim more at stabilising particular segments where a crumbling mosaic is actually what is at stake. For example, seeking to crush the Taliban militarily, as was done in Afghanistan after 9/11, can be considered a perfect example of how non-systemic thinking has brought about a short-sighted military victory and a political defeat at the same time. Assessed systemically, the intervention intended to create stability has installed a new government but has simultaneously contributed to destabilising the country and even the whole region. As this example makes clear: complex and interdependent settings of conflict are where systemic thinking must inevitably come into play.

The actual matter of transforming (violent) conflict into constructive interaction is about people internalising the chances for socialising alternative non-violent patterns of beliefs, behaviour and relations. It goes without saying that the more actors are actively involved in, or are affected by, a conflict, the more complex and diverse their interests and potential interventions will be. The risk of hyper-complexity is obvious and cannot be ignored. But reduction of complexity is not always the best solution. If there is anything to be learnt from the over-simplistic use of force in the form of military interventions seen in the recent past, it is that simplicity is often a 'red herring'. This said, it is also clear that systemic approaches will only be accepted if the process of gradual transformation is able to attract all of the actors involved or affected.

Active participation means paying respect to the diversity of actors' stakes. By bringing the actors to the fore, deeper socio-cultural and behavioural aspects of action and decision-making can be explored in the context of change. Following this methodo-

logy, the agenda of research is being influenced and shaped increasingly by those who are immediately affected by its results. The growing interest in action research and in reflection on peace practices, to mention just two positive trends, have already begun to narrow the gap by reconciling the communities of research and practice, by motivating both towards collective learning and by encouraging researchers to collaborate with practitioners and practitioners to create reflective feedback loops.

The Berghof Foundation is deeply committed to the idea of collective learning about the systemic 'ingredients' of conflict transformation. Quite literally, founded as a cross-disciplinary institution, the foundation itself is systemically positioned. It has not only spent the last four decades building bridges between social and natural sciences, but has also fostered collaboration between researchers from different disciplines, practitioners and education communities. This is also what its two sister organisations, Berghof Conflict Research (BCR) and Berghof Peace Support (BPS) stand for. The book you are holding is a strong reflection of this tradition. Being a collaborative endeavour of BPS and BCR this book marks both a milestone and a kick-off for further efforts.

My BPS-colleagues Daniela Körppen and Norbert Ropers deserve the credit for having invited distinguished authors from different strands of research and practice and for patiently managing the project in spite of various counteracting feedback loops that arose during its course. The printed result of this work reflects the difference in perspectives but also the remarkable progress achieved during the last decade. Taking stock of the different current strands of discourse, this book should spark intellectual spirit and invite further debate.

Hans J. Giessmann

Introduction

Addressing the Complex Dynamics of Conflict Transformation

Daniela Körppen and Norbert Ropers

The social world is characterized by interrelatedness and uncertainty. Trying to influence social processes and induce positive change in a system is therefore challenging. This is even more true when it comes to peace processes, as they are constituted by complex and interdependent issues which interact in a non-linear manner.

Existing approaches to peacebuilding and conflict transformation have tried to address these challenges for quite a while now, and are even quite sophisticated, yet crucial issues in the field still remain unresolved, especially with regard to the multi-layered nature and unpredictability of today's protracted conflicts. Often, long-lasting conflicts detach from their context and develop their own dynamics where the original causes and reasons for escalation fade into the background. As a consequence, it is still an open question as to what the adequate steps to reach 'peace writ large' are, or if it is sufficient to focus on peace writ little (CDA 2010). Conflicts are highly dynamic processes in which it is difficult to attribute causality and to bridge the attribution gap between activities on the micro-level and their impact on the macro-level of a society (Smith et al. 2004).

Still, many projects in the peacebuilding field are based on a linear and dualistic logic. Lederach calls this the "tunnel vision" (Lederach 2005, 118), and uses this metaphor to describe how conflict resolution is understood as a process which indicates how to get from A to B. Against this background, conflict transformation is considered as a tool through which a pathway can be created that cuts through the problems and allows people to reach 'the light at the end of the tunnel'. However, the experience of peacebuilding shows that the creation and development of peacebuilding strategies is a dynamic, non-linear process and should therefore be seen more like "carving a curve through an active volcano" (ibid.).

Even if several studies are critical of this tunnel vision and associated linear logic, only a few things have changed in the way of reasoning, in the models of thinking, and in the way we look at peace and conflict dynamics.

One of the main ideas of this volume is to emphasize that systemic thinking can enrich the theory and practice of conflict transformation. It will be shown that the integration of systemic thinking into conflict transformation strategies offers inspiring potential for addressing some of the main shortcomings in the field. The most promising systemic concepts and methods from different disciplinary and cultural backgrounds

regarding the further development of peacebuilding and conflict transformation approaches are presented and discussed. In addition, the shortcomings and limitations of systemic methods are analysed, as well as the extent to which they need to be complemented with other peacebuilding approaches.

1. Background of the Book

This book is a result of a four-year action research project on systemic approaches to conflict transformation, which started in 2006. After identifying the most important current systemic discourses in disciplines such as organizational development, systemic therapy, political sciences and sociology, we organized a series of workshops on this topic and invited peace researchers, practitioners and systemic experts from various disciplines to discuss their understandings of systemic thinking and the particular relevance for the conflict transformation field. Some of them also contributed to this volume. Two workshops took place in Berlin (2007, 2008) and a third one in February 2010 in Washington D.C. in collaboration with the *International Center for Collaboration and Conflict Resolution* (ICCCR) at Teachers College, Columbia University/ New York and the *Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution* (ICAR) at George Mason University.

During the first project phase we developed guiding questions to be addressed in every contribution, in order to create a common space for discussions about the pros and cons of systemic conflict transformation:

1. What is the particular understanding of systemic thinking and on what kind of systemic approaches and/or methodologies is the article based, and why?
2. Where are the critical issues for applying the respective type of systemic thinking to the conflict transformation field?
3. What is the added value of systemic thinking for conflict transformation and peacebuilding?

Besides this, at the beginning of our project and on the basis of our extensive literature research, we identified five basic principles of systemic thinking, which we found helpful for enriching current discourse in the peacebuilding and conflict transformation field.

Basic Principles of Systemic Thinking

- Thinking in network structures
- Thinking in dynamic frames and thinking in terms of relationships
- Not focusing only on identifying the problems but emphasizing also the solutions which already exist within the (conflict) system
- Accepting ambivalence and contingency and acknowledging perspective-dependency
- Concentrating on human beings and their learning processes

While discussing these key markers of systemic thinking we realized that, from our perspective, the most promising path for designing a conceptual framework of systemic conflict transformation was to combine several systemic concepts from various disci-

plines. For example, 'thinking in network structures,' 'thinking in dynamic frames' and 'thinking in terms of relationships' are basic parameters of the system dynamics concept developed at the *Massachusetts Institute of Technology* (MIT) by Jay Forrester and his team. The 'solution orientation' and the 'acceptance of ambivalence and contingency' are pursued in constructivism and family therapy (Schlippe/Schweitzer 2003; Retzer 2006). We consider these systemic key markers as flexible components which can be combined with and integrated into existing peacebuilding concepts. In our view, a systemic approach to conflict transformation is based on a sound mix of pre-existing peacebuilding methods and systemic concepts.

2. A Short History of Systemic Thinking

Brief overview on the main systemic discourses

Because the spectrum of systemic discourses is quite broad, we would like to give a brief overview of systemic thinking. Systemic approaches emerged at the beginning of the last century as a critique of the reductionism which generates knowledge by separating and extracting single elements out of a system and studying them in terms of cause and effect (Bertalanffy 1968). In contrast to this, it is a crucial principle of all systemic approaches to understand phenomena as an emergent property of an interrelated whole; hence, a phenomenon cannot be fully comprehended by analysing its constituent parts. Whereas all concepts or theories which encompass elements of systemic thinking would agree that 'the whole is more than the sum of its parts' and that within a system the particular elements are connected and interact with each other, they differ in some basic assumptions.

In general, systemic discourses can be divided into two main strands: first and second order cybernetics. Systemic thinking rooted in the field of first order cybernetics, such as Norbert Wiener's research on communication in the animal and in the machine (Wiener 1948), focuses on the human being as a biological system. He assumes that social relations function in the same way as biological processes and can therefore be controlled and influenced from the outside. Another crucial characteristic of systemic approaches from first order cybernetics, such as Wiener's concept or Stafford Beer's "viable system model" (Beer 1994), is the assumption that it is possible to observe a system in a 'neutral' way and to gather information about it without influencing or interacting with it. These theories regard the observer and the observed as two separate entities.

Scholars from the field of second order cybernetics such as Heinz von Foerster or Gregory Bateson, which strongly influenced concepts of psychotherapy and family therapy (Retzer 2006, Schlippe/Schweitzer 2003), argue that the observer and the observed interact with each other. According to this, 'neutral observation' or analysis of a system is not possible because the observer becomes a part of the system that they observe. Therefore, the results of the observation depend on the perspective one adopts. Against this background an objective truth does not exist because every observation is based on the interpretation of the observer. Hence, interacting with social and political systems means always dealing with uncertainty and contingency.

In addition to this, between the different strands of systemic thinking it is still an open question if it is necessary to enter the system to carry out an intervention on it (Flood 2004), and to what extent it is possible to initiate and control processes of social change. On the one hand, from a more systemic-constructivist point of view, it can be argued that social processes can be influenced only indirectly; for example, through a change of context which might contribute to the irritation and mutation of the system itself (Luhmann 1987; Wilke 1999, 2001). On the other hand, approaches based on Forrester's concept of system dynamics state that social processes themselves can be modelled to a certain extent (Forrester 1968). These first order cybernetic approaches influenced management and organizational theories, such as Peter Senge's "Fifth discipline" (1990).

Systemic thinking and conflict transformation

In the social and political sciences, systemic approaches have been used for analysing political systems and conflicts for quite a while now. The main focus has been on analysing political conflicts on a macro-level (Deutsch 1963; Luhmann 1987; Wilke 1999, 2001).

In contrast, the discussion of systemic ideas in the field of peacebuilding and conflict transformation started only recently. It is assumed that systemic thinking offers some inspiring insights on how to capture and transform the complex dynamics of ethnopolitical conflicts (Lederach 2005; Collaborative Learning Projects 2010). The background to this discussion is that during the last fifteen years the field of peacebuilding and conflict transformation has become increasingly popular and many donors, as well as peace practitioners, have engaged in this field with high expectations. In hindsight, this enthusiasm appears somewhat similar to the hopes which accompanied the take-off phase of development cooperation a couple of decades earlier. In the meantime, both areas had been through a process of disillusionment with the realization that there are no simple recipes to achieve either development or peace.

The response from practitioners and development and peace agencies, as well as scholars, was diverse. On the one hand, efforts were undertaken to emphasize the need for clarifying in detail the indicators of 'success' and to encourage a systematic reflection in the form of 'logframes' on the causal links between different variables which would have an impact on these indicators. On the other hand, some experts started to explore the ways systemic thinking might help to bridge the gap between the majority of interventions which were located on a micro-level and the macro-political peace they wanted to achieve at the end of the day.

This exploration resonated well with parallel developments in other areas of applied social sciences and in the management field, where people were searching for better tools to cope with unpredictability, rapid change and unexpected consequences. They tried to make use of insights from complexity sciences and chaos theory to develop tools for practitioners in the peacebuilding field to better cope with the challenges of non-linearity in human interaction. One of these groups, organized around the Human Systems Dynamics Institute, also addresses issues of conflict escalation, de-escalation and peacemaking (Owen 2004; Eoyang 2005). They define conflict as a

pattern in a complex adaptive system and stress that it is necessary to create 'meta-stability' to cope with violence-generating differences. This can either happen through revising the borders of the system or by revising the way the exchanges of information, energy and resources within the system are organized.

Another systemic initiative was linked to the invention of 'multi-track diplomacy', i.e. the proposition that protracted conflicts need a multiplicity of 'tracks' of pro-peace engagements beyond the traditional inter-state diplomacy. Inspired by systemic thinking, Louise Diamond argued as early as 1997 that to transform 'conflict habituated systems' it is necessary to work towards 'sustainable peace systems' with a holistic understanding of change including beliefs, behaviour and relationships.

This approach has been further developed to apply a 'whole systems' approach to complex global issues, including peace and conflict transformation (Diamond 2008). It is very much in accordance with a couple of other initiatives to particularly emphasize the capacity of systemic thinking to connect the multiplicity of global challenges, to pay attention to emerging networks and learn how to 'read' and 'listen' to how systems are transforming and where there are promising entry points and leverage for change (Meadows 2009).

In the scholarly literature, apart from the contributions and currents of thinking which are included in this volume, an influential strand is the "Transcend Method" of conflict transformation initiated by Johan Galtung (2000). Graf/Kramer/Niculescu (2011) have developed this approach further, using complexity thinking as a meta-framework for conflict transformation. They argue that a "complex conflict transformation" might be best served by combining a systemic conflict analysis with an understanding of the deeper socio-cultural and historic dimensions of the conflict, as well as with a pragmatic, socio-therapeutic dimension of (inter-)action.

The utility of systemic thinking was also developed in several action research projects, some of which are represented in this volume (Woodrow/Chigas, Ricigliano, Burns). One of them, the Reflecting on Peace Practice Project (RPP), played a key role in promoting systemic thinking as a tool to improve the understanding of the gap between the majority of micro-activities in conflict regions and the aim of achieving some impact with respect to 'peace writ large'.

In the management sphere, systemic thinking was from the start very much linked to the need for organizational learning (Senge 1990) as the best way to make use of systemic insights for navigating complex developments in organizations. In principle, these insights are also highly relevant for the effectiveness of peacebuilding activities because they are in most cases also delivered in an organizational context. But so far this area of research and practice is still in its infancy (Hopp/Unger 2009).

3. Structure and Content of the Book

The contributions of this book can all be interpreted as a result of the efforts by scholars, practitioners and policy makers to enhance the effectiveness of peacebuilding and conflict transformation. The structure of the book follows two organizing principles: the first part focuses on conceptual debates about approaching peacebuilding issues

from a systemic perspective. Authors with different theoretical backgrounds, such as sociology, peace research, action research and constellation work discuss the advantages and disadvantages of integrating systemic thinking into peacebuilding strategies.

In the second part, the same question is discussed from a practitioner's point of view. Various systemic approaches are presented and the consequences of their implementation in the field are discussed. A basic conviction of all systemic approaches is that processes of complex social change cannot be controlled in any direct or linear manner. The focus has to be on enabling the drivers for constructive change within the system itself. In several contributions the implications of this conviction are explored with respect to the planning, intervention, monitoring and evaluation of peace promoting initiatives.

Conceptualizing systemic thinking

The first section of the book presents a great variety of concepts with a systemic background. They range from a meta-theoretical and academic perspective to a practical hands-on concept with systemic constellations in the field of organizational development and family therapy.

In academia, systemic discourses can be found in constructivism and in chaos and complexity theory, amongst others. The possibility of developing a model which is able to represent reality is highly contested in systemic theories based on constructivist concepts and second order cybernetics. As already been pointed out, these theories posit that it is not possible to capture reality as such because each assertion is the result of a subjective interpretation.

Sirin Bernshausen and Thorsten Bonacker emphasize in their contribution that, from a constructivist point of view, it is crucial to analyse communication processes and concepts of observation. Following their argumentation, a combination of Luhmann's operative constructivism and the securitization theory of the Copenhagen School offers a sound epistemological starting point for the development of a theoretical basis for a systemic approach to conflict transformation. Moreover, the integration of resilience management into this theoretical framework guarantees a 'healthy' social system that is capable of preventing the outbreak of conflicts.

Systemic approaches which are rooted in chaos theory emphasize the importance of considering a conflict as a self-organized system of patterns. It is assumed that despite divergent information and contradictory external influences the system's behaviour consistently converges on the same pattern of destructive thought, affect and action which can not be dissolved by linear interventions. This is exemplified in the article on dynamical systems theory written by Peter Coleman and his team. They argue that chaos theory and its related concepts, such as the idea of attractors, prove to be helpful for conflict analysis. The focus of interest in this research strand is mainly on developing a coherent and testable theoretical model that links the different parts to the underlying structures and dynamics that account for intractability in conflict processes.

Against the background of a critical reflection on recent discourses in the field of peace research, Oliver Ramsbotham points out that the most challenging current conflicts in the world are characterized by "radical disagreement" between the disputing parties. In his opinion, the existing paradigms of dialogue work and conflict resolution

through communication are not capable of guiding the transformation of these radical disagreements. Based on the example of the Israel/Palestine conflict, Ramsbotham proposes a new approach to address radical disagreement which emphasizes the need for a strategic engagement of discourses. He considers his chapter as a supplement to a systemic approach to conflict transformation in those cases where linguistic intractability has so far resisted all conventional efforts to positive transformation.

The discussion about adequate methods for analysing conflicts and planning peacebuilding projects has been dominated by liberal peace discourses for quite a while now. One aspect of a liberal understanding of peace is the assumption that what constitutes peace is universally accepted. Liberal democracy, neoliberal economic reform, human rights, humanitarian law and human security are considered as crucial parameters for a peaceful society. One of aims of Daniela Körppen's article is to put emphasis on the normative underpinnings of liberal peace and to illustrate that the operational strategies of liberal peacebuilding are faced with mounting critique with regard to their legitimacy and efficiency (Lidén/MacGinty/Richmond 2009). In addition, it is argued that by claiming they are universally true, these strategies lead to a de-politicization of peacebuilding concepts. This article outlines that the integration of methods from systemic therapy and organizational development into conflict transformation approaches offers a huge potential for reintegrating the discussion of values into peacebuilding discourses. Re-politicization of peacebuilding concepts starts where universal (liberal) norms are contested and questioned.

That systemic ideas are very close to the basic ideas of action research is emphasized in several contributions in this book. Sometimes, differences between systemic ideas and action research can hardly be seen. Participatory forms of action research have been able to support sense-making and generate solutions to problems which are rooted in the views of the most affected. But they have frequently lacked mechanisms to deal with the circularity of social interactions and the refusal of powerful actors to engage. Danny Burns argues in his contribution that systemic action research is a way of scaling up the action research model so that it can work across systems. It involves multiple inquiries running in relationship to each other. As a result, it assists in bringing into view the many complex inter-relationships which affect interventions on the ground.

As said above, very promising insights for peacebuilding and conflict transformation are coming from organizational development and family therapy. Due to the practical orientation of their work, systemic experts from this area can enrich the development of methods for peacebuilding and conflict transformation. Dirk Splinter and Ljubjana Wüstehube give an overview of a particular approach of systemic work, which is a relatively unknown field in the English-speaking world: systemic constellation work. It has achieved some prominence in psychotherapy and organizational development and has recently also been applied to helping parties and interlocutors in ethnopolitical conflicts. As the authors show in their contribution, the added value of systemic constellation work is threefold: it assists in revealing hidden conflict dynamics, it facilitates a better understanding of the conflict parties' emotional experiences and it leads to the identification of new strategies for action.

Implementing systemic thinking

The second part of the book focuses on the practitioner's point of view. Against the background of case studies from Sri Lanka, Israel/Palestine, Afghanistan, Georgia-Abkhazia, Kosovo, Guinea-Bissau and South Africa, several systemic methods are presented and the consequences for integrating them into conflict analysis, strategy planning and evaluation are reflected upon.

Luxshi Vimalarajah and Suthaharan Nadarajah elaborate in their contribution how systemic thinking, in particular second order cybernetics and system dynamics, can contribute to a better understanding of the complex conflict web. Drawing on the 2001-2006 Norwegian-led international intervention to end Sri Lanka's protracted ethno-political conflict, the authors explicitly point out the inherent subjectivity of every conflict analysis and emphasize that the intervener or analyst is always part of the system they observe. With reference to the Sri Lankan case, the authors illustrate that systemic approaches can also be part of the liberal peace agenda.

Norbert Ropers concentrates on Sri Lanka in his contribution, too, and identifies several added values from a systemic perspective on the situation in the country. In his opinion, one major advantage of a systemic approach lies in the fact that the analysis of the protracted conflict is combined with reflections about possibilities for peaceful solutions. Moving from armed conflict to sustainable peace means working on the transformation of the existing conflict system and, at the same time, creating new peaceful relations. He considers peace processes as 'corridors for systemic change'. By using this term he draws the attention to both aspects of transformation and intends to overcome the fixation on the root causes and the reinforcing loops of violence. Ropers considers Peter Senge's analytical method of using archetypes as a helpful classification for typical patterns of interaction in a conflict process, and indicates how they can be transferred to conflict transformation. This is demonstrated in an in-depth analysis of these mechanisms – using the example of Sri Lanka 2002-2005.

The article by David Stroh focuses on identity-based conflicts in Israel and Palestine. Stroh introduces the key principles involved in understanding Senge's concept of system dynamics, such as feedback loops, time delays and unintended consequences, and explains in detail the working of three 'archetypal dynamics': shifting the burden, conflict goals and escalation. The argument here is that knowledge about these archetypes can help third parties and moderators to reflect on the unintended implications of actions, to reassess goals and beliefs, to ask different questions and to explore different and more creative leverage points for intervention.

While most authors in this volume opt for the integration of single components of systemic thinking into existing peacebuilding concepts, Robert Ricigliano underlines the importance of a systemic theory for peacebuilding and develops the so-called "SAT model". He classifies this model as prescriptive because it elaborates on how to make changes in the system and think holistically. Against the background of the conflict situation in Afghanistan, Ricigliano points out that using systemic thinking is necessary for improving peacebuilding practice, but it is not sufficient for making macro-level change. Crucial principles of his systemic theory are interconnectedness and dynamic causality. In addition, it includes a series of tools (causal loop dia-

gramming, pathway analysis, scale analysis and a programme planning matrix) which are designed to help peacebuilders work more strategically and holistically.

Peter Woodrow and Diana Chigas agree with Ricigliano on the shortcomings of linear causal chains to trace the impact of a community programme at the societal level. Their article summarizes and reflects on how the Reflecting on Peace Practice Project (RPP) in Kosovo, Guinea-Bissau and Sri Lanka has engaged with systems thinking. One of the main efforts of their work in the field has focused on developing practitioner-friendly ways to design systems maps of conflicts and use them as a basis for the programming of intervention strategies. Woodrow and Chigas also point out that progress has already been made with respect to the integration of systemic methods and conflict analysis. However, the creation of systemic theories of change is an area that merits further attention. Besides this, they argue that in the conflict transformation field analyses are, at best, rough approximations of reality – and we will never be able to predict with certainty the outcomes or impacts of our peace interventions. Nevertheless, we can increase our ability to obtain constant feedback through more effective monitoring processes, both of the context and of our initiatives. A step in the right direction is engaging in adaptive management that enables changes in programme directions in response to feedback about the programme and about the political environment. For this reason, they suggest that, in a systems approach to programming, the 'M' in Monitoring and Evaluation might be more important than the 'E'.

Systemic-constructivist thinking has inspired the development of innovative and creative approaches in various areas of psycho-social work, particularly in counselling and in organizational development. Oliver Wolleh discusses methods from systemic therapy with respect to their applicability to conflict transformation, especially in interactive conflict resolution. Against the background of the Georgian-Abkhaz dialogue process, the author demonstrates that insights from applied systemic psycho-social work can enrich a field which in the past has been primarily dominated by rational-intellectual approaches. After introducing both concepts the author argues that the notion of 'client' from systemic therapy can assist in explaining the dynamics amongst the participants in a dialogue workshop. A crucial criterion of this systemic concept is its process orientation. The task of the 'therapist' is to transform the behaviour and the attitudes of the client so that they become a 'true client', i.e. a person who acknowledges that they themselves have to change in order to obtain a change in the whole situation.

The advantage of systemic thinking lies not only in enriching methods for strategy planning and conflict analysis. Systemic components in a peacebuilding approach can function as a bridge builder between 'western' concepts of peacebuilding and African cultures. This is exemplified in the South African case study of the community-based organisation Sinani. In a process of continuous action and reflection, Sinani has developed its own approach of peacebuilding and community development, which combines African philosophy with systemic thinking and participatory interventions. As shown, the Sinani Model is based on a fluid, organic and non-linear theory of change which includes basic components of systemic thinking. Juba Khuzwayo, Berenice Meintjes and Usche Merk underline that thinking in relationships and admitting that social interactions are based on non-linear principles, can be found, for example, in both the African principle of Ubuntu, and in systemic approaches from the field of family therapy and psychotherapy which have been integrated into systemic conflict transformation.

Last but not least, we would like to thank all the authors who have contributed to this volume for their commitment. Very warm thanks go to our colleagues and friends who participated in our workshops for their inspiring thoughts and the vibrant discussions we had[1], as well as to the Berghof Foundation which has made this publication possible with a generous grant.

Bibliography

Bertalanffy, Ludwig von 1968. *General System Theory*. New York: Braziller.

Collaborative Learning Projects (CDA) 2010. *Consultation report: Understanding Cumulative Impacts*. January 2010. Boston. Available at: www.cdainc.com/cdawww/pdf/other/rpp_consultation_report_final_cumulative_impact_20100406_Pdf.pdf [accessed 10 December 2010].

Deutsch, Karl 1963. *The Nerves of Government: Models of Political Communication and Control*. New York: Free Press.

Diamond, Louise 1997. *A Systems Approach to Peacebuilding*. Available at: www.globalsystems-initiatives.net/A%20Systems%20Approach%20to%20Peacebuilding.pdf [accessed 10 December 2010].

Diamond, Louise 2008. *Twelve Simple Rules of Systemic Thinking for Complex Global Issues*. Available at: www.globalsystemsinitiatives.net/TwelveSimpleRules.pdf [accessed 10 December 2010].

Eoyang, Glenda (ed.) 2005. *Voices from the Field: An Introduction to Human Systems Dynamics*. Minnesota: HSD Institute Press.

Galtung, Johan, C. G. Jacobsen, Kai Frithjof Brand-Jacobsen and Finn Tschudi (eds.) 2000. *Searching for Peace: the Road to TRANSCEND*. London: Pluto Press.

Graf, Wilfried, Gudrun Kramer, Augustin Niculescu. *Complexity Thinking as a Meta-Framework for Conflict Transformation. In Search of a Paradigm and a Methodology for a Transformative Culture of Peace*, in: Viktorija Ratkovij, Werner Wintersteiner (eds.). *Yearbook Peace Culture 2010*. Alpen-Adria Universität, Centre for Peace Research and Peace Education, Klagenfurt: Drava Verlag, 58- 81.

Flood, Robert L. 2004. The Relationship of System Thinking and Action Research, in: Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury (eds.). *Handbook of Action Research*. London: Sage, 117-128.

Forrester, Jay Wright 1968. Principles of Systems. Cambridge, MA: Wright Allen Press.

Owen, Harrison 2004. *The Practice of Peace*. Minnesota: HSD Institute Press.

Hopp, Ulrike and Barbara Unger 2009. Time to Learn: Expanding Organisational Capacities in Conflict Settings, in: Beatrix Schmelzle and Martina Fischer (eds). *Peacebuilding at Crossroads? Dilemmas and Paths for Another Generation*. Berghof Handbook Dialogue Series 7. Berlin: Berghof Conflict Research, 77-86.

Lidén, Kristoffer, Roger MacGinty and Oliver P. Richmond 2009. Introduction: Beyond Northern Epistemologies of Peace: Peacebuilding Reconstructed? in: *International Peacekeeping*, 16, 5, 587-598.

Lederach, John Paul 2005. *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*. Oxford, MA: Oxford University Press.

Luhmann, Niklas 1987. *Soziale Systeme*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.

Retzer, Arnold 2006. *Passagen – Systemische Erkundungen*. Stuttgart: Klett Cotta.

Schlippe, Arist von and Jochen Schweitzer 2003. *Lehrbuch der systemischen Therapie und Beratung*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Senge, Peter 1990. *The Fifth Discipline*. New York: Doubleday/Currency

Smith, Dan 2004. *Towards a Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding: Getting Their Act Together*. Overview Report of the Joint Utstein Study for Peacebuilding. Oslo: PRIO.

Wiener, Norbert 1948. *Cybernetics: Or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Wilke, Helmut 1999. *Systemtheorie II: Interventionstheorie. Einführung in die Theorie der Intervention in komplexe Sozialsysteme*. Stuttgart: Fischer.

Wilke, Helmut 2001. *Systemtheorie III: Steuerungstheorie*. Stuttgart: Fischer.

1 Special thanks goes to Timo Lange for his editorial assistance.

I. Conceptualising Systemic Thinking

A Constructivist Perspective on Systemic Conflict Transformation

Sirin Bernshausen and Thorsten Bonacker

Introduction

This volume wants to introduce the systemic approach to conflict transformation and thereby give a greater understanding of the idea of conflict as a self-organized social process. The aim of our article is to develop a constructivist view on systemic conflict transformation. In contrast to other approaches, operative constructivism tries to grasp the momentum of conflictual processes by introducing observation as a central concept. To begin with, we will explain our understanding of systemic conflict transformation in the context of Luhmann's operative constructivism. We will then present a theoretical foundation for the development of a systemic approach to an understanding of escalation and de-escalation processes, based on securitization theory. Next, we will explain in more detail what we believe should be understood as systemic conflict transformation, before finally illustrating our findings based on an example of resilience and resilience management.

Against this background, we argue that conflict transformation can be seen as a process of de-securitizing and de-escalating conflict systems.

1. The Constructivist Perspective

As outlined in the terms of reference for this edited volume, Berghof Peace Support puts forward a number of elements of systemic thinking. A fundamental premise is the acceptance of ambivalence and contingency, as well as the acknowledgment that analytical models are perspective-dependent and a construction of reality rather than *the actual* reality. Furthermore, systemic thinking implies a dynamic perspective – i.e. a focus on processes, communication, relationships and network structures. Finally, systemic thinking as proposed by Berghof Peace Support means concentrating on human beings (actors) and both individual and collective learning processes.

In an endeavour to apply systemic approaches to conflict transformation to the Sri Lankan situation, Wils et al. (2006, 31) have identified the following aspects as core elements of systemic conflict transformation:

1. systemic conflict analysis and conflict monitoring
2. strategic planning of systemic interventions

3. engagement with key stakeholders
4. mobilization of agents of peaceful change
5. creativity in imagining sustainable solutions

Furthermore, a balance must be found between depicting a system in all its complexity and contradictions, and the need to reduce this complexity to something manageable and amenable to intervention. Wils et al. (2006, 31) thus acknowledge "the need to both recognise the complexity of our work (complexify) and at the same time generate simple insight to guide our actions (simplify), are at the core of systemic conflict transformation and the five elemental areas of work."

Although we would largely subscribe to the concept of systemic conflict transformation as put forward by Berghof Peace Support, there are a few aspects we would disagree with. Most importantly, many of the interventions presented in Wils et al. (2006) and Körppen et al. (2008) seem to put too strong an emphasis on actors. For example, Baechler (ibid.) holds that the role of the individual should be central to all approaches to conflict transformation. Similarly, Glasl (ibid.) stresses the importance of considering the actors' "mechanisms of unconsidered reaction patterns". In his view, conflict transformation strategies must identify the "secret rules" of such unconscious mechanisms and disable them through awareness-raising.

This focus on individual and collective actors and their respective behaviours is by no means a rare phenomenon, and there are certainly good reasons for adopting an actor-centred approach. When it comes to determining entry points for intervening in a conflict, people – actors – are immediately identifiable. Conflicts become manifest through actions – menacing gestures, acts of violence etc. – performed by the people involved. Adopting an actor-centred approach often seems to be the most tangible and promising way forward. While this strategy certainly has its merits, proponents of systemic conflict transformation must also take processes, notably communication, actions (and not actors as human beings) and relational dynamics into account. Systemic thinking stipulates that the whole is always more than the sum of its parts; manifestations are contingent and non-linear and result from the accumulation of various, partly contradictory, partly enhancing processes. Dissecting the whole (social systems) and focusing on its constituent parts (individual actors) rarely results in sustainable strategies. Similarly we cannot comprehend, let alone transform, a conflict by solely working on individual and collective actors. An actor-centred approach must therefore be complemented by a process-oriented perspective and acknowledgement of the role of communication processes and discourses.

As opposed to actor-centric approaches, systemic approaches – and especially approaches founded on systems theory – direct considerable attention to the self-selectivity and self-referentiality of conflicts. Based on this perspective, conflicts tend to escalate due to cumulative effects that the participants can often neither control nor fully understand. Fritz B. Simon has illustrated this by referring to the self-fabrication of causes of conflict within conflict systems:

> "Whichever official and factual causes are given at the beginning of a war, for the most part they have little relation to the mechanisms that account for its continuation. The war creates its own reasons once it has started" (Simon 2001, 226; transl. by the authors).

Thus, systemic approaches prefer to not only look at conflicts from the perspective of the actor but also incorporate the process perspective, which puts more emphasis on the momentum and dynamics of conflicts.

Niklas Luhmann's version of operative constructivism proves to be a good starting point for the development of a systemic approach to conflict transformation. At the centre of his approach, Luhmann refers to George Spencer Brown's concept of observation, which defines observation as the operation of drawing a distinction by means of identification (Luhmann 1990). Consequentially, observation plays an important role in defining conflict from a constructivist point of view. The observer constitutes himself by drawing a boundary between himself and the observed – and by communicating this difference. Such an observation is literally all-encompassing: nothing exists outside of the observed world. On the contrary, the observation creates, or rather alters, the world by means of distinction. However, it is important to keep in mind that observation is contingent, i.e. we define the world; the world does not define us (Rorty 1990). Furthermore, observations have social consequences. Not only do they determine the specific meaning of something but can also determine the respective subjective position. If I perceive someone as an aggressor, this may not only lead to a lasting conflict but also frame my opponent, based on their opinions, to the extent that we become permanent enemies.

Observations can take place in a variety of meaning-based systems. Communicated observations that correlate with other observations have far-reaching social consequences. These communicated observations take place in social systems that also distinguish themselves from their environment through observation.

> "If continuity of observing is to be guaranteed, the observer has to constitute a structured system, which differentiates itself from its environment. The system requires a boundary over which it can observe, and all self-observation presupposes the establishment of corresponding internal differences. […] Observers are only identical with themselves, because in each case they observe over a boundary they have drawn, and other systems can at best observe observers, as they observe but do not take part in their observation" (Luhmann 1990, 79; transl. by the authors).

Hence, systems cannot intervene in other systems; they only can observe other systems' observations.

According to Luhmann, observations are not easily abandoned once they have been communicated. As often witnessed in conflict situations, differentiated systems that are subsequently closed through recursive observations tend to live on. A good example of this is the attempt to restore justice by means of reconciliation. The reiteration and affirmation of past injustice often leads to a continuation of injustice and can prolong a conflict instead of ending it.

Following Luhmann's social systems theory, three elements can be described as essential for the development of conflicts: observation, communication and normative expectations. Conflicts arise when observers perceive incompatibilities between themselves and others and communicate this observation. Communication determines social conflict; without it there would merely be mutual assumptions and accusations, which cannot be observed as such. Luhmann argues that conflicts stem from a negative response to communicated selection. In conflict situations in particular, actors adhere to their normative convictions and expectations.

Once conflicts emerge, a social system develops in which specific types of observations are established. These observations lead to conflict continuation. For instance,

it is often expected that the opposing party acts contrary to one's own wishes and as it is expected to act – even if one knows that the other side will not act accordingly (see Bonacker/Schmitt 2007; Bonacker 2008). Most intergroup conflicts are good examples for such a pattern, and usually include stereotypes and prejudice on both sides.

In summing up this perspective on operative constructivism with respect to conflict research, two aspects are particularly relevant: firstly, conflicts are produced through communication. Secondly, they are composed of communicated, interrelated observations that form social relations.

In addition, against this theoretical background it is assumed that there is no causal relationship between an occasion in the environment and changes within the system. As a consequence, the focus of a particular conflict analysis is less on pinpointing single causes but rather on clarifying how the conflict has been constructed by means of communication. Thus, a constructivist approach to conflict research means focusing on the momentum and self-selectivity of conflicts.[1]

2. Securitization as a Process of Conflict Escalation

From our point of view, operative constructivism offers a sound epistemological starting point developing a theoretical basis for a systemic approach to conflict transformation. In this chapter, we want to expand this approach to conflict theory by taking into consideration the securitization theory of the so-called Copenhagen School. In the mid-1990s the Copenhagen School began to develop a constructivist approach within the context of security studies. Since then, a number of publications have advanced the scope of security studies and adopted the theoretic and methodological approach of the Copenhagen School in trying to explain how certain types of conflicts (such as territorial or ethnopolitical conflicts) develop and progress (see Diez et al. 2006; Pia/Diez 2007; Gromes/Bonacker 2007).

At its core, securitization theory can be seen as a vantage point for a constructivism-based systemic approach to conflict transformation because one of its core assertions is to explain how an issue evolves into (or is made to be) a security issue and how conflicts emerge and escalate due to securitization processes:

> "With this definition of security, the approach has clearly turned constructivist in the sense that we do not ask whether a certain issue is in and of itself a ‚threat', but focus on the question of when and under what conditions who securitises what issue" (Buzan/Wæver 2004, 71).

According to Wæver, security per se does not exist in a vacuum, but is constructed through communication. Referring to Austin's speech act theory, Wæver suggests that:

> "Security is not of interest as a sign that refers to something more real; the utterance itself is the act. By saying it, something is done (as in betting, giving a promise, naming a ship). By uttering 'security' a state-representative moves a particular development into a specific area, and thereby claims a special right to use whatever means are necessary to block it" (Wæver 1995, 55).

1 For an example regarding conflicts in the Middle East see Stetter (2008). Messmer (2003) and Simon (2001), have developed a conflict theory that addresses the momentum of social conflicts based on the above-mentioned aspects of operative constructivism from a general social systems theory.

Securitization consists of three components:

1. the claim of a threat to survival and a demand for extraordinary measures,
2. the adoption of emergency action,
3. the effect on the relations between the affected units by violating rules that are otherwise binding (Buzan et al. 1998, 25).

Within the concept of securitization, one can distinguish between a securitizing move and securitization itself. Asserting an existential threat and requesting extraordinary means constitutes a securitizing move. An issue becomes securitized only if an audience accepts the allegation that an existential threat exists and approves a response by emergency measures. Thus, securitization is an inter-subjective practice: "(S)ecurity (as with all politics) ultimately rests neither with the objects nor with the subjects but *among* the subjects […]" (ibid., 31, emphasis in the original).

Security is neither something out there waiting to be found nor can it be defined objectively (Wæver 2000, 251). Rather, security is constituted through an inter-subjective practice. The starting point of the securitization concept is the speech act theory developed by John Austin (1962), who demonstrated how we do things with words. Uttering 'security' can be considered as an action (Wæver 1995). An issue may turn into a security issue once an actor presents it as an existential threat to a reference object. An existential threat endangers the self-determination and possibly even the existence of a political unit. Because it refers to the great question *to be or not to be*, a security problem can thus "alter the premises for all other questions" (ibid.). As survival is at stake, the securitizing actor claims that a threat cannot be adequately addressed by ordinary means and must be responded to by emergency measures. Such use of all necessary means breaches the rules of normal politics (Buzan/Wæver 2004, 71; see also Gromes/Bonacker 2007, 2).

From the perspective of operative constructivism, a fundamental problem of securitization theory is that it puts too much emphasis on the crucial role of actors, too. As Buzan and Wæver point out, successful securitization must find acceptance within the audience. "Successful securitization is not decided by the securitizer but by the audience of the security speech act: Does the audience accept that something is an existential threat to a shared value? (Buzan et al. 1998, 31)

Securitization can be understood as a communicative act by which conflict systems and conflict actors constitute themselves. Here we find the link to system theory's concepts of communication and observation. In general terms, securitization is nothing more than threat communication, whereby an observer distinguishes himself (through his own identity) and perceives himself as being threatened by something. An apparent component of this form of communication is self-reference and reference to others. The observer creates a personal threat by means of communication. In Luhmann's terms, a system is created when others join in this communicated observation. In other words: what Wæver and Buzan refer to as successful securitization based on acceptance is essentially identical with the differentiation of a system, i.e. an observer who distinguishes himself from the outside world by means of threat communication. Thus, the issue is not necessarily about two systems that perceive each other as mutual threats, but that continuous threat communication exists, which enables the differentiation of a (sub)system. It is not even necessary that the subsequent communication relates to the