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Author(s): Fetherston, A.B.

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**Centre for Conflict Resolution  
Department of Peace Studies**

**Working Paper 4**

**From Conflict Resolution to  
Transformative Peacebuilding:  
Reflections from Croatia**

**A. B. Fetherston**

**April 2000**



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## **Introduction**

This paper considers the limits of conflict resolution in theory and practice. Conflict resolution, defined in various ways over the years, is distinguished from a general category of conflict management – any attempt to curtail, contain, or resolve conflict. It is here understood to be a field of study situated within peace research, and based on the work of John Burton, Edward Azar and others who noted that protracted violent conflict resisted the international community's attempts to control it and were looking for alternative means of *resolving* rather than merely settling disputes. While in itself conflict resolution was a critical – perhaps radical - response to realist approaches in IR, this paper argues that over its nearly thirty-year history, though, little significant critical analysis has been applied to its theory and practice – much to its cost. I argue here, that CR needs to undergo reappraisal in the light of critical social theory and in the context of peacebuilding practices which have emerged out of warzones. The purpose of this analysis is to consider the ways in which conflict resolution is limited by its own discursive practices and, as a result, is largely irrelevant for the very problems it attempts to tackle. This paper is organised into three sections: first an overview of conflict resolution in theory and practice is offered, followed by a critical analysis of some of the problems of the theoretical approach of conflict resolution. Finally, through a description of peacebuilding work in Croatia, the emergence of counter-discursive practices in response to overwhelming problems is offered as an illustration of the limitations of conflict resolution methodologies in the context of violent conflict.

### **1. Conflict Resolution in Theory and Practice**

This section provides a brief overview of the theory of conflict that underlies conflict resolution. From this 'generic theory' is derived the practice of conflict resolution. Analytic and consultative problem-solving processes are discussed and some consideration is given to contingency theory.

#### **1.1 Violent Conflict**

Conflict resolution, like peace research, evolved as a critique of realism in international relations. In realism, states are in conflict over the proportion of resources they control and, therefore, the power they wield in the international community. Realism derives from the likes of Hobbes, who argued that in a state of nature, life for 'man' would be nasty, brutish and short, and that it would be characterised by a continual war of all against all.<sup>1</sup> This picture of an anarchical world was then applied to international relations where, in the absence of some check on the nastier side of human nature (a 'check' which states supplied, at the behest of man, within their domestic realms), anarchy had free reign. Cooperation was possible only to the extent that it maximised self-interested goals of individual

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas Hobbes, "Of the Naturall Condition of Mankind, as Concerning Their Felicity, and Misery," *Classics of International Relations*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, ed., John Vasques (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1990),. 213-15.

states and minimised risks to sovereignty. Violent conflict, in this context, can only be contained, and controlled.<sup>2</sup>

According to realist formulas, conflicts are caused by a scarcity of resources, and attempts by states to win control over those resources. From this perspective, conflicts are objective – caused by knowable, measurable, reducible objects, outside of and separate from the subject. Within this ‘world’ the methodologies employed for minimising the worst excesses of violent conflict were limited to settlement strategies. Such strategies (seen in the practices of mediation, negotiation, arbitration) seek to secure a division of resources which will return two states at war to some status quo. These settlements are always zero-sum, that is, where one state gains the other loses, and focus, exclusively, on divergent interests. Thus, realism, is seen by conflict resolution, as a paradigm, or a cluster of assumptions and practices which paint a particular – and inaccurate - picture of the world and derive problematic practices from it.

From a conflict resolution (CR) perspective, realist approaches (applied at any level) are not effective at dealing with violent conflict or, for that matter, with all forms of ‘deviances’. The realist picture of inevitable conflict, caused by either inherent aggressiveness or by the inherent structure of the international system where power is the main arbiter, the best we can hope for is containment and control. In such a situation, there is no possibility of a transformation of that structure. The distinction between realism and conflict resolution rests on CR’s argument that realism doesn’t work because the assumptions it makes about the world are unsound. Conflict resolution offers an alternative paradigm, another set of assumptions and practices from which practitioners derive a different set of methodologies for dealing with – in this case ‘resolving’ - conflicts. Conflict resolution challenges realism on a number of fronts.

### ***Conflict in Conflict Resolution***

CR takes issue with the assumption that *violent* conflict is inevitable – although CR scholars do argue that *conflict* is an inevitable feature of human existence. This is because CR posits a different cause of conflict other than the inherent violence of the international system. Many CR scholars argue that conflict has an ontological base in human needs, the denial of which causes violent conflict. Therefore, the objective source of conflict is *needs not interests*.

Moreover, while violent conflict (referred to as ‘protracted social conflict’<sup>3</sup>, or ‘deep-rooted’ conflict<sup>4</sup>) always has objective features, it also always has subjective features. This subjective aspect of

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<sup>2</sup>Kenneth Waltz, *Man, the State and War* (New York: Columbia University Press,1959); Robert Keohane, ed., *Neorealism and its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press,1986); D.A. Baldwin, ed., *Neorealism and*

conflict is derived from work in the field of psychology where empirical studies have examined the processes of conflict and found that people's perceptions of each other and of 'out-groups' changed through different stages of escalation and de-escalation.<sup>5</sup> While conflict has objective causes, it is possible, even probable, that in complex violent conflict situations psychological aspects of conflict have obscured or exacerbated those objective causes. Indeed, conflict is understood as a situation in which parties *perceive* that they have incompatible goals.<sup>6</sup> The structure of conflict, then, is seen as having three essential aspects, often represented as a triangle – including behaviours, attitudes, and context which interact to produce conflict.<sup>7</sup> From this perspective, conflict has to be dealt with at two levels: the psychological, to get past 'blocks' to positive communication and, ontological, to uncover the 'real' cause of conflict.

It is here that a divergence within conflict resolution theorising about conflict can be noted. On the one hand there is the school of thought that hypothesises the denial of ontologically-derived basic human needs as the ultimate source of all violent conflict. John Burton is the key figure here. Others prefer a more 'psychologistic' interpretation of conflict. Fisher and Keashly see "conflict at least partly and at times predominantly as a subjective social process. This rationale does not deny the objective approach to conflict, but indeed accepts the tenets of realist conflict theory that real differences in interests cause inter-group conflict."<sup>8</sup> This is significantly different from Burton's human needs approach.

### ***Generic Conflict***

Burton, a hugely influential figure in the field, has tried to develop a generic theory of conflict based on ontologically-derived human needs, thus supplying a 'new' objective base for conflict. Burton argues that "there are certain ontological and genetic needs that will be pursued, and that socialisation processes, if not compatible with such human needs, far from socialising, will lead to frustrations, and to disturbed and anti-social personal and group behaviours."<sup>9</sup> Three needs seem to be important –

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*Neoliberalism: The Contemporary Debate* (New York: Columbia University Press 1993).

<sup>3</sup>Edward E. Azar, *The Management of Protracted Social Conflict: Theory and Case* (Aldershot, U.K.: Dartmouth Publishing, 1990).

<sup>4</sup>John W. Burton, *Conflict: Resolution and Provention, Vol. 1* (London: Macmillan, 1990). See also, John W. Burton and Frank Dukes, *Conflict: Practices in Management, Settlement and Resolution Vol. 4* (London: Macmillan, 1990); John W. Burton and Frank Dukes, eds., *Conflict: Readings in Management and Resolution, Vol. 3* (London: Macmillan, 1990).

<sup>5</sup>Ronald J. Fisher, *The Social Psychology of Intergroup and International Conflict Resolution* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1990).

<sup>6</sup>Christopher R. Mitchell, *The Structure of International Conflict* (London: Macmillan, 1981), 17.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ronald J. Fisher and Loreleigh Keashly, "The Potential Complementarity of Mediation and Consultation Within a Contingency Model of Third Party Intervention," *Journal of Peace Research* 28:1(1991):32.

<sup>9</sup>Burton, *Conflict, Vol. 1*, 33. See also, John W. Burton and D.J.D. Sandole, "Generic Theory: The Basis of Conflict Resolution," *Negotiation Journal* 2:2(1986):333-44; John W. Burton and D.J.D. Sandole,

identity and recognition, security and the possibility of development. Realist approaches to international relations cannot work, Burton argues, because settlement strategies are based on erroneous assumptions about the causes of conflict and ultimately about human nature. Realism operates as if human beings, living within the protective boundaries of states, can be controlled or, as Burton puts it, are socially malleable. Aggressive natures can be contained under the rule of law. Aggression is not inherent but only an outcome of attempts to deny human needs, and these, Burton maintains, are not malleable or controllable. If these needs are not met, problems, and ultimately, violent conflict, result. Containment – operated through settlement strategies in international relations, does not work, because human needs are ignored. In addition, Burton's work implies that analyses of violent deep-rooted conflict at any analytic level must account for basic human needs – thus he argues that his is a generic theory.

One important implication of the postulation of needs, is a crucial distinction between needs and interests (the basis of realism). While interests are negotiable, divisible and finite, needs are not. Because they are ontological they are not negotiable - something that can be given away or divided. Needs are also not finite, that is, the more security I have the less you have. In fact, it is surmised that needs work in the opposite way – the more security you have the more security I have. Accordingly, if all our needs are being met, we have moved from a zero-sum to a non-zero-sum position, from which 'integrative solutions' to violent conflict can be generated.

## 1.2 Resolution and Settlement

Two aspects of conflict are relevant to practice: first, perceptions of those involved in the conflict – the subjective aspect of conflict, which often obscures the 'reality' of the second, the objective base of conflict – unfulfilled human needs. Settlement practices miss the point because they focus only on interests failing to take into account the importance of relationships and perceptions and, underneath it all, human needs. Such strategies work, at best, as short term palliatives never getting to the root and therefore never *resolving* conflict.

It should be added here, that CR does not completely write-off interests as a source of some conflicts and for those kinds of conflict, settlement strategies may be the most applicable. Burton makes the distinction between *disputes* and conflicts. Disputes are "those situations in which the issues are negotiable, in which there can be compromise, and which, therefore, do not involve consideration of altered institutions and structures."<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, the issues that lead to *conflict* "are not the

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"Expanding the Debate on Generic Theory of Conflict Resolution: A Response to Critique," *Negotiation Journal* 3:1(1987):97-100; John W. Burton, ed., *Conflict: Human Needs Theory*, Vol. 2 (London: Macmillan,1990).

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.



ordinary ideas, choices, preferences and interests which are argued and negotiated as part of normal social living. They are those whose sources are deeply rooted in human behaviours.”<sup>11</sup> Somewhat differently, Fisher and Keashly argue that *within* a conflict process there are times when strategies which focus on interests are most appropriate and effective and times when a shift in focus to relationships is required.

### ***Burton’s Problem-Solving Approach***

Conflict resolution theory leads to the development of methodologies different in scope and aim from settlement strategies. Moving beyond mere control, CR strategies aim to resolve by dealing with the root causes of conflict. The main method developed and employed by CR scholars is called a problem-solving process. According to Burton, practices can be considered part of an analytic problem-solving process if they have four features: they are on-going (that is, finding a solution is not so much the aim as establishing on-going relationships through which problems can be handled as they arise); second, they often require a re-perception and reconceptualization of the conflict and its context on the part of participants; third, they are comprehensive – they are situated analytically in the context out of which the conflict arose; finally, they tackle the source of conflict – frustrated needs. Problem-solving, Burton maintains, “brings to attention a major decision making dilemma: to aim for *needs satisfaction*, or to employ the simpler expediency of *needs suppression* by power.”<sup>12</sup>

The key to problem-solving is analysis – a distancing from and neutral attitude towards conflict so ‘new’ ways of looking at issues can be explored. Facilitated analysis normally brings conflicting parties together with facilitators (an impartial third party) into a neutral ‘academic’ environment, where non-hierarchical, non-competitive, non-coercive norms are meant to predominate.<sup>13</sup> This kind of analysis is crucial to reaching resolution because, as Burton points out, “in order to reveal the nature of conflict and the source of particular conflicts, the approach must be analytical. It must include not only clarifications of terms and concepts, but also a questioning of assumptions.”<sup>14</sup>

Because it attempts to resolve complex and deep-rooted problems, the process of problem-solving must be facilitated by a third party. In this environment third parties are not seeking to provide a solution to the sides, but rather to create and maintain an environment where the sides can analyse their situations and create solutions for themselves. Fisher and Keashly describe the functions of facilitators as, “inducing mutual motivation for problem-solving, improving the openness and accuracy of communication, diagnosing the processes and issues of the conflict, and regulating the interaction

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<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>13</sup>See, John W. Burton, *Conflict and Communication* (London: Macmillan, 1969); John W. Burton, *Resolving Deep-rooted Conflict: A Handbook* (Lanham MD.: University Press of America, 1987).

<sup>14</sup>Burton, *Conflict*, Vol. 1, 5.

among the participants.”<sup>15</sup> Hoffman adds that for facilitators, “the central concern is the nature of the relationship between the conflict parties and how to change the actual meaning, conditions, and circumstances of that relationship.”<sup>16</sup> Bringing about an atmosphere of inclusiveness is key to the process because it opens space “to focus on the structural, social, attitudinal, and interpersonal dimensions of the conflict relationship.”<sup>17</sup>

Ultimately, those engaged in an analytical problem-solving process need to address the fundamental basis for their conflict and come to see the unmet needs at the root of their problems. Moreover, their analysis of their situation must include an understanding that needs can be met through cooperation and on-going partnership. But problem-solving does not leave its work there. There is, theoretically, a functional aspect to the process so that not only are needs and values – and how they are perceived – subjected to analysis, but also social structures and institutions which are part of creating conditions where needs are frustrated. This is a rather heavy weight for a problem-solving workshop to bear. The underlying aim to transform, forcefully indicated in Burton’s writing, is not matched by his theoretical framework of generic conflict or the practices which derive from it (more will be said about this in the following section).

### ***Non-Needs-Based Problem-Solving***

As indicated above, for other CR practitioners this last aspect, tackling frustrated needs, is problematic. In Fisher and Keashly’s work, for instance, consultation (their problem solving approach), focuses on the psychology of inter-group relations as the main problem-to-be-solved. They argue that,

once a conflict is initiated, the perceptions, attitudes and interaction of the parties become crucial elements of determining its further course. Typically, there is an escalating spiral of increasing intensity in which the relationship between the parties moves toward destructive competition and finally to a ‘malignant social process’ from which the parties are unable or unwilling to extricate themselves.<sup>18</sup>

The objectives are similar to Burton’s problem-solving - minus the implication of structural changes, but Fisher and Keashly focus on subjective aspects of conflict as the main barriers to resolution of interest-based issues. This leads one to wonder how their approach can be distinguished from the

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<sup>15</sup>Fisher and Keashly, “Potential Complementarity,” 32.

<sup>16</sup>Michael Hoffman, “Third-Party Mediation and Conflict Resolution in the Post-Cold War World,” in *Dilemmas of World Politics*, eds., J. Baylis and N.J. Rengger (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 271.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 271.

<sup>18</sup>Fisher and Keashly, “Potential Complementarity,” 32; Loreleigh Keashly and Ronald J. Fisher “A Contingency Perspective on Conflict Interventions: Theoretical and Practical Considerations,” in *Resolving International Conflicts: The Theory and Practice of Mediation*, ed., Jacob Bercovitch (Boulder, CO.: Lynne Rienner, 1996), 235-261.

array of settlement strategies including mediation, since they seem only to ‘add’ subjective elements to the settlement emphasis on interests. There has been some discussion in the academic literature over this point between Fisher and Keashly and others.<sup>19</sup>

### *Contingency and Complementarity*

Contingency theory in conflict resolution has been pioneered by Fisher and Keashly. In brief the theory, which comes mainly from organisational psychology, is that at different points during a conflict different types of third party intervention are more or less effective. The implication is that the distinction which Burton makes between disputes and conflicts – noted above, is not necessarily useful. Research from organisational psychology analogously applied to deep-rooted conflicts suggests moments at which substantive issues (interests) are most salient whereas at other times miscommunication and misperceptions block attempts to resolve. The assumption is that subjective elements get worse as conflict escalates. Fisher and Keashly summarise their argument:

A contingency approach to third party intervention is based on the assessment that social conflict involves a dynamic process in which objective and subjective elements interact over time as the conflict escalates and de-escalates. Depending on the objective-subjective mix, different intervention will be appropriate at different states of the conflict.<sup>20</sup>

Although Fisher did, in a later article, consider Burton’s human needs approach as the basis of analytical problem solving, this seems to have been a brief foray – and later work discusses a contingency approach without reference to basic human needs.<sup>21</sup> Where Fisher does engage Burton (and Azar) he seems to view needs-based problem-solving as part of a broader peacebuilding process and separates conflict resolution from a needs approach: “The analysis of protracted inter-group conflicts as rooted in denial of basic human needs explains why such disputes defy traditional methods of conflict management and resolution.”<sup>22</sup> Fisher places needs-based ‘peacebuilding’ within a contingency framework as,

activities designed to improve the relationship and meet the basic needs of the parties, in order to de-escalate the conflict and render it amenable to peacemaking. Peacebuilding can then take its place as the essential bridge between peacekeeping and peacemaking.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>See especially, Ronald J. Fisher and Loreleigh Keashly, "Third Party Interventions in Intergroup Conflict: Consultation Is Not Mediation," *Negotiation Journal* 4:4(1988):381-93; Keashly and Fisher, "A Contingency Perspective."

<sup>20</sup>Fisher and Keashly, "Potential Complementarity," 34.

<sup>21</sup>Keashly and Fisher, "A Contingency Perspective." 235-261.

<sup>22</sup>Ronald J. Fisher, "The Potential for Peacebuilding: Forging a Bridge from Peacekeeping to Peacemaking," *Peace and Change* 18:3(1993):248.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 249.

Consultative problem-solving works on relationships, enabling parties to perceive their conflict more 'objectively', build trust, develop more effective communication patterns, and, in the end, resolve substantive issues causing conflict. Problematic, though, remains Fisher and Keashly's reliance on psychologistic elements of conflict and their 'realist' interpretation of objective conflict being over interests. For deep-rooted conflict, Burton argues, objective elements are human needs: interests and values, in Burton's scheme, are a means of expressing – often inaccurately - unrealised needs. His method undertakes to uncover the unfulfilled needs at the root of conflict and resolve the problem partly by changing social relations and institutions. One implication of this difference between the two is the more tenuous link that consultative problem-solving has with genuine transformation than Burton's needs-based approach. Neither, as will be discussed in the next section, is genuinely transformative and this is especially problematic in the context of violent conflict.

## **2. The Limits of Conflict Resolution**

### **2.1 Critical Conflict Resolution**

It can be argued that conflict resolution has been a critical force in the theories and practices of conflict management. It has brought an alternative voice to taken-for-granted practices in international relations. Burton (and here I would distinguish between the transformative potential of Burton's problem-solving and Fisher and Keashly's contingency theory), through the concept of prevention, stretches toward conflict resolution as transformation. Even he, though, seems to get mired in the problematic discourses of international relations (and psychology).

Robert Cox has made the point that it is perfectly possible to be critical and never step outside the bounds of your own discourse.<sup>24</sup> What lacks in Burton, and especially in Fisher and Keashly, is a self-reflexivity that casts a critical gaze on the assumptions which, mostly, confine both the theory and practice of conflict resolution to the problematic discourse of modernity. Research which seeks to understand the basis of social meaning and practice is distinct from research which seeks to render that practice more efficient and controllable. To be discursively critical, Cox points out, is more than mere problem-solving which functions from within the dominant framework of social relations and institutions. From his perspective a critical approach begins by problematising those dominant frameworks and seeks to find alternatives which would transform those institutions and social meanings – that is seeks to shift the basis on which everyday life and meaning are constituted and practised.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Robert W. Cox, "Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory," *Millennium*10:2(1981):129-30. See also, Robert W. Cox, "Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations: An Essay on Method," *Millennium*12:2(1983):162-75; Robert W. Cox. *Production, Power, and World Order: Social Forces in the Making of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 129-30.

It is crucial, therefore, to distinguish between what is transformative from the view of critical theory, and what is transformative from the point of view of existing discourses. Critical theory offers the *possibility* of transformation, as Foucault put it,

in the sense that it will not deduce from the form of what we are what it is impossible for us to do and to know; but it will separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer, being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think.<sup>26</sup>

## 2.2 The Irrationality of Warzones

Understandings of war implied in the definitions, researches and methodologies of conflict settlement and conflict resolution lack connection to the everydayness of the warzone.<sup>27</sup> These kinds of descriptions of war and its aftermath fail to catch its complexity and deep effects on social space and meaning. Carolyn Nordstrom has written extensively on the ways in which violence fractures communities and becomes fixed into social meanings.<sup>28</sup> In the context of Croatia, for example, survivors of rape camps in Croatia and Bosnia still carry that experience with them, and, research suggests, are likely to for the rest of their lives.<sup>29</sup> Villages and towns that were demolished and divided by the war in the Balkans did not just experience physical damage, the social fabric of their lives was torn apart.

The irrationality of violence and the psycho-social effects it inflicts, do not just come and then go. They become part of everyday life or what Pierre Bourdieu has called, 'habitus'.<sup>30</sup> The fear, insecurity, and violence of death, torture, disappearances, rape, become 'normal' and 'natural'. As Bourdieu puts it, "every established order tends to produce (to very different degrees and with very different means) the naturalisation of its own arbitrariness.... out of which arises the sense of limits, commonly called the sense of reality."<sup>31</sup> We understand little of the ways in which such extensive

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<sup>26</sup>Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" in *The Foucault Reader*, ed., Paul Rabinow (London: Penguin, 1984), 46.

<sup>27</sup>See Linda Green, "Fear as a Way of Life," *Cultural Anthropology* 9:2(1994):227-56; Carolyn Nordstrom and Joann Martin, eds., *The Paths to Domination, Resistance, and Terror* (Berkeley CA.: University of California Press, 1992); A.B. Fetherston and A.C. Parkin, "Transforming Violent Conflict: Contributions from Social theory," in L-A. Broadhead (ed.), *Issues in Peace Research, 1997-8* (Bradford: Bradford University Press, 1998), pp. 19-57; and A.B. Fetherston and C. Nordstrom, "Overcoming *habitus* in Conflict Management: UN Peacekeeping and Warzone Ethnography," *Peace & Change*, 20:1(1995):94-119.

<sup>28</sup>Carolyn Nordstrom, "Warzones: Cultures of Violence, Militarisation and Peace," *Working Paper, No. 145* (Canberra: Peace Research Centre, Australian National University, 1994); see also Nordstrom and Martin, *Paths to Domination*.

<sup>29</sup>A. Stiglmayer, ed., *Mass Rape: The War Against Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994).

<sup>30</sup>Pierre Bourdieu *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. J.B. Thompson, trans. G. Raymond and M. Adamson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991); Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

<sup>31</sup>Bourdieu, *Outline*, 164.

social damage play out over lifetimes, much less how processes aimed at settlement, resolution, or transformation affect peoples lives at this level. In Croatia hatred, distrust, harassment, and discrimination of Serbs is both part of everyday life and part of state policy (not just of political rhetoric, but systemic intolerance practised through, for example, educational institutions and the work place). This 'culture of violence' is one layer, one level of complexity, one outcome of war. The aftermath of war perhaps provides us with the opportunity to see more emphatically the operations of pervasive discourses of violence. Two points at least need to be noted. In understanding cultures of violence, or discourses of violence, we need to understand the broader context. In the Croatian case, for instance, networks of institutions, structures, social meanings need to be analysed. Such an analysis is not just confined to the territory of the Balkans, as if the Balkans were some space of irrationality cut off from the rest of the world, but in a globalised/globalising sense.

Many other aspects of a prevailing culture of violence are evident in Croatia and have less to do with the war (although that certainly has exacerbated them) and more to do with a wider discourse of violence and militarism that pervades the state system. The 'everydayness' of a warzone is not a 'special' case outside of the norms, although it may generate some unique practices, as 'rape camps' in Bosnia appear to have been.<sup>32</sup> Rather, it is one outcome of international and domestic structures, institutions, and ways of life that are fundamentally based on repression.<sup>33</sup> Vivienne Jabri has argued that we need to seek critical understandings "by situating war and violent conflict in the constitution of the human self and human society."<sup>34</sup> She assumes "that specific instances of war are a manifestation of the longer-term processes which have established war as a form of institution linked to discursive and institutional practices which define social continuities."<sup>35</sup> In this sense, she goes further than Nordstrom, and points to a broader 'culture of violence' out of which these wars emerge. Moreover, our understandings of war both constitute and are constituted by the social institution and practices of war. In other words, we participate in and perpetuate war as social continuity.

How, for example, do studies of war in the Balkans which dissect its causes as essentially ethnic, produce particular practices and prescribe particular responses? The Dayton Accords, with their emphasis on 'separation' of ethnicities, is an example which suggests further study. Studying war, Jabri proposes, must, "incorporate both understanding and the practical intent of promoting emancipatory social transformation" not only at the most visible site of war – the warzone, but in our

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<sup>32</sup>Stiglmeier, *Mass Rape*.

<sup>33</sup>See James Der Derian and Michael Shapiro, eds., *International/Intertextual Relations: Postmodern Readings of World Politics* (New York: Lexington, 1989); R.B.J. Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

<sup>34</sup>Vivienne Jabri, *Discourses on Violence: Conflict Analysis Reconsidered* (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 1996), 22.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 22-3.

own localities as well.<sup>36</sup> The extent to which conflict resolution in theory and practice does not wrestle with these deep complexities suggests the limits of its usefulness for creating opportunities for emancipatory social transformation. A similar point could be made about peace research.<sup>37</sup>

### 2.3 Conflict Resolution and the Project of Modernity

It has been argued elsewhere that conflict and conflict management are sets of assumptions and practices that constitute problematic discourses on violence – and, ultimately, are part of an unproblematised discourse of modernity.<sup>38</sup> How much is conflict resolution part of these discourses? This section addresses three aspects of this large and complicated question. First, some attention is given to the unproblematised project of modernity within conflict resolution. Following on, the extent to which conflict resolution constitutes sets of problematic discursive practices is considered. Finally, the issue of power in conflict resolution is discussed as illustrative of the implications a critical analysis has for reconsidering theories and practices of CR.

The power of discourse is to render ‘right’, ‘legitimate’, ‘taken-for-granted’, ‘natural’ specific ways of knowing, acting and organising social life. More precisely, “it makes ‘real’ that which it prescribes as meaningful.”<sup>39</sup> Crucially, this rendering of ‘right’ silences other possibilities (they are unknowable since they are not possible). A discourse also sets the limits of critique especially in this sense, that it “...constructs narratives that tell us unambiguously, what the varied and changing events of history must be taken to mean.”<sup>40</sup> Critical analysis within discursive knowing can only rearrange, and perhaps make more efficient, practices - it cannot transform. The unproblematised discourse of modernity which is at the heart of both IR and CR theory and practice, demands that this objective knowing be uncontaminated by the subjectivities, the contingencies of social life – although ironically the main purpose of modernity is to itself ‘contaminate’ social life. The knowledge this discourse produces is rational, universal and permanent. The end project of modernity is total knowledge, total power, total enlightenment, the end of history, and simultaneously, the end of difference.

Conflict resolution as part of this modern project comes with baggage that is made invisible because of its seeming ‘rightness’. Set within an unproblematised version of a discourse of modernity, conflict resolution assumes that we can ‘know’ – objectify, make rational, understand - violent conflict to such

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<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 23

<sup>37</sup>Hayward R. Alker, *Rediscoveries and Reformulations: Humanistic Methodologies for International Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 332-354.

<sup>38</sup>Jabri, *Discourses*; Fetherston and Parkin, "Transforming Violent Conflict."

<sup>39</sup>Jim George, *Discourses of Global Politics: A Critical (Re)Introduction to International Relations* (Boulder, CO.: Lynne Rienner, 1994), 29-30.

<sup>40</sup>Richard K. Ashley, "Living on Border Lines: Man, Poststructuralism, and War", in *International/Intertextual Relations*, 274-5.

an extent that we can have *power over* it, and thus, solve the problem of it. Eventually, *à la* enlightenment, violent conflict will cease to exist - the implication being we have all 'come to understand' both the cause and solution of violent conflict and re-arrange practices, institutions, and social meaning accordingly. Parties in conflict become aware and are enlightened by the prescribed knowing and rational processes of conflict resolution.

The modern project privileges the rational knowing subject and in doing so a world of the 'other' is both generated and silenced. 'Rational' is legitimised at the same time that everything else, labelled 'irrational', is othered, delegitimised, and set outside the bounds of the discourse. The unknown and uncontrollable, are made separate from our own lives. Jabri, as previously described, has argued that this 'othering' of violence makes its practice separate from ourselves, thus, silencing ways in which we are part of a discourse of violence that supports, legitimises, and normalises war. War and other forms of violence, e.g. systems of oppression, from her perspective, are rational, are part of our everyday lives, of social activity, institutions, structures, and are constituted and constituting of social meaning. Jabri's point brings home the great extent to which conflict resolution forecloses discussion of its own participation in discourses of violence. The question of how procedures of conflict resolution which, unproblematised, have a powerful disciplinary and normalising function, come into practice, cannot be asked. Coxian critique and, by implication, emancipatory transformation are inconceivable. The project of conflict resolution in its present state then, is potentially fundamentally mis-directed.

#### **2.4 Conflict Resolution as Discursive Practice**

The prescriptive rationality that underlies analytic problem-solving sets up several difficulties. Rationality within a modern project prescribes a singular 'objectively' reasoned truth. Consultation aims to facilitate the process of 're-perception', a coming-to-see by the parties their own problematic communication patterns and 'learning' more appropriate ones – those empirically tested and found to be most 'effective'. In analytic problem-solving a rational distancing is demanded, where participants in the process come to see their conflict as unfulfilled human needs and 'learn' through this insight how to better handle conflicts of interest. Ultimately, application of consultation or problem-solving methods leads to resolution because the participants have been 'corrected' (however subtly) and, armed with this newly enlightened perspective, can together seek appropriate resolutions.

This discursive practice has its limitations. What is considered right and, therefore, 'rational' is really merely 'point of view' but is rendered as discursive truth. And although most CR scholars would not pretend to have all the answers, they are operating from a particular standpoint of modernity where they are on the 'right' track and further research, and application, will refine what is now known. This progressive linearity of knowledge is central to the modern project. Perhaps more interesting than



what is considered 'rational' is the unstated but implied consideration of what is 'irrational' and therefore in need of enlightenment. The whole of the Balkans is looked at through this lens of irrationality, cut off from normal rational living and in need of instruction. Participants of a problem-solving process have to re-perceive the totality of their war as irrational, simultaneously rendering their experiences and practices illegitimate and irrelevant – and cutting off, at least, an understanding of the power of war as social construct which conditions and is conditioned by social meaning. One potential outcome of problem-solving then is to undermine, by delegitimising and disempowering, particular practices of survival and resistance.

Power, here, is a significant issue. Although power is evident in settlement processes, since it is power that decides, it is not so clearly present in problem-solving with its insistence on 'neutral third parties' and 'facilitative non-coercive processes'. This need to de-power conflict resolution processes, though, still brings with it an understanding of power as 'power over', as negative power. CR scholars, of course, are not unaware of this 'problem of power', and suggest that it may be important to 'empower' certain groups in conflict before resolution become possible.<sup>41</sup> But again this reflects a Hegelian understanding of power. By denying this kind of power within the analytic process of problem-solving it does not disappear and participants have to re-enter the social context where negative power is very apparent and problematic. Problem-solving offers no palliatives for this, and its analysis of power is quite weak. One consequence of its CR practices to face the problem of power is a back-door legitimisation of understandings of power as only power over. Again, the result is disempowerment, since individuals (local peacebuilders, for example) have little or no access to this negative power. Moreover, the possibility of transforming structures and institutions which exercise this negative power (like the state) seems, at best, remote. For problem-solving to work depends on convincing power-holders to change their ways, to become enlightened, through the analytic process which shows them the way. This is an unlikely scenario.

The analysis of power by Michel Foucault, though, traverses the boundaries of modern power and suggests a way out of the power-bind of problem-solving. The State, according to Foucault, exercises a form of negative meta-power, conceived as a series of prohibitory powers. Foucault argues that "this meta-power ... can only take hold and secure its footing where it is rooted in a whole series of multiple and indefinite power relations that supply the necessary basis for the great negative forms of power."<sup>42</sup> State power is impossible, Foucault theorises, in the absence of a pervasive network of

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<sup>41</sup>Joseph A. Scimecca, "Theory and Alternative Dispute Resolution: A Contradiction in Terms?" in *Conflict Resolution Theory and Practice: Integration and Application*, eds., D.J.D. Sandole and H. van der Merwe (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 1993), 211-221.

<sup>42</sup>Michel Foucault, *Power and Knowledge, Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*. trans. C. Gordon, et al (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1980), 122. See also, Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish:*

disciplinary and normalising 'positive power'. These indefinite networks of positive power are knowledge-producing, functioning throughout the social body through all forms of institutions and social organisations to 'normalise', to make visible, measurable and compliant the entire social body. More fundamental than repressive power, Foucault's conception posits an array of disciplines, discourses, specialised knowledges, techniques, and institutions which together function not to prohibit or repress, but to exhort and to normalise modes of thought and action.

Scholarly 'knowledge', empirically tested, objectively signified, is part of the normalizing process. The *productive* conjunction of power/knowledge generates, through the use of technologies of power, 'discourses of truth' where truth "isn't outside power" rather, "it induces regular effects of power."<sup>43</sup> Instruments of discipline such as, hierarchical observation, normalising judgement, and the examination, induce normalising tendencies and then enable categorisation, separation, production of statistics and the objectification of knowing.<sup>44</sup> Human needs theory provides an example of such a process. The claim of separation between power and knowledge produces a theory of conflict which is unconscious of its conditioned and conditioning presence. How does this 'knowing' of the keys of conflict, i.e. human needs, become problematically inscribed in practices of war and peace? How useful, for example, are concepts and practices of impartiality and facilitation in this context? This kind of question cannot be asked by scholars unself-reflexively situated within a discourse of modernity. In other words, this potential knowledge is silenced.

Using this Foucauldian analysis of productive power it becomes possible to consider conflict resolution as part of an apparatus of power which attempts to discipline and normalise. Problem-solving is a productive process constituted from within a regime of truth, part of an apparatus which produces docile bodies and seeks to establish the disciplinary power of the regime of truth. Delivering 'rational' understandings and practices through problem-solving techniques, is part of rendering a social body normalised to such an extent that neo-liberal forms of social/economic/political organisation are taken for granted. Thus, conflict resolution might be understood as an apparatus of positive forms of power, which normalise and induce particular practices. Conflict settlement strategies, on the other hand, can be seen as a means of re-establishing juridical power, part of the mechanism of repressive power of the State and part of the international system.

This reconsideration of power is, from one perspective, quite frightening in its implications. From other standpoints, Foucault's analysis of micro-power does open spaces for transformative activity. He

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*The Birth of the Prison*, trans. A. Sheridan [1975] (London: Penguin, 1977); Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, trans. R. Hurley [1976] (London: Penguin, 1990).

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>44</sup>Foucault, "The Means of Correct Training," *Foucault Reader*, 188.

argues that “there are no relations of power without resistances; the latter are all the more real and effective because they are formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised.”<sup>45</sup> Resistance is not conceived, in Foucault’s mind, as a process of organising against and overthrowing, all at once, state power. It is, rather, understood as diverse, dispersed multiple forms of activity which have the potential to change relations of power at their locality. Moreover, Foucault suggests that even as it is possible for micro-procedures of power to be “adapted, reinforced and transformed” by global strategies of domination, the opposite is also possible, that “resistance is multiple and can be integrated into global strategies.”<sup>46</sup> Two points are particularly important: first, that resistance, to cultures of violence for example, occurs within localities and has the potential to transform those localities; and second, that these micro-resistances can be connected to broader global changes in power relations. Finally, in relation to taking a critical theoretical approach to conflict and the problem of transformation Foucault notes,

the role of theory today seems to me to be just this: not to formulate the global systemic theory which holds everything in place, but to analyse the specificity of mechanisms of power, to local the connections and extensions, to build little by little a strategic knowledge.<sup>47</sup>

What this indicates about theory-building in conflict resolution is that contingency or generic theories have significant flaws. While as discursive practices situated within the project of modernity they are exactly on track, as theory with the potential for transformation of discursive structures, ways of knowing, practices, they are fundamentally missing the point.

Reconsiderations of discourse, warzones, rationality and power in relation to analytical problem-solving suggest, not the end of its function or power, but the need to direct our gaze to the constituted and constituting conditions of our existence. In this direction lies the possibility of transformation of power relations and therefore the networks, apparatus, institutions, structures and techniques which empower meaning. To pretend that conflict resolution (settlement) or any other action, structure, or thought holds a privileged, untouched view, consigns us “to deduce from the form of what we are what it is impossible for us to do and to know.”<sup>48</sup>

This brief discussion provides a base from which to consider the limits of conflict resolution at a specific locality. The next section explores the emergence and development of peacebuilding work in Croatia both ‘during’ and ‘after’ the war following the work of three ‘projects’: the Volunteer Project Pakrac, the Info and Training Centre, Pakrac, and finally, the Centre for Peace Studies in Zagreb.

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<sup>45</sup>Foucault, *Power and Knowledge*, 142.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>48</sup>Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?” *Foucault Reader*, 46.

Three questions are considered: What characterised the activities of these projects? How was conflict resolution incorporated into practices in this context, if at all? In what ways did their work go beyond the limits of conflict resolution in theory and practice and challenge its discursive knowing? The point, as Foucault has said, is to 'analyse the specificity' looking for sites of resistance and, therefore, potential transformation.

### **3. Responding to Conflict**

The work of a group of Croatian activists provides an interesting and useful illustration of conflict resolution in practice, as Croats themselves attempt to come to terms both with the 'new' everydayness of violence and of the violent discourses fixed within social structures and institutions, both national and international.<sup>49</sup> Their initial work focuses on the more visible, immediate outcomes of violence, physical hardship and trauma. Their later activities developed out of a self-reflective understanding of the need for long-term counter-discursive education and activism. Where, in the context of Croatia, do the practices of conflict resolution fit? Croatia provides an example of Burton's deep-rooted conflict and as such analytic problem-solving should be applicable in theory and practice. The description and analysis provided here suggests that conflict resolution offers some useful 'tools for transformation' but does not offer paths towards critical understandings and practices of discourses of violence.

#### **3.1 Conflict in Croatia**

Violent conflict erupted in Croatia in the latter half of 1991 between Croatian Serbs supported by the Yugoslav National Army (JNA) and Croatian government forces. Although cease-fires were signed and UN peacekeepers deployed, the war did not formally end until August 1995 when the Croatian army 'reintegrated' territory held by Croatian Serb forces. The cost of war was high. An estimated 6000-10000 people were killed, and over 13,000 'disappeared', mostly civilians.<sup>50</sup> In addition, a two-sided ethnic cleansing took place where large numbers of Serbs moved into Croatian-Serb-held territory and large numbers of Croats moved into Croatian government controlled territory. According to Paul Stubbs, "400,000 people were internally displaced in the war in 1991. Combined

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<sup>49</sup>This section is based on which I conducted while living in Croatia for a year (1997-1998). The research was supported by a two-year Social Science Research Council - MacArthur Foundation fellowship. Although based in Zagreb and working at the Centre for Peace Studies, I also traveled, conducted interviews, and attended various training programs. During the year I conducted hundreds of informal interviews and over seventy formal interviews (i.e. taped with a interview schedule). I interviewed (and worked with) most of the activists who ran each project discussed and had wide-ranging discussions with them.

<sup>50</sup>Marcus Tanner, *Croatia: A Nation Forced in War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 277-283; see also R. Jambresic-Kirin, and M. Povrzanovic, eds., *War, Exile, Everyday Life: Cultural Perspectives* (Zagreb, Croatia: Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research, 1996); Paul Stubbs, "Social Reconstruction and Social Development in Croatia and Slovenia: The Role of the NGO Sector," *Occasional Paper No. 7* (Leeds, U.K.: International Social Policy Research Unit, Leeds Metropolitan University, 1997).

with refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina, registered forced migrants totalled over 700,000, or almost 20 percent of the Croatian population by the end of 1992.”<sup>51</sup> As well as massive population movement there was a large-scale destruction of building and economic infrastructure,<sup>52</sup> both through shelling and by blowing up houses to render them uninhabitable. One report estimated that “on the Croatian side, between 75% and 90% of all objects were damaged.”<sup>53</sup> Vukovar, a small city in Eastern Slavonia was virtually levelled. Fighting in this town alone accounted for over 2500 dead.<sup>54</sup>

As a result of the two Croatian government ‘reintegration’ operations in 1995, large-scale population movements again occurred, but this time most of the people on the move were of Serb ethnicity. Estimates suggest approximately 180,000 left the area following these two offensives.<sup>55</sup> This period was also characterised by a large number of human rights abuses.<sup>56</sup>

Significant problems remain in Croatia. Damaged property and the status of various displaced and refugee populations living in these areas are ongoing serious problems.<sup>57</sup> In addition, lack of free independent press, limited political opposition, discrimination, harassment and human rights abuses restrict individual freedom and undermine democratic norms.<sup>58</sup>

### **3.2 Volunteer Project Pakrac**

Many of the local NGOs now active in Croatia were founded only recently, in response to war. Of these, the Anti-War Campaign Croatia (ARK) begun in 1991, formed by a nucleus of Croatian activists. It has been a leading voice in countering cultures of violence in Croatia and supporting the emergence of counter-cultural practices (two examples in Zagreb are ARKzin and the Alternative Culture Factory). ARK is an umbrella group supporting, organizing and cooperating with civil initiatives around the region. In early 1993, through an ARK initiative, the Volunteer Project Pakrac (VPP) was established.<sup>59</sup> Its aim was social reconstruction in the small town of Pakrac in Eastern

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<sup>51</sup>Stubbs, "Social Reconstruction," 17.

<sup>52</sup>Tanner, *Croatia*, 277-283.

<sup>53</sup>Stubbs, "Social Reconstruction," 40.

<sup>54</sup>Tanner, *Croatia*, 278.

<sup>55</sup>US State Department Report, "Croatia Human Rights Practices, 1995," March 1996.

<sup>56</sup>Human Rights Watch Report, "Croatia: Impunity for Abuses in 'Operation Storm'," 1996.

<sup>57</sup>See the numerous reports by *Otvorene Oci*, the Croatian-based arm of the Balkan Peace Team, their reports are available at the following web site, <http://antenna.nl/bpt/index.html>.

<sup>58</sup>See Human Rights Watch Annual Reports for 1998 and 1999, and International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights Annual Report, 1997 for specifics of the human rights problems still facing Croatia.

<sup>59</sup>Aside from my own interviews of people involved in VPP, there are two interesting primary source materials. One, called VIP 'Volunteers Information from Pakrac', was a more or less monthly newsletter; copies can be found at the following web site: <http://www.ddh.nl/org/pakrac/index.html>. Another source is a diary kept by a Dutch Activist, Vam Kat, who worked in Croatia from 1991-1995 and was instrumental in setting up a number of projects. His nearly daily diary provides a sometimes fascinating personal account of the situation in the region and the reaction of activists to that, as well as the process of setting up and running the Volunteers

Slavonia, which had been divided, literally, by the war. With Serbs on side of the cease-fire line, Croats on the other, and UN troops in between, there was little interaction between the two communities. As typified by the wars of succession in the region, many multi-national families were split apart and living on opposite sides of the line. As well, a large number of houses and other structures, estimates suggest more than 75%, had been destroyed and there was a desperate need for both humanitarian aid and physical reconstruction. In the midst of this situation, two Croatian activists and one Dutch activist began a project of social reconstruction based on a previously tested model of international volunteer camps.

The idea of the project was long-term engagement with the communities in and around Pakrac, aimed at supporting both physical and social reconstruction. Social reconstruction was focused on fostering an atmosphere of mutual tolerance and creating spaces where local people could begin the process of healing. A key avenue to realising social reconstruction was participation in the work of physical reconstruction. The project was run by a core of activists who provided continuity for on-going projects and short-term, three-week volunteers from around the world, who came for ‘work camps’ (in all over the nearly four-year period of its existence more than 500 international volunteers, from over 30 countries, came to 43 separate work camps<sup>60</sup>). While short-term volunteers provided the physical labour (and often energy and enthusiasm), long-term volunteers coordinated the social reconstruction projects which were on-going. Volunteers received some introduction and training in Zagreb prior to arriving in Pakrac. Some of the projects run throughout the time volunteers lived in Pakrac were: work camps, small repairs program, community visits, youth club, radio programme, language classes, dance classes, play with children, young women’s group, email project, and children’s puppet theatre. These programmes were not only the inspiration of the volunteers, but grew out of living and working in and becoming part of the community, developing relationships and sharing social space. As one volunteer noted, listening was a big part of what they did, and this was tough work:

The work we do is the hardest of jobs, harder than any physical work. It takes longer hours, working, talking, listening and just being with people. It takes strength; not a physical strength but a strength of will to listen to hate words, to walk with ones head up past the sometimes hostile stares and to voice opinions that may be difficult for others to listen to or accept. Above all, it takes perseverance; pushing ahead even if it means with only small steps, continuing on when the goal seems so far away.<sup>61</sup>

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Project Pakrac. There are over 500 separate entries which can be found at the following web site, <http://memopolis.uni-regensburg.de/usertomb/memo242/public/>.

<sup>60</sup>See open letter from Goran Bozicevic, one of the project's founders, "Closing Down the Volunteer Project", at web site, <http://www.ddh.nl/org/pakrac/index.html>.

<sup>61</sup>Lynette Larson, August 1996, <http://www.ddh.nl/org/pakrac/reports/1-6-96/prelim.html>.

The project was meant to work in both communities, although this proved to be problematic. Eventually, a team did go to the Serb side of Pakrac and lived and worked there, but conditions were quite bad and establishing any kind of ongoing communication or cooperation between the two sides did not materialise. Most of the work of the project was on the 'Croatian' side. The Pakrac project was unique in the region and the model has since been deployed and developed in two other projects in Bosnia-Herzegovina (one in Travnik and one in Gornji Vakuf). One significant aspect of the project was that it served as a training ground, a kind of peace school, for local and international activists. Many of the long-term volunteers went on to be involved in other projects around the region, or to work for international agencies.<sup>62</sup>

There were two, interrelated, parts of VPP. The physical reconstruction was important work on its own, but because volunteers were assigned to work brigades organised by the town, they worked alongside members of the community. This was an opportunity to communicate, build trust, and listen. Although valuable in itself this communication was also the main means through which social reconstruction work could be done. Much of the social reconstruction work emphasised providing space for people to talk about their experiences and traumas or to forget about them for a while. Part of the goal also was to empower local people to become active. This can be seen, for example, in the email project which was established with the help of VPP but which eventually ran independently. As well as being an empowering process, it was a way for young people, especially, to feel less isolated and to engage in dialogue with people different from themselves. The work of direct mediation or reconciliation with the 'other side' was not a major focus of the project, not because the volunteers did not want to do this, but because the barriers to that kind of work were too great. In noting the reasons for closing the project one of its co-founders remarked:

Pakrac changed a lot these last years, economic reconstruction is not happening – and it's a crucial issue, not social reconstruction any more. Reconciliation and peacebuilding have to be done, initiated, and raised by local people. Foreigners, either from Zagreb or from Europe or the USA are not needed in those processes any more, sometimes even not welcomed.<sup>63</sup>

Volunteers did not hold problem-solving workshops or organise community mediation sessions. They did make use of tools such as communication skills like active listening, and they did try to offer alternative perspectives both verbally and example. How much of this could be considered analogous to a problem-solving process in the sense described above is questionable. The long-term volunteers did have access to training in conflict resolution during the whole period of the project and some were involved in training short-term volunteers in basic conflict resolution skills, among other things. It was not, then, lack of knowledge that led them to choose other foci for training and action, but their own

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<sup>62</sup>Interview with Goran Bozicevic, 19 February 1998, Zagreb, Croatia.

experiences which suggested different means. Social reconstruction from the VPP experience is only nominally related to conflict resolution practices. Most of the work they engaged in grew out of the mutuality of their presence in the community. The methods they used were not prescribed by some theoretical understandings of conflict and therefore resolution, but rather were prescribed through their experiences of living and working in Pakrac. They made use of resolution tools as they were applicable in the given situation but in terms of the broader picture of creating spaces for healing, conflict resolution processes were not employed because they were not what was needed or what would have been appropriate.

### **3.3 Info and Education Centre, Pakrac**

Two years following the start of the Pakrac project, several of its activists began, through another initiative called the Info and Training Centre Pakrac (which later became the Centre for Peace Studies, Pakrac), to offer training programs in peacebuilding. They had found that their work in Pakrac was too confined, given the needs throughout the region. The core activists shifted their priorities away from direct action, toward empowering local people to take action and organise themselves.

The idea of establishing a training program was to address the very apparent need for long-term education in peacebuilding and to help build local capacity to take on this kind of work. This initial training, called MIRamiDA Basic, was held in Pakrac in October 1995 and had eleven participants. Some of the areas covered were non-violence, civil society, communication skills, human rights, gender issues, and use of email. Using a combination of workshops, small group activities and informal discussions on key issues, MIRamiDA training

sought to combine theory, practice and social awareness and action – integrating skills of non-violent communication and active listening, with practical case studies of human rights and social reconstruction set in a broader social and political context.<sup>64</sup>

Since 1997 the training work has expanded to include more training programs - MIRamiDA Plus, Training for Trainers, and Youth MIRamiDA - and to provide more ongoing support for the peacebuilding work of groups around the region. This has taken the form, for example, of providing evaluations of the work of other projects. Although all of these training programs offer sessions on communication skills and understanding conflict, and make use of role-plays, they are not couched in the terms of conflict resolution. Analysis of conflict, for example, is a deeply personal experience and there is no attempt to encourage participants to distance themselves from their experiences or analyze their conflict as one based on human needs. Rather, they are given the opportunity to share their

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<sup>63</sup>"Closing Down the Volunteer Project".

<sup>64</sup>"Social Reconstruction and Social Development in Croatian and Slovenia," *Newsletter, No. 3*, January 1996: A project of Leeds Metropolitan University and the University of Zagreb.



experiences, and to talk about how those experiences have affected them, their families and friends, and their work (in good ways and bad). In addition to conflict resolution-like skills, other skills-training and information is also offered which focuses on action/peacebuilding in local communities. These include: coping with the media, understanding and working with local government, fund-raising, grant-writing, organisational development, networking, and so on. It should be noted that this training is provided for people working in areas where war-like conditions persist such as in Bosnia, Kosovo, and parts of Croatia. The training programme relies on a kind of loose framework of counter-discursive activism supported by critical reflections on experiences. The overall goal is not resolution, but something far more radical - to build a broader peace constituency than currently exists in the region, which provides a counter-discourse to violent nationalism and opens space in civil society for diversity and difference. This practice reflects, far more, a critical theoretical approach rather than a conflict resolution one.

### **3.4 Centre for Peace Studies, Zagreb**

During 1996 the name of the Info and Education Centre Pakrac changed to the Centre for Peace Studies, Pakrac. And in early 1997, CPS Pakrac, moved to Zagreb. Although the idea of a peace studies program in Croatia had been talked about in ARK for years, it was only in 1996 that there seemed to be a large enough pool of activists with experience in grassroots peacebuilding and training who could develop and run such an ambitious project. As well, the needs of communities seemed to be shifting away from physical reconstruction and humanitarian aid, toward creating longer-term projects for social reconstruction and peacebuilding – therefore, the need for access to information, skills, and other experiences was growing. Another factor in this ‘turn’ was the shift in interests of the activist themselves, who, after years of direct grassroots action, were showing signs of exhaustion and looking for opportunities to reflect on their experiences, learn from them in a more coherent way, and share those reflections with others. This was also related in a feeling that they were not reaching or interacting with a ‘wider public’ and that this made it less likely that they could challenge cultures of violence.

The mission of CPS was to provide a ‘safe space’ for people working on peacebuilding to “articulate, exchange and reflect upon their practical experiences.” Its educational work was based on a “participatory learning process” in which “critical questioning” was undertaken, underpinned by a commitment to “non-violence, social justice, respect for human rights, tolerance, and the appreciation of difference and diversity.” One facilitator commented, “ If we are talking about social change, I think one way we are doing something important is citizen’s empowerment... this transition from being objects into subjects, as considering themselves active agents in society, I think this is one way that

peace is created.”<sup>65</sup> The founders of the peace studies programme, run by CPS, also emphasised the importance of non-hierarchical, non-judgmental learning space which avoided providing packages of unproblematised knowledge for absorption (and regurgitation) by the participants. Facilitators wanted to avoid offering “any kind of framework, be it non-violent communication, an evangelical approach, or whatever.”<sup>66</sup> Here there was to be a space for ‘many truths’, where the focus and starting place for learning was the experiences (and localities) of the participants and facilitators. The connection made between participatory learning and peace was a fundamental aspect of the work:

If we are talking about peace it’s something unclear and undefined, then we need to be enough autonomous or independent to deal with that. I mean if its about making machines, I don’t need to be the most creative person in the world, you have a book and you can fix it. But with peace you need to have your opinion, your system of values, and your kind of ideology in a positive sense which is about building peace. So I expect an interactive approach because for me it’s an empowering approach.<sup>67</sup>

From these and other accounts a picture emerges of radical peace education which self-consciously aimed to build a vocal and active counter-discursive constituency and in the long-term to transform social spaces in Croatia (and the region). Such spaces would, for example, allow people to challenge prevalent negative attitudes towards Serbs, Muslims, and other minorities in Croatia, be critical of the government, and protest high levels of military spending and militarisation without threat of reprisals. At present, attitudes are so strongly negative and reinforced through multiple networks of social discipline and institutionalised control, that many peace activists think that if they remain unchecked or unchanged further violence is likely. This, they see, as only one aspect of a range of concerns about the general direction of life in the Balkans. Many of the activists I spoke to and worked with conceptualise the problems facing Croatian society as discursively perpetuated, and their activities to challenge and change the situation are specifically seeking to transform those discursive practices.

It is within this broader transformative framework that some skills of conflict resolution were deployed in the peace studies programme. But the tools used are deployed critically undergoing their own problematisation. This means that means of training and the philosophy that underlies it are discussed, critiqued, and (re)adapted in an on-going self-reflexive process. No MIRamiDA training, for example, is the same. Each one is situated in the specific local context within which is given, developed and changed, not only after the training is over, but also during the training, in response to participants’ needs. The aim is not to build a specific ‘correct’ and final training program, but rather to engage in a continual process of self-reflection, action, and, where appropriate, transformation. Analytic problem-

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<sup>65</sup>Interview with Marina Skrabalo, 17 February 1998, Zagreb, Croatia.

<sup>66</sup>Interview with Ana Raffai, 17 February 1998, Zagreb, Croatia.

<sup>67</sup>Interview with Goran Bozicevic, 18 February 1998, Zagreb, Croatia.

solving processes are far removed from the work of the Centre for Peace Studies. When asked about the usefulness of conflict resolution as a methodology, the activists I worked with seemed to think that they had outgrown CR – having taken what was useful for them, and evolving, through practice, more critical and transformative approaches to addressing the problems around them.

The Info and Education Centre, Pakrac, the Centre for Peace Studies, Zagreb, and to a lesser extent the Volunteer Project Pakrac, aimed to empower people to act in opening space for alternative discourses within their communities, and to work on specific problems they face (like housing, jobs, education, etc.). Problematisation of understandings of identity, violent conflict, civil politics and civil society are of central concern. More specifically, these projects have tried to share knowledge and experiences, and to work on peacebuilding skills including: organisational development, working with municipal governments, fundraising, grant writing, information technology. While conflict resolution has contributed some basic skills, the problems are far too complex to be limited to the application of conflict resolution theory and practice. Instead empowerment was emphasised, empowering people to act where they live, in creative ways that can resist and transform.

#### **4. Transformation**

Charting the progress of one strand of NGO/activist work in Croatia provides a context for considering the significance of conflict resolution. The diversity and density of the work described here suggests the need for complex, flexible and inter-subjectively produced responses to violent conflict which intend, in practice, to create emancipatory social transformation. The Croatian case-study demonstrates levels of complexity which demand more critical, self-reflexive responses to violent conflict than those offered in analytic problem-solving processes. The social reconstruction project in Pakrac, with its long-term engagement and partnership with local communities cannot be contained within theories or strategies of settlement or resolution. Locals themselves – activists who were introduced to conflict resolution methodologies through intervention training by academics – realised the limitations of this practice and developed an approach I have elsewhere called transformative peacebuilding. Their work is distinctly counter-hegemonic - counter, at least, to the culture of violence in Croatia. The pre-formed package of the theory and practice of conflict resolution, based on problematic understandings of conflict, is not especially relevant in this context. Perhaps if the goals of these activists were limited to resolution – coming to analyse their conflict as prescribed and deal with unfilled human needs through analytic or consultative problem-solving processes - CR would warrant application. What is apparent, though, from the emergent practices of the VPP to the more refined, considered and organised practices of the Centre for Peace Studies, Zagreb, is that conflict resolution *skills* have application but only when deployed as part of critical-

transformative practices like those described above. In other words they are useful when they are not 'conflict resolution' skills per se, but are deployed for the purposes of resistance and transformation.