

*CONFLICT: FUNCTIONS, DYNAMICS, AND CROSS-LEVEL INFLUENCES*¹

Proposal for NWO Strategic Theme 2007 – 2011

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INTRODUCTION

Wherever one looks, the world appears to be in turmoil and seems to struggle with a multitude of changes and social problems. Political and religious conflicts emerge in various countries, and ethnic tension causes violent eruptions in the suburbs of European cities. Technological developments and global media coverage appear to contribute to the spreading and intensification of conflict, and relatively localized conflicts exceedingly spill over to countries elsewhere in the world. The legal and illegal movements of people, goods and ideas across the globe shake up social orders and bring about or intensify insecurities and injustices. Internet and e-mail have the potential both for bringing opposing groups of people closer together and for polarizing debates. Both in the Netherlands and elsewhere the fear of terrorist attacks seems to be associated with discriminatory prejudice and stereotyping against some immigrant populations, and writers and journalists self-censor because they fear hostility and violent reactions. The multitude of changes in the workplace require employees to negotiate their conflicts of interest with their supervisors and colleagues on an almost day-to-day basis, the growing tendency to privatize and create competition to serve customers not only creates choice conflicts within citizens looking for new health insurance and better transportation, but also between competing firms, companies, and institutions providing these products and services.

Together, globalization of economy and business, and the rise of a diversified and exceedingly multicultural society appears to come together with a variety of conflicts at all levels, of different degrees of intensity and urgency, and of different form and shape. Indeed, both here and elsewhere citizens, policy makers, social workers, schoolteachers, and politicians all wonder how to deal with these disputes, with these latent conflicts and manifest outburst of violence and aggression. We see tendencies to prevent and suppress, to increase control and attempts at containment. We also see tendencies to mediate conflict, to bring rivaling groups together, and to build and exploit common ground.

But what strategies work, and when? How do social systems such as families, work groups, and entire societies benefit from conflict, learn from debate and use it to strengthen social bonds? Do different types of conflict require different strategies, and do groups with different cultural background require being approached differently? What do we know about conflict, about possible ways to manage it, about what happens if we try to suppress it? Do different actors interpret conflict issues differently, and what symbols and rituals are used to give meaning to conflict? Is conflict always bad, or does it have other, more beneficial consequences as well – and to whom? And what causes conflict to escalate, what dynamic and longitudinal characteristics can we identify and use when we need to intervene and call a halt to violence and aggression? How were conflicts dealt with in our past, or elsewhere in the world, and what lessons can be drawn from such analyses? What do practices elsewhere in the world teach us? Are similar types of conflict seen as

valuable and constructive in some parts of the world, but as bad and destructive elsewhere in the world?

Many of these and related questions have been the focus of research in many different scientific disciplines, yet rarely have they been connected to each other. Not only does this impede scientific development and prohibit creative development, it also means that we continue to design interventions based on incomplete understanding, poor assessment, and loose rather than tight theory. Obviously, inaccurate diagnosis and poorly designed or executed interventions fuel rather than mitigate conflict, and the cure may be worse than the disease. This would be particularly problematic because The Netherlands increasingly becomes the world-leading center of justice and conflict mediation. The Hague aspires to be the Justice Capital of the world, hosting the Peace Palace and the International Court of Justice, and organizing the Yugoslavia Tribunal. Dutch diplomats and conflict mediators play a prominent yet often covered and behind-the-scenes role in seeking peaceful solutions to potentially violent ethnic or territorial conflicts elsewhere in the world. Increasingly, Dutch universities and related institutions install Conflict Research Centers, to train practitioners, conflict mediators, and military personnel serving in UN-peacekeeping missions. Likewise, in other areas applied work on conflict is conducted – think of health care organizations particularly geared towards victims of war and violence, those suffering of and seeking treatment for posttraumatic stress symptoms (e.g., Trimbos, Centrum 45), institutions applying scientific insights on conflict in work organizations (e.g., TNO Arbeid; Nederlands Mediation Instituut; Min Sociale Zaken). Finally, pressures on the Dutch legal system, institutions focused on law need not to be overlooked (e.g., WODC; Min. Justitie; Raad voor de Rechtspraak). All these efforts require solid backing by academic work that can provide sophisticated insights into conflict in all its facets and complexities.

CONFLICT AS A STRATEGIC THEME: GOALS AND AMBITIONS

Although conflict research is conducted in many different academic disciplines, across disciplines scientific findings are scattered and incoherent, insights exist in isolation, and empirical results are ignored or misunderstood because of the fundamentally different research methods that were used. Continuing this piecemeal approach means we forego the possibility of connecting old and new insights on the biological and psychological mechanisms underlying the conflict process with the sociological and anthropological insights into governance and institutional shaping of policy, with the religious, historical and geographical dimensions along which conflict proceeds, and so on. It also means that we continue the well trodden path of looking for ways to prevent and manage conflict, overlooking the potentially fruitful consequences certain types and forms of conflict may have on individual functioning, organizational productivity, and international collabora-

tion. In short, a first key ambition of our call is to connect and where possible integrate existing insights and analyses of conflict and conflict-related phenomena.

Conflict as a theme not only allows for internationally renowned, in-depth, and innovative research. It also connects fundamental research to a number of relevant developments and institutions in society at large. At various levels, and with varying degrees of intensity, the Dutch government has invested heavily in the study of conflict, and its applications at the local, national, or international level of analysis. Examples include the training of UN-peacekeeping forces to negotiate and mediate in local (inter-ethnic) disputes, field-experimental work on court-annexed mediation, large-scale surveys into work place bullying and systematic mobbing behavior in organizations, mediation in schools. In addition to these initiatives, there is a host of institutes, research or practice-oriented, with a vested interest in the determinants and consequences of conflict and dispute resolution (e.g., TNO, WODC, SER, SCP, Pax Christi). A second ambition of our call is to fuel these practices and applications with solid analyses, empirically grounded insights, and sophisticated models of the conflict dynamics and outcomes.

A third and final ambition of our call is to further research excellence among Dutch scientists studying conflict and conflict-related processes and phenomena. At all levels of analysis, Dutch scholars take leading positions and are internationally recognized for their theoretical and empirical research into conflict. But conflict as a theme requires a multi-disciplinary orientation – researchers from quite different background, with quite different expertise and insights, to collaborate on scientifically groundbreaking and practically relevant topics. Thus, we call for a concerted effort to bring together ideas, insights, and empirically validated models of conflict. Ultimately, such joint research efforts should further the visibility and internationally leading role of Dutch scientists working in conflict-related areas, and should inform society about ways to benefit from, and manage its conflicts in healthy ways.

EMERGING TRENDS IN CONFLICT RESEARCH AND THEORY

“And if you calculate cost, than even in case of victory,
one’s losses greatly exceed the gains”

Desiderius Erasmus (Letters to Antonius van Bergen, Oxford, 1906)

“Conflict is the gadfly of thought. It stirs us to observation and memory. It instigates to invention. It shocks us out of sheep-like passivity, and sets us at noting and contriving....Conflict is the sine qua non of reflection and ingenuity”

John Dewey (Human Nature and Conduct, Holt & Company, 1922)

People live in and depend on groups and find protection, shelter, and opportunities to learn and to develop. However, group life and its ensuing social interdependencies also contain ample opportunity for conflict. In fact, conflict seems to emerge in all social systems at all levels of analysis. Throughout history, numerous examples exist of between as well as within-state conflicts involving religious issues, territorial claims, contradicting value and belief systems, or any combination of these causes. Technological innovation and industrialization with their concomitant division of labor and authority have contributed to contentious relations between owners (management) and workers (union), and became the foundation for a variety of highly influential political ideologies including Marxism and Keynesian economics. Closer to home, we witness cultural and identity-driven conflicts between neighborhoods, and between and within immigrant communities, within organizations between board members and the board of governors, or between colleagues working on joint tasks. Schoolchildren learn to manage playground conflicts in “safe-learning projects,” and neighbors increasingly use community mediators to help them solve their mundane yet highly disturbing disputes.

Because of the many forms conflict takes, and because conflict emerges at all levels of society, many shy away from providing an encompassing and comprehensive definition of conflict. For the purpose of this program, a working definition is that conflict is a process that begins when an individual or group perceives differences and opposition between oneself and another individual or group about interests and resources, beliefs, values or practices that matter to them. This process view can be applied to all kinds of parties – nations, organizations, groups, or individuals – and to all kinds of conflict – from latent tensions to manifest violence. Importantly, the process view leaves open how parties manage their conflicts, and what outcomes the conflict has. Of course, the process view does not exclude an analysis of conflict as situation, to directly or indirectly compare with conflict-free situations. In fact, studying conflict as a situation in which a system finds itself may well lead to important insights into the dynamics of conflict processes. We return to this below.

The process view points to the fact that conflict is potentially everywhere, which corresponds to Vilfredo Pareto's notion that within each social system – family, neighborhood, work organization, state, et cetera – participants face cooperative as well as competitive incentives: "The efforts of men are utilized in two different ways: They are directed to the production or transformation of economic goods, or else to the appropriation of goods produced by others" (Pareto, 1902). That is, people can satisfy their material desires in two basic ways – by engaging in productive activity, or by means of appropriation such as theft, confiscation, litigation, or war. Although this binary choice is surely an abstraction of the subtleties of real-life, it lends itself for very useful analyses of the environmental and institutional factors that tend to encourage one option over the other, and hence for analyses of the variables that tend to stimulate the occurrence of conflict (Hirschleifer, 2001).

In addition to this so-called mixed-motive interdependence (Schelling, 1960), people have a fundamental need to develop and maintain a positive self-view, and base their identity in part on the groups, communities, or states to which they belong (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Because a positive identity derives from social comparison processes it is relative vis-à-vis other individuals, groups, or nations. Striving for positive identity thus comes hand in hand with feeling better and superior to others and readily forms the basis for prejudice, competition, and hostility towards those seen as different from oneself or one's own group or community. Finally, and in addition to these instrumental and symbolic origins, conflicts are rooted in premature suspicion, misunderstanding, incomplete information, or lack of insight. That is, conflict may lack any instrumental or symbolic base and may be solely the result of (own and others') misinterpretation of (other's and own) intentions and actions (Hagendoorn, 1986).

Regardless its origins, the omnipresence of (latent) conflict requires people to manage conflict and to reach agreement (Deutsch, 1973; Schelling, 1960). In a way, it can even be argued that most, if not all institutions are systems to manage political, governmental, or judicial opposition and contradiction, that is, are systems to manage conflict. Conflict handling is a prerequisite for the myriad of agreements underlying close relationships, group decision-making, effective intergroup relations, and interstate coordination. High quality agreements that meet all parties' needs, and integrate all parties' aspirations, create order and stability, foster social harmony, increase feelings of self-efficacy, reduce the probability of intensification of (new) conflict, and stimulate economic prosperity. Poor agreements, or failures to agree, leave parties dissatisfied, create frustration and annoyance, disrupt social order, and drive new conflict.

Conflict research and theory development has long suffered from three major shortcomings – its one-sided focus on the detrimental and destructive consequences of conflict to

the neglect of other functions conflict can have, its tendency to take a static rather than dynamic and longitudinal approach, and its tendency to focus on one single level of analysis to the neglect of multiple levels of analysis and their cross-level influences. However, the past several years have witnessed a promising new take on conflict and conflict research. These revitalizing trends can be organized around three challenges conflict research and theory development tends to take, and which we argue should be promoted further. In the sections below we address the idea that (1) conflict theory and research will benefit greatly from a stronger focus on other than purely destructive functions of conflict, (2) more and more systematic attention should be given to the dynamic and longitudinal character of conflict, and (3) new and important questions arise when cross-level influences are taken into account.

THE MULTI-FACETED FUNCTIONS OF CONFLICT

Much of the relevance of conflict research and theory-development derives from the outcomes conflicts have. Following *Desiderius Erasmus*, conflict outcomes can be seen in terms of the utility gained or lost by participants alone and together. Utility can be narrowly defined in economic, monetary terms, or broadly defined in terms of both material (money) and non-material (love, respect) value. However, a case can be made for a much broader approach to conflict outcomes. Conflict not only affects individual or collective utility narrowly defined, but also health, wellbeing, life and/or job satisfaction, relationship commitment, community values, justice and so on.

Broadening the repertoire of proximal and distal conflict outcomes allows one to move away from the traditionally strong and rather one-sided focus on the detrimental, negative, and destructive power of conflict. As aptly summarized in the above quote from *John Dewey*, conflict may have a variety of consequences that are easily and too often overlooked. Whereas Dewey concentrates on cognitive functions, and links conflict to flexibility of thought and creative performance, many other functions have been discovered or can be explored. First, conflict is the key driver of change at the societal and group level – without conflict no change, and no change without conflict (e.g., Coser, 1956; Moscovici, 1985). For example, the formation of the Dutch state and many of its current institutions is partly the result of sometimes rather violent conflicts in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. Likewise, conflict within work teams increases their innovative capacity, helping them to solve problems, and leads them to make better decisions. Second, conflict helps to define boundaries, and clarifies who and what belongs where. It leads to (re)defined social identities, but also to the disappearance of certain group characteristics, lifestyles or institutions, languages, or specific livelihood strategies. Third, and finally, conflict relates to long-term health decline and trauma, to the quality of subsequent interaction processes, to the extent to which agreed-upon contracts are

implemented, or the innovations that the social system creates and implements. In short, conflict brings creative potential that helps families, organizations, ethnic groups and entire states to (re)define themselves, to change and to adapt, and to innovate and create.

While these and other outcomes of conflict have been recognized and, to some degree, been documented in a variety of scientific disciplines (e.g., Blok, 2001; De Dreu & Van de Vliert, 1997; Nirenberg, 1996), further integration, organization, and development of these insights will foster a better understanding of conflict in general, and its societal, group, and personal functions in particular. In doing so, it would be useful to take into consideration the basic fact that to participants as well as more or less neutral observers the consequences of conflict are grounded in interpretative processes. Historical data, economic, cultural as well as social or political differences are interpreted and combined in identity negotiations. For example, the mere labelling of conflict (e.g., as “difference of opinion” versus “power struggle”) and their participants (e.g., “freedom fighters” versus “terrorists”) can have important implications for the interventions and historical meaning attributed to conflict. Thus, in addition to incorporating more, and more diverse sets of functions conflict research and theory would benefit from closer consideration of the interpretative aspects of conflict.

Critical for our understanding of the multi-faceted consequences of conflict, is that the existence of conflict should be differentiated from the way conflict is handled. Conflict is often seen as a fight, a struggle, or the clashing of opposed principles (e.g., Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1983). However, a proper analysis of conflict and its different functions requires an explicit distinction between the *presence or emergence of conflict* and *the way conflict is managed*. Conflict may emerge over the allocation, the accessibility, or the distribution of (perceived) entitlements to scarce resources such as water, land, money, individual or collective security and safety. Alternatively, conflicts may emerge over truth and correctness, and involve a search for the correct or the best solution to a problem, solving discrepant views about worldly states, about predicting the future, and so on. Finally, conflicts may emerge with regard to norms and values. Such value conflict is about proper and improper, about good and bad, moral and immoral, and they emerge because parties adhere to different religions, have different cultural background, or need to defend and enhance their identities.

The distinction between conflict over resources, over information, and over values should not be taken as if all conflicts are about one of these issues. In fact, mixtures of conflict issues often emerge when conflict intensifies or lingers on and one key defining feature of the dynamic nature of conflict is that its content changes and transforms. Although many conflicts are thus about resources and values, or about cognitions and values, or even about all three types at the same time, it is not so much what the conflict is about, as well as what parties do with the conflict – how they react and manage their conflicts. Do they

employ cooperative strategies oriented towards accepting and incorporating other's will, or trying to come up with a mutually acceptable solution? Do they compete and try to impose their will on the other side, using threats and bluffs, persuasive arguments, and positional commitments? Or do they withdraw from the situation, reduce the importance of the issues, and attempt to suppress thinking about the issues? Does it matter how people manage what type of conflict for the consequences it has? These types of questions have been scarcely addressed, and as a result we have poor understanding of what types of conflict, along with what conflict management strategies have types of consequences. Answering these and related questions represents the first general challenge for the next generation of conflict research and theory development. This challenge is further developed in several of the research programs we develop, most notably in the programs 1 (Ethnic conflict in local communities and societies) and 2 (conflict around work and organizations).

CONFLICT AS A DYNAMIC AND LONGITUDINAL PROCESS

Much of the writing and thinking about conflict, including many of the examples thus far, is static in the sense that the true dynamics of conflict are rarely taken into account. Too often is conflict viewed as an event in itself, to the exclusion of its roots, its longitudinal development, and its post-conflict settlement processes and procedures. Exciting developments worldwide, including the various "truth-finding" courts in (south) Africa, and reconciliation movements that emerge following exceedingly hostile and violent ethnic wars, are taken into account only recently and are scarcely addressed in combination with other conflict literatures than those on transitional justice itself. Many of the great generators of conflict (and obstacles to change) have to do with historic formations like the state in which social and cultural capital is invested. These states not only differ concerning their formation, but also concerning their position in the (continually changing) world system of states, and these have an impact on the occurrence, duration and intensity of (intra-state and inter-state) conflicts. For example, the outcomes of episodes of activated ethnic conflicts, including institutional re-arrangements, set the conditions for a next episode of ethnic conflict, and so on. In other words, conflicts are dynamic and embedded in several layers of time (e.g., Braudel, 1947): (1) *structure* – those aspects of the situation that are fixed and hardly change (e.g., the geographical surroundings and climatic aspects within which events take place); (2) *conjuncture* – those aspects of the situation that do change, but at a relatively slow pace (e.g., the religious make-up of particular regions in the world); and (3) *events* – those aspects of the situation that change rapidly (e.g., the conflict arising around cartoons of Mohammed published in Danish newspapers).

Apart from ignoring the different “layers of time” few consider the post-settlement consequences of interpersonal conflicts (Beersma & De Dreu, 2005). Researchers stop when conflicts are settled, and tend to ignore the more distal consequences in terms of individual health, group interaction and performance, and so on. Clearly, to contribute to societies’ need and desire to intervene in conflict situations, we need a more encompassing and systematic analysis of the dynamic and longitudinal character of conflict, including attention to post-conflict developments. Such insight will inform us whether interventions aimed at prevention and mitigation, or directed at controlled stimulation, indeed can improve the quality and durability of social systems within which conflict emerges, or are in fact counterproductive (see also research program 5 on conflict-escalations, justice, and intervention).

The relative neglect of the dynamic and longitudinal nature of conflict allows for closer attention to the tendency among some actors to prefer continuation rather than resolution of the conflict. Lawyers and consultants who work on an hourly basis may be motivated to fuel rather than mitigate conflict because the conflict provides them with income. In some neighbourhoods adolescents derive income and status from ethnic or community conflicts (e.g., by offering protection) and may prefer to see the conflict continue rather than end. A final example would be the economies of war with heavy investments in arms- and drug-trade, or vested interests in oil, diamond and timber, where multiple parties benefit from prolonged rather than resolved conflict. Continuation of conflict may be in some parties’ self-interest, and a longitudinal orientation on conflict may facilitate better understanding of these understudied processes.

Finally, it should be emphasized that stronger focus on the dynamic and longitudinal character of conflict forces one to consider such questions as “do conflicts evolve in basically the same form, or can different sequences and time-lagged forms be distinguished?”, “what determines the particular dynamical nature of conflict, and what determines that certain conflicts linger on for long periods of time whereas others appear to be characterized by short moments of violent eruptions followed by longer periods of relative quietness?” Does the nature of the conflict play a role, and to what extent is the economic, cultural and religious context a critical moderator of the dynamics of group and societal conflict?” And the other way around, how does conflict impact the use of resources, as well as the meaning of identity, ethnicity and religion? And to what extent can conflict become ritualized, as we see in encounters between soccer hooligans, hells’ angels and street gangs as much as in some forms of ethnic or religious strife (see also programs 1 on Ethnic conflict in local communities and societies; and program 6 on Religion and Conflict)?

CONFLICT EMERGES AT, AND CROSSES DIFFERENT LEVELS OF ANALYSIS

Be it about interstate war, about organizational disputes, or about community conflicts, research often remains within one level of analysis. Some study interpersonal conflict interaction using game-theoretic models, others use discourse analysis to understand the media coverage of community conflicts, and still others may resort to quantitative text analysis to get at the heart of religious conflicts in ancient history. Our examples thus far revealed that indeed conflict emerges at all levels of society – between individuals in one family or (organizational) team (interpersonal level), between groups or organizations, between ethnic groups in cities or countries (intergroup level), and between countries or coalitions of countries (interstate level) – and that the study of conflict spans all these levels of analysis and thus bridges many areas of scientific inquiry. Some conflict theories explicitly deal with, or can be readily applied to such multiple levels-of-analysis perspective. For example, *Game Theory* and related work in behavioral economics and psychology (e.g., Camerer, 2003; De Cremer, Zeelenberg, & Murnighan, 2006; Schelling, 1960) covers conflicts of interest as they emerge at the interpersonal level, and can be applied to intergroup conflict as well as to political conflicts between (coalitions of) states. Likewise, social identity theory and related work on self-categorization principles covers value and identity conflicts as they emerge between groups (Turner, 1987), and can be applied to interpersonal and small group situations (Ellemers, Haslam, & De Gilder, 2003). Finally, ethnographic inquiry into the meaning and everyday practices of conflict increasingly become multi-level and multi-sited in order to discover, for example, how global discourses on the role of women in peace-building influence the practices of conflict in Southern Sudanese villages (Hilhorst & van Leeuwen, 2005).

Although much remains to be done at specific levels of analysis, interesting and thought-provoking issues emerge when we consider cross-level influences and interactions—how do processes at one level of analysis influence processes at another level of analysis. A prominent example involves the massacres in Srebrenica following the withdrawal of UN-Peacekeeping forces out of the Safe Areas. A careful analysis shows how the decisions and actions taken by key individuals are closely intertwined with, informed by, and inspired upon larger movements both in other parts of former Yugoslavia, in the European Union, and in the United Nations. Furthermore, many of these decisions cannot be fully understood without including into the analysis the historical past of the region, its multitude of religions and previous ethnic, cultural and religious wars. Seemingly irrelevant or even blatantly ignorant decisions made sense when these other levels, and their influences, were taken into account (www.srebrenica.nl). A second example of cross-level influences involve situations where conflict in one area of the world (e.g., Israelis vs. Palestinians) gives meaning to, and fuels conflicts people elsewhere in the world (e.g., Moroccan youth in Amsterdam) fight with other groups within their society, including the official government. A third example would be that state-level changes in laws and social security

affects the power relations in work organizations and thus the ways managers handle disputes with their employees. Related, interpersonal conflict handling often takes place within the *shadow of the law*, so that specific laws and regulations affect the ways people manage their day-to-day disputes. Finally, and the other way around, an example of cross-level influences would be the heated competition and conflict between two world-famous laboratories may speed up the scientific discovery of energy-saving devices, thereby reducing territorial conflicts in oil-rich areas (see e.g., program 2 on Conflict around work and organizations; program 4 on Resource and Territorial Conflict; and program 5 on conflict-escalation, justice, and interventions).

PROGRAMS OF RESEARCH

The three trends in scientific research and theory development (multifaceted functions, dynamic nature, cross-level influences) can be further substantiated in a series of more specific research programs centered around topical areas and thematic facets of conflict where new, innovative, and practically relevant research and theory-development is needed. This section describes these six programs of research in more detail.

1. ETHNIC CONFLICT IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND SOCIETIES

The ethnic, religious and cultural diversity of many societies, including the Netherlands is increasing due to migration and the admission of asylum seekers and refugees. Increased diversity in turn increases the likelihood of latent and manifest conflicts based on ethnic, religious and cultural interests and identities, especially in the larger cities where most immigrant communities come to reside. Latent conflicts may emerge between the host population and minority groups, or among the minority groups, and may induce conflicts in families, schools and in workplaces as well as manifest violence in public places. These processes occur at many places and seem to have a similar nature, as is illustrated by ethnic conflicts in Africa, India, Indonesia, the Russian Federation and the Balkans.

An important cause of such conflicts is that ethnic, religious, and cultural differences coincide with different preferences, interests and resource access and availability. Ethnic minority groups generally occupy lower socio-economic positions, which may lead to conflicts of interests with the less-educated segment of the native population. However, ethnic, cultural and religious differences may also be a direct reason for value conflict, because they imply different views on relevant individual, social and political goals and on social relations. In addition, ethnic, religious and cultural identities can be made salient, used and mobilized, so that people choose sides in conflicts of interests and values, by which small-scale latent conflicts may develop into large and manifest inter-group or

community conflicts. A relevant question is how spontaneous and circumstantially activated identifications interact with the ethnic, religious and cultural categorizations used by political leaders, leading to communal conflicts. The study of the history of ethnic, religious and cultural conflicts can teach us which factors are important, how they connect and how conflicts spread out from the inter-personal and inter-group level to the societal level and what the dynamics of such conflicts are. Conversely such studies can teach us how higher level conflict affects the lives of groups and individuals. In addition, comparative studies of cities and countries can shed light on important explanatory mechanisms behind the emergence, existence and development of various kinds of conflicts.

The most vulnerable areas for ethnic, religious and cultural conflicts are the larger cities, where many first and second-generation immigrants are concentrated. Poverty, lack of adequate education, inadequate language proficiency and forms of spatial and social segregation of ethnic groups seem to contribute to the likelihood of conflicts; but how the effects of these conditions differ among minority groups, cities, regions, and countries is unclear. Other conditions that may affect the likelihood of conflict are the economic development of a country, region, or city, the scarcity of local, regional or national economic opportunities, the attitudes of the host populations, the relative size of the different groups and communities, or their concentration, the role of the (welfare) state, and the characteristics of the immigrants; but little is known about which conditions are sufficient, necessary, or aggravating.

European countries have strong differences in institutional arrangements and policies, but the problems of communal violence in all of these countries lead us to question whether these policies are as significant for the integration of immigrants and the prevention of ethnic, religious and cultural conflicts. Tensions are strongly influenced by exclusionist reactions within the host country that are often manipulated by extremist parties for political gain. In turn, decreased tolerance for religious and cultural differences and politics based on exclusion and racism may provoke a rise in religious fundamentalism among migrant communities. Finally, it is unclear what the relative importance is of culture and religious beliefs (though these are perhaps inseparable) in the resistance to change and integration, compared to the relative duration of residence in the host country, the transmission of values over generations, and the effect of education in the host language and culture. How should governments choose between supporting integration rather than maintaining and embracing cultural diversity? Will the religious culture of the immigrant groups eventually achieve some fusion with host societies? And under which conditions will the difference in religious culture further bolster itself into radicalism and manifest conflict, and if so, where and among which groups?

Insights might be derived from the study of traditionally multi-ethnic societies (India, Yugoslavia, the Soviet Union), which are natural laboratories to study the emergence as

well as the prevention and solution of ethnic, religious and cultural conflicts. Little is known about the dynamics of ethnic, religious and cultural conflicts and the ways to prevent and control them; also because of the diversity of the type of conflicts under this label. A community conflict in a city may start because a family member of one ethnic group has broken a cultural rule of a family member of another ethnic group, and the larger communities of these families may be mobilized because community leaders have specific political aspirations rather than want to solve the conflict. Which intervention methods are effective to prevent such chains of events leading to conflict? Which methods are adequate at the community level, the regional or the national level? Does previous conflict prevent new conflicts because lessons have been learned, or does previous conflict stimulate new conflicts because of older hatreds and revenge?

2. CONFLICT AROUND WORK AND ORGANIZATIONS

Conflict, work, and organizations are so strongly intertwined that some have concluded that organizations without conflict do not exist, and that conflict cannot exist without people being interdependent for their task achievements. This close connection between conflict and collaborative work has become even stronger due to a variety of changes in the world of work and organizations. Immigration and specialization create a more diverse workforce in terms of cultural and ethnic terms, as well as in terms of specialty, educational background, and expertise. The continuing tendency to organize work in (semi-autonomous) teams creates greater interdependency among employees, undermines the traditional power relations and hierarchical command-control typical of traditional organizations, and requires higher levels of self-management and self-regulation. Finally, globalization and increasing pressure to adapt to changing market forces intensifies between-firm competition and requires new forms of control and governance, as well as a constant pressure towards innovation and change. All in all, at the interpersonal, group, and between-organization levels of analysis conflicts in and around work and organizations intensify and become more rather than less frequent.

Traditionally, the consequences of conflict in and around organizations are considered in terms of team and unit performance and effectiveness, in terms of organizational change and survival rate, and in terms of individual employee health and wellbeing (including turn-over and absenteeism). Only recently has research considered other functions of conflict, including possible consequences for creativity and innovation at the individual and team level, and learning at the organizational level. Nevertheless, many questions remain. For example, it is unclear whether conflict directly causes creative performance and innovation, or whether creative performance and innovation are a mere by-product of the conflict process. In addition, it is quite plausible that innovation and organizational change in and by itself cause conflict, although these conflicts may be fundamentally

different in nature from those that laid the foundation for creative performance and innovation in the first place. Apart from the issue of creativity and innovation, little if any attention has been given to conflict's consequences for the (re)structuring of organizational design, for the formation and dissolution of groups and networks – both formal and informal – within and between organizations, to name but a few alternative functions conflict in and around work and organizations can have. In short, much can be learned by expanding our focus and to include the multifaceted nature of conflict's functions in work and organizations.

Because of the multifaceted functions of conflict in and around work and organizations, research is needed to better understand the dynamic and longitudinal character of workplace conflicts. Although most would agree that conflict is a dynamic process, most studies in this area take a rather static, transitional perspective and do not incorporate the longitudinal and dynamic nature of conflict. Likewise, although there is substantial knowledge about the ways employees, managers, or even entire units and departments manage conflicts, we have relatively poor understanding of the dynamics of interaction patterns that take place between individual or groups while managing their conflicts. As a result, we still need answers to such questions as “why do employees find it so difficult to manage their day-to-day conflicts?” and “do recurring conflicts between labor and management institutionalize and why do ritualized traditions emerge?” “why do conflicts between individuals run a more constructive and less intense course than workplace conflicts that involve groups or even entire units and departments?” Related, a whole series of questions can be asked about the way organizations build and maintain systems for conflict management (Alternative Dispute Resolution), the use of mediation and arbitration to solve workplace conflicts, and the role of organizational hierarchies and decision making power. For example, we do not know whether it helps to channel and structure patterns of influence and power struggles in an organization or whether this fuels resistance? We know little about the role of internal networks and patterns of mutual monitoring and peer pressure in curtailing internal and external conflict? And we know little about the way the structure of conflict impacts its dynamic development. That is, both small and large-scale organizational change involves conflict between those who desire change and those who seek to maintain the status quo and this involves quite different dynamics compared to more symmetrical conflicts in which both parties desire change albeit in different directions.

Finally, most research into conflict in and around work and organizations is located at one single level of analysis (individual, group, organization) and fails to take into account cross-level influences. Many models, theories and descriptions treat organizations, firms, and formal and informal groups therein as unitary actors. These actors however are obviously not unitary. Decisions are made - or emerge - within a complex internal structure of governance (election, delegation, representation, leadership, networks). These

structures vary across firms (degree of centralization), organizations (degree of accountability), and groups (formal or informal). A central question then is whether there is a systematic relationship between governance structures and the likelihood of conflict or its character (e.g., external or internal, violent or non-violent)? Evidence suggests for example that participative, democratic as well as outright authoritarian systems are less conflict prone than intermediate governance structures, but it is unclear why this is the case? Is conflict the cause or the consequence of this relationship? Or is there another mediating factor such as economic growth or the availability of resources?

3. FRAMING CONFLICT IN CULTURE, POLITICS, AND SCIENCE

Thus far, conflict is predominantly defined as a process. An alternative, complementary view derives from philosophical analyses, foundational research, and discourse analysis. It focuses on conflict as a “situation perceived by the actors or the observer as a discord (dissensus, *différend*) between interacting agents or powers vis-à-vis an end situation of incompatibility” (Karskens, 1995). This perspective draws attention to the fact that conflicts are perceived and, as such, [subjective] experiences that are susceptible to framing and construal processes. They take shape in the form of communication as shared social representations and thus become a truth of their own. In this research program we take as point of departure the observation that states of conflict have cultural, philosophical, and political aspects and entail constructive/construal processes – Napoleon may be a hero to one culture, but a terrible and cruel aggressor to another. Or, as Ross (1983) puts it, “conflicts are rooted both in interests and in participants’ observations of events and other actors.” Within this program of research we concentrate not only on framing and construal processes in conflict as a phenomenon in and of itself, but also on their consequences – both positive and negative.

Sometimes the framing of conflict is manipulated explicitly by one or more participants and sometimes construal processes evolve over time, as the social, cultural and economic environment changes, and when new parties and new media become engaged. Conflicting parties may frame the conflict differently, with one party constructing it in terms of clashing religious and/or cultural values, whereas their counterparts, or outside observers, would frame the dispute as a battle over scarce resources. Framing takes shape in symbols such as texts, speeches, conversations, and symbolic actions and (ritual) events. Sometimes these written and spoken construal processes are underscored and accompanied, or even fully replaced by less obvious expressions – through music, poetry, and expressive arts. This triggers questions like “What drives construal processes in conflict situations?” “What role does language play, how is language used to frame and reframe the conflict itself, the participants, and their respective roles?” “What is the ruling discourse, and are certain conflict parties – e.g., those with power – more likely to direct the discourse and to

steer interpretative processes?" "What is the role of media through which construals are evoked, the perspective they take and the norms and values from which they perceive conflict dynamics in their own, or in foreign cultures?" More general historical and anthropological questions are in this respect; "How does the framing change over time, as the conflict develops, or even after the conflict has settled?" "Do cultures differ in the way they frame conflicts, in the way they talk and write about it – and how does the framing by nations' leaders affect citizens, their motivation to join armed forces or their aversion of the outside enemy? From a historical, analytical and hermeneutical perspective, one may even ask what sort of concept conflict is, what sort of science conflict analysis is, and what the place of conflict in human society and nature is. Because humans – conflict parties, outside observers and scientists alike – are subject to, and engaged in construal, framing, and interpretation of conflict.

Apart from the question what drives construal and framing processes in conflict, we need to improve our understanding of the consequences of these processes for a variety of possible outcomes. How does differential framing by opposing conflict parties influence the conflict resolution process, and how can outside interventions facilitate the development of common understanding and shared (rather than unshared) framing? How do construals of conflict direct the search for solutions? In the case of a conflict constructed as a religious and sacred battle driving for solutions grounded in values, the very same conflict can be reconstructed as a battle over resources driving for solutions grounded in integrative (win-win) negotiations. Does the reframing of a conflict – taking a new and unexpected angle to analyze and understand – promote creative solutions? Is it that specific forms of framing cause eruptions of violence or, to the contrary, de-escalating processes? In short, how do conflict framing and construal processes influence understanding, creative processes, dispute resolution, and economic value creation in conflicts.

4. RESOURCE AND TERRITORIAL CONFLICTS

Scenarios for the 21st century often evoke the image of increasing large-scale wars over water and oil. Indeed, competition for natural resources is a major challenge of our times. Beyond the obvious conflicts driven by the strong economic gains from extraction of mineral and petrochemical resources, access to land, water and living resources is an important factor in most conflicts. Particularly in the South the food, forests, wildlife, fisheries and energy sources that are bound to land and water form the economic base. Avoidance of future conflicts revolves on negotiation of equitable means for the sustainable exploitation of these natural resources.

Resource conflicts occur both in conditions of scarcity as in conditions of relative abundance: the most vehement conflicts take place in resource rich areas. Rather than solving social problems, the exploitation of oil reserves in Africa, for instance, widens the gap between governments and their people and increases the chance of intra-state conflict. The relation between conflicts and resource use is often mutual and complex. Competition over resources can fuel violent conflict, and conflict creates conditions in which local resource disputes can easily escalate.

Resource conflicts occur at all levels: local, national and regional. As many resources have multiple uses, local conflicts for exploitation of natural resources are common. Within this complex arena, international development policy attempts to target and assist the poor and disadvantaged. Poor communities are often marginalised: both in terms of living in risky and remote areas subject to extraction and in terms of their political, social and economic voice.

Conflicts over resources are intimately related to questions of governance. The deeply political character of claims on resources renders manifest divergence of interests between those in power and the powerless, those having entitlements to resources and those that have not, between genders, ethnic groups, etc. Conflicts can be as much the result of failing governance as of friction between plural and co-existing regimes of resource governance. Interestingly, cross-border agreements on common resource use often continue to be upheld even during periods of violent conflict. This points to the potential of resource utilisation schemes to ease inter-group tension.

Research, policymaking and interventions have so far addressed problems in natural resource management from various angles. Mainstream thinking at this moment is dominated by ideas derived from the public choice and New Institutional Economics paradigm, environmental entitlements going back on ideas of the economist Sen (1977), and the evolutionary theory of land rights. Though there has been ample attention for resource conflict, these paradigms tend to focus on the integrative character of social processes and institutions connected with sustainable natural resource management, rather than the conflicts and diverging interests between various stakeholders and the inherent violence embodied by many policies sponsored by states and international agencies of various sort. Underlying many conflicts are the rightful claims of people to a decent means of living.

Considerable research in the social and natural sciences has focused on describing conflict and the consequences for exploitation of natural resources. Much can be learned from understanding and analysing historical trends concerning past successes and failures relating to policies and management of natural resources. Exploring the linkages between manifestations of resource conflict at different levels, from local to global, can further

enhance our understanding of the dynamics involved. Multi-disciplinary analyses how resource conflicts spill over to other domains of life, and how they are legitimized and find explanation in the eyes of different groups of people is another promising venture for research.

Work within this theme will focus on the following areas: (1) Exploring the relation between conflict over (use of) natural resources and (more) equitable use of natural resources; (2) Exploring the conditions of resource regimes that enhance or minimize the likelihood of violent conflict; (3) Establish how increasing scarcity of resources affects the governability of societies and where conflict leads to unexpected and unwanted degradation and exploitation of natural resources that in many cases can be used to fuel violent conflict; (4) Understanding the dynamics of resource conflict in terms of linkages between different governance regimes (of different level and different nature), and in terms of their relation with (discourses) of other types of conflict.

5. CONFLICT-ESCALATION, JUSTICE, AND INTERVENTION

Conflict is part and parcel of all forms of social life, and quite difficult to manage. In fact, often conflict escalates into competitive cycles of exceedingly hostile exchange. For example, marital disputes about division of household chores may end in wife battering, parliamentary debates sometimes end in shouting games and fist fighting, work teams manage their task-related conflicts so that their effects are as detrimental as the more self-relevant conflicts about deeply held political values and beliefs, and interstate trade-negotiations escalate into violent and encompassing war. But why is managing conflict so difficult? Why do mild disputes about seemingly unimportant matters so readily escalate into heated conflict? Why is it that our counterparts so often take our comments much more personal than we intended them to be? Why do nations have difficulty solving their disputes in constructive ways, and instead resort to violence and war. What psychological and sociological, economic, and geographical factors conspire to intensify and escalate conflict? Is conflict escalation the default and bound to happen, or is it a specific state that emerges only when specific factors are present – and what are these escalatory conditions? And given that conflict escalates so easily, what interventions can be used and have been proven to be (in)effective. Under what conditions is conflict intervention meaningful, and why are certain intervention techniques more effective than others?

It is these types of questions around the escalation of conflict, and around possible interventions, that are the focus of this research program. The program of research seeks to expand and integrate insights into conflict escalation and interventions that have been developed in multiple disciplines and consider several levels of analysis. At the intrapersonal level research is needed to understand better what biological and

personality factors contribute to the escalation of conflict, and how certain intervention techniques influence the resolution process. At the (inter)group level important questions remain regarding the way intergroup relations, and their historical embeddedness, predispose towards escalatory spirals once conflict emerges.

The process of conflict escalation and resolution is strongly tied to the presence or absence of fair and just procedures. For instance, when parties in a conflict have some control over the process of conflict resolution it seems more likely that the procedure will be judged to be fair and just, and as a consequence, that the conflict will be managed, moderated, or resolved (than when the parties are denied process control). Similarly, when all parties are treated in the same objective and respectful way, procedural justice and, thus, conflict resolution are more probable than they are when parties are treated differently, or when one or more parties are treated with disrespect. Thus, justice in general and procedural justice in particular may positively affect the resolution of conflicts, and these concepts therefore deserve attention.

Related to this is the role that social norms may have in the arising and management of conflict. Because social norms promote predictability of behavior and reduce uncertainty they can serve as a lubricant to social and economic interactions. As such social norms may advance productive interaction and reduce the scope for conflict, as they foster convergence of expectations and facilitate coordination. Justice and social norms thus can help to perceive conflicts as opportunities. However, darker and much more neglected side of social norms is that they may also provide ammunition for conflict. Social norms do not have the character of a complete and precise set of rules and more often than never there is considerable freedom of interpretation and application. In such cases people have a self-serving tendency to interpret situation such that the norm prescribes a course of action that is line with their self-interest. Furthermore, people tend to conflate what is fair, with what benefits themselves, and this contributes to the escalation of the conflict, which then becomes increasingly difficult to manage and resolve because not just interests differ, but both parties perceive legitimacy, justice, fairness and morality to be on their side. Finally, a fairness rule or social norm may clash with other sources of information (such as distributive fairness), and in such circumstances parties may find themselves faced with the difficult task of deciding what source of information one receive the greatest weight.

In short, procedural justice and related social norms may both de-escalate as well as escalate conflict. This insight applies to procedures that are explicitly intended to settle large-scale conflicts under the common denominator of transitional justice, and encompasses political purges, trials of crimes of war and against humanity, procedures for compensation of victims, restitution of looted properties, and administrative dealing with damage caused by predecessor-regimes. The way in which successor-regimes are choosing to deal with such issues are strongly subject to social and ideological norms of the time, and have both a

conflict-resolving and conflict-generating potential.

Interventions in conflict situations are usually taken to de-escalate the conflict and to bring parties closer. Typical instances of such conflict interventions are described in other research programs on conflict in and around organizations (e.g., Alternative Dispute Resolution) and on justice and social norms in conflict (e.g., third party interventions, mediation). And whereas these types of intervention more or less de-escalate conflict, other types of intervention easily escalate rather than de-escalate. Consider the score of so-called humanitarian (but often military) interventions driven by UN ambitions, by NGO's; by journalists trying to influence politics and public opinion to 'do something' (journalism of attachment); and by belligerents who provoke their adversaries into committing gross human rights violations to force the international community to intervene. Governments and international organizations, thus forced to intervene, subsequently fuel rather than mitigate the conflict because, first of all, military interventions take place at too small a scale so that it, in fact, enhances the warring parties' access to weapons and humanitarian aid. Second, such intervening actors often act according to their own rationales and framing of the conflict, rather than to the realities of the conflict as perceived by the region and cultures involved. Third, and finally, the execution of the intervention is primarily done by twenty year olds who lack the proper training to take the complex decisions required in a cultural context that is often completely foreign to them.

These observations ask for the study of examples from the past of protectorates, peace-enforcing, peace-building and civil-military cooperation (civic) to establish optimum moments and strategies for conflict intervention and resolution. They also suggest a host of questions regarding the (in)effectiveness of other, more traditional forms of conflict intervention, and requires one to wonder whether, and when, conflict intervention in and by itself constitutes an escalating factor in the dispute resolution process. Finally, it points to the cross-level influences that occur when interventions of some sort (e.g., providing humanitarian aid) turns latent intergroup conflict into manifest outburst of violence

6. CONFLICT AND RELIGION

In spite of an ongoing secularisation and modernization process the public relevance and visibility of religion is much greater than expected by many observers some decades ago. Indeed, many areas in the world experience a sort of insurgence of religion and a revival of its political and social role. Almost everywhere, this insurgence is accompanied by local conflicts, often with far reaching consequences. Religious diversity on a local level is associated with intergroup conflict, and poses unexpected challenges to (secular) systems of governance and politics. At the same time, religions do not only incite conflict, but play

a role in conflict *prevention* as well (cf., the 'ambivalence of the sacred'). Thus, religion and conflict are closely intertwined and of increasing societal relevance.

These contemporary developments have led to an increased interest in the history of the relation between conflict and religion as well. But even though the scholarly attention for conflicts at various levels of analysis is considerable, sound knowledge about many aspects of the religious processes involved, both in historical and contemporary respect is still lacking. Research into Srebrenica demonstrated that to explain such conflicts, multilevel research is needed, in which empirical studies (interviews with actors) and historical research into long-term religious history of conflict. What is needed is research into religion and conflict that is undertaken in a multi-disciplinary way and on a more than one level, connecting the local and the global aspects and synchronic and diachronic aspects. To determine the best way to resolve a religious conflict insight into the precise role of religious groups and individual actors in such conflicts is needed. As promising fields we distinguish the following:

First of all, research into the *role played by religions in conflicts with apparent religious dimensions*. Do religions in particular settings merely legitimize conflicts which have in reality cultural, economic or political roots or are they the cause of a conflict? This question can be asked, for example, with regard to the recent conflict about the Danish cartoons in which Muhammad was among other things, depicted as a terrorist. There may have been a clear immediate and local cause (viz. the cartoons in question), but it may be doubted that the said conflict has religious roots. Similar questions can be posed with regard to (armed) historical and recent conflicts such as the Crusades, the conflicts between radical Islamist groups such as al-Qa'ida, and Western countries, the conflict in Northern Ireland, in Nigeria, the Balkan, the conflict between the Japanese Buddhist movement of Aum Shrinrikyo and Japanese society resulting in the attack on the Tokyo subway in 1995, between Hindu nationalist movements and Muslims in India, and in between Muslims and Christians in Indonesia. More research is needed.

The second field refers to a problem raised in a number of recent historical studies, viz. whether particular types of religion are conflict-prone and more violent than other types. In fact, historical research points to monotheism as more conflict prone because of its inherent intolerance that appears to be connected to the truth claims of monotheist groups vis-à-vis other groups. Monotheisms are seen as a 'counter religions' that behave intolerantly towards all other religions (Jan Assman). Other scholars, such as Rodney Stark, however, stress 'positive' aspects of the discordant character of monotheism. He draws attention to intriguing the relation between conflict, religious diversity and social renewal and argues that monotheism played a decisive role in the abolition of slavery and as dynamic force in history.

In the third place, the contemporary conflicts between secularist and anti-secularist ('fundamentalist') groups and their historical precedents deserve closer study. The main questions here seem *in the first place* the interpretation of the discordant relations and processes between particular religious political, social movements, fundamentalists or religious nationalists, and secularist groups and institutions, in particular the pre-modern and modern state. In particular, it is needed to have better insight into the question under which circumstances 'fundamentalisms' come into being and in which circumstances groups start to radicalise, viz. support a Manichean division of the world into good and bad forces and engage in a struggle (armed and/or spiritual) to overcome this evil (for example in eschatological movements, messianic movements). What is the role of power/powerlessness and injustice which many 'fundamentalists' experience as a violation of the divine order and divine will and which they want to restore? How do conversions to such movements occur? Which policies and strategies do they follow? In the second place, it may be asked whether such movements may, sometimes in spite of themselves (since they often appear to aim at the conservation of a status quo, or a return to a status quo ante), be at the root of an unexpected social and religious renewal.

In the fourth place we wish to draw attention to questions about prevention, management and resolution of conflicts with a religious dimension. According to a number of observers, religions are sources for the resolution of conflicts. Due to the fact that believers often claim they interact with meta-empirical beings (gods, angels, spirits), religious traditions present particular problems when it comes to the management of conflict. Is it possible and desirable to use the instruments and resources that religious groups themselves develop, such as particular ritual procedures for determining sin and sanction, and for achieving reconciliation? Which religious values can be instrumental? Which role adherents of religious traditions play in peace processes? Does the study of the role of religions in conflicts yield applicable knowledge about conflict resolution and can it yield strategies in this respect?

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