Volume XXIV - (2023)

A Transformative Approach to Conflict and Violence

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Since human beings have always waged conflicts, they have also always engaged in different ways to resolve them. Every society has settled violence using a variety of practices such arbitration, conciliation, retorsion, and reprisal. Those approaches sometimes end a conflict but do not prevent the conflict from recurring,as the conflict has not been addressed at its roots. This article explores the transformative approach to conflict and violence, which leads the parties in conflict to come to an integrative solution that preserves the dignity of all.

In general, conflicts arise because human beings have fundamental differences and live in diverse social contexts. In fact, the wide range of potential differences among people living in communities, often with diverse interests, is a catalyst for conflict. In any human society, the absence of conflict signals the absence of meaningful interaction between individuals. Thus, the conflict in itself is neither good nor bad. However, the way in which the conflict is dealt with determines whether its nature is transformative.[1]

The term "transformation" was defined by the 19th century Swedish psychologist Carl Jung, as "an inner spiral, facilitating movement towards your soul: your essential self."[2] A transformative approach to conflict refers to a fundamental change in the attitude and/or behavior of individuals and/or the relationship between two or more parties to the dispute. Therefore, conflict can be either constructive or destructive depending on how individuals or groups choose to resolve their issues. In fact, the method of conflict transformation integrates conflict prevention and emphasize peace education. It also considers crisis management when the use of force is inevitable to end violence. Finally, conflict transformation includes reparation and healing in the post-conflict context.

This article will first describe the emergence and evolution of conflict transformation and the contributions of Johan Galtung and John Paul Lederach as pioneers in the field. The article will explore the effectiveness of the psychosocial approach to conflict, utilizing a relational dialogue. It will also describe how a healing experience is fundamental for conflict transformation, through the biblical story of Jacob and Esau, and the lives of Jesus and Father Moon.

Emergence and Evolution of Conflict Transformation

Emergence

Darwin, Marx, and Freud are the three theorists who had considerable influence on the writings of the first psycho-sociologists on conflict in the 19th and 20th centuries. All three emphasized the competitive and destructive aspect of conflict instead of its transformational or constructive aspect. Karl Marx (1818-1883) emphasized class struggle as the struggle for progress, "the whole of society is fragmented and divided into two large hostile camps, two large directly antagonistic classes: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat."[3] He and Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) end their *Communist Manifesto* with a resounding call for class struggle: "The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to gain. Workers of all countries, unite!"[4]

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), an Austrian neurologist and founder of psychoanalysis, used a clinical method to treat psychopathology. This involves dialogue between the patient and a psychoanalyst. Freud's view of psychosexual development was largely one of a constant struggle between the biologically rooted infantile ego and the internalized, socially determined parental surrogate, the superego. The concepts and language used by Freud to describe the metamorphosis of life, from the womb to life in the world, are replete with "images of war, of coercion, of reluctant compromise, of importunate necessity, of imposed sacrifices, of the precarious truce under pressure, of forced detours, to return to the original peaceful state of absence of consciousness and stimulation."[5]

Charles Robert Darwin (1809-1882), English naturalist, geologist, and biologist, is best known for his contributions to evolutionary science. The popularization of Darwin's ideas in the form of "social Darwinism" provided intellectual justification for racism, sexism, class superiority, and war. Ideas such as "survival of the fittest," "hereditary determinism," and "stages of evolution" have been applied wrongly across the relationships between human social groups, classes, and nations, as well as races to rationalize imperialist policies:"Blessed are the strong, for they will attack the weak."[6] Darwin emphasized "the competitive struggle for existence" and the survival of the fittest. He argued that "all nature is at war, one organism against another, or with external nature."[7]

The intellectual atmosphere during the period when social psychology began to emerge contributed considerably to regarding conflict from the point of view of competitive struggle. To this must be added the precarious social condition of intense competition between companies and between nations. Thus, the ravages of World War I, the economic depression of the 1920s and 1930s, and the rise of Nazism and other totalitarian systems reinforced this perspective. The rich and powerful were biologically superior; they had reached their positions through natural selection. It would be unnatural to interfere with inequality and the suffering of the poor and weak.[8]

After World War II, the paradigm of peacebuilding and effective conflict resolution focused on reconstruction, security, and existing economic progress. Nation building, economic infrastructure, political process, such as the rule of law and fair elections,were supported by the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the United States, and the United Nations. Unfortunately, intra-state, ethnic, and religious conflicts, accompanied by genocide and fascism, have persisted in the world. These repeated crises have shaken people's belief that economic development based on capitalism and infrastructure building alone will lead to the peaceful coexistence of peoples.

Scholars began to study revolution and class struggles, organizational conflicts such as conflicts between companies and workers, and to analyze the root causes of ethnic and ideological wars in particular ways. This is how the first socio-psychological analyzes of the conflict took shape.[9]

Evolution of Conflict Resolution Research

The period from 1946 to 1969 was marked by a rapid increase in research on conflict resolution. American mathematician John Von Neumann developed game theory and applied it to conflict situations. Game theory has made a major contribution to the work of social scientists by formulating the problem of conflict of interest in mathematical terms.[10] Quantitative studies have analyzed the impact of war

and international cooperation. Scholars have examined traditional diplomacy and its application to nonviolent action.[11] Sociologists have studied conflict processes, exploring the similarities and differences between various types of conflict and distinguishing constructive from destructive processes. Peace researchers have examined the social and institutional bases of war and developed techniques to defuse protracted conflicts. The practice of conflict resolution has seen an extension of informal diplomacy, or "Type 2 diplomacy," at the international level and the use of non-violent action in addition to mediation on the national level.

From 1970 to 1985, the practice of conflict resolution flourished, and consensus was reached on many fundamental ideas in the field. Scholars agreed on the importance of reframing conflicts as shared problems with mutually agreeable solutions. They also recognized the usefulness of mediators in resolving conflicts and the importance of their training.[12]

Over the past twenty years, feminist theory and social movement theory have added important new perspectives to the field. Work continued in the areas of game theory and social psychology, with a particular focus on conflict transformation. Conflict resolution has become a social movement in the United States, fostered in part by peacemaking activities among religious groups and the rise of ongoing interfaith dialogue. The concepts of "mutual gains," "win-win negotiation," and "Alternative Dispute Resolution" or ADR, i.e., the extrajudicial settlement of disputes, have benefited from positive publicity in the United States.[13]

Since the end of the Cold War, research on conflict resolution has become a global movement. Problem-solving workshops have become a popular form of second-way diplomacy. During this period, the field broadened its scope to include conflict prevention and post-crisis reconciliation. The nature of international conflict has changed in the post-Cold War world, and scholars have struggled to understand the new global dynamics. New work has been done on the design of dispute resolution systems, the nature of conflict, and ways to address the emotional aspects of conflict.[14] Conflict resolution practices have been extended to new contexts and have become increasingly institutionalized in the United States and Europe. Internationally, the use of mediators and humanitarian intervention has increased.

Today, the field is marked both by areas of broad consensus and deep disagreement. Researchers agree that several strategies are appropriate for different types and stages of conflict. They agree in emphasizing the influence of opposing parties on the escalation and de-escalation of conflicts. And it is increasingly recognized that social conflicts involve many parties and issues at the same time and are therefore often intertwined. Scholars still differ widely in their approach to power and the use of force; some view coercion as an inevitable part of any resolution, while others view force as the antithesis of true conflict transformation.[15]

This article does not reject either position, but argues that conflict transformation includes prevention, crisis management, and post-conflict reconstruction. Disagreements in conflict resolution stem from differences in values. People assign different priorities to values such as freedom, economic well-being, justice, empowerment, or equity. This justifies, moreover, a psychosocial approach emphasizing the transformation of the conflict, such as pioneered by Johan Galtung and John Lederach.

Galtung's Contribution

According to Galtung, violence is an attack on basic human needs. The basic needs of all people are survival, well-being, freedom, and identity. A threat to these basic human needs can also be defined as violence, because individuals can only establish a meaningful relationship with their environment by meeting their basic needs. This relationship with the environment can also be at an emotional and spiritual level, beyond the physical.[16]

Galtung developed his view of violence based on his research carried out in 1969. According to him, violence can be identified according to three categories: direct, structural, and cultural violence. The connection between the three types of violence is illustrated in the figure below.[17]
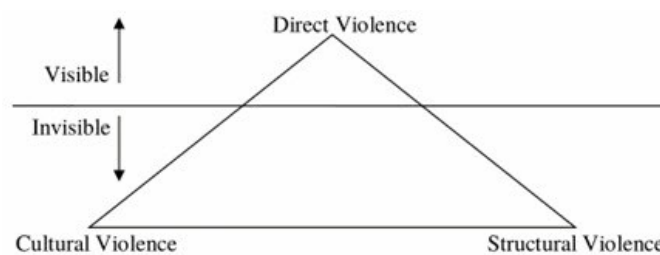

Figure 1. Galtung's Violent Triangle Model[18]

According to this distinction, Galtung asserts that structural violence is caused by mechanisms, processes, and institutions that guarantee the satisfaction of identity, reputation, and the need for security. In contrast, cultural violence is fueled by the anger, fear, and hatred that stem from parties who do not understand each other. According to Galtung,[19] this type of violence is akin to social injustice and the structures that promote this social injustice. It is a rather invisible force that is formed by the structures that prevent the satisfaction of basic needs. It is usually expressed indirectly and has no directly visible cause. Galtung states that this happens when people are influenced in such a way that they cannot realize themselves as they would genuinely wish—under Apartheid, racial segregation laws, legal provisions for the subjugation of the civilian population, unjust social conditions, unequal access to education, degrading living conditions, poverty, etc. Cultural violence, also called symbolic violence, represents aspects of a social culture that legitimize the use of direct or structural violence. Cultural and symbolic violence often manifests itself in attitudes and prejudices (racism, sexism, fascism, Islamophobia, xenophobia, and so forth).

Structural and cultural violence remain invisible conflicts until this type of violence turns into direct violence and becomes visible. In this context, conflict is a variable process in which structural, cultural, and direct violence influence each other. The invisible level refers to a situation of structural and cultural violence, in which it is difficult to identify who is responsible. Structural violence is built into the system and manifests in power relations that are unequal and therefore in unequal life opportunities.

The three types of violence are interrelated. To prevent one, the other two must also be taken into account and tackled. Galtung's position on violence forms the basis of his view of the concept of peace. In particular, the link he establishes between the direct, structural, and cultural types of violence and the concept of peace is essential. Thus, understanding violence becomes a prerequisite for achieving social peace. Galtung therefore defines peace as "the capacity to transform conflicts with empathy and creativity, without violence; a never-ending process."[20]

Lederach's Contribution

John Paul Lederach, Professor of Peace Studies at Notre Dame University in the USA, is widely known for his pioneering work on conflict transformation. Lederach is involved in reconciliation work in Colombia, the Philippines, Nepal, and Tajikistan, as well as countries in East and West Africa. He has helped design and conduct training programs in 25 countries on five continents.

As described by Lederach, conflict transformation does not suggest that we simply eliminate or control conflict, but rather that we recognize and work with its "dialectical nature."[21] Lederach uses the term "conflict transformation" to describe his approach to peacebuilding. This approach emphasizes the dialectical nature of the conflict. For him, conflict results from changes in relationships. To build social peace, negative and destructive patterns of interaction must be transformed into positive or constructive relationships and interactions. This happens through personal means and systemic change that encourages and enables parties to seek truth, justice, and forgiveness along with peace.

Lederach also focuses on developing empowerment and mutual recognition, as well as interdependence, justice, forgiveness, and reconciliation. By this he means that social conflict is naturally created by humans interacting, but once it occurs, it changes, i.e., transforms, the events, people, and relationships that created the original conflict. Thus, the causal relationship goes both ways—from people and relationships to conflict, and from conflict to people and relationships. For both Galtung and Lederach, relational dialogue is at the center of conflict transformation.[22]

Relational Dialogue: A Psychosocial Approach

The psychosocial approach defines identity from an interaction perspective, integrating, on the one hand, the individual aspects related to the personality (the self) and, on the other hand, the sociological variables related to the notion of social role and group membership. This approach distinguishes personal identity from social identity. The first designates a psychological process of self-representation which results in the feeling of existing in continuity as a singular being and then being recognized as such by others.

In 1934, George Herbert Mead proposed a definition of identity based on the existing relationships between the mind, the self, and society. This describes identity in terms of the self, the individual who defines himself through his own consciousness marked by social interactions and the construction of norms and values in which he participates. It is in the interaction of the "I" and the "Me," in reference to social reality, that the self is constituted; he is therefore the product of all this social play.[23]

For conflict transformation, dialogue is used as a psychosocial vehicle to improve and change the basic mechanisms of perception and interaction. The practice of dialogue could also inform the out-of-court dispute resolution phase. This phase encompasses the formulation of opinions by the conflicting parties, responding to needs and fears, common interests, and controversial issues. Thus, a safe space is created to discuss and address the substantive issues of the dispute. A reflection is made on the implementation of collective decisions. Unfortunately, in most conflicts, the usefulness of dialogue is often relegated to the background.

On the other hand, no representative or comprehensive overview of practical dialogue projects in conflict regions has taken place so far.[24] Increasingly, several NGOs are trying to engage in dialogue within a cultural context in the form of reconciliation. However, most of these dialogues are militant, subjective types that do not consider the relational or transformational aspect. Thus, the dialogue remains limited in durability and fragile, since it fails to improve relations between the belligerents. In most cases, the victims and perpetrators of violence remain frozen in their positions.

Relational dialogue emphasizes human relations and the transformation of consciousness. While acknowledging differences of opinion on substantive issues, the emphasis is more on a relational level, focusing on the causes of misunderstandings and stereotypes that commonly arise between belligerents. These types of dialogues are often preceded by preparatory training in the basic mechanisms of perception and group interaction. The goals are recognition of oneself and the other and increased respect of each party for the other.[25]

Since conflicts are also the result of existential ignorance, it is crucial that the parties learn to coexist and face the truth about themselves and others. In this way, we could achieve an effective resolution of conflicts and human problems. Otherwise, treating a gunshot wound becomes easier than changing the psychosocial impact of the conflict. This implies that it is important to address the psychosocial impact of conflict, particularly the negative images that are associated with the mind, memory, and thinking of survivors.

The Challenge of Change

All change is threatening because it forces us to let go of something we hold dear and consider vital. Any change requires us to give up something, and so some degree of discomfort accompanies all new behaviors.[26] It is a process of transformation of human consciousness, behavior, attitudes, and structures that requires freeing our minds from the history of events, memory, and lived conflicts. Then it becomes psychological, and most people become addicted to a thought associated with the past and fail to free their mind.

Change can cause psychological pain. Thus, "The more you are identified with your thinking, your likes and dislikes, judgments and interpretations, which is to say the less present you are as the watching consciousness, the stronger the emotional energy charge will be, whether you are aware of it or not."[27]Work on ourself therefore becomes important to free us from this anxiety, and the avenue for this is through relational dialogue. This kind of dialogue is a tool for resolving conflict in a constructive manner, which includes psychological approaches considering reflection, history, memory, safety, security, material needs of victims, and the community.[28]

Psychosocial pain is the most dangerous of all pains. There are two levels of pain: the pain we create now, and the pain of the past that lives in our mind and body. The elements of time, history, memory, and process become strategically imperative in understanding psychosocial pain. Thus, relational dialogue becomes a strong psychosocial paradigm in the transformation of conflicts by working on attitudes, behaviors, and structures. The link is that relational dialogue has the power to resolve conflicts by non-violent means, through the construction of human relations. At its core, this dialogue could bring together people with divergent interests and sharing similar past pains. The example of the gacaca courts in Rwanda, which brought the victims and perpetrators of the 1994 genocide to a relational dialogue, is a textbook case.[29]

This process breaks down psychological barriers through non-violent communication by mutually and progressively clarifying perceptions and relationships. The clarification of perceptions transforms the thinking and behaviors of individuals, and therefore attitudes where individuals learn to cope positively and creatively. The process of integration into society becomes natural and fluid. Additionally, changing attitudes requires a solid practice of managing emotions.

Daniel Goleman explains in his book *Emotional Intelligence* that to solve the psychosocial factors that threaten human beings and their existence, we must understand our emotions and know how to manage them. Managing emotions beyond one's self is the power behind forgiveness, adopting a better mechanism for coping and improving an interaction. As a result, a transformation then takes place within us and impacts others, in an inclusive manner.[30]

Another essential aspect is that truth lies in dialogue. Relational dialogue brings together all actors that include different genders, affected people in the community who should be welcomed and reintegrated, such as offenders, victims, perpetrators, and other stakeholders. This is a guideline to build trust and eliminate any form of labeling and negative images associated with bad events that have produced biased perceptions of perpetrators or victims. Relational dialogue opens the way for a positivist approach focused on transforming perceptions and behaviors. The continuity of community dialogue through established structures is what creates sustainability and gradually the cycle of conflict opens to a change of mind and structure. Truth and reconciliation commissions are often a way for perpetrators and victims to publicly acknowledge episodes of violence between them. Such commissions provide space for former enemies to lessen their differences. For the most part, they are designed to induce healing processes, processes that offer victims comfort and assurance that their trauma will not happen again.

Relational dialogue must be supported by public authorities for real change to occur. This change must consider state structures, linked to an understanding of the hierarchy of power, the politics of power and how public power can influence and create social peace.[31]

For this, structures are subject to change, for example the desire of communities to reach out and embrace critical issues such as national healings changed many institutions (political, social, economic, and infrastructure) in Rwanda, Uganda, and Kenya.[32] The structural

dimension should not only concern communities, but it should also focus on addressing the underlying issues that are the root causes of conflict and aim to transform the social structures that generate conflict, such as inequalities in education, hunger, and poverty, and resource sharing.

Emphasis should also be placed on how social structures, organizations, and institutions are built, sustained, and changed by conflict. Central to conflict transformation is the process of change, which should include direct interaction with social structures. This will help to develop the capacity to initiate processes of change at all levels of relationships. Thus, dialogue remains the fundamental way to promote constructive change, for justice and peace at all levels. The likely benefit from this is the sustainability of peace.

Conflict Transformation through a Healing Experience

For most people, the immediate reaction to a conflict that involves hurt and pain is the fight or flight paradigm. The flight or fight human response is similar to what animals do when in danger. From this perspective, protecting oneself, and in most cases, taking revenge against one's oppressor became highly valued.

An alternative response to threat has been proposed that challenges that of flight or fight. Victor Frankl, the 20th century psychiatrist, impacted the world with his view of the stimulus and response to suffering and torture. He himself was tortured in a Nazi concentration camp and while enduring suffering, he discovered the truth about human response to pain and hurt. A quote that sums up Frankl's realization is: "Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom."[33] In fact, in a conflict situation, we can choose flight or fight but also, we can choose to treat our opponent as a patient, a person who is also hurt and needs help. Frankl's experience in the concentration camp opened the possibility to look at conflict from a transformational perspective.

Historically, religious, and political conflicts have often led to misunderstanding and division between people, resulting in massive violence such as genocide. A transformative approach to conflict includes a connection with the human soul, which also extends to the death of the ego.In any relationship where conflict is present, it is important to acknowledge how one's own actions and behaviors have caused pain to others. This gives a better chance to resolve the conflict. Most people's reaction to a conflict situation involves blaming, judging, and finding fault in "the other." How to heal the pain and any unresolved psychological wounds becomes the primary orientation to transform the conflict. Addressing conflict from this vantage point creates needed space to go beyond our own limited, strongly held beliefs, and allows us to see "the other" in a different light.

In any relationship there is a potential for hurt, misunderstanding, or division. When emotional pain or unresolved resentments are present in a relationship, it is helpful if each party is able to acknowledge this reality in an honest and constructive manner. In most conflicts, we have been led to believe it is all about conflicting and competing ideologies and theologies, exacerbated by the bad behavior of misguided, corrupt leaders. However, a closer look reveals unresolved emotional and psychological wounds that have not been adequately acknowledged and addressed. When parties in conflict are not aware of their own unresolved emotional pain and refuse to acknowledge and even deny this aspect of themselves, there are fewer chances to resolve the conflict effectively. When parties in conflict are consumed with their own pain, the pain controls their actions. It leads to playing the victim, not being willing to listen anymore to the pain and suffering of others. Therefore, one can engage in judging, condemning, rejecting, and pushing others away.

In fact, when parties choose to heal, they create the possibility for unity and peace and, on that foundation, God's providence can move forward. When parties choose to withdraw, to blame, and to retaliate, then it brings disunity and only the ego is victorious. All unresolved conflicts are manifestations of human ego. For a peaceful transformation of the heart, the ego must die; as the Holy Scripture says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24). This is incontestably the path to human maturation and a transformation in any conflict.

The transformational approach to conflict is revealed in the Esau and Jacob encounter in the Bible. Esau was prepared to kill his brother Jacob for stealing his birthright. The night before their encounter Jacob wrestled with "a man," an angel,[34](Gen. 32:22-30). Jacob won over the angel; he asked the angel to bless him and rejoiced, saying "I saw the face of God and yet my life was spared" (Gen. 32:30). Jacob sent messengers to Esau with a friendly greeting. They returned with word that Esau was coming to meet him with 400 armed men (Gen.32:6). "Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed" (Gen. 32:7). Since God had given the direction, Jacob appealed to Him in fervent prayer for protection. Jacob then instructed his servants to divide over 550 of his animals into many groups and to drive them in a staggered formation toward Esau. Each servant of Jacob presented his group of animals as a separate gift, gift piling upon gift. Jacob hoped this manner of presentation would soften his brother's heart (see Gen. 32:13-21).

As Esau drew close, Jacob went out with his wives and children to meet his brother, bowing seven times as he went—a sign of respect for his older brother;"For to see your face is like seeing the face of God" (Gen. 33:10). None of this was lost on Esau, who "ran to meet" Jacob (Gen. 33:4). He had buried all his resentment and forgotten all his injuries; and received his brother with the strongest demonstrations, not only of forgiveness, but of fraternal affection. Esau "embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept" (Gen. 33:4). They conversed about Jacob's beautiful family, and then Esau returned Jacob's gifts (see Gen. 33:9). But Jacob insisted, so Esau relented, for, according to custom, the acceptance of the gift signified a reliable friendship had been formed.

Divine Principle explains that Jacob's course, the process whereby Jacob reconciled with his brother Esau was the foundation for God to change Jacob's name to Israel. It was also the foundation for the descendants of Jacob, the nation of Israel, to be the chosen nation for the coming of Christ and his ministry.[35]

Christ was wounded, tortured, and finally crucified for calling himself the Son of God. Even though Christ was wounded, he became a healer of the world. This could be considered a classic transformational path to resolve conflict between individuals and groups. As he said while hanging on the cross, "Father, forgive them…" His attitude towards his enemy became a universal message known as the Gospel, the good news, and the hope for humanity. This model set the pathway for all peacemakers to die symbolically every day, not only for those they love and care for, but also to heal their enemies.

Father Moon walked the path of Jesus on the cross when he was tortured in North Korea from 1948-50. He was in a concentration camp in Heung Nam where he almost lost his life and would have if not for the UN forces' intervention. Forty years later, in 1991, Father Moon decided to meet his so-called "enemy," Kim Il Sung, with the spirit of love, forgiveness, and unity. As he said:

> Now, I have visited North Korea in my position as the founder of the Unification Church and in the spirit of True Love. True Love is that love which loves even that which cannot be loved. It is the love that Jesus spoke of when he told us to love our enemies.[36]

The conflict transformation approach depends on the genuine and sincere will of all parties to want to forgive, unite, and love again. What brings healing to enemies is not necessarily proving them wrong, but rather engaging in a sincere relational dialogue to seek for mutual understanding. When the focus is about who will win over at the end it sustains a perpetual conflict between the parties. Additionally, a "win-lose" spirit inflates the ego and promotes mistrust between groups. It is driven by the idea that someone has to be subdued or punished at the end, and no one likes to experience losing a fight. In fact, the win-lose mentality ultimately leads to a lose-lose result for all parties in a conflict. A transformative approach to conflict demands that parties in conflict come to an integrative solution that preserves the dignity of all.

Conclusion

The experiences of conflicts and our ways of transforming them do not depend only on the conflicts themselves, but also on our subjective situation and the perspective that we adopt according to our life course, our convictions, and our affiliations. Hence the interest in the psychosocial approach in the transformation of conflicts.

The central element of conflict transformation is the process of change through relational dialogue which takes into account the direct interactions between individuals, groups, and social structures to develop the capacity to initiate change at all levels of relationships. Relational dialogue is the fundamental pathway to promoting constructive change, justice, and peace on all levels. Therefore, focusing on the psychosocial dimension could provide better insight into the causes, impacts, and effects of change, both nationally and internationally.[37]

Conflict transformation can be challenging for those who are ego driven. It takes courage, humility, and patience toward "the others." At first, it can appear that one is losing, but only the ego is losing while one's spirit self is allowed to be expressed. The process can be painful and even humiliating at times. However, if done well it can be rewarding and beneficial for all parties.

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