Conflict Disruption: Reassessing the Peaceandconflict System

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ABSTRACT

The notion of conflict disruption is proposed as an addition to the established conflict response framework of conflict management, resolution and transformation. Drawing on Schumpeter's idea of creative disruption, the article considers how disruptive actions or stances may trigger or operate within conflict management, resolution, or transformation Moreover, conflict disruption prompts us to think of peace and conflict in systemic terms: peaceandconflict. Thus the article concludes by discussing the wider implications of conflict disruption for four aspects of peace and conflict: Time, Power, Scale and Connectedness.

Introduction

The tripartite framework of conflict management, conflict resolution and conflict transformation is widely-accepted as an analytical device through which to understand conflict and responses to conflict. This article seeks to add to that framework by introducing the notion of conflict disruption – or moments and processes that disrupt the conflictive ethos (Bar-tal 2013) and totalising logic of conflict, and possibly create space for conflict-calming measures. Conflict disruption can play three roles: as a pre-cursor to pacific developments; as an action or stance in its own right; and as an entry point for an examination of the nature of conflict and violence. Building on the economics literature on 'creative disruption' (a literature originally associated with the economist Schumpeter but more recently with business start-ups and social entrepreneurship), the article takes the form of conceptual-scoping of the behaviours, motivations, and inhibiting factors behind conflict disruption. The concepts of conflict management, conflict resolution, and conflict transformation do not necessarily consider what might trigger change, nor do they often regard conflicts in systemic terms. By adopting a systemic lens, we are able to address more fully issues of temporality, complexity and intersectionality with regard to conflict.

The primary purpose of proposing the concept of conflict disruption is to gain a firmer understanding of the dynamics of peace and conflict and how change may happen. Initially, conflict disruption can be seen as a way of pausing or staunching violent conflict so as to allow pro-peace or pro-social processes to take root. It may be a precursor to conflict management, conflict resolution, or conflict transformation. Yet, as this article

seeks to demonstrate, the concept of conflict disruption goes further in that it encourages us to move beyond conceiving of peace and conflict in binary terms. Instead, it is useful to conceive of 'peaceandconflict' as a complex adaptive system (De Coning 2018). The conceptual proposition of conflict disruption can be regarded, in a positive sense, as a precursor to conflict-calming events and processes. It is of a different order to conflict management, conflict resolution and conflict transformation in that it may not always be a conscious strategy, nor may it always have pro-peace or pro-social normative ambitions. Clearly the 2004 tsunami was not a conscious act and cost many lives, but it did also spur some peacemaking activity (Törnquist 2011). The key point is that conflict disruption is not automatically a normatively pacific phenomenon. Our focus, however, is to demonstrate how peace entrepreneurs can be deliberate in their actions and stances, and how conflict disruption can, in some circumstances, lead to pro-peace and pro-social processes and outcomes.

The article begins with a brief outline of the widely-accepted tripartite conflict response framework in order to set the groundwork for thinking through how the concept of conflict disruption could apply. It then consults literature from economics on the creative potential of market disruptions. While we must be circumspect about direct or wholesale transfers from one discipline to another, there are useful insights. The concept of disruption is examined to investigate how it can offer space for creativity, renewal or pro-peace change in conflict contexts. The next section then sets out the concept of conflict disruption. Drawing on Schumpeter's typology of entrepreneurship, it examines the behaviours, motivations and inhibiting factors involved in conflict disruption and how they might apply to, or even prompt, situations of conflict management, conflict resolution, and conflict transformation. The concluding discussion unpacks the insights the concept gives us for understanding peace and conflict in relation to four aspects of peace and conflict: Time, Power, Scale and Connectedness. While this article can be read as an explication of a single concept (conflict disruption) it also aims to make a broader contribution to conflict theory, especially debates on the systemic nature of peace and conflict.

It is worth noting that considerable ambiguity is attached to the notion of conflict disruption. It can be an event (singular), a pre-event, an impact, a set of actions and stances (plural). It can also be part of long-term processes and trends. Conflict disruption can also be a deliberate strategy (for example, anti-war protests) or a 'natural' disaster (for example, rains that disrupt an offensive). On top of this, it can fall into the problem-solving and critical categories (Cox 1981). Such ambiguity may initially seem problematic and especially frustrating to those in favour of neat categorisation and analytical clarity. While these attributes are certainly welcome for comprehensibility they do not well reflect the complexity of peace and conflict, or the messiness that constitutes peaceandconflict. As will be covered later in the article, such ambiguity and complexity fits well with notions of peace and conflict as constituting a system (or perhaps a set of interwoven systems) that encapsulates macro-social processes as well as micro-events (Moore 2011, 308).

Conflict response framework

Like much of Peace and Conflict Studies, the tripartite conflict response framework of conflict management – conflict resolution – conflict transformation (hereafter CM-CR-CT) – is relatively recent in its formulation and has developed iteratively in response to

academic and practical developments (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall 2016, 34–36). Thus to see all three approaches in a single gaze, and constituting a unified framework, is to benefit from no little hindsight. It is also worth noting that the terminology, literature and worldviews most prominently associated with CM-CR-CT are often ethnocentrist and thus important evidence on conflict-calming and conflict-avoiding techniques and processes is either missing or under-represented in debates (Akinola and Uzodike 2018). This may be particularly relevant to our thinking of conflict disruption as some contexts place a greater emphasis on accommodation and co-existence rather than on deal-making and victory (Usegi 2017; Call and de Coning 2017). The reason for setting out the established CM-CR-CT framework is to allow us to consider how conflict disruption may operate within it.

Like any schemata, the CM-CR-CT formulation is an abstraction and implies distinctions, neatness, and a linearity that – in reality – are likely to be more complex. The general landscape in which all three operate has changed over time, as have the roles that they play (Chandler 2017, 206). Thus conflict management, as originally constituted in the post-WWII era is not quite possible; geo-political dynamics have changed as have understandings of the complexity of conflict, and its links with development. This caveat aside, CM-CR-CT are often seen as stretched along a continuum, with conflict management being regarded as the most conservative form of conflict response and conflict transformation the most emancipatory. CM-CR-CT leach into one another, can operate alongside and within one another, (a)synchronously, and may empower each other. Importantly, peacebuilding and statebuilding are activities that can operate along any state of the CM-CR-CT continuum but the character of these activities is likely to be constrained or facilitated by wider political and economic dynamics. For example, conflict management is likely to emphasise statebuilding, particularly the security aspects of the state, while it may be less interested in the people-to-people aspects found in some versions of peacebuilding.

Conflict management been associated with the realist playbook (Richmond 2014, 166) and is a regarded as a form of conflict response that reflects power, states, and the international *status quo*. It accepts conflict, possibly simply as a function of 'natural' competition and seeks to manage conflict so as to protect the wider international system and the states within it. In Richmond's (2001) 'generations of peace' typology, conflict management is concerned with conflict 'basics' such as staunching violent conflict, protecting the sovereignty of the state, and ensuring that security institutions are in place (Babbitt 2009). Soft-security and people-focused peace initiatives are seen as of secondary importance, if relevant at all. Of course, there is a danger that descriptions of conflict management 1.0 may verge towards caricature and it is worth noting that there is variation and complexity within conflict management. On the one hand, authoritarian conflict management describes how non-liberal powers 'seek to control conflict and manage their outcomes, including the management of post-conflict elections, the co-optation of civil society groups, the construction of new infrastructure and the installation of charismatic strongman leaders' (Heathershaw and Owen 2017, 271). On the other hand, some security-focused actors, for example NATO in some of its operations, are now mindful of the civilian aspects of conflict. Conflict management can also be disruptive to conflict activities and norms. For example, a talks initiative can disrupt the activities of violent actors, although it may be limited in its ambitions. The key criticism to be made of conflict

management is that it is likely to be system preserving and content with stabilisation or long-term situations of 'political unsettlement' rather than anything more ambitious (Bell and Pospisil 2017).

Conflict resolution can be regarded as a more enlightened iteration of conflict management and fits with Richmond's second generation of peace (Richmond 2001). It is largely respectful of the international order but can tolerate limited changes in the form of secession and new modes of governance. It favours structured change within limits and is tolerant of, indeed often reinforces, power asymmetries (Powell and Maoz 2014; Thiessen and Darweish 2018, 74–75). Most peace processes and many liberal peace interventions can be regarded as conflict resolution. They were largely respectful of the overarching international order and attendant economic norms, and thus change was to be accommodated within the existing system (Distler, Stavrevska, and Vogel 2018). Indeed, in extreme cases, peacebuilding has morphed into counterinsurgency (Turner 2015). In some cases, however, pro-peace change could be quite significant and, importantly, went beyond a strictly realist agenda of security and boundaries. In the conflict resolution model, individuals and citizens mattered and thus, depending on context, could expect rights including a democratic mandate. In Chandler's words (2017, 198), its proponents are 'solutionists' who believe that complex social, political and security problems can be resolved through constitutional, political, social and economic engineering programmes and projects. In the main, conflict resolution stopped short of examining the structural drivers of conflict such as identity and political economy. It remained in the problem-solving realm (Cox 1981) but was capable of mobilising significant international and transnational capital in pursuit of its version of peace.

The third part of the conflict response framework – conflict transformation – can be regarded as potentially the most emancipatory. It seeks to distinguish itself from conflict management and resolution through its attention to the underlying structural drivers of conflict, and its focus on people (individuals and communities). Associated with John Paul Lederach (1996), conflict transformation can be seen, in part, as a reaction to the failure of conflict management and resolution to deal with root causes of conflict, and their failure to drill down beyond institutions to the level of society. It is also in sync with the 'local turn' in Peace and Conflict Studies, and some peacebuilding practice, that recognises that peace is enacted, embodied and experienced at the local and hyper-local levels and thus academics and practitioners need to find ways to take seriously the sub-state level (Firchow 2018; Wallis 2017; Leonardsson and Rudd 2015). A key feature of conflict transformation is its whole of society approach (Martin, Bojicic-Dzelilovic, and Benrais 2018). In conflict management and resolution, the primary responsibility for making and keeping peace rests with elite institutions; the state, security institutions and militant organisations, international organisations, or INGOs that act as proxies for these institutions. With conflict transformation, institutions, as well as communities and individuals have responsibility to make and maintain peace. Thus conflict transformation envisages a participatory and on-going form of peace that goes far beyond a one-off peace accord and associated institutional and legislative engineering. Instead, it envisages a type of peace characterised by a 'continuous cycle of reflection-action-reflection' (Lederach 1996, 32) or 'continuous learning' (De Coning 2019, 38) whereby individuals and groups consider their own identity and stance and how it might contribute to peace and conflict. Under this model, through societal-wide self-realisation, conflicting parties

might consider how they might have to re-orientate in order to de-escalate tensions and work out more productive inter-group relations. 'In the long-run, building on local and available resources fosters self-sufficiency and helps sustain development and change over time' (ibid). In this way, conflict transformation seeks to address the deep structural factors behind many conflicts: identity and perceptions of the other, and the structures that maintain those. Clearly conflict transformation is easier said than done. Initiatives by individuals and communities that might be transgressive to a prevailing conflictive ethos are likely to face significant opposition. Such initiatives may have to (at first) happen outwith the surveillance of the state, militant groups and in-group members.

Conflict theory has already given some consideration to the notion of events and processes that might trigger deconfliction. Most notable has been I. William Zartman's work on 'ripeness'. In Zartman's view, parties to conflicts will investigate a 'way out' when they reach a mutually hurting stalemate, or a realisation that they are unable to 'escalate to victory' (Zartman 2003, 20). Zartman's analysis has been critiqued by Lederach who found that the concentration on ripe 'moments' or on harvesting undervalued the long-term cultivation or 'nourishment of the soil and plant rather than picking the fruit'. Lederach recommended, ' a shift from thinking about negotiations as a 'ripe moment' in time to towards understanding the preparation and support for a change process over a much longer period' (Lederach 2003, 34). Inspired by Zartman, Dean Pruitt (2005, 6) discusses readiness theory and focuses on 'the psychological states of leaders and their willingness and preparedness to investigate conflict calming measures'. Others have looked to 'shock theory' or the extent to which economic or other shocks have a conflict (de)escalation effect. Rising prices, for example, can lead to war (Bazzi and Blattman 2014). For Bercovitch, Diehl, and Goertz (1997, 767), 'political shocks', in the form of 'dramatic changes within a state' may prompt conflicting parties to pursue conflict resolution or conflict management. Others have deployed the notion of rupture or how communities break with the state and its notions of legitimacy and acceptable forms of violence (Burnyeat 2017). This is not unrelated to literature on peace zones (Mitchell and Allen Nan 1997) and extraordinary friendships (Gopin 2012) whereby individuals or communities engage in actions that are transgressive to conflictual norms. Notions of ripeness or triggers for change put in mind the rather arresting thought that possibly conflicts need to escalate and reach a level whereby the participants are forced to take de-escalation measures. Herman Schmid's 1968 critique of the essential conservatism of peace research floated the possibility of peace research 'sharpen[ing] conflict relations' in order to engender more profound change (Schmid 1968, 228); a position not without ethical implications.

To recap thus far, the article has set out a widely accepted conflict response framework: CM-CR-CT. It has done so in order to help think through how conflict disruption might perform in relation to different contexts and stages of a conflict. The next section will look at the intellectual heritage of the concept of conflict disruption, namely creative destruction or disruption in the business world.

Creative disruption

The concept of creative disruption has received most academic attention in the fields of economics and business, and is most closely associated with the Austrian economist Joseph Schumpeter. His original formulation of 'creative destruction' has largely

been softened to 'creative disruption' in most contemporary literature (Borrup 2018, 224) and mainly concerns the disruptive potential of start-up business models to threaten established businesses. Schumpeter set out three aspects of entrepreneurial activity: behaviour, motivation, and inhibiting factors. The next section will examine the extent to which these aspects of entrepreneurialism can be applied to conflict management, conflict resolution, and conflict transformation. First, however, it is worth investigating how the concept of disruption is used in economics. In the contemporary era,

> Broadly speaking, disruption talk among tech entrepreneurs and speculative venture capitalists champions innovation driven destabilization as a positive force. More specifically, disruption is seen as necessary to the outsize return on supposedly radically experimental, high risk start ups that both groups eternally seek. It portrays older industries as staid, outdated, and ripe for enforced irrelevance by bold young technological challengers. (Knuth 2016, 100)

In the typical case, the market disrupter would seek to establish a foothold at a lower price point and then, once established, offer a wider range of goods and services, often at premium prices (Kimberley 2016, 10; Smith 2006, 8). Crucially, 'discontinuous change' (Schumpeter 1961, 64) is not an endpoint but merely part of a permanent process of adaptability – thus suggesting the need to see creative disruption in systemic terms. Often the system will continue but it will be enriched or changed by the start-up entrepreneurial activity.

Schumpeter is sometimes portrayed as a blunt champion of 'the entrepreneurial type' (Swedberg 1991, 71), but his work contains considerable nuance and is worth considering in some detail. He also changed his ideas on entrepreneurship with time, and was in favour of others developing iterations and critiques of his thinking (Swedberg 1991, 173; Klein 1988, 127). Schumpeter's 1934 *The Theory of Economic Development* is no dry economic text. It contains a good deal of history and psychology, and is anxious to situate economic development in its wider political, social and cultural hinterland (Swedberg 1991, 71). Clearly this was within a developmentalist paradigm that lacked 'any serious consideration of capital-labour relations' (Selwyn 2015, 258). Nonetheless, as argued here, his ideas on disruption and entrepreneurship contain lessons for peace and conflict scholarship.

Schumpeter begins with echoes of Marx's 'perpetuum mobile' and a recognition of the 'circular flow' in many economies and 'economic system's tendency towards equilibrium' (Marx 1887, 85; Schumpeter 1961, 64 and 62. See also Harvey 1975, and Jenkins and Fife 2016, 76). In this model change does happen, but it often takes the form of 'continual adaptation through innumerable small steps' (Schumpeter 1961, 64). It is in such contexts that Schumpeter sketches 'new combinations of productiveness' with the power to disrupt existing markets (ibid: 63). The market is renewed, with early entrants able to exploit their advantages and make a profit (Young and Lecy 2014, 1325). According to Schumpeter, disruption might come in five ways: the production of new goods, the introduction of new methods of production, the opening up of new markets, access to new supplies of raw materials, and achieving a new market position if, for example, a competitor goes bust or falters (Schumpeter: 64). Historical examples might include the introduction of canals in the United Kingdom as a way of circumventing poor roads, and the

subsequent replacement of canals with railways, and then a reversion to improved roads (Bogart, Lefors, and Satchell 2019; Armstrong 2009).

Given our interest in conflict disruption, it is worth explicating Schumpeter's views on the entrepreneur who, for our purposes, can be cast as a conflict disrupter. Schumpeter discusses three aspects of the entrepreneur: behaviour, motivation and inhibiting factors.

In terms of *behaviour*, the key entrepreneurial behaviour is breaking away from orthodox business models through innovation or, as Schumpeter put it prosaically, 'the doing of new things' (Schumpeter 1991, 412). Schumpeter is particularly interesting on the entrepreneurial psyche. He is careful not to glorify the entrepreneur and notes that the 'typical entrepreneur is more self-centred than other types' (Schumpeter 1961, 91). But he was alert to the ability of entrepreneurs to draw on 'conscious rationality', 'intuition', and 'mental freedom' to identify opportunities and act accordingly (Schumpeter 1934, 84, 85). Much depended on the 'entrepreneur's hunch' (Schumpeter 1991, 308) or the emotional, economic, and cultural intelligence that informs decision-making. According to Snihur et al. (2018, 1279), the disruptor is faced with a 'strategic gambit' on whether to launch their start-up company, at what time, and with what level of visibility.

Rather than highlight profit as a key *motivation*, Schumpeter placed emphasis on the psychological and self-affirming benefits accruing from entrepreneurship. Thus, the 'Schumpeterian entrepreneur' (Cantner et al. 2017, 191) was motivated by 'the will to conquer; the impulse to fight, to prove oneself superior to others.' Moreover, 'there is the joy of creating, of getting things done, or simply exercising one's energy and ingenuity' (Schumpeter 1961, 93). In this view, entrepreneurship sits in the realm of creativity, personal fulfilment and an ability to exercise 'individuality' (ibid., 62).

Schumpeter is particularly interesting in his discussion of the *factors inhibiting entrepreneurship* and creative destruction. He devotes much attention to the supply of credit, a factor that ultimately relates to the credibility of the innovation and the entrepreneur given the inertia of existing business models (ibid., 84). Given our interest in the application of Schumpeter's ideas on creative disruption to conflict, we can also see the supply of credit and similar market forces as largely exogenous and systemic factors (such as the actions of great powers or international norms relating to sovereignty). Schumpeter was alert to the essentially coercive nature of markets and the need for the entrepreneur to show extraordinary willpower to break convention. He was aware that 'any deviating conduct by a member of a social group is condemned' (op. cit., 86). Moreover, 'It may even come to social ostracism and finally to physical prevention or direct attack' (op. cit., 87). Beyond this social sanctioning, Schumpeter assumed that most risks linked with business innovation would be shouldered by creditors rather than the entrepreneur.

Schumpeter's observations on entrepreneurship and disruption gained new life in an era of aggressive start-up business that sought to challenge existing business models. Whether in the airline, retail or taxi businesses, we have seen new market entrants seek to use technology, lower cost models, deregulated labour and other innovations in order to claim a stake to existing markets or carve out new ones. Some literature has lauded the business disruptors, and particularly their audacious shaking up of staid markets, their nimbleness, and the challenges they set out to old-style competitors. Thus it is possible to find commentary on the 'healthily disruptive impact' of Uber or the 'excellent example' of the 'Netflix effect' (Thornhill 2017; Perry 2015). Other literature

has been less complimentary, pointing to how some disruptors rely on new and often harsh forms of extraction and exploitation including scant attention to regulations, an ambivalence on paying tax, and a tendency to profit on the basis of offering 'sub-poverty wages' (Borrup 2018, 225; see also Carroll 2015; Cramer and Krueger 2016).

A more recent iteration of the notion of creative disruption and entrepreneurialism has been a focus on social entrepreneurs who 'recognize systemic problems within existing social structures and address them by introducing revolutionary change' (Zahra et al. 2009, 519). This form of entrepreneurship is usually led by 'socially conscious individuals' (op. cit., 520) although there is much debate on the balance between sociality and profit, and the extent to which corporate social responsibility marks a significant or declaratory change.

Conflict disruption

Having sketched the notion of creative disruption as it pertains to the business world, we now scope the ways in which conflict disruption may work under the conflict management, conflict resolution and conflict transformation models. In particular, we consider – following Schumpeter – the behaviour, motivations and inhibitors behind them. The different models offer different opportunities and challenges, thus provoking us to think about issues of scale, complexity and the connectedness of different levels and types of conflict. It is worth re-stating that the focus here is on pro-peace and pro-social conflict disruption; that is, actions and stances that create space for a lessening of tension and violence, and possibly the development of something more positive.

An immediate point to make is to emphasise the difference between interruption and disruption. An interruption can be seen as a pause or as Eisikovots (2016, 5) puts it 'a mere truce', while disruption is qualitatively more significant. As will be argued later, it is more than a new starting point or temporal hiatus. It can be regarded as a break from the norm and able to usher in something qualitatively different from what went before. In the case of conflict disruption, the disruption presents an opportunity for change. It is more than a ceasefire (a pause in violence) and may extend to a peace initiative, expanding pro-peace public sentiment, or the introduction of new pro-peace mediators or other resources that can potentially change the conflict dynamic. Yet, the extent of conflict disruption possibilities will vary significantly depending on context and power relations within them, and who has the power to narrate them (Moore 2011, 307). In some cases, notably conflict management, the forces supporting and perpetuating the peaceandconflict system are so strong that disruption will have minimal effect and may actually end up reinforcing the power of dominant conflict actors. In other cases, conflict disruption may have more potential and change the behaviour, stance, and speech acts of conflict actors, encouraging conflict resolution or conflict transformation. We may see disruption in an overall context of strong inertia and the societal reproduction of division (Moore 2011, 308)

As outlined previously, conflict management tends to take the form of top-down interventions that are concerned with staunching, or at least managing, direct violence. The minimalist nature of conflict management means that it tends to be uninterested in the wider and systemic drivers of conflict and division. To the extent that it is disruptive to conflict, it concentrates on managing the kinetic aspects of conflict and usually does

not extend to the more complex social, economic, cultural and identity-related aspects of conflict. Thus, for example, in 2015 the Russian and US governments agreed protocols for 'professional airmanship' for their military sorties over Syria so as to avoid accidents and the possibility of escalation (Weiss and Ng 2019). This deconfliction *behaviour* made no pretence at dealing with the wider Syrian civil war and attendant regional crises. Instead, it was restricted managing one aspect of the conflict. In this case, the conflict disrupting behaviour was at the elite level – between the Pentagon and the Russian Defence Ministry – and the text of the memorandum was not shared (MacFarquhar 2015). The behaviour did not extend beyond the bilateral parties and thus made no reference to Syria's humanitarian crisis. The *motivations* were again parsimonious and self-interested in the ultimate aim of minimising potential costs that could arise from accidents between military aircraft and ensuing escalation/retaliation. It is worth noting that state-on-state retaliation involving Russia, Turkey, Syria and Israel has been a feature of the Syrian civil war. As this was bilateral activity, the *inhibiting factors* were few. Both parties had established lines of communication and the move was unlikely to result in domestic opprobrium. Indeed, it is worth considering if this counts as conflict disruption in the sense of activity that qualitatively disrupted the conflict and opened up opportunities for other conflict-calming measures. More broadly, it is worth asking if conflict disruption is possible under the conflict management model. The principal aim is to manage, rather than qualitatively alter the conflict system. In many instances it is interruption rather than disruption. The conflict disrupters, to the extent that there was any conflict disruption, in this case were states or agencies of states.

Conflict resolution is more ambitious and comprehensive than conflict management. It seeks to 'resolve' conflicts often through complex political and constitutional engineering that is usually accompanied by economic and sometimes social initiatives. It aims to go beyond merely freezing conflicts and instead addresses fundamental drivers of conflict. Of course, criticisms are made that conflict resolution does not go far enough and that it fails to take account of power asymmetries and the profound imbalances associated with the international system. Yet, those involved in conflict resolution are often convinced that their approach is comprehensive and aimed at the fundamentals of a conflict. Consider, for example the principal actors in the Northern Ireland peace process: the British and Irish Prime Ministers, the US President, and the leaders of Northern Ireland's political parties (for background, see: Tonge, Shirlow, and McAuley 2011; Gilligan and Tonge 1997). With hindsight, we can see that their *behaviours* were those of entrepreneurs investigating when to make the 'strategic gambit' (Snihur et al. 2018) of setting up a new market (the peace process), and making judgment calls on how much capital (political, economic, symbolic, coercive) to invest in it. Their *motivations* were about lowering the costs of the conflict in terms of human lives and suffering, but also in terms of missed economic potential for their various constituencies. Most probably as well, motivations extended to the realm of the ego and the possibility that history might kindly judge political leaders who were seen to act bravely. In terms of *inhibiting factors*, these differed according to actors and their circumstances. For the British government, for example, inhibiting factors ranged from potential criticism for 'talking to terrorists', a loss of parliamentary majority for John Major's government, and dissent within the media and political establishment. Here the concept of 'intrapreneurship', or entrepreneurship within the organisation, (Deprez, Leroy, and Euwema 2018) comes into play as many of the

calculations made by the British government (and other peace process actors) related to managing expectations within their own constituency. There was innovation and entrepreneurship in the sense of adopting new strategies and language.

While much of the Northern Ireland peace process was restricted to elite political actors, there were significant elements that involved the public. Most notably this involved referendums in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland on the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, and the introduction of a power-sharing Assembly in Northern Ireland. The peace process and accord resulted in profound quality of life improvements linked to demilitarisation, prisoner release, reform of the police force, and economic growth. It is incontrovertible that the conflict was disrupted. Indeed, the failure of militant splinter groups to gain public support and sustain violent campaigns in the years after the Good Friday Agreement indicates the extent to which conflict was disrupted (Whiting 2016; Evans and Tonge 2012). Yet, it is important to note, and this is in line with much criticism of conflict resolution, that Northern Ireland's peace process only went so far. The fundamental drivers of the conflict – the seemingly irresolvable conundrum of accommodating competing nationalisms in the rigid structure of sovereign states – remained unaddressed. Although two decades have passed from the Good Friday Agreement, there have been no serious and sustained attempts to promote reconciliation or address (in)justice issues (Morrow 2017; McEvoy, McEvoy, and Mcconnachie 2006). In other words, while major conflict issues have been disrupted and actors have undergone significant change, important elements of the conflict system remain undisrupted. Indeed, in some ways, the nature of the political dispensation that followed the Good Friday Agreement reinforced identity politics.

Conflict transformation is the most ambitious form of conflict response in the CM-CR-CT framework. It aims to address the underlying conflict causation factors and thus has an interest in identity formation and the political and economic structures that cause and maintain conflict. It often operates at the local, community, and individual levels and so encourages us to think of issues of scale and connection. Conflict transformation has disruptive potential in that it can be genuinely transgressive to the conflictive ethos or the notion that conflict is totalising and normalised. It has the potential to contradict elite political narratives that suggest that a population is mobilised and united, and that an opponent is incorrigible. The limitation of conflict transformation, however, is that it often highly localised and operates outside of the remit of formal political institutions. While it may have an impact in terms of saving and improving lives, this impact might be limited geographically and demographically. The hope is that disruptive acts, stances and words might have a snowball effect and develop into something more significant.

Conflict transformation *behaviours* might include self and intra-community education, inter-group activities that cross the conflict-related fissures in society, or localised violence reduction schemes. They often rely on charismatic individuals and community mobilisers who can lead by example at the local level (Krause 2018). They are, at the micro level, what Lehrs (2016, 384) refers to as 'private peace entrepreneurs', or ' private citizens with no official authority' who engage in pro-peace or pro-social acts. Given that conflict transformation often operates at the local level, the *motivations* behind conflict transformation are often personal: individuals or small groups of individuals want to improve the quality of life in their area and break a cycle of violence, radicalisation, or imprisonment. The *inhibiting factors* call to mind Schumpeter's discussion of the social sanctioning that

entrepreneurs can face if they break established norms. In a community setting, investigating links with the out-group risks criticism from the in-group or surveillance or discipline from the state or another authority body.

An example of conflict transformation shows the ability of a single disruptive act to snowball into something that can affect the meta-conflict. In April 2019, a group of Sudanese Defence Forces soldiers were monitoring crowds who were protesting against the almost 30 year authoritarian rule of President Bashir and rising food prices (Abdelaziz, Georgy, and El Dehan 2019). One evening, pro-Bashir militia members fired on the crowd, presumably to intimidate them. The soldiers made a split second decision and fired back to protect the crowd (Pilling 2019; Burke 2019). This micro-incident was to have significant implications in that it signalled that the army was not loyal to Bashir and the move helped hasten his departure. Sudan's post-Bashir story is messy and unfinished, but the incident was important in that the soldiers displayed sociality (Watson 2009; Lewis 2013; Schatzki 2003), indeed solidarity (Kolers 2012), towards the crowd. While their actions were not pacific, they were motivated by a desire to protect human life and a recognition of the relationality central to human society (Brigg 2018; Hunt 2017). Moreover, they were to have a multiplier effect in showing how conflict disruption based on notions that feature heavily in the conflict transformation playbook could lead to something of systemic importance. The post-Bashir story contains elements of conflict resolution and management, but were hastened by a disruptive spark.

On reviewing the possibilities of conflict disruption in relation to conflict management, conflict resolution, and conflict transformation, it is clear that agency, or the ability of actors to engage in disruptive behaviour, will vary. In conflict management, those with coercive top-down power are likely to dominate and engage in system maintenance. The space for disruptive activity is likely to be narrow. Situations of conflict resolution would, theoretically, contain room for conflict disruption, although in reality much conflict resolution activity is often in the problem-solving mode. Citizens and NGO and civil society actors are often co-opted into conflict resolution processes and rarely wield significant power. In a few cases, citizens and campaigning organisations have sought to disrupt slow-moving or unambitious peace processes. For example, women's and victims groups have sought to widen issue agendas. In general, however, conflict resolution processes are often rule-based and system-preserving, and place limits in disruption even if it is pro-peace and pro-social. Conflict transformation offers greater possibilities for conflict disruption, and may have greater space available for bottom-up actors. In cases such as peace zones, mother's protests, and mutinies against militarism, this behaviour is transgressive to conflictual norms and can be broad-based. The key point is that there is an ambiguity attached to conflict disruption. It can fit into both the problem-solving and the critical worldviews depending on circumstances. In an optimal scenario, conflict can be disrupted – sometimes by design and sometimes not - and conflict actors compelled to pursue de-escalatory strategies.

Peaceandconflict systems: time, power, scale and connectedness

Having explored the notion and practice of conflict disruption in relation to the Schumpeterian framework of behaviour, motivation and inhibiting factors, this section moves to examine the wider implications of conflict disruption in relation to four aspects of peace

and conflict: Time, Power, Scale and Connectedness. There is a dialectical relationship between all four that points to peaceandconflict as a system.

Academic literature on the temporalities of conflict has questioned linear notions of peace and conflict (Hom 2018; Hutchings 2008; Read and Mac Ginty 2017). It has emphasised multiple and simultaneous timelines that combine to produce complex ecosystems in which neither peace nor conflict are discrete processes (De Coning 2018). Instead, they are intertwined and co-constitutive and can be more accurately considered as peaceandconflict rather than peace and conflict. Some conflict response strategies, such as stabilisation, tend to facilitate these 'no war, no peace' situations (De Coning 2020). Indeed, there is no totalised or absolute condition of peace and conflict, merely states in between. It may be tempting to see conflict disruption as a precursor to conflict management, resolution or transformation: a disrupting event that paves the way for a change in attitudes or behaviour among conflict actors. It is prudent, however, to regard it as part of a process. Certainly some acts (such as the Sudanese soldiers firing on the militia) can initially be seen as events that rely on 'spatio-temporal particulars' (Galton 2012, 289). Yet, these events are not standalone; the proximate is part of the structural. In other words, individual acts and events, while seemingly spontaneous and one-off, need to be placed in broader processes of peace and conflict. Just as actors are intersectional, so are events and processes, thus allowing us to question the categories and terminology that we deploy routinely. As Sewell (2005, 9) observes, 'One significant characteristic of historical events is that they always combine social processes with very different temporalities-relatively gradual or long-run social trends, more volatile swings of public opinion, punctual accidental happenings, medium-run political strategies, sudden individual decisions, oscillating economic or climatic rhythms-which are brought together in specific ways, at specific places and times, in a particular sequence. That there are a diversity of temporalities operating in any present raises difficult analytical challenges.'

There is no guarantee that uncertainty and turbulence will result in conflict disruption in the sense of activity that will create space for pro-peace and pro-social activities. It may be that conflict actors do not have the bandwidth or appetite for anything other than a conflict maintenance pathway. Much will depend on the extent to which actors (institutions, militant groups, communities etc.) are able to withstand turbulence and choose the timing and nature of their actions (Ang 2016).

Conflict disrupting events may occur at particular 'moments' during a conflict, but the event has a pre-and after-life. Its pre-life, or formative processes and events, refers to the factors that led to actors engaging in conflict disrupting behaviours and stances. Its afterlife, or legacy, refers to the impact of the event. In many cases, the conflict may not be disrupted at all. It may be interrupted, in the sense of a pause, there may be no material or qualitative difference to the course or intensity of the conflict. In optimal cases, conflict is disrupted in a meaningful way with the disruption providing an opportunity for pro-peace and pro-social innovation. Ultimately it seems sensible to move beyond thinking in terms of linearities and sequencing. These notions may hold at the tactical level in the sense that conflict management and conflict resolution or some prior level of security may have to be in place to enable conflict transformation. Yet, and this is in line with Schumpeter's view of economies as systems of circuits, it seems more accurate to think in terms of interconnected and intersectional networks in which time is relative, and

involves both the proximate and the longue durée and other dimensions in between. In this view, disruptive 'acts' are inherently part of processes.

The notion of temporality also encourages us to think of the value of hindsight in our analytical armoury. It is not always obvious that a conflict disrupter will have any effect. Uber, Deliveroo and Amazon were all written off in the early days (as are many other start-ups) and their disruptive potential only became clear once significant numbers of customers started to change behaviour. Crucially, and thus illustrating the power of disrupters to change systems (or markets), they were joined by new start-up competitors and forced existing market providers to change behaviour. All of this was, of course, only visible with hindsight.

The concept of conflict disruption also invites us to consider the notion of power in the sense of who has the ability to disrupt conflict, or resist that disruption. Power operates in different ways in the conflict management, resolution and transformation scenarios. Conflict management considers power in an orthodox manner: power is material, potentially coercive and often routed through states, militaries and formal institutions. In Kenneth Boulding's phrase, it is 'threat power' (1990, 10). Conflict resolution envisages a mixed economy of power – some formal and some informal. Under the conflict transformation rubric, more emancipatory versions of power are envisaged. So rather than the 'power over' of the realist worldview, more positive versions of power are on offer: power to, power with, power from (Chinn and Falk-Rafael 2015, 65). Moreover, power (or agency) is devolved and can reside in individuals and communities. Importantly, this worldview is accepting of immaterial types of power that are often tacit and embedded within 'deep culture'. The types of conflict disrupting power will vary according to context and what the conflict response model allows. Under conflict management, power is usually exercised exclusively through states and international organisations and often includes coercion and compliance. Under conflict resolution, a mixture of methods will be involved, reflecting the more expansive nature of conflict resolution but also its residual conservatism. Under conflict transformation, more personalised forms of power are at play as individuals and groups of individuals make decisions to self-educate, have contact with the out-group, and contravene hegemonic group narratives that are axiomatically pejorative against the out-group. Conflict disruption allows us to think about more variegated forms of power that may be subtle, deliberately shielded from surveillance and very context specific. The conflict disrupting act may be a source of energy that reverberates, impacting on some more than others. We might see different constellations of power coming together: social, moral, material, celebrity, media etc. Some actors may lose energy in conflict disruption scenarios.

Conflict disruption also encourages thinking about scale and the connectedness of the different scales that constitute peace and conflict ecosystems. In abstract terms, the CM-CT-CT framework maps onto a hierarchy that descends from states and international organisations to conflict-affected national governments and civil society and then, finally, to individuals and communities. Yet, on thinking about conflict disruption and its possible multiplier effects, it becomes clear that rigidly stratified notions of peace and conflict seem unrealistic. It seems sensible to think in terms of connectivity and intersectionality whereby actors and structures inhabit and co-constitute common but complex life-worlds (Mac Ginty 2019). Rather than hierarchies and actors that are contained or isolated, peaceandconflict is systemic and relies on chains of connection.

Some of these connections are invisible, temporary, occasional or largely dormant. But they help constitute a multi-scalar peace and conflict system in which the micro-dynamics of conflict transformation between individuals in a particular locality are framed by, but might also help co-constitute actions and stances at other levels. Thus, for example, no shoot zone initiatives led by charismatic individuals in gang violence-affected areas of north American cities might begin as highly localised initiatives in a particular neighbourhood (Adams 2018). Such initiatives might gain attention and buy-in from other community leaders, municipalities and law enforcement and public health officials. Over time, there might be the formalisation of initiatives that began informally. In totality, these multiple actions and stances form a dynamic, complex adaptive system (De Coning 2018).

Conflict disruption can occur at any point in the scale, but it may have unanticipated consequences (Sewell 2005, 352) with a disruptive act at one level having an impact at another level and not necessarily in a strict linear way. The analogy of fracking or fracturing used to extract shale gas seems suitable. Fracking processes involve a high pressure water mixture being injected into the earth in the hope of opening up new channels and releasing gas. Sometimes though, there are unanticipated outcomes in the form of tremors. Conflict actors, and those who wish to disrupt, manage, resolve or transform conflict all operate in contexts defined by imperfect knowledge (De Coning 2018, 309). In some cases, actors pursue a course to see what happens, or in the hope that a particular outcome will ensue. As De Coning (2019, 36) notes in relation to adaptive peacebuilding, 'Pressure for change accumulates, but often without much evidence during the build up phase. And then suddenly, when a tipping point is reached, a system can change significantly in a short space of time.' This 'moment' (although the moment is actually the product of multiple factors constructed over the longer term) is crucial in terms of what happens next. Are pro-peace actors able to capitalise on it and turn it into something more significant, or are violent or authoritarian actors able to regain control and impose their will? Can part of the conflict-peace system 'self-organise' and inject new ideas, momentum or dynamics into the system?

The notion of conflict disruption encourages us to think about the relationship between events (a disruptive act) and processes (the wider conflict dynamic). Sewell (2005, 76) notes the importance of 'grasping the ongoing dialectic between small-scale and large-scale processes.' In truth, a neat 'dialogue' is probably impossible to disaggregate because of the multitude of processes, narratives, stances, and logics in simultaneous operation. Indeed, it is worth reaching for experimental thinking from Quantum Mechanics in which two different states of being can be in simultaneous operation (Fein et al. 2019). For example, a conflict could be disrupted and pro-peace and pro-social actions and stances could be in operation while – in the same conflict situation – authoritarian or militant actors may be planning for the next crackdown or offensive. It seems important to move beyond binary thinking – as those investigating agonistic approaches to peace and conflict have done (Strömbom 2019)

Much depends on the extent to which the peaceandconflict system is insulated against shocks or conflict disruption. Systems that tolerate conflict management are often dominated by states and security institutions, and so may be able to withstand attempts to disrupt the conflict. Such systems, especially those involving authoritarian regimes, can be brittle however and susceptible to regime change interventions and protest. Peace and conflict systems that tolerate conflict resolution and conflict transformation may

provide greater opportunities for pro-peace and pro-social disruption. It is worth noting, of course, and in keeping with the systemic worldview in this article, that conflict management, conflict resolution, and conflict transformation may be in operation simultaneously with disruptive actors operational throughout. As already noted, these actors will face different inhibiting factors depending on context.

To conclude, the concept of conflict disruption provides us with a vehicle with which to reassess the CM-CR-CT framework and our conceptualisations of peace and conflict more generally. Crucially, it is important that we see conflict disruption as something more than a pre-step to the next step. Certainly, it can play an ignition role and, in an optimal scenario, can lead to a positive step-change in the conflict dynamic or ethos. Indeed, this role is not to be dismissed lightly given the pressures for path dependency found both in conflicts and in peacebuilding (De Coning 2019). But beyond this role as an initiator of actions, speech or stances that are pacific, conflict disruption encourages us to think about peace and conflict in ways that emphasise their systemic and co-constitutive nature. In turn, this encourages us to dispense with binaries, notions of conflict beginnings or terminations, and notions of discrete and targeted interventions. Instead, it seems more accurate to think in terms of complex adaptive systems that are constituted through 'the interrelatedness and multidimensionality of the feedback loops (positive and negative) within and between scales' (Millar 2019, 15). In turn, this facilitates the dismissal of Orientalist ideas connected with conflict that seek to exoticise it and associate it with distant people and places.

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Disclosure statement

Notes on contributor

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