

# Conflict and Conflict Management: A Cross-Cultural Approach

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## Course Description

Conflicts are found in all human communities. As Nader and Todd write, "In all human societies there are persons who have problems of debt, of theft, of infidelity, of employment, of consumption, and of personal injury. Many of these people seek to do something about their problems, and in so doing resort to remedy agents that the society has previously developed to deal with them." When we look at who or what these remedy agents are we find great variety. In some societies the original disputants settle the matter themselves, sometimes in a peaceful fashion, sometimes resorting to physical force or threatening its use. In other cases third parties are quickly brought into a dispute and the members of a community work towards the achievement of a settlement in various ways. Some third parties are specialists in this area, while in other cases the third parties include all members of the community. Similarly, we can observe variation in how societies deal with conflict involving members of other societies. How can we understand such great variation in conflict and its management?

**Goals.** This course aims to provide an awareness of the range of variation in the conflict and dispute management processes starting with an examination of small scale, preindustrial societies, typically studied by anthropologists, and a consideration of ways in which insights gained from these societies, quite different from our own, can help in understanding conflict and dispute settlement in more familiar settings.

At the most general level, conflicts are about divergent interests and threatened identities which can both be captured in the competing, often hostile and threatening interpretations of a dispute the parties offer. A broad conceptual goal of this course is to understand the dynamics of interests and identities in conflict processes. A key working hypothesis is that conflicts in very different cultural settings involving a wide range of social and political groups share important common properties. Additional general questions underlying the course concern understanding the distant vs. proximate causes of disputes, an appreciation of the sequences or stages through which conflicts go, a sense of the ways in which external and internal community dynamics affect outcomes, and the role of perceptions and group dynamics in conflict processes. Finally, all theories of conflict contain underlying assumptions about conflict management. Making these explicit can help us better connect an analysis of conflict to strategies for managing it constructively.

**Expectations.** The material covered in the course is wide ranging. There is a great deal of reading to do; don't take this course if you are not sure you have the time or commitment to do it. Students are expected to complete the reading assignments *before* each class and be prepared to ask questions and discuss them.

**Organization and assignments.** The class meetings will be organized around the assigned readings. On some occasions there will be short lectures to present additional background. Most of the time, however, will be devoted to developing ideas from the readings through group discussion. Each student will hand in seven logs-- short reactions to material in the readings, class discussions or recent events. They should be between a paragraph to a page in length and are due at the Tuesday class each week. You may choose when to write them as long as you don't go longer than three weeks without handing one in. The logs will be graded but they must be completed to pass the course. There will also be several short (2-3 page) papers, an observational assignment, a midterm, a final, and a research project on a local conflict.

## Course Reading

The required books can be purchased from the Bryn Mawr College Bookshop.

1. Marc Howard Ross. *The Management of Conflict: Interpretations and Interests in Comparative Perspective*. Yale.
2. David W. Brown. *When Strangers Cooperate*. Free Press. 3. Robert Axelrod. *The Evolution Of Cooperation*. Basic.
4. Muzafer Sherif et al. *The Robbers Cave Experiment*. Wesleyan University Press.
5. Lawrence Susskind and Jeffrey Cruikshank. *Breaking The Impasse: Consensual Approaches to Resolving Public Disputes*. Basic Books.
6. Beth Roy. *Some Trouble With Cows: Making Sense of Social Conflict* University of California Press.
7. Roger Fisher, Elizabeth Kopelman, and Andrea Kupfer Schneider. *Beyond Machiavelli: Tools for Coping with Conflict*. Harvard University Press.

### **Reserve Readings**

(Can be copied as a packet)

1. Colin Turnbull, "The Politics of Non-aggression," in Ashley Montagu (ed), *Learning Non-Aggression: The Experience of Non-Literate Societies*. Natural History Press, pp. 161-221.
2. Napoleon Chagnon. "Yanomamo Social Organization and Warfare," in Morton Fried et al (eds), *War: The Anthropology of Armed Conflict and Aggression*. Natural History Pres, pp. 109- 159.
3. Stephen Worchel. Dawn Coutant-Sassic, and Frankie Wong, "Toward a More Balanced View of Conflict: There is a Positive Side," in Stephen Worchel and Jeffrey Simpson (eds), *Conflict Between People and Groups: Causes. Processes and Resolutions*. Nelson-Hall, pp. 76-89.
4. Laura Nader and Harry Todd. "Introduction: The Disputing Process," in *The Disputing Process--Law in Ten Societies*, Columbia pp. 1-15. 5. Robert A. LeVine and Donald T. Campbell. *Ethnocentrism: Theories of Conflict. Ethnic Attitudes. and Group Behavior*. John Wiley, Chapters 3-4 pp. 29-59.
6. Patricia Draper. "The Learning Environment for Aggression and Anti-Social Behavior Among the !Kung," in Ashley Montagu (ed), *Learning Non-aggression: The Experience of Non- Literate Societies*. Oxford, pp. 31-53.
7. Mervyn Meggitt. "Male-female Relations in the Highlands of New Guinea", *American Anthropologist*, 1964, pp. 204-224.
8. Terrell A. Northrup. "The Dynamic of Identity in Personal and Social Conflict," in Louis Kriesberg, Terrell A. Northrup and Stuart J. Thorson (eds), *Intractable Conflicts and Their Transformation*. Syracuse University Press, pp. 55-82.
9. Svenn Lindskold, "GRIT: Reducing Distrust Through Carefully Introduced Conciliation," in Stephen Worchel and William G. Austin (eds), *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*. Nelson Hall, pp. 305-322.
10. Lynn Mather and Barbara Yngvesson, "Language, Audience, and the Transformation of Disputes." *Law and Society Review*. 1980-81, pp. 775-821.
11. William Felsteiner, Richard L. Abel, and Austin Sarat. "The Emergence and Transformation of Disputes: Naming, Blaming, Claiming..." *Law and Society Review*. 15 (1980-81), 631-653.

12. Robert Jervis. "Deterrence, the Spiral Model and Intentions of the Adversary," in Ralph K. White (ed). *Psychology and the Prevention of Nuclear War*. pp. 107-130.
13. Richard Ned Lebow. "Deterrence Reconsidered: The Challenge of Recent Research," in Ralph K. White (ed). *Psychology and the Prevention*
14. Herbert Kelman, "Israelis and Palestinians: Psychological Prerequisites for Mutual Acceptance." *International Security*. 3 (1978), pp. 162-186.
15. Joseph Montville, "Psychoanalytic Enlightenment and the Greening of Diplomacy," in Vamik Volkan, Joseph Montville, and Demetrios A. Julius (eds). *The Psychodynamics of International Relationships: Unofficial Diplomacy at Work*. Lexington Books, pp. 177-192.

## Course Schedule

### I. Introduction.

#### **Weeks 1-2: January 23- February 1: The concept of conflict and contrasting cases of conflict in two small scale societies**

##### **January 23:**

Overview of the semester

##### **January 25:**

1. Colin Turnbull, "The Politics of Non-aggression," in Ashley Montagu (ed), *Learning Non-aggression: The Experience of Non-Literate Societies*. Natural History Press, pp. 161-221 (on reserve)

##### **January 30:**

1. Napoleon Chagnon. "Yanomamo Social Organization and Warfare," in Morton Fried (eds), *War: The Anthropology of Armed Conflict and Aggression*. Natural History Press, pp. 109-59 (on reserve)

Why is there more conflict and violence in some communities than others? What do people fight about? How can we describe conflict and cooperation in the daily life of any community? Construct an explanation for the relative peacefulness of the Mbuti and the fierceness of the Yanomamo. Is the social organization of each community a cause or an effect of patterns of conflict each author observes? What about the psychocultural dynamics? How do they fit in with each pattern?

##### **February 1:**

1. Stephen Worchel, Dawn Coutant-Sassic, and Frankie Wong, "Toward a More Balanced View of Conflict: There is a Positive Side," in Stephen Worchel and Jeffrey Simpson (eds), *Conflict Between People and Groups: Causes. Processes and Resolutions*. Nelson-Hall, pp. 76-89 (on reserve)

2. Laura Nader and Harry Todd. "Introduction: The Disputing Process," in *The Disputing Process--Law in Ten Societies*, Columbia. pp. 1-15 (on reserve)

Can you define the key concepts: conflict, cooperation, aggression? What is meant by conflict management? What do Worschel et al tell us about the positive aspects of conflict? What do Nader and Todd suggest about the relationship between the structure of a community and the patterns of conflict management likely to be found there?

#### **Week 3: February 6-8: Conflict and Escalation: The Disputing Process**

1. Beth Roy. *Some Trouble With Cows*. Chapters 1-5, pp. 1-122

Recounting the story of a conflict is often not a simple task. Roy takes us through the steps of reconstructing the story of a conflict in a Bangladesh village. While the specific events and the participants' accounts at first seem very far away from your daily lives, another view is that there are some very universal features to the conflicts she describes. What might these be? Can you say what the conflict is about? Why or why not? To what extent might different participants accept or reject your account?

## **II. Exploring the Roots of Conflict**

### **Week 4: February 13-15: A Cross-Cultural Approach to Conflict and its Management**

#### **February 13:**

1. Marc Howard Ross. *The Management of Conflict*, Chapters 1-2, pp. 1-34.

What is the connection between how we understand societal differences in conflict behavior and how we discuss individual disputes? How can we talk about the course which individual conflicts take? Why did the case of the scarves in French schools continue to escalate? How is this conflict about both the interests and interpretations of the participants? Why is it important for us to recognize that a serious social conflict is rarely about just one thing? Consider the different meanings of the conflict and the identity issues surrounding the French case.

#### **February 15:**

1. Ross. *The Management of Conflict*. Chapter 3, pp. 35-68.

Studying low conflict societies is important for a number of reasons. One is because the institutions and practices of constructive conflict management societies are not necessarily the opposite from what we find in societies with severe conflict. Which of the elements identified from the five case studies in the chapter are most interesting to you? Which part of the argument is least persuasive?

### **Week 5: Feb. 20-22: Conflict and cooperation as group processes: Ingroups and outgroups**

1. Muzafer Sherif et al. *The Robbers Cave Experiment*. (Skim chapters 1-3, read Chapters 4-8 more carefully)

This classic study which has been called an example of experimental anthropology still merits our attention-- particularly the chapters of the book describing and analyzing the experiences in the camp. Does this provide support for a human disposition to divide into ingroup and outgroups? We can certainly find many examples of it. Sherif says that this is primarily due to the structure of the situation and that by altering it conflict or cooperation can be elicited.

### **Week 6: February 27-29: Social structure, psychocultural interpretations and conflict**

#### **February 27: Social structural interests and conflict**

1. Robert LeVine and Donald T. Campbell. *Ethnocentrism. Theories of Conflict. Ethnic Attitudes and Group Behavior*. John Wiley, Chapters 3-4, pp. 29-59 (on reserve)

How does the social structure and ecology of particular society explain the pattern of regularized conflict and warfare? How does it "determine" who fights with whom? What is the nature of social structural interests which underlies "realistic" group conflict? What are the forces for escalation of conflict associated with particular patterns of social organization? What are the forces for terminating conflicts?

#### **February 29: Psychocultural identities and conflict**

1. Patricia Draper. "The Learning Environment for Aggression and Anti-Social Behavior Among the !Kung," in Ashley Montagu (ed), *Learning Non-aggression: The Experience of Non-Literate Societies*. Oxford, pp. 31-53 (on reserve)

2. Mervyn Meggitt. "Male-Female Relations in the Highlands of New Guinea", *American Anthropologist*, 1964, pp. 204-224 (on reserve)

3. Terrell A. Northrup. "The Dynamic of Identity in Personal and Social Conflict," in Louis Kriesberg, Terrell A. Northrup and Stuart J. Thorson (eds), *Intractable Conflicts and Their Transformation*. Syracuse University Press, pp. 55-82 (on reserve)

What is a psychocultural explanation for conflict? What are its key elements? Consider different pieces linking early childhood experiences in the construction of social orientations such as basic trust, aggression, and attachment? How are these core building blocks in the development of social and group identity? Consider the centrality of gender identity issues to these theories of conflict. Suggest how the arguments presented in the context of small scale, pre-industrial societies might help explain the dynamics of conflict in our own society.

### **III. Conflict as process**

#### **Week 7: March 5-7: Making sense of social conflict**

1. Beth Roy. *Some Trouble With Cows*. Chapters 6-10, pp. 125-194.

We return to Roy's conflict in Bangladesh. this time our goal is to "make sense" of it? Why did such an apparently trivial incident spark a social event of such wide ranging significance? What does her analysis tell you about the roots of social conflict and about prospects for its successful management? How are both interests and identities involved in the conflict she examines? How are each addressed or not addressed in the conflict's termination?

#### **Weeks 8-9: Conflict and Cooperation**

##### **March 19-21: The evolution of conflict and cooperation**

1. Robert Axelrod. *The Evolution of Cooperation*. Basic.
2. Svenn Lindskold, "GRIT: Reducing Distrust Through Carefully Introduced Conciliation," in Stephen Worchel and William G. Austin (eds), *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*. Nelson Hall, pp. 305-322 (on reserve)

What are the key elements in an evolutionary explanation for conflict and cooperation? What are the advantages to studying conflict and cooperation through games such as the Prisoner's Dilemma? When do nations seem to be similar and different in their behavior than the players in the PD game? How is the structure of the game similar or different than the "real world"? How is GRIT as a strategy for cooperation similar or different to Tit for Tat? What are the strengths and weaknesses of each?

##### **March 26-28: Encouraging Cooperation**

1. David W. Brown. *When Strangers Cooperate*. Free Press.

Brown starts with the simple observation that social life is patterned and an important part of the regularity we come to take for granted involves cooperation among strangers. How does such cooperation begin? How is it reinforced? How can it be extended? In what ways is Brown's analysis similar to different to Axelrod's?

#### **Week 10: April 2-4: Conflict stages and strategies: Deterrence and escalation**

##### **April 2:**

1. Lynn Mather and Barbara Yngvesson, "Language, Audience, and the Transformation of Disputes." *Law and Society Review*. 1980-81, pp. 775-821 (on reserve)

2. William Felsteiner, Richard L. Abel, and Austin Sarat. "The Emergence and Transformation of Disputes: Naming, Blaming, Claiming..." *Law and Society Review*. 15 (1980-81), 631-653 (on reserve)

#### **April 4:**

1. Robert Jervis. "Deterrence, the Spiral Model and Intentions of the Adversary," in R. K. White (ed). *Psychology and the Prevention of Nuclear War* . pp. 107-130 (on reserve)

2. Richard Ned Lebow. "Deterrence Reconsidered: The Challenge of Recent Research," in R. K. White (ed). *Psychology and the Prevention of Nuclear War* . pp. 352-372. (on reserve)

Why are escalatory sequences so difficult to break? What are the structural and psychological forces which promote or inhibit escalation? Consider the ways in which Mather and Yngvesson talk about language and escalation pointing out important ways in which disputes change over time. What do Felsteiner et al mean when they talk about a transformation perspective and why do they suggest that perhaps there is not enough conflict? Deterrence, in the form of mutually assured destruction (MAD) was the core of American defense policy throughout the post World War II period. Both Lebow and Jervis raise serious questions about the key assumptions underlying deterrence's effectiveness. What are the alternatives to deterrence?

#### **IV. Conflict Management**

##### **Week 11: April 9-11: Understanding success and failure in conflict management**

1. Ross. *The Management Of Conflict*. Chapters 4-7, pp. 69-166.

Conflict management is a process which needs to address both divergent interests and hostile interpretations. What is required to do each? Consider how different considerations are involved in each case and yet successful conflict management often finds ways to combine the two. What constitutes success? How do you know it when you see it?

##### **Week 12: April 16-18: Problem solving and joint decision making in public disputes**

1. Lawrence Susskind and Jeffrey Cruikshank. *Breaking the Impasse*. Basic Books.

Joint decision making is strikingly different from situations where solutions are imposed from the outside. If it's so easy why doesn't it occur more often? What strikes you as the most crucial stumbling block in their scheme? Is it always possible to define mutual interests?

##### **Week 13: April 23-25: Addressing interests in constructive conflict management**

1. Roger Fisher, Elizabeth Kopelman, and Andrea Kupfer Schneider. *Beyond Machiavelli: Tools for Coping with Conflict*. Harvard University Press.

Roger Fisher is a conflict resolution practitioner who emphasizes structural barriers to negotiated agreements. Altering structure provides a vehicle for negotiating "win-win" outcomes-- ones in which all parties are better off than if they had failed to reach an agreement. Consider the tools he offers to people locked in conflict? Are there types of issues or contexts where his approach is likely to be particularly effective? To what extent are you prepared to argue that his approach is applicable in a wide range of cultural settings? Some say that Fisher fails to address deeply rooted identity conflicts? Do you agree or disagree?

##### **Week 14: April 30-May 1: Psychocultural prerequisites for constructive conflict management**

1. Ross, Chapters 8-9, pp. 167-185.

2. Herbert Kelman, "Israelis and Palestinians: Psychological Prerequisites for Mutual Acceptance." *International Security*. 3 (1978), pp. 162-186 (on reserve)

3. Joseph Montville, "Psychoanalytic Enlightenment and the Greening of Diplomacy," in Vamik Volkan, Joseph Montville, and Demetrios A. Julius (eds). *The Psychodynamics of International Relationships: Unofficial Diplomacy at Work*. Lexington Books, pp. 177-192 (on reserve)

The hypothesis that disputants' hostile interpretations must be modified before divergent interests can be addressed in severe conflicts is compelling. What does this mean in practice, however? White suggests a key element is the development of empathy with an opponent and in so doing altering perceptions and (mis)perceptions of the enemy. Although White focuses on international conflict, how can his ideas be applied to conflict at different levels? Kelman (in a 15 year old article) offers specific hypotheses about key psychocultural interpretations which need to shift for Palestinian-Israeli peace. Montville offers ideas about the incorporating of psychocultural factors into the international diplomatic process. What are critical questions about conflict and its management which need additional attention? To what extent is a cross-cultural perspective helpful in developing a general framework in which you can place particular conflicts? Does a comparative understanding of conflict help you analyze the local dispute you are studying?