



**CATOLICA**  
**INSTITUTO DE ESTUDOS POLÍTICOS**  

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**LISBOA**

**Rethinking United Nations Peacekeeping Missions:  
the case of Western Sahara**

Dissertation submitted to the Portuguese Catholic University, for the degree of  
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**Author: Joana Carolina Saragoça Lameira Ramos**

**Student Number: 104516001**

Dissertation written under supervision of Professora Doutora Mónica Dias  
and General Fontes Ramos

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## **Abstract**

This study aims to address a simple question: is the current strategy of conflict resolution defined and developed by the United Nations sustainable, or should a new model be adopted? To answer this, this work has presented an analysis of the evolution of the concept of conflict, as defined by several crucial authors, such as Lewis Coser, Ralph Dahrendorf, and Raymond Aron. Once a suitable definition was found, several theories on conflict resolution were addressed, particularly the works of Edward Azar, John Galtung, and the development of this notion within the United Nations, mainly focused in former UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali report, *An Agenda for Peace*.

Then, this thesis focuses on presenting the evolution of peacekeeping operations through time. In a critical analysis, it stresses the missions' lack of communication, resources, preparation, and political will. With unfit and unclear mandates, their main goal of reaching an agreement is insufficient in today's world. This study shows that an agreement will not take away years of resentment and hate, nor will it lead people to a peaceful coexistence after years of violence and war. In line with these conclusions, this study proposes John Paul Lederach's theory on Conflict Transformation as an alternative strategy to rethink peacekeeping operations. Highlighting the importance of relationships to achieve reconciliation, it emphasizes the central role individuals must play to achieve peace.

Through the example of the conflict in Western Sahara, this work concludes that there is the need to rethink peace operations as a whole. Beginning in 1975, this conflict lasts for 40 years, without a foreseeable end. This research goes further by arguing that this new approach suggested by Lederach can help unlock this stalemate when everything else seems to have failed. If applied, it can improve parties' communication and understanding of the other, thus providing them with tools to create and envision a new shared future.

## **Resumo**

Este estudo pretende responder a uma questão: será a atual estratégia de resolução de conflitos, definida pelas Nações Unidas, sustentável, ou deverá um novo modelo ser adotado? Para responder a esta pergunta, foi analisada a evolução do conceito de conflito, baseado na definição apresentada por autores como Lewis Coser, Ralph Dahrendorf, e Raymond Aron. Uma vez encontrada uma definição, foram apresentadas algumas teorias de resolução de conflitos, ilustradas nos trabalhos de Edward Azar e John Galtung, bem como a ideia desenvolvida pela Nações Unidas, com particular enfoque no relatório apresentado pelo antigo Secretário-Geral Boutros Boutros Ghali, *Agenda para a Paz*.

Esta tese apresenta ainda a evolução das operações de paz ao longo do tempo. Através de uma análise crítica, sublinha a falta de comunicação, recursos, preparação e vontade políticas como principais problemas que assolam as missões de paz. Neste sentido, este trabalho revela que um acordo de paz não afasta anos de ressentimento ou ódio, nem produz entre as comunidades uma convivência pacífica após anos de violência e guerra. Em linha com estas conclusões, este estudo propõe a teoria de Transformação de Conflitos apresentada por John Paul Lederach como uma estratégia alternativa para repensar estas missões. Salientando a importância das relações para alcançar reconciliação, esta teoria enfatiza o papel central que cada indivíduo deve assumir para alcançar a paz.

Tendo como base o exemplo do conflito no Sahara Ocidental, é possível concluir que é necessário repensar as missões de paz. Com início em 1975, este conflito dura há 40 anos, sem um fim à vista. Este estudo argumenta ainda que a abordagem sugerida por Lederach apresenta-se como uma possibilidade de desbloquear este conflito, sobretudo quando tudo o resto parece ter falhado. Poderá melhorar a comunicação e o entendimento entre as partes, fornecendo assim as ferramentas para que ambas possam construir um futuro em conjunto.

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## **Introduction**

Conflict resolution is broader than conflict termination. Ending a violent conflict does not necessarily resolve the issues that were root causes. Nor does resolving the issues in conflict necessarily end violence. It is quite possible that efforts to resolve a conflict may not end a war, and efforts to end a war may not resolve the underlying conflict. Conflict resolution aims for both a transformation of the conflict and the elimination of violence, but (...) these are not always achieved.

(Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall 2011, 171)

Conflict is, in itself, an intrinsic and universal feature of human society, a dynamic reality underlined by a complex interplay of attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors. As such, it is unpredictable and our best efforts to end it may have contrary effects and cause relapses, breakthroughs, and setbacks with unforeseen consequences. However, one thing is certain: the most common outcome of violent conflicts is both parties becoming worse off than if they had decided for another strategy. When both parties understand this, they have a strong incentive to change and move towards outcomes previously disregarded. This means they should stop perceiving conflict as a win-lose situation, where one of them wins all and the other is defeated, and rethink it as a lose-lose (if both insist on ongoing violence) or win-win situation (conflict transformation which means cooperation and reconciliation).

There was little room for peace negotiations throughout the Cold War, and victory and defeat were the most common outcomes (Wallensteen 2002, 88). The escalation of a conflict was quickly felt, and the wars were shorter, with one side usually prevailing in the field. Even remote areas were strategically important, and so direct and indirect military interventions were frequent.

With the end of the Cold War, in the '90s, came high hopes of a decrease in the number and brutality of wars: several of them were being sustained by the Cold War climate and were thought to be on the verge of conclusion.



Some things did indeed change: the number of conflicts that ended with a peace agreement increased significantly (before the Cold War, 1% ended with a cease-fire and 9% in peace agreement; in the '90s, 18% of conflicts ended with a vpeace agreement and 20% with a cease-fire, according to Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall (2012, 172)). This data shows a stronger emphasis on peaceful settlement of dispute after the end of the Cold War than before, but it does not show the level of success of these missions.

Despite this apparently good sign, reality happened to be quite different than expected: As Wallensteen argues, “it appears that for each conflict solved between the parties with international efforts, a new one emerges, requiring the same mix of improvisation and standard operating procedures by the international community” (Wallensteen 2002, 27). The independence movements all over the world and the dissolution of old borders soon originated new disputes on territories, resources and power and intrastate wars replaced the wars between states (Kaldor 2012). Not only the number of ongoing conflicts after the end of the Cold War was increasing, but there was also the need for a new approach to this reality: it was, and still is, necessary to address the underlying roots of a conflict, restore relationships and promote reconciliation to achieve a lasting peaceful solution.

Despite this need, research is more focused on legitimizing United Nations operations than trying to understand if they are successful in the long term. In many cases, conflicts frizzle out, armed conflicts end, but the underlying reasons and contradictions remain, thUs increasing the probability to break out again.

Given this reality, one question arises: **is the current strategy of conflict resolution as defined and developed by the UN sustainable, or should a new model be adopted**, as, for example, the idea of Conflict Transformation proposed by John P. Lederach?

To illustrate this, **the conflict on Western Sahara** will be used as a **case study**. Despite the existence of a peace agreement signed in 1991 and an ongoing UN mission deployed in the field (MINURSO), the conflict in itself is far from over and it is not nearer today to its end than it was thirty years ago (Theofilopoulou, 2007). After 16 years of war and more than 40 years of overall conflict (since 1975), it is important to reconsider what was done and think about a new approach to this conflict.

## **I. Thesis Proposal**

The United Nations has, since the end of the Second World War, established peace missions throughout the world with the goal of ending war. This doctrine was later solidified in 1992, under the presidency of the UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali with the resolution *An agenda for peace: preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peace-keeping* (UN A/47/277 - S/24111 1992). This document established UN primary responsibility as the “maintenance of international peace and security” (UN A/47/277 - S/24111 1992, par. 16) and set forth measures to ensure that this ambition would be achieved. To do this, Boutros-Ghali suggested several approaches to conflicts, depending upon the stages they were in: preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace enforcement.

It is precisely the idea of peacekeeping, the “deployment of a United Nations presence in the field, hitherto with the consent of all the parties concerned” (UN A/47/277 - S/24111 1992, par. 20), that this thesis intends to analyze to understand if they are successful in achieving long-lasting peace and, if not, to present an alternative approach. Thus, this work intends to answer the yet another question: **can peace agreements, as they are thought and developed in present circumstances, provide enough guarantees for peace and conflict resolution?**

To do this, this thesis proposes not only to study the theoretical approaches and background definitions and ideas on peacekeeping operations but also to study their evolution and efficacy over time. Lack of coordination between UN departments and agencies working in the field may hamper the prospects of achieving an agreement, easily explored and manipulated by the parties to get a favorable deal in the negotiations.

Given this, a possible response to this question would be to rethink the current peacekeeping strategies: different conflicts and contexts require different approaches and strategies rather than an almost ‘devotion’ to the belief that a specific theory or path will always work best in every situation. Another possible solution is a new approach to the realms of the conflict: more than a particular way of looking and seeing the conflict, the conflict transformation approach gives priority to rebuild confidence and relationship between the conflicting parties. More than an agreement between the elites, it seems even more necessary the reconciliation and empowerment of mid-level groups – “community-based bottom-up peacebuilding approach” (Paffenholz 2009, 5).

In their book *Contemporary Conflict Revolution: The prevention, management and transformation of deadly conflicts* (2011), Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall claim, as we have seen before, that "civil wars ended by negotiated settlements are more likely to lead to the recurrence of armed conflicts than those ended by military victories; on the other hand, those ended by military victories are more likely to lead to genocide" (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall, 2011, 173). Conflicts settled by negotiations lead to more fragile situations, less likely to result in sustainable peace and more probable to lead to a resume of violence.

For some actors involved in the conflict, peace can bring loss of status and threaten their interests; maintaining the status quo seems to offer advantages that a permanent peace

solution might put at risk. Despite this, most conflicts impose massive costs on societies (economic, political, security and human costs), so there is usually a large portion of the population that would greatly benefit from peace. To surpass this, both sides must realize that they cannot achieve their goals through violence and that it is costly to continue on the same path to conflict. However, if this is so, why, even after signing peace agreements, violence is recurring?

Do conflicts end after the ratification of a peace agreement, and to what extent can the United Nations enforce them? In case the answer to both questions is no, then what is the future for this type of agreements?

These are some of the questions this thesis proposes to answer, using the Western Sahara conflict and the 1991 cease-fire agreement and UN mandate, MINURSO (United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara), as a case study.

This case study is fundamental to the field of peace research. This ‘science of peace’ aims to provide the basics to help prevent future wars by better understanding the causes of violence and reducing/removing them. To do this, it is fundamental to study past and present experiences of war, and the conflict of Western Sahara is a very rich and meaningful one. First, it teaches us what should and must be avoided in future approaches to conflict (explained through the thesis), and by the innovative strategies that have yet to be adopted, which leaves space for much to be done.

Thus, it seems that the study of this conflict is of utmost relevance today. This idea was only solidified by a trip to the Saharawi refugee camps in Tindouf in 2017. Unfortunately, the conflict is, nowadays, a very remote one, lacking international attention, despite being fundamental for the region’s stability and security as well as the promotion of human rights. Besides, this conflict is at the center of one of the most important discussions

in peace studies: what is peace? How can we describe and deconstruct the concept of peace? Is peace merely the absence of war, or is there something else involved? There has not been active fighting for almost 30 years in Western Sahara, and there is a signed peace agreement. Does that mean that there is peace?

Based on this example, peace must mean more than just a negative concept, as the absence of something, of war, direct violence; it must have a deeper meaning that needs to be grasped to overcome the current stalemate. It must also have a positive sense, and require conditions like security, justice, reconciliation, and respect. As such, the contribution of peace research is of great importance.

Furthermore, another aspect also calls our attention: how unimportant the population was in all this peace process. Until today, they remain unheard and unseen, unconsidered. They have yet to be consulted. Their experiences under Moroccan and Polisario's rule are not requested. After more than 40 years of conflict, it is time to start considering new approaches to this conflict. Peace studies has several valuable proposals with analyzing, one of which will be presented in this thesis.

## **II. Context and Research Field / Research Field and Context**

At first, it is important to begin by unraveling concepts such as conflict and peace: the idea of peace and what it entails is in part the subject of this thesis. Here, the works of Lewis Coser (1956), Ralf Dahrendorf (1958; 1959), and Raymond Aron (2003) will be essential to grasp fundamental insights on social conflict. This will teach us that conflict is a dynamic reality that can never be erased from society. It is intimately connected with liberty, diversity, and human individuality, so the road should be more to transform violent conflict into a peaceful one than to try to solve or erase it. To understand the idea of peace, and how it can be more than the end of violence (positive peace as opposed to negative peace), the works

of John Burton (1972), Christopher Mitchell (1981; 1990), Edward Azar (1990) and Johan Galtung (1969; 1990; 1996; 2000; 2004) will be analyzed.

To understand how conflict resolution works on the ground, it is certainly fruitful to look at the work of the United Nations – the most important and committed institution to tackle the problem of conflict resolution and peacekeeping on a general basis and an international-universal level.

It is necessary to rethink peace operations so that they convey different values and meanings: they need to integrate different interests, expectations and contributions that translate people's views of the conflict and not only the interests and perspectives of the belligerent actors, directly involved on the violent and armed part of it. To be successful, an approach to conflict cannot only be thought of based on a top-down perspective, for this idea only restricts the possibilities to achieve peace. It is important to integrate the population, their will, their ways of thinking about the issues in question. Without this, no peace agreement can last. As Ramsbotham Woodhouse and Miall defend, there is a “need for an approach that is not situated within any particular state, society or established site of power, but rather promotes constructive means of handling conflict at local through to global levels in the interests of humanity” (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall 2011, 265). Here it is important to bring to the discussion the works of A. B. Fetherston (1994), Guy Arnold (1997), Oliver Ramsbotham (2005; 2011), Séverine Autesserre (2010; 2019) and Kate Seaman (2016).

Particularly relevant is the contribute of former United Nations Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, and his work entitled *An Agenda for Peace* (1992), which constitutes the basis for today's approach to conflict resolution within the United Nations. Other reports such as the *Brahimi Report* (2000) issued by the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations,

and the report *In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all* (2005) by UN former Secretary-General Kofi Annan will also be analyzed through this thesis.

This necessity to rethink the concept of peace as more than formal negotiations and peace agreements led John Paul Lederach (1997; 1995; 1999; 2005; 2009; 2014) to develop a different school of thought, Conflict Transformation. For him, conflict transformation is more than a “set of specific techniques. It is about a way of looking and seeing, and it provides a set of lenses through which we make sense of social conflict” (Lederach and Maiese 2009, 7). More than a specific way of looking and analyzing conflict, this approach compiles three frames of analysis: help us focus on a global and regional level, a national level and on a local level; the whole picture (situation) can only be fully comprehended in an integrated way.

First, we need a lens to see the immediate situation. Second, we need a lens to see past the immediate problems and view the deeper relationship patterns that form the context of the conflict. Third, we need a lens that helps us envision a framework that holds these together and creates a platform to address the content, the context, and the structure of the relationships. From this platform, parties can begin to find creative responses and solutions (Lederach and Maiese 2009, 7-8).

This idea suggests that conflict is complex, full of different layers that cannot be addressed with a fast solution, hoping for a quick process to solve it. Sustainable change calls for active participation from all segments of society, which means involvement and relationship. Stop the killing is an important and valuable goal but must not be the only one: parties need reconciliation and to develop healthier and peaceful relations and ways to overcome and cope with conflict. In other words, they need to envision a shared and common future and then work to live in it – transcend the conflict while still leaving with it.

Conflict transformation understands that parties, those on different sides of the conflict, will have to continue to face each other daily. People will have to live with those

who caused so much destruction and pain. That cannot be simply overcome and forgotten with a signed paper or when leaders order so. Conflict has profound emotional and psychological effects and so the desperation, hate, pain it degenerates must be addressed. Otherwise, people will be left with an impossible task: to forget. On the contrary, they need to find their voice, express their shared fears, and find in themselves the strategies to overcome the bitter reality of war through an empowerment process.

So, within this conceptional framework, the case of Western Sahara could be really revealing. One of the most enduring conflicts in the world, the conflict in Western Sahara started in 1975 between Morocco and the population of the region, known as Sarahawis, and has yet to see an end. The more than 40 UN resolutions on this subject worth studying and reports elaborated both by this organization and by many others (Human Rights Watch, Crisis Group, Amnesty International), will be the basis for the analysis of this conflict, also complemented by the work of Zunes and Mundy (2010), that has written extensively about the situation in Western Sahara and are two of the leading researchers in this field.

As former United States Secretary of State James Baker, many tried, but the lack of a political will has fated it to remain a frozen conflict for many years to come. Despite its moderate efforts, the United Nations has not been able to find an alternative that suitable pleases all the parties and at the same time, respects international law. As such, it is a good case study to test both the efficiency and efficacy of UN's conflict resolution strategy as well as to suggest new alternative and innovative approaches to unlock the stalemate that lasts for 45 years.

After years of fighting against Spain's forces in the region, in 1975, Western Sahara was invaded by the neighbor Morocco. From former colony fighting and waiting for independence, the population saw themselves again under attack and had to, one more time,



fight against an outside invader. The war lasted until 1991 and left in its wake a trail of destruction: little after the invasion, many Saharawi had to abandon their houses, their communities and run to to neighbor Algeria, where they formed several camps in the southern city of Tindouf, and where they remain until today.

In 1991 a peace agreement was signed, and the UN deployed the mission MINURSO (United Nations Missions for the Referendum in Western Sahara) to organize a referendum for the people in Western Sahara to vote in favor or against independence. However, the mission's primary goal has yet to be accomplished. There are 29 UN resolutions (and 51 documents, both Security Council Letters and Secretary-General's Reports) worth analyzing as well as an extensive literature on the present situation: both from the UN, from the International Court of Justice and other international organizations (Human Rights Watch, International Amnesty).

After so many years, the question remains: what is the future for Western Sahara and its population and what is left to be done? And it is precisely here that conflict transformation can provide a valuable contribution. Understanding the centrality of relationships helps parties focus on each other, listen to each other, and share experiences. One of the things that have been lacking in the process of settling this conflict is the lack of contact between the parties, between the populations. As such, they are unaware of the challenges each faces as a result of the conflict. Local knowledge and culture are invaluable resources in any conflict and cannot be locked up as secondary. It is this exchange of experiences and the empowerment of communities that have been lacking so far. After years of failed high-level peace negotiations that led nowhere, maybe it is time to start looking for new approaches, and John Paul Lederach's theory on Conflict Transformation has much to say about this.

### **III. Methodology & Goals**

This dissertation will be based on a qualitative perspective: the goal will be to understand if current findings on conflict resolution and peace operations can and should be revisited or not, taking into account MINURSO operation in Western Sahara. The proposal is to divide the thesis into four chapters: Chapter I – From Conflict to Conflict Resolution: the Idea Behind Peacekeeping; Chapter II - A Critical Assessment of Conflict Resolution as Applied by the United Nations; Chapter III - Conflict Transformation: an Alternative Path to Peace and Reconciliation; Chapter IV - The Western Sahara Conflict: New Possibilities.

However, it is important to mention that this work will focus more on peace operations that result in peace agreements. More importantly, it will discuss the current resolution model applied, as opposed to a new school of thought on international relations that supports the idea of conflict transformation and not only of conflict resolution.

Bearing this in mind, Chapter 1 will focus on understanding the ideas behind peacekeeping operations and conflict resolution (the current paradigm to understand and solve conflicts), presenting a theoretical evolution of both concepts.

Chapter 2 will address the current state of peace operations, their evolution and their achievements and long-term consequences. Here it is important to focus on the need for more cooperation on the approach to conflict resolution. As such, there will be presented a more in-depth analysis of peacekeeping missions as developed by the United Nations and their evolution through time to reassess their efficiency. Given the questions of legitimacy raised in the first chapter, it is necessary to think about peacekeeping operations from the point of their sustainability: do they contribute to a lasting peace?

Within this context, Chapter 3 will present an alternative to the current conflict resolution paradigm: John Paul Lederach's theory of Conflict Transformation. This will lead

us to rethink the role of peace workers not as technicians but as facilitators of peace, which is, in itself, a long process of reconciliation and progress. Only by envisioning a future together and establishing authentic and fruitful relationships is it possible to have harmony.

Chapter 4 will focus on our case study, the Western Sahara conflict. This case will be presented to understand, in the field, both the practical approach of the UN to conflict and the possible contribution of conflict transformation. To do this, a first analysis of the conflict's historical background will be presented. This will lead us to the 1991 Peace Agreements and a series of UN resolutions that followed, as well as the implementation of MINURSO (UN mission in Western Sahara). Finally, we will try to understand if this is the best approach to the situation and what future lies ahead of the region and how a stalemate situation such as this one can be changed and improved.

#### **IV. Perspectives: Hopes and Challenges**

Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall (2011) remind us that managing a conflict is always a challenge: there is no exact formula that fits all situations and the best efforts can lead to nowhere. Ending a war is, in fact, a complex expression that raises even more questions: does solve a conflict mean the end of violence and/or its underlying root causes, or is it more than that?

The case of Western Sahara has proved that it is possible to end direct violence without ending indirect violations and without settling the conflict. There is peace in the traditional sense since the 1991 peace agreement, but thus that means sustainable peace? As Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall argue conflict resolution is broader than conflict termination (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall 2011, 171). The end of war can just mean that root causes of the conflict, old differences and wounds were accumulated to new ones,

never to be addressed or healed, and thus perpetuating a cycle of separation, discrimination, stereotypes, emotions that can easily lead countries and societies to the break of a new escalation.

One clear and recent example of this increase in tensions is the question of the African Eco Race that crosses the Guerguerat Village, a buffer zone in the southwest of Western Sahara, near the border with Mauritania, after having crossed the occupied cities of Smara and Dakhla, presented as being part of the Moroccan territory. The same has been happening since 2018 and is now a major source of instability in the conflict and yet remains to be addressed by the United Nations, that issues statements on this matter calling for “actors to exercise maximum restraint and to defuse any tensions” (UN SG/SM/19938 2020).

Never losing its optimism, in the most recent press release, the Spokesman for UN Secretary-General António Guterres has reiterated the UN’s commitment to “support the parties to reach a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution to the conflict in Western Sahara in accordance with Security Council resolutions” (UN SG/SM/19938 2020). And yet, tensions continue to rise each year without the common ground being achieved, and root causes addressed.

Besides the tensions in the region that can lead to the outbreak of another war, this also has severe consequences for the regional stability that undermine its integrated and socio-economic development and cooperation: tensions between Algeria and Morocco, Algeria and France, and Morocco and Spain; possibility of a regional war which leads to an increase in arms spending, funds that could be applied to regional development; violations of international and humanitarian law. There is much at stake here and so much more to be done. This case has proven time and time again that end violence is not the end of the line,

nor is the most difficult stage. The real problem are emotions, tensions, histories that remain untouched and unseen.

## **Chapter 1**

### **From Conflict to Conflict Resolution: the Idea Behind Peacekeeping**

How do we move from violence to the cessation of violence, to building a sustainable peace and the reconstruction of a civil society (...)? How do former parties to a conflict, parties formerly engaged in a relationship of violence, whose identities interlock historically and include historical injury, reconcile their relationship so that both can live within a civil framework of mutual obligation?

(Wilmer 2002, 55)

The questions raised by Franke Wilmer in her work *The Social Construction of Man, the State, and War: Identity, Conflict, and Violence in Former Yugoslavia* (2002) are some of the most critical issues that are currently being discussed by peace and conflict studies researchers, and that will be equally addressed on this first chapter. They are at the core of both conflict formation and resolution, and only by focusing on them, it is possible to present a suitable theory on conflict. Moving from violence to sustainable peace is the goal of many torn societies, being the critical question of how can this be done in practice. How can former warring hostile parties cooperate and thus engage in positive relations, reconcile with each other so that their members can live together?

Since conflict is an essential and intrinsic feature of human nature, this chapter will first present a collection of some of the most relevant proposals set forward by prominent researchers on this topic. Conflict is a complex reality, subject to constant change. It's subjective and not always entirely negative. As such, it can be transformed into a positive, cooperative, and structured interaction between parties, thus having positive outcomes. It can, according to some authors, help parties re-examine their perceptions of each other. Despite all of this, there has not yet been reached a consensus on how to develop this complex process successfully.

## 1.1. Social conflict and human nature

To explain the dynamics of conflict, it is vital to look at a group of thinkers who debated this question, namely Lewis Coser, Raymond Aron, Ralph Dahrendorf, and Johan Galtung.<sup>1</sup> This chapter will analyze their different positions to establish links and explain how important their thoughts have been for the contemporary study of conflict.

The first theories on conflict begun by addressing the general topic of class and social conflict, first with Marx and Engels (*The Communist Manifesto*) in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and later, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, with Georg Simmel (*Soziologie*), in 1908<sup>2</sup>. In the '50s, Lewis Coser, in his book *The Functions of Social Conflict* (1956), relaunched this very important debate by analyzing conflict as part of the socialization process.

According to **Lewis Coser**, conflict has a social function, for it regulates relationships in a society, sort of “clears the air” (Coser 1956, 39) between the parts. By allowing the free expression of ideas, conflict helps to eliminate accumulated hostile behaviors and positions. By this, it “prevents the ossification of the social system by exerting pressure for innovation and creativity” (Coser 1957, 197). It pushes for vitality and steers new inventions, blocking and preventing accommodation that impoverishes societies and relationships. It not only stimulates politics and institutions, but it also generates direct economic and technological benefits. For the author, who was strongly influenced by Simmel’s work *The Sociology of Conflict*<sup>3</sup>, the Industrial Revolution is one example of the advantages of conflict in the Western World.

In his article on *Social Conflict and the Theory of Social Change* (1957), Coser presents an additional distinction that is also important to explore: between changes of

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<sup>1</sup> There are many more, but for our work, these have been the most relevant ones.

<sup>2</sup> Despite being fundamental for the early development of theories on social conflict, this thesis will not be present an in-depth analysis of both Simmel and Marx’s works. Instead, the intent is to provide a contextualization of the topics developed in this chapter.

<sup>3</sup> A series of three papers wrote by Georg Simmel for the American Journal of Sociology between 1903 and 1904.

system and changes within the system (Coser 1957, 201). The first encompasses major and abrupt changes in both relations and institutions. Contrarily, the second adopts requires a vision of change as gradual process, undergoing small adjustments over time (changes within the system). To be subjected to one or another will depend on the rigidity of the system that is being questioned: more rigid ones, by suppressing conflict (Russia under the Tsars), face more radical social cleavages; whether more flexible systems, by allowing the constant release of frustration and readjustments, manages to balance different group aspirations, and are less prone to more explosive and violent alignments. Thus, they minimize the danger of social conflict breaking society's basic consensus.

Additionally, conflict has an impact on group identity, helping to both shape and maintain it. It makes individuals more aware of their bonds and mobilizes them into participation. It limits the boundaries between different groups, setting the difference between allies and enemies. As Coser explains,

Conflict serves to establish and maintain the identity and boundary lines of societies and groups. Conflict with other groups contributes to the establishment and reaffirmation of the identity of the group and maintains its boundaries against the surrounding social world (Coser 1956, 38).

Another influential sociologist on social conflict is **Raymond Aron**, according to whom conflict is a fundamental and undeniable feature of man's life in society and is present in almost all social interactions<sup>4</sup>.

Accordingly, Aron explains in *Peace & War* (2003) that, given societies limited resources, when two individuals or groups aspire to the same property or share incompatible

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<sup>4</sup> On this subject, it is important to consider Kant's theory of the "unsocial sociability of men", developed on his essay entitled *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose*. By this, he advocates that nature pushed man to live with each other in society. Yet, at the same time, this urge is coupled with a continuous resistance that threatens to dissolve society at any time. Thus, man seem to have two tendencies, that complement and the same time antagonize each other: to live in society, where he is able to develop his natural capacities; or to live isolated, wanting everything to happen according to his ideas. One expression that exemplifies this can be found on his Fourth Proposition: "Through the desire for honour, power or property, it drives him to seek status among his fellows, whom he cannot bear yet cannot bear to leave" (Kant 1970, 44).



goals, conflict begins (Aron 2003, 345). Moreover, even when compromise is possible, it is not always desirable for every faction. After all, why share when we can obtain everything through force? As Raymond argues: "As long as the enemy is not defeated, he may defeat me" (Aron 2003, 22), so the war is won when total submission to one's will exists.

When conflict ceases to be positive and constructive and becomes violent, escalating to war, parties tend to perceive their interests as diametrically opposed. They adopt a win-lose strategy: I can only win if the other loses, forgetting compromise as a possible solution. The goal is to reduce the enemy to submission by either disarming them or threatening to do so. Unfulfilled and unsatisfied by nature, deprived continuously from his ambitions, for not all his desires can be met, man tends to resent those around him (Aron 2003, 355).

Given this idea and the countless conflicts in today's societies, it is vital to understand what this entails and what can be done to prevent conflicts from becoming bellicose and violence from spreading. In Aron's own words, "it is not proved that these conflicts must be manifested in the phenomenon of war, as we have known it for thousands of years, with organized combatants, utilizing increasingly destructive weapons" (Aron 2003, 366). According to him, there must be found alternative ways to manage social tensions, other than let it rise and degenerate into wars increasingly bloodier and more brutal.

Figure 1 reveals that the 19<sup>th</sup> Century quickly became the bloodiest one in battle directly related deaths and overall death rate. In fact, since the 17<sup>th</sup> Century and the 30 Years War, at least one major war has taken place every 50 years: War of Spanish Succession between 1701 and 1714; Seven Years War, 1756-1763, Napoleonic Wars, between 1803 to 1815. Then there is the Crimean War and the American Civil War, followed roughly 50 years later by the First World War and later by the Second World War. More recently, the world was devastated by Corra, Vietnam, Cambodia, Afghanistan, and Ruanda. In short,

the number of small conflicts taking place around the world has increased significantly in recent years.

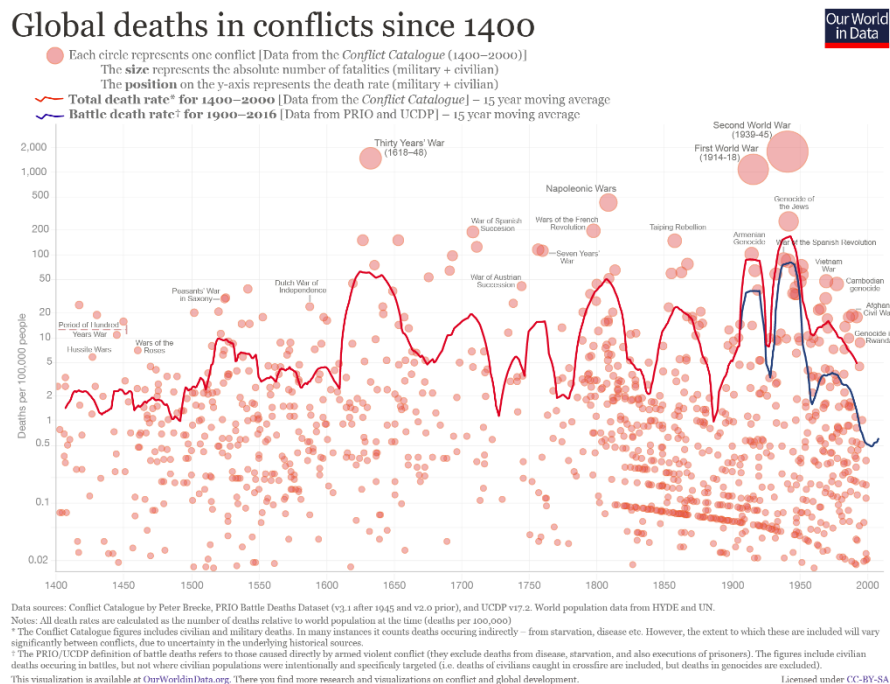


Fig. 1. Global deaths in conflict since 1400 (Our Wold Data 2016)

**Ralf Dahrendorf** soon followed this line of thought in his book *Class and Class Conflict* (1959). He argues that conflict (as an incompatibility of goals) is present in every society, under any condition or circumstance, for it can never truly disappear. It can be mitigated for short periods of time, but even in totalitarian states trying to suppress opposition, it cannot be overall abolished (Dahrendorf 1958, 182).

He adds that conflict can prevent accommodation to the status quo and push for society's empowerment (Dahrendorf 1959, 207). The clash of ideas and interests produces vitality, the discussion and tension between ideologies and values, between what is and what some groups feel should be benefit socialization, acceptance, toleration, and progress. It strengthens relations and stability more than it endangers them, allowing the safe release of hostility and aggression. Through political parties, Parliaments, and elections, different

groups can disagree and, at the same time, defend their own interests without disruption and revolution (Dahrendorf 1958, 105).

From this, he concludes that political power should foster a dynamic and powerful civil society, full and rich with different ideas, interests, and debates, where everyone feels safe to express their views peacefully. More flexible societies allow individuals to develop different affiliations, being both allies and antagonists of each other in several contexts.

Conflict is, thus, in the words of Wilmer, “at the core of political life – not an evil in itself, but normal (...). The channeling and containment of conflict reduces the potential, role, scope, and impact of violence in organized social life” (Wilmer 2002, 13). By contrast with open societies, totalitarian societies seem to be incapable of adapting themselves to new patterns and trends, to new concepts and values. Thus, they are more drawn to, due to a lack of adjustment mechanisms, accumulate hostilities, and conflict situations that will seriously threaten consensus in the long run.

In this sense, when properly integrated, conflict can help societies function by positively solving “contrasts and achieve some kind of resolution to tensions in social relations” (Binns 1977, 149), re-establishing unity, stability, and removing dissociating features.

## **1.2. The concept of conflict in peace research**

The development of the field of peace and conflict research as an institutionalized field of study had to wait until the end of the Second World War, despite some earlier considerations on this subject (as is the case of the University College of Wales, which established an international relations discipline in 1919 (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall 2011, 37)).

In the aftermath of the war, especially after the Hiroshima and Nagasaki nuclear bombs, Theodore Lentz founded, in Missouri (USA), the first institute dedicated to peace research, Peace Research Laboratory. In 1957, a group of academics of the University of Michigan (including Kenneth Boulding) created the Journal of Conflict Resolution and later, in 1959, developed the Centre for Research on Conflict Resolution.

In Europe, this research was launched by Johan Galtung that founded, in 1959, the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), first integrated into the Norwegian Institute for Social Research and since 1966 as an independent institute. In 1964 he launched the Journal of Peace Research.

### **1.2.1. Johan Galtung's conflict triangle**

According to **Johan Galtung**, in his book *Searching for Peace: The Road to Transcend* (2000), to understand conflict, there is first the need to distinguish between several levels of conflict analysis: micro (within individuals and between people – family, small organizations and associations), meso (within the society) and macro (between states, nations, civilizations) (Galtung and Jacobsen 2000, 108). The last two are the most studied and the ones that are under more scrutiny from peace research scholars. Despite this, they do not exclude each other, and its likely different levels will be present simultaneously on the same conflict.

In a more in-depth analysis, Galtung divides conflict into three interdependent components (triadic phenomenon): contradiction, behavior, and attitudes/assumptions<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Christopher Mitchell, in his book *The Structure of International Conflict* (1991) also presents a similar distinction, between situation, behaviour and attitudes/perceptions (Mitchell 1981, 19).

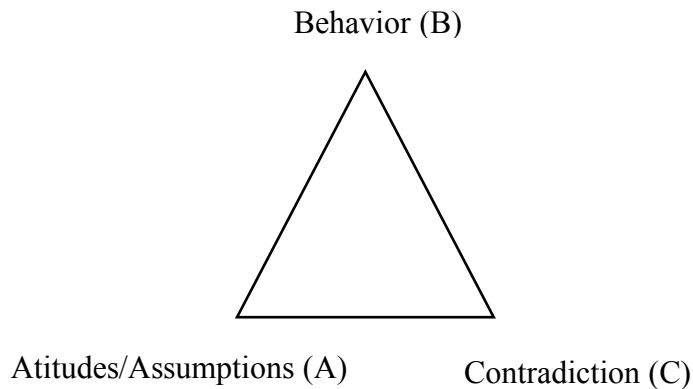


Fig. 2. The Conflict Triangle (Galtung 1996, 72)

The first element, contradiction, arise precisely when two parties pursue goals viewed as incompatible and that cannot be simultaneously achieved in a satisfactory way. And there will always exist incompatible goals, as long as the human species exist:

Goals and life – living beings, humans and animals, plants and micro-organisms, you and I – are inseparable. Only what is living has a goal. Without a goal life ceases to exist. (...) Goals nag at us. There is no limit to the activity we undertake in order to achieve or satisfy our goals (Galtung 2004, 2).

The second element, behavior, can be destructive, which has to do with a predisposition to aggression and violence, both physical and verbal (coercion, threats). Here there is the severe problem of misinterpreting the other's actions, so the intention behind the act itself is of crucial importance.

The last element, assumptions (cognitions) and attitudes (emotions), include the perceptions the parts have of both themselves and of each other, usually associated with stereotypes and misperceptions. In a conflict, emotions are commonly influenced by fear, anger, resentment, and bitterness.

According to Galtung, all three components are present in a conflict, always interacting, changing, and influencing each other: contradictions are easily experienced as frustration (the goal is being blocked), which leads to aggression both as an attitude and as a behavior. Moreover, because violence breeds and creates violence, aggression triggers

aggression, originating a full cycle of violence. Over time, one party may have accumulated experiences, thus prejudices, against the other, which, fuelled by aggressiveness, result in a negative approach to conflict (Galtung 1996, 73).

As parties interact with each other, so their interests, clash, and the relationship become oppressive. Based on this, they develop aggressive attitudes and behavior, and conflict starts to escalate. The de-escalation can only come after a change in both parties' attitudes and the transformation of their relationship.

We can also trace to Johan Galtung another important distinction regarding conflict between direct violence, structural violence, and cultural violence (Galtung 1996, 2). In the first one, also referred to as personal violence (or social injustice), the actions and consequences can be traced back to one concrete actor. Thus, it is a visible and intended action, one event easily perceived and expressed, both by the subject and the object. Structural (or indirect) violence, in turn, is a process that may not even be perceived at all. It is silent, perceived as natural for those inside the system. "Violence is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances" (Galtung 1969, 171). The repression and inequality start from within a particular community, from its structures. It is about an unequal distribution of power and resources<sup>6</sup>.

The third element, cultural violence, is elaborated on his essay *Cultural Violence* (1990). He describes this as "those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence – exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science (logic, mathematics) – that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence" (Galtung 1990, 291). It can go from flags or symbols to inflammatory speeches.

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<sup>6</sup> This distinction between direct and structural violence may be easily grasped through the following example: "Thus, when one husband beats his wife there is a clear case of personal violence, but when one million husbands keep one million wives in ignorance there is structural violence" (Galtung 1969, 171).

This is the one aspect that legitimizes the other two types of violence: it makes direct and structural violence seem right, thus rendered it acceptable by others in society.

“One way cultural violence works is by changing the moral color of an act from red/wrong to green/right or at least to yellow/acceptable (...). Another way is by making reality opaque, so that we do not see the violent act or fact, or at least not as violent” (Galtung 1990, 292). This means that a society divided between first and secondary class citizens, in which the latest group members are deprived of their freedom and identity, forced to express the dominant’s culture and forget their own, repressed, can more easily accept hostile acts towards the group perceived as inferior<sup>7</sup>. Culture leads individuals to understand exploitation and repression as usual or into not seeing it in the least (preventing consciousness formation).

In his essay *Twenty-Five Years of Peace Research: Then Challenges and Some Responses* (1985), Johan Galtung presents one additional equally important distinction between positive and negative peace. Negative peace has to do with the absence of direct violence (one example of this stage is a cease-fire). Contrarily, positive peace, built around ideas such as cooperation and harmony, has to do with the end of cultural and structural violence – and that implies something very close to the idea of peacebuilding as we perceive it today<sup>8</sup>.

In line with this model, **Christopher Mitchell**, in his book *The Structure of International Conflict* (1981), further elaborates on the subject of conflict. According to him, it is important to note that war is a particular case in this broader phenomenon called conflict, “and should be treated as a sub-class rather than a unique category in its own right. Findings about conflict at other levels may thus be helpful in developing insights into the causes,

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<sup>7</sup> Johan Galtung describes these two groups as the “topdogs” and the “underdogs”. According to him, the “topdogs” get the advantage over the “underdogs”, left in a state of permanent misery (Galtung, 1990, 293).

<sup>8</sup> Galtung’s theory on positive and negative peace is very complex and, as it is not the main subject of this thesis, will not be further addressed. The intention was to present a basic definition, a starting point for the discussion, and not a full explanation.

processes and outcomes of international war” (Mitchell 1981, 3). But what is, after all, a conflict?

Conflict is a situation in which two or more human beings desire goals which they perceive as being obtainable by one or the other but not both. (...) there must be at least two parties; each party is mobilising energy to obtain a goal, a desired object or situation; and each party perceives the other as a barrier or threat to that goal (Ross Stagner, 1967, as cited in Mitchell 1981, 15).

According to Christophe Mitchell, conflict arises when one or both parties feel threatened, making space for tensions and, as they rise, to open hostilities and violence escalation. This happens in a context of scarcity, for as many goals as one community, group, or individual may have, there will always be scarcity among the resources necessary to achieve them. There will always exist different ideas on where to allocate them, how to do it, who should do it, and on which goals/interests should be prioritized.

However, goals are not set in stone or eternal, even if they can be perceived as such. First, goals are not just something consciously desired (positive goals), such as wealth, power, land, security, but also the avoidance of a future event (negative goals) (Mitchell 1981, 22). Conflictual actors desire both, ones more prominent than others. This means that parties can have incompatible interests that clash, but its intensity may vary. Similarly, not all goals are incompatible: hostile parties may perceive one specific goal as such, but others might be compatible and subject to negotiation. This reminds us of the importance of secondary goals, as they may be a way to surpass a conflict stalemate. The major goal may not be negotiable, but there are seemingly less important ones that are.

### **1.2.2. Protracted social conflict: Edward Azar’s proposal**

Another important reference on conflict theory is **Edward Azar** that developed, since the early '70s, the concept of *Protracted Social Conflict* (PSC), which refers to an enduring,



long-term, and often violent conflict between communal groups<sup>9</sup>. These conflicts have a set of characteristics that help us understand their extended nature, namely: “economic and technological underdevelopment, and unintegrated social and political systems” (Azar 1990, 145). Change requires eliminating social and economic disparities and redistribution of opportunities, privileges, and justice. Any solution besides this derives from law enforcement and control of the population. This means that a change in this balance of forces or economic/political conditions easily originates violence, a common situation in protracted conflicts. This suggests that the real causes of conflict are deep-rooted in the lives of the people involved; what drives them is the denial of basic needs required for the development of their identity, their society:

(...) security, distinctive identity, social recognition of identity, and effective participation in the processes that determine conditions of security and identity (...). The real source of conflict is the denial of those human needs that are common to all (Azar 1990, 146).

According to Azar, these conflicts may seem unique to their participants. Each has its history, set of circumstances, and behavior associated. However, they have specific common characteristics: they arise to struggle against perceived discrimination, exclusion, and victimization. This results from a denial of their own separate identity, absence of political participation, and lack of respect for cultural differentiation. Agreements that do not touch upon these issues will not last.

Given that protracted conflicts develop in multi-ethnic societies, to be solved they require the creation of decentralized institutions and structures that serve each group and individual's needs<sup>10</sup>. Societies with ongoing wars and violence have little trust in governmental institutions. Thus, a more decentralized system promotes local participation,

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<sup>9</sup> This idea is very similar to Martin van Creveld notion of low intensity conflict (Creveld 1991).

<sup>10</sup> According to Edward Azar, contemporary political theory lacks in these respects, for it favours the centralized state and its monopoly of violence, which are in this case sources of hostility. Increase alienation, tend to deny groups the fulfilment of their needs, reducing the opportunity for them to feel and grow as a community (Azar 1990, 151).

gives the groups a sense of control over their destiny, and allows the construction of an environment in which groups can better protect and develop their own identity.

From here, we can conclude that the most useful unit to analyze protracted conflicts is the identity group (racial, cultural, ethnic, religious), noting that it is precisely the relation between these groups and the state, which is at the core of the problem. The state apparatus is under the influence, hostage of one (or a coalition of few) groups, and so fails to comply with the needs of the others, which strains social relations and in time leads to a crisis of legitimacy of the state authority, giving rise to fragmentation and conflict. It is the deprivation of human needs and the failure to address this problem that triggers protracted conflict.

Nowadays, the scenario described above tends to be concentrated in developing countries, characterized by rapid population growth, limited access to recourses, restricted political participation, excess of bureaucracy, and inherited repressive mechanisms. This is heightened by reciprocal negative ideas of the other that solidify preconceptions and antagonisms. “Antagonistic group histories, exclusionist myths, demonizing propaganda and dehumanizing ideologies serve to justify discriminatory policies and legitimize atrocities” (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall 2011, 103). To this, Johan Galtung called cultural violence. With time, the space for compromise and cooperation shrinks, and disintegration follows.

To halten this spiral to violence, Azar proposes to address the root causes of conflict, underdevelopment being one of them. It requires an exploration of the needs of the different parties and ways to satisfy them. Groups seeking to guarantee their security and identity through conflict seek change in their society’s structure, and only by addressing this can conflict resolution truly work.

### 1.3. Towards a theory of conflict resolution

In his work *The Structure of International Conflict* (1981), **Christopher Mitchell** presents the resolution of conflicts as “durable, long-term and self-supporting solutions to disputes by removing the underlying causes and establishing new, and satisfactory, relationships between previously antagonistic parties” (Mitchell 1990, 150). To accomplish this, missions must comply with a set of essential characteristics:

- Complete, so the issue/cause at hand must disappear and an agreement achieved.
- Acceptable and satisfactory to all conflict parties and not just the elite. They must perceive it as just and fair according to their ideas and values. Leaders must be able to defend the agreement before their compatriots.
- Self-supporting, so there is no necessity for third party intervention.
- Uncompromising, in the sense that the parties do not sacrifice their major goals to obtain a compromise.
- Innovative so that solutions are new and beneficial to all those involved.
- Uncoerced, as the parties freely reach a compromise, not imposed by any outside agency.

Conflict resolution intends to deal with the underlying causes/tensions of a dispute, removing the incompatibilities, and enabling parties to achieve their goals without compromising. Thus, it is about finding groups' basic values and needs and helping them fulfill it by eradicating frustration associated with the conflict (Mitchell 1990, 153).

Similarly, in his book entitled *World Society* (1972), **John Burton** establishes a set of propositions that define his approach to conflict. First, in conflict resolution, given the complexity of this phenomenon, it is important to separate the issues and the parties. Thus, what at first sight may seem a conflict between two parties over a well-defined subject,

usually involves a more complex variety of issues and factions (Burton 1972, 140). Second, parties do not act irrationally in an international conflict, even if sometimes it may seem so. Instead, they position themselves and act based on their environment, according to their perceptions of their situation and of their goals.

Third, conflict in the international arena is somewhat subjective, dependent on a set of subjective perceptions and ideas about the other side's motivations, even if to them, it may seem an objective situation. This is not to say that there are no objective elements; there are undoubtedly incompatible goals, but they are not unalterable. Goals change in a conflict, especially once the parties understand the costs of attaining them or when these costs increase. New justifications are found to justify and legitimate the conflict.

Fourth, "coercive or third-party settlements are rarely successful or stable; international conflict needs to be resolved and not just settled" (Burton 1972, 140), which means the parties need processes that help them find the outcome. This does not mean a third-party intervention is irrelevant or undesirable. However, it is only one among other important instruments to help parties transform conflicts from a hostile confrontation to a peaceful exercise.

To Burton, in any conflict situation, there are latent opportunities for sharing new routes and satisfaction to be divided when resources are commonly exploited, and there is a mutually beneficial understanding. "Accordingly, the outcome of resolution of conflict could be such that both sides could gain satisfactions, or both between them could share gains on a scale not possible if conflict continued" (Burton 1972, 146). This means that there are additional benefits that can only be explored when parties negotiate and develop peaceful

relations<sup>11</sup>. When they recognize each other and are ready to listen and set differences aside, they can transform the relationship into a positive outcome through cooperation.

This can only be understood by parties when they recognize that neither can achieve absolute victory and if they are not willing or prepared to negotiate and compromise, they “may impose such massive costs on each other that all the parties end up worse off than they would have been had another strategy been adopted” (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall 2011, 18).

As several authors explained<sup>12</sup>, war is not the single (or even the most rational) possibility in a conflict situation<sup>13</sup>. Parties often reach this conclusion when they understand that neither side can eliminate the other – they reach a stalemate. It is finally possible to work towards a peaceful settlement of the dispute. When this situation becomes clear, there is a real motivation to move towards other outcomes (win-win situation). This requires moving from a zero-sum way of thinking, my gain is others' failure, towards a positive-sum direction (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall 2011, 18). This also means that both parties move beyond the irrationality of war and find “equally satisfying alternative ways” (Coser 1956, 50) to solve the conflict and achieve their ends.

For parties to be ready to dialogue to achieve peace, they first need to move beyond the narrative of mistrust and preconception that dominates conflicts. It is not possible to truly solve a conflict without confidence in the other part.

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<sup>11</sup> This reminds us of a well-known negotiation story about two children arguing over an orange.

When they finally agreed to divide the orange in half, one child eats the fruit, throws away the peel and the other throws away the fruit, and uses the peel to bake a cake. If they had devoted their time to communicate and have a conversation over the issue at hand, they would have created a better outcome for both.

<sup>12</sup> Lewis Coser (1956), Ralph Dahrendorf (1959), Raymond Aron (2003).

<sup>13</sup> Franke Wilmer, former member of the Montana House of Representatives and professor of political science, analysing the relation between individuals and war, wrote: “People do not think: ‘Oh, well, there is much to be gained by putting my life and property at risk, even if my children, parents, husband, wife, or neighbor are very like to be killed; but my life will be better afterward. People (...) prefer peace and security to violence and fear” (Wilmer 2002, 153).

Let us now analyze how the United Nations have adjusted these perceptions in practice and see if and in what way did they introduce this.

#### **1.4. Conflict resolution as developed by the United Nations**

To maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace, and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace. (UN Charter 1945, art. 1, par. 1).

Since its foundation in 1945, the United Nations Organization has been the key international player on conflict resolution. Tasked with the goal of ‘maintain peace and security’ and promote and support the ‘peaceful settlement of disputes’, the UN focuses much of its attention, resources, and personnel on conflict resolution/prevention. In fact, its creation “did a great deal to stabilize interstate relations and provides one explanation at least for the decline of interstate conflict” (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall 2011, 40). It has or attempts to have an active role in settling international conflicts.

To achieve such an ambitious design, the member states approved two crucial Chapters (VI and VII). The first was Chapter VI, on the *Pacific Settlement of Disputes*, designed to bring hostile factions/parties to a peaceful agreement and persuade them to settle their differences without violence, through mechanisms such as “negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangements, or other peaceful means of their own choice” (UN Charter 1945, art. 33, par. 1). To successfully achieve this, and for the UN to deploy its personnel on the field, all parties involved must give their consent. This also provides the UN with the legitimacy to investigate possible breaches and threats to international peace and security and act accordingly by

recommending appropriate procedures<sup>14</sup>. Thus, this offers a broader range of methods to help parties solve their disputes without the use of force.

Initially, the great powers envisioned a United Nations quite different from what it later became. At this early stage, their intention was for the UN to deploy military forces as a forceful mechanism to ensure peace. This idea was shared by all major powers (United States, Soviet Union, France, Great Britain, and China), even with different degrees of enthusiasm. At the center of this vision was Chapter VII of its Charter (MacQueen 2002, 3). *Action with Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression* was the description established to one of the most important Chapters of this document which presents an extensive list of commitments that bind both states and the Security Council, empowered to “take such action by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security” (UN Charter 1945, art. 42). By doing this, they were trying to ensure that the UN would succeed where the League of Nations had failed.

However, this proved to be far more ambitious than expected, and soon the influence of the bipolar international system (Cold War) was felt. The first vetoed resolution (one of many) soon followed: February 16, 1946, the Soviet Union voted against the withdrawal of French and British troops from Lebanon and Syria. After this, there was another on June 18, 1946, then June 26, 1946, then August and September of the same year. By this time, the division of the world could not be more evident. An organization that depended upon the cooperation and consensus among the permanent members found itself rendered useless.

According to **Norrie Macqueen**, in his book *United Nations Peacekeeping in Africa since 1960* (2014), this was a period of crises within the UN institutions. It made clear that

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<sup>14</sup> This is made possible under Article 34, according to which “The Security Council may investigate any dispute, or any situation which might lead to international friction or give rise to a dispute, in order to determine whether the continuance of the dispute or situation is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security” (UN Charter art. 34).

“the Charter itself offered no help (...). Although repeatedly making use of the term, it offered no definition of ‘aggression’ and so provided no legal compass” (MacQueen 2014, 4).

In this environment, the first United Nations observer mission was deployed in 1948 - UNTSO (United Nations Truce Supervision Organization) to mediate Israel and its Arab neighbors' peace process. At the time, this operation was not regarded as a peacekeeping mission since the concept had not yet been developed. Instead, it was understood, together with the mission in Kashmir (UNMOGIP – deployed in January 1949 to oversee the cease-fire between India and Pakistan in Jammu and Kashmir), as an *ad hoc* approach to crises.

The world had to wait until 1956 for the first peacekeeping operation, the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF), which was deployed after the Israeli attack on Egypt and its subsequent occupation of Sinai and Gaza Strip, followed by the Anglo-French invasion of Egyptian territory (Suez Crises). With this new mechanism, the United Nations peace forces provided a multilateral neutral force that contained local conflicts and reduced regional tensions.

In such a bipolar international system, and unable to gather consensus within the Security Council and guarantee its members' cooperation, the United Nations abandoned the ambitious goal of becoming a significant military presence in war zones. Instead, it settled for multilateral interventions (preferable to the unilateral interference of states).

This operation laid the foundations for subsequent peacekeeping operations<sup>15</sup>, whose ideals and values were briefly clarified in this mission's summary:

It was not a peace-enforcement operation, as envisaged in Article 42 of the United Nations Charter, but a peacekeeping operation to be carried out with the consent and the cooperation of the parties to the conflict. It was armed, but the units were

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<sup>15</sup> There is no reference to peacekeeping operations in the UN's Charter. The closest to it is its chapter VII, focused mainly on enforcing collective security.



to use their weapons only in self-defence and even then with utmost restraint (UN Middle East UNEF Summary).

Therefore, peacekeeping operations were characterized by three main cornerstones: consent, non-use of violence, and impartiality, which, according to Norrie Macqueen, rendered them the stand of “article six-and-a-half”. Hence, they were caught between the *Pacific Settlement of Disputes* (Chapter VI) that didn’t foresee troops deployment, merely negotiation and mediation, and a more muscular military activity - enforcement actions under Chapter VII.

#### **1.4.1. The Summary Study: Dag Hammarskjöld and the foundations of United Nations peacekeeping operations**

On October 9, 1958, two years after the first peacekeeping operation, Dag Hammarskjöld, the second UN Secretary-General, submitted to the UN General Assembly a *Summary Study of the Experience Derived from the Establishment of the United Nations Emergency Force*, known as the Summary Study, which resulted from the previous experience with the UNEF (Suez). A somewhat idealized document, it nevertheless outlines a set of standards that soon laid the foundations for peacekeeping, providing a framework for future interventions.

First, and to guarantee state sovereignty, the mission should not try to substitute itself to the state’s authority or compete with it. Instead, it should be detached from any involvement in internal problems and political affairs, therefore maintaining its neutrality. After all, “whatever its ambitions in the area of collective security, the UN was ultimately an inter-governmental organization composed of sovereign states. It was not a putative world government” (MacQueen 2014, 9). Thus, its activities should be well separated from those of the national authorities, otherwise risking clashing with local authorities and getting

involved in internal conflicts, detrimental to the mission's efficiency and UN relations with the host country<sup>16</sup>.

In line with this, the second tenet establishes that: “follows from the Charter that the consent of a Member nation is necessary for the United Nations to use its military personnel or material” (UN A/3943 1958, par. 155). To build a spirit of mutual trust and collaboration and guarantee the security of the personnel on the ground, this was a crucial requirement for UN peace operations. Additionally, and although not referring to peacekeeping, the UN's Charter does mention the principle of non-intervention, for instance, in Article 2(7), which states that:

Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state or shall require the Members to submit such matters to settlement under the present Charter (UN Charter 1945, art. 2, par. 7).

The study also asserted that a peacekeeping mission could not include active combat or force unless in self-defense (defined under strict conditions). According to Hag Hammarskjöld, a suitable definition is one in which “men engaged in the operation may never take the initiative in the use of armed force, but are entitled to respond with force to an attack with arms” (UN A/3943 1958, par. 179). Military involvement, it is argued, comprises the identification of an aggressor and the subsequent definition of a specific outcome for the conflict, which in itself is a gross violation of the first tenet – neutrality (MacQueen 2014, 12).

Another idea was associated with the composition of the UN's military elements deployed on the territory of another member state: it should not include units from permanent members of the Security Council and from any country that might have a particular interest

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<sup>16</sup> Regarding this idea of impartiality and non-interference with internal affairs, the report states, in point 166, that: “As a matter of course, the United Nations personnel cannot be permitted in any sense to be a party to internal conflicts. Their role must be limited to external aspects of the political situation as, for example, infiltration or other activities affecting international boundaries” (UN doc. A/3943, par. 166). They should not enforce any specific solution or influence political powers towards one.

in the conflict (for geographical, strategic, historical motivations or other reasons)<sup>17</sup>. Based on the idea of voluntary contribution, troops could not be demanded, only requested by the Secretary-General on behalf of the Security Council. Also essential to the success of the mission and the recruitment process is the idea that personnel involved in criminal actions are under their home countries' jurisdiction.

Henceforward, middle powers such as India and South Africa took the lead as contributing powers in these operations. They were sufficiently well trained and equipped to carry the mandate but not big enough to threaten the host country. The contribution to peacekeeping operations was and still is, a matter of reputation for it indicates that those involved are, according to Norrie MacQueen, “stable domestic politics, disciplined and well-trained armed forces and diplomatic sophistication” (MacQueen 2013, 111). It is a central element in the foreign policy of many less influential states such as Bangladesh, Ethiopia, and Rwanda that, as we can see below, are the top troop contributor countries. The first European country is Italy, in 20<sup>th</sup> place, followed by France, in 29.

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<sup>17</sup> Additionally, and despite not being mandatory, the United Nations should take into account, when deciding on the composition of its missions, the view of the host country.

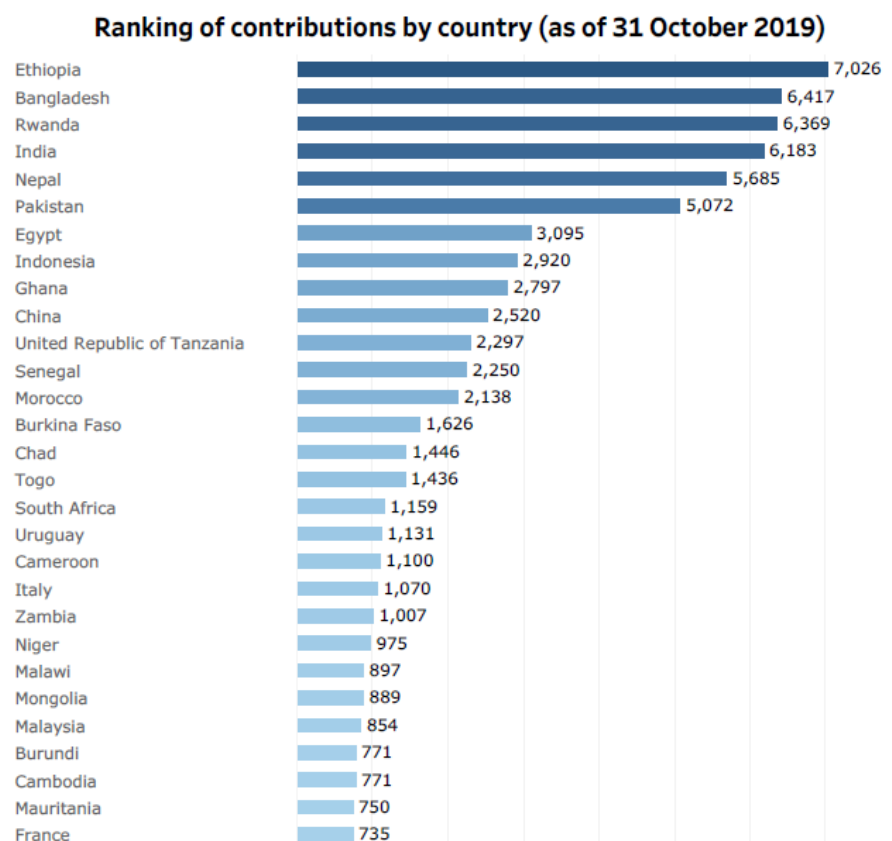


Fig. 3. Raking of contributions by country (as of 31 October 2019) (UN Troop and Police Contributors)

Based on Hammarskjold's work, it is possible to sum up peacekeeping operations in three essential features<sup>18</sup>: (1) consent of the main parties involved in the conflict (which offers freedom of movement to the operation's staff, without them risking to become a third party to the conflict), (2) non-use of force except in case of self-defense, and (3) impartiality (without favoring one party over the other). Inevitably, given the UN's lack of maneuver and a more direct reaction to Rwanda and the Yugoslavia catastrophes, it became necessary to rethink how peace operations were through particularly the absence of a prevention mechanism of conflicts and mass violence.

<sup>18</sup> According to Macqueen this is also known as the "holy trinity of peacekeeping" (Macqueen 2013, 44).

### 1.5. An Agenda for Peace: United Nations peace operations revisited

With the increasing demand for more and multifaceted (complex) operations, in 1992, the UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali presented a report entitled *An Agenda for Peace: preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peacekeeping*. In his own words, it was:

(...) an analysis and recommendations on ways of strengthening and making more efficient within the framework and provisions of the Charter the capacity of the United Nations for preventive diplomacy, for peacemaking and for peace-keeping (UN A/47/277 - S/24111 1992, par. 1).

The report presented a very clear analysis of the changing context of international relations, addressing the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War as both unprecedented opportunities to rethink the UN's future and new possibilities to counter security threats.

Additionally, Boutros Boutros-Ghali debated the UN's role in the world, paying special attention to its principles, from the protection of human rights and freedoms to promoting peace, security, social development, and prosperity. Yet, it also assumes that since its creation, it has been "rendered powerless": "over 100 major conflicts around the world have left some 20 million dead" (UN A/47/277 - S/24111 1992, par. 14). During the Cold War, the Security Council was often divided and constrained by its permanent members' veto power, that used it as a strategic advantage<sup>19</sup>.

To answer this destructive scenario, Boutros-Ghali presented in this document three new approaches to conflict: **preventive diplomacy**, concerning diplomatic action taken to "prevent disputes from arising between parties, to prevent existing disputes from escalating into conflicts and to limit the spread of the latter when they occur" (UN A/47/277 - S/24111 1992, par. 20). The UN Secretary-General, upon the request of the Security Council or the

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<sup>19</sup> Between 1945 and 1992, the United Nations Security Council vetoed 164 resolution proposals (in a total of 47 years), 41 of which until 1950. Since 1992 (27 years), the same assembly vetoed 42 proposals.

General Assembly or on its own accord, can exercise his ‘good offices’ role and appoint a special envoy “to help to defuse tensions and resolve problems in the context of border disputes, territorial questions, regional conflicts, constitutional and electoral crises, reunification negotiations, peace talks and a range of other issues” (UNSC S/2011/552 2011, par. 18). An area that needs greater attention, preventive diplomacy intends to dissuade the parties from escalating violence to a full conflict.

Another instrument is **peacemaking**, defined as the “action to bring hostile parties to agreement” (UN A/47/277 - S/24111 1992, par. 20), attempting to restore communication between the parties by the means foreseen under Chapter VI of the UN Charter. It involves mediation and negotiation to restore contact severely damaged by war and reach a peaceful and favorable agreement. To achieve such ambitious goals, these efforts must be flexible but also structured, addressing specifically each conflict and taking “into account the causes and dynamics of the conflict, the positions, interests and coherence of the parties, the needs of the broader society, as well as the regional and international environments” (UN 2012, 4). The parties must be ready and available to dialogue and negotiate, open to achieve a settlement. The mediation process must be impartial but not neutral, in the sense that the negotiator must uphold certain universal and basic rules.

Boutros-Ghali likewise stated the significance of **peacekeeping**, which will be further elaborated and thoroughly explored in the subsequent subchapter, and introduced the concept of **peacebuilding**. These operations represent a new approach presented by the Secretary-General to face the new challenges he was perceiving. He describes it as a commitment to “rebuilding the institutions and infrastructures of nations torn by civil war and strife; and building bonds of peaceful mutual benefit among nations formerly at war” (UN A/47/277 - S/24111 1992, par. 15). It aims to create long-lasting and resilient bridges between groups, factions, and nations, helping to eliminate sources of distrust, tension, and

fear by enhancing communication to avoid future reassess of violence (Fetherston 1994, 132).

Thus, it calls for more involvement after the end of direct violence, particularly in the reconstruction of society's crucial areas to help create more sustainable peace and avoid a relapse into violence. For all of this, it was necessary the effort and contribution of all nations. He was, thus, trying to break with the past, for it seemed “time of absolute and exclusive sovereignty (..) has passed” (UN A/47/277 - S/24111 1992, par. 17). To do this, Boutros-Ghali presented innovative ideas and projects that could help enhance cooperation between peoples and nations as a way of both enhance social and economic development and also improve confidence: collaboration in the fields of agriculture, transportation, and the exploration and usage of resources (water, electricity), “cultural exchanges and mutually beneficial youth and educational projects” (UN A/47/277 - S/24111 1992, par. 56). In line with this analysis, these activities are currently carried out by several United Nations agencies as the World Food Programme (WFP) and United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF).

#### **1.5.1. A new paradigm for peacekeeping operations**

In his *Agenda for Peace*, Boutros-Ghali offered a new perspective on peacekeeping. Its main goal was to “work to preserve peace, however fragile, where fighting has been halted and to assist in implementing agreements achieved by the peacemakers” (UN A/47/277-S/24111 1992, par. 15). According to Fetherston, in his article *Peacekeeping, Peacemaking and Peacebuilding* (1994), it intends to “ensure the maintenance of a *status*

*quo*, or a controlled impasse” (Fetherston 1994, 125), helping the parts to hold a cease-fire and also act as a deterrent<sup>20</sup>.

Peacekeeping missions differ according to their mandate, both in size and in structure - “ranging from unarmed military observers creating a thin blue line dividing the parties (...) to large multidimensional peacekeeping forces” (Peck 2009, 415). These troops are in charge of cease-fire supervision and reporting the ongoing conflict situation. Besides this, they also offer support to national and local authorities, offer training to the national police agencies, security to government institutions and other crucial infrastructures, help keep the free flow of people and goods, and provide humanitarian aid.

According to the *United Nations Peacekeeping Operations* document issued in 2008, “the core functions of a multi-dimensional United Nations peacekeeping operation are to:

- Create a secure and stable environment while strengthening the state’s ability to provide security, with full respect for the rule of law and human rights.
- Facilitate the political process by promoting dialogue and reconciliation and supporting the establishment of legitimate and effective institutions of governance.
- Provide a framework for ensuring that all United Nations and other international actors pursue their activities at the country-level in a coherent and coordinated manner (UN 2008, 23).

This document endorses the three fundamental ideas stated above that sustain peacekeeping operations: consent of the parties, impartiality, and non-use of violence (except in case of self-defense and of defined by the mission’s mandate, with a proportionate force of the one used by the attackers). Besides these three, experience has shown that are other equally important values: legitimacy (directly related to the way military and civilian personnel conducts themselves and their tasks), credibility (deployed in unstable and

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<sup>20</sup> According to Fetherston, “is a form of third party intervention aimed at facilitating the peaceful settlement of disputes” (Fetherston 1994, 126).



stressful environments, they are often scrutinized and tested by those who feel threatened by their presence; credibility is also directly influenced by their effectiveness and ability to meet the population expectations) and promotion of national ownership (missions are often involved in efforts to help rebuild the country and state institutions) (UN 2008, 36-38).

With *An Agenda for Peace*, Boutros Boutros-Ghali radically changed how peace operations were carried: previously, they were more circumscribed to inter-state conflicts, requiring all parties agreement to the mediation of the conflict. With this new doctrine, the paradigm changed. The UN mandate was extended to intrastate conflicts, and the scope of its missions was expanded. The UN should be involved in the military arrangement and civilian matters such as the return of refugees, integration of former combatants into civilian life, ensuring the respect of human rights, humanitarian assistance, observation and supervision of elections, support for economic reconstruction.

We can easily understand how crucial this document was to redefine the UN's peace operations scope by analyzing the numbers. Until today, the UN has deployed 71 peacekeeping missions (of which 13 are still active on the ground). Data shows that between the UN's first mission, in May 1948 (UNTSO), and June 1992, 26 missions were deployed worldwide (in 44 years). After the publication of *An Agenda for Peace*, in June 1992, until today, 45 missions were sent to the ground (28 years): the numbers almost doubled, which shows how important this report was as a means of opening up dialogue for a new debate on peace and ways to more effectively implement it on the field.

### **1.5.2. United Nations peacekeeping missions: current developments**

In 2018, Secretary-General António Guterres launched the *Action for Peacekeeping (AAP)* initiative to call for a renewal of collective engagement with the UN peacekeeping operations (in a document entitled *Declaration of Shared Commitment*).

The Secretary-General has called on Member States to join him in developing a set of mutually-agreed principles and commitments to create peacekeeping operations fit for the future, with the goal of reaching a formal agreement by the end of 2018<sup>21</sup>.

Although considered one of the most effective UN mechanisms to support peace and security, these operations face ever-growing challenges that undermine their ability to present good results: lack of clear solutions, an increasing number of wounded, mortalities, and displaced people, and lack of personnel are some of them<sup>22</sup>. In such a scenario, this initiative identified eight areas of improvement: 1) politics; 2) women peace and security; 3) protection; 4) safety and security; 5) performance and accountability; 6) peacebuilding and sustaining peace; 7) partnerships; 8) conduct of peacekeepers and peacekeeping operations. This included more than 150 endorsements and a total of 45-shared commitments to be implemented by each member state<sup>23</sup>.

In this Declaration, the United Nations member states reaffirm their commitment and support of peacekeeping operations and its basic norms as an effective tool of prevention and conflict resolution, promoting international peace and security. They compromise to “seek measures to enable greater coherence between mandates and resources” (UN 2018, par. 5) and to strengthen cooperation and the implementation of resolutions through bilateral and multilateral agreements.

These states also commit themselves to hold all peacekeepers accountable for their performance and conduct, supporting a zero-tolerance policy concerning sexual exploitation and abuse. To achieve this, they intend to develop a framework with clear and precise standards for all these missions. They also compromise to equip and train the uniformed personnel, specialty regarding pre-deployment preparation. They commit to enhance

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<sup>21</sup> <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/action-for-peacekeeping-a4p>, accessed on June 15, 2020.

<sup>22</sup> <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/action-for-peacekeeping-a4p>, accessed on June 15, 2020 .

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/A4P/>, accessed on June 17, 2020.

collaboration with relevant international and regional organizations such as the African Union and European Union.

Despite all of this, the United Nations remains a tool through which the great powers pursue their interests and wield their influence. Oliver Ramsbotham, Tom Woodhouse, and Hugh Miall remind us in their book *Contemporary Conflict Resolution* (2011) that the success of peace operations depends on the commitment of the parties involved and on the vested interests associated with the conflict. They explain this by writing that

(...) success depending on the levels of internal unity and the fluctuating political will of those operating within the UN system, the conflict context, the relative strength and the nature of the disputing parties, the perceived importance of the national interests involved, the skill and timing of the peacemakers, and the adroitness of antagonistic conflict parties in using – or delaying – the often cumbersome UN system itself to derive maximum bargaining advantage (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall 2011, 271).

The next chapter will focus on how these conceptual and theoretical frameworks have been applied in practice by the United Nations and how have conditions on the ground been influenced by these different understandings of conflict resolution. To achieve this, we'll analyze the evolution of UN peacekeeping missions through time to better understand their contribute to the development and progress of peace in the world.

## **Chapter 2**

### **A Critical Assessment of Conflict Resolution as Applied by the United Nations**

With the goal of ending war and promoting peace and security in the world, the United Nations, since its first operation in 1948, set up a total of 71 missions, of which 13 are still active, led by the United Nations Peacekeeping department. Through all this time, more than one million men and women served under the Blue Helmets, both police, military, and civilians; and almost 4,000 of them have lost their lives while on duty<sup>24</sup>, as we can understand by Figure 4.

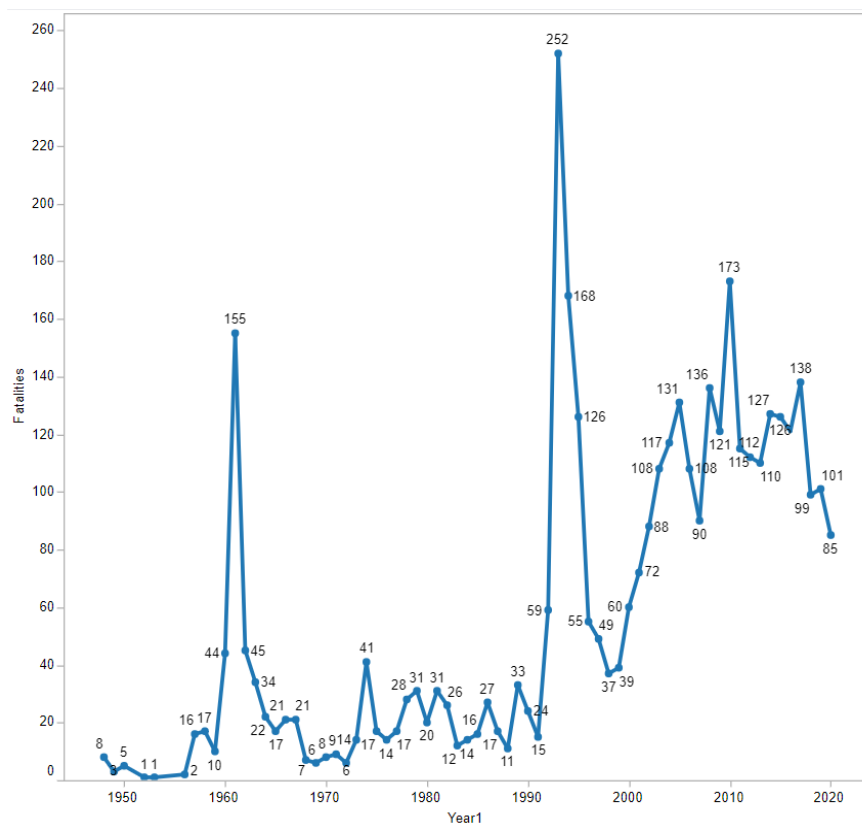


Fig. 4. Fatalities since 1948<sup>25</sup>

Despite the recent decrease, the graphic shows that the years after the end of the Cold War were bloodied than the years that processed it, with most fatalities occurring after the

<sup>24</sup> <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/our-peacekeepers>, accessed on February 10, 2020.

<sup>25</sup> <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/fatalities> accessed February 11, 2020.

year 1992. The year 1993 was particularly dark, with the death of 54 soldiers (30 from Pakistan and 24 from the United States) under mission UNOSOM (United Nations Operation in Somalia II), in a total of 154 deaths in the whole mission.

From America (Haiti) to Africa (Western Sahara, Mali, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Darfur, Abyei area, Republic of South Sudan), Europe (Kosovo, Cyprus), Asia (India and Pakistan) and Middle East (Lebanon, Israel, Syria, and Palestine), there is currently more than 110,000 personnel involved, from more than 120 countries<sup>26</sup>.

Considering these numbers, it is important to critically examine these missions to understand and measure their success. This chapter intends to present precisely that: an analysis of the UN's actions abroad.

## **2.1. Evolution of United Nations peacekeeping: 1948-present**

As discussed in the previous chapter, the first peacekeeping operations followed a pattern: their deployment depended upon the host country's request and the agreement of all the involved parties and the Security Council's approval. As a consequence of this, these operations were rarer in the first years, mostly led by a “small number of unarmed observers (that) would monitor cease-fire lines and troop withdrawals (...) or lightly armed soldiers would try to insert themselves between national armies”<sup>27</sup> (Autesserre 2019). It was the Cold War full raging effects.

The end of the Cold War marked a new era for peace operations: with the East-West polarization and competition no longer paralyzing the Security Council, there was a unique

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<sup>26</sup> <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/our-peacekeepers>, accessed on April 10, 2020.

<sup>27</sup> United Nations dealt with war only on a basis of inter-state conflict, between two sovereign nations. The organization's intervention on civil wars (intra-state) stated only years later.

opportunity to develop this mechanism further. No longer limited to monitor cease-fires and maintain peace agreements, the ambition was to truly solve conflicts. As Unsal Sigri and Ufuk Basar clarified in their article, *An Analysis of Assessment of Peacekeeping Operations* (2014):

UN troops found themselves in intrastate conflicts in order to protect civilians, provide humanitarian assistance and punish the offensive side. Additionally, UN troops took action without the consent of the belligerent parties and took part as an active player. With the permission of the UN Security Council, the consent of belligerent parties was not needed (Sigri and Basar 2014, 390).

Equipped with heavy arms (and with an extended mandate), peacekeepers helped decrease violence and disarm combatants, even without the consent of all the parties involved. This was also possible because of the increased involvement of the United States in these operations.

Between 1991 and 1993, there were 15 new peace operations, and their budget increased in proportion: according to Khusrav Gaibullov, Todd Sandler, and Hirofumi Shimizu, “peacekeeping spending rose from an annual average of \$208.5 million dollars for 1980-1988 to over \$3 billion dollars in 1994” (Gaibullov, Sandler and Shimizu 2009, 827).

As the budget grew, so did the responsibilities. If prior to the end of the Cold War these missions were primarily designed to monitor cease-fires and break hostilities, in this new era, peacekeepers were tasked with monitoring and supervising social order; assist in the establishment of local governments and a viable administration; deliver humanitarian assistance and guarantee the security of the civil population; provide police and military training; mediation; and help with the withdrawal of forces and disarmament.

### **2.1.1. From high hopes to reassess: peacekeeping crises in the '90s**

According to Kate Seaman, in her book *UN-Tied Nations: The United Nations, Peacekeeping and Global Governance* (2016), in the early '90s, as the constraints imposed by the Cold War were lifted, “there was an increasing belief and expectation that the international community, in a new global era, could and would act swiftly in the name of peace, justice and global solidarity” (Seaman 2016, 32). It should mark the end of what became known as “traditional peacekeeping” (Seaman 2016, 31), as described in chapter 1.

However, and despite this newly acquired optimism, in 1992, the UN's Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, in his report *An Agenda for Peace* (1992), besides underlying the new possibilities that improved relations between East and West might create, also called states' attention to several key challenges the future would pose. State sovereignty and cohesion were threatened by ethnic, religious, and social differences, terrorism, and the proliferation of weapons, together with new racial and ethnic tensions, endangering peace in vulnerable parts of the globe. The world was still assaulted by old enemies such as poverty, disease and famine, and an ever-growing number of refugees. Thus, instead of falling in sheer optimism, Boutros-Ghali calls for a new approach to peace operations, which should “encompass matters beyond military threats in order to break the fetters of strife and warfare that have characterized the past” (UN A/47/277-S/24111 1992, par. 13).

Just as anticipated by Boutros-Ghali, and as if confirming his fears, high hopes soon faded, giving way to reality, first with the operation in Somalia, in 1993, when two dozen Pakistan peacekeepers were killed, and a few months later, 18 U.S. soldiers suffered the same fate in the ‘Black Hawk down’ episode; and then with the massacres in Rwanda in 1994 and Srebrenica in 1995, when, in both cases, UN peacekeepers stood by and watched the genocide taking place without interference.

What was not understood right away was that the UN was facing a much different and complex reality than expected. The end of the Cold War did not mean the end of conflicts, but rather a transformation of them, for it had not only left many places over-harmed and divided but also had contained diversity by “demanding ideological conformity and strategic subordination” (Seaman 2016, 32). As the restraint and discipline once imposed by the Cold War faded, and the external pressure and control were no longer as strong, regional conflicts soon proliferated.

Then, the late '90s were a decade of reassessment of peace operations, marked by the international community's unwillingness to commit themselves and their resources to this problem (Chiarella 1997, 61). There was an evident reluctance, especially on the part of the West, to continue contributing to these operations, which again led to the UN's marginalization, also increasingly selective regarding its missions (pick winners and avoid casualties and failures).

States were not available to invest in more muscular multilateral missions, being resistant to the idea that they could not pursue their interests in the international sphere. There was no genuine interest in sustaining peacekeeping efforts once the Cold War was over on the part of the big powers.

These new missions were established in places of ongoing war, not yet ready for peace, where guns could still be heard – Yugoslavia (UNPROFOR), Rwanda (UNAMIR), and Somalia (UNOSOM II). They were under more criticism than the previous ones for lack of political, financial, and logistical (resources) support from many members of the UN and international public opinion.

It became increasingly clear that UN soldiers' presence was not enough to stop active combat or the renewal of hostilities and effectively separate the conflicting parties. Besides,



it also had to deal with states' reluctance to provide means to complete the mission's demands. With an increasing gap between these demands and the ability of the deployed forces to achieve them, it was not only a political problem but also an operational one.

### **2.1.2. Rethinking peace operations: new realities**

With the beginning of the new century, and with the peacekeepers' capability, efficiency and reputation significantly undermined, it was clear that new challenges were emerging; a new reform was needed to face what was coming ahead.

Gözde Kaya, in his approach to peacekeeping, describes a new threat: “The fragmentation of states by reason of uncontrolled socio-ethnic wars has become one of the fundamental security threats of the new century” (Kaya 2015, 49). The UN could no longer face this new challenge with its old ideas and methods of peacekeeping (‘traditional peacekeeping’), for the dynamics of recent conflicts was different. There was no longer a clear and easily identifiable enemy, for they were no longer under one distinguished flag or uniform; they were not easily separated from civilians. Besides the threat of insurgencies, these failed states could endanger their neighbors' stability and security, potentially leading to the disruption of the whole region (Kaya 2015, 50).

As a result of this new international scenario, the new operations were thus focused not only on stabilization and peace maintenance but also on supporting the country's reconstruction and rebuilding efforts. These peacekeeping activities, taking place when the conflict was still raging on, are more aggressive, especially when compared to the initial, more traditional operations, struggling to keep up with the new United Nations responsibilities.

The use of more robust military operations is understood, according to Gözde Kaya, as the only short-term alternative to stop this kind of ethnic conflicts. Instead, non-military mechanisms like economic sanctions are not sufficient to end violence. There needs to be a complementarity between these two types of tools that address both the more urgent needs (avoid more death) and long-term problems (underdevelopment, prejudice).

It is currently challenging to get all the parties' consent in a conflict and maintain some measure of impartiality<sup>28</sup>. Conducted in collaboration with other international organizations (NATO, African Union, European Union), peacekeeping forces are diverse, including military personnel, civilian police, staff, and non-governmental organizations, and strive to both develop, implement and enforce agreements and solve conflicts amid belligerents in environments of hostility and chaos (Kaya 2015, 46-47).

## **2.2. The need to rethink United Nations mandates: impact of lack of management and unclear directives on peace efforts**

Our record of success in mediating and implementing peace agreements is sadly blemished by some devastating failures. Indeed, several of the most violent and tragic episodes of the 1990s occurred after the negotiation of peace agreements (...) Roughly half of all countries that emerge from war lapse back into violence within five years. These two points drive home the message: if we are going to prevent conflict we must ensure that peace agreements are implemented in a sustained and sustainable manner (UN A/59/2005 2005, par. 114).

These are United Nations former Secretary-General Kofi Annan words, in a 2005 report entitled *In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all* (addendum). It's the state of the art of UN peace operations. It calls for more international engagement, stressing the importance and centrality of human rights. It is a call for action in

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<sup>28</sup> Current peacekeeping missions are more aggressive and demanding, multi-disciplinary with intervention in more areas – it is not just about trying to keep peace but also to construct peace. Here we can easily apply Johan Galtung's distinction between negative peace (traditional peacekeeping) and positive peace (new peacekeeping).

the face of several challenges the UN faces today: failure of negotiation and peace agreements, relapse into violence, overall lack of implementation of the accords sustainably and effectively.

Bearing this in mind, in an article from January/February 2019, *The Crisis of Peacekeeping: Why the UN can't end wars*, Séverine Autesserre stresses out several problems peacekeeping operations face today. She begins by saying that peacekeepers are looked upon as “meek foreigners uninterested in their work” (Autesserre 2019, 104) by local populations; they were given nicknames such as ‘Vacaciones Unidas’ (El Salvador), ‘beach keepers’ (Cyprus) and ‘Smurfs’ (Bosnia) (Autesserre 2019, 104).

Despite all the improvements, today peacekeepers fall short of the expectations and hopes set for them, both due to external and internal conditions. “They operate in places rife with ruthless militias, abusive armies, corrupt officials, and shabby infrastructure” (Autesserre 2019, 107), always under pressure to support the host government, which further complicates their job. According to Séverine Autesserre, with 7 billion dollars, less than 0.5 percent of worldwide military spending, they are expected to help solve more than a quarter of all current wars.

For many years, it was considered that cease-fire and peace agreements were the end of the line in reaching a stable and long-lasting peace. However, with so many of them being unsuccessful and giving way to violence, it is necessary to rethink this strategy.

Recent missions in the Middle East and North Africa (as is the case of MINURSO in Western Sahara) have shown that there is more in establishing and rebuilding peace than reaching an agreement. Newman and Richmond remind us that, in many cases, “peace processes become marred by endless rounds of inconclusive talks and sporadic outbreaks of violence, and become hostage to the internal political processes of the disputants” (Newman

and Richmond 2006, 61). Many peace processes seem to be locked in a never-ending cycle: negotiations, with little to no concessions that produce fragile agreements, rarely implemented.

Instead of being negotiated in good faith between parties genuinely committed to sustainable peace, negotiations are initiated under heavy international pressure. Based on a competing strategy, the parties, not yet ready to talk, make use of manipulation (punishment or rewards) to try to “change the pay-off structure of the negotiations and the preferences of the opponent in order to get desired concessions and move towards an agreement” (Newman and Richmond 2006, 29). Through threats (sticks) and rewards (carrots), one side tries to influence others to make concessions and act according to its interests.

Therefore, we can conclude that parties make use of negotiations to accomplish several goals, not limited to peace: “gain international publicity and attention; to prepare for the use of force or to rearm; to gather intelligence; to use negotiations as a sounding board; or to gain prestige” (Newman and Richmond 2006, 30). With an imbalance of forces, parties may have asymmetrical expectations concerning mediation: the stronger part favors a less active process, while the weaker desires more intervention on the part of the mediators. The result is often a stalemate, especially in civil wars, for no organization or institution can ensure the implementation and enforcement of a signed agreement.

### **2.2.1. Management and strategic problems**

For a start, the Security Council is the lively representation of the UN’s rigidity. There is little the United Nations can do if the major powers (Security Council) are not interested in involving themselves in a crisis. To be effective, military operations require the support of at least one major power. Though we have seen that smaller countries are ready to provide forces, they **lack the financial capacity** to pay for the missions and the logistical capacity

to transport and organize their troops. More often than not, the five Security Council permanent members are ready to use the UN to further their interests in the world. Guy Arnold, in his book *World Government by Stealth* (1997), writes about a “tendency on the part of the big powers to see the United Nations as an irrelevancy or at best an irritant to be overruled or ignored rather than as an instrument of policy through which to achieve results” (Arnold 1997, 85).

According to Fetherston, in his book *Towards a Theory of United Nations Peacekeeping* (1994), despite the increase in personnel since the end of the Cold War, the UN continues to be severely **understaffed**, for it lacks an essential resource: “experienced and knowledgeable personnel, both civilian and military” (Fetherston 1994, 35). For one thing, all countries involved in these missions would like to have their national officers appointed to top head positions. Because of this, there is a lot of lobbying activity going on regarding the selection of senior positions such as Force Commander and Chief of Staff. At the same time, there is also a certain degree of reluctance, on the part of some contributing countries, of letting go some of their best officers to sometimes dangerous positions out of the country (regarding, for example, the high risk of death or serious injuries). This may lead to less competent officers holding important high-ranking positions in peacekeeping missions. For instance, Fetherston shares the story of a general appointed Force Commander for UNDOF (United Nations Disengagement Observer Force), located on Golan Heights since 1974. He says, “after several months it became apparent that he was ‘a soggy, drunken disaster’ leaving the ‘staff at each other’s throats and the Syrians incredulous” (Fetherston 1994, 39). The general was later recalled, but even that can create a lot of tension between the State and the UN Secretariat, so this kind of decisions are, in many cases, postponed as

much as possible. There are many cases like this: of a lavish style, arrogance, and patronizing attitude<sup>29</sup>.

Another shortcoming is **training**: where training exists, it is fragmented at best, and collective training before the operations does not exist. In fact, many troop-contributing countries do not offer any training to their personnel, and the UN is not better at this. With no formal, centralized, and institutionalized training program, the UN leaves most of this to the countries. Even today, the prospects of some advance in this area are minimal, for there is a lack of resources and logistical support in terms of transport, housing, food, staff for training and materials.

In 2000, a report known as the **Brahimi Report**<sup>30</sup>, issued by the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, alerts to the troops' lack of equipment and training. For example, “some countries have provided soldiers without rifles, or with rifles but no helmets, or with helmets but no flak jackets, or with no organic transport capability (trucks or troops carriers)” (UN A/55/305-S/2000/809 2000, par. 108). In many cases, the soldiers never worked with each other before and did not even speak the same language. Even if this is not a problem, they still lack a common interpretation of rules of engagement and requirements, especially regarding the use of force.

These troops come mainly from developing countries (Ethiopia, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Rwanda, Nepal). While major powers contribute with money, the Southern countries deploy the man. For this, they receive monthly compensation for each soldier, police, or military observer, which, in some cases, more than compensates the costs. In

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<sup>29</sup> Severine Autesserre describes well these situations, having closely analyzed peacekeeping operations. She concluded that, “In country after country, residents complain that peacekeepers are arrogant and demeaning, live in lavish accommodations, drive fancy SUVs, and spend far too much time relaxing and far too little actually doing their jobs” (Autesserre 2019, 111).

<sup>30</sup> The Report on the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, known as Brahimi Report, was the result of the work developed by a panel of experts led by Lakhdar Brahimi, at the request of former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, in 2000. Its goal was to present specific and practical improvements to assist the UN in future missions and recommendations to reform the peace operations system.

contrast, in others (specialty in the West), the costs are much higher with well trained and equipped troops.

### **2.2.2. Miscommunication and unclear mandates**

Additionally, there is also a need **to clarify the Security Council mandates**, for there is often too much room left for interpretation. As a political process, mandates are designed under intense negotiations and result from a difficult consensus within the Security Council (between nations that are not directly involved in the conflict) and the conflicting parties. Each side has its perceptions of the problem, its interests, and an understanding of possible solutions.

According to Fetherston, “More often than not, in order for a mandate to get the required vote in the Council, contentious issues are left out and ambiguous wording is used” (Fetherston 1994, 37). Usually, they are the “lowest common denominator of agreement” (Fetherston 1994, 37). This is particularly troublesome when different organizations collaborate in the field, as is the case in recent missions. In many cases, it is not clear the amount of force that troops can use. The same is true for peace agreements, in many instances poorly planned, far too vague and ambiguous for the parties to rely on. This can deteriorate an already fragile situation, creating new ground for hostilities.

Instead, a reliable mandate should be clear and objective, practical, with a previously well-defined and secure funding system, and with the involvement of both local and regional actors. It also should be emphasized, as a rule within the United Nations, that impartiality does not equal neutrality or inactivity. This means that the organization should maintain

good relations with the parties and condone violent actions that may undermine both the peace process and the mandate and the protection of the local population<sup>31</sup>.

Another problem has to do with the **chain of command**. In peacekeeping missions, officers are required to report and answer directly to the Force Commander. This means that they are not supposed to report to their national governments, which complicates matters, especially when the orders contradict each other. According to Séverine Autesserre, “When they have to choose between fulfilling the UN mandate and avoiding casualties, they generally choose the latter” (Autesserre 2019, 108), as was the case in Srebrenica in 1995, when the peacekeepers, outnumbered, stood by as Serbian forces massacred 8.000 Muslim men and boys.

To complicate matters even more, there is also the problem of communication between the headquarters and the field. It is often difficult to reach those who make decisions when violence erupts. Thus, in the early days of the conflicts, when a quick response on the part of the organization is crucial to mitigate violence, this reaction is continuously delayed. Therefore, it is imperative for the UN to **improve its reaction time and capacity**, with more freedom of action in an increasingly complex and anarchical world.

### **2.2.3. The need for a new approach: how a bottom-up strategy can impact peace operations**

Besides this, there is also what Séverine Autesserre calls the “UN’s overriding disdain for all things local” (Autesserre 2019, 111). In countries where violence is, in many cases, local in origin (disputes over land, water, exploitation of natural resources, and power over

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<sup>31</sup> According to its principles, the UN is an impartial actor, not a neutral one. Therefore, it should thrive to support both parties but not stand by and let transgressions stay impugned (<https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/principles-of-peacekeeping>, accessed on August 13, 2020)



villages), this is another mistake. In many cases, tensions start in a particular village and quickly escalate into a generalized war.

However, to understand this, it is necessary to have more than a general knowledge of the country. The mission's Commanders and forces do not have, in many cases, an in-depth understanding of the culture, society, traditions, and institutions of the host country. Living in fortified infra-structures, peacekeepers have little contact with the locals (even if they know the local language, which is not the case in many operations). Thus, they lack an understanding of the real causes of violence, which constrains the UN's future decisions.

Séverine Autesserre, again in her article, raises two fundamental problems regarding the UN's strategy for peacekeeping:

(...) first, to work with national elites to stop violence from the top down and, second, to push for quick elections as a way to consolidate the peace. The standard UN approach to ending wars is to host large, costly conferences in order to strike agreements between governments and rebel leaders and then organize a national vote and declare victory (Autesserre 2019, 110).

Peacekeepers, grounded on a top-down approach, have limited and insufficient engagement with the population. Instead, as Séverine Autesserre reminds us, they assume that peace is built upon an agreement with the elites, without local partners' participation, relying on the knowledge of diplomats and other interveners. On the contrary, today's experience shows that constant and reliable contact with the population should be the primary way of gathering information necessary to guarantee the mission's success.

The strategy of imposing a peace process upon an unwilling and unprepared population is an erroneous one<sup>32</sup>. As an alternative, the UN should negotiate with the conflicting parts and answer their legitimate claims and concerns. Pushing for elections when the country and

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<sup>32</sup> This paternalist tendency is rooted in two main beliefs: the idea that local institutions and population lack expertise and knowledge to solve their problems and the belief that international actors have the knowledge required to help them. The idea that local are lazy, corrupt and uneducated justifies international intervention (Barnett 2016, 164).

the populations are not ready can be a recipe for disaster. It requires more than political will (when it exists): it also involves security constraints and financial and logistical resources.

To Michael Barnett, in his book *Paternalism Beyond Borders* (2016), while it seems that the host population lacks theoretical expertise, peacekeepers lack an even more important type of knowledge for the fulfillment of their task: local/country knowledge, an in-depth understanding of the cultures, traditions, and societies. As a direct result of this, UN's missions are dominated by outsiders that hold management and leadership positions, while local experts, if integrated, are limited to collecting information (Barnett 2016, 170-71).

In turn, peacekeepers should make an effort of socializing and have contact with the locals, developing good relations with them. Just by doing this, they can understand local tensions and dynamics, underlying causes of violence, and have an accurate perception of the challenges they face. If it's true that civilians cannot defeat armed groups, they can help defuse tensions, preventing it from escalating into war. Instead of being marginalized and dismissed, they should be heard and elevated in peacekeeping strategies.

This is all a "vicious cycle" (Barnett 2016, 177) that only generates resistance and rejections, making the work of peacekeepers more difficult and creating obstacles for implementing programs to end war and build trust. However, they also need to keep in mind that sometimes local partners also want to extract from negotiations as many resources as possible and increase, or at least maintain, their power. As such, this can be a very frustrating job and, as Michael Barnett writes:

Often expatriates get so frustrated at the behavior of their counterparts (like their abuse of power, resource embezzlement, and disregard for the plights of their fellow citizens) that they eventually stop trying to involve them or even get their consent (Barnett 2016, 182).

According to Roland Bleiker, another prevailing problem in peacekeeping operations is the lack of sensitivity to all things non-Western. Today's approaches to conflict are mainly embedded in Western frameworks that include deep cultural considerations and assumptions (Bleiker 2012, 295). For instance, the separation of the political and religious realms prevails in Western societies and is considered an implicit universal value. However, that is not true for at least half of the world. To Bleiker, "the result, of course, is that western approaches, even if well intended, often fail to understand and deal adequately with conflict, particularly when cultural difference is in play" (Bleiker 2012, 295).

Changing policies and introducing new institutions is not enough. It is far more difficult to change mindsets that legitimize oppression; to deal with traumas associated with war, with the collective memory of conflict, division, and mistrust. For this, it is necessary more than institutions. It is the re-establishing of a society in peace with itself, with the past. But this is a long-term endeavor that surpasses an approach focused solely on the state. It is necessary to primarily address the local realm, where people build relationships and interact, which requires the capacity to "transcend" violence<sup>33</sup>.

Therefore, the UN needs to continue making an effort to accommodate "alternative ways of seeing the world and to learn from the rich peacebuilding potential they offer" (Bleiker 2012, 296). Hence, local resistance, more than hostile to peace, should be seen as a crucial feature in shaping post-conflict reconstructing.

### **2.3. Financial constraints**

Besides management problems, the United Nations also faces severe financial constraints. Despite the increase in operational costs, the unpaid country contributions put

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<sup>33</sup> This point will be addressed in chapter 3, focused on John Paul Lederach and on his theory on Conflict Transformation.

serious weight on the organization since it undermines its capacity to efficiently deal with the increased international demands. According to the report issued by the UN's Secretary-General on May 10, 2019, "at the end of 2018, unpaid assessments for peacekeeping operations amounted to \$ 1.5 billion. (...) As at 30 April 2019, the level of unpaid assessments was \$2.1 billion" (UN A/73/443/Add. 1 2019, 15). This comprises "\$1.7 billion owed for active missions and \$414 million owed for closed missions" (UN A/73/443/Add. 1 2019, 16).

The situation gets worse: "by year-end, six active operations had cash for one month or less of operations. Two operations had run out of cash, requiring them to borrow from closed peacekeeping missions to sustain their operations" (UN A/73/443/Add. 1 2019, 17). UN's approved budget for the fiscal year of 1 July 2019 – 30 June 2020 was \$6.5 billion, which represents an "average of 1.9% reduction on approved budget for 2018-19"<sup>34</sup>.

The UN General Assembly resolution 3101, approved in December 1973, established non-voluntary fixed shares of UN annual peacekeeping expenses for each UN member. Through a complex formula that they have established, countries' contributions consider each nation's economic wealth. On this scale, the five permanent members of the Security Council are "required to pay a larger share because of their special responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security"<sup>35</sup>. In 2019, the top providers of financial contributions to UN peacekeeping operations were the United States (27.89%), China (15.21%), Japan (8.56%), Germany (6.09%), and United Kingdom (5.79%)<sup>36</sup>. "Approximately 95% of all UN peacekeeping expenses are covered by permanent members of the Security Council and rich industrial countries" (Sandler 2017, 1880). According to

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<sup>34</sup> <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/how-we-are-funded>, accessed on September 3, 2020.

<sup>35</sup> <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/how-we-are-funded>, accessed in September 4, 2020.

<sup>36</sup> <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/how-we-are-funded>, accessed in September 4, 2020.

UN data, in April 2019, only China and Germany had paid all assessments due, in a total of 44 countries.

It is evident by the data that there is an unwillingness on the part of most countries to pay the required contributions, especially considering there is no penalty associated. Despite the United States' contribution to the peacekeeping budget of 27.89% in 2019, the rule that each member must pay at least 0.001% (UN 2018, par. 6) burdens more small countries than it does to the US. In his speech, in a General Assembly session on September 26, 1995, the British politician Malcolm Rifkind said:

The bill for all United Nations peace-keeping, all aid and development work last year, was slightly over 3.5 per cent of the United States' defence budget, or less than the United Kingdom spends on police and public administration. One day of Operation Desert Storm cost as much as all that year's United Nations peace-keeping. The price of disengagement and disorder would be greater (UN A/50/PV.6 1995, 13)<sup>37</sup>.

In the 90's the importance of non-UN peacekeeping operations increased, particularly with Bosnia and later Kosovo. Being voluntary, countries cover their troop and equipment costs, which imposes higher costs on them. These missions are more focused on the Middle East and North Africa (oil interests), Europe (contain conflicts before they spread, jeopardizing Western countries' stability, economy, and investments) and Central Asia, East Asia and Pacific (Gaibullov, Sandler and Shimizu 2009, 831).

Contrarily, UN missions are concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa, where most countries have little interest. "The UN has little choice but to maintain peace in places where most countries have little specific economic or strategic concerns" (Gaibullov, Sandler and Shimizu 2009, 831). This also indicates that non-UN peacekeeping operations are more driven by the state's interests rather than protecting human rights or justice.

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<sup>37</sup> This shows us the overall relevance of the UN, and particularly of peacekeeping operations, in these countries' strategy and interests. The price of war is much easier to support than that of peace.

## 2.4. Sexual violence and women related crimes

Equally important, it is the dimension of sexual violence in peacekeeping operations<sup>38</sup>.

Targeting women produce both short and long-term consequences. It contributes to spreading diseases (HIV) and hinders women's living conditions, especially regarding poverty. More importantly, it causes lifelong traumas and makes peace and reconciliation more complicate.

United Nations Security Council resolution 1325<sup>39</sup> has been followed by nine other resolutions (UNSCR 1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106, 2122, 2242, 2467, and 2493), which make up the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. This Agenda has transformative potential - the potential to escape cycles of conflict, to create inclusive and more democratic peacemaking, and to turn from gender inequality to gender justice. All of them mandate peacekeepers specifically to protect civilians (women and girls) from sexual violence. Deplorably, they are also the cause and perpetrators of many of these crimes. In April 2018, the newspaper *The Guardian* reported the rape of two teenage girls in South Sudan by Nepalese UN Blue Helmet troops (Agence France-Presse 2018). In 2005, the same journal wrote *Report reveals shame of UN peacekeepers*, about a United Nations report that again identified "repeated patterns of sexual abuse and rape perpetrated by soldiers supposed to be restoring the international rule of law" (Bowcott 2005). This study, published by Jordan's ambassador to the UN at the time, and endorsed by the Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, calls attention to troops' misconduct on Haiti, Sierra Leona, Bosnia, Cambodia, East Timor, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

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<sup>38</sup> "forced prostitution, sexual mutilation, and forced abortion and sterilization" as described by Shanna Kirschner and Adam Miller in their article *Does Peacekeeping Really Bring Peace? Peacekeepers and Combatant-perpetrated Sexual Violence in Civil Wars* (2019, 2046).

<sup>39</sup> UN resolution 1325 urges member states to continue working towards inclusion and increase participation of women in all decision-making processes, both at national and international level. It calls for gender equality and support of women, particularly in situations of more vulnerability (in conflicts). It also emphasizes States responsibility to end the impunity of those responsible for crimes against humanity and war crimes, and guarantee the protection of women and girls from violence, particularly rape and sexual abuse.

However, this was not new at the time. In fact, through the 90's it was found that “soldiers were customer in brothels run in Bosnia and Kosovo which relied on women sold into forced prostitution” (Bowcott 2005). In June 2017, in an article entitled *UN Peacekeepers’ sexual assault problem: how to end it once and for all* by Anderlini (2017), *Foreign Affairs* also addressed this problem, reporting several cases, as the 2014 accusations on peacekeepers from France and Georgia of sexual violence against children in the Central African Republic.

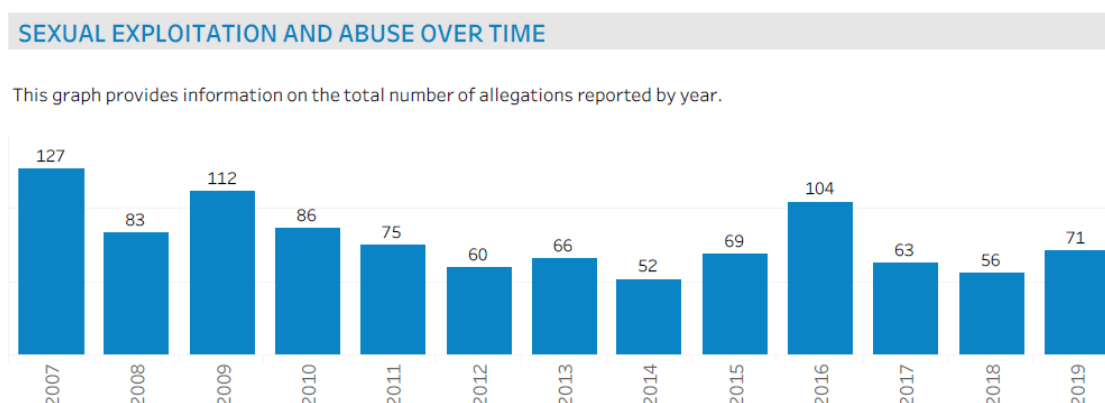


Fig. 5. Sexual exploitation and abuse over time<sup>40</sup>

Figure 5 provides information on the number of allegations of sexual misconduct by year on UN peace missions. Regarding the year 2019, of the 71 allegations, the majority, 49, were sexual exploitation. The United Nations also provides information on the alleged perpetrators: of the 71 cases, 47 were perpetrated by military personnel, followed by civilians (22 cases) and 2 by police. The nationalities of the personnel implicated are South Africa, followed closely by Cameroon and the Democracy Republic of Congo<sup>41</sup>. Since 2010, of all the allegations, 208 were considered substantiated by the UN: of these, 165 regarded uniformed personnel (62 of which are still pending action by the national government and 51 resulted in jail) and 43 civilians (20 resulted in dismissal by the UN)<sup>42</sup>.

<sup>40</sup> <https://conduct.unmissions.org/sea-overview>, accessed July 3, 2020.

<sup>41</sup> <https://conduct.unmissions.org/sea-subjects>, accessed July 3, 2020.

<sup>42</sup> <https://conduct.unmissions.org/sea-investigations>, accessed July 3, 2020

These data shows that the same people mandated to guarantee the safety of the population and the respect for human rights are accused of the same behavior they were sent to end. They are expected to act on their best, based on a set of high standards. Instead, they are involved in sexual abuse, exploitation, and prostitution, being, in many of them, one of the vectors of the sexual markets in the countries they were deployed to. The book *Unintended Consequences of Peacekeeping Operations* (2007) addresses this problem to identify less studied consequences of these operations. According to its authors:

Lessons from past missions, including those in Haiti, Mozambique, East Timor, Bosnia, Kosovo and Cambodia, inform us that the arrival of peacekeepers increases the demand for prostitutes substantially: “rape, trafficking in women and children, sexual enslavement and child abuse often coexist alongside peace operations” (Kent 2007, 45).

This shows that, with more soldiers on the ground, the demand for sex workers also increases. Despite the UN strongly discouraging these behaviors in resolutions and directives, the prosecution of these crimes is still complicated. For example, armed forces remain under their national authorities' criminal jurisdiction, which gives them immunity from prosecution by local authorities.

“Repatriation is often the United Nations’ only disciplinary option and, once suspects are repatriated, the United Nations loses any influence to ensure the troop- and police-contributing countries report back on the issue” (Kent 2007, 49). The remaining disciplinary actions depend on the will of the country of origin, in many cases reluctant to charge soldiers for actions taken on foreign territory.

The case of civilian personnel is a little different, for they can be locally persecuted for illegal acts committed. Still, many hosts do not have functional legal systems, so they also have limited capacity to advance with a legal process. Given the economic, political, and logistical constraints that many UN missions face, the organization has limited capacity to monitor their personnel and deliver a complete follow-up. This can severely damage the



UN's reputation and relation with local people, undermining its mandate, and promote organized crime (Kent 2007, 49).

Thus, it is essential to educate the soldiers before their deployment on human rights, gender equality, and local culture. It is also necessary to strengthen women's awareness of their social, economic, political, and civil rights to reduce their vulnerability to such attacks. Establishing peace requires more than the end of the fighting, for there are other areas that must be addressed to avoid a relapse into conflict (positive peace). Thus, the UN cannot only monitor cease-fires or reach agreements; it needs to consolidate security, strengthen national democratic institutions, and promote economic and social development.

## **2.5. Not everything is lost: final considerations on the United Nations' peace activities**

Despite some discouraging results, the presence of peacekeeping missions helps reduce violence. Through disarmament and demobilization, they reduce the potential of both lethal and non-lethal violence.

In this regard, education and socialization are also important. For example, "many Liberians did not know rape was a reportable crime; simply changing the terms of the conversation and providing information about how to report rape and preserve evidence proved a vital part of the mission" (Bacon, cited in Kirschner and Miller 2019, 2049). The deployment of more robust missions is also more effective in reducing violence, making it easier to identify possible crises.

It is also important to manage local expectations. Local populations tend to go from a state of high optimism with the arrival of peacekeepers to frustration and disappointment as time passes and their living condition remains pretty much the same. Despite its good

intentions, MacQueen argues, “it is, however, possible that in pursuit of what is seen as the greater goal of international stability, justice and equity are not served well at the local level” (MacQueen 2013, 62).

In his book, *The United Nations, Peace Operations and the Cold War* (2013), Norrie MacQueen gives the example of West New Guinea: UN’s intervention (UNTEA – United Nations Temporary Executive Authority) was established as a temporary and intermediate stage in the transfer of power from the Netherlands to Indonesia. In terms of its mandate, the mission was a success as the transition took place with stability and security. However, if we look more deeply into the results on the ground and how it affected the population, we can see that they were left under the undemocratic rule of a distant country, Indonesia, turning the country’s history into one of domination and repression.

The United Nations must also learn from past experiences by learning both with success and failure. “And it must ‘learn to learn’: it must continue to study and consolidate its understanding of the lessons arising from its mounting body of experience, while avoiding the delusional self-congratulations” (Black, 2001, 174). The consolidation of peace is a long-term process that entails an effort that takes time. It involves promoting an agenda that seeks to transform current conditions and, far from short term planning, it requires engagement long after an agreement has been reached.

On October 31, 2014, former United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon assembled a High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations to review UN peace operations. This resulted in a report presented to the General Assembly on June 17, 2015. The report begins by praising UN peace personnel, both on the ground and the UN Headquarters, for their dedication and commitment, risking their lives daily for the pursuit of peace and freedom.

However, it also underlines that, despite the reforms over the years, new challenges are arising, and change is necessary to ensure the UN's effectiveness in the future. For a start, "the United Nations is often too slow to engage with emerging crises" (UN A/70/95-S/2015/446 2015, 9) and should seek to invest in conflict prevention and mediation to address emerging situations (which includes partnerships with regional organizations).

Regarding mandates, they are often created based on universal templates and lack a realistic element to them. Thus, the UN should strive to close "the gap between what is asked of missions (...) and what they can provide" (UN A/70/95-S/2015/446 2015, 11), and elaborate clearer mandates, more easily achievable. Instead of ignoring national experiences and realities, missions should focus on them to seek better solutions. They often overlook local networks and informal mechanisms of assistance that play an important role in sustaining peace. However, they also face challenges that make this engagement more complicated: it is difficult to access all the population in vast countries and territories. It is also challenging to identify those who genuinely speak on behalf and truly represent local people.

This report stresses the need for more than a peace agreement, cease-fire, or elections to sustain peace. Peacekeepers must engage with local communities, a core element to the mission's success, as we have already discussed. Instead of only consulting them, they must include them in their daily work and decision process. This also means increasing accountability within each operation – "Immunity must not mean impunity" (UN A/70/95-S/2015/446 2015, par. 284). The member states must investigate and credibly persecute all allegations of misconduct on the part of their troops.

Additionally, member states must provide their personnel with means and equipment to fulfill their missions, including adequate physical protection – "They must not be budget-

driven” (UN A/70/95–S/2015/446 2015, par. 96). Also, training should be a priority. Instead, it is underresourced and underestimated: the UN training system relies on each member state to deliver their training<sup>43</sup>. The United Nations should support each member state in updating their training systems (“including night patrolling, convoy security procedures, counter-improvised explosive device and counter-ambush training (...) and joint exercises for formed police units and military contingents” (UN A/70/95–S/2015/446 2015, par. 231)), in close collaboration with regional organizations.

In conclusion, peace operations must be people-oriented, for they are the biggest beneficiary of them. If it is true that simply through their presence, these missions help to protect civilians, saving them from the brutality of war, they are also facing more significant and increasingly more dangerous challenges. As the Report states:

Where deployed, United Nations peace operations must be mandated and empowered to support the political resolution of threats to international peace and security (...). United Nations peace operations must answer to “We the peoples”, the ultimate beneficiaries of peace and the survivors of conflict. Their perceptions and their assessments, particularly those of women and youth, are the critical barometer of the success, or failure, of United Nations peace operations (UN A/70/95–S/2015/446 2015, par. 346).

With these critical considerations in mind, a new alternative approach to conflict resolution will be presented in chapter 3, in line with John Paul Lederach’s theory of Conflict Transformation. More flexible, based on the centrality of reconciliation and building relationships and dialogue, this perspective may be an excellent adding to the UN’s current strategy, especially when negotiations seem to have reached a halt.

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<sup>43</sup> According to the General Assembly UN resolution A/RES/49/37 (1995), member states are responsible for the pre-deployment training of their personnel. It should be based on UN peacekeeping standards and materials, provided by the Integrated Training Service (ITS), created in 2007 as the center responsible for providing guiding and standard materials.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Conflict Transformation: an Alternative Path to Peace and Reconciliation**

As was reinforced in the first chapter, peace is not just the absence of violence but also an understanding and work on the underlying causes of violence and its dynamics. In the face of this view that was already discussed in chapter 1, and bearing in mind the appraisal of current United Nations peace operations and its faults mentioned in chapter 2, there is the need to rethink the world's strategy to achieve peace for the current one has proved to be inefficient and inadequate to deal with conflict<sup>44</sup>. One of these alternatives is **John Paul Lederach**'s thesis on Conflict Transformation, which will be presented and further explored in this chapter. On the field and as a scholar, he has been working on conflict resolution for more than 30 years, based on which he developed his theory on conflict.

John Paul Lederach is an American professor of International Peacebuilding at the University of Notre Dame, scholar and founder of the conflict transformation Program at Eastern Mennonite University. Lederach has worked in conflict transformation since the '80s, in places such as Columbia, Somalia, Philippines, Nicaragua, and Northern Ireland.

Lederach is renowned for his efforts as a mediation trainer and conflict resolution specialist and has helped design training programs in more than 25 countries. Based on his field experience, John Lederach developed his own training methodology, which he presented in this book *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation Across Cultures* (1995). A vital component of Lederach's theory of conflict transformation, he has a very practical approach to training and mediation that is currently lacking in the United Nations peace operations. In line with his overall thesis, he highlights the mediator's role as a

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<sup>44</sup> According to SIPRI (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute), the "Global military expenditure is estimated to have been \$1917 billion in 2019, the highest level since 1988" (SIPRI 2019, 2). Never has the world spent so much in war – it is the highest since 1988.

facilitator that, more than passing down knowledge, helps others discover and create their own processes to handle conflict. However, and given the extensive material on training and negotiation, this will not be further developed in this thesis, for it is not the central theme being discussed.

A Mennonite Christian, Lederach's work is strongly influenced by his faith in God and on people and their capacity to bring the best of each other, of humanity, into relationships. It's his faith that leads him into believing it's possible for rivals to see beyond their circumstances and build long-lasting friendships. He proposes a very practical approach to the dynamics of conflict and how to transform them from violent to peaceful in the field. Instead of focusing on high-profile negotiations with several key actors, Lederach's theory intends to break with traditional peacekeeping ideas. Instead, it understands the transformation of conflicts as a people-centered response, collective and communal in nature.

Based on his experiences in conflicts and communities torn by war, Lederach presents more than one model, a collection of steps to achieve peace. He offers a journey into human relationships, of making possible today what seemed impossible yesterday, in a long path towards healing and reconciliation. No technique can be applied to turn communities towards peace: this journey, as much as involves turning towards the other, also entails turning towards oneself. It is as internal as is external. It means helping people face their own fears, their actions, their past, and face others, the bitterness, resentment, hate, and pain that walk hand in hand with violent conflict.

Therefore, it is not only the end that matters: for Lederach, the process seems to matter even more. He suggests a way of living, a permanent choice, and move towards the other, which only happens through experience. People are the ones making peace, not agreements.

All of this is addressed in his books, several of which will provide the basis for this chapter: *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (1997), *The Journey Toward Reconciliation* (1999), *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace* (2005), and *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation* (2014).

It's in his book *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace* (2005) that the question that will guide this chapter, and the overall thesis, can be found: "How to build creative responses to patterns of self-perpetuating violence in a complex system made up of multiple actors, with activities that are happening at the same time"? (Lederach 2005, 34) How to move beyond histories of violence, resentment, and prejudice towards a new, more peaceful horizon towards reconciliation?

### **3.1. A first look into conflict transformation**

According to John P. Lederach in his book *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (1997), the majority of armed conflicts still take place in developing countries, especially between groups from the same country, and thus are "intranational in scope" (Lederach 1997, 11). However, and despite this characteristic, they are, at the same time, also international since some of the conflicts inhabit neighboring states, weapons, and money flow from the surrounding region, and displaced populations cross borders trying to escape. Consequently, they are "internal and internationalized" (Lederach 1997, 12) and contribute to regional instability – which explains the need for a regional, and not only national, perspective.

As a direct result of this national element in contemporary conflicts, they are "lodged in long-standing relationships" (Lederach 1997, 14), which in many cases gave origin to long-term hatred, hostility, and fear. The enemy is quite literally living next door.

Thus, in many conflicts, what drives violence are not only the originating issues but the subjective (and negative) experiences, perceptions, and emotions that have been developing for years towards the other side. Central to this is the image of the other constructed as the enemy. The other is seen as separate, as different, attached an adverse judgment, a threat<sup>45</sup>.

Precisely because of this reality, contemporary conflicts call for more than what he describes as “traditional statist diplomacy” (Lederach 1997, XVI). This model is based on a hierarchical assumption: agreements achieved at the highest level of power (with the intervention of a third party) will translate themselves into the rest of the country’s population by identifying the leaders and getting them to agree. Contrarily to this idea, Lederach argues in his book *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation* (2014) that there needs to be a constructive change beyond resolving specific problems since conflict is an undeniable feature of human interaction<sup>46</sup>, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Conflict resolution carries with it a “danger of co-optation, an attempt to get rid of conflict when people were raising important and legitimate issues” (Lederach 2014, 8). As recalled in the previous chapter, in many cases, it means “lots of good words but no real change” (Lederach 2014, 8), for it does not address deep political and social problems. By focusing on present difficulties and immediate solutions, it is presented as the end of the conflict. However, this is hard to find – even a peace agreement does not always end violence. If there is a relationship, the conflict remains.

Conflicts are a dynamic reality, always changing, unpredictable, and complex. New issues and struggles can emerge, modifying parties’ goals, and further complicating a

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<sup>45</sup> “I imagine that the other person is completely bad and that I am completely good” (Lederach 1999, 48).

<sup>46</sup> The goal must be to build “healthy relationships and communities, locally and globally” and this requires a true change in our interactions in society. (Lederach 2014, 9)



volatile situation (escalation). From difference, common in pluralistic societies, it can quickly escalate into contractions by changing the power dynamics. When this is not addressed openly, violence and war quickly follow (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall 2011, 12-13). By emphasizing negotiations as the recipe for conflict, current peace missions focus mainly on the immediate and more apparent causes of conflict (such as land, resources, power), forgetting the relational context and latent causes of these conflicts.

Conflict is more than a single, linear line: events move along other directions, even if sometimes they are not visible from an immediate perspective. A circular view seems much more accurate: it grasps the idea that things are all connected, thus interdependent, and that they do not move simply in one direction. Sometimes the parties involved feel they are progressing, and at other times feel like they have hit a wall, an impasse that they cannot surpass. This is a reminder that change and transformation are more than a moment; they are a process that takes time and should be done with caution but also with a flexible mindset.

Stop the killing and reach a cease-fire are important goals, especially in humanitarian terms, but it is only one aspect of the overall picture of peace (is only one of many events). When direct violence ends, there is space to address other issues. Agreements are seen as the end of the line, expecting too much from them. In the path to create sustainable peace, agreements are only the beginning.

This is, thus, a long-term process that must be focused on the people, on relationships, on the political culture, on finding new strategies to overcome collective challenges and problems. The challenge is to move forward with the feet on the ground, connected with people's reality, with their daily issues, and at the same time dream with a better future, that reality can be changed, and things can be different. In Lederach's words: "To stay so close to the ground that we feel the very soil's moisture bubbling up from people's daily life, pains,

and realities. Yet we must be so close to our dreams of what could be that we can feel and hear the seeds pregnant with life as they break forth from below the surface” (Lederach 1999, 197).

Peace is made by and of people that dare to dream, not with a future based on the present, but with a present based on a vision of the future. They do not live according to the way things are, but according to something not yet seen. This is Pedrito's case (Lederach 1999, 195), the elected leader of a movement in Nicaragua, representing two thousand *Campesinos*. He traveled for five days by foot or horse in the mountains looking for armed groups to encourage them to meet their enemies and then walked five days back to meet with government officials and military forces to encourage them to gather with the opposition leaders. After a day of training, Lederach describes one day he asked the hotel staff for a sack and then fill it up with seeds falling from a nearby tree. When questioned on this, he said: “We have a problem with deforestation in my area. I want to take back these seeds for the people. Nobody here really seems to want them” (Lederach 1999, 196). The seeds were a symbol of dreams and hope for his people, embodying reconciliation through care and building bridges. Pedrito had his feet on the ground, on the reality of his country, but the head on the clouds, living in the hope that things could be different.

### **3.1.1. Healing and reconciliation: a long way towards peace**

One of the major problems in conflict resolution is hate and resentment. In many cases, people have been involved in systematic violence for several years, counting violence as justified. The question is: how can they move past this? How can people process the violence, traumas, hatred they have been subjected to for years?

To achieve reconciliation, John P. Lederach suggests, in his book *The Journey toward Reconciliation* (1999), the need to address four elements: Truth, Mercy, Justice, and Peace (Lederach 1999, 54). **Truth** is about bringing the past into the light, with clarity and honesty, to free people from that burden. **Mercy** is about acceptance and support, forgiveness that can heal, to allow people and communities to start anew. **Justice** is required to make the situation right, repair the damage done, restore relationships based on accountability, and open the door to a better future. **Peace** is what holds everything else together; it is what connects individuals with respect. The place where all of this meet is reconciliation.

To achieve Peace, three central elements must be present in the peace process: a Truth Commission (Truth), Amnesty (Mercy), and a “negotiated peace” (Justice) (Lederach 1999, 66). The **Truth Commission** intends to investigate what happened, especially in terms of human rights. It’s not about delivering justice or render sentences but to create space to acknowledge the crimes and abuses that have taken place. It’s the public recognition of the past that helps people and communities move forward and heal. “In this framework, social reconciliation depends on first establishing and acknowledging the wrong, the wrongdoer, and those who suffered” (Lederach 1999, 68). Acknowledging not only the past but also present differences and disagreements is part of the commitment required to achieve peace.

**Amnesty** is understood as a way to move past hatred and vengeance to avoid further violence. If Truth Commissions are about the past, amnesties are about the present, about starting fresh, as individuals and communities, about accepting responsibility and moving forward. As in South Africa, it can be offered beforehand to encourage people to come along and tell the truth. In the case of Argentina, it was negotiated and provided after the Truth Commission as an incentive for people, for they knew they would not be punished for telling their stories.

In turn, **negotiations** are the end of war, of violence, allowing people to return to their lives, to avoid generalized and immediate punishment for the ones on the losing side.

According to Martina Fischer, in her article *Transitional Justice and Reconciliation: Theory and Practice* (2011), reconciliation, rather than an end, is a process to healing, to (re)building relationships, to move from a violent past into a shared and healthy future, especially when societies have been through a process of ethnic and political conflict, marked by a lack of trust and confidence. Given the proximity, not addressing this may mean returning to violence (Fischer 2011, 415).

All of this requires the transformation of all those involved in the fighting that must come from within. In many cases, former soldiers feel isolated, marginalized from society after the war comes to an end<sup>47</sup>, and so they return to violence as if it is the only thing they know. Suspicious of the political power, living in poverty and not integrated, they find no other way to live. Florence Gaub warns precisely to this, the danger of releasing “large amounts of men trained in arms, stripped of their social surroundings, assignment and occupation” (Gaub 2011, 130): it has severe social consequences, for it is difficult for them to find jobs, but they can also be more prone to use violence as a method of problem-solving. As such, an effort must continue to be cultivated to disarm and reintegrate these groups in society through labor and business projects, dialogues, and forums, by addressing both the problem in its roots and also preventing recruitment<sup>48</sup>.

To move past this is a rather complicated and long-term process that must be at the same time flexible (there is not one single recipe for peace) and systemic/holistic

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<sup>47</sup> Soldiers first receive orders to join the fight and then receive new ones demobilise and continue with their lives, without any support from the state or those involved in these decision-making processes.

<sup>48</sup> Some of this work is already being developed by the United Nations through its program of *Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration*, since late '80s and it has been included in the mandate of several UN missions, Burundi, Haiti, Liberia, Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

<https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/disarmament-demobilization-and-reintegration>, accessed in October 9, 2020.

(understating people in their context, as evolving and interdependent individuals). It's a dynamic process, with activities taking place simultaneously, related to the past, present, and future, that overlap each other, and that requires a voice.

John Lederach summarises this by saying that:

This strategy is not driven by the concern of how to end the immediate and most pressing symptoms of the conflict, but rather focuses on how to create and sustain a platform capable of generating adaptive change processes that address both the episodic expression of the conflict and the epicenter of the conflictive relational context (Lederach 2005, 47).

To achieve this, one of the challenges is the need to think of the post-agreement as a separate and single-phase in the peace process, controlled by those who negotiate it. This must be addressed even before any paper is signed to hope to create sustainable change and peace. The other is recognizing agreements as temporary conflict reducers that generate opportunities to move beyond cycles of destruction – there is a long-term goal. “People are led to believe that the key to changing the situation lies in some kind of miraculous solution” (Lederach 2005, 49). However, the solution does not come from a signed agreement that may easily collapse if a more significant and constructive change is not created if there is no engagement. Focusing too much on the solution leads to forgetting the process.

On the contrary, transformation leads to change, for it centers the attention on the pattern and web of relationships. This requires a long-term commitment that goes beyond the pressure for quick results. It seeks the core of the conflict, rather than just solving specific problems. In effect, move away from war and create change is not easy and quick solutions do not exist – they are just empty promises.

Lederach provides one practical example of this (1999, 70-75): Network for Peace and Development case in Nicaragua. Developed in the post-war period, it gathered demobilized low-rank soldiers and their families, from both sides, on a process of work, empower and

integrate them into society. Over the years, they have created a network of local leaders, people from both sides who received training to be mediators in their villages and develop small businesses. They let go of the past, for it was too painful, and learned to work together to better their communities. They found a way to develop relationships without demanding the recognition of right and wrong (Mercy), and they are now accountable to each other, instead of trying to establish who should have been in the past (Justice).

Another example is the one in Cambodia (Lederach 1999, 75-77): focusing on the future generations, on creating a better world for their grandchildren, people have found ways to be able to work with former enemies today. Focusing on the future, they developed a sense of harmony that has helped them cultivate positive interactions while focusing on the past would gather more defensive responses.

### **3.1.2. Moral imagination: the complexity and essence of change**

In his years working in peace, Lederach says that one common idea of all those involved in conflicts is the **complexity of change**. If the proposed solution is quick or does not consider this idea, it is ineffective, unreal, and dangerous<sup>49</sup>. Change must not overlook history or be utopian; instead, it requires the commitment of those involved, always supported in the reality of the past and the present, but at the same time seeking to move beyond these patterns.

Additionally, change cannot be measured by campaigns, words, or promises. Entirely, on the contrary, change is tested in real relationships, inside communities – “people judge change by what can be felt and touched and by what touches their lives” (Lederach 2005, 56). When things happen, and people don’t feel touched, the distance towards national

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<sup>49</sup> Lederach explains: “People living in settings of violence often give a warning: If the proposed changes lack a serious account of complexity or a long-term commitment, then the proposed changes are dangerous” (Lederach 2005, 55).

leaders' increases (they feel detached from the decision-making process), creating a sense of indifference and imposition<sup>50</sup>. The great challenge of sustainable platforms for change is the “lack of authentic engagement of the public sphere” (Lederach 2005, 60). This process has been taken over by a small economic and military powerful minority, thus producing suspicion and distance.

Change requires the capacity to transcend violence while still living with its effects, still “engaging the past, without backtracking into the land of forgetfulness or condemning communities to repeat what has gone before” (Lederach 2005, 59). The challenge is to transcend the past and the present while still living in it. This calls for a new way to rethink the future: while still dealing with the consequences of the past, with grief, pain, and sorrow, it's about being able to look at it, think about it, without being led by a path of hatred and blame that, instead of helping communities to move forward, only locks them up in the past, leading individuals to repeat what was done before.

To this process of change, John Lederach calls the ‘moral imagination’, “the capacity to imagine something rooted in the challenges of the real world yet capable of giving birth to that which does not yet exist” (Lederach 2005, IX). This is the capacity to develop constructive and innovative responses that transcend and break the destructive patterns of violence despite rooted in the everyday challenges. Again, this is not about finding one single (miraculous) solution but about pushing parties into understanding the destructive relational patterns and violence they're involved in.

Moral imagination in a moment in time when imagination sparked and started a process of change. It is a turning point between individuals, quiet, the beginning of a journey

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<sup>50</sup> People feel the peace process and the decisions taken as foreign and distance, for they are not part in them. They are developed without engagement, without the majority of the population being heard. This increases the sense of manipulation and distance - “Stuff happens to us. We are not shaping what happens” (Lederach 2005, 56)

to break with patterns of animosity. It involves actors, people, willing to embrace and move towards the other by imagining themselves in a relationship.

One example of this is of a story from Ghana, presented by Paul Lederach: “I Call You Father Because I Do Not Wish to Disrespect You” (Lederach 2005, 7-10). During the 1990s, northern Ghana was assaulted by an escalation of ethnic conflicts between several groups, among whom are the Konkombas (dispersed, agricultural, with no political structure) and Dagombas (with a strong structure of leadership, they were the most powerful group in the north of Ghana). In 1995, violence escalated due to a dispute over land in a small town, giving way to a killing spree and threatening the stability of the whole region. In response, several organizations started pushing for a peacebuilding effort, and a space for dialogue was created between the two groups. On one of their first encounters, a story transformed the relationship between them and the course of the conflict. One the first face-to-face meeting, the chief of the Dagombas arrived, with his staff, and with an attitude of superiority, demeaning the Konkombas for their lack of a leader. In the face of this stance, the mediators could do nothing, for they could not directly challenge him, especially in the presence of his staff and enemies. However, the Konkombas spokesman requested the word replied by calling him *Father* and addressing him with the utmost respect<sup>51</sup>. This moment in time, this small reaction transformed the meeting. The chief admitted his shame for his insults towards the Konkombas people and even replied saying:

Though I insulted your people, you still called me Father. It is you who speaks with wisdom, and me who has not seen the truth. What you have said is true. We who are chiefly have always looked down on you because you have no chief, but we

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<sup>51</sup> Konkomba spokesman exact words were as follows: “You are perfectly right, Father, we do not have a chief. We have not had one for years. You will not even recognize the man we have chosen to be our chief. And this has been our problem. The reason we react, the reason our people go on rampages and fights resulting in all these killings and destruction arises from this fact. We do not have what you have. It really is not about the town, or the land, or that market guinea fowl. I beg you, listen to my words, Father. I am calling you Father because we do not wish to disrespect you. You are a great chief. But what is left to us? Do we have no other means but this violence to receive in return the one thing we seek, to be respected and to establish our own chief who could indeed speak with you, rather than having a young boy do it on our behalf?” (Lederach 2005, 9).



have not understood the denigration you suffered. I beg you, my son, to forgive me (Lederach 2005, 10).

The younger man walked to the chief, knelt before him, and gripped his leg, a sign of profound respect, vocalizing the word *Na-a*, in acceptance. The room was charged with feelings, emotions. It was not the end of the problems, but that moment impacted what followed. Maybe the seeds that avoided a full civil war were planted by that young man. Later, in March 2020, the king of the Dagombas was killed in an internal power struggle. Instead of taking advantage of that moment of weakness, the Konkombas expressed, on television, their solidarity for their loss and pleaded with the Dagombas for them to work together to find a long-lasting solution for their dispute. They concluded by promising that those from Konkombas found taking advantage of the situation to promote violence would be dealt with: isolation and police.

This example shows that relationships are at the center of the idea of change – the capacity to imagine a relationship with the enemy that goes beyond the cycle of violence, while violence is still present. And this implies interdependence – in Lederach’s words: “the moral imagination has a capacity, even in moments of greatest pain, to understand that the welfare of my community is directly related to the welfare of your community” (Lederach 2005, 62).

Therefore, the challenge is not to create “a land of forgetfulness” or “social amnesia” (Lederach 2005, 62), but to help people feel they have a voice and are at the center of processes of change in the public sphere, to help them build quality relationships even with those they fear the most. It’s not about forgetting the past, but about learning to leave with it, acknowledge that it happened, but understand and accept that they don’t have to go down that destructive path again.

Building peace also requires involvement from across all levels of society to achieve reconciliation from within. There is the need to find innovative ways to address conflicts, rooted in each group's realities and experiences, beyond negotiations and agreements. Reconciliation must seek to engage all the sides on a constant encounter, find ways to address the past, express their mutual traumas and losses, and grieve together<sup>52</sup>. It involves facing those who have caused great pain<sup>53</sup>.

Based on this, it can be concluded that “social-psychological and spiritual dimensions that traditionally have been seen as either irrelevant or outside the competency of international diplomacy” (Lederach 1997, 29) are of core importance to conflict formation. Hatred, prejudice, racism are primary motivations behind contemporary conflicts, to which only reconciliation, seen as an encounter, as a relationship, can give an adequate answer.

To John P. Lederach, reconciliation can be understood both as a “focus and a locus” (Lederach 1997, 30), a space where conflicting parties meet. It must be proactive in getting parties to meet, focus on their relationships, feelings, perceptions, and create new ones, new shared experiences. It is, therefore, also about interdependence.

### **3.2. Defining conflict transformation: a way of looking and seeing**

One way to truly know our humanness is to recognize the gift of conflict in our lives. Without it, life would be a monotonously flat topography of sameness and our relationships would be woefully superficial (Lederach 2014, 19).

Conflict has an important social role, for it brightens life, brings innovation, and steers change and deference, keeping relationships alive. This is the root of conflict transformation: view of conflict as a chance and a gift. Precisely because it is a natural social phenomenon,

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<sup>52</sup> Sustainable peace requires not merely the end of war, of direct violence, but also reconciliation based on a “society-wide network of relationships and mechanisms that promote justice and address the root causes of enmity before they can regenerate destabilizing tensions” (Lederach 1997, IX).

<sup>53</sup> As Lederach describes, in many cases, it means people have to stay face to face with those who killed their family members, who committed atrocities against them.

as explained in chapter 1, it emerges through individuals' interaction in society. It is rooted in people's perceptions and interpretations of themselves and others, of their social reality. If not dully acknowledged, it eventually explodes, giving rise to violence.

In conflict, the other is perceived as the problem, the enemy that either needs to be changed or eliminated to achieve victory. As the war progresses, the issues involved multiply, and language changes as parties start operating only based on prejudices and stereotypes. They lose sight of what started the conflict but feel increasingly more restless, distrustful, and defensive<sup>54</sup>.

Before hearing the other, each party assumes to know the other's intentions, attaching and developing their answers to what was not yet said, creating a succession of misunderstandings. Conflict transformation intends to address and break this miscommunication cycle by emphasizing the need to listen to the other through methods such as paraphrasing and active listening<sup>55</sup>.

As was discussed in chapter 1, conflict is socially constructed, created by individuals based on the meaning they attached to each event, their knowledge, their considerations regarding what is appropriate and what is not, what is fair and right, and what isn't. From here springs the idea of peace not as a static element but as a continuously evolving social phenomenon centered in human relationships. And this requires dialogue and engagement with the other side, not only between leaders but also as a common practice in the public sphere.

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<sup>54</sup> This leads to a vicious cycle of action-reaction, where the goal it's to win and get revenge.

<sup>55</sup> By repeating in our own words what the other said, we slow down and check if what we heard is really what the other meant. It is also a sign of our interest and commitment to understand their point of view.

Rather than seeing conflict exclusively as a danger or a threat, it must be understood first as an opportunity to increase self-awareness, knowledge, and understanding of the others.

More than a technique, “conflict transformation is a way of looking as well as seeing” (Lederach 2014, 12), that recognizes conflict as a regular dynamic within human interactions<sup>56</sup>. Transformation provides a holistic perspective on conflicts: conflict is characterized by a multitude of actors, causes, power dynamics, and cultures. As such, it requires an approach that can take into account all these levels of complexity, allowing for intervention in all levels, both micro and macro, local and national, more than sectorial strategies to address specific problems.

For that, it requires a set of lenses: each helps understand one aspect of reality. One allows to see the closest and immediate situation in a better way – it magnifies reality. The other clarifies aspects at a midrange, helping to see the “deeper patterns of relationship” (Lederach 2014, 13). Finally, there is also the need to see things at a great distance; this is the framework that holds the other two together and provides a complete understanding of conflict, addressing the present issues and developing new and deeper relationships (reconciliation).

Since one lens cannot focus on everything, there is a need for multiple sets of them to see different aspects of a tricky situation for each brings into focus one dimension of each conflict<sup>57</sup>. These lenses are held together in one frame – each must be in contact with the other to see reality as a whole. In many cases, only the immediate situation is address, as parties look for a fast solution. By doing this, the whole process is undermining, especially

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<sup>56</sup> As such, conflict can bring constructive change and the potential to generate and maximize growth (Lederach 2014, 17).

<sup>57</sup> Each lens focus one layer and, at the same time, blurs the other, for “we cannot expect a single lens to do more than it was intended to do, and we cannot assume that what it brings into focus is the whole picture” (Lederach 2014, 13).

the possibility of achieving peace, for the deeper layers remain untouched. The goal must be not only to solve the conflict but to create sustainable and constructive change – “Not satisfied with a quick solution that may seem to solve the immediate problem, transformation seeks to create a framework to address the content, the context, and the structure of the relationship” (Lederach 2014, 15).

These lenses provide a map of the whole conflict: they help to see the “immediate situation”, the “deeper patterns of relationship” and the “conceptual framework that holds these perspectives together” (Lederach 2014, 13). One example of this, a domestic one, is doing the dishes, a common motive for fights in today’s families. These fights focus on something very specific, dirty dishes, but they also suggest something more profound: in a family, is a moment of negotiation over relationships and roles, expectations, sense of care of the other as well as the distribution of power and decision-making process. It’s not only about who will wash the dishes in one specific night: it also raises the question of who did it in the past and who will do it in the future. It is possible to find an immediate answer that solves the problem. However, that solution will not address the deeper levels of relationship, nor will it avoid future conflicts over the same issue. Dishes are only the window that allows the family to look deeper and redefine their relationships and understanding of each other.

This strategy goes beyond UN regular peace activities: “high-profile envoys shuttling between capitals; soldiers in blue berets patrolling streets; nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) delivering food or advice; or even efforts to build civil society or establish rule of law” (Lederach 1997, X). These activities should not be underrated, for they are essential, but each should be conducted with a new purpose. The work does not end when the war ends or when elections take place. Rather, peacekeeping and peacebuilding are understood as complex processes and approaches towards the transformation of conflicts, to achieve “more sustainable, peaceful relationships” (Lederach 1997, X).

### **3.2.1. The heart of conflict transformation: the prominence of relationships**

Relationships are at the core of every conflict. They are both the framework in which violence happens, but, at the same time, they are also the energy that enables individuals to move beyond that same conflict. The key to transforming conflicts is the “capacity of individuals and communities to imagine themselves in a web of relationship even with their enemies” (Lederach 2005, 34). This is the role of peace operations: to help individuals understand their interdependence and, with that, create a new web of relationships, thus breaking the cycle of violence. It’s about recognizing that nothing, especially the humans, exist in isolation and complete independence, no one lives alone, and that everyone is part of a web of relationships. Through choices and behaviors, each individual creates the patterns they are involved in, and only by understanding that “ultimately the quality of our life is dependent on the quality of life of others” (Lederach 2005, 35) is possible to break with cycles of violence.

There is no peace without a relationship, for “if there is no capacity to imagine the canvas of mutual relationships and situate oneself as part of that historic and ever-evolving web, peacebuilding collapses” (Lederach 2005, 35). To transform conflicts is to understand that relationships are the heart of change. To be sustained and nurtured, peace must connect people (especially those that are not like-minded) in a constructive way. Thus:

(...) the goal is not stasis, but rather the generation of continuous, dynamic, self-regenerating processes that maintain form over time and are able to adapt to environmental changes. Such an infrastructure is made up of a web of people, their relationships and activities, and the social mechanisms necessary to sustain the change sought. This takes place at all levels of the society (Lederach 1997, 84).

It becomes clear by Lederach’s words that conflict transformation goal is to change hostile and violent relationships into just and sustainable ones, with the capacity to discover nonviolent tools to deal with conflict. Adaptive and dynamic, these structures must emerge

from every community's culture and context centered on reconciliation and repairing destructive relationships.

Finally, based on this relational element, conflict transformation can be understood in two ways: descriptively and prescriptively, across four scopes – personal, relational, structural, and cultural (Lederach 1997, 82-83).

	<b>Descriptive</b>	<b>Prescriptive</b>
<b>Personal:</b> change affects the individuals (emotional and spiritual aspect of conflict)	Individuals are affected in positive and negative ways by the conflict.	Intervention to minimize the destructive impact and maximize its benefits
<b>Relational:</b> change in relationships	How communication is affected by the conflict	Intervention to minimize bad communication and maximize understanding
<b>Structural:</b> causes of conflict and change it brings to social, economic, and political structures	Analyze the social circumstances that allowed conflict to rise and how it affects social structures	Intervention to gain insight into the causes of conflict. Promotion of non-violent methods to reduce hostility
<b>Cultural:</b> change produced by conflict in groups and how culture affects the response to conflict.	How conflict produces change in the patterns and identity of groups. How culture affects the response to conflict	Understand how conflict affects the cultural patterns of groups and how these patterns affect the way people react to conflict.

Table 1. Conflict transformation: descriptive and prescriptive level

The first (descriptive) refers to the effects created by social change (empirical); prescriptive, in turn, implies deliberate intervention to produce change in a conflict. At both these levels, change happens across the interdependent scopes: the personal one refers to prompted modifications in the individual. Descriptive transformation suggests that individuals are affected negatively and positively by the conflict (for example, in their physical and psychological well-being and emotional stability); in a prescriptive perspective,

it refers to deliberate intervention to minimize conflict's destructive impact and maximize its benefits from individual growth.

The relational level highlights the changes that take place in the relationship: its effects on communication and interaction, looking beyond the strain of pressing issues, to the changes produced by the conflict on the way people perceive themselves, the other and the conflict (descriptive) – what are people's hopes for the relationship, for their lives; how do they perceive themselves; what are their expectations. It also represents intentional intervention to increase mutual understanding (prescriptive) by working on fears and hopes.

The structural dimension refers to the change that conflict brings to the social structures. Transformation based on a descriptive level focuses on analyzing the conditions that gave rise to the conflict and how it affects decision-making processes. At a prescriptive level, transformation refers to the deliberate intervention to understand and have insight into the causes of conflict, openly promoting nonviolent tools to minimize and eliminate violence, fostering the answer to basic human needs, and engaging individuals in decisions affecting them.

The cultural dimension refers to the changes produced in a group's culture and how it affects conflict. A descriptive approach focuses on the conflict that affects groups' cultural patterns and how they impact how people react to conflict. Prescriptively, it tries to understand the practices that help the evolution of violence and build mechanisms within each culture to handle conflict in a healthy way.

### **3.3. Hands-on approach to conflict transformation: from Lederach to Galtung**

Chapter 2 argued that a bottom-up approach to conflict was essential to achieve peace: there needs to be more than a general, abstract notion of the realities and challenges each



community faces. In his theory on conflict transformation, John Paul Lederach also calls attention to this, considering the **cultural knowledge of local people**, their “everyday understandings”, an essential resource to conflict (Lederach 1995, 26). People are the resources for peace, and they must be empowered to trust their abilities and strategies to overcome violence. This means that local people’s knowledge is essential and that the solution found is also locally provided. This nurtures self-sufficiency and helps sustainable development and change.

Therefore, peace missions (as the ones developed by the United Nations) should be more focused on discovering and applying strategies suited to their context. After all, people from different contexts/backgrounds handle conflict in very different ways. This idea highlights a dichotomy between two types of knowledge that shape how conflict is addressed: 1) practical experience, known as implicit knowledge, and 2) a more technical one (explicit knowledge).

Implicit social knowledge refers to “everyday understandings accumulated through natural experience”<sup>58</sup> (Lederach 1995, 44), based on cultural reality and daily experiences. Here, culture is the foundation of people’s approach to peace: it is rooted in their history, traditions, language, context, situation, and past. On the other hand, there is explicit knowledge, “focused, intentional effort to increase one’s knowledge about conflict and how to handle it” (Lederach 1995, 44) – technical skills (expertise) accumulated through study, research, training.

The ideal approach is a combination of these two models: accumulated expertise and skill on how to handle conflicts and, at the same time, help people look for their daily lives, their contexts and, based on their knowledge, look for the best approach. By only adopting

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<sup>58</sup> This can also be referred to as “commonsense knowledge” and practical experience (Lederach 1995, 44).

one of these approaches, peace missions often lose essential insight into the conflict itself. For example, in Nicaragua, people have different words for conflict, depending on its context. They have as many words to describe it as the conflict has faces. They use the word *pleitos* to describe a fight; conflict is used to describe the country's situation, war. This unveils how vital language is: more than communication, it is a window to people's minds, how they understand their reality, how they express conflict<sup>59</sup>.

Another example is that of the Mexican word *desmadre*, which translates to mess, chaos. In reality, *madre* is the Spanish word for mother. Thus, this doesn't mean just chaos, but the total disintegrating of living without a mother. This leads to understanding the central role of women in conflict in Latin America. "It highlights the significance of women's natural networks as a resource for handling conflicts and women's key conciliatory role of holding people together" (Lederach 1995, 76).

Also relevant is the importance of sayings and stories (oral tradition) in Africa – they carry images related to the way people perceive conflict. While among Western tradition negotiation is perceived as a formal event, get people to sit down, usually at a round table, and try to reach an agreement (rational and bureaucratic process), in African countries, the tradition points more to the use of elders as a resource to handle and deal with conflicts<sup>60</sup>. In East Africa, there is a saying: 'What old people see seated at the base of the tree, young people cannot see from the branches'. This not only highlights the wisdom of the elders as the source of conflict resolution, as it also calls attention to the importance of the community space (trees have special meaning for some tribes, representing the conflict resolution activities), of the traditional and local forums as places of discussions. This suggests that

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<sup>59</sup> For example, the Guatemalan expression "the Indian came out of me", characterizes the quick deterioration of a situation. However, this also has a deeper meaning: the move towards civilization is a good one and towards the Indian is bad. There is the need to control the Indian, to keep it in check (Lederach 1995, 77).

<sup>60</sup> The proverb 'what old people see seated in the base of the tree, young people cannot see from the branches' reminds of the importance of old wisdom. The tree is usually the place where people meet and where they can gather council from the community elders.

conflicts are dealt with informally, face-to-face, based on traditional knowledge (wisdom), and without the state or bureaucracy's interference.

Any work with conflict should consider this. Instead of using complex definitions and concepts, peacekeepers can and should use sayings and other local traditions as a starting point – use what is available, what is natural rather than attempting to transfer foreign abstract ideas. “Working from common knowledge and understanding moves us away from seeing the concept or skill as something new we have to learn, to something we knew and can now apply in a new way” (Lederach 1995, 81).

Conflict transformation proposes to use and see culture as a resource, thus allowing participants to look for their reality and, based on their knowledge and skills, identify their tools and build their strategies to surpass conflict. Training and operations must be more than an event, a moment in time. It is a long and complicated process, for it takes time to empower communities to use and value their resources. It requires involvement and relationship to see reality through each other eyes to stop seeing the other as the problem.

Another relevant perspective on conflict that supports and reinforces John Paul Lederach's approach is suggested by **Johan Galtung**, according to whom conflict arises when there are incompatible goals and contradictions between individuals or communities. If sufficiently rooted and not address, it can escalate into violence. Thus, to him, conflicts are a regular part of human interactions and cannot be prevented. However, violence can and should be, channeled in “positive, nonviolent, constructive, transforming directions” (Galtung 2000, 107)<sup>61</sup>. To achieve this, he suggests the method of transcendence, of going beyond the polarization or arguments and ideas. He supports the notion that conflict must be transformed and not eliminated and that the root causes of conflict must be addressed.

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<sup>61</sup> Galtung's theory on conflict was comprehensively explored in the first chapter, and as such will not be detailed now.

Thus, in line with Lederach's theory, the idea should be to promote dialogues with all conflict parties to expand their scope regarding the conflict itself and possible outcomes. And this includes individual, one-on-one conversations, for it's harder to think on creative solutions, to think outside the box when the other is present. This work should be developed previously to an encounter between the parties (Galtung and Tschudi 2001, 212). In many cases, as it also happened in the Western Sahara conflict, the parties agree with negotiations with already fixed, hard lines that limit their capacity to discuss other outcomes. They are already entrenched and blinded by hatred and may even understand negotiations as a possibility to push further, defend, and enforce their interests. "Anger may well be a dominant emotion if the conflicting parties are prematurely brought together. No emotion is likely to be more contagious" (Galtung and Tschudi 2001, 217).

When parties have the possibility of discussing and thinking on the conflict first with conflict workers, they don't feel bind by what they say, and thus the discourse is freer and more honest. Just then, when a relationship has already been created (as Lederach would say), should the parties gather to discuss with each other. Here, they should face the possibility of an endless cycle of violence and the costs associated with it, of thinking not only on the present but also on the future<sup>62</sup>. The goal is to elicit new perspectives and goals from the parties, helping them expand their perception of the conflict itself so that they can also transcend it despite still being able to identify their positions.

Therefore, the idea of transcendence incorporates the need to see beyond the conceptions of either/or, and move towards and/both, from division to a future together. To

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<sup>62</sup> This can be though in the form of more economic development, regional integration, acceptance from international organizations and other countries (particularly regarding trade). As in the case of Western Sahara, regional stability is threatened by conflict and thus it can halt economic growth.

transcend violence, there needs to be transformation achieved through dialogue and based on empathy and the capacity to envision a shared future.

The Transcend method preconized by Johan Galtung is a way, a path, to unlock incompatible goals and open new possibilities. This calls for creativity and the discovery of new courses of action; it means empowering people rather than opt for a top-down approach. “Transcendence means redefining the situation so that what looked incompatible, blocked, is unlocked, and a new landscape opens up” (Galtung 2000, 14).

### **3.4. Final considerations: a bottom-up strategy to address conflict**

Everywhere we traveled, two sixteen-year-old boys protected me. One carried a grenade launcher made in the Soviet Union. The other carried a machine gun produced in the United States. As we grew to be friends, I discovered that neither had been in school for the past ten years and neither could read or write. With weapons from East and West, they were a living legacy of the superpowers’ Cold War (Lederach 1999, 83).

This is the story of many children worldwide, caught in wars that are not theirs to fight, young enough for their lives to be destroyed. This is a picture of two boys in a Muslim country, but the scenario described is far too common through Africa, Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East.

Agreements are signed between top leaders, cease-fires start, but the people’s suffering continues. When the population starves and kills each other, leaders discuss who will be the next President. Presenting themselves as the solution to all the problems, they are, in many cases, the base of those problems. If it is essential to negotiate and work with them, it is equally important to have a bottom-up approach. Even when an agreement is reached on a national level, it is still necessary to implement it at a sub-national, regional, and local level.

However, as discussed in the previous chapter, international organizations and peace workers often neglect to address and include the local population in their plans. Instead, they interpret fighting as a consequence of national tensions and people's tendency to violence, failing to look beyond the surface of the causes of conflicts.

Addressing this problem, Séverine Autesserre, after having interviewed many diplomats, UN staff and nongovernment organizations officials, describes an episode with a diplomat in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: "A diplomat based in Kinshasa similarly observed that most UN officials use the same strategy, write the same reports, and organize their lives similarly, regardless of where they are in the world. Most do not even try to contextualize their actions" (Autesserre 2010, 84). With a top-down approach, serious work with local communities must be developed to change and create relationships and heal communities from the prejudices, hatred, and vengeance constant for many years.

This involves work towards reconciliation at a local level, both on the perpetrators (by acknowledging what happened and accepting responsibility for it and facing the truth of their past actions) and the victims (that look for compensations for their suffering). This cannot happen without recognizing the humanity of all those involved, including those who committed the crimes. As was previously discussed, war tends to dehumanize individuals and give a sense of moral superiority. Working in a post-conflict reality is also to reinforce the need for mutual forgiveness.

Frequently, recognition of the other side's humanity entails only recognizing that many members of the adversary community did not personally and directly carry out harmful actions and the next generation is not responsible for the acts of previous generations (Kriesberg and Dayton 2012, 306).

This is not a one-way process: both sides have suffered and been damaged, although not always in an equal manner. The only way to move forward, to make peace is to break the cycle of destructive relations.

Despite this approach to conflict breaking with the traditional model of thinking peace operations, Lederach's theory is not without its critics. First, it downplays the role of third parties, outsiders, when, in many cases, they have a strong impact on local conflicts. The actions of powerful regional and national actors can enrich or hinder the possibilities of peace, as the analyses of the conflict in Western Sahara in chapter 4 will reveal. Without support from the outside, locals can do little despite their mobilization. It is also important to mention that civil society is not always in favor of peace. Several internal organizations and actors profit more from war, both in terms of economic gains and regarding popular support, power, and control.

Besides the questions raised above, there is also the problem of oversimplification by categorizing conflict as a lack of relationship or poor communication, thus risking to neglect several key aspects that intensify violent dynamics such as marginalization and economic and social underdevelopment. Since this is a long process, it now only requires a high degree of resources, as it entails a lasting commitment to peace. With its slow pace, it risks creating the same thing it intends to heal, frustration, and the sense of a never-ending cycle of reopening old wounds. If not dealt with the sensitivity required, stories, actions, and emotions can endanger communities by leading to a sense of constant blame and guilt. Work with people broken by conflict is a delicate process that needs the patience to nurture peace and healing.

This sensitivity is precisely one of the crucial aspects lacking in the international approach to the conflict in Western Sahara, the case study discussed in chapter 4. To fill this gap, the next chapter will examine how Lederach's theoretical proposal can be translated into practice based on an analysis of this conflict. For many years a frozen conflict, is a perfect example of a war in desperate need of a new approach, a new look.

## **Chapter 4**

### **The Western Sahara Conflict: New Possibilities**

Western Sahara, Africa's last colony, is the site of one of the continent's longest-running conflicts

(Zunes and Mundy 2010, xxi)

With 266.000 square kilometers, most of it a vast desert, Western Sahara is located in northwest Africa. Despite its sandy plains, the territory blooms with natural resources such as fisheries, phosphate reserves, and hydrocarbons. With scarce oasis but rich in underground water resources, it is one of the least populated territories in the world, with its population barely reaching 570.000. Part lives in the refugee camps near Tindouf, in Algerian, since 1976; the other part lives, as a minority, under Moroccan rule in Western Sahara territory, and in Algeria, Spain, Mauritania, and Morocco itself.

A Spanish possession since 1884, Western Sahara was later annexed by neighboring Morocco, with whom they fought a war for independence between 1975 and 1991 when both parties accepted the United Nations proposed Settlement Plan. This plan, endorsed by the Security Council, proposed a cease-fire, followed by the organization of a referendum for the self-determination of the Western Sahara population. It also established the creation of MINURSO (United Nations Missions for the Referendum in Western Sahara). Until this day, the promise of a referendum has yet to be fulfilled, and the Western Sahara conflict remains an open decolonization process, according to international law and United Nations (UN A/5514, Annex III 1963).

This conflict is also one of the United Nations' biggest shortcomings, unable to propose a credible solution and enforce it since the beginning. If it is true that since the UN cease-fire, there has been no bloodshed, the fact remains that the UN is not closer to a solution, after almost 30 years of stalemate, failed negotiations, and millions of dollars spent to maintain MINURSO.



The Western Sahara conflict is a complex and long-lasting one that has been absent of public discourse for many years, with “a marginal position in world affairs” (Zunes and Mundy 2010, 259). Yet, it destabilizes a whole region, Northwest Africa, and has become a significant obstacle to African development and cooperation. As George McGovern, a former U.S. representative, Senator, and the Democratic Party presidential nominee in the 1972 presidential election wrote:

What ultimately is at stake is the post-World War II international legal system. If the people of Western Sahara are not granted the right to choose their own future, including the option of independence, and Morocco’s control of the territory is allowed to stand, it will be the first time since the founding of the United Nations that the international community has allowed a recognized non-self-governing territory to be forcibly annexed without the population’s consent and the first time a country has been allowed to expand its territory by military force against the wishes of a subjected population (Zunes and Mundy 2010, xiv).

Based on this, this chapter intends to present a thoughtful analysis of this conflict, its historical background, and the role played by its key actors. The goal is to understand what went wrong in the peace process and present suggestions to unlock and improve the current situation.

#### **4.1. The historical background and colonial period: 1884-1975**

The idea of a Sahrawi people is central to Western Saharan nationalism and thus to the Morocco-Polisario dispute (Zunes and Mundy 2010, 92).

Despite Saharawi's common association as the indigenous population of Western Sahara, their identity as a people is much more complex and hybrid: it's rooted in their history, language, tribalism, and nomadic lifestyle, and profoundly shaped by a culture of resistance and conflict.

Stephen Zunes and Jacob Mundy present one possible definition: “they are the Hassaniyyah-speaking peoples who claim membership among at least one of the social

groupings found in and around the area now known as Western Sahara” (Zunes and Mundy 2010, 93). The Saharawi identity is “a mixture of autochthonous, Arab, and sub-Saharan African factors” (Zunes and Mundy 2010, 95). Despite this, the ambivalence and ambiguity remain, particularly evident in the '90s, when the United Nations mission in Western Sahara (MINURSO) tried to establish a list of Saharawi people allowed to vote on the referendum.

As in the other countries of North Africa, Islam has a profound impact on everyday life, present since the eleventh century in the region. With the ambition of increasing its presence in North Africa and keeping its status as a colonial power, in 1884, Spain established Villa Cisneros (nowadays known as Dakhla) and declared a protectorate over the Río de Oro region. At the Berlin Conference, 1884-85, Spain's coastal occupation was recognized as covering the territory's interior.

Over the years, several treaties were signed with France regarding the territorial boundaries; the last convention reduced Spain holdings, yet recognized Saqiyah al-Hamra as Zona del Libre Ocupación. Laayoune's city became the regional administrative headquarters, and small garrisons were maintained in the region, including a large post in Smara. Thus, as it is possible to see in the map, Spain's take over and control of the territory focused mainly on the north of the territory. With the Atlantic Ocean in the west, this region is rich in natural resources, specially fisheries, and so very appealing to the western powers, at the time. It is also in Western Sahara that Cape Bojador is located, that for many years paved sailors' nightmares. The safe passage of Bojador by Gil Eanes was considered a great fit and breakthrough in Europe in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century.



Map 1. Map of Western Sahara<sup>63</sup>

#### 4.1.1. The drive for independence: the growth of Saharawi's nationalism

The movement for self-determination and independence started manifesting itself in 1956 when a group of militants from Morocco organized an insurgency in Algeria, Mauritania, and Western Sahara, which led Spanish colonial forces to withdraw to the most important colonial cities.

In the late '60s, a new organization developed to fight for Sahara's independence: the Harakat Tahrir Saqiyah al-Hamra' wa Wadi-al-Dhahab (Liberation Movement of the Saqiyah al-Hamra' and Wadi-al-Dhahab). It was founded by Mohammed Sidi Ibrahim Bassiri, recognized as the first Saharawi activist to argue publicly for independence. Drawing forces and experience from the 1957-58 war veterans, organized a public demonstration on June 17, 1970, quickly repressed.

<sup>63</sup> <https://minurso.unmissions.org/map>, accessed in September 28, 2020.

In 1963, the United Nations designated Western Sahara as a non-self-governing territory, established under General Assembly Resolution 1514 (XV) of 1960, known as the **Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples**. This declaration calls for the respect of the right to self-determination of all peoples and a truthful and significant commitment to advance human rights and freedoms by putting an end to all forms of colonialism, segregation, and discrimination. It also reaffirms peoples' rights to dispose of their natural resources based on the principle of mutual benefit. Thus, it declares that:

2. All peoples have the right to self-determination; by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.
3. Inadequacy of political, economic, social or educational preparedness should never serve as a pretext for delaying independence.
4. All armed action or repressive measures of all kinds directed against dependent peoples shall cease in order to enable them to exercise peacefully and freely their right to complete independence, and the integrity of their national territory shall be respected (UN A/RES/1514(XV) 1960).

Thus, the subjugation and domination of a people constitute a fundamental denial of human rights, which, in turn, is contrary to the UN Charter and international law and an impediment to world peace and development. Instead, an effort should be made to transfer power to the peoples, without preconditions and acting according to their freely expressed will.

In 1965, the UN General Assembly approved, almost unanimously, Resolution 2072 (UN A/RES/2229 1966) on the Question of Ifni and Spanish Sahara, urgently requesting “the Government of Spain, as the administering power, to take immediately all necessary measures for the liberation of the Territories of Ifni and Spanish Sahara from colonial domination”. Later, in 1966, the United Nations General Assembly approved Resolution 2229 (XXI) that “reaffirms the inalienable right of the peoples of Ifni and Spanish Sahara to

self-determination” and invites Spain, as the administering power, to set up a date and further procedures for the holding of a referendum in the territory.

In May 1973, the Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguia e-Hamra y Río de Oro, now known as **Polisario Front**, was founded by El-Ouali Mustapha Sayed. It drew expertise from 1957-58 veterans and young Saharawi refugees who, fleeing from war, lived and had studied in Morocco. Between 1973 and 1975, it organized a series of raids against Spanish forces, despite the little support it received from neighboring countries such as Libya, Mauritania, and Algeria.

In May 1975, an official United Nations mission on the territory “noted that the population, or at least almost all those persons encountered by the Mission, was categorically for independence and against the territorial claims of Morocco and Mauritania” (UN A/10023/Add.5 1977, par. 24). Besides this, they also recognized the importance of Polisario that, despite being considered a clandestine movement, had the support of most of the population as the “dominant political force in the Territory” (UN A/10023/Add.5 1977, par. 21).

The increasing goodwill between the colonial power and Polisario led to an exchange of prisoners and, in a September 9 meeting between the Polisario Secretary-General and Spanish Foreign Minister Pedro Cortina Y Mauri, according to the former, they reached an agreement whereby Spain would give the territory’s control to a Polisario government in exchange for economic concessions on natural resources such as phosphate and fishing. However, less than a week later, Spain abruptly cut the deal off in favor of Morocco and Mauritania.

#### 4.1.2. Morocco's claim: national sovereignty and international support

On November 14, 1975, Spain, Morocco, and Mauritania announced that they had reached an agreement on Western Sahara, known as the **Madrid Accords**. This was announced after the International Court of Justice (ICJ) released its opinion on Mauritania and Morocco's claim of the territory, endorsing Sahrawi's population right to self-determination. This process began on 30 September 1974 when Morocco, fearing that the Western Sahara population would choose independence, requested an ICJ ruling in the United Nations.

The ICJ determined that Western Sahara did belong to "someone" at the time of the colonization and could not be regarded as terra nullius: "Western Sahara was inhabited by peoples which, if nomadic, were socially and politically organized in tribes and under chiefs competent to represent them" (International Court of Justice 1975, 101).

The Court also acknowledges that, while there existed legal ties between some tribes in the Sahara territory, the Kingdom of Morocco, and the Mauritanian entity, the information presented did not reveal sovereignty ties. It concluded by stating that "the Court has not found legal ties of such a nature as might affect the application of General Assembly Resolution 1514 (XV) in the decolonization of Western Sahara and, in particular, of the principle of self-determination through the free and genuine expression of the will of the peoples of the Territory" (International Court of Justice 1975, 100)<sup>64</sup>.

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<sup>64</sup> Of the sixteen judges, one of them, Judge Ruda, considered that, despite voting in accordance with the Court, it nevertheless considered that there were no legal ties between the Western Sahara and the Kingdom of Morocco. To him there was not enough evidence to conclude the manifest acceptance of allegiance and political authority of the Sultan over the tribes in the Sahara. He says: "Sporadic manifestations of allegiance and authority, even if established, are not sufficient to declare the existence of legal ties, whether of a territorial or personal character. I do however recognize the religious, moral and political influence of the Sultan, but I remain unconvinced that such influence has created legal ties of any nature" (International Court of Justice 1975, 176).

To Judge Nagendra Singh the existing ties are not sufficient to justify the integration of Western Sahara without the consultation of its people.

Judge Gros reminds that the two Governments agreed with the decolonization process of the territory set in motion in the United Nations (International Court of Justice 1975, 71).

Hours later, Morocco's King Hassan II declared that the Court had ruled in Morocco's favor and announced, in what became known as the **Green March**, that 350.000 Moroccan civilians would march into the Sahara to claim the territory and reunite it with the rest of the Kingdom. Despite having pressed the Security Council to take action regarding this issue, Spain received no adequate response: the Council urged all parties to avoid any actions that might escalate the situation without genuinely trying to stop Hassan's invasion<sup>65</sup>.

Ultimately, the Security Council's inaction forced Spain to choose between open fire over unarmed civilians or negotiate with Morocco. The **Madrid Accords** established a tripartite administration over Western Sahara between Morocco, Mauritania, and Spain that would withdraw its troops until February 1976.

On October 31, 1975, elements of the Morocco military forces crossed the territory's northeastern border. They soon faced Polisario troops' resistance and thus started a war that lasted until 1991 when the parties finally reached an agreement over the cease-fire.

Although there are economic motivations behind Morocco's change of position (associated with the territories rich natural resources<sup>66</sup>), political reasons are equally, if not more, important to explain this conflict. The idea of '**Greater Morocco**' was not a new one in 1975, dating back to 1956 by Moroccan leader 'Allal al-Fassi' (Strategic Studies Institute 2013, 28). As Morocco's independence from France approached, al-Fassi argued that colonialism had reduced the real Moroccan borders. He even published a map of 'Greater Morocco', arguing that the country's borders encompassed a large portion of north-western Africa, including northwest Algeria, northern Mali, all of Mauritania, and Western Sahara.

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<sup>65</sup> The Security Council approved resolution 380 on November 6, 1975, deploring the march and in which "calls upon Morocco immediately to withdraw from the Territory of Western Sahara all the participants in the march" (UN S/RES/380 1975). However, this resolution was approved with no enforcement mechanism and, thus, had no effective nor practical consequence on the ground.

<sup>66</sup> The issue of natural resources will not be extensively addressed in this dissertation, that will focus more on the question of human rights, despite this being an important source of dispute between the parts.

In 1957 the Moroccan state officially recognized and adopted the ideology of ‘Greater Morocco’, and in 1958 King Mohammed V defended that Morocco should work into achieving this goal. King Hassan II, after the death of his father, followed his footsteps, championing this idea. In 1965 he created a ministry for Mauritanian and Saharan affairs, quickly dismissed in 1969 when Morocco recognized Mauritania. This discourse was more for internal consumption, for the elites, as his actions were mostly symbolic.

This was particularly true when we look at Morocco’s political situation in the 1960s: in 1965, fuelled by a deteriorating economy, widespread dissatisfaction increased, and thousands of Moroccans joined strikes and protests on the streets. Two coup d’état attempts later, one in 1971 by the army and other in 1972, led by air force officers, the widespread unrest continued. Under this international situation, the question of Western Sahara came up as a way for the monarchy to redirect national attention and promptly became central to Moroccan national identity: it was the monarchy’s most significant achievement since independence.

#### **4.2. The war for Western Sahara and the peace process: the beginning of the stalemate**

The year 1976 marked the formal Spanish withdrawal from Western Sahara and the subsequent takeover of the territory by Morocco and Mauritania. With nearly half of the population living in the refugee camps of Tindouf<sup>67</sup>, Algeria, the Polisario Front proclaims on February 27, 1976, the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), acting as a government in exile. With the death of its first Secretary-General, Mohammed Abdelaziz

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<sup>67</sup> Part of the Saharawi population escaped from the brutality of the first stages of the occupation by fleeing to Algeria, after having been bombed and napalmed by Morocco (the case of the towns of Galtah Zammuer and Um Draygah, bombed in February 1976). In 1976 a report issued by the International Federation of Human Rights reinforced this, by noting that “The soldiers of the two occupying countries have butchered hundreds and perhaps thousands of Sahrawis, including children and old people who refused to publicly acknowledge the king of Morocco” (Zunes and Mundy 2010, 114).



was elected Secretary-General in 1976, where he remained until his death. In May 2016 Brahim Ghali was elected his successor and is now the Secretary-General.

If all predictions pointed to a short war, with Morocco's military supremacy over a weaker Polisario, this quickly was proved wrong. Not only was the Western Sahara terrain more suited to guerrilla warfare, as observers greatly underestimated Polisario. Highly knowledgeable of the desert, for centuries the peoples of Western Sahara had lived and traded across its stretches and knew how to explore this advantage to the full<sup>68</sup>.

They also made fair use of captured weapons and materials provided by Libya and Algeria. With quick attacks, they were able to minimize their losses and take their enemy by surprise. Taking refuge in Algeria, Polisario guaranteed the movement's security: to defeat them permanently, Morocco would have to invade Algeria that would certainly fight back.

Since the beginning, Polisario chose to focus more on the war against Mauritania, from the start the weaker of the two invading forces. Facing internal challenges, poor, with a small population and politically fragmented, it also had external threats. After the 1978 coup d'état led by the President's chief of staff, Lieutenant-Colonel Mustafa Ould Salek, the war, never popular among the Mauritanian people, was even less at this time, when the country also faced a severe economic crisis.

An agreement was signed on August 5, 1979, in which Mauritania renounced all claims to Western Sahara and agreed to hand over its part of the territory to Polisario's control. However, not agreeing with this, Morocco quickly took control of Dakhla, the biggest city under Mauritania's control. On February 22, 1984, the country recognized

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<sup>68</sup> Not only Polisario had great knowledge of the territory, but they were also able to choose the location and time of their attacks and use the climatic conditions to their advantage and thus hold and block Moroccan technological superiority.

SADR. Since then, the Mauritanian government has tried to remain non-partisan on the conflict.

On the contrary, Morocco seemed to be in a dominant position, with 80.000 soldiers against Polisario's 2.000 armed forces. Well supplied with weapons, had practical knowledge from its war against France. Yet, they faced humiliating defeats at the start of the war. With a highly centralized military structure, it was slow to answer. For example, the air response had to be cleared from Rabat, thus rendering the air force inefficient. In 1979, Polisario launched an attack on the Moroccan city of Tan Tan for two hours without facing resistance.

#### **4.2.1. A turn of events: how external support helped shape the war for Western Sahara**

Since the beginning of the war, and with Spain's withdrawal, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) took the lead in trying to solve the conflict, laying the foundations for the UN's approach in 1984. Within the organization, support for the Polisario was strong. In 1978 the OAU created the Committee of Wisemen, led by the heads of state of Mali, Nigeria, Sudan, Tanzania, and Ivory Coast to study the conflict and present possible solutions. Their report was presented in July 1979, and it defined a settlement plan based on three ideas: cease-fire, withdrawal of armed forces, and referendum. It later proposed the parties to enter a cease-fire in December 1980, however, the date passed unnoticed, and the situation remained unchanged.

To keep pressuring Morocco, the OAU approved resolution 104 in June 1983, which calls for direct negotiations between the parties. It also states that there should be taken steps to "create the necessary conditions for a peaceful and fair referendum for self-determination of the people of Western Sahara, a referendum without any administrative or military

constraints” (OAU AHG/Res.104 (XIX) 1983). As a reaction, Morocco withdrew from the organization in 1984, the only country to do so<sup>69</sup>. Mohammed Abdelaziz, President of the RASD, was elected in 1985 and again in 1990 Vice-President of the OAU. This was a clear sign of the support Polisario had gathered within the OAU. However, its Charter lacked enforcement mechanisms, thus rendering its resolution ineffective and with no practical result.

While Algeria (and for a little while Libya) supported the Polisario Front with weapons, Morocco's support came mainly from France, the United States, and Saudi Arabia. Receiving significant foreign financial and military aid, it was able to turn the war against Polisario in the 1980s.

This Franco-American support is rooted in the firm belief that the whole region's stability depends heavily on Morocco's monarchy. In turn, the control over Western Sahara is of crucial importance for the regime's survival. There is the fear, among Western countries, that Morocco would slide into anarchy and chaos without the monarchy, which would certainly not benefit western interests. During the Cold War, there was the danger posed by communists, and later, after 9/11, it turned to Islam extremists. The monarchy has been more than willing to explore this vulnerability to win support for its cause<sup>70</sup>.

After the September 11 events, Morocco was seen as a crucial ally, this time in the war against radical Islam and the global war on terror. This was only reinforced by the 2003 suicide attacks on Casablanca, further justifying United States' support and aid. An

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<sup>69</sup> On January 30, 2017, Morocco was readmitted to the African Union, however still maintaining the position that Western Sahara is part its territory. This return shows Morocco's desire to influence African and world politics and thus gain the support countries' support to its cause (Tambwari, and Kurebwa 2018, 14).

<sup>70</sup> Since the beginning of the war, a significant part of Morocco's diplomatic strategy has been to portray Polisario as a “Communist dictatorship controlled by Algeria's geopolitical interests, implicated in crime, smuggling and Islamic terrorism – in contrast to Moroccan democracy and human rights. Polisario stands accused of being simultaneously Communist and Islamic fundamentalist, holding a dictatorial grip on the Tindouf camps and facilitating lawlessness“. By polarizing the conflict, Morocco has been able to associate it with the global War on Terror, first in the form of Communism and then on Islamic extremism. Thus, it has been able to undermine Polisario's reputation and legitimacy, and at the same time reinforced its role as a major allied in the Arab world (Orellana 2015, 478).

independent Western Sahara came to be seen as a threat to Morocco and as a threat in itself, for it would be weak and open to extremism – in an unstable region as is North Africa, the US government could not risk another anti-US country.

While considering themselves neutral in this conflict since none has yet recognized Morocco's sovereignty or the SADR, France and the United States have directly and indirectly supplied Morocco with weapons, also providing plenty of diplomatic support<sup>71</sup>. "By 1980, the United States had supplied close to \$1 billion in arms to Rabat, mostly in the form of sales financed by Saudi Arabia" (Zunes and Mundy 2010, 18). This support of Moroccan war efforts protracted the war and delayed the possibility of reaching a peace agreement by encouraging inflexibility.

Key to U.S. strategy in North Africa and the Middle East, Morocco is also in a critical geographical position for its shared control over the Strait of Gibraltar with Spain and the United Kingdom.

As a sign of its commitment to Morocco, the United States gave Rabat \$3.53 billion in economic and military aid between 1946 and 2006 (...). Apart from Egypt, Morocco has received more U.S. aid – especially military – than any other country in Africa before September 11, 2001. In Middle East, apart from Egypt and Israel and Iraq after 2003, Morocco is second only to Jordan (\$9.46 billion) in terms of aid received (Zunes and Mundy 2010, 71).

By 2017, according to the United States Agency in Development, the total foreign assistance to Morocco had been, since 1946, of \$5.316 billion (of which \$3.945.2 was on economic aid and \$1.370.8 on military assistance) (U.S. Agency for International Development 2014, 24).

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<sup>71</sup> Zunes and Mundy, noting this overall trend of support towards Morocco, and denouncing this biased view of neutrality, wrote: "The French and U.S. governments have never shied away from the fact that they support the Moroccan monarchy, do not trust in Algeria, and see Polisario as another destabilizing force in Africa and the Middle East. Since the outbreak of war in 1975, the United States and France have been among the most important supporters of the Moroccan occupation, providing significant political, economic, and military backing for Rabat's conquest" (Zunes and Mundy 2010, 60).

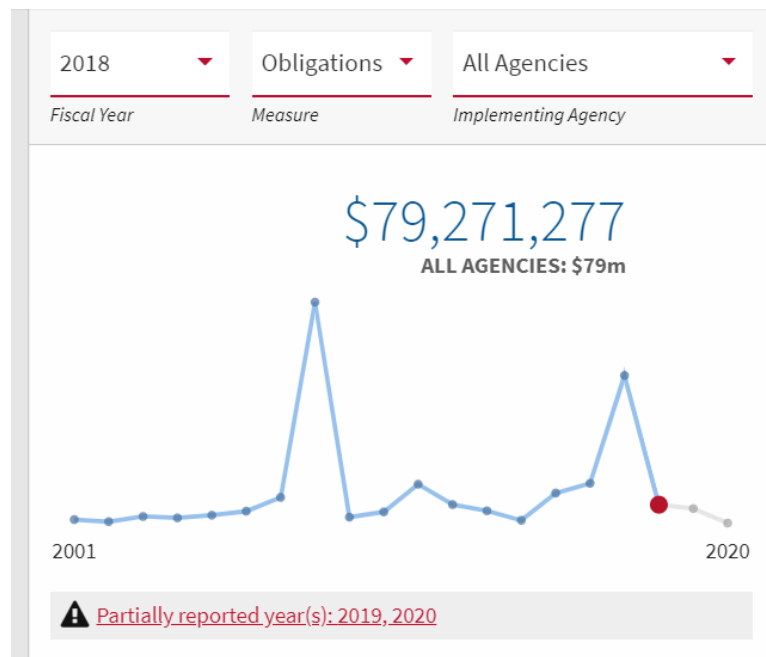


Fig. 6. U.S. foreign aid to Morocco in 2018<sup>72</sup>

As can be observed Figure 6, the assistance provided to Morocco in the year 2018 was more than \$79 million. However, unlike other Cold War conflicts such as Vietnam, the Western Sahara conflict was never a proxy war between the Soviet Union and the United States. The Soviets never tried to use Polisario to strike a United States allied country, for they had close relations with Morocco. They maintained a close distance to the conflict, at the same time as they developed important trade relations with Morocco and Algeria, not having recognized SARD until this day<sup>73</sup>.

France's support of Morocco and its policy towards Western Sahara has been in line with the United States. It not only provided financial, military, and diplomatic support, but it was also the only third country to directly intervene militarily in this conflict. In 1977 against Polisario, it launched Operation Lamantin to respond to the killing of two French at the iron mines in Mauritania.

<sup>72</sup> <https://explorer.usaid.gov/cd/MAR>, accessed in June 5, 2020.

<sup>73</sup> Despite having received Soviet weapons, they were supplied to Polisario through Libya and Algeria. In fact, Polisario was one of the few African liberation movements that never received arms for the Soviet countries directly.

#### **4.2.2. Cease-fire agreement: how war shaped parties' strategy in times of peace**

In 1980 Morocco adopted a new approach: with time, it had come to accept that the war would last, and there was the need to minimize casualties. Thus, a defensive posture would render the war more affordable, under the form of a wall that would help to keep the Polisario forces out. Protected with mines and barbed wire and monitored by sophisticated sensing devices, the wall (also known as the berm) is guarded by 100.000 to 150.000 Moroccan soldiers. "At the final length, fifteen hundred miles, Morocco's 'great wall' is the largest functional military barrier in the world, giving Morocco more or less absolute control over 80 percent of Western Sahara, leaving roughly twenty thousand square miles to Polisario" (Zunes and Mundy 2010, 21). The construction started in 1981 and was divided into six stages, until its completion in April 1987, and stretches from southern Morocco to the Mauritanian border.

The wall was a success: it minimized losses and turned the war less intense, giving way to a stalemate situation. If, at the beginning of the conflict, Polisario Front conducted military operations inside the territory of Western Sahara (and even in Morocco), with the construction of the berm its freedom of movement was severely constrained. Thus, the war was over long before the cease-fire of 1991: for Morocco to destroy Polisario, it would have to invade Algeria; for the Polisario, the only remaining option would be to resort to terrorism, which was not in itself an option (it was ruled out from the beginning).

The cease-fire was initiated in 1991 but started to be designed by UN Secretary-General Pérez de Cuéllar years before. In 1987 he began drafting a document entitled *Proposals of a Settlement of the Question of the Western Sahara*, under which a cease-fire would be declared after Morocco had reduced the number of troops on the terrain.

In June 1990, the Secretary-General settlement proposal came to the public, under intense critics on the part of Morocco and Polisario. A finalized plan was presented in April 1991 to the Security Council, still ignoring both parties' insights. It was followed by UNSC Resolution 690 issued by the Security Council that, believing they had the full consent from both parties to the final version of the plan, created MINURSO (United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara).

With this agreement, neither party was forced to compromise their exclusive goals. Instead, it gave them the possibility of continuing the conflict but without human losses: for Polisario, it was the possibility of self-determination; for Morocco, it was the international consent to its annexation of Western Sahara. It's easy to understand how the war helped shape both parties' positions in times of peace: Morocco understood with its actions in times of war that the country would not be punished internationally for its behavior regarding Western Sahara (impunity).

As both parties only made unimportant concessions, neither took this new stage seriously. Instead, the animosity between them only increased, coupled with years of mistrust. The UN's credibility also suffered a severe blow, especially with the Saharawi population: if in the beginning, they were seen as liberators, in the face of this new situation, they began to be perceived as accomplices to the occupation. As Zunes and Mundy so well grasped:

King Hassan, assured of his bases of support in the West, entered into a UN peace process feeling assured that his two friends on the Security Council – France and the United States – would never hold him accountable for attempting to subvert the referendum not to mention for invading Western Sahara in the first place (Zunes and Mundy 2010, 25).

This same strategy would later be applied to King's Hassan son and successor, Mohammed VI. Thus, the conflict's intractability was maintained even, and especially, after the peace agreement. Both sides were entrenched on their side of the barricade: one

defending a referendum for independence and the other full integration. When victory by force and arms ceased to be possible, the UN process proposed victory by other means.

Despite being tired of this stalemate, especially after years of false promises, and more willing to return to war than they were a couple of years prior, Saharawis support their cause on non-violence in an attempt to gather international attention and scorn to Moroccan repression. A new war would certainly undermine this strategy by channeling international criticism and justifying Morocco continuous repression tactics. However, it is also true that the younger generation is getting increasingly more restless and more in favor of armed struggle, with tensions increasing in the occupied territories.

#### **4.3. The forgotten referendum: how the United Nations was unable of handling the Sahara conflict**

Under the cease-fire agreement, the struggle became a demographic one. “Ballots, not bullets, would determine the victor” (Zunes and Mundy 2010, 191), and controlling the referendum’s electorate was the goal of both parties. Morocco argued for the integration of Saharawis living in Morocco, having escaped from economic hardships and persecution during Spanish colonialism. Polisario feared that Morocco would try to flood the identification process with voters with little to no connection, both ethical and territorial, to Western Sahara.

By 1995, the promised referendum was yet to occur, and the United Nations was under increasing criticism. On October 7, 1996, when addressing the United Nations Fourth Committee, Douglas K. Dryden, a former US military representative to MINURSO, denounced Morocco’s manipulation of the mission by controlling those who could register with the Identification Commission. He says:



The atmosphere at the MINURSO Force Headquarters in Laayoune is practically a siege mentality. The mission is not allowed to function independently, but as a creature of the Moroccans. Moroccans regularly gain access to the Headquarters compound with an air that it is, after all, theirs. It is the only UN mission that I am aware of where the flag of one of the parties is required to fly alongside that of the UN. Telephones were tapped. Mail was tampered with. Rooms of MINURSO personnel were searched (Dryden 1996).

He continues by claiming that, despite attempts to report this situation, the complaints were repeatedly concealed in Laayoune by UN officials. When they reached the UN Headquarters, they were dismissed as not relevant.

#### **4.3.1. The Baker Plan: new hope for the peace process**

To get the process moving again, in 1997, Kofi-Annan, at the time the UN's Secretary-General, asked the former U.S. Secretary of State James Baker to become the new Personal Envoy to Western Sahara, with the decision being announced on March 17, 1997<sup>74</sup>.

In September 1997, Baker got both parties' signature to the **Houston Accords**. After three rounds of negotiations, Polisario and Morocco agreed on troop's confinement and withdrawal, refugees, political and war prisoners, a "Code of Conduct for the Referendum Campaign", and a series of measures for the resumption of the identification process (UNSC S/1997/742 1997).

With the death of King Hassan on July 23, 1999, the impasse continued. The new monarch, King Mohammed VI, renewed his support for Morocco's territorial integrity through a confirmative referendum under the UN.

In his report on the situation concerning Western Sahara and the outcome of the identification process, on February 17, 2000, Secretary-General Kofi-Annan detailed a series

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<sup>74</sup> This decision was received by the Polisario with great enthusiasm. First, Morocco could not so easily dismiss Baker; second, because Baker himself had been a supporter, several years prior, of the liberation of Kuwait. It also brought media cover and attention to a long-forgotten conflict.

of reasons as to why the Settlement Plan and the Houston Accords should be abandoned. Among these, the most important seems to be the lack of an enforcement mechanism to force the parties to accept the referendum's result. Thus, he considered that the best option would be to negotiate a new alternative to solve the conflict, other than the referendum. This was later endorsed by the Security Council on February 29, 2000, in a Resolution that called for the parties' consultation to "explore ways and means to achieve an early, durable and agreed resolution of their dispute" (UNSC S/RES/1292 2000). This calls for a solution outside the idea of self-determination (the notion of autonomy).

Since 2000 the idea of autonomy has set ground inside the UN, especially within the Security Council. Whether the Settlement Plan had engendered competition (win-lose/lose-win – zero-sum), under autonomy, both parties could win (positive-sum - cooperation).

In June 2001, Baker presented the **first Baker Plan** (Framework Agreement), which did not explicitly offer an independence referendum. Under this new plan, Morocco would control foreign relations, defense, and some security aspects. Most internal matters, such as an executive, assembly, and courts, would fall under the Western Sahara autonomous government's responsibility. After five years of autonomy, the referendum would take place with an electorate favorable to Morocco (the criteria was to be a resident of Western Sahara for the preceding one year), thus giving the possibility of moving settlers to the territory just to be eligible to vote. Morocco's enthusiasm over the plan equaled Polisario's dissatisfaction and rejection.

The second Plan, **Baker Two** (Peace Plan for the Self-Determination for the People of Western Sahara), was presented to the parties in 2003 and came to the public in May. The idea was to devise a plan that neither party had reasons to reject. Like the Baker One, this plan offered a period of autonomy followed by a referendum within five years. Baker Two

showed a more balanced electorate by limiting its size (voters would have to prove continuous residence in Western Sahara since December 20, 1999) and offering Polisario a shot at independence.

Under this plan, following a transitional period, indigenous Western Saharans would elect the first autonomous government: an executive and legislative body, with the judicial power being appointed later. In turn, Morocco would be responsible for and have competence over “foreign relations, national security and external defence (...). In addition, the flag, currency, custom, postal and telecommunication systems of Morocco shall be the same for Western Sahara” (UNSC S/2003/565 Annex II 2003, par. 8).

Not only would that be dominated by Polisario officials, as the most important economic aspects would also be controlled by them (fisheries, petroleum, and phosphates), posing a threat to Moroccan interests.

Morocco contested the idea of not having complete control over Western Sahara affairs during the autonomy period and the option of independence on the referendum. Polisario objected that it was not the 1991 Settlement Plan, especially considering the electorate's question, deemed unfair to the Saharawi people.

As for the United Nations, the UNSC Resolution 1495 (July 31, 2003) declares that the UN “support strongly the efforts of the Secretary-General and his Personal Envoy and similarly supports their Peace plan for self-determination of the people of Western Sahara as an optimum political solution on the basis of agreement between the two parties” (UN S/RES/1495 2003). While Morocco rejected the plan, Polisario, taking everyone by surprise,

accepted it and thus backed Morocco into a corner by refusing to negotiate further until Morocco accepted it<sup>75</sup>.

On June 1, 2004, Baker submitted his resignation, as he had done all he could to help solve the conflict. In an interview on August 19, 2004, Baker justified the collapse of the peace process with Morocco's fear of losing the referendum, as well as with the Security Council's unwillingness to impose a solution and move to Chapter 7 of the UN's Charter, for fear of alienating either Morocco or Algeria. "And they're not willing to ask either or one or both of the parties to do something they don't want to do" (Baker 2004).

#### **4.3.2. The end of the peace process: international law versus political reality**

Alvaro de Soto, a Peruvian diplomat, was appointed in August 2003 head of the MINURSO and after June 2004 assumed duties as Personal Envoy. Despite the difficult times, he got both parties to agree to 'confidence-building measures', allowing family visits from the refugee camps to the occupied territories and vice-versa. On July 29, 2005, Peter van Walsum (Dutch Diplomat) was appointed Personnel Envoy.

On April 11, 2007, Morocco submitted an autonomy proposal to the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. However, this plan was marked for its lack of actual autonomy. Morocco proposed a 'Saharan Autonomous Region' with a locally elected government with significant competencies. On the other hand, the Moroccan government would ultimately rule over the territory, entirely subordinated to the central power, for it would have to be invested by Morocco's King.

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<sup>75</sup> The situation in Morocco made it almost impossible for the Security Council to press the country. In May, Morocco had witnessed the largest terrorist attack in the country's history, fighting its own 'war on terror'.

The Security Council issued a UNSC Resolution 1754 on April 30, 2007, on this issue, considering Morocco's proposal and efforts as "serious and credible"<sup>76</sup> (UNSC S/RES/1754 (2007)). It also calls for a "just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution, which will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara" (UNSC S/RES/1754 2007). Calling for "negotiations without preconditions", the UN seemed to be on the same page as Rabat. However, as in previous resolutions, the promise of self-determination as a precondition ensured that Polisario had nothing to lose by negotiating.

Thus, Van Walsum slowly maneuvered both parties into positions where rejecting negotiations was not an option. To achieve that, he had to convince Morocco to put a reasonable proposal on the table and, while moving away from Baker Plan, and still convince Polisario that the referendum on independence would eventually occur. Once this was guaranteed, Polisario would not be able to reject negotiations without losing its credibility. Nevertheless, one problem remained: Morocco had no intention of discussing independence and Polisario of discussing autonomy.

Therefore, and precisely because of this, these meeting had little content or substance as both parties seemed unwilling to compromise. As for the United Nations, since 2004 that its intention and strategy "had been how to get Polisario to abandon a vote on independence" (Zunes and Mundy 2010, 246). If Polisario discussed autonomy, there was no turning back; the danger was, clearly, on them. "The danger in 2007 was that as soon as Polisario showed any willingness to discuss the modalities of autonomy, the Security Council would either abandon or redefine self-determination to suit new 'political realities'" (Zunes and Mundy 2010, 246-47). Therefore, these meetings had little content or substance.

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<sup>76</sup> Regarding Polisario it only takes note of the April 10 proposal.

On August 28, 2008, in his editorial in *El País*, Sahara's long and troubled conflict, Van Walsum described the question of Western Sahara as a problem of lack of political will, especially on the part of the Security Council, that was not prepared to impose a solution. Given the current situation, he admits that an independent Western Sahara is a less viable solution.

Despite recognizing that international law is on Polisario's side, Van Walsum also concedes that the Security Council must consider the political reality. Instead, he advises Polisario to negotiate and give up on the idea of independence (instead, it should submit a credible autonomy proposal). That would, in turn, increase international support that has been lacking so far, with many states believing that "Polisario's insistence on full independence for Western Sahara has the unintended effect of deepening the impasse and perpetuating the status quo" (*El País* 2008).

By the time of this interview, Van Walsum's contract had expired and not been renewed. In January 2009, the Secretary-General announced the appointment of retired U.S. Ambassador Christopher Ross as his Personnel Envoy for Western Sahara (an Arabic-speaking diplomat with experience in the Middle East and North Africa, that had served as United States Ambassador in Algeria and Syria).

In February 2010, Morocco and Polisario held an informal meeting facilitated by Christopher Ross. This was repeated through 2010 and 2011, both parties discussing confidence-building measures. While continuing to reject each other proposals for the end of the conflict, they agreed to explore new innovative approaches to the conflict.

On March 20, 2016, it was reported that 84 MINURSO staff members had left the mission. Morocco demanded they leave after UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon issued a declaration in which he used the term 'occupation' during a visit to the Tindouf camps.

According to BBC, Morocco “threatened to pull out the soldiers it contributes to UN global peacekeeping missions, mainly in Africa, over the row”<sup>77</sup> (BBC 2016). In July 2016, the United Nations reported that 25 staff members of MINURSO had returned to Laayoune.

In August 2016, the tensions in this region increased again, with Morocco announcing the decision to send armed security personnel to the buffer zone of Al Guerguerat<sup>78</sup>, on the Morocco-Mauritania border, to fight drug trafficking. In two letters sent to the UN, Polisario accused Morocco of violating the 1991 cease-fire agreement. After an analysis of the situation, MINURSO concluded that Morocco had not violated the cease-fire.

According to Reuters, “Western diplomats and a U.N. source said Morocco’s move in Guerguerat appeared to be a flexing of muscles to test the new Polisario leadership while it plays for time diplomatically”. According to a UN source, Morocco “wanted to demonstrate to us all that they can move beyond the berm, which is a dangerous initiative to take” (Markey 2016). In April 2017, Polisario announced the withdrawal of its troops after Morocco had already broadcasted the same in February (Africa Times 2017).

In August 2017, the new UN Secretary-General António Guterres appointed former German President Horst Köhler as Personal Envoy for Western Sahara. Under the Trump administration, the United States appointed former US Ambassador John Bolton as National Security Advisor, who quickly declared that MINURSO should produce results or be ended. If since 2008, MINURSO’s term was being renewed annually, since 2018, the Security Council started renewing the mission for a six months’ period.

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<sup>77</sup> According to the UN this could be the beginning of a dangerous situation, not only because this was and still is a latent conflict (and a small spark can give rise to a raging fire), but also because, taking this situation as an example, other countries with Security Council mandated peacekeeping operations could take the same path and decide to expel UN troops (BBC 2016).

<sup>78</sup> The village of Al Guerguerat, located on the far southwest of Western Sahara, is 11km from the border with Mauritania and controlled by Morocco. However, the area between the village and the Mauritanian border is seen by Polisario as part of the SADR and by Morocco as non-man’s land.

In May 2019, Horst Köhler, announced his decision to step down from this role. In his two years tenure, he oversaw two rounds of peace talks between Morocco and Polisario, the last of which took place in March (Thomas-Johnson 2019). There is yet to be appointed a new Personnel Envoy to Western Sahara.

#### **4.3.3. A final analysis of the current situation in Western Sahara**

According to **Stephen Zunes and Jacob Mundy**, in their book *Western Sahara: War, Nationalism and Conflict Irresolution* (2010), the whole peace process has been guided, since the beginning, by four wrong assumptions. The first is the belief that, sooner or later, Algeria would walk out on Polisario's support. However, history proved the contrary: not only this support remains until this day, but it also reflects Algeria's image and reputation in the world.

Since its independence, Algeria tried, for many years, to present a new, alternative way, to the pro-American and pro-Soviet Union world division, particularly in Africa. Therefore, the country supported, in a fight against colonialism and imperialism, national liberations movements. Thus, it can be concluded that "Algeria's Western Sahara policy has changed little since 1975. Algerian Presidents from Boumedienne to Bouteflika have remained faithful to Western Sahara nationalism and the ideal of self-determination" (Zunes and Mundy 2010, 43).

The second assumption these authors present is that Polisario, being the weaker party in this conflict, should make the most concessions. However, Polisario has little internal space to support such manoeuvres. A side deal would only break the trust the people have placed on Polisario and thus undermine its credibility as the genuine and trustworthy representative of the Saharawi's and therefore give rise to factionalism – "that is, political suicide" (Zunes and Mundy 2010, 250). As pro-independence movements in the occupied



territories (1999 and 2005 Intifadas) has shown, this nationalism transcends Polisario and the refugee camps and has become even more important as time has gone by.

Third, there is the idea (especially in recent years) that Morocco has been willing and can make concessions. Internally, Morocco cannot willingly compromise because of political reasons and military ones, highly connected with economic interests. Would the Moroccan army forces accept being defeated on a referendum without starting a new war?

Besides commanding soldiers, high-ranking Moroccan officers deployed in Western Sahara have been given control over several aspects of the territory's economy, such as fisheries. After several coup d'état attempts, and to keep them peaceful, King Hassan started distributing spoils of war through veteran generals, thus enriching the most senior officers who have accumulated considerable wealth (Zunes and Mundy 2010, 251). One example was General Abdelaziz Bennani, a senior Moroccan officer, former Commander of the Southern Zone, and General Inspector of the Armed Forces. For years, there were rumors of his wealth. In 2008 a telegram from the U.S. Ambassador to Morocco, Thomas Riley, to Washington referred that:

Credible reports indicate that Lt Gen Benanni is using his position as the Commander of the Southern Sector to skim money from military contracts and influence business decisions. A widely believed rumour has it that he owns large parts of the fisheries in Western Sahara. Benanni, like many senior military officers, has a lavish family home that was likely built with money gleaned from bribes. Leadership positions in regional sectors are a significant source of extra-legal income for military leaders (Western Sahara Resource Watch 2010).

The document also alerted to the widespread corruption that still prevailed in Moroccan military structures. Therefore, the high military commanders are against a change in the *status quo* and the best placed within the system to secure their interests by using coercion and violence.

The fourth and final point that has guided the Western Sahara process is that the United Nations, especially its Security Council, is willing to do what is necessary and pursue any political and diplomatic solution, to achieve a stable and long-lasting solution to the conflict. And to do this and guarantee the security needed to all parts, the UN needs to make a more substantial commitment to the Sahara region that it has done so far.

For autonomy to happen, the Saharawi presence needs to increase, and the number of Morocco settlers and military personnel decrease substantially. As this does not seem possible in the near future, the question is whether the Security Council is willing to invest more in the peace process. Rather than having a well-developed and defined strategy to tackle this conflict, the UN instead “allowed the parties to manipulate and derail the process to suit their own ends” (Theofilopoulou 2006, 14). By withholding their cooperation with the UN with impunity when the chain of events was not favorable to them, parties repeatedly stopped the process at the slightest opportunity, thus rendering it useless.

#### **4.4. International law, human rights, and the conflict in Western Sahara**

Shortly after the Madrid Accords were inked in 1975, both Moroccan and Mauritanian forces tried to control the areas evacuated by Spanish soldiers. Facing brutal military attacks, mainly targeting the civil population, the only alternative for many Saharawi was to flee and find refuge in Algeria. As Mundy and Zune's recount, in February 1976, “near the northeastern towns of Galtah Zummur and Um Draygah, where thousands of refugees had congregated (...) the Moroccan air force bombed civilian refugee encampments, resorting to the use of napalm on four known occasions” (Zunes and Mundy 2010, 114). Because of stories such as this one, in the coming years, Tindouf would receive a massive influx of thousands of Saharawi refugees and quickly became the center of the Saharawi resistance under the government of Polisario.

With close ties and support from Algeria, Libya, and Cuba, Polisario's image and international reputation was easily manipulated since the beginning of the war. However, more than a political ideology or Marxist movement, Polisario is described as an idea by most Saharawi:

To be a Polisario means to be committed to the liberation of your country. It is only such a concept as national liberation for which one can expect such total identification from the people. You cannot get that kind of commitment to a party or ideology (Zunes and Mundy 2010, 115).

#### **4.4.1. Life in the Tindouf refugee camps**

Initially, a set of tents, the camps located in Tindouf, later developed into five well defined and separate spaces, named after towns in the occupied territories: Laayoune, Awserd, Smara, Dakhla, and Cape Bojador. Additionally, there are two other satellite camps: Rabouni (the camps' administrative capital) and February 27, a smaller one developed around the National Women's School.

The number of refugees living in the camps is, until today, up to discussions: for many years, it was internationally accepted the number initially provided by Algeria in 1976 of 165.000 people. In 1982, UNHCR agreed to give aid to 80.000 of the most fragile refugees. This number was later increased, first in 2000 to 155.000 and again in 2004 to 158.000. However, in 2005 the number suddenly dropped to 90.000 persons.

Different from any other reality in the world, the camps are entirely self-managed and not under the management or control of NGO's. Despite being dependent on outside help, recent years witnessed the development of a small internal market economy, fuelled both by the pensions paid by the Spanish Ministry of Defence for Saharawis veterans of the colonial period (former members of Tropas Nómadas and Policía Territorial) and by money

donations from Spain and other European countries, besides the UN and non-governmental organizations (NGO) financial help.

Besides this, programs such as ‘Vacaciones en Paz’ (Vacation in Peace), which sponsors summer visits each year by thousands of Western Saharan children to families in Spain, also generates additional income. In turn, the Spaniards often visit these children and their respective families in the camps, buy products, and leave gifts, thus bringing financial support (Strategic Studies Institute 2013, 56).

Each camp has a primary school (free and compulsory) and a hospital. There are secondary schools and classes in Arabic, and several European languages (such as Spanish and English) are offered. As a result, the Saharawi population has one of the highest literacy levels in Africa. Additionally, students can transfer to schools and universities in Algeria and other countries such as Libya, Syria, and Spain. Cuba has sponsored study for thousands of young Saharawis in secondary schools, universities, technical institutes, and military academies.

With men away fighting a war, women have since the beginning been in charge and were responsible for the camps' daily management. From their perspective, they, too, have a duty to fulfill to work towards liberation. However, this did not just happen out of necessity: they not only continue to perform those duties and leadership roles today as this is also a reflex of Saharan's more open disposition towards women.

One of the main problems inside the camps is the high unemployment rate, especially amongst the well-educated youth, which is a significant source of dissatisfaction and frustration. Here the United Nations could provide an important contribute, instead of only providing financial aid. As explored in chapter 3, one important strategy against conflict in a peace process is to combat underdevelopment, poverty, isolation, and marginalization. To

move past, it would be crucial to increase the investment in social projects, small businesses and labour. It's not only about providing aid. Instead, it is about helping people develop their own abilities so they can do this themselves.

This was precisely what Netwofrk for Peace and Development was doing in Nicaragua, an example presented by John Paul Lederach to illustrate the need to see conflict transformation as a long-term process. To move beyond the patterns of destruction that war has caused, it would be important to empower this people, by providing training, workshops, forums, opportunities for them to learn and develop practical skills to increase social and economic development.

However, and according to a Human Rights Watch report issued in 2008, the camps' most significant vulnerability continues to be its insolation and remoteness. They state that "Polisario effectively marginalizes those who directly challenge its leadership or general political orientation, but it does not imprison them. It allows residents to criticize its day-to-day administration of camp affairs" (Human Rights Watch 2008, 2). Additionally, the camps' residents can leave via Mauritania, although social pressure keeps them from disclosing their plans freely.

Furthermore, "political detentions are rare or non-existent in the refugee camps" (Human Rights Watch 2008, 9). There is a widespread lack of significant challenge and opposition to Polisario, which has a dominant role in distributing resources and jobs.

Since the beginning of the war, and particularly during the years of active fighting, Polisario was, as Morocco, known for "torture, long-term imprisonment without trial or charge, and forced labor" (Human Rights Watch 2008, 115). This was later acknowledged by Polisario and justified by the ongoing war. In a Polisario's congress, in 1989, it was

decided the victims' compensation, the release of the detainees and hold abuses, and those who perpetrate them, accountable. The last 404 prisoners were released in 2005.

#### **4.4.2. Occupied territories: Morocco's breaches in human rights**

Since the beginning of the conflict, Morocco has been far from obliging with its international responsibilities. Soon after the signing of the Madrid Accords, the Kingdom promoted a massive influx of people towards Western Sahara. However, under Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, on 'Deportation, Transfers, Evacuations' (International Committee of Red Cross 1949), of which Morocco is one of the signatory countries since 1956, it is forbidden both the individual and mass transfer or deportation of persons from the occupied territory to the occupying state, regardless of the motive. On this matter, it further establishes that evacuation can only occur for security purposes and may not involve the displacement of the population beyond the country's borders, and only as a temporary measure.

As the Human Rights Watch Reports draw attention, Morocco has repeatedly violated Saharawi's rights in the occupied territories of Western Sahara. Not only does it suppress opposition and peaceful manifestation in favor of independence or self-determination, as it also promotes arbitrary arrests and torture of Saharawi activists. The report states:

(...) the security forces arbitrarily arrest demonstrators and suspected Sahrawi activists, beat them and subject them to torture, and force them to sign incriminating police statements, all with virtual impunity; and the courts convict and imprison them after unfair trials (Human Rights Watch 2008, 3).

Thus, they also leave several recommendations: allow the monitoring of human rights conditions on the ground; oversee credible and independent investigations into allegations of human rights abuses, especially in cases involving police officers, and bring the correspondent charges to these officers, implicated in cases of torture; allow the peaceful

gathering and manifestation of people, including those in favor of self-determination for Western Sahara, thus guaranteeing the right to free speech. Besides, Morocco should also work to ensure that courts reach verdicts grounded on the impartial examination of evidence and ask for medical examination to check allegations of mistreatment and torture.

Moroccan system also fails to provide Saharawi activists with a fair trial; courts have convicted persons based on statements attained under torture and even fabricated by the police. “Many defendants report that the police coerced them to sign statements that the police prevented them even from reading” (Human Rights Watch 2008, 39). The courts also make little credible effort into investigating these allegations and go as far as to “ignore requests by defendants for prompt medical examinations following the period of police interrogation to check for signs of abuse” (Human Rights Watch 2008, 39).

Regardless of its permanent mission in Western Sahara, MINURSO is one of the few peacekeeping operations without an independent mechanism to monitor, report, or investigate alleged human rights violations. According to Morocco, it would undermine its authority and the country’s sovereignty, so MINURSO should only be responsible for monitoring the cease-fire agreement. A mandate over human rights applies when a state cannot ensure respect for those rights, and it considers that this issue has been politicized to downplay the country.

Despite the international pressure from several NGOs, UN Secretary-General, and countries such as Costa Rica, Nigeria, and South Africa, this proposal has been rejected several times by the Security Council, particularly by its permanent members such as France and U. S.<sup>79</sup>.

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<sup>79</sup> When the United States signalled sympathy towards the inclusion of a human rights mechanism in MINURSO’s mandate in 2013, “Morocco promptly suspended the annual ‘African Lion’ joint US-Moroccan military exercises and substantially stepped up its lobbying targeting US policy makers”. The strategy worked and the US retreat its support (Khakee 2014, 458).

In 1999 King Mohammed VI finally acknowledged the government's role in several disappearances and created an independent Arbitration Panel to compensate the victims. In 2004, King Mohammed established a truth commission to write the history of repression under his father's rule.

The situation in the occupied territories escalated since 2005 after what became known as the 'Saharawi Intifada'<sup>80</sup>. This year marked the beginning of a cycle of pro-independence manifestations, followed by clashes with the police that quickly spread to other cities (Smara and Dakhla and Tan Tan and Assa, southern Moroccan towns)<sup>81</sup>. This also counted with students' support in Moroccan universities in Agadir, Marrakesh, Casablanca, Fez, and Rabat, which organized solidarity protests, also condemning the occupation.

A new generation of Saharawi arose, tired of the UN promises and the lack of results of Polisario's strategy, frustrated with the state of marginalization they were subjected to. After years of repression and occupation, they had finally decided to take the situation into their own hands. Lacking coordination planning and central leadership, these protests are the result of individual initiatives that spread through the population. By 2007, at least one of these small acts of protest took place in Western Sahara every day, with a commitment to non-violence<sup>82</sup>.

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<sup>80</sup> "A typical action starts on a street corner or a plaza when someone unfurls the SADR flag, women start ululating, and people start chanting pro-independence slogans, but then – within a few minutes, when soldiers and police arrive – the crowd will quickly scatter. Other tactics have included leafleting, graffiti (including of 'collaborators' homes) and cultural celebrations with political overtones" (Zunes and Mundy 2010, 155).

<sup>81</sup> There had been a first round of protests in 1999, after the death King Hassan, with Saharawis demanding scholarships and subsidies while studying in Moroccan Universities. As in 2005, these were non-violent protests, to which later joined poor Moroccan settlers, focused on social and economic demands. After twelve days of peaceful manifestations, the police started using force to disperse the people.

<sup>82</sup> For Saharawi's, non-violence is both an ethical and a strategic option: first because they consider it to be immoral; second because of the diplomatic strategy adopted by Polisario, considered incompatible with violence and aggression; third because it would cast their fight under negative light, as a terrorist movement. Additionally, a more violent strategy probably would not work at all given Morocco's military superiority, easily outnumbering the population. They are easily identified in the occupied territories, given their segregation, and would have a hard time accessing resources.



Besides claims favoring independence, these protests also call for more equality between Saharawis and Moroccan settlers in the occupied territories. Morocco has wasted more money in accommodating its settlers than helping the local population, thus leading to major divisions. The revenue from fisheries and phosphates has not been reinvested in the territory or is not available to the Saharawi people. Another issue in their list of grievances is the attempt of 'Moroccanization' of Western Sahara to create a feeling of belonging and integration<sup>83</sup>. It is important to keep in mind that:

Approximately one-third of the Moroccan population in Western Sahara consists of soldiers, to which must be added an unknown number of military police, gendarmes, regular police, agents of the Interior Ministry, royal secret services, plainclothes security agents, and civilian informants (Zunes and Mundy 2010, 158).

All of this has strengthened unaddressed feelings of resentment and exclusion that must be acknowledged and dealt with for peace to be possible, more than just a remote, distant possibility. As Lederach argues, peace is journey of relationships, of turning to the other and envision a shared future. However, in the case of this population, there seems to be no moral imagination. Both the Saharawi and the Moroccan settlers were imposed on each other, sharing a land but no more than that. Instead, Saharawis are being pushed into assimilation with a population that are seen as having deprived them of some of their basic rights (the possibility to choose their future, have their land). There has been no transcend and no change: the past has not been addressed so far and people continue to live with the same pain and grief that has accompanied them since the beginning of the war.

Here to there is space to do more, to be more involved. Instead of being locked up in their Headquarters, too constrained by international politics, United Nations peacekeepers could be working towards bringing this people together. By promoting a fair encounter

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<sup>83</sup> This attempt to strip Saharawis from their culture is clear in several Moroccan acts: authorities banned the use Hassaniya, the Saharawi dialect, and they were forbidden from placing jaimas in the desert, traditional tents, symbol of their culture.

between them, they could help create a mutual understanding between both sides. An effort should be made to promote an exchange of cultural and social traditions. Relationships are at the center of the process of change, Lederach would say, but in the case of this conflict, little effort has been made to nurture this contact.

Far from this, there are many examples of hatred, bitterness and broken relationships. One of these cases became known as Gdeim Izik. In October 2010, the situation escalated when Saharawi activists organized a camp known as Gdeim Izik, 12 km outside Laayoune, gathering families in the desert to protest against the social and economic discrimination faced under occupation. A protest that started with 60 people, quickly, after one month, overpassed the 20.000 people – from spontaneous, it transformed into “mass demonstration of collective action” (Murphy and Omar 2013, 354).

In November, the Moroccan police surrounded the camp demanding its dismantling. With the use of force, authorities destroyed the tents and confronted its inhabitants with water cannons, batons, tear gas, which provoked riots and the spread of violence.

In the aftermath of this episode, in 2010, 24 men known as Gdeim Izik prisoners were arrested and collectively accused of murdering 11 Moroccan officials, allegedly killed in the camp's violent disassembling. They were condemned to sentences that range between 20 years to life in prison by a military court in 2013, having been kept under arbitrary detention during this period, a situation that was denounced not only by several international organizations (International Amnesty and Human Rights Watch) but also by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detentions (UN A/HRC/27/48 Add.5 2014). In July 2016, the Supreme Court of Morocco considered that this trial lacked sufficient evidence to connect the accused with the crimes and the victims' bodies' identification (remain unproven). The

2013 initial sentence was later confirmed in July 2017, in a trial whose proceeding was based on the same confessions previously obtained.

Detained in solitary confinement for more than 20 daily hours, this group is a victim of physical and psychological torture, worsened by the lack of medical attention. In December 2016, the UN Committee against Torture recognized the critical situation of one of these political prisoners, Naama Asfari, for both the torture he faced and the criminal confessions that he signed, also under torture, and issued the decision CAT/C/59/D/606/2014.

In a public statement issued on April 26, 2019, Amnesty International (AI 2019) advocates that the UN should establish an independent and impartial mechanism to monitor human rights and accounts for the continued violation of these rights, including, but not restricted to, freedom of expression, assembly, and association<sup>84</sup>.

Freedom House, in the freedom in the World 2019 Index, gives Western Sahara a score of 4 in 100 and thus 'Not Free' (Freedom House 2019). Controlled by Morocco, voters can elect 13 representatives to the Moroccan parliament that cannot contest the status of Western Sahara. The information regarding the territory is nearly non-existent, and corruption is widespread. "Civil liberties are severely restricted, particularly as they relate to independence activism" (Freedom House 2019).

#### **4.5. How to transform the Western Sahara conflict: ideas on peace**

As it was already discussed, the conflict in Western Sahara has reached a stalemate that lasts since the beginning of the new century (if we consider the two Baker plans).

Despite being crucial for the region's stability, peace, integration, and growth, it is one of

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<sup>84</sup> Morocco rejects activists' applications for peaceful manifestations and registration of their associations, thus depriving them of legal recognition

the oldest and most neglected and forgotten conflicts in the world – it is frozen. Unless behaviors and perspectives are reconsidered, it will remain so.

Since the end of open and direct war, parties have changed their strategy: they now seek international support and recognition for both their claims by pretending to agree and seem committed to dialogue. Thus, to this day, and despite several rounds of negotiations, there is an evident lack of trust and bad faith between Morocco and the Polisario Front. “Both parties evade negotiations, and the few times they have agreed to them, they did so with no intention of reconsidering their positions” (Fregoso and Živković 2012, 42). The United Nations has not pushed enough for the parties to oblige with the agreements and not has not punished them for human rights violations.

This process has brought to light the breakdown of the political will of the major international players. While Polisario Front has made several concessions over the years, going as far as agreeing with the Second Baker Plan (as thus with the possibility of temporary autonomy for five years) without any reassurance, Morocco, for its part, has refused to cooperate with complete impunity. It refused to accept the UN’s arbitration, even interfering with the organization’s decisions.

The UN must give the “appearance of attempting to do something about it while hiding its reluctance to act” (Centro de Estudos Africanos 2018, 83). While the organization has renovated its mandate more than 40 times, this has little impact on its conduct on the ground.

Throughout the years, several solutions have been proposed by different actors: the UN and its Personal Envoys, international organizations, politicians and political analysts, researchers, and human rights activists. However, they were and are based on the idea that the Security Council will sometime in the future change its policy towards the region and do what it has not done so far: act decisively. Therefore, a new perspective must be brought to

the dialogue: given the lack of external pressure and political will to solve this conflict, debated in this chapter, it seems the pressure must now come from within, from both societies. As was discussed in chapter 3, only by transforming parties views on each other, change their interaction, and create sustainable relationships can this conflict's dynamic begin to change. Instead of being a bystander in Western Sahara, the United Nations should invest in this region, both time, resources (particularly human resources) and effort to bring reconciliation. Time as proven that a simple agreement can stop temporarily the bloodshed but cannot restore Peace. For that to happen, this land and this people need Truth, after years of injustices, for healing to be possible; Mercy, so there can be acceptance and forgiveness; Justice, to repair years of damage, to restore accountability.

#### **4.5.1. The need for a bottom-up approach**

The peace process has, since the beginning, been rooted in the interests of the different parties, with high costs to the peoples on both sides. Being held between high representatives of both parties, the rounds of talks have left little space for each people to voice their concerns on this conflict. Unheard, they are left at the side-line of the solution when they should be its center. Thus, a less formal mechanism could be an excellent first step to unlock the present situation.

This is precisely what conflict transformation suggests: transforming a conflict is a long-term process that must be focused on people to work and sustain itself. It must be grounded on people's realities, on their problems. This is what John Paul Lederach describes as "Levels of Leadership" (Lederach 1997, 38), to explain how a population is affected by a conflict, in simplified terms. To each of these levels of leadership corresponds one specific approach to peacebuilding.

At the top-level (Level One), there are the key (few) political actors, the representative leaders of both sides. They are highly visible, have significant power, and are under pressure to keep the “publicly stated goals or demands” (Lederach 1997, 40). At this level, we find what is commonly described as a ‘top-down’ approach to peace: the peacemakers themselves are often high-profile persons, backed by a government or international organization (as was the case of James Baker, endorsed both by the United States and the United Nations). Through negotiations with the top leaders, their goal is to achieve an agreement between the parties focused on guaranteeing a cease-fire or end of hostilities and, later, on creating mechanisms to enable a transition from war to peace.

However, this proved time and time again to be a challenge: as the process is usually under great scrutiny, it is challenging to create an environment where parties can trust each other and where new options can be discussed for compromise to take place. This is also based on the belief that agreements achieved on this level will be translated and applied to the population on the ground.

This is precisely the strategy that has been pursued in Western Sahara: high-level peace talks between the head leadership of both Polisario and Morocco, mediated by an advisory appointed by the United Nations, with somewhat disappointing results. Instead, the process should be approached differently and include two perspectives: level two and level three mechanisms.

The middle-level (Level Two) intends to bring together respected people from each side of the conflict (either ethnic or religious leaders, academic or intellectuals), both connected to the top leadership and well respected in their communities. They often “have more intimate knowledge of the conflict’s dynamics and public sentiments on the ground”

(Hill and O'Brien 2019, 4). As they are rarely associated with formal political power, they are less captured by it and have more flexibility of compromise and action.

This can occur through different mechanisms such as workshops, training, and peace commissions, enabling the analyses of the conflict under different perspectives, as a shared problem, to generate new alternative paths of action and seek new innovative solutions. This more informal environment encourages the development of relationships and, through that, of trust and flexibility. It is about creating “a politically safe space for floating and testing ideas, which may or may not prove useful back in real-life settings” (Lederach 1997, 47). In turn, training raises everyone's awareness of the issue at hand and allows them to develop tools to deal with the conflict. What this suggests is that middle range leaders can have, if empowered, a crucial role in changing the conflict dynamics by targeting people's perceptions and helping them develop new ideas.

As considered in chapter 3, Peace commissions would allow truth and healing, especially in a conflict such as this one, where there is a lot of grievance still to be acknowledged. As we've already discussed, throughout the 30 years of conflict, many aggressions and violations were not addressed and continue to be common practice to this day: disappearances, arbitrary arrests, torture, lack of freedom of expression and assembly, where justice never took place. Therefore, these commissions are particularly important to increase awareness to the conflict itself and its consequences for both sides.

Given that each considers itself to be the only victim, this would increase the idea of shared values, forgiveness, acceptance, accountability, and restoration. It is not about vengeance but about acknowledging the past and present to change behaviors and perceptions. Moreover, since Morocco is unwilling to consider the possibility of including a human rights mechanism in the MINURSO mandate, this would be a sign of good faith and

increase confidence between the parties without external intervention. It is not possible to move forward without acknowledgment, acceptance, or change. The protection of human rights must be part of any potential future solution.

The grassroots (Level Three) represent the masses, most of the society. They are the ones that suffer more in a conflict. Thus, their leadership is associated with “people who are involved in local communities, members of indigenous nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) carrying out relief projects for local populations, health officials, and refugee camp leaders” (Lederach 1997, 42). They understand the fears and suffering of the population, and they know local communities. This is known as the ‘bottom-up approach’, when the pressure for change floats from the masses to the top. It is both about considering and addressing people’s issues and, at the same time, place responsibility on them to help change the situation. Relaying on elders, creating forums for deliberation and discussion, and compensation for losses are some of the activities involved.

The history of the Western Sahara conflict has proven so far that depending only upon on one of these approaches impoverishes the peace process, for it ends up lacking a real application on the ground. By giving a voice to women, youth, and refugees, the peace process could become more inclusive and broad-based.

After years of failed international pressure, if the parties’ interests and positions remain the same, then the only solution is for a bottom-up transformation of the conflict and civil society. It has quickly become evident that negotiations have reached an impasse, and no new developments are expected in the following months if not even years.

To achieve results, any peacekeeper deployed in the region must go out into the streets and meet the people; any peace process, to be successful, must be grounded on the reality of every community, of every person. However, until now, the process has been far from that:



instead of reaching everyone, it has created greater separation. In Western Sahara, each community lives separately, without interaction between each other, with the Saharawi population facing a violent process of forced ‘Moroccanization’. Thus, they lack contact, but this distance has also enabled and made it easier for them to develop ideas and fears regarding the other. Only quality relationships can clear these preconceptions.

Therefore, instead of being locked up in headquarters, peacekeepers should be in touch with reality and bring that into every process. Being Saharawi is not the same as being Moroccan: they speak Hassaniya, a unique combination of Arabic, Berber, and Spanish and have an embedded tradition of oral culture, of sharing stories and songs. This means Saharawis have a deep sense of community, a vibrant social life<sup>85</sup>. Those who had the pleasure of staying with Saharawis for a little while know how deep this is rooted in them, enjoy opening and sharing their time and their houses with the others. Under their culture, gatherings are regular in their daily life. However, by prohibiting this, Moroccan authorities are depriving them of a vital aspect of their identity: hospitality.

To achieve real transformation and lasting peace, there needs to be dialogue and shared experiences. “Dialogue and action groups can be a powerful method for transforming people into change agents for peace in their communities” (Kronish 2011, 4). This allows people to understand conflict as a complex reality that always entails two sides<sup>86</sup>; helps individuals becoming better listeners and thus grow into being more active in society; to realize that the previously demonized ‘other’ is also a human being, with feelings, experiences, perspectives, and opinions and that some of them are even more valid than their own. Usually, we see the other “through the prisms of the conflict and the negative media

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<sup>85</sup> One fundamental aspect of this life is the ceremony of tea, one Saharawis’ most important rituals that entails the drink of three cups of tea. They even have an expression that truly describes this ritual: the first cup taste as bitter as life, the second as sweet as love and the third as soft as death.

<sup>86</sup> This is particularly important for conflict situations because, when ingrained in them, people tend to see only their side of the story and feel they are the only one’s suffering. This brings them to the reality: every interaction has two sides.

stereotypes which dominate our print and electronic media” (Kronish 2011, 6). By asking people to share their stories, their identity, this enables each to understand that, in some respects, they are similar, which can only bring tolerance and acceptance.

## **Conclusion**

Conflict is and will always be an intrinsic part of every human society, internal to every system. Where there is scarcity and limited resources (power, land, money, natural resources, military or political posts - or the desire for recognition or restoration), there is disagreement and incompatibility on where to allocate them. At first sight, this may seem a basic and simple conclusion, but the idea of conflict and peace has troubled researchers throughout history, with major developments since the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

At an early stage, research on peace focused more on the idea of conflict resolution, with more in-depth studies since the middle of the 1980s. This theory is based on the premise that parties must solve their major, central incompatibles, to be able to move forward and live with each other in a non-violent way and thus stop ceasing the use of arms and violence with each other. This is usually reached through a peace agreement.

Especially since the end of the Cold War, the United Nations Organization has been the world champion on conflict resolution and its application to the realities of war. From ad hoc responses to particular crises, severely constrained by the polarization of the world, it has evolved to more structured and complex interventions under challenging conditions and in environments of war.

Based on this, we can understand that the concepts and theory behind conflict resolution have also progressed to better adapt to reality. Major examples of this are former UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's 1992 report, *An Agenda for Peace*, in which he elaborated the notions of conflict prevention, peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace enforcement, as well as Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security (2000), reaffirming the role of women in the resolution of conflicts. This thesis focused precisely on this: present an analysis of the current paradigm in the peace settlement of

disputes, particularly the strategy of conflict resolution as defined and developed by the United Nations Organization. This study intended to conclude whether the model presented is efficient and the most sustainable or if a new model should be adopted, using the conflict on Western Sahara as a case study.

By doing this, it was possible to conclude that, despite recent evolutions in the UN's approach to conflict resolution, and particularly to peacekeeping operations, there is still a long way to go. With the new challenges and threats of the new century (terrorism, lack of a clear and identifiable enemy, failed states, and insurgencies), the responsibilities and difficulties grew, with more countries relapsing into violence after signing peace agreements.

Thus, the time has proven that mandates need to be clearer and more grounded in reality, with more resources (funds, equipment, knowledge) allocated to each operation. In many cases, as it happens with Western Sahara and MINURSO, for mandates to be approved both by the parties and by the Security Council, important subjects are left out and ignored, and ambiguous words are used in the resolutions and agreements.

On the other side, peacekeepers are known in the places they are deployed for their uninterest and lack of involvement with locals, failing to meet the expectations set out for them. They have insufficient, and sometimes non-existent, in-depth knowledge of local culture, traditions, and values of the host country. With little to no contact with the population, they develop top-down approaches to conflict, based on high-level negotiations and costly conferences between heads of governments and rebel leaders.

For their part, instead of negotiating in good faith, parties try, through high-profile negotiations, to influence the other to make concessions and gain international support and attention, as well as time to regroup, rearm and develop new strategies to win the war.

Once these problems were identified, there was a need to suggest a different approach to conflict resolution, as presented in this thesis. A credible alternative is John Paul Lederach's theory on Conflict Transformation. The fundamental question for him is not how to end a conflict but how to move beyond violence, resentment, and years of war and hate, towards peace, reconciliation, and a future together. In this sense, conflicts call for more than the traditional methods of diplomacy, with its bilateral negotiations, based on the idea that agreements reached at the high levels of power will somehow translate themselves into the population and achieve precisely the intended results and thus lead to peace. For Lederach, it is quite the contrary: there needs to be constructive change, that goes beyond words. Agreements are not the end of violence for if the relationship between the parties continues and is not addressed, the conflict remains.

Therefore, the idea is that the end of direct violence through an agreement is only the beginning and not the end of the line to achieve peace. It is a long-term process that requires investment, connected to the reality of every community, with their problems, and at the same time, imagine a better future. Lederach then suggests the need to address four elements in a conflict: Truth, Mercy, Justice, and Peace. This means, respectively, bring the past into light; acceptance and forgiveness; reparation and restoration of the relationship; and peace is what holds this together— all of this is involved in reconciliation.

Conflict Transformation, thus, can be seen as a theory of reconciliation, of healing and (re)building relationships, to move towards a better and sustainable future together. For this to happen, the process is equally, if not more important, than the end result, engagement and relationships and not only a signed agreement. Change requires the capacity to transcend, to see beyond violence, while still living and feeling its effects – transcend the past while still living in it. For this to occur, communities must find solutions based on their reality, which

address their everyday challenges, and that pushes them to understand the pattern of relationship they are involved in and to hear each other.

This was precisely what women did in Wajir, Kenya, in 1993 when, fearing for their lives and of their children and tired of violence, they decided to turn their market into a safe space for any clan. Soon, they were engaging in peace talks with elders, government officials and even national representatives in Parliament, as well as working directly with fighters in the bush. Through their work (Wajir Peace and Development Committee), a cease-fire was agreed, disarmament took place and peace was reached (Lederach 2005, 11-13).

These considerations have practical implications in peace training and imply a transformation in the model used to approach conflict. In this sense, it becomes clear that using a universal strategy with small adjustments is not working; culture must be a central aspect in conflict resolution, not merely a technical aspect that can be integrated into a pre-determined strategy. Every aspect is culture in a conflict, even the meaning of conflict itself and the definition of a situation as, such is culture. In different communities, different behaviors, expressions and words can have the same meaning and the same expressions can have different meanings. This makes it harder for parties to communicate and understand each other. The same can, and thus happen, also between peacekeepers and negotiators.

A key element to conflict transformation is the value of local knowledge, local culture, and tradition. People are the resources in conflict transformation: they must be empowered to value their voice and trust in their abilities to cope with conflict. Solutions must be locally provided for communities to be self-sufficient. Instead of adopting a Western-centric perspective, peace workers must help people creating their own responses to conflict based on their own contexts.

All of this is exemplified in the case of Western Sahara, a perfect example of the need to explore alternative and innovative ways to approach conflict for it reached a stalemate a long time ago. First, as a Spanish colony and later as territory invaded by Morocco, its population, known as Saharawis, is fighting since the '70s, both with weapons and later with diplomacy, for their right to achieve independence. The war with Morocco that lasted 26 years, from 1975 until 1991, resulted in a peace agreement that has yet to be applied, an unsuccessful UN missions, MINURSO (United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara), refugee camps in southern Algeria, Tindouf, and thousands of people waiting to return to their homes.

Through the usual methods of conflict resolution, the UN has promoted peace negotiations throughout the years between top leaders that have resulted in a peace agreement signed in 1991 full of promises of a referendum that have yet to see the light. Without the capacity to monitor human rights violations, the UN mission cannot respond and meet the most basic aspirations of the Saharawi people – freedom, self-determination, and recognition. Locked in a stalemate for more than 40 years, the UN has warned out all its strategies to approach the conflict, despite being fundamental to the region's stability, integration and growth. When it should have obliged parties to abide by their agreements and promises, the UN backed down for lack of political will. This has increased people's frustrations and their predisposition for war.

As such, this thesis tries to present, based on John Paul Lederach's theory on Conflict Transformation, new strategies to unlock the impasse. As formal negotiations have so far failed to keep up with people's expectations, less formal mechanisms could be the start of a new phase in the conflict. One example is bringing together well-respected leaders from local communities of each side, with influence in their contexts and integrating them in the peace process. They have more intimate knowledge of the reality on the ground and the

influence on the top leadership to promote real change. This can be achieved through workshops and training. Thus, there are encouraged to share experiences that can change the way the other sees conflict. Often, communities are only focused on the influence and consequences conflict has on their lives. Eventually, they forget that conflict is a shared reality that has victims in all sides and leaves a trail of destruction familiar to all people.

Through these alternative strategies, it should be possible to create a safe space for sharing and testing ideas and, at the same time, increase awareness of the challenges both sides face. It is about innovation and empowerment. In turn, peace commissions can have a healing effect, helping grief and forgiveness by acknowledging crimes. Particularly in the case of Western Sahara, where human rights violations are not investigated, and the stories of arbitrary arrests, disappearances, and torture are common, it would be fundamental to bring acceptance and accountability to this process. For those who argue that this is about vengeance, this must instead be perceived as vital to accepting and bringing into the light the past to change future patterns of behavior, especially considering that MINURSO does not include the possibility of a mechanism to monitor human rights.

This thesis suggests that peacekeepers, far from being locked up in their headquarters, should be in the field, among locals, sensing and feeling their dilemmas, their questions, their sorrows, for their role is not a passive one. They are called to help people dialogue and share experiences to better understand each other, thus becoming better listeners. But by letting people share their stories, they enable them to realize that they are similar, humans, and thus overcome the stereotypes and blindness that conflict brings.



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