

“Emerging Archetypes”: A Comparison of Patterns of the Peace Processes in Sri Lanka and Nepal

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1

1. “Reading Ropers”: Three Cornerstones of Systemic Thinking	2
1.1 Bringing Solutions Closer to Problems	2
1.2 Systems are Constituted by Many Actors, and Not Only by Those We Like	3
1.3 In Mediation, the Individual Matters	4
2. Archetypes of Fragile Peace Processes – The Example of Nepal	5
3. Systemic Conflict Transformation: The Added Value is in the Practice	10
4. Further Reading	12

“Emerging Archetypes”: A Comparison of Patterns of the Peace Processes in Sri Lanka and Nepal

A response by Günther Baechler

A peace process often appears to start at one point in time (e.g. when a third party is mandated), to move from a ceasefire agreement to some sort of interim power sharing and then end with a peace accord, followed by a period of post-conflict rehabilitation. This sequence easily evokes an image of bright sunshine over a harmonious and prosperous community. Linearity provokes idealistic and normative thinking: the peace process is constructed up-stream according to visions that tend to be very general indeed (democracy, human rights, good governance). What such visions – most often put forward by external third parties – miss is that conflict parties may themselves be considering a series of options, may have hard choices to make and might not simply adhere to one externally imposed long-term objective, however “shiny” it may be. My personal experiences as a facilitator in Nepal between April 2005 and October 2007, and as the current Senior Adviser for Peace Building in Darfur for the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, have made me think differently about the relationship of linearity and complexity, which quite often implies circularity.

In this short essay in response to Norbert Ropers’ propositions for a systemic approach to conflict transformation (SCT), I will first touch on three aspects of systemic thinking which I see as the most important ones; namely, (a) bringing solutions to the problems; (b) acknowledging that systems are built by actors and not by abstract structures; and (c) underlining the crucial role of the individual in mediation. My main assumption is that in conflict transformation the ‘subject’ matters (in historical terms we may focus on ‘material structures’ – so-called root causes – but as a mediator this is not so). In a second step, I will then concentrate on the seven “emerging archetypes” which Ropers has developed against the Sri Lankan background. I will discuss whether and to what extent the seven archetypes apply in the Nepali context. For me, the “archetypes” resemble a three-dimensional pattern constituted by the individual behaviour of actors, by collective action in the light of specific perceptions and by the psychological dispositions of those involved. Keeping this pattern in mind, a comparison of the two cases (Sri Lanka and Nepal) may allow us to critically assess the value added of the systemic approach. Two questions have to be answered: What have we learned that we did not know before, and what have we learned to enrich the praxis of conflict transformation?

1. “Reading Ropers”: Three Cornerstones of Systemic Thinking

1.1 Bringing Solutions Closer to Problems

In contrast to the common “linear ideal” sketched out above, Ropers offers a different view. “Because of the complexity of causal interactions, of time delays and various in-built resistances, systems do not function in the way a linear expectation of ‘the more the better’ would assume” (Ropers 2008, 5). Certainly there is nothing new about complex approaches to conflict resolution. What is new about Ropers’ “system dynamics” is that he (together with a group of “likeminded” people at Berghof and elsewhere) breaks with the linear trinity of time, steps, and instruments we

normally find in *international* or *political* conflict transformation systems. Instead, he sheds light on the autonomous dynamic and self-reproduction of social systems (Luhmann's "*autopoiesis*"). What he aims at is not a new (macro) theory but rather a radical new practice informed by conceptual thinking. Making use of the chief institutions of any systemic thinking such as feedback loops, impact cycles, reflection on external intervention in a dynamic system and the like, he concentrates on adequate forms of visualisation and an illustration of (mental) models. In the context of SCT, interactive conflict mapping which involves conflict parties is a "systemic intervention" in itself. It mobilizes internal resources in a system, promotes inter-subjectivity and therefore mutual understanding and empathy. In SCT the solution is already contained in the problem and the problem is well reflected in the solution; e.g. if power sharing is at stake in a multicultural conflict arena, then the solution cannot ignore this but must reflect it in a certain set of concrete options (be it federalism or other means of devolution). This means that only through its practical application – and not through isolated reflection – systemic thinking is becoming real, is having an impact, or inserting an impulse-giving energy. It is "learning by doing" but in a structured, self-reflexive and conflict (systems) sensitive way. Ropers would not have been able to develop the concept we are discussing in this volume without his personal, practical, and long-lasting experience in the Sri Lankan conflict system.

1.2 Systems are Constituted by Many Actors, and Not Only by Those We Like

In "non-systemic" conflict resolution, various actors try to influence the system dynamics in a linear manner. Key issues and key actors are identified from the outside. The strategies they create are based on linear timelines. This holds true for both the conflict parties and the facilitators. Armed non-state actors, for instance, tend to have a very particular view about the internal dynamics of a system; they use armed violence in order to accelerate or change dynamics they may perceive as being too stable, or blocked by the conservatives. Third parties impact on a system they do not fully understand, by laying an inflexible structure over a complex and dynamic fabric: for example, by setting deadlines; by selecting participants for talks; by narrowing down the scope of negotiations; by putting pressure on one or all sides; by intervening with financial means or by imposing mediators who the conflict parties do not like. One of the worst practices in this regard is the linking of "pushes for peace" with third parties' own election calendars.

SCT is based on the assumption that the interests, needs and fears of all actors – including third parties – constitute the system. Negative expectations of the diplomatic community impact on a system as much as intra-party resistance or the stubbornness of individual leaders does. Referring to Ropers' clustering of elements of a systemic approach (Ropers 2008, 7), I dare say that for professional facilitators (from the ranks of the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, Berghof, Conciliation Resources, the Mediation Support Unit to the United Nations (UN / MSU), etc.) it is relatively easy to link up with and mobilize agents of peaceful change (cluster 4). Nor is it so very difficult to be creative in imagining alternative peaceful futures (cluster 5). Yet Ropers' cluster 3 – engaging with key stakeholders – has always proved to be a difficult one. Professional facilitators do have an impact on the system, but it is quite often biased and at the same time not sustainable. The main reason is that professional facilitators often exclusively engage civil society actors and intellectuals at Track 1.5 or 2 levels. However, as a Sudanese colleague aptly described it, "the SPLM [Sudanese People's Liberation Front] (in the South) did not fight for independency just to hand over to us intellectuals." Externally driven conflict transformation is also quite often like a *wadi* in the Sahel: when there is rain the *wadis* are full of water rushing downhill; as soon as the rains stop the *wadis* dry up.

It is imperative to understand that each one of the actors aims at shaping the system according to their own preferences. Armed rebels may wish to trigger a revolutionary change of the system's dynamics. Human rights activists may wish to promote a democratic transformation as part of the peace process. Conservatives, including regular armed forces, may not easily agree that peace should automatically lead to radical change; for them peace equals the cessation of hostilities, nothing more. Why should the powerful agree that peace is equal to revolution or democratic transformation which basically means undermining their very power base? In Nepal, the feudal elite in Kathmandu wanted an end to the Maoist violence; they did not want a Maoist revolution wiping them away along with their "feudal system". So each and every actor lives in a different system and it is hard for them to understand that they are part of one system which they constitute together. The plurality of visions and interests is the main and at the same time widely ignored challenge for any external impulse-giver. Therefore, the following questions are crucial: how can individuals from all constituencies be engaged in systemic conflict transformation? What are their preferences, options, needs and fears – but also what means are there for overcoming a given crisis or for mitigating collective stress?

1.3 In Mediation, the Individual Matters

If individuals matter, then the next question is who should participate in a peace process, who should third parties approach or trust, and who should be excluded and why? One of the main challenges for SCT is that third parties (conflict resolution experts and professional facilitators in particular) quite often lack access to some of the most powerful actors of the conflict parties. Normally the "primary parties" in a conflict system are tiny elites, intelligence officers, regular armed forces, and armed non-state actors or rebels who have gone underground. The main dilemma is that prime ministers, presidential advisers, army generals, field commanders, etc. do not often participate in conflict transformation seminars and interactive learning workshops. Many seminars reach out only to specific strata of the conflict parties. The tools developed for systemic changes only make sense, though, if they are applied in a process impacting on the systemic links as a whole.

How then to address this dilemma of inclusion? First of all, systemic tools and instruments are necessary components of a third party's intervention, but not sufficient ones. Individuality and subjectivity matter as much as systemic tools do. If SCT aims to engage individuals of all segments of the primary parties, facilitators have to establish excellent and respectful relations with key figures of all of them, no matter which party they come from or what they did in the past. Secondly, they may apply a long-term strategy and engage with key figures long before these have become part of a primary party. Thirdly, SCT facilitators may aim at enlarging the circle of those belonging to the primary parties through capacity-building, institution-building, etc. (as, for example, in Track 1.5 work). Fourthly, the third party has to reflect on its own role, mental models, analytical 'constructions', cultural biases and personal preferences, not least with regard to the chemistry in the relationship with key individuals. In Nepal, I succeeded in establishing excellent and also emotional relations with a relatively large group of people from all sides (including a close adviser to King Gyanendra). People must feel that you respect them; there is no such thing as 30% or 60% respect. If a facilitator does not have this personal capacity or wants to keep a distance (e.g. to people who have allegedly committed war crimes) because he or she is confusing mediation with advocacy, he or she will not be able to properly implement the tools and approaches of SCT.¹

A first lesson can be drawn from the discussion above: protracted conflicts call for

¹ However, mediators are bound by international law and should not hinder advocacy groups from doing a sound job in terms of monitoring, investigations, etc.

protracted peacebuilding. It is not sufficient to punctually kick off a meeting, organise one-off events, pay three-day visits, or try and impact on the system with only one or two minor impulses. Conflict transformation means the third party becoming part of the transformation as an actor. What is needed is not only a concept of the, as Ropers puts it, “self-reproducing character of protracted conflicts”; there is also a need for a concept of the self-reproducing character of peacebuilding and the means to transform it. For example, international actors who put pressure on the conflict parties may use the same conflict-reproducing pattern; a pattern which quite often undermines the process leading to consent about major issues.

2. Archetypes of Fragile Peace Processes – The Example of Nepal

In order to shed light on the value added of systemic conflict transformation, I will now undertake a comparison of “emerging archetypes” in Sri Lanka and in Nepal. One caveat should be placed before comparing experiences made in different contexts. It is, in my opinion, not the description of archetypes which distinguishes systemic from non-systemic approaches. What makes a difference is the way of addressing the archetypes, or the type of relations a third party has with those actors who are behind such emerging patterns. So the question is whether SCT offers concepts, instruments and tools that are better adapted (or adaptable) to the conflict context than non-systemic approaches. If the description of emerging archetypes is seen as a conflict analysis within SCT, then the challenge would be to establish such analysis together with exponents of the primary parties – as a first step to peaceful conflict transformation.

In the following I refer to the seven archetypes as described by Ropers in this volume (Ropers 2008, 21-25). Since this essay is a dialogue response to his reflections, I will not repeat his definitions/descriptions here.

(1) *‘Ethnic outbidding’* (Ropers 2008, 21) was not a prominent issue in the Nepali context. In countries with a multitude of ethnic and other identity groups (in Nepal there are more than 100), ethnic outbidding may not work the same way as in countries with two (dominant) groups struggling for power and/or territory. The Nepali conflict is very much a political-ideological system, dominated by political parties with membership all over the country. If there was an emerging archetype, it was rather that the parties were urged to fight for the ‘inclusion’ of marginalized groups. This became one of the most prominent issues during the peace process. Inclusion *de facto* meant that the parties co-opted some emerging political leaders of marginalized groups, while keeping more or less “mum” about social and political inclusion of marginalized groups as a whole (in Nepal there is a complex fabric of cast, ethnicity, religious and regional identity).

Whereas the main issue was therefore inclusion by means of overturning the feudal and highly centralized monarchy, there were some elements of ethnic outbidding. I would call this a secondary conflict: in the late nineties, the Maoists started to mobilize their constituencies along ethnic lines (Magar, Gurung, Tamang, Limbu, Rai, etc.) for opportunistic reasons. First, the Maoists started their rebellion in the rural Mid-Western hills (Rukum und Rolpa districts). Their mass base were farmers who belonged to one or the other identity group and cast. Although Maoist leaders tend to underscore that “we do believe in class and not in cast or ethnicity!”, they had no choice but to attract the rural poor by addressing grievances related to ethnic and cast marginalization. Since the Maoist central committee consisted mostly of high cast Brahmans, the rural poor were highly suspicious about the peace deal of Kathmandu and the interim constitution. Immediately after the

Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed, many groups felt they had been excluded from the Kathmandu elite peace deal, and raised their grievances both with the seven democratic parties and with the cadres of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), or CPN (M).

In February 2007, when the conflict in the lowlands of Terai escalated, the Madhesi (the main population group in Terai) opened up a new ethno-political front against the Kathmandu elite (or hill Brahmins). Initially all parties – including the Monarchists – tried to use the Madhesi upheaval to weaken the Maoist movement, which had some strongholds in (western) Terai; in particular Maoist splinters used the Terai “card” to fight against their previous mother party and to strengthen their position vis-à-vis the central government. So in fact, in Nepal, ethnicity was not a primary factor of intra-party obstruction, but rather an issue of inter-party fighting and propaganda.

(2) ‘*Mutual disappointment*’ (Ropers 2008, 22) and, consequently, a permanent crisis of trust was one of the main barriers in the Nepali peace process. In May 2005, when I started to shuttle between the political parties in Kathmandu and the Maoist leadership in India, there was tremendous mistrust between the leaders of both sides. This mistrust and real lack of confidence was based on bad experiences with each other related to the democratization process that had taken off in 1990/91. When the leaders of both sides finally – and following some confidence-building measures from my side – called each other on the phone, an incredibly dynamic process started to take shape. The 12-point understanding of 21 November 2005 – a kind of declaration of principles signed in Delhi – indicated that both sides had rising expectations about their joint capacities to end the direct rule of King Gyanendra (who took over executive power on 1 February 2005).

With the declaration of a unilateral ceasefire, the Maoists enabled the seven parties’ alliance to reach out to their constituencies in the districts, to take to the streets for political protests, to organise mass rallies and finally to mobilize the huge manifestations of more than a million people from 21 to 24 April 2006.

In the aftermath of the successful move against the King and the re-instating of the old House of Representatives (with G.P. Koirala as Prime Minister), the mutual disappointment slowly but steadily grew bigger again. In the euphoria of the peace rallies, both sides (democratic parties and Maoists) somehow naively overestimated the capability of the other side for real change. The Maoists somehow expected that the social democratic Congress Party would move leftwards and would automatically drop the constitutional monarchy from its programme. Leading Congress members of the “peace wing” were convinced that they could easily transform the ultra-left Maoists – once the cadres had begun to enjoy their life in the hundreds of bars in Kathmandu – to a “mainstream” parliamentary party. Of course, neither was the case. For both sides the peace deal was necessary to stop armed violence, to end the direct rule of the King and to jointly establish an interim government. There was no need and no will to change the ideology or the parties’ political programmes and strategies. The Maoists made it very clear that they would never go back to the jungle. But they also made it clear that democratic struggle is a continuation of the people’s war with different means. In their view, the constituent assembly – once elected – should be a platform for the people’s movement towards socialism. The Congress on the other hand was mainly interested in remaining the most important political party, appointing the Prime Minister and safeguarding some kind of ceremonial monarchy. With each agreement signed, disappointment increased: the Congress used its strong position in the interim parliament to grasp state power; the Maoists continued with extortion and even abduction. The newly founded Young Communist League in particular embarked on a dangerous kind of political hooliganism which urged the regular security forces to take action against elements of a political party in government.

However, in contrast to Sri Lanka, the Nepalese succeeded in managing their expectations as well as their disappointments. The peace process did not collapse. Maybe the Nepalese understood better than the international community that a step-by-step approach with a cascade of agreements is better adapted to the country's conflict culture than a comprehensive peace that deals with each and every issue at once. With the crisis of confidence after the signing of a new agreement, a new pattern emerged: despite public accusations about the other side's obstructive politics and non-implementation of the provisions, both sides engaged in internal (intra-party) discussions. After a period of strange silence, some leaders started to send signals and finally reached out to test the ground for confidential talks with the other side. New meetings were set up to deal with open questions or emergencies. This pattern reproduced itself again at least five times – while the rather nervous international community reproduced its generally pessimistic view about the peace process in Nepal. The successful elections of 10 April 2008 proved again that the Nepali political actors had been able to combine diverging interests in the system in order to avoid a deep crisis – if not breakdown – of the peace process.

(3) *'Avoiding core issues'* (Ropers 2008, 22). “Nothing is agreed on until everything is agreed on” – this quotation concerning the status negotiations of Kosovo is attributed to the Finnish peace diplomat Martti Ahtisaari. In Nepal this would not resonate. In fact, just the opposite was true. Avoiding core issues turned out to be the most important – and productive – archetype. As I mentioned (under (2) above) both sides engaged with a lot of political will and energy in a cascade of preliminary and interim agreements. Even the Comprehensive Peace Accord of 21 November 2006 was neither final nor comprehensive. The CPA was only the platform from which the main and final event ought to be launched. The core of everything, the future of Nepal, would be dealt with in a Constituent Assembly (CA). After 50 years of democratic fight against the monarchy, the CA became a national symbol for the solution of all problems of the entire nation and all individual Nepali citizens. Since the expectations of the CA and its revolutionary, democratic, and change capacities are extremely high and loaded with visions of *Shangri-La* (Nepal as paradise), the Nepalese themselves somehow fear the very moment when the CA starts its work. The political parties were afraid of a tremendous loss at the ballot box (and for some of them this proved to be justified). The path to the CA elections – postponed several times – was paved with obstacles and hurdles. The nearer the date came the more the Nepalese understood: once confronted with the reality of it, they would almost certainly face another disappointment. This is the pathological aspect. At the same time, the CA is a big chance. There is hardly any country on the globe that is happily engaged in an internally-driven peace process, of which the core is democratic change through a participatory constitutional process. The latter is also necessary because many of the core issues have only been dealt with at a very general level of principles. The “federal state restructuring” is one of these issues that need a lot more hard work, both politically as well as legally.

(4) *'Limits of bilateralism'* (Ropers 2008, 23) are evident in Nepal as well. Before April 2006, the conflict was triangular: monarchy – seven political parties – Maoists. With the political defeat of the King, the conflict became bipolarized. The triangle was still there, but the monarchists either kept quiet or acted clandestinely in the background. So the seven political parties' alliance on the one hand and the CPN (Maoist) on the other sat at the table. The table was constituted by two negotiation teams consisting of three representatives each. The two sides negotiated a comprehensive peace and an interim constitution in the name of all Nepali people and the country as a whole. The King was defeated, the monarchists were invisible and other groups and actors did not really count.

Civil society was subsumed either under the seven parties or under the Maoists.

However, the limits of this arrangement surfaced rather soon. I have already discussed the main issues under (1) ‘ethnic outbidding’. After the signing of the CPA and the endorsement of the interim constitution by the interim parliament, bilateralism came under heavy pressure from various sides. The birth of this problem is clearly linked with one politically explosive issue of high symbolic value: while the CPA was clear about decentralization and federal state restructuring, the same provision is not to be found in the interim constitution (although it was in one of the last drafts I checked). For many actors, this was a plot of the old hill Brahmans (including the Maoists) who do not really want to devolve power. So bilateralism – via the issue of federalism – triggered new bilateralism: there was no unified opposition that could have stood up against the bi-polar antagonists in the peace process. But many individual groups had learned from the Maoist movement how to get access to power and consequently copied their strategy. More and more groups formed which, under the name of a Madhesi people’s movement or “Cobra” or “Terai Tigers”, burnt tyres in order to be listened to by the government. The Minister for Peace and Reconstruction had more than 70 bilateral rounds of talks with different groups, including many serious political actors and powerful associations like the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities, the Madhesi Human Rights Forum, the Dalit Federation, Women’s Associations, etc.

Neither side wanted to open up the negotiation table for more groups. The Maoists basically refused to talk to some radical left wing and newly armed groups with former Maoist cadres as their leaders. Therefore, bilateralism heavily backfired. Until the election date of April 2008 the series of deadly actions, Terai *bandhas* (closures) and blockage of the only transport route to the capital Kathmandu did not end. Only at the end of February 2008 did the interim government and three main agitating Madhesi parties sign the first agreement that has a chance of being implemented; previous agreements signed by the peace minister were not taken seriously by either side.

A striking parallel concerning the limits of bilateralism is the CPA between the parties in North and South Sudan. Before it was signed by the National Congress Party (NCP) and the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) it triggered the deadly Darfur conflict in the West and the conflict in the Beja region in the East (as well as a range of further conflicts at a lower scale among pastoralist communities).

(5) ‘*Dilemmas of asymmetry*’ (Ropers 2008, 23) are related to the ‘limits of bilateralism’ and to questions of recognition. Peace processes are very much a struggle over and for recognition (cf. the Oslo process that led to the recognition of the Palestine Liberation Organization, PLO). At the moment when the seven political parties agreed to negotiate with the Maoists, they *de facto* recognized the CPN (M) as a political party on an equal footing. Both sides agreed to apply a one-to-one formula for the talks (two equally staffed delegations). This almost perfect symmetry was only jeopardized by the fact that the Maoists were not recognized by the US, since they were on their list of terrorist organisations.

With the power sharing agreement, the question of asymmetry came up again. Since the parties considered the conflict as having been solved, there was no need to apply the one-to-one formula any further. The seven parties’ alliance created the notion of “mainstreaming the Maoist party”, which basically equalled a 7 to 1 formula (for the interim institutions). Needless to say, this created the first and maybe most serious crisis of confidence. The Maoists threatened to initiate a new “peaceful movement” which in real terms was prepared as a kind of urban warfare. At the same time, new asymmetries emerged: in the ceasefire commission, the Nepal Army (previously the proud Royal Nepal Army) did not want to be compared with the Maoist People’s Army. When it comes to

issues of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) and Security Sector Reform (SSR) this very fact poses a lot of serious problems with risks even for the peace process as a whole.

The international community plays an extremely critical role in the question of asymmetry, in particular when it comes to UN security arrangements and guarantees. Country envoys, it seems, have a natural affiliation towards state actors, no matter how badly they behave (with some exceptions). They have serious problems recognizing armed non-state actors, let alone talking to them or building a relationship. In Nepal the Maoists complained weeks after they came to the surface and established their party offices in Kathmandu that almost no envoy paid them a visit. At the same time, diplomats were found almost daily at one of the receptions or tea parties organised by the Chief of Army staff, Ministers, or the King's secretariat (the latter basically stopped after 24 April 2006). Asymmetries and a lack of recognition are major stumbling blocks on the road to peace, be it in Nepal, Sri Lanka or elsewhere (e.g. Sudan).

(6) The last two emerging archetypes, namely '*repercussions of even-handedness*' and '*paradoxes of international safety nets*' (Ropers 2008, 24) do play a role in the Nepali context as well, but may not be so important, or at the forefront, as the other five archetypes. What was interesting about the repercussions of even-handedness was that the "balancing of criticism" or the attitude of promoting neutrality (and favouring "neither side") was quite superficial. The international community was politically correct in the regular press statements. However, behind the scenes and also in newspaper commentaries this balance often got lost, or was never even intended. The US envoy normally came down heavily on the Maoists whereas the King was only softly criticized for not reaching out to the political parties. Of course, those directly involved in the peace process – such as the UN – were more prudent. The local non-governmental organisations, in particular the human rights advocates and their international supporters, had a real problem with the regime change from the King to the political parties and Maoists. While all advocates and journalists were very outspoken about human rights violations during the direct rule of King Gyanendra (and welcomed the Swiss / European Union burden-sharing initiative in Geneva's Human Rights Commission, which led to a big mission of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, OHCHR) the same advocates did not really know how to address the human rights violations committed during the period of the interim government. They mainly feared disturbing the peace process and confronting the Maoists.

The international safety nets were maybe not as paradoxical as elsewhere. Nepal was basically a process driven by the Nepalese themselves. The United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) had a limited mandate focused on monitoring arms and troops, as well as on the ceasefire and on CA elections. UNMIN was not mandated to mediate or to set up a huge mission. India, as a big and dominant neighbour, played a crucial role which, however, was often neither clear nor visible. For sure, India was there and used its influence in many ways and at various levels. It is difficult to prove, but my impression was always that there was an invisible safety net that would hold. The Nepalese may refuse to admit it, but everybody was aware that in the worst case India would help. The close links between the Indian and the Nepal Army were a kind of insurance against free fall. Paradoxically, India always claimed not to interfere, knowing that Delhi is the only actor that would have the capacity to do so. India was also the force behind the refusal of a more comprehensive UN mission or a formal mediation through a third party other than India. The Nepalese, however, managed the situation quite well, applying a mix of attitudes like, "we do not need India or foreigners to solve our problems" against, "please help us to get things done in a proper way".

3. Systemic Conflict Transformation: The Added Value is in the Practice

Coming back to the questions set out in the beginning, I have to say that I did not learn anything I had not known before. However, I (and hopefully the readers) may be enabled to use knowledge based on experience in a much more structured way. Having said this, I concentrate my conclusions on the second question, which is also more important: what have we learned to enrich the praxis of conflict transformation? Some answers will be presented here; not in a “final sense” but rather to promote further discussions.

Three crucial general observations are:

- The value added of SCT is to be seen in practical terms; it is not about providing a new theory or creating a new school of conflict resolution. Emphasis should be on solutions next to problems in terms of systemic interventions – see the example of power sharing in a multicultural context (*Section 1.1*).
- Mobilizing internal resources and adding energy to the system are the main points of reference for SCT. There is an in-built scepticism on how changes in systems can be initiated and controlled from outside. The radical focus on narratives of the disputing parties constituting the system as individual actors urges a revision of current conflict transformation practices.
- It is not the description of archetypes as a sort of pattern which distinguishes the systemic from non-systemic approaches. What makes a difference is the way of addressing the archetypes, or the type of relations a third party has with the actors who are behind such patterns.

The value added of systemic conflict transformation can, in my opinion, therefore only be fully appreciated if it is tried and tested in practice, and thus experienced. Hence I would like to conclude my reflections by providing six personal lessons and experiences which I found important when addressing archetypes:

First, I am deeply convinced that the only way to cope with *ethnic outbidding* and ethno-politicization is to be as inclusive as possible. In practical terms: negotiation tables should reflect the complexity of the conflict lines among various actors. If conflict parties refuse to recognize certain actors, one has to develop concepts of sequencing and flexible geometry (with different types of participation) based on consent and transparency. Ethno-politicization in whatever form always has a true core. In SCT one has to explore this core at early stages of the process, in order to use internal energies to deal with it constructively.

Second, addressing *mutual disappointment*: if a third party has trustful relations to all sides it will be accepted in a role of holding the mirror, warning parties about elusive elements of the process and about shortcomings and illusions. In Nepal, I confronted both sides with a SWOT analysis of the 12-point understanding three days after it was signed.² Although the leaders did not like to be disillusioned at such an early stage of the post-agreement honeymoon, they soon learned that the analysis addressed those very points which would remain critical throughout the process.

Third, *avoiding core issues* can be a sound approach of conflict parties and negotiators in order to bridge gaps, circumvent blockages, provide common ground through creative ambiguity, etc. Both sides win time for intra-party consultations but also to deal with misunderstandings, lack

² A SWOT analysis systematically explores the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of a presented option or chosen course of action, drawing attention to potentially helpful and harmful factors of both internal and external origin.

of trust, and disappointments. In SCT one could use concepts of sequencing and of negotiation architectures to address the aspects of this archetype. Pre-talks and talks about talks can contribute to highlighting the process first, without entering into substantive talks. In Nepal, there was a kind of second track task force with the Peace Secretariat (later Ministry) which prepared some of the core issues well in advance. The parties could make use of non-papers, concepts, proposals, etc. when they saw it as being useful and adequate.

Fourth, one must have established good relations and the parties must understand how a facilitator really ticks before he or she can do anything meaningful to address *dilemmas of asymmetries*. Again, in SCT a third party only acts if and when internal resources are being mobilized. Asymmetry is usually deep-rooted due to perception, cultural pre-dispositions and psychological patterns. Dealing with asymmetries implies long-term strategies of empowerment for both sides, of capacity-building, and of dealing with the past. In SCT we can help to mitigate asymmetries through dialogue facilitation, feedback processes and joint interactive analysis. The problem of recognition can be solved through a clear concept of representation and participation. On Nepal, Switzerland organised a first seminar in February 2003 (during the ceasefire which ended in August of the same year), where all three conflict parties (the monarchy, democratic parties and Maoists) engaged for one day in an interactive “needs and fears mapping exercise”.

Fifth, how should the issue of *even-handedness* be addressed? I believe that a facilitator has to sharply distinguish between values and persons. A clear value orientation may help the conflict parties in their own orientation, as long as you respect individuals and as long as those individuals trust you. And why do they eventually come to trust (you as) a third party? Maybe because parties see, personified in you, the values that they want to live up to in the future. It is not about a general normative background; it is more about democratic processes and fair play. My experience is that if you have no personal value profile (in terms of ethics, human rights, democratic values) or if you pretend to be “balanced” or “a blank sheet” in this regard, conflict parties are left wondering why they should believe you and entrust you with a sensitive mandate that their future depends on.

Sixth and finally, in order to address *paradoxes of international safety* nets, a key lesson for third parties is to be clear and consistent in roles and capacities. In my experience the UN, as the major actor in peacebuilding and peacekeeping today, is collecting too many roles and mandates to be active in one single context. The spectrum reaches from prevention (through Special Envoys of the Secretary General) to protection and humanitarian aid, ceasefire monitoring, peacekeeping, technical advisory roles, facilitation and mediation, as well as implementation, including post-conflict rehabilitation in all its different aspects. This confusion of roles not only leads to coordination problems within the “UN family”, it also makes the UN highly vulnerable to pressure from different sides. It is high time for the UN and other international actors to assess their own capacities and to reconsider their support strategies and architecture.

4. Further Reading

- Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) 2008. *Swiss Peace Policy: Nepal*. Berne: FDFA.
- Ogura, Kiyoko 2008. *Seeking State Power. The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)*. (Berghof Transitions Series No. 3.) Berlin: Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management. Available at www.berghof-center.org/uploads/download/transitions_cpnm.pdf.
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- Ropers, Norbert 2008. Systemic Conflict Transformation: Reflections on the Conflict and Peace Process in Sri Lanka, in: Daniela Körppen, Beatrix Schmelzle and Oliver Wils (eds.). *A Systemic Approach to Conflict Transformation. Exploring Strengths and Limitations*. (Berghof Handbook Dialogue No. 6.) Berlin: Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management. Online version, available at www.berghof-handbook.net/uploads/download/dialogue6_ropers_lead.pdf.

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See also...

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The complete version includes the following articles:

- Daniela Körppen and Beatrix Schmelzle, *Introduction*
- Norbert Ropers, *Systemic Conflict Transformation: Reflections on the Conflict and Peace Process in Sri Lanka*

- Friedrich Glasl, *Enriching Conflict Diagnosis and Strategies for Social Change: A Closer Look at Conflict Dynamics*
- Günther Baechler, „Emerging Archetypes“: *A Comparison of Patterns of the Peace Processes in Sri Lanka and Nepal*
- Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu, *A Sri Lankan Perspective on Systemic Conflict Transformation*
- Dekha Ibrahim Abdi, *Working for Peace in Conflict Systems in Kenya: Addressing the Post-Election Crisis 2008*
- Dan Smith, *Systemic Conflict Transformation: Reflections on Utility*
- Norbert Ropers, *Perspectives for the Further Development of Systemic Conflict Transformation. A Concluding Reflection*

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