

**The Intersection between Anthropology, Drama, and Conflict Transformation:
A New Method for Research and Practice**

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Abstract

Conflict transformation practitioners working cross-culturally must acquaint themselves with new socio-cultural norms, languages, behaviors, and roles conveying information on approaches to and processes for dispute resolution and conflict transformation, in order to effectively manage or transform local conflicts. However, many socio-cultural groups embrace strict taboos involving the sharing of intimate information with outsiders, particularly with regard to heated conflict scenarios. These taboos leave conflict transformation researchers and practitioners at a loss for key information on local conflict and mechanisms for its transformation or management. This paper introduces a methodology for research and practice that offers a new understanding of and provides new opportunities for conflict transformation by exploring the intersection between anthropology and dramatic arts. Specifically, studying local dramatic arts provides new information about cultural resources for conflict transformation and contributes to the development of more effective and socio-culturally appropriate conflict transformation methodologies. Inspired by the elicitive approach to conflict transformation, this essay offers a practical model for generating data about conflict transformation practices, including socio-cultural processes for trust-building, dialogue, dispute resolution, forgiveness, and reconciliation, and for developing or enhancing mechanisms for conflict transformation and dispute resolution.

Keywords: anthropology, culture, dramatic performance, conflict transformation, research, practice

Introduction

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This paper introduces a methodology for research and practice that offers a new understanding of and provides new opportunities for conflict transformation by exploring the intersection between anthropology and dramatic arts. Specifically, studying local dramatic arts provides new information about cultural resources for conflict transformation and contributes to the development of more effective and socio-culturally appropriate conflict transformation methodologies. Inspired by the elicitive approach to conflict transformation, this essay offers a practical model for generating data about conflict transformation practices, including socio-cultural processes for trust-building, dialogue, dispute resolution, forgiveness, and reconciliation, and for developing or enhancing mechanisms for conflict transformation and dispute resolution.

This essay briefly introduces the different contributing fields of study, including dramatic performance, anthropology, and conflict transformation. First, the essay introduces the two key approaches to cross-cultural conflict transformation practice: the prescriptive and elicitive methods. Next, the paper highlights common elements between the elicitive method and the field of cultural anthropology. The paper then explores the presentation of conflict in dramatic performance, rendering conflict data more easily accessible for research. Finally, the paper offers a synthesis of key themes from each discipline and proposes a multidisciplinary methodology for research and practice. The paper concludes with suggested areas for application.

Conflict Transformation Theory – An Anthropological Perspective

The field of conflict transformation has experienced a renaissance in the past few decades. Conflict management, dispute resolution, human rights, and international justice have become popular fields for academic study. As these fields grow and gain increasing attention, academics and practitioners question and test older methods and modify them to accommodate more recent findings. Two main perspectives, the prescriptive and elicitive, dominate the field of conflict transformation. While these two approaches are theoretically distinct, most conflict transformation interventions integrate both to varying extents. Conflict transformation approaches can be said, therefore, to lie along a spectrum from the purely prescriptive to the purely elicitive.

Prescriptive approaches to conflict transformation and dispute resolution impose processes and outcomes developed primarily within western academic settings. Rather than consider disputes as unique within each cultural context, prescriptive approaches assume that western conflict values, such as face-to-face negotiations, rationality, direct articulation of concerns, suppression of hostile emotions, and notions of fairness, are universal. Within the prescriptive paradigm, practitioners are charged with

resolving disputes, relying on knowledge acquired through their education, training, or professional experience. Increasingly, conflict transformation researchers and practitioners are questioning the validity and appropriateness of the prescriptive paradigm. By assuming the universality of conflict behaviors, the prescriptive model and its underlying methods can, in practice, replicate the colonial experience, particularly in developing countries (Turner & Cheboud, 2000). These conflict transformation and dispute resolution practices and practitioners have been exported internationally to contend with a wide range of conflicts for which they are not well suited.

Kevin Avruch notes that these accepted practices for conflict management are based in the West, “in industrial or postindustrial societies, in bureaucratically organized states with formal judiciaries backed by coercive structures, in relations between organized labor and management, between corporations, between diplomats, among elites, among the middle classes, among the essentially empowered” (Avruch, 1991, p. 4). The politics of dominance and power have elevated a white, middle-class, academic theory of dispute resolution such that it is no longer considered a theory, but the theory. “The discourse of such a theory, which, conceptually speaking, is but one folk model among many, gets reified and elevated to the status of—if not a science then—an expert system” (Avruch, 1991, p. 5).

Recently, conflict transformation scholars and practitioners have proposed new, more inclusive and participatory methods, known as elicitive approaches to conflict transformation. Elicitive approaches rely on the experiences, wisdom, and knowledge of the disputants to create culturally relative, and therefore more locally appropriate, resolutions. The conflict transformation practitioner partners with the disputants and other stakeholders in the process of exploring mechanisms for conflict transformation and dispute resolution, fostering creativity and new discoveries. Ultimately, elicitive approaches may be more sustainable than their prescriptive counterparts because of the disputants’ participation in the design process, which increases their sense of ownership over outcomes. Furthermore, the stakeholders’ participation in elicitive approaches results in processes and outcomes that comply with the disputants’ shared socio-cultural norms, increasing the likelihood that resolutions and transformation mechanisms will be accepted and embraced by the community.

Elicitive approaches to conflict transformation are greatly aided by ethnographic data on indigenous approaches to conflict and processes for conflict transformation (Lederach, 1991). The discourse on dispute resolution and conflict transformation may be enhanced through qualitative research and analysis into the practices and methods used by cultural groups to transform interpersonal and intergroup conflicts. The study of cultural methods for conflict transformation supports international dispute resolution efforts by providing fresh insight into the range of cultural responses to conflict and contributing to the development of new culturally appropriate conflict transformation methodologies.

Anthropology of Conflict – Research Methods Design

Current anthropological research exploring cultural processes for conflict transformation is based on qualitative ethnography. A key premise for this research is the necessity of triangulating data - deriving information from three (or more) sources. Triangulation requires three sources of information about cultural values, perceptions, and behavior. One source of information is the ethnographer’s observations of behavior (i.e. what the informants *do*). The second source is comprised of informants’ testimonies of their own behaviors (i.e. what the informants *say they do*). The third source of information consists of

the informants' testimonies of culturally expected and/or accepted practices (i.e. what the informants *say they should do*).

One potential barrier to a qualitative study of the anthropology of conflict transformation is the presence of societal taboos, present to varying degrees in all societies, regarding conflicts and disputes. Many cultural groups prohibit or discourage open confrontation or public discussion of conflicts and disputes. For the purposes of this study, those groups with more extreme taboos will be referred to as "closed conflict" societies. In these closed conflict societies, ethnographers will experience difficulties as they endeavor to gather information about the nature of that group's disputes and processes for resolving them. The societal taboos are particularly detrimental to the triangulation of data for ethnographic research on conflict or conflict transformation. Societal taboos about conflict hinder ethnographers' abilities to triangulate data, as they are unlikely to observe disputes, elicit information from informants about disputes, or accurately interpret data regarding disputes outside the researcher's personal framework and schemas for conflict transformation.

In Erin Tran's early research into the dispute resolution mechanisms of minority ethnic peoples from Burma (Myanmar), informants typically reported in semi-structured interviews that they did not experience conflict or disputes. A naïve interpretation of this data is that the minority ethnic groups of Burma are peaceful cultures that have learned to coexist without conflict, a finding at odds with Burma's history of more than fifty years of interethnic warfare. Rather, as confirmed by further research, the data demonstrate the informants' feelings of shame associated with experiences of conflict, discomfort in discussing these experiences with others, and their tendency to avoid situations of conflict whenever possible. For example, members of the Karen cultural group are conditioned to practice "ah-nar-deh," or the use of indirect language, to avoid offending others and allow others to save face. Karens will assume great personal responsibility, including emotional and even physical pain, to prevent the discomfort of others. An interview with Naw Lu Baw, a Karen woman, revealed that, "children are taught not to fight, even if someone hurts you.... [They are] taught to deal with that pain. If someone hits you, don't hit back. Then you will only hurt once. If you hit back, then they will hit back, and you will hurt twice or more than that" (Baw, 2000).

F. K. Lehman describes this tendency as a paradox in neighboring Karenni culture, noting that the Karenni (Kayah) demonstrate a "preference in both theory and practice for compounding disputes and eschewing violence... In short, the general picture of peacefulness and communality is functionally complemented by a marked tendency for violence and lawlessness to ensue when control machinery breaks down" (Lehman, 1967, pp. 32-33). Lehman (1967) attributes this tendency to the Karenni necessity of appearing to be in agreement on all issues. "These pressures tend to bottle up violent emotions that may eventually erupt with all the more force. The very circumstance that ideology allows little place for personal aggression ensures that when it does occur it is likely to be almost uncontrollable" (p. 33). The lack of socially acceptable means of addressing community conflict can cause emotional pressures to build until violence results. Erin Tran noted this tendency among the Karen, as well. In an interview with Tran, a Karen woman noted, "...It's so difficult to argue. If you get mad enough, it's easier to pick up a gun and shoot someone than to argue with them" (Craig, 2000).

As demonstrated by these examples from Burma, an ethnographic study of approaches to conflict and mechanisms for conflict transformation can be hindered in communities that discourage open communication about sources and incidents of community tension and conflict. Informants may

deny that conflict exists, and it may be difficult for an outsider to interpret indirect speech, such as *ah-nar-deh*, used to disguise issues of disagreement. Violence, when it does erupt, may be far removed from its source, and the disputants themselves may find it difficult to reconstruct the chain of events. How can researchers overcome these barriers to explore dispute resolution processes in these closed conflict societies? When information about conflicts is divulged, how can a fieldworker appropriately guide the disputants to explore new opportunities for conflict transformation? If cultural norms for face-saving prevent individuals from openly discussing conflict, how can a conflict resolution practitioner elicit approaches to and opportunities for conflict transformation? To effectively address the obstacles posed by societal taboos related to conflict, the authors propose a new methodology based on drama theory.

Dramatic Performance

According to performance theorists and anthropologists, a society's public performances are mirror images of that society's values and ideologies. Performances, in all cultures, are stylized re-enactments of the social reality of the culture or group of individuals that they represent. By viewing a performance, an observer can successfully discern many underlying assumptions, manners, and behavioral norms. According to Victor Turner (1982), a leading theater anthropologist, the function of these rituals is to promote and preserve group solidarity. Ritual bonds all members of society together, through common recognition of re-enacted behavior. Indeed, public performances and rituals are filled with symbols and signs that all members of the community understand.

With theater serving as a mirror image, we may scrutinize our own cultural behaviors by watching them in performances. Barbara Myerhoff thus explains that cultural performances are "reflective in the sense of showing ourselves to ourselves. They are also capable of being reflexive, arousing consciousness of ourselves as we see ourselves. As heroes in our own dramas, we are made self-aware, conscious of our consciousness" (Myerhoff, 1992, p. 234). Through performance imitation, we can see ourselves from afar, in the third person, allowing us to evaluate ourselves.

Victor Turner develops the parallels between social dramas and theatrical performances or rituals in terms of the dramatic element in both. The drama in both fictive stories and social dramas is the performance of that which is intriguing, intensely emotional, and/or physically demanding. Indeed, both fictive and actual dramatic presentations, as seen in all cultures throughout the world, are based on intrigue -- conflict is what makes performance dramatic. Whether in public performance or as a real-life event or situation, drama is defined by intense and gripping excitement based on startling or impressive events. The conflict is what makes these situations riveting and compelling. It is only those activities, situations, and interactions that are intriguing that may be described as dramatic. Thus, in order to be considered a "dramatic performance," the audience and performers alike must focus on scenarios of conflict.

Based on this concept, Victor Turner (1982) focuses his anthropological study of performance on common, everyday dramatic events or "social dramas." Turner explains that observing these dramatic social situations provides information about cultural approaches to conflict management and social change. He defines social drama as, "an objectively isolable sequence of social interactions of a conflictive, competitive, or agonistic type" (Turner, 1982, p. 33). These social dramas belie the "social-structural, political, psychological, philosophical, and, sometimes, theological perspectives of

the narrators” (Turner, 1982, p. 33). In short, Turner focuses on dramatic social situations as sources of information on local conflicts and perspectives in dealing with them.

By viewing a social drama, one witnesses that group’s approaches to conflicts and breaches in accordance with accepted social norms. Turner (1982) notes that performances, as mirror images of society, enable the observers to see their own dramatic conflicts from this new perspective. He further states that “this proximity of theater to life, while remaining a mirror distance from it, makes of it the form best fitted to comment or ‘meta-comment’ on conflict, for life is conflict, of which contest is only a species” (Turner, 1982, p. 105). Based on this theory, Turner (1982) develops his idea of the social drama as comprised of four stages: the initial social breach, a subsequent crisis, application of redressive or remedial procedures, and finally a reintegration or recognition and legitimating of an irreparable schism.

These four stages are based on someone or something breaking from the norm, being transformed through stages of change, and finally being reintegrated or recognized. The initial breach is essentially the source conflict, and the redressive actions and ultimate decision of whether or not to reintegrate reflect the established conflict management mechanisms. But what is particularly interesting about crises and conflicts, and why are these the sources of intrigue and dramatic performance?

Turner (1982) defines the root of social performances and their theatrical counterparts as “liminality.” This term involves a “betwixt and between” state: being neither in nor out of social spheres. In public performances and dramatic stories, the liminality is the key to the tension in the performance. For example, in the popular story of Cinderella, the intrigue is based on Cinderella’s role-change and transformation from slave to princess. In social interactions, the tensions in rites of passage are equally intriguing. A girl who becomes engaged goes through a liminal stage, where she is not yet a wife, yet she is no longer single. The excitement in the culminating wedding celebration comes from the tensions of the liminal period: the wonder and new expectations involved in changing roles. These emotions and tensions are interesting both to experience as a participant and to watch as an observer. A wedding is exciting not only for the “actors” (the bride, groom, etc.), but also for those invited (the friends and relatives who come to watch and enjoy the festivities).

Richard Schechner (1977), in his *Essays on Performance Theory*, defines theater in terms of “transformation,” rather than liminality. Although these terms are in many ways synonymous, Schechner’s word choice involves a general change not only of the parties directly involved in the role-change, but of the society as a whole. Certainly, when an individual who has been in a liminal stage is reintegrated into the community, all of the role-interactions involved are transformed. Schechner (1977) points out that everyone, not just those directly changing roles, is affected by social dramas and liminal states. He notes that “Turner locates the essential drama in conflict and conflict resolution. I locate it in transformation—in using theater as a way to experiment with, act out, and ratify change” (Schechner, 1977, p. 123). While Turner focuses on the conflict between parties, Schechner takes a step back to look at social change on the larger scale.

The basic foundation for theater anthropology is the focus on drama and conflict, essentially synonymous terms. That which is dramatic inherently involves conflict and vice versa. Thus, if one observes the fictive dramatic performances of a culture or group, one essentially observes conflicts relevant to that socio-cultural context. The way in which the performers treat the conflict/drama is the culturally prescribed and appropriate manner for addressing non-fictive conflicts as well. As such, careful observation and use of performance material may provide information about conflict and transformation opportunities.

Dramatic Performance and the Anthropology of Conflict Transformation

Dramatic performance may provide opportunities to explore approaches to conflict and mechanisms for conflict transformation in closed conflict cultural groups. As noted by Turner and Schechner, fictive dramatic presentations mirror real life situations, and may be used to display publicly what otherwise would be concealed. Dramatic performance depersonalizes conflict, enabling individuals who would be uncomfortable discussing conflict to explain an observed dispute and its potential or actual resolution(s) more securely from a third-person perspective. Additionally, as noted previously, dramatic rituals preserve group solidarity, counteracting divisive elements of the conflict.

Though dramatic performance provides informants with sufficient emotional distance that taboo topics may be discussed openly, the data generated remains grounded in the reality of the cultural group. Central to Turner's (1988) social dramas is the theory that the drama is "rooted in social reality, not imposed upon it" (p. 37). The conflict and its transformation specifically reflect the social norms of that particular society. Myerhoff (1992) supports this theory and notes that public performances can also serve to bring the secretive into public view. She notes that "when such performances are successful... the invisible world is made manifest, whether this is a prosaic affair such as demonstrating the fact of a rearranged social relationship, or a grander more mysterious presentation involving supernatural beings or principles" (Myerhoff, 1992, p. 234). Indeed, viewing a specific group's dramatic presentation of itself will give the researcher a magnified view of the group's disputes and mechanisms for conflict transformation.

Meyerhoff (1992) further contends that since dramatic performances "are intentionally designed, they are not only reflections of 'what is'; they are also opportunities to write history as it should be or should have been, demonstrating a culture's notion of propriety and sense" (pp. 233-234). When supplemented with interview data, dramatic performance, then, will provide researchers with insight not only into what informants say they do, but also with a close approximation of what they actually do and what they believe they should do (or should have done), thereby aiding with data triangulation.

Dramatic performance, therefore, is a key ingredient in the new merger of anthropology and conflict transformation. Serving as a useful resource for studying cultural approaches to conflict and processes for conflict transformation, dramatic performance provides researchers with the information necessary for triangulating data even in closed conflict societies. Disputants in closed-conflict societies need not openly share their opinions, concerns, or reflections on actual events and may instead provide data through fictive dramatic scenarios. Furthermore, the cultural data obtained from dramatic performance can contribute to the design of elicitive conflict transformation interventions. For example, by understanding the practice of *ah-nar-deh*, which serves as a mechanism for the prevention of disputes in Karen culture, conflict transformation practitioners can collaborate with Karens to design resolutions or transformation mechanisms that appreciate and are appropriate for Karen culture. Disputants can also work through the processes of agreement building or reconciliation using informal, improvisational dramatic performance, thus preserving social taboos and face-saving mechanisms. Ultimately, dramatic performance can be used more formally to alter perspectives of conflict within a culture, as a prescriptive application of this theoretical development.

Applications for Ethnographic Research

While multidisciplinary collaboration among the fields of anthropology, conflict transformation, and dramatic performance is theoretically interesting, the real significance of this approach lies in its potential contribution to conflict transformation research and practice. This model therefore applies principles of dramatic performance to ethnographic research of approaches to and mechanisms for conflict transformation. The model also provides tools that use dramatic performance for elicitive conflict transformation practice.

Chart 1 illustrates the range of applications for conflict transformation research (section I) and practice (section II). As the theory is intended to aid in information generation and the creation or enhancement of conflict transformation mechanisms, researchers and practitioners may choose to move backwards, forwards, or circularly within the model. Indeed, each application may serve different socio-cultural climates to varying degrees and in different orders. This flow chart is presented as such for purposes of logical organization, rather than prescribed chronology. Moreover, the authors encourage each individual researcher/practitioner to consider which applications are appropriate and when they should be applied. In the following sections, each application is explained in terms of its use and value for conflict transformation research and practice.

Ethnographic research using formal or public performances

Ethnographers can draw new information about cultural approaches to conflict and mechanisms for conflict transformation from formal or public dramatic presentations (see chart, part A). The plots reflect socio-cultural attitudes and behaviors involving conflict and its management. Some potential applications include:

- *Researching existing myths, fairy tales, folk tales, and popular stories (see chart, part C)*

A society's myths and stories convey social messages and are based on at least one dramatic conflict. The underlying socio-cultural attitudes about conflict thus will be apparent in these stories. Moreover, the ultimate resolution of a story will inform ethnographers and practitioners, helping them understand that particular society's perceptions of conflict transformation.

Example: The story of Jack and the Beanstalk conveys to outsiders conflicts involving: parent/child relations, fair trade and market practices, social mobility, and economic depression. Resolution within the story includes: adopting new social roles, growth and change in family structure, alternative paths to economic success, and attitude transformation about social roles and norms.

- *Observing public performances and dramatic rituals (see chart, parts D & E)*

Since public performances act as a cultural mirror, observing these performances and rituals offers researchers and practitioners the opportunity to observe social workings and norms indirectly. More important, that which people would not disclose in the first person (i.e. through personal, actual stories) may be disclosed in these impersonal, third-person, fictive public performances.

Example: The play, *Taming of the Shrew*, reflects cultural attitudes toward courting practices and marriage, male/female behavior and duties, father/daughter relationships, and romantic relationships and roles. If one were to inquire about actual, non-fictive breaches involving these issues, informants

may be uncomfortable or reluctant to engage in open discussion. These issues, however, can be observed clearly in an impersonal public performance.

Ethnographic research using informal or private performances

In addition to gleaning data from formal and public performances, researchers can extract information from informal or privately elicited dramatic presentations (see chart, part B). Researchers can use these informal, often impromptu performances to:

- *Elicit information about conflict transformation processes*

Pairs or small groups of informants may enact a fictive scenario of a potential conflict suggested by the researchers, assuming roles within that scenario and acting out the situation from the breach through the transformation process to the disputants' reintegration or reconciliation (see chart, part F). For example, a researcher may ask two adults to enact a scenario in which both claim ownership of a particular farm animal. By observing the performers' response to the fictive dispute, the researcher can formulate hypotheses of appropriate local mechanisms for addressing possession disputes.

Informants may be uncomfortable engaging in a performance of even a fictive scenario if they believe they may be subject to criticism resulting from their enacted response to the dispute. They may also resist performing particularly controversial roles, even in fictive performances. In these cases, it may be beneficial for the researcher to ask the performers to assume different roles, therefore enacting another person's response to the fictive scenario (see chart, part G). For instance, in the example above, the adults could instead be asked to enact a scenario in which two children are fighting over a particular toy. This new scenario still would provide information about communal responses to property disputes, but the roles now would be sufficiently removed from the actual roles of the performers so as to prevent discomfort and anxiety in a closed conflict culture.

- *Probe for informants' evaluation of conflict transformation processes (see chart, part H)*

Researchers can use dramatic performance as a tool for eliciting informants' judgments about mechanisms for dispute resolution with which they are familiar. For example, researchers could ask the informants to identify and re-enact either a real or fictive dispute that they believe was resolved poorly or particularly well. The performers can use their dramatic presentation to demonstrate their attitudes and concerns about the dispute resolution process or outcome and brainstorm alternative, perhaps more satisfactory mechanisms for addressing the dispute.

The researcher also can suggest intervention strategies (for example, "show me what would happen if the village elders tried to resolve this conflict"), in order to elicit the informants' perceptions about the likelihood of appropriate, sustainable resolution with each possible strategy.

Supplementing performance data with interviews

Ethnographers may wish to enhance the research applications of this theory with interviews to elicit additional information and interpretations from the informants (see chart, part I). The informants may be interviewed following a formal dramatic performance or in response to an informal, private dramatic presentation by the informants or their peers. In particular, interviewers may inquire:

- What is/are the conflict(s) observed? Informants identify and evaluate the "breach" and situations of

liminality in the context of the community.

- Has the informant or someone s/he knows experienced this type of conflict? Researchers identify how realistic this conflict is, i.e. in what ways and how often it is experienced in the community.
- How is this type of conflict typically managed? Informant relates the management process and probable outcomes from his or her cultural context.
- Is the informant satisfied with this process for resolving disputes of this type? Why or why not? Informant evaluates the dispute resolution process.
- Is the informant satisfied with the outcomes that result when disputes are resolved in this manner? Why or why not? Informant evaluates the likely outcomes that result from the dispute resolution strategy.
- How does the informant think this type of dispute should be resolved, when it occurs within his or her community? Informant suggests preferred processes and outcomes for resolving such disputes within his/her community.
- Of what other examples of conflict is the informant aware? Interviewer probes for other examples of breaches.

In addition to standard semi-structured interviews, using questions such as those presented above, researchers can use dramatic performance to elicit additional information from the informants. By way of illustration, researchers can alter the story line of an observed performance and ask the informants to enact it. After a performance of Cinderella, for example, researchers could ask informants to re-enact the story such that Cinderella has male, rather than female, stepsiblings. Exercises such as this one will enable the ethnographer to explore the ways in which changing the disputants' ages, genders, or social positions affects the range of possible outcomes. Moreover, the ethnographer can interpret from these creative exercises many elements of role-dynamics and learn how changing roles alters the relationship between actors.

Applications for Conflict Transformation Practice

Dramatic performance also can be used to improve the design and delivery of mechanisms for conflict transformation and dispute resolution. In particular, conflict transformation practitioners can use dramatic presentations to:

Help disputants and other stakeholders see other perspectives (see chart, part W)

Dramatic performance provides a useful tool for helping communities gain perspective. For example, role reversal performances can be used to help disputants see each other's perspective. Husband and wife could, for instance, be asked to re-enact a dispute with the husband playing the wife and vice versa. Similarly, villagers could be asked to play the role of militia members, returning to villages where they have committed violent acts of war, as part of a post-war reconciliation program.

The examples provided above illustrate informal, private applications of dramatic performance designed to increase awareness of alternative perspectives. However, dramatic performance also can be applied formally and publicly to achieve these ends. There is a long tradition of theatrical performances used to alter the public's perceptions about a conflict or dispute. For example, *The Laramie Project* (Kaufman & Tectonic Theater Project, 2001) was written and produced in order to foster understanding

of the murder of a homosexual man in Laramie, Wyoming, including the acts that led to the murder and reactions to the incident. In performing their roles, the actors present to the audience a variety of differing perceptions, values, and beliefs held by members of the community in Laramie.

Probe disputants and community members for possible solutions or opportunities for transformation (see chart, part X)

Rather than prescribing solutions based on their personal experiences and training, conflict transformation practitioners can use information obtained from dramatic performances to design resolutions that will maintain the existing socio-cultural norms for conflict transformation. By maintaining rather than challenging these norms, the resolution will be more readily accepted and integrated into the community's social framework. Externally imposed "resolutions" that ignore traditional and local social processes are less likely to have a lasting impact on the disputants.

Propose solutions based on redressive actions observed in the group's social dramas and performances (see chart, part Y)

Should probing prove inefficient or ineffective, the practitioner may propose solutions based on his/her perceptions of acceptable measures, according to the social norms and practices observed in formal or informal dramatic presentations. While the authors encourage probing rather than informed-proposition, this may prove difficult or impossible in more rigidly closed societies.

For example, a conflict transformation practitioner may observe a dispute prevention mechanism, such as *ah-nar-deh*, utilized in Burmese Pyu operas. If the community resists involvement in the design of culturally appropriate conflict transformation mechanisms and requests external intervention, the practitioner could design a conflict transformation mechanism that utilizes *ah-nar-deh* to reduce community tensions and promote reconciliation. In this case, the practitioner extends a cultural practice beyond its normal application (dispute prevention), in order to serve other aspects of conflict transformation (reconciliation and the reduction of hostilities). Though the conflict transformation methodology is technically prescriptive, it does take advantage of cultural capacities for conflict transformation and is, therefore, more likely to be sustained by the community.

Evaluate the desirability and sustainability of proposed resolutions or mechanisms for conflict transformation (see chart, part Z)

Role-plays or other informal dramatic performances can help evaluate proposed resolutions or conflict transformation mechanisms. When disputants believe they have achieved a sustainable resolution, practitioners can enact various scenarios designed to test the agreement's durability and comprehensiveness. For example, if two neighbors agree to resolve a boundary dispute by sharing the property claimed by both, the conflict transformation practitioner can test the durability of the agreement by asking the disputant to enact scenarios involving potential weaknesses in the agreement.

Practitioners alternatively can assess a new dispute resolution mechanism by acting out a variety of disputes and evaluating the mechanism's ability to address them satisfactorily. For example, a village may decide to elect an ombudsperson to resolve disputes within the community. In this instance, the conflict resolution practitioner could ask a member of the community to play the role of ombudsperson, and other informants could act out potential disputes the ombudsperson may be expected to address.

The community then could use data generated during the role-plays to evaluate and refine the conflict transformation mechanism.

In these instances, dramatic performance would provide a safe space for evaluating proposed resolutions and conflict transformation mechanisms before they actually are implemented.

Conclusion

This article has introduced and illustrated opportunities for research and practice in conflict transformation, based on the combination of cultural anthropological research methods and principles of drama theory. By using the theory that drama is synonymous with conflict, one may use fictive and non-fictive dramatic performance as a means to both probe for underlying conflicts in a closed society, as well as to creatively explore opportunities for dispute resolution. The application of this theory leads to more elicitive approaches for transforming cross-cultural conflict, creating more sustainable, culturally contextualized outcomes in conflict transformation and dispute resolution.

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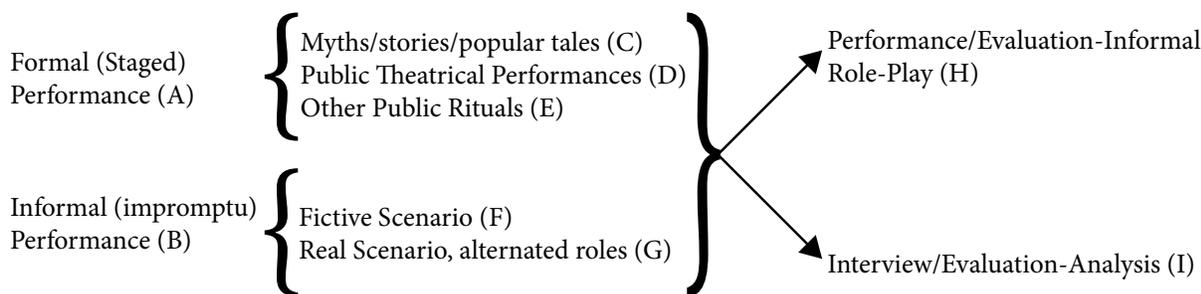
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CHART I

I. Information-Gathering



II. Transformation Practice

