

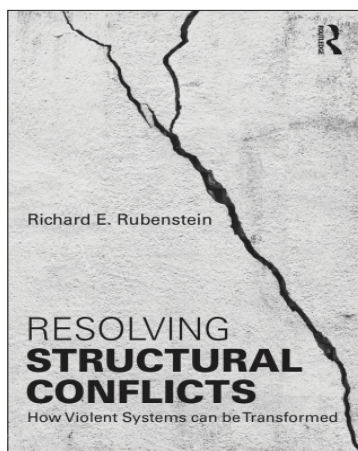
# S-CAR News

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CONFLICT ANALYSIS  
AND RESOLUTION  
George Mason University

## The Advent of Donald Trump and the Need for Structural Conflict Resolution

By Richard Rubenstein, University Professor of Conflict Resolution and Public Affairs, rrubenst@gmu.edu

The election of Donald Trump as president was a product of four decades of American system failure. Beginning in the 1970s, vast areas of the country de-industrialized, wages stagnated, inequalities of wealth and income soared, and poverty or near-poverty became endemic. So did criminal activity, police violence, substance abuse, mental illness, community decay, and other ills associated with socioeconomic stagnation and decline. Family and communal bonds frayed under the pressure. Public schools became increasingly dysfunctional. In politics, the



Book: *Resolving Structural Conflicts: How Systems Can Be Transformed*.  
Image: Routledge.

two-party system produced little more than partisanship, gridlock, endless foreign wars, and a bureaucracy dedicated to serving favored interest groups. Americans insecure about their declining status felt threatened by the slippage of their influence abroad and changing mores and multiculturalism at home. Discontent finally reached the point that workers and middle class people long associated with the Democratic Party in key states like Michigan, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Wisconsin, and Florida abandoned the Democrats in

sufficient numbers to hand a new type of Republican – the nationalist/populist Donald Trump – a presidential victory.

In my view, the new President's personality and governing style are not the primary problems. A system in trouble – a sociopolitical structure that regularly produces shattered hopes and civil violence – must concern us even more. In a recent book (*Resolving Structural Conflicts: How Violent Systems Can Be Transformed*, Routledge, 2017), I argue that the alternative to systemic criticism and change is partisan moralism – a type of thinking that blames all of one's social and political problems on the other side's personal defects.

For example, many anti-Trump activists blame the loss of the 2016 election on foreigners (Vladimir Putin, in particular), domestic racists and other misguided “deplorables,” Hillary Clinton's lack of charisma, and the arrogance of the anti-Clinton Left. Since his inauguration, the President's belligerent rhetoric and behavior have tempted opponents to counter-attack in kind. Yet playing the personalist game leaves the country very close to where it was in November 2016 – divided roughly 50/50, with at least half the nation aggrieved and alienated by the results of system failure.

Certainly, if the new regime's policies and actions threaten vulnerable groups, whether immigrants, Muslims, people of color, or sexual minorities, opponents must prepare to resist, if necessary by participating in acts of civil disobedience.

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COMMENTARY

# Johannes Melchior Botes (1952 - 2017)

By Christopher Mitchell, Professor Emeritus of Conflict Analysis and Resolution, cmitchel@gmu.edu

Jannie Botes and I arrived at CCAR – as it was then – at more or less the same time, in the autumn of 1988. I came as a newly appointed faculty to help teach on the doctoral program which was just starting up at George Mason University. Jannie came as one of that first cohort of students to study for the degree and so was a member of an astonishingly varied and accomplished group of 8 people, most of whom had careers behind them and were looking for a change and a challenge.

In Jannie's case, as I very rapidly learned, he probably knew more, more directly and for longer about social cleavages and intractable conflicts that I did. He was an Afrikaaner South African who had worked for the South African Broadcasting Corporation, both in sound radio and then as a television planner and presenter, and had increasingly found the political constraints placed on journalists by the apartheid government of the day to be intolerable – and antithetical to the practice of any kind of independent journalism. So, he had come to the USA as the local representative of the SABC and, in looking around for an interesting higher degree [he already had two South African degrees from the prestigious Afrikaaner university in Stellenbosch] had happened upon this odd new centre and degree at GMU.

Jannie never forgot that he was by trade firstly a journalist and by background an Afrikaaner – a white African. He never lost his interest in the countries of that continent and particularly in his own country, for which he always wanted the best and had hopes for some resolution of its many conflicts. His pleasure in the legalization of the ANC, the release of Nelson Mandela and the other ANC leaders, and the transition towards the Rainbow Nation there was profound. It was made more so by the fact that one of his old professors at Stellenbosch had participated in some of the crucial Track Two discussions that had been held in secret in England and which had contributed significantly to the breakthrough leading to the ending of apartheid.

My wife and I went with him on one of his last trips back to South Africa, when he had truly settled down with Susan and his family in Fairfax to become an immigrant American, and it was clear to us that this was – for him – a journey of reminiscence. He took us round to all his old haunts - as a student, as a young journalist, as a television presenter - and puzzled us no end by asking everywhere we ate for snoek – a boney, inedible



Johannes Melchior Botes (1952 - 2017)

Photo: University of Baltimore CPA Blog.

South African fish rejected even by the hungry British just after the Second World War when presented as a “tasty” source of protein. It was a part of his roots.

Jannie never forgot his television roots either. He was always very annoyed at the faculty and staff of CCAR and ICAR for their not having troubled to make any kind of pictorial record of the early years of the M.S. and Ph.D. programs and for there being no systematic effort to record what happened to our graduates when they went out into the conflict-ridden world and grappled – as they did - with its problems and pains. In 2002, when he had finally graduated – I think he still holds the record for the longest Ph.D.

ever undertaken at ICAR [he was always busy on something else] - and was teaching up at Baltimore University – he came to me and suggested that we really ought to interview and record the views of that first, pioneering generation of conflict and peace researchers who were rapidly aging and becoming mere names to the next generations entering the field. Fortunately, I had the sense to agree that this was a good idea and should be done, but it took me a while to realize that this was Jannie, the TV journalist, still at work and not just Jannie the conflict researcher. At all events, this started a ten-year period of travels with a cine camera throughout North America, Europe, Scandinavia and – eventually – South Africa, interviewing as many of this pioneering generation as possible. After that, came the business of editing, cutting, adding to and introducing each interview – all on a financial shoestring, and all in the interstices of teaching, writing, and – in Jannie's case – directing a new teaching program at the University of Baltimore.

Again, fortunately we managed, with Paul Snodgrass' help, to finish off the project - originally intended to involve 15 interviews but ending up with 40 – before Jannie finally succumbed to the last stages of the ALS he tragically contracted in 2015. The “Parents of the Field” interviews thus form Jannie Botes' final gift to the field he joined in mid-career in the late 1980s, and then became himself one of the next generation of “parents” through his own contribution and his work in recording the work and ideas of others. Looking back, I was honored to be part of this work and realize that the autumn of 1988 was the start of a time with Jannie as first my student, then my colleague, and always my friend.

I will miss him.

– Chris Mitchell ■

# Promoting Inter-Ethnic and Inter-Religious Dialogue in Iraq

By Cynthia Nassif, PhD Student, [cnessif2@masonlive.gmu.edu](mailto:cnessif2@masonlive.gmu.edu)

Iraq has long been affected by political turmoil, the most recent being the invasion of the Islamic State, who have been oppressing the local population and most importantly non-Muslim minorities and other ethnic and religious groups. As a result, people have been forced to flee their homes and towns looking for a safer shelter for themselves and their families.

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) has been highly affected by the displacement crisis. Other cities in Iraq have also received a high percentage of internally displaced persons from Mosul and Kirkuk (Shia'a and Turkuman) as well as Najaf, Karbala, and Babil provinces.

In response to the alarming situation in Iraq, civil society organizations along with non-governmental organizations are working on various projects to develop local capacities and to address the conflict and related issues. Their aim is to strategically contribute to peace and security in Iraq and the region as a whole. Youth and academics have been targeted as key stakeholders in the Iraqi social fabric and are seen as instrumental in strengthening social cohesion and promoting civil society initiatives and dialogue between various ethnic and religious groups. The emergence of a sustainable culture of dialogue and peace education promotes diversity and conflict transformation.

For that purpose, the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding at Eastern Mennonite University (Harrisonburg, Virginia) partnered with Iraqi al-Amal Association with the intention of strengthening social cohesion among the internally displaced population and host communities particularly in Najaf and in all of Iraq as an end result. Internally displaced persons and the host community youth in Najaf Province will initiate peace interventions to promote peace conditions through multiple projects addressing inter and intra-communal divisions. These projects will be funded by a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) grant. In Najaf, Kufa University is the main partner for Iraqi al-Amal Association, which is supporting the development of connections among youth from different ethnic and religious groups, with Eastern Mennonite University playing an advisory role.

In preparation for such a tedious job in a highly volatile context, Alma Abdul-hadi Jadallah (Adjunct Professor of Conflict Resolution at George Mason University, President and Managing Director of Kommon Denominator, Inc.) along with two S-CAR



Cynthia Nassif.  
Photo: S-CAR.

doctoral students (Cynthia Nassif from Lebanon (2016 cohort) and Najla Magnoush from Libya (2015 cohort)) and Ahmad Tarik (Iraqi alumnus of EMU's graduate program in Conflict Transformation), have worked on designing workshops on conflict resolution in Arabic for both youths and academics.

Dr. Jadallah personally travels to Iraq to facilitate around six workshops with local partners, whereas the rest of the team works on project design and proposal evaluations for youth projects to be implemented by the end of June 2017.

Youths are then coached and mentored throughout the process learning how to design a project, seek funding, and implement a project that will then be evaluated. Academics who undertook this

workshop will also seek to integrate those learnings in their teaching.

The goal of this project is for participants to gain knowledge in conflict resolution and peacebuilding and to develop their capacity to be involved and to initiate peace interventions that are sustainable for peace in Iraq through universities and youth platforms.

This project is hopefully the beginning of a partnership that will continue to grow and develop. It brought together a team of professionals from the Middle East some living abroad and some living in Iraq itself. With ripple effects, we hope that this project will contribute to the broadening of perspectives of youths and academics taking this workshop as well as support host communities and those internally displaced to promote a culture of diversity and tolerance through dialogue and peace education. ■

## Conflict Resolution Youth Summit

July 17, 2017 - July 21, 2017

Delve into today's toughest problems this summer at the Conflict Resolution Youth Summit (CRYS). The CR Youth Summit is a summer program for high school students in the District Metropolitan area that explores: Social and Political Action, Global Engagement, Justice & Reconciliation, Collaborative Leadership, and Interpersonal Dynamics.

Priority Application Deadline: April 3, 2017.

Apply at: <http://conflictresolutionyouthsummit.weebly.com>

initiative

# Zuela - A New Political Network Mobile App

By Kwaw de Graft-Johnson, Newsletter Editor and PhD Candidate, [kdegraft@masonlive.gmu.edu](mailto:kdegraft@masonlive.gmu.edu)

**O**n Friday, February 24, 2017, Friends of Angola, an NGO founded by MS alumnus Florindo Chivucute, held a presentation at S-CAR to present on their newest project - a mobile application with the aim of promoting political engagement and good governance between civil society, especially the youth, and their respective governments.

According to Chivucute, the inspiration for this mobile application came about after he came across an article published by the Huffington Post, in which researchers found out that only 26 percent of eligible young voters turned out to vote during the 2014 midterm elections in the United States. These statistics were quite worrying for Florindo and after conducting some more research, he realized that there was a similar trend in other countries. "I was appalled to learn that in 2014 in South Africa only about 8.4 percent of eligible voters between the ages of 18-19 and less than 50 percent between 20-29 had registered to vote," Chivucute said.

Chivucute also cited a 2014 BBC research, which found that in the United Kingdom the younger generation electorate were becoming increasingly disengaged with the democratic system, but they were still very passionate about political issues that would affect them such as poverty, unemployment, and lower levels of wealth and personal income, race debates, and human rights issues among others. According to Hanna Yamir, an S-CAR alumna and staff member of Friends of Angola, "The real issue here is that individuals, especially the youth seem to have lost their confidence in their elected

officials to bring about the change that they wanted and as such had stopped interacting with their respective political systems as they should."

Zuela, the name for this mobile application which translates as Speak Up, was thus designed to enable users engage with issues that they are passionate about and then interact with the relevant government agencies, NGO's, civil society groups, and business organizations.

Rather than being another opinion based application, Chivucute mentioned that Zuela is mainly evidence



Florindo Chivucute (middle) with members of the S-CAR community during the presentation of Zuela.

Photo: Genet Bogart.

focused. "For example, if I find myself in a country that is just about to hold elections and I come across a group of individuals who appear to be tampering with ballot boxes, I can record or take a picture, write a comment and post it to the central zuela server which will be seen by everyone. The electoral agency of that country will have the ability to comment on the image or video," Florindo explained. Yamir, also mentioned that the interaction was not limited to only government agencies but also business, NGOs, and civil society groups who may have the resources to help address some of these issues.

Currently, the application has five main topics that the user can choose from. These are elections, politics, corruption, violence, and human rights, and these are designed to provide guidance for the user in terms of the kinds of issues they can post about. These categories also make it easier for governments, civil society groups, business organizations to respond to posts. As Chivucute said, "This app is meant to help individuals bridge the gap between governance and citizen participation – a first step in any good governance process."

Chivucute also mentioned that the first phase of the mobile application development was made possible by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), inputs from staff at Amnesty International as well as some members of the S-CAR community. "We also just finalized talks with Microsoft on using their platform Azure, to make our application reach more people and regions," Chivucute said. The next phase for Zuela, Yamir mentioned, was to work on getting funding to enable this project to grow and make it accessible to places where there is limited access.

At the end of the presentation, Chivucute mentioned that the app was available for free for both Android and iOS. ■

## Upcoming S-CAR Community Events

**Wednesday, March 22, 2017**

Tainted Heroes - Film Screening Followed with Q&A with Production Crew

2:00pm - 3:30pm

**Wednesday, March 22, 2017**

Dialogue and Difference Series - Exploring Difference, Inclusion, & Justice - Inclusion

7:30pm - 9:30pm

**Wednesday, April 5, 2017**

America's Human Right Emergency Roundtable Discussion

5:00pm - 8:00pm

**Tuesday, April 11, 2017**

Dialogue and Difference Series- Exploring Difference, Inclusion, & Justice

8:30am - 10:30am

For more, visit [scar.gmu.edu/events-roster](http://scar.gmu.edu/events-roster)

# Opinion: Sifting Through Information in the Digital Age

By Brian Garrett-Glaser, Undergraduate Alumnus, [brian@theworldincontext.com](mailto:brian@theworldincontext.com)

Thirty years ago, tens of millions of Americans had a straightforward process for keeping up with current events. They read local newspapers each morning, and tuned into half-hour news programs such as CBS Evening News and NBC Nightly News. Sure, there were different newspapers and TV programs with various political leanings, but the information landscape wasn't that complicated.

*In the past, people could act as passive consumers of information and expect to be relatively well informed.*

Fast forward to today. We live in a completely different information world—one that moves at break-neck speed, overflowing with sources, biases, and over-sensationalized headlines. Sifting through information to understand something that used to be simple—just “what’s going on in the world”—now often feels like a full-time job, complete with required knowledge (of different media outlets and their leanings) and time-consuming tasks like reading multiple versions of the same story. The Internet and associated communication technologies democratized the information landscape, almost completely removing the financial and technical barriers to entering the media arena. The cost and skill of operating a printing press has been reduced to the monthly fee of WordPress website hosting.

In many ways, this has been a positive revolution, allowing people from all walks of life and all socioeconomic classes to participate in the global information exchange, and destroying many aspects of the monopoly on information and news that previously existed.

But the democratized information landscape has also created a number of problems. It has eliminated any semblance of quality control among information; empowered small, radical voices with massive megaphones that are difficult to distinguish from “mainstream megaphones;” and exacerbated known psychological problems with how people process information they agree with and disagree with.

*Where does this leave the consumer of information?*

In this environment, the consumer is left struggling to make sense of the information he or she is presented with. Overwhelmed, increasingly skeptical, and unable to put forth the time required to separate signal from noise, the consumer falls prey to sensationalized headlines and misinformation — either purposeful or due to a lack of journalistic standards.

People are slowly learning that to be well informed in today's information landscape, they must take control of how they consume and process information, acting purposefully to seek out proper sources as well as viewpoints that exist outside

of their algorithmically-created media silos.

*Enter my project: The World in Context.*

I believe there is more that can be done from the media's side of the table to reduce the effort and time required to be an informed citizen. I believe that a simple, concise, and accessible way to read about current events is precisely what is needed to combat the over-saturation of the digital age.

My project is low-tech and unoriginal. It's a daily email newsletter that offers the reader a five-minute, straight-to-the-point read of what's going on in the world—and why it matters. I summarize news events as concisely as I can, offering sources throughout, and then follow the summary with brief analysis, filling in background context and asking key questions. The information presented is a combination of “big stories of the day” and less-covered but equally important breaking news.

The World in Context is far from perfect. It is itself a single news source, written by one recent S-CAR graduate trying to avoid political bias while retaining a Jon Stewart-inspired partiality for truth and opposition to absurdity.

But I do think my newsletter adds value for consumers of information — and so far, my few hundred readers seem to agree. The project provides a baseline understanding of current events from which consumers can jump off. It moves beyond the services of an aggregator, offering important context for developments in politics, world affairs, technology, and occasionally business. There's also a dash (but no more) of humor spread throughout.

Today, the newly elected U.S. president continues to escalate a war with the free press. Russia openly engages in disinformation campaigns for geopolitical purposes. The effects of the Internet, social media, and algorithms on people's consumption of information show no signs of slowing.

Facts, of course, are subjective, and there is no universal truth when dealing with human conflicts. But how (and whether) people choose to consume information will always have an outsized impact on our ability to solve conflicts of all types—from political gridlock to identity struggles.

The World in Context is my humble attempt to attack that problem. I hope you'll give it a try—and send me your thoughts on the project. ■

## Recent S-CAR Media Appearances

### Realising Peace Potential of Constitution

Tatsushi Arai, PhD Alumnus  
Kathmandu Post 02/20/17

### 'Strength Through Peace - Not Peace Through Strength': A reaction to Trump's America First Foreign Policy

David Alpher, Adjunct Faculty  
Saferworld 02/07/17

### What is Trump's Foreign Policy? - Inside Story

Ibrahim Fraihat, PhD Alumnus  
Al Jazeera 02/04/17

Conflict analysts from S-CAR have appeared on 18 occasions since the last newsletter. These 3 represent a sample of those publications. For a complete list, visit: <http://scar.gmu.edu/media>



Brian Garrett-Glaser.  
Photo: Brian Garrett-Glaser.

PRESS

# Interview With Herman Wanggai, Visiting Scholar and a Leader of a Non-Violent Movement for West Papua Autonomy

By Kwaw de Graft-Johnson, Newsletter Editor and PhD Candidate, [kdegraff@masonlive.gmu.edu](mailto:kdegraff@masonlive.gmu.edu)

*Indonesia absorbed the region known as West Papua in 1969 following the withdrawal of the Dutch colonial administration. This development has resulted in a protracted conflict over freedom and autonomy between the Indonesian Government and some indigenous populations of West Papua.*

*What are some of the challenges that you have faced in your struggle for freedom in West Papua?*

Torture, long term imprisonment, and death are some of the consequences political activists and their families face every day in our fight for self-determination. Growing up in the 1970s, I heard tons of sad stories, and then came to witness many heartbreaking events. When I stepped into the role of an activist, I was arrested and served time in jail and experienced firsthand the horrible treatment of political prisoners. Now, younger activists are also in jail, going through the same treatment I did. The sad thing is that most of them are being arrested under false charges.

*Why do you think Indonesia is doing this?*

They do not want to give the West Papuan pro-independence movement a chance, knowing that if West Papuans get the opportunity to vote for self-determination it will be the last time they [Indonesia] will be able to occupy our lands. They denied our right to the kinds of freedom enjoyed by our fellow Pacific Islanders – including Australia and New Zealand – for far too long. All of these actions by Indonesia are designed to keep West Papuans at bay. Every president after Suharto, even though the Indonesian government has gone through internal shake-ups, has maintained this military approach toward West Papuan demands for self-determination even after 53 years since the occupation.

*What are some of the next steps that you and other leaders are taking in your struggle?*

Freedom cannot be achieved if there is no intervention from the international community. We don't want to fight; we want our vote – we want to exercise our legal rights to vote for our future. Our last hope is for our neighbors – not only the Melanesian leadership but Micronesians and Polynesians as well – to take up the lead. So far, the politics within Melanesia and the free cash from Indonesia has hampered our appeal to our Melanesian brothers and sisters in Melanesia, and to this day the leadership is still in limbo. They simply danced around the issues and often downplayed the urgency of the situation in West Papua. While most support our people, the most influential governments and economic leaders in Melanesia remain uncertain. Today, I'm reading what is going on with the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) but I see little progress when it comes to people. We appealed to the PIF back to 2000 and in 2002, but up until



Herman Wanggai.  
Photo: Herman Wanggai.

now, there's little tangible support to show from these leaders. We, however, see that there's a huge support for West Papua within the leadership of the PIF and the people in general. They too want to see something done about West Papua. There's wide support for West Papua throughout the Pacific Islands; peaceful rallies from Samoa to New Zealand, PNG to the Solomon Islands, Fiji and Tonga. We know our brothers and sisters in the Pacific want something done about our situation, how about you leaders? PIF continues to miss great opportunities to make a difference. PIF leaders need to stand up and push the West Papuan case before the United Nations and urge the "Free World" to give us what was denied to us in 1969 – a referendum for self-determination, or the right to determine what our future should look like.

*How are foreigners who visit West Papua treated?*

A lot of their interactions with foreigners is based on paranoia. An example of this is when a young Spanish tourist visiting Indonesia transited in Jayapura hoping to cross the border to Papua New Guinea within a day or two. There was a rally being held where he was staying, and out of curiosity he decided to explore. Little did he know he was being watched. As he stopped to speak to protesters, police officers arrested him and he was hauled to the police station where he was interrogated until the next day. When they did not find any connection between him and the rally, officers informed him they had turned over all his personal information to police and the media all over West Papua and Indonesia. Well, the rally was in support of West Papuan membership of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG), and that his presence there raised red-flags among Indonesian intelligence officers.

*What are some of the steps that the international community are taking in this conflict?*

Academics have written about our struggle providing important data about the deaths, abuses, and illegal imprisonment of ordinary West Papuans, but to this day the world pretends nothing is there to see. So much crime committed against our people and no one seemed to ask why. It's been years since Indonesia banned journalists from visiting West Papua and the reason is Indonesia doesn't want reporters in West Papua to tell the world what's going on. They don't want their mass arrests, execution, and imprisonment of innocent people reported to the world. ■

S-CAR SPOTLIGHT

## The Advent of Donald Trump and the Need for Structural Conflict Resolution

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But we cannot lose sight of the reality that America's social problems are systemic, and that solving them will probably mean changing the system in some basic ways. This means that three questions, in particular, need to be deeply and imaginatively reconsidered. These topics are (a) economic restructuring, (b) ethical globalism, and (c) democratic (small "d") renewal. Each topic requires a different type of public conversation.

*First conversation: We need to talk together about alternatives to "economic nationalism" and the current capitalist system.*

In winning the 2016 election, Donald Trump appealed to the half-hidden racism, misogyny, and xenophobia of white people fearful of losing social status and political clout. But these appeals would have gotten nowhere without a socioeconomic program designed to capitalize on working class misery – a goulash that can be summed up in two words: economic nationalism. Trump and Steve Bannon promise to restore domestic industries and the workers dependent upon them to health by adopting an "America First" economic program. Their proposals range from compelling big companies to keep their production facilities in the U.S., to slashing taxes on the rich, expanding U.S. military forces, renegotiating trade agreements, and – *pièce de résistance* – initiating a huge new public works program to rebuild the national infrastructure.

We have not yet seen these proposals put in the form of legislation or executive orders, but that will surely happen. Liberals like Robert Reich have criticized them as "trickle down economics dressed in populist garb," opining that they will further enrich the wealthy without creating jobs, raising wages, reducing poverty, or mitigating inequality. Many conservatives agree that Trump's populism will remain a matter of symbolic gestures, while market forces ultimately decide the big economic questions. What these middle-of-the-road opinions ignore, however, is that, if the economy continues to generate inequality, job insecurity, and precarity, Trump's economic nationalism could turn out to be a lot more like Benito Mussolini's New Order than Ronald Reagan's Morning in America.

How to devise structural solutions that would put workers back to work, revitalize the economy, and protect the planet? Conflict resolvers are in a position to facilitate conversations about socioeconomic reform among a wide range of discussants ranging from Marxists and social democrats to "cooperativists," Greens, and libertarians. Unless these conversations take place, I fear that the field of social reconstruction will be left to the "Right-populists." So let's organize them pronto!



Richard Rubenstein.  
Photo: Mason Creative Services.

*Second conversation: We need to discuss how to end America's "culture wars" and counter the current trend towards nation-worship.*

Intensifying socio-political conflicts among Americans are not merely the product of presidential pugnacity. Five months before the election, the Pew Research Center reported that, "For the first time in surveys dating to 1992, majorities in both parties express not just unfavorable but very unfavorable views of the other party. And today, sizable shares of both Democrats and Republicans say the other party stirs feelings of not just frustration, but fear and anger" (<http://www.people-press.org/2016/06/22/partisanship-and-political-animosity-in-2016/>). Following the election, not only were increases reported in acts of politically motivated violence, but also popular dating websites revealed that their clients were insisting that potential dates announce themselves as pro- or anti-Trump. When political differences invade the eroti-sphere, you know that domestic conflicts are escalating!

This situation points to a set of cultural issues urgently requiring discussion. First, we know that intergroup struggles in modern America are rooted in both socioeconomic inequalities and a clash of cultures. The question is what can be done to understand these "culture wars" more fully and to mitigate their causes. Could "problem-solving" workshops help?

The good news is that conflict resolvers have developed several forms of conversation particularly well suited to help parties deal with this sort of conflict. One such form, the interactive or problem solving workshop, is a confidential, facilitated dialogue, repeated at intervals, that permits participants to explore the deep sources of their mutual alienation and to imagine creative new ways of working things out. Participants can be community or group leaders, people in mid-level roles, or grass roots folks. This process, like certain forms of public dialogue, does not aim at ending the conflict immediately so much as at helping the parties to speak directly to each other, analyze their situation, humanize their adversaries, and discover how to prevent their differences from destroying lives, communities, and people's peace of mind. In some cases, it can even lead the parties to decide to act cooperatively to alter a conflict-generating situation.

A related topic requiring discussion involves the moral and religious implications of "America First." Many Americans believe that they can love their nation without worshipping it, since we are part of an interdependent humanity, not just inhabitants of a nation-state or members of a cultural tribe.

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# The Advent of Donald Trump and the Need for Structural Conflict Resolution

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Even so, when Steve Bannon preaches that American “cultural identity” is endangered by globalism and multiculturalism, few in the opposition respond that this is a wildly exaggerated response to an imaginary threat, and, worse yet, a thinly disguised assertion of American cultural superiority. The problem, they fear, is that expressing their universalist views openly will isolate them and strengthen the most reactionary elements of the nationalist movement.

The conversation needed, then, is how to help our countrymen and women understand that the interdependence of American society with all other societies is a fact, not “fake news.” Along the same lines, how can we make it clear that world society is not a jungle (or a clash of civilizations) in which cultures must either triumph or be sacrificed?

A broad discussion, featuring religious and ethical leaders of many persuasions, might help us to reconcile patriotism and universalism in a way that protects threatened identities while keeping alive the ideal of a cooperative global commonwealth.

*Third conversation: We need to come together in local and national assemblies to rethink and renovate American democracy.*

Why has the U.S. political system worked to exacerbate internal conflicts rather than managing or resolving them. What are the structural causes of this crisis, and how can they be mitigated? Space limitations forbid discussion of these questions here, but it is important to help put scholars and activists in a position to consider the roles of America’s two-party system, its winner-take-all voting institutions, and its adversarial forms of political struggle (among other things) in intensifying domestic conflicts.

“We need to talk,” as Joan Rivers used to say, and not just about what we are against, but what we are for. The controversial presidential campaign and Mr. Trump’s activities in office have generated a great wave of political anxiety and interest in the country, but unless his opponents find ways to focus their thinking on a discrete number of vital issues – and unless they begin to discover creative, practical solutions to underlying systemic problems – the wave could leave them beached.

Let’s start organizing these conversations now! ■



## School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution

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