

Conflict can never be  
fully resolved essay



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England can breathe a sigh of relief at the moment, and rightly so – the worst riots they have witnessed for decades have been subdued. In light of this, a distant observer could understandably assume the conflict had been resolved.

Yet, the increased number of police and vigilance on the streets is a sure indication otherwise. Indeed, the riots were merely the top layer of a conflict entrenched on a number of levels. On one degree, they were retaliation to the police shooting of Mark Duggan, yet this too appears to merely be a trigger. In the wake of the riots, as England begins to return to normal and heightened tensions are lowered, it is slowly becoming clear that they were born from the frustration at entrenched social problems – chronic unemployment, slow economic recovery and cuts to public service spending. And yet, these serve as no excuse. In this way, they were also a product of sheer human weakness – greed and envy manifested into criminal opportunism.

Perhaps most disheartening though, is that these underlying causes will always exist. Human beings will always be flawed, and there will always be an equality gap between social classes. It is the sad nature of the world – some prosper at the expense of others. In this light, whilst we may not witness such riots again, the tension that caused them will never be fully soothed, and therefore the conflict will never be completely resolved.

And so it would appear that for conflicts of this type, of such complexity, a resolution is never possible. Yet, it would be naïve to extend such sentiments to all forms of conflict, because they differ in their nature. Some are

inherently simplistic, and thereby easy, or at least feasible to mediate.

Therefore, it appears flawed to say it is never possible to resolve conflict in all cases, because ultimately it is not an absolute truth. Conflict, as a concept, will always exist: human weaknesses, Crucible Yet, conflict, when taken as an abstract, over-bearing concept, is impossible to resolve as it is an irrepressible, inevitable friction in life.

Thomas Hobbes, the famed philosopher, certainly suggests ‘our natural state is war’, and indeed his book *The Leviathan* reflects on man’s propensity for conflict. Ultimately, we are flawed beings, and so, as long as we live, so too will our weaknesses – jealousy, envy, greed, pride, vanity, revenge and fear. As conflict derives from such limitations, it therefore will always exist with us. Indeed, in Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible* it is a twisted form of greed, “land-lust”, that compels Thomas Putnam to shamelessly exploit the prevailing mistrust and hysteria of the Salem Witch-Hunts. For his wife Ann Putnam, a deeply resentful and psychologically disturbed mother of seven dead children, it is a perverse type of revenge that led her to engage in the conflict. She wants vengeance against the world, and thus is ultimately led to appease her discontented heart by afflicting similar pain on someone else – Goody Nurse, and the other midwives.

It defies rationality. Deep down, Ann Putnam knew she was simply a victim of bad luck, but her human weakness, her irrepressible emotion, compelled her to ignore such rationale. Her conflict in isolation may be resolved, but it serves to show that conflict, as a broader concept, will always exist. Human weaknesses are intrinsic to our being, and whilst they may not excuse our actions, they nevertheless will inevitably give rise to animosity, quarrels,

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disputes, litigations and sadly, violent and deadly deeds. And so, although world peace is an ideal we can strive towards, it will forever be beyond our reach.

Conflict and humanity are intertwined at their core, thereby meaning, they are impossible to fully untangle and resolve. Conflicts can be a necessity, meaning it will never be resolved. The term conflict is evidently more commonly used to refer to individual situations in isolation. In these cases, it is the nature of the conflict that determines whether an absolute resolution is a feasible concept. In certain cases, conflict can act as a necessity, thereby indicating it is not only impossible to resolve such conflict, but also inherently dangerous to do so, because it will have a corrosive effect on those involved.

Indeed, modern democracies are based upon conflict that is manifested in a healthy debate, as perhaps indicated by the very title of the 'opposition' – their function is to question the government, and thereby act as a protection against mediocrity. Esteemed political critic and writer Waleed Aly certainly supports this notion, suggesting “they very vacuity of our politics, and even its veneer of nastiness, derives not from too little consensus, but far too much”. The current parliament validates his belief. As we move towards “political consensus”, epitomized in the form of Julia Gillard’s and Tony Abbotts current meeting about the Malaysia solution, democratic politics ceases to be a contest of ideas, but becomes about power and little else, and so as a consequence, it quickly collapses into content-free slogans derived in focus groups and directed at disengaged voters in marginal seats. Indeed, both sides have the same intention to whip up hysteria about ‘stopping the boats’

– it is just a matter of who can do it more effectively and with greater publicity. This situation above anything displays the need for conflict, rather than a resolution.

Thankfully the carbon tax continues to be a contest of ideas, albeit one in grave need of more profound intellectual debate. Ultimately, despite episodes of “ political consensus”, our parliament will never be resolved of conflict because it acts as the pillar on which our democracy stands. There will always be an opposition and a government questioning each other, and even though it is often crude, it is nevertheless necessary, for as Walter Lippmann instructs, “ where we all think alike, no one thinks very much”. In this way, for as long as democracy reigns, the conflict entrenched in it will never be resolved.

It serves as an indication that for instances when we need conflict, when it serves as a catalyst for change and progress, when it is engrained in the function of nations or institutions alike, a resolution is not possible, because it would have severely detrimental effects. Conflicts which are complex will never be resolved Conflict can likewise be an intricately complex phenomenon, based on a myriad of layers, forever-evolving and manifesting itself in different ways. For conflicts of this nature, it is reasonable to say a complete resolution is never possible. It is always difficult, and indeed involves an element of risk, to make such an absolute statement, but if anything, history can validate this claim. The past thousands of years have seen the Muslim conquests, the French Wars of Religion, the Crusades and the Reconquista. These movements may have been subdued, but the religious and cultural differences behind them still reign free.

We are still a divided world and a world where the relationship between Islam and Westerners can be defined as antagonistic. Many commentators will say that September 11 is the single cause for the prevailing tension, yet it is such naivety that is prohibiting any reconciliation. On one degree, it is an inherent racism, a fear of what is different and indeed a fear accentuated by the politicization of the matter. Yet as Waleed Aly asserts, " it is truly a problem of ego".

We - both Muslims and Westerners - need the humility to listen and learn about another culture. It requires Western commentators to see that 19 men with box cutters on September 11 does not render oppressive, criminal and anti-social behaviour an inherent function of Muslim existence. It likewise requires Muslims to see the Western culture is not characterised by the Hollywood world of violent action, crime, drugs and heightened sexuality. Aly's sentiments encapsulate it - " to transcend such a conflict we need a level of knowledge that a grotesque proportion of those engaged in the conversation are either too arrogant or lazy to obtain". We need whole civilisations, millions of people, to each individually move out of an age of ignorance. History and the fact that this problem has existed since the birth of religion to the very day, suggests it is impossible.

Perhaps I am unduly pessimistic, perhaps nothing is impossible but a complete resolution of this issue must render something close to it. The Crucible supports the same concept. The conflict in Salem was multifaceted, based on more than just the witch-hunts. And so, as Miller indicates, " twenty years after the last execution.

.. he factionalism was still alive". It seemed the tension in Salem could not be ended by any resolution, but merely by the deaths or departure of those involved. And so, whilst I dearly hope I am proven wrong, it appears that for conflicts developed on a myriad of layers, a complete resolution is an unrealistic ideal. Conflicts comparatively simplistic can be resolved Yet, conversely, at the other end of the spectrum, a certain situation of conflict, when taken in isolation, can be a comparatively less complex concept, thereby meaning a complete resolution is a possible outcome.

On the most simplistic level, disputes such as a feud between two brothers over the front seat of the car, can be resolved by sound mediation skills. Even for a more complex issue, an ensuing tension between two students at school perhaps, a resolution can be sought if each has the humility to recognize their own faults. The intrinsic difference here compared with the Islam and Western world conflict, is that there is less scope for human weakness - arrogance, revenge, envy - to prevail, as ultimately there are only two individuals involved. It is again a concept mirrored in *The Crucible*.

. Giles Corey's sentiments, " John Proctor, I have only last month collected four pound damages", suggest there was a dispute between the two characters. Yet, Proctor's cheerful language, " I hope I can call you deaf without charge", coupled with Miller's stage note " laughing", indicates any ill-feeling no longer exists. In light of this, it seems that for less complex conflicts, a resolution is possible. Perhaps we will move out of an age of ignorance, of arrogance, of self-serving desires and be able to bring peace and harmony to the mutual antagonism between Muslims and Westerners, or

sooth the prevailing tension in London. Yet the current climate, and indeed history, seem to render such a resolution impossible.

At least then, we are able to resolve more simplistic, or perhaps better expressed as ‘less complicated’ conflicts. If we were not able to do so, then our world would descend into a state of anarchy, a sure passage to death, destruction and doom. And so, whilst it is not possible to resolve some forms of conflict, it is flawed to say this is the truth in every case.