This autobiography of conflict is a reflexion on the key influences/ informative events that shaped my understanding, approach and responses to family conflict (Part A) and consequently, my working definition of Conflict Transformation (Part B). The latter offers a rationale for the way that early experiences have shaped and influenced my professional career path. I propose that the emerging constant theme is 'the healing of injustice in settings of conflict' as in Fisher's conflict transformation theory: (2000: 9). My family history of conflict is from memory and has become my story. I cannot verify what I perceive to be the truth, therefore my judgements about events, reasons, perceptions and influences could be contested. This is my narrative, the story of my life's purpose.

Part A: My History of family Conflict

My narrative concerns family conflict, which I experienced from my earliest memories, through to my late teens and beyond. I now realise that my current responses to perceived conflict and ability/ inability to deal constructively with incidents/ situations are influenced by learned childhood patterns. For example, the strategies that I deploy in conflict situations are instinctive and are from observed behaviour. My identity is also influenced by my early experiences, 'identity is constructed by past as well as through the present' (Woodward 2004: 17). My career path choices cannot be separated from my 'chosen traumas' (Lederach 2005: 142): which are the causes with which I engage, continually advocating and striving towards achieving justice. Through considering my history for this assignment, I have become aware of how my low 'threshold' for identifying a situation as conflict, and how I react to it, still impacts on my responses to incidents and events today.

I will consider the impact of my history of conflict from four causal dimensions: (1) personal, (2) relational, (3) cultural (4) structural (Lederach 2005:34) and how relating these to myself, can provide insight into causes and solutions for conflict in others.

Context: (1) Personal

My most vivid memories of childhood are episodes of conflict and the ritualistic behaviour patterns between my parents. Their unhappy relationship remained unresolved until their deaths in old age.

My mother's attitudes and values derived from her interpretation of her Irish family history. Lederach's (2005: 142) describes three classifications of past memories into: 1. 'Narrative', which for my mother, of Catholic Irish decent was feeling exiled and oppressed. She was influenced by her perception of historical events in Ireland e.g. 'the troubles'; 2. 'Remembered History', which was her experiences growing up Irish Catholic in Liverpool; and 3 'Lived history' which was her lifelong sense of pride in a ridiculed (e.g. Irish jokes and negative stereotypes), impoverished nation and her virulent defence of the actions of the IRA, who she saw as 'fighting for the cause'. This caused her to be rigid, defensive and dogmatic and provided 'ammunition' for my father to verbally attack her for her support of the sectarian conflict. As Lederach describes conflict transformation so succinctly when he suggests that when there is conflict in the family about who will do the washing up. It is rarely about the washing up!

My parents were classic products of their age, class, gender, ethnicity, faith and place, which Woodward suggests are 'important dimensions of identity' (2004: 22). Despite both being white British Catholics, brought up in Liverpool, they were from vastly different cultures. This may have been at the root of their lifetime of conflict with neither knowing how to have their needs met, nor how to meet the needs of each other.

Unpicking the Source of Conflict (2) Relational:

My belief is that we form our identity from influences around us, and select aspects/groups to which we subscribe. Some are constant (gender, race, home culture): others we will be drawn to or reject at various times. Our formative family years influence our values, beliefs, choices, understanding and behaviour. In my mother's case, her allegiance to one group (The Southern Irish) resulted in 'between group discord' (Sen 2006:2) causing her rejection of perceived opposing groups (The British).

G: My father was self assured, bright and ambitious. The youngest of 4 from an uncomplicated working class family, he was handsome, giving him a choice of admiring girls to date. He worked hard and gained an engineering apprenticeship, which assured him a prosperous future. He was generous and charming, using these qualities to gain admiration.

P: My mother was first generation born in Liverpool. My grandmother was strict, blunt and fiercely proud, having airs and graces that were out of step with the 'spit and sawdust' Scotland Road pub that they ran in a deprived area of the city. My mother was the youngest of 6 and lacked confidence. Her values mirrored my grandmother's, famous for her expensive hats, polished brass door step and her discipline method of pinching her offspring for bad behaviour- for my mother's family, keeping up appearances was paramount. They demonstrated to others the image they wanted to portray through their clothing and behaviour. (Woodward 2004: 44). It was as much about demonstrating who they were not, as who they aspired to be.

My mother inherited a strong Irish identity, the family frequently returning to the family farm back home, where she learnt Irish singing and dancing. She also inherited an irrational dislike of Protestants, through her strong support of the IRA. My grandmother's narrative of 'the troubles' led her to believe in the righteousness of those who fought for 'the cause' and that Protestants were in the wrong: a perfect example of Lederach's dualistic polarities (2005:35). Her early life in Liverpool reinforced these beliefs when the annual Orange Parade caused the pub to board up windows, ahead of the march because of the likelihood of mob attacks on any Catholic properties. These events had a life long impact on her values, loyalties and prejudices. Her belief was unshakable in the righteousness of the oppressed (Catholics) and the wrong doing of the oppressors (Protestants), just as Lederach (2005) talks about the 'embedded patterns' in communities: 'Lived experiences create, recreate and reinforce the story of our collective life' (Lederach 2005: 142). My mother felt different, set apart, belonging to a different 'group' to her English peers.

. **Faith:** My parents observed the rules of the Catholic Church e.g. obligatory Sunday mass, fasting and giving to charity. Apparently their faith did not include consideration of their behaviour towards each other. Their faith was one of fear: it was a sin to eat meat on Friday; to miss Mass on Sunday; to disobey the 10 Commandments; and to divorce would mean excommunication. I remember fear and rules rather than love, compassion and forgiveness- appearances needed to be kept up and conflict hidden. My mother focused on appearances, pride and an unwavering support for those defending her faith and country (IRA), which Lederach describes as 'a chosen trauma' (2005: 142). She carried considerable 'baggage' through feeling that her faith and ethnicity were undermined, oppressed and needing her defence. My father observed Sunday worship though I never remember him discussing his faith.

(3) Culture: My parents grew up in working class environments, meeting as teenagers at social gatherings. They were part of the majority being white, British born and Catholic. They enjoyed socialising with their peers, fashion, popular music and going dancing. They

left school young, having no higher education aspirations: my mother did clerical work while my father, his apprenticeship- the normalness of this is described by Seth as 'the richness of leading an abundant human life' (2006: 20).

Once married, my parents became 'upwardly mobile', moving to the more affluent Wirral, across the Mersey. They were financially comfortable and quickly climbed the social ladder. My father's career as a shipping engineer brought new friends, colleagues and opportunities for socialising on a grand scale. Business lunches and after work club drinking became the norm for him. My mother became a housewife and mother (my sister, 8 years my senior), probably overwhelmed by the life change and was mainly unsupported. This was not unusual as even by the 1950s, only 21% of married women were in paid employment (Woodward 2000).

Conflict Begins: My father found his new 'multiple identities' (Woodward 2004: 154) of professional, husband, father and breadwinner, conflicted with his desire for admiration and praise, especially from colleagues and acquaintances and particularly women. He paid less attention to his wife and child, as she struggled with her new house bound identity. He grew unsettled and deceitful, seeking entertainment elsewhere. This impacted on my mother's confidence and self worth, causing resentment of her absent husband. Goffman would describe my father's behaviour as 'audience segregation': showing different 'sides' to different audiences, ensuring that he never let each audience see his other sides (Goffman 59:57).

A Pattern of Conflict for life: The conflict became well established and became embedded over time. Lederach describes the 'pessimism' about every day conflict that was probably a survival mechanism (2005: 52). We expected it, lived with it but continued with our lives, that pessimism removed the 'shocks'. Incidents would arise when my father used my mother's defence of the IRA as opportunities to attack her very core. This was in the days of IRA violence which was constantly on the news. This was probably more about retaliation for her confronting his increasing unexplained absence and deceit.

The memories are vivid of late night arguments: the anticipation of hearing the key in the lock and knowing that there would be a loud and angry confrontation with accusations and denials, like a broken record. My mother was locked into name calling and accusations, my father in booming defensive insults and denial. They seemed to lack alternative strategies. This cycle of deceit, heavy drinking, challenging and shouting was relentless for many years.

The family continued to accumulate wealth and status the symbols (Seth 2006)- a large house, car, cocktail parties and an au pair. In common with domestic abuse, all conflict was kept secret, a 'front' was shown to friends and family while the nightly battles continued. My mother drank to drown her sorrows; my father drank to enhance his enjoyment- and maybe blot out his Catholic conscience. Each were burdened by inner conflict, neither able to express their feelings of hurt. For me, alone after my sister moved to London, my drawing became my therapy and creative outlet- my moral imagination (Lederach).

When in my teens, I have strong memories of feeling the need to defend my unhappy and weary mother. Her isolation and shame caused her to share every detail of my father's infidelity with me and I was aware that something had to be done. So from that time began a lifelong 'habit' of speaking out, advocating and getting involved in conflict. This is the point where the pattern of taking responsibility and acting on behalf of others was set. What began as a desperate attempt to improve life for my mother, evolved into a desire to improve the lives of those who needed support.

3

Lederach (2005:35) describes 'cycles of violence often driven by reducing complex history into dualistic polarities, that attempt to both describe and contain social reality in artificial ways'. Our family conflict was reduced to those 'either/or' categories. I was unaware of the importance of that early experience which taught me that containing social reality in artificial ways is a cause of conflict through from the domestic to the great wars. I gravitated towards the oppressed, the labelled, the discriminated and the excluded, seeking ways to improve their lives in small ways. 'We cannot do great things, only small things with great love' (Mother Theresa)

Part B-

Conflict – 'A Motor for Change' - Injustice: My professional response

('Taking up the journey of where and how I have actually been in this world of experience that I call a vocational home') (Lederach 2005: viii).

My working definition of Conflict Transformation is working to change those structures that cause inequality and justice, to work to change attitudes that arise from or cause conflict, to develop ways to enable others to find a voice, be empowered and to live in safety and peace. These goals relate to Fisher's theory (Fisher 2000:9).

(4) Structural: My professional response to conflict has been as a 'motor for change' Lederach's (2003) Throughout my career, a pattern emerges, of seeking out the vulnerable, excluded and disadvantaged and finding creative and imaginative ways to improve their circumstances or perspective. Reflecting on my narrative, suggests that I have sought out situations and circumstances that have compelled me to find solutions to the conflict found in inequalities. I have chosen to work with the disadvantaged, working in a wide range of settings, always seeking effective ways of engagement, advocacy and effective creative 'vehicles' and removing 'barriers' to learning.

'Taking Up The Journey': My childhood therapeutic drawing and moderate creative talent, influenced my desire to study art. At just 16, I went to art school, and began to learn to express myself visually. My interest was in portraying injustice: my paintings were of captive apes, meticulously observed in zoos and expressing the sadness and injustice of such intelligent creatures being caged. I can remember the joy of being able to express myself through my art and being able to share this with a gallery audience. The moral imagination was emerging (Lederach). I found my vocation in teaching art and soon found a passion in working to encourage and engage those with learning disabilities, disadvantaged backgrounds, behavioural difficulties and from minority ethnic communities. I sought accessible creative routes for each to express themselves. I became champion, defender and advocate, frequently challenging management to bring about change. I used drama, through writing and directing large fantasy productions to be inclusive, writing parts for the truants, glue sniffers and MLD young people. This became my vocation where I thrived on adapting, creating, designing and delivering strategies and techniques for positive results. Lederach defines vocation as being more about a 'sense of purpose' than the work that we choose (2005).

Rising Above Dualistic Polarities' (Lederach 2005: 35):

My passion was in unlocking individual potential through finding creative methods to engage. I was striving for 'the essence, the core rules', the simplicity that Lederach describes when observing the randomness but pattern in a flock of birds (2005: 32). I have seen those 'turning points' (Lederach 2005: 28) when the invitation to participate, to be heard and to understand, almost to be given permission, initiates positive change in an individual's attitude and perception. It is (as Lederach suggests), 'unpredictable' but it is the 'permanently

4

dynamic', which drives me on to further develop my practice. My teaching experience found me negotiating with management to be allowed the opportunity to let the poor performers and disruptive element 'take flight'. This would be seen to be too great a risk but I continued on my journey to find effective ways of meeting complex needs- labels such as 'remedial' and 'slow learners' would destine these young people to exclusion, misery, anger, loss of self worth and rejection of educational achievement. The use of labels can be both helpful and damaging. If the label of SEN (Special Educational Needs) is to be helpful, it must include effective strategies for unlocking potential. The simplistic categorisation by educators sometimes merely segregates the individual into dualistic polarities.

I saw the emergence of PSHE in the 80s, as having the potential to develop empathy, self esteem, confidence and ambition. I left teaching and advised and trained educators and other professionals in participative methods of engagement. My accumulative experience provided learning opportunities that used visual stimuli, drama, photography and art, encouraging active participation to address the conflict around substance misuse, sexual relationships, smoking, bullying and racism. I experienced those 'turning points' (Lederach 2005: 28) 'pregnant with new life' when attitudes shifted, skills were developed and learning took place. I still come across those who came on those courses, who tell me how it changed their practice.

I moved into drugs and then crime policy, where I was able to design innovative programmes to engage the 'hard to reach' including drug users, sex workers, offenders and potential radicalised young Muslims. Fisher (2000) lists the goals for work based on transformation as changing structures, improving long term relationships and developing processes and systems. This list mirrors my own mission to challenge institutions and systems that cause inequalities and to revise practice, procedures and processes which demonise e.g drug users and the sex industry; and strategies that discriminate against Muslims in the 'fight against terror'. Seth suggests that such groups have been assigned by structures/ institutions to a 'divisive categorisation' (2006:13). This was my experience of labelling, discrimination and failing to see behaviour as symptomatic: failing to look beneath the surface for root causes, opportunities and solutions.

Within the Home Office, I found conflict at every level. Across every partnership there were vested interests, assumptions, hidden agendas, suspicion and a lack of trust. Each new relationship I began as a policy adviser, needed to begin by motivating, encouraging, challenging, compromising, rewarding and praising in order for practice to improve, needs to be met and targets achieved. It was just like school but they were bigger! I learned quickly that initiatives and programmes were generally personality led and vested interest driven. There was a lack of transparency, 'smoke and mirrors' were deployed and the 'with us or against us' mentality ruled. You were judged and treated according to your role- you were reduced to dualistic polarities. I was often unpopular with councils who resented being monitored and treated with hostility from the outset. It was the civil service equivalent to a traffic warden. I can relate to Fisher (2000) when he suggests that the strategies that are used to engage an audience will be as important as those that are brought to the table for discussion. His 'umbrella for dissatisfaction' applies to policy, where change results in new grievances as if on a loop. His solution involves listening carefully and 'creative solutions' (Fisher 2000). How telling it would be, if some key organisations completed Fisher's 'value tree' (Fischer 2000:80) to assess whether the 'fruits' nurture the roots and values.

'Giving birth to that which does not yet exist' (Lederach 2005):

My practice has now moved into the realms of a vision and belief in fairness and justice, working to enable those without a voice to be supported in having their needs met. My

5

engagement has moved from 'top down' delivery of policy, to 'bottom up' work at grass roots level, striving to be a catalyst for change, through supporting infrastructures and designing programmes for personal development. I am working with migrant community groups to build capacity, deliver training and to bring diverse communities together to collectively find their voice. This work centres on empowering those who are discriminated against and through prejudice and ignorance to singular identities e.g. Muslim, Migrant, Refugee. I am also advocating on their behalf with both public and third sector, to promote equality of opportunity outcomes.

Conclusion:

This assignment has taken me on a journey through my history, taken me to the present. It has provided clarity and direction for my future development of Conflict Transformation. I have arrived at a place where I am comfortable in my own skin, feeling trusted by the communities with whom I want to work, developing creative tools for engaging with those are from minority communities; empowerment of young Muslim women through a Lifeskills programme; leading a forum for new migrant communities and advocacy with foreign nationals in the UK on permits.

I want to review my practice to date and reflect on what has been successful and to continue to learn and revise my practice. I will need to develop criteria for 'success', which will be a challenge. I will use a wide range of tried and tested learning strategies including photography, symbolism, storytelling and art to enable those whose lives are in conflict to find their voice and expression and tell their stories. I want to experience, remember, document, share, celebrate and most of all bring about positive change. I cannot wait to begin.

POSTSCRIPT 28.10.2011:

This first assignment (submitted January 10) was for an MA course 'Conflict Transformation' at Marjon University College in Plymouth. After the first year, it folded due to the departure of the tutor.

Revisiting it has been therapeutic- as writing it originally had been a revelation.

Since it was written, I have worked further with BME communities in Bristol, including BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) elders. I have presented at the Poverty and Social Exclusion conference in Brussels as well as UWE conferences on Global Ethics and supporting academic refugees and am a visiting lecturer at Bath Spa university. I have run a Somali traditional fashion show, a 'Worldly Wise' celebratory music concert for BME elders from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, planned a weekly radio show run by and for older people, run the arts tent for the annual Refugee week, taken part in the planning and launch of Bristol as 'City of Sanctuary', run art sessions for Mind/ Genesis's mental health group, developed and run a new Diversity course for early years practitioners, become a grandmother twice (and would like to develop my ideas around the 'conflict of teenage pregnancy'), lead a social justice group and have delivered around 20 CPD days for teachers across the country on subjects around Art, SEN and Personal Development. I have qualified as a Lifecoach, and offering 1:1 and group days around personal and professional development.

My current role part time role is with the Cultural Olympiad where I hope to promote the Olympic and Paralympic values, the Olympic Truce and to engage the marginalised and excluded in achieving and showcasing their personal best.

My journey continues as I find opportunities in situations rather than the other way round.

6

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Simon Fisher et al. (2000) Working With Conflict   Zed

Diana Francis (2004)   Rethinking War and Peace   Pluto Press

Erving Goffman (1959)   The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life
    Pelican

John Paul Lederach (2005) The Moral Imagination   Oxford
University Press

John Paul Lederach (2002) Into the Eye of A Storm   Jossey-Bass

Tim Prentki & Sheila Preston The Applied Theatre Reader   Routledge

Amartya Sen (2006)   Identity & Violence   Pelican

Dudley Weeks (1994)   The 8 Effective Steps to Conflict Resolution   USA
                                        Tarcher Putnam

Kath Wooward (2004)   Questioning Identity, Gender, Class, Ethnicity
                                        Routledge