

The 'So What do you see project?' web project: exploring one way in which the world-wide-web can be used to contribute to processes of conflict transformation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

This project seeks to push out the parameters demarcating the field of Conflict Resolution by exploring one way in which the world-wide-web could be used to contribute to conflict transformation processes. The use of the web enables participants to be anonymous. This challenges a key assumption within Conflict Resolution which is that representatives from two warring factions should meet face-to-face. This project challenges this contact hypothesis. Is it really the case that in a protracted conflict such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict the protagonists don't know each other's point of view? The web, social media, You Tube and all sorts of other forums provide a huge amount of information to anyone interested at a click of a button. Track one or official mediation and track two, unofficial mediation were developed well before the world-wide-web revolution took place in the 1990s. The field of Conflict Resolution I would argue, has not yet fully explored what this remarkable new digital technology can bring to the field.

The 'So What do you see?' project as its name suggests, aims to build a database of images created by self-selecting participants who are connected to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict either through nationality, ethnicity or faith. The participant is asked to provide information about him/herself, age, gender, ethnicity, faith and location. S/he then chooses one of several prompts on the website which address perceptions, how the Israelis and Palestinians, Muslims, Jews and Christians perceive or think about themselves and the 'other' in this conflict. The prompts are: I see you as..., you see me as..., we see them as..., they see us as..., I see myself as..., you see yourself..., we see ourselves as..., you see yourselves as... Use of language and words is removed, which is another way in which this project challenges mainstream assumptions underpinning Conflict Resolution. I argue that the use of words particularly in protracted conflicts can often be counter-productive. Key words or phrases can become inflammatory whilst others become vacuous as they have been repeated so often by so many over the years. Removing the familiar, that is to say words, forces participants to pause and think about the prompt they have chosen to engage with. Participants are asked to produce a response by using a medium most of them will be unfamiliar with – art - in one of its many different forms; a drawing, a painting, a collage, a doodle, an abstract or any other artistic way of communicating they can think of. They are allowed to use up to 10 words in either Hebrew, Arabic or English which can be used as part of the image they produce or as a title. These images are then uploaded onto the website and displayed alongside the information about the artist that has been provided – but importantly, not the artist's name. This database will allow a mapping exercise to take place where significantly perceptions of *ordinary people* at a grassroots level (a constituency not really engaged with by mainstream conflict resolution processes) are mapped along the lines of gender, ethnicity, age, faith group and proximity to the focal point of the conflict, something that to date has not been done.