

Sami Adwan
Armin G. Wildfeuer (eds.)

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Participation and Reconciliation

Preconditions of Justice

Schriften der KathO NRW, Band 16

In order to make justice work, participation and reconciliation is needed within and between societies, peoples, and nations. In this compilation, authors—senior academics as well as students—from Bethlehem University, Palestine, and the Catholic University of Applied Sciences, Cologne, Germany, contribute to this important field. Thus, to some extent, the book in itself is an example of the subjects it deals with.



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Socio-Psychological and Spiritual Dimensions of Intercultural Learning and Peace Education

Intercultural and interreligious learning as well as peace education aim at building bridges between individuals and groups of different origin i.e. different languages, cultures, religions, and nations.

The following article stresses the point that learning processes must include the deeper socio-psychological and spiritual dimensions which influence those encounters: the taboo of committed crimes, the problem of individual and collective traumatization, personal and common experiences of suffering, black and white-thinking, and images of hostility.

The article will treat some socio-psychological aspects of individual and collective identity building, especially about what it means deep down to be a victim or a perpetrator. Collective traumatization, polarized thinking, and fixation on others as enemies will be discussed. I will then go on to show why resolving fear is such a crucial condition for mutual understanding and for the peace-building processes. Finally, concepts of intercultural education in connection with peace building and conciliation on micropolitical, mesopolitical and macropolitical levels are presented. My approaches are based on a specific humanistic and religious basic understanding of human personality.

I want to start with biographical approaches.

Three brief sketches of people who were confronted with suffering during World War II will serve as an introduction to this subject:

- The renowned German publicist Marion Gräfin Dönhoff and her family were displaced from their manor in East Prussia when she was a young woman. During the early 1970s, the German Chancellor Willy Brandt sought reconciliation with Poland and the Soviet Union. He signed the Treaty of Moscow, striving for a more normalized political relationship between Germany and its former enemies in the East. Marion Dönhoff supported the Treaty of Moscow and its goals, although it meant her losing all hope of ever regaining her family property. Willy Brandt invited her as a guest of honor to come to Moscow for the signing of the treaty. Two days before this historic date however she decided not to attend. She felt that going to Moscow would be too painful for her to endure.
- A Polish concentration camp survivor tells of the following incident: One day at his home in Poland the doorbell rings. When he opens the door, he

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meets a German man, who asks if he may be allowed to have a look around the residence. He says he himself had lived there up until 1944, when he was displaced by Russian soldiers. The Polish tenant invites the German man inside and shows him around the flat. The German visitor looks at everything and compares it as to how it was when he lived there. They have a cup of coffee and the visitor asks his host where he comes from. The Polish man rolls up his sleeve and shows him the tattooed number on his forearm. He then tells his story of how he was deported to a concentration camp at the age of sixteen and how after he was freed he had been assigned this vacant flat. They sit together in silence for a long time. Finally they say farewell gravely but amicably.

- I myself was born six years after the end of World War II. Consequently, I did not suffer the agonies of war myself, but I have heard about the war from family members. One of the first impressions I had about the war was that of an aunt from Silesia, who was displaced as a young woman. While fleeing from the Russian army she frequently had to hide from approaching soldiers and once she only just escaped being raped. She must have suffered incredible fear. In my childhood, the main image that World War II conjured up was that of Russian soldiers who raped women. Only much later I realized how many Russians, Poles, French and people of other nationalities had suffered from German aggression.

These short stories show one thing very clearly: if methods of intercultural and interreligious education are to contribute to political mediation and reconciliation, they have to allow for the emotions that memories like these evoke. To really allow a profound change to take place, suffering, sorrow, angst, fury, hate, the loss of faith in humanity or God, all of these have to be given a place and a voice. Only then can they do more than merely scratch the surface. Only then can the gaps be bridged that divide people of different cultures, languages, religions and nationalities who are set against each other by a history of war and enmity, of oppression, suffering and loss.

1. Social-psychological considerations about individual and collective identity building

Some psychoanalysts and social psychologists have described these connections by drawing attention to the individual's capacity for peace as a condition for societies to overcome hate and violence. Every child's development includes distinguishing between the self and the surroundings, between what is familiar and what is strange. He or she has to learn how to discriminate between people belonging to a "we-community" and those who are strangers

and have to be treated warily and kept at a distance. The child learns to discern good and evil, first by taking over his/her parents' belief-systems, building a monolithic identity. Characteristics of that first, monolithic system of morals a child acquires are the clear-cut, static lines that split the world into good and evil, right and wrong, friend and foe. Fairytales often describe such a view of the world. Puberty can be a first chance to soften and differentiate these clear barriers. Norms and rules can be questioned in puberty. The young person realizes that there are different value-systems and learns about them. At this stage, adolescents can start to deviate from the value system their parents have taught them and develop their own complex and pluriform identity. To be able to develop such an identity the person in question has to have a certain inner openness to dialogue. He or she needs to learn how to weigh up different inner voices, different needs and wants, interests and emotions against each other. The young person needs to think these things over, not just judge them quickly against a precast set of rules that may not be questioned. These processes of internal discussion can be hindered by taboos and fears. If parts of one's self are being repressed or dissociated because confronting them would be too painful to bear, the amount and quality of empathy one can show someone else will be affected too.

To understand feelings of grief, rage and aggression in others, I first have to learn how to handle these emotions myself. When individuals do not process their own emotions adequately, displacement can take place: We punish others for the pain we have suffered (Gruen, 2002). Only if I explore the dark side of my own soul and face the abyss I find there, only then can I overcome polarized thinking that only allows me to see myself as good and innocent and the others as dark and sinister.

Dan Ban-Or, an Israeli social psychologist who developed a concept of Dialogue Training between perpetrators and victims of German National Socialism, said that every person needs to find a way to open a dialogue between his inner victim and the offender to finally transcend his concept of the enemy.

Dan Bar-On as well as Jürgen Habermas (1976) sees a clear connection between the development of the individual and collective identity. Societies too have monolithic phases, in which orientation to a religion (state religion), a culture or an ideology is made mandatory. In the age of globalization such a monolithic structure can no longer be upheld. Societies must pass through stages of transformation leading to a collective pluriformal identity. A complex, pluriformal collective identity that is capable of dialogue can incorporate the multitude of different orientations its members have. Basic parameters are given, but varying specifications by the different fractions of a multicultural and multireligious society are allowed.

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2. Overcoming fear as a condition for understanding and peace building processes

Fear is a driving force in the emergence of violence and war. One main reason for the recent escalation of the Middle East conflict is that Israelis and Palestinians are afraid of one another: The Israelis are afraid the Hamas could ally with or support those forces, like the Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadi-nejad, that aim to wipe Israel off the face of the earth. The Palestinians on the other hand, are afraid that Israel could start a war to drive all the Palestinians out of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip into the neighboring Arab states.

In our German society global capitalism, too, frightens people, who cannot adjust to the changes it can cause. They are afraid that they won't succeed and lose their jobs and their place in society. Several social psychologists (Bauriedl, 2001; Gruen, 2001) see the obsession to buy and consume as an outward sign of angst repression. The obsession with buying things, with professional status and personal achievements blankets the fear we feel about our own inner emptiness. Instead, what is needed is a strengthening of the inner identity- individually as well as collectively, to combat fear. Spiritual and religious resources in individuals and society could help to overcome fear and develop empathy in others, even for political enemies. A spiritual tenor can transform fear into hope.

The following approaches of intercultural learning on the micro-, meso- and macro-level distinguish themselves by taking into account the spiritual and religious dimensions of human existence.

3. Intercultural peace work at a micro-level: compassionate listening, biographical learning and non-violent communication

Intercultural peace work on the micro level concerns itself with the strengthening of personal relationships between people from opposing political camps. Compassionate listening is a specific method of communicating that enables people to listen to one another without judging or condemning what is being said. The only thing that matters is the ability to put oneself in the other's position. The Buddhist monk Thích Nhất Hạnh (2000) regularly invites Palestinians and Israelis to his Centre, Plumvillage in France. Before they start talking to one another they spend a few days meditating and getting in touch with their own experiences and feelings of hate, grief, suffering and

fear. Only after they have been “purged” do they enter into a dialogue. This pre-phase of meditation makes the participants sensitive and open for the perception and experiences of others.

The meetings in Plumvillage produce astonishing results in the way the Palestinians and Israelis encounter one another and open processes of real understanding between these two groups.

The meetings between victims and perpetrators of Nazi crimes organised by Dan Bar-On have already been mentioned. Meetings like this are an example of how this kind of confrontation can spark self-healing processes, helping individuals to shake off the traumatization that had a grip on their lives.

The American humanistic psychologist Marshall Rosenberg (2001) has developed a process of Non-violent Communication. With his methods, individuals learn to liberate themselves from cultural learning that is in conflict with communicating positively with others. Rosenberg sees polarised thinking, condemning others, denying our own responsibility because we see ourselves exclusively as victims, as forms of destructive communication. Instead of judging and condemning someone, we can learn to communicate our own emotions and formulate requests. This form of empathy towards our own emotions and needs corresponds to the empathy we have with the emotions and needs of others.

Nonviolent Communication teaches us to actively listen to the emotions and justified needs of others and to mirror our own perception of them. This way, appraisal and appreciation are conveyed and an honest dialogue can evolve. Marshall Rosenberg and his Centre for Nonviolent Communication offer training courses all over the world.

4. Intercultural mediation on the meso-level

The North-American peace researcher John Paul Lederach formulated the theory that diplomatic peace-building efforts are often unsuccessful because they do not sufficiently represent the real needs and interest of their citizens. He believes that information disseminators, for example teachers, local mayors or social workers, should be used on the middle level. As Intermediaries these information disseminators have connections to the local people that will be affected by change, but they also have a certain potential to influence politics. Political agreements have to be supplemented by reconciliatory work on the micro level. People must be prepared to see decisions made by politicians as leading to changes that will influence their life.

Lederach describes his idea of conflict resolution based on the example of the Nicaraguan Reconciliation Commission that helped mediate the con-

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flict between the rebellious Misquito and the Sandinistic government in the 1980s.

“It was part of our work there to sit at the negotiating table with high ranking officials the one day, and to go to along the jungle rivers through the villages of the east coast with them the next day. Because we saw the negotiating table as well as the villages that had been destroyed by war, we came to grasp the existence of multifaceted realities that were closely entwined, but nevertheless radically different from one another in their style and development: It showed us how big the differences are, between diplomacy with its hierarchical political structures of representation and the organical devolutions of reconciliation and re-building of life that had to take place among the relationships of the people that are the bread of the local village life” (Lederach, 1997: 45).

Hildegard Goss-Mayr (1999) and her husband Jean Goss have also worked in conflict and war zones all around the world. With a Christian mindset of active nonviolence they have practised reconciliatory work for over 30 years. The concept of conflict mediation through uninvolved third parties, who stand somewhere between politics and a basis on the meso-level, has influenced the idea of Civil Peace Services strongly. These Civil Peace Services are an important part of the German foreign policy and were instated in the late 1990s by the German government. Since then several hundreds of qualified volunteers have been sent to conflict zones all around the world.

5. Political conflict mediation on a macro political level

The Norwegian peace researcher Johan Galtung has had a large influence on the Transcend-method, which deals with the structural and cultural causes of violence and war. This method is constructed on a complex theory of violence and peace (Galtung, 1998). Its goals are the reduction of direct, structural and cultural violence and finding solutions that are more than just compromises. Galtung's theory is rooted in the belief that violence can only be understood if the underlying dimensions of culture, society and human interaction are taken into account. He suggests that there are collective and unconscious underlying deep structures, deep cultures and deep needs that have to be taken into consideration in political negotiations. The Transcend method uses the creative potential of people to find solutions that lie outside the conventional borders of thinking and behaving.

To foster conciliation, the legitimate goals of each of the opponents have to be taken into account. The spiritual and religious forces that provide for our hearts must be mobilized. Johan Galtung was sent out as a UN-intermediator and was part of many negotiations concerning international conflicts. The Catholic NGO Saint Egidio too has worked with a similar ap-

proach to peace building mediation and has made a significant contribution to ending the civil war in Mozambique and Uganda

6. The inclusion of deep underlying mental and spiritual structures in the intercultural learning processes

In cultural learning processes within political mediation the mental and spiritual underlying deep structures that shape human behavior have to be considered. On an interpersonal level (the micro political level), relationships between members of antagonized nations or cultures can help to overcome traumatic experiences and to resolve enemy projections.

The German peace service Action Reconciliation Service for Peace (ARSP), Aktion Sühnezeichen / Friedensdienste in German, has been sending young Germans to countries that have suffered at the hands of Germany in the Second World War, to work as volunteers for almost fifty years now. The volunteers go to Israel, Russia, Poland and France for example. They assist elderly people in residential care. The elderly people reported gaining some relief from their traumatic memories of their experiences with Germans, after meeting and being cared for by German volunteers from the ARSP. Through meeting these young people they have experienced a different Germany than the one they remember. Intercultural encounters like these have a therapeutic character; they can heal. However, there is also the danger that clichés may be aggravated and that compassion cannot be fostered, and that these encounters will lead to revivifications

Someone who cannot properly get in touch with his or her own feelings of aggression and fury will find it difficult to find access to others' feelings. On a macro political level too it is important to consider the subconscious sides of a culture and to acknowledge the underlying deep needs for a collective feeling of self-worth. In Germany, the football World Cup in 2006 showed clearly, that there is a desire among Germans to show the happy and jolly side to their nature. However, it is only possible to be jolly and happy about one's national identity if all of this identity is acknowledged. Patriotism must not include polarized thinking and disrespect of other nations.

The Russian monk Serafin of Sarov once said: "Try to find your own inner peace, it will lead thousands around you to find their own salvation" (quoted from Riccardi, 2003: 224) He does not simply argue that meditation and introspection are enough to save the world. He does, however, imply that there is a connection between the individual's mental state and the general state of the society surrounding that individual.

(Translation: Grace Krause)

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