

THE MULTICULTURAL CONTEXT AND MULTIDIMENSIONAL SCOPE OF PEACE

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Abstract

Since culture is deeply rooted in human beings of all groups, its role in both causing conflict and resolving conflict can be quite dynamic. Through time-proven traditions of dealing with conflict, culture can function constructively and meaningfully. Culture can also harbour divisive elements, however, which lead to discrimination against people of other cultures, and to conflict. When a breakthrough to mutual cultural understanding and respect has taken place, however, much more than an ad hoc peace agreement can be reached. A transformed and coexistential situation can become a reality. Both traditional and contemporary methods of dealing with conflict should be explored and utilised as necessary. Appropriate development, of which the people concerned can take ownership and to which they can commit themselves, should be supported. A climate of harmonious but realistic and natural coexistence should be promoted.

The Multicultural Context of Conflict and Peace

The main thrust of this paper is to propagate the notion of taking the cultural context into account when dealing with a conflict situation and working towards cross-cultural understanding and coexistence.¹ It should be obvious that ways of dealing with conflict cannot be studied, practised or taught in a cultural vacuum, and that the mono-, bi- or multi-cultural background and environment of any conflict are always relevant; not as an afterthought, but as a starting point (Davies & Kaufman 2002:2-5, 7-8). The first part of the paper is therefore focused on some of the most important insights that can make a difference in dealing with conflict and restoring peace.

Dealing with the dynamism of internalised culture

Culture confronts all of us with the complicated and challenging task of somehow penetrating to its hidden depths. The observable aspects of culture, such as language and customs, are relatively easy to study. But the really important aspects are the underlying ones, which sub-consciously or unconsciously provide the motivation for the typical behaviour in the cultural context concerned. This distinction between the visible and the invisible elements of culture has prompted the use of the iceberg metaphor.² Customary behaviour, verbal communication and typical food and dress are like the visible but small tip of an iceberg. Beliefs, values, attitudes and thought patterns are like the huge part under the surface. And just as icebergs collide underwater, cultural clashes usually take place at a deep and unseen level. While the externalities of a culture can be relatively easily learned (and unlearned), the internalities are absorbed in an existential way and

cannot simply be discarded and replaced. Values, mindsets and beliefs are usually not formally taught, but simply lived (Storti 1994:5).³ In this way the core of a culture is almost unconsciously *internalised* by the people concerned, and it becomes a dynamic driving force in each and all of them.

When people are in conflict with one another, they are in conflict as inherently cultural beings, and when they try to do something about their conflict, they are doing that too as culturally conditioned beings. The further implication is that, in dealing with conflict, the culture or cultures concerned must be taken seriously throughout the process. A cultural orientation cannot only be brought in as a gesture at the end, for instance by insisting on a culturally appropriate confirmation of an agreement. 'In our increasingly multicultural society and interconnected world', culture should be 'the starting point of discussion about conflict and transformation' (Stutzman 1994:1).⁴ Calling this process a 'discussion' is another important bit of realism. In a multicultural world it is almost impossible to have a comprehensive knowledge of the cultures and/or sub-cultures involved in a particular

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conflict situation. Experts in the field may investigate all the interesting cultural phenomena, and hopefully penetrate to an understanding of 'culture as the shared and lived principles of life, characteristic of different groups and classes as these emerge within asymmetrical relations of power and fields of struggle' (Giroux 1988:97-98, quoted in Goduka 1999:35). We may of course

benefit from the fruits of such studies, but in a discussion about a specific conflict it may be enough to listen to the words and pick up the non-verbal communication of the groups. Significant clues may be discovered about the 'group-orientedness' or 'individual-orientedness' of a culture (García 1994:52, 55), the historical background and the contemporary context of the shared customs, values and beliefs of a group, and the power imbalances and relational problems that may be present.

With regard to culture studies, it should therefore be emphasised that our cultural exploration should be wide enough and deep enough. We should not think that we can simply focus on cultural traditions about dealing with conflict. Such traditional methods provide a fascinating field of study, about which more in the next section, and in situations where the groups concerned happen to have such methods, they indeed deserve due attention. In all situations, however, whether such methods are generally adhered to or not, insight is needed into the loyalty and conformity of groups to their cultures. The main objective should not be quantitatively expanded databases full of facts and details, but rather qualitative understandings of internalised values and resulting behaviours.

Studying traditional ways of dealing with conflict

It should be obvious that traditional ways of dealing with conflict warrant devoted, critical and creative attention. They developed long ago and have remained in use in spite of all the changes that have taken place in the circumstances, experience, knowledge and skills of the people concerned. They are indeed time-proven, either as structured methods in their entirety or as models containing elements of timeless validity.

The All-Africa Conference on African Principles of Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation held in Addis Ababa in 1999 has provided us with an authentically African and very useful frame of reference for discussing methods from Africa (See '**Summary of Principles from**

Summary of Principles from across Africa

Underlying principles

To prevent latent conflict escalating into violence, through open dialogue and consensus decision-making, and, where required, to reconcile all parties and to re-establish non-exploitative relations or re-incorporate offenders into the community and to maintain social harmony.

Values

1. Consensus leadership with views being heard from all and debated exhaustively, with the leader expressing the consensus once reached;
2. Counsellors and judges consist of those showing wisdom, integrity and maturity in a spirit of calmness;
3. Participation by all, men and women;
4. Open agenda where no perspectives or parties are removed from public discussion of grievances except by the parties themselves;
5. Transparency and accountability to the community – no decisions behind closed doors;
6. Equal access to and sharing of resources as God-given gifts to all;
7. Emphasis on justice and fairness;
8. Eradication of economic injustice;
9. Non-violence against women, children, the old and the weak;
10. Respect for life;
11. Forgiveness, tolerance and co-existence;
12. Acknowledging and celebrating diversity.

Processes

1. Investigate total context and all roots to a conflict or offence. This was traditionally carried out by elders, initially behind the scenes, with evidence being broad and unbounded. This tradition can be reflected in the modern choice of respected experts and leaders;
2. Build consensus around expected outcomes that will emerge from any public discussion of the conflict/offence and the attitudes of the parties towards a resolution;
3. Public admission of responsibility and expression of remorse/repentance for negative actions, including sharing of the responsibility by the family/group/clan;
4. Determination of damage and redressing the victim/aggrieved party by way of reparation, including compensation, whether symbolic or proportional;
5. Public act or reconciliation entered into by all parties which is binding on the parties with the sanction on breaches being exclusion from society;
6. Importance of mediation and third-party principle;
7. Use of expressive arts – poetry, song, dance, dramatic representations.

across Africa').⁵ On the last day, a consensually drafted summary was developed, which succeeded in capturing – concisely, clearly and dynamically – distinguishing elements of traditions from Africa. Its most important sections (with the original emphasis) deserve to be quoted in full (Murithi & Pain 1999:95-96).

It should immediately be added that the sharing of information and insight at this landmark conference did not take place in an uncritical mood. The idea was not to romanticise the past. What was emphasised in the very first paper 'was neither a nostalgic and blind glorification of African thought nor a wholesale rejection of colonial or Western values' (Murithi & Pain 1999:15).⁶ Traditional methods were explored with receptive attention and without a sense of being pressured to adhere to them just because of their antiquity. Findings were that some of them are still used or can still be used in their original form or with slight adaptations, while others may have become dated, but may contain core elements of all-time validity. Therefore the conference drafted strategies for creatively integrating timeless traditional principles, values and procedures with contemporary methods of dealing with conflict and reconciling people (Murithi & Pain 1999: 98-107).

Questioning traditions that may cause or contribute to conflict

Critical comments and suggestions about modifications may be quite readily accepted with regard to traditional methods of *dealing* with conflict. Problems may be encountered, however, when we dare to begin asking questions about traditions that *cause* conflict. That such traditions do exist should not surprise us. After all, it is usually within a particular group of people that a whole body of cultural traditions is developed. The inherent 'own-groupishness'⁷ of any group of people may tempt them to adopt ways of doing things that are convenient and beneficial to themselves but inconvenient and disadvantageous to other groups. One of the most notorious examples of this phenomenon came from white South Africans – *Apartheid* ('separateness'). This discriminatory injustice inflicted by a white minority on the majority of their black compatriots inevitably caused and exacerbated the protracted anti-apartheid conflict (or 'struggle'). Fortunately, in the new South Africa the divisive structures have been dismantled and reconciliatory attitudes are being developed.

We may of course wish to leave this tragic history behind us, but precisely for the sake of not repeating its mistakes, we should remember the rationale behind it – and learn a crucial lesson. The foundations on which the policy of apartheid was built were long-standing social practices plus a belief in the racial superiority of whites and a fundamentalist theology of divinely ordained separateness. In the white-dominated political arena of those days, and in the cultural upbringing of young whites, especially Afrikaans-speaking whites, it was not the social separateness or the racial superiority that was emphasised. These

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elements were hidden between the lines. The emphasis was placed on 'separate development' and on the prohibition of 'mixed' marriages and socialising across the ethnic divide. That was the apparently well-intentioned tradition that was inculcated in young white South Africans. This did not

only happen when the 'National' Party came into power with its discriminatory policy, but preceding generations had been similarly conditioned to accept that 'different races should ... be kept separate and allowed to develop along their own lines' (Johnston & Sampson 1994:182). Then, however, some white South Africans began the challenging experience of questioning, criticising, opposing and rejecting a firmly entrenched tradition in the culture of their own families and communities. They have stories to tell – of being

ostracised, but also of being thanked for providing eye-openers. Being critical of divisive elements in one's own culture can become an ongoing responsibility, however. All of us should constantly be on the lookout for signs of a conflict-generating mindset, such as superiority, discrimination, exclusiveness or separateness. This commitment requires watchful observing and constant searching, since the hostile nature of such traditions is usually disguised under partisan propaganda or charismatic rhetoric. As in the case of apartheid, the people upholding a conflict-causing tradition may be bluffed by good intentions, cunning explanations and clever excuses. They may trust their cultural leaders and be loyal to their traditions without realising that their cultural package includes hostility and injustice towards fellow-humans.

Promoting cultural loyalty, but counteracting the own-culture-best syndrome

Fortunately, however, cultures are usually made up of much more than such problematic traditions. The main ingredients may be everyday customs that have developed over time among the people concerned, in their geographic environment, and therefore have historical, social and contextual validity. The particular ways of saying and doing things are owned and trusted by generation after generation.⁸ From the perspective of culture studies, we may and should therefore encourage people to be loyal to their culture and to live their traditions with joint commitment and encouragement. At the same time, however, all of us should be nudged away from the notion that one's own culture is self-evidently the best. Bearing in mind how all of us have been nurtured by our respective cultures and

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how we have faithfully and loyally internalised the set of traditions handed down to us by parents and educators, we realise that this change of mindset is never undertaken lightly and easily. It is usually prompted by a surprising insight or a shocking experience. The insight may be an

acknowledgement of diversity. The shock may be the discovery of flaws and fallacies in one's own culture. Either of these may develop gradually or happen as a dramatic breakthrough. In this regard we may receive assistance from others and we may render assistance to others. It should always be emphasised that downgrading one's culture from 'best of all' to 'as good as others' does not imply any diminishing of loyalty to one's culture. What may happen, however, is that a favourably prejudiced observance, which may be somewhat superficial, is replaced by an unbiased and more genuine commitment. At the same time, one's group and oneself can become liberated from the tendency to defend one's culture, or even to fight for its 'honour'.

A good deal of courage is needed to admit that the culture of one's own group is not the best on earth. To propagate this admission where a cultural establishment is in a dominating position, even more courage may be necessary. And when it comes to the field of *religion*, fearless risks may have to be taken. That was what had to be done in South Africa, since apartheid was not only a socio-political monster, but also a theologically inspired one. What was called 'apartheid theology' was a construct concocted by fundamentalist Christian 'theologians' from bits of *Old Testament* history (*not* from the Christian New Testament), which they authoritatively declared 'the will of God'. Many things have since then changed in the new South Africa, but the changing of attitudes is a long-term process. Some South Africans are therefore trying to communicate the message that however well intentioned fundamentalist Christianity may be, it inevitably sidelines Jesus' essential message of *inner* transformation through its obsession with doctrinal 'certainties' that emerged *after* the time of Jesus.

With regard to open-mindedness about one's own culture, we also have an example of meditation and introspection from Kenya, where 'the Borana community spends much of its time thinking about their culture and making deliberate attempts to modify their customs' (Duba *et al* 1997:16).⁹ This line of thinking is one that may indeed be encouraged. It can promote both own-culture assessment and other-culture acknowledgement. A particular training manual provides a good example worth following by others:

The following exercises on culture help a group to understand more fully the dynamic nature of culture, to look both appreciatively and critically at their own culture, and to become more sensitive to the values in other cultures (Hope & Timmel 1999:186).

Promoting cross-cultural understanding, respect and coexistence

In the televised world of today, we can hardly avoid taking note of our amazing cultural diversity. Human beings happen to find themselves in thousands of ethno-national groups (Connor 1994:196) and are committed to large numbers of distinguishable cultures (Solanke 1982:27). Africa is no exception with its cultural heterogeneity (Olaniyan 1982:7-8) and its mosaic of ethnic groups. But we can also allow our thinking to proceed further into our responsibilities as global citizens. One obvious responsibility is that if we wish to be loyal to our own culture, it is only fair to allow others the scope to be loyal to theirs. Another one is to develop a reasonable degree of interest in the cultures of others. If cultures exist by the hundreds and thousands, no individual or group can be expected to make a detailed study of all cultures. It is realistically possible, however, to focus on the *cross-cultural*

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context of a particular conflictual or coexistential situation. There are of course cases where more than two cultures are involved, and where a multicultural complexity has to be dealt with. Even in a mono-cultural setting there may be two or

more sub-cultures to be borne in mind.¹⁰ In most cases, however, it is not a comprehensive and penetrating study that is needed, but merely a genuine willingness to understand and respect the culture(s) concerned. In any situation where groups of different cultures are living together, each group usually knows at least something of the culture of the other groups. Such bits of knowledge are, however, often accompanied and even overruled by opinions of criticism and feelings of dislike.

The level and quality of cross-cultural coexistence can be substantially improved when limited and biased knowledge of one another's cultures is turned into an open-minded willingness to learn more about the cultures concerned. This learning should not only be focused on gathering more *facts* about traditions and customs, but should penetrate to as much understanding as possible of the *reasons* behind the traditions and customs. Meaningful research can undoubtedly be done in this field. In many cases the rationales behind cultural elements may be well known, but may have to be verified. Distinctions may have to be made between original rationales and ones that have been adduced (or fabricated) at later stages. The value of such an investigation may lie not only in actual findings, but also in the message it conveys to a culturally conditioned public that they should explore the backgrounds of their behaviour. As culturally motivated people, all of us indeed have the important responsibility of thinking *why* we are saying and doing things the way we do. Of course, we cannot be engaged in such thinking every moment of our daily life, but we can at least do it in moments of meditation and in times of crucial choices.

The Multidimensional Scope of Peace

With cross-cultural understanding and respect happening on all sides, the outcome of a peace agreement is more than just an ad hoc settlement of a particular problem. A transformed situation can be experienced in which diversity and differences are transcended, tolerance and/or reconciliation are achieved, and relationships and social harmony are restored and improved. In this second part of the article, a few ways of contributing to such a culture of peace are briefly discussed.

Counteracting misunderstandings of 'peace'

There is, unfortunately, a widespread misunderstanding of 'peace' as an imposed pacification, which is 'weak, passive, dull and boring' (Kreidler 1990:xvi). There is also the view that peace is merely an inner state of consciousness (Weil 1994:26-28). For counteracting such lapses in understanding, the basic distinction between 'negative peace' (absence of violence or war) and 'positive peace' (a state of harmony between people) is often used as a starting point (Weil 1994:23-25). In 'Peace' in the *Glossary of Terms and Concepts in Peace and Conflict Studies* of the University for Peace, the negative-positive contrast is used, but several aspects are added to show that 'peace connotes more than a mere absence of war or hostilities' (Miller & King 2005:56). And in the very first line of the entry, the interrelated key concepts of 'justice and social stability' are brought into the explanation (Miller & King 2005: 55).¹¹ Another appropriate key word that can be associated with peace is *freedom*. In a modest publication of more than two decades ago, two founding fathers of peace studies in the United Kingdom presented very meaningful contributions (O'Connell & Curle 1985). They emphasised that

peace, justice and freedom – are intrinsically linked with one another ...
[They are] abstract values that to be effective in our contemporary world
need to be mediated through related attitudes and values as well as through
practical capacities and organisational forms (O'Connell 1985:30, 33).

In the summary of African principles of conflict resolution and reconciliation quoted above, there are more key words and concepts: *socio-economic justice, reconciliation, social harmony, forgiveness, tolerance and coexistence* (Murithi & Pain 1999:95-96). They are recognised for time-proven validity and for contemporary relevance. The more these concepts and perspectives are used in conjunction with 'peace' – either just to annotate a brief reference to peace, or to elaborate on the outcomes of the kind of peace that should be promoted – the more effectively partial understandings of 'peace' may be counteracted. And of course, what is communicated through teaching, researching and propagating 'peace studies' can be endorsed by the work done by people addressing the root causes of conflict and promoting a climate of peaceful coexistence.

Focusing on causes and purposes of conflict

When limited notions of peace are rejected and insight is gained into a comprehensive culture of peace, important implications follow. One is that the addressing of causes, even root causes, of conflict should not be dealt with in an ad hoc way – as if it is merely a matter of reaching a 'settlement' that seems to rectify the particular wrong, or its most irritating part. The entire approach and process should be oriented to an outcome that satisfies the parties concerned and enables them to restore and maintain the best possible degree of coexistence after the resolving of the conflict.

It is to be appreciated therefore that causes of conflict are usually properly emphasised in conflict and peace studies (Anstey 1999:12-28). Students can write good examination answers on causes of conflict. Practitioners are trained to identify apparent causes, to search for underlying causes, and even to delve deeper until they reach the deepest root cause. And when they deal with a conflict situation they usually manage very well to put this part of their training into practice.

It can make a seemingly small but significant difference, however, when causes are translated into *purposes*. This may appear to be a mere playing with key words, but it actually represents a key paradigm shift. It changes an analytical exercise to identify a cause into an empathetic undertaking to fathom a purpose. This approach goes further

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than asking fact-finding questions, such as 'Where exactly did this conflict begin?' It also asks mind-exploring questions, such as 'What did you have in mind when you felt compelled to instigate (or get involved in) this conflict?'

The important point is that rephrasing in terms of a *purpose* usually represents *the perspective of the party who had a valid reason* (at least according to its perception) *for initiating the conflict*.¹² It shows that the people dealing with the conflict situation are imagining themselves into the positions of the parties, and especially into the position of the party suffering (the most) injustice. Empathy can change a matter-of-fact label for a cause into a warmly human, motivational term for an objective.

Moreover, this perspective can help to ensure that when an agreement is eventually reached, it will deal with the root cause of the conflict in a way that satisfies both (or all) parties – including the one which had felt obliged to start the conflict. During the anti-apartheid struggle, some white South Africans gained this insight into the importance of understanding the purpose of a conflict. For the apartheid regime and conservative establishment it was enough to blame the 'unrest' on the *cause* they identified: communist instigation. More liberal whites saw the cause as unfair discrimination. But for the victims suffering under the unjust system the *purpose* of the 'struggle' was to gain acknowledgement and respect as human beings with equal rights and dignity.

The emphasis on purpose can also be put to good use in cases where a party may be unable to formulate its purpose. This often seems to happen in the political dimension when a charismatic leader founds a party without having any clear policy. By default, the main objective of such a party then simply becomes that of supporting its leader and his or her rhetoric. Such a party or an alliance of such parties may end up in a rebel group fighting a war with no other purpose than putting a self-aggrandising leader into a position of power. We may just hope that when people dealing with conflict pay specific attention to the *purpose* of a conflict, this may send a message to the public that will dissuade them from supporting goalless political parties.

Studying and assessing contemporary ways of dealing with conflict

When we realise how wide-ranging and profound the scope of peace can be, we often feel the urge to build our expertise by learning from traditional, recent and current methods of dealing with conflict and propagating peace. We may be intrigued by methods from the past, but we must also keep up with methods of the present and be on the lookout for methods that are ahead of their time. Our repertoire should be rich enough to suggest the most appropriate approach for each unique conflict situation. A conflict between groups faithfully observing traditions of long standing obviously calls for a traditional method. A

conflict between groups of youth today would require a method enjoying contemporary popularity. And a conflict between a tradition-oriented group and a progressively minded group may need much wisdom plus an extended deliberation before consensus about a procedure can be reached.

Current ways, as well as many traditional ones, allow flexibility and adaptability, however. And all methods have advantages and disadvantages. As noted above with regard to cultural traditions, the various methods and procedures should therefore not be studied nor used uncritically. They should be evaluated and improved where necessary. A useful tool in this regard is the report of the worldwide 'Reflecting on Peace Practice Project' (Anderson & Olson 2003).¹³ When a revered ancient method urgently needs some updating – for instance, phasing out patriarchalism and phasing in gender equality – care, tact and courage are usually needed. In such a case it may be better to focus on the contemporary methods first and make them as satisfactory and as exemplary as possible.

Propagating conflict-transforming insights and skills

An interesting recent development was one in which a new idea validated an old one – and a particularly African one. For some time the most popular options on the menu of current methods were prevention, management and resolution of conflict. These three were particularly emphasised when the Organisation of African Unity (which became the African Union) used them in the name of the division that it set up to deal with conflict. A number of years ago, however, a new option was added to the menu: *conflict transformation*. It was greeted with some hesitancy and some confusion. Some used it for the changes in context, parties, issues, processes or structures (Miller & King 2005: 26) and therefore applied the idea of transformation mainly to the *process* of a conflict and its resolution (Miller & King 2005: 27). Others used it for the changing of the entire situation that had caused a conflict by rectifying the wrongs so that a transformed *situation* for post-conflict coexistence could become a reality. At ACCORD we believe that this second sense is the one that is most generally used in South Africa, and we are therefore trying to promote such conflict transformation in our work and our training. Our training manuals bear the title of 'Transforming Conflict' and contain the following description:

Conflict transformation focuses on changing the structures and institutions that keep injustice entrenched in a society and prevent peace and stability. It is closely linked to peacebuilding in that it involves systemic transformation with a view to increasing justice and equality in the social system as a whole. Reconstruction and reconciliation are often part of conflict transformation (ACCORD 2002: 37).

In Africa, this approach is not a new one, however. Most, if not all, of Africa's traditional methods of dealing with conflict seem to have been rooted in conflict transformation thinking. They were never intended to produce ad hoc solutions of a quick-fix and retributive kind. African ways of resolving conflict were designed to restore social harmony and lead to a process of transforming structures, changing attitudes and improving relationships.

Supporting development as needed and desired

Among the typical causes of conflict, some seem to be very prevalent: for instance, unsatisfied human needs or rights, social or personal injustice, domination and discrimination. Such conflict-causing realities are not only current and worldwide phenomena; in differing forms and degrees they have been afflicting our ancestors through

the ages. In the summary of conflict-resolving and reconciling principles from across Africa quoted above, there are the values of 'equal access to and sharing of resources' and of the 'eradication of economic injustice'. In a contemporary analysis of conflicts, it is stated that 'a functional correlation exists between poverty and conflict' (Solomon 1999: 35),¹⁴ and this is substantiated by statistical observations as the following:

In the past fifteen years, about fifteen of the world's twenty poorest countries have experienced violent conflict ... About half of the world's low-income countries are either engaged in conflict or are in the process of transition from conflict (Solomon 1999:35).

In the same publication, there is a picture of a sad-looking Liberian in front of a poster with the encouraging but over-simplified message, 'The War is Over! It's Time for Development' (Mekenkamp *et al* 1999:20). This picture appears in a chapter in which the African Renaissance idea is frankly debated (Liebenberg & Mackay 1999:17-24). Debate is indeed urgently needed, also about development itself. While competition for resources 'typically lies at the heart of conflict', the 'most significant of all causes is the role of prevailing development paradigms in causing conflicts or at least in fuelling them' (Adedeji 1999:10-12). The particularly problematic paradigm Adedeji referred to was 'externally initiated and funded' structural adjustment programmes, which provided a pertinent example of 'dictated development' (Malan 1999).

Development can obviously be a crucially important and inspiring peace dividend, but then it should not be an imposed version of development. Enloe (1973:xi) has aptly described 'development' as a 'slippery term' and pointed to the intimate relationship between the study of development and the study of desires, goals, aspirations and perceptions (Enloe 1973:9). An obvious example of *dictated* development was the ideologically designed, patronisingly presented and bureaucratically implemented separate 'development' of the apartheid era. And an obvious example of *desired* development is found in the democratically compiled Freedom Charter (Polley 1988:16), which presented a remarkably

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cogent and comprehensive plan for democracy and development, as it was urgently needed and intensely desired by the majority of South Africans half a century ago. It is such development that can be welcomed and owned by the people in need of it that fits into the comprehensive scope of the peace

we should be advocating. A great advantage of this approach is that it tends to focus on development as an essential part of human living, rather than as the particular achievement of a privileged and/or successful group. And by taking note of more cultural contributions than just one, it can be prevented from elevating a single culture to a position of predominance. Feelings of superiority and inferiority can therefore be avoided or at least discouraged. There may be some aspects, as the development of literacy for instance, that may have to be accepted as 'dictated' by our global environment, but on the whole people may become voluntarily committed to developing in terms of personality growth, educational progress and social coexistence.

Promoting a climate of harmonious coexistence

The ultimate goal of the time-proven approach of transforming a conflict situation is to promote a climate of harmonious coexistence. This has to be done with realism, but at the same time it can be done with optimism. We have to remember that the metaphor of

climate is a realistic one, which does not include any idea of incessant good weather. Even a very moderate climate can have its spells of stormy weather. For African families, while 'the ideal is love and harmony ... African customs state that conflicts are inevitably present within this harmony' (Gluckman 1973:56).

In a South African fieldwork research project on coexistence after violent conflict, people frankly shared their experiences of breakthroughs to talking, listening, understanding and changing mindsets, and the outcomes of working together and living together. They emphasised how they used problem-solving talks, accepted but transcended differences and maintained the commitment to compromise (ACCORD 2008:54-68). They explained how they were experiencing coexistence as a natural phenomenon. They were therefore able to make two important recommendations about naturalness. The first was that we should be oriented towards *a normal, realistic kind* of coexistence, and not an extraordinary, idealised one. And the second was that genuine coexistence comes *spontaneously* and that we should not be bluffed by a show of coexistence that is achieved by effort (ACCORD 2008: 68-69).

Conclusion

Each conflict has a complicated background and context, in which the cultures concerned may be of crucial importance or of less importance, but they will rarely be of no importance. The responsibility for approaching cultural and cross-cultural situations receptively, understandingly and critically does not only rest on institutions with 'culture' in their names. Everyone who is committed to assist in dealing with conflict and restoring peace needs insights and skills in this regard. This paper therefore strongly recommends attitudes, mindsets and actions that can contribute to the following:

- Understanding parties in conflict, and parties trying to resolve their conflict, as people conditioned by deeply rooted cultural convictions;
- Learning from traditional African methods of resolving conflict and reconciling, which are typically oriented towards restoring relationships and social harmony
- Promoting loyalty to one's own culture, while allowing people of other cultures to be loyal to theirs;
- Counteracting divisive elements such as superiority, discrimination, separateness, or exclusiveness in our own cultures, and recommending the same to people of other cultures;
- Promoting as much cross-cultural understanding, tolerance and respect as possible in each particular situation.

This paper further emphasises that our orientation should constantly be towards a comprehensive, multidimensional peace. In this regard, the following are recommended:

- Counteracting misunderstandings of peace as superficial pacification or partial understandings that regard an ad hoc settlement as enough;
- Understanding the mindsets of the parties involved in a conflict – both the aggrieved parties and the parties who refuse to attend to the causes of the grievances;
- Working for the kind of peace that becomes possible when the root causes of conflict (such as socio-economic injustice or socio-political 'unfreedom') have been effectively dealt with;

- Propagating development which is desired and owned by the people concerned
- Living spontaneously in the dimension of human coexistence, taking the problems and disappointments in our stride, and remaining wholeheartedly committed to our inherent interrelatedness.

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Endnotes

¹ In its original form – under the title ‘How Meaningfully and How Courageously Can Culture and Peace Studies be Practised?’ – this paper was presented at the launch of the Centre for Culture and Peace Studies in Gaborone, Botswana, on 12 April 2007.

² Apparently first used by Edward Hall, an anthropologist (Hall 1976). The same metaphor is also used by LeBaron and Pillay (2006:17) as one of several very apt metaphors found in this publication.

³ Where the process is outlined as follows: ‘... “teach” is too formal a word to describe the process of cultural conditioning. As a rule, parents don’t actually sit down and explain these values to children; most parents aren’t even aware they hold them. Rather, these cultural attitudes are merely inherent in the things parents do and say (which they learned from *their* parents), and children, imitating what parents do and say, absorb the values with the behaviours’ (Storti 1994:5).

⁴ A good (but rare) example of incorporating this emphasis in a training manual is found in one published by the Mennonite Conciliation Service (Stutzman & Schrock-Shenk 1996). About a quarter of the second chapter, ‘Understanding Conflict and Transformation’, is devoted to the ‘Cultural Dimension’, and in the fourth chapter, ‘Interpersonal Mediation: One Model’, there is a section on ‘Cultural Considerations for Mediators’.

⁵ At this conference, more than a hundred participants from more than 20 African countries gathered for five days. They discussed more than 60 presentations, 70% of which were focused on examples of traditional methods. The participants included practitioners, researchers, indigenous chiefs, civil society associations (including women’s and youth networks), prominent African personalities, government policy-makers and representatives of sub-regional organisations (Murithi & Pain 1999:vi).

⁶ Presented by Titilayo Ogundipe-Leslie of Ethiopia, after opening statements by the Ethiopian Prime Minister and the secretary-general of the Organisation of African Unity as well as a keynote address by the executive director of the African Renaissance Institute.

⁷ A term coined on the analogy of selfishness.

⁸ ‘Culture is in short ‘... “the way things are done around here”. It is embedded in our lives, especially our lives beneath the surface, nurturing our dreams and birthing our legacies’ (LeBaron & Pillay 2006:26).

⁹ *Honey and Heifer, Grasses, Milk and Water: A Heritage of Diversity in Reconciliation* (Duba et al 1997) is a remarkable publication containing descriptions of indigenous methods of conflict resolution written by authors from eight pastoral communities in Kenya, and beautifully illustrated by Isam Aboud and Izzeldin Kojour.

¹⁰ ‘Cultural groups may share ethnicity, race or nationality, but cultural differences may also arise from socio-economic class, generational difference, sexual orientation, ability and disability, political and religious affiliation, gender, regional origin, and so on ... individuals in cultural groups may or may not observe the group’s norms and values in any given context’ (LeBaron & Pillay 2006:27).

¹¹ The Hague Appeal for Peace Global Campaign for Peace Education describes peace education as ‘a participatory process which changes our way of thinking and promotes learning for peace and justice’ (Burke 2000: 16). John Paul Lederach has even coined the term ‘justpeace’ (Lederach 1999:36).

¹² The bracketed words in the last question are meant as a reminder that this question should also be asked to the party who responded to the instigation of the conflict.

¹³ Five of the 26 case studies were done in Africa, and five of the 25 feedback workshops (in 2001 and 2002) were conducted in Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria and South Africa. Other workshops were held in Canada, the United States, Central America, the United Kingdom, Europe, the Philippines, Indonesia and Australia.

¹⁴ 'Poverty and conflicts feed on each other while both go hand in hand with bad governance' – Adedeji (1999:14).

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