

Regional Cooperation's Ideas and Mechanism from the Perspective of Peace Studies

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I

There are four different constellations for understanding the relationship of cultures (religions) and nations. At the first level, the lowest level, you can see the constellation of Ego. This describes the persuasion that your culture, religion or nation is the best and highest one. In this egocentric view all other cultures, religions and nations are not comparable with your own. However, this archaic opinion is found increasingly seldom, especially among the young. The next constellation – under the term Multi – illustrates the ability for cultures and nations to live together side by side, a kind of coexistence that we find much more of nowadays. More often we find constellations which are determined by various forms of Inter. For example, our cultural and national lives are defined by inter-actions which involve communication and cooperation. Unfortunately, in relation to religions, the development from Ego across Multi to Inter still happens comparatively rarely. On the level of Trans – the highest level in our model – we feel we are all sitting in the same boat, living in One World, having the same experiences, sharing the same wishes and also having the same troubles (for example, our ecological problems). From this perspective we are all connected and unified in a single global network.

Academic discussions have been characterized by a focus on diversity. This is good because it has been necessary. We need to have an awareness of people's different specialities as this can bring acceptance of these and the understanding necessary to value them. But now that the process has been started by this awareness, we need to focus much more on unity, on universals (see Donald E. Brown, Human Universals) and on universality, or on transversality. Because, if our discussions remain permanently concerned with diversity, they will engender the wrong impression: that the reality of our differences that such discussions highlight is the main reality. However, although it is no less important, these differences are peripheral to our main reality. In particular, the dense network of digital communication and economic relations (including their shadow: the ecological

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problems that we're now discovering) signifies that we now exist and live interdependently in a world we are characterizing as transcultural, transreligious, and transnational. These interdependencies demonstrate a unique drawing together of people that has not previously been experienced. Under these conditions, we need to discuss the possibilities of peace building in a new way, especially its potential within the framework of social networking. Please note: in a world unified by common lifestyles, close economic ties, and digital connectivity we can expect that the basic phenomena of culture, religion, and nationhood may continue to exist and function.

Nations are constructs; constructs defined by special interests, by history. Moreover, features that are considered natural borders very often function as connections. Take a river: it can function as a separating line and it can also be a bond between people who share the same situation, with the same organizing principle, the same mentality, and connected by common trade and traffic. Very often issues concerning specific parts of a nation may connect across a border because they also affect the people who live in similar environments in a neighbouring country. In Africa, especially, national structures divide tribes by borders that cut through the regions where indigenous tribes have lived since eternity. In the light of these considerations, we need to relativize the existence of nations on the understanding that their existence is largely a contingent one. A consequence of this relativization is the alliance of nations as a global federation with transnational structures and intentions. The most visible result of such progressive connecting is the phenomenon of the United Nations which involves many international institutions (or, even better, transnational ones), as well as declarations like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, decades like that for a "Culture of Peace and Non-Violence" and countless other border-transcending international/transnational non-governmental organizations. More than this, Peace Studies are aware of the relevance of a double relativization of nations and nationalism: a relativization by decentralization and federalization on one hand and unification through transnational connectivity on the other.

II

At the beginning of the 20th century, when the first Israelis went to Palestine to settle there, claiming legitimacy because of their Palestinian Jewish roots, Martin Buber, the famous philosopher of dialog, insisted that they intersperse themselves among the Arab people already living there by choosing a federal system of living together. Later Joseph Abileah, argued the same from a geo-political

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viewpoint; namely, that in a non-federal system the Palestinians would always be denied access to the sea and therefore to the trade they depended on. However, both Abileah and Buber argued without success. Since then, there have been many wars in Palestine, and future developments will also prove both men right: The only solution to the Palestinian conflict is federalism. Through this structure the different groups of people can rule the country together and remain autonomous at the same time. Federalism is the political ideal - not only as a possibility to structure a country of autonomous parts, but also as an underlying principle. Federalism is a way of thinking and a moral understanding. You cannot realize it by only being concerned with the relationships between provinces and maintaining a common political structure if the principle of organizing political unity at all levels is not fully respected. Federalism only functions as a bottom-up system, realized from the smallest societal unity up to the largest one. It's inner principles are participation, tolerance and a great ability for compromise. An amusing illustration of this is to compare federalism with a jigsaw puzzle, as both need to have all the individual parts in place for the whole picture to be complete.

Conflict transformation depends both on structural measures and on actional ones. The so called Round Table (RT) stands for both. Bringing people together, that is coming together instead of trying to solve a problem by a constellation, which is determined by the separation of the conflicting parties, is a first structural measure. We may solve a lot of problems by structural decisions. For instance, if your very young child is irritating you by insisting on playing with a sharp object on your damageable glass table, you could use an actional solution and continuously criticize the child and so make it permanently stressed. Alternatively, you could take the glass table out of the living room, probably only for a while, and replace it with a cheap less damageable table. In this case a structural decision dispensed with the need for actional measures. So the establishment of a RT is already half the solution, in itself. A Round Table is both a structure and a method. RT discussions and decision-making are defined by the participation of all persons concerned, or their representatives. They are also realizable for all levels of peace building. In particular, RT is an efficient way to transform conflicts as an alternative to attempts by institutions and movements that are normally determined by exclusion and confrontation. Like the alternative Nobel Prizes, we can imagine a kind of RT that is used alongside or within the UN, where principled and only (!) nonviolent solutions are worked out by persons affected by the conflict, for example in a situation when civil war seems imminent.

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As it is, the UN is too quick to believe that only violent solutions are viable.

Currently, life on our planet is dominated by (international) political conflicts. A lot depends on how these conflicts can be resolved. Indeed, politics is essentially “conflict politics“. As such, politics will always be indispensable, now and in the future. Because we will always have conflicts we need to have a balance of the political forces through political struggle. But, in future, the fate of the globe may not depend on the free play of political or economic forces but on an unstressed, efficient worldwide administration. This one small planet needs, firstly, a highly professional, well-functioning administration to solve the economic and ecological problems of life and, supporting this, a sub-administrative ethics constituting a culture and practice of political struggle. Thus, the priority is administration not politics. Politics is oriented to a common, globally and federally organized administration that is only thinkable in terms of domestic world policy. The global atmosphere, in which politics acts and administration handles the challenges of daily life, is mainly determined by common cultures of interpersonal dealings, such as nonviolent conflict transformations, working and consuming, education and learning, music and sports. The youth of the world is not only connected by same fashion and taste but also by the same distance from politics and the same orientation to culture.

III

Max Weber made a far reaching distinction by highlighting the polarization of conviction on one side and responsibility on the other. His thesis was that a man who is politically responsible cannot keep his hands clean in a moral sense and, conversely, a man who tries to keep his hands clean cannot act responsibly. If you are responsible for a community or more generally for a political system you have to practice violence in several forms. In the political dimension, nonviolent conviction and responsibility are brought together. Nonviolence in this context isn't a pure persuasion, rather it is the ability to manage conflicts and to regulate societal and political living together in a nonviolent way. Activists keep their hands free of blood, even as they undertake actions. However, acting must not automatically be connected with violence in any form. Nonviolent acting is acting, even acting very efficiently, but it is acting without violence. In active nonviolence, conviction and responsibility aren't opposites, rather they are compatible because it's possible to take responsibility in society and to keep your hands clear of violence. In a philosophical sense, this

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is the square of the circle.

Nonviolence can be a tactical weapon used to win out over somebody and/or achieve particular goals. For example, because nonviolence can use socio-psychological mechanisms it can be as tricky as other methods in realizing the own will against the will of others. In this respect, nonviolence is a political method like other political methods. But nonviolence of this kind is not the nonviolence peace studies intend. Nonviolence in the tradition of Gandhi and King is not a method of enforcing particular interests but of opening a process of seeking and finding conflict resolution by creating conflict transformation based on cooperative management with one's opponent in the community. Much more than a means, nonviolence is a framework within which a solution may be found. In this sense, nonviolence smooths the way, so resolution can occur. It is not a method of realizing one's own interests, but of finding solutions that both sides can live with in the future. Therefore it is directed at keeping the conflict space free of violence, even under conditions whereby the opponent doesn't want the same and is acting violently. Violence is the main enemy of solutions that are workable. The outcome of violent attempts at conflict regulation is always a unilateral solution, and therefore not really a solution. The principle of nonviolence is based on the faith that, in the vacuum of nonviolence, a process is occurring that leads to a solution all parties can accept. This may well be a solution that is not the one that the nonviolent actor actually wants.

Those who work towards a nonviolent space, and expect processes that deliver results all participants can accept to develop in this space, believe in a power that is acting in the vacuum in the interests of both parties: a third, independent power, who both the nonviolent agent and the conflict opponent or partner are subject to. If nonviolence is to be more than merely a tactic or method to achieve an end, its agents have to believe in a power that is acting in the vacuum of nonviolence which the agent prepares through special nonviolent actions. Thus, Gandhi's nonviolent agents trusted in the power of truth (satyagraha): that there is a dynamic, a constructive potential that brings people together - a form of Third Power. In the biblical tradition this is represented by the four letters, JHWH which means that there is something that exists in the interests of the people. In a South African theology the name for this is MODIMO, which means that there

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is a God who collects friends and enemies within the same fence. There are many ways of naming it: Lao Tse called it the Being beyond the whole being, Christians would say God, Muslims Allah, others believe in Biophily as the center of living together, or the Absolute Horizon of Being. In a very original way, the Anglican theologian, Carter Heyward, signifies dealings that relate to the existence of such a Third Power. From this perspective, every nonviolent behaviour or dealing demonstrates an absolute trust in an inaccessible, in the between of all parties existing and acting Third. This spirituality is the core of a nonviolence that is much more than only a method.