**PEACEBUILDING AND CHRONIC VIOLENCE: LEARNING FROM LATIN AMERICA**

**SPECIAL ISSUE OF JOURNAL OF PEACEBUILDING**

**MANY VIOLENCES, MANY PEACES: WOLFGANG DIETRICH AND JENNY PEARCE IN**

**CONVERSATION**

**Topic 1: How Central America in the 1980s taught us about Peace**

**JP:** I am kickstarting this conversation, with a return to our memories before we became peace scholars as such. We share something. I learnt this by accident in personal conversations with you and also with John Paul Lederach. I learnt that Latin America, but particularly Central America, played a big part in all our lives and how we think about ‘peace’. And this was Central America of the 1980s, in the midst of civil war, repression and revolutionary upheaval. I want to know how the Central American civil wars of the 1980s impacted on each of us personally. And then we can discuss how our perspectives continue to be shaped by Latin America and why.

I will start the conversation, by sharing my own story.

I first went to Central America in 1978. I went to Guatemala and El Salvador. I was supposed to go to Managua, but President Somoza bombed the city the day I was due to travel and they closed the airport. I was just about to begin my post as researcher/writer for the Latin America Bureau. This organisation had been set up in London to research and raise awareness about human rights, development and resistances of people in Central America as tensions mounted in that region, as well as the challenges facing other parts of Latin America. I knew little about Central America when I first went there, I had till then worked in Uruguay under the military dictatorship of the 1970s; thats where I did my doctoral research. However, the Latin America Bureau had many contacts through the Catholic Church, and I got to know priests, labour and student activists, lawyers and academics, peasant leaders and organizers. The region was polarising politically. Some in the opposition saw no route other than armed struggle, while others tried to retain a position of electoral opposition. The armed option was growing, as the other position proved increasingly untenable and its leaders were murdered. In Guatemala, the deaths of Alberto Fuentes Mohr and Manuel Colom Argueta in 1979, two social democratic minded politicians, convinced many that this route to change was no longer viable. In El Salvador, right wing death squads were torturing and killing social organisers as well as political opponents of the government. The country’s Archbishop, Monsenor Romero, was murdered in 1980 as he said mass. And in Nicaragua, Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, the editor of La Prensa, the main opposition newspaper, was assassinated in January 1978. The ‘middle ground’ group of Los Doce joined forces with the FSLN (Sandinistas) armed group at this time. As I got to know the actors involved in these struggles, I was forced to confront the issue of violence and non violence in the struggle for change, and this has haunted me since. I did support the armed struggle in Central America. However, it was precisely having to confront, as a young researcher, the real world of polarised and violent politics, that I began a journey towards peace research and action. Central America taught me that activism for social change comes in many guises. The actual form is not an ‘academic’ choice, but one which emerges in concrete historical moments. At the same time, I learnt that the use of violence does not guarantee the quality of the change demanded. On the contrary, violence can take away agency for change and erode the democratic potentiality of that agency.

This paradox (violence is the only way, but violence does not guarantee the change) must be set in the context of the extreme violence that came from the State in Central America and the elites who backed it. Truth Commissions have revealed that in Central America, the extreme cruelty was committed mostly by the State and paramilitary actors working with it. However, in the course of the war, insurgents were also responsible for abuses.

 I returned many times to the region during the war years. In Guatemala, in 1982, I was in Coban in the highlands, just after one of Rios Montt’s counter insurgency massacres against indigenous peoples. And in El Salvador, an experience which has shaped my life, I lived with the peasants of Chalatenango for a few months under the aerial bombardment and army invasions, as they tried to build their own local government. These experiences taught me about agency amongst the poorest. They taught me that the grand narratives of war, of perpetrators and victims, do not capture the everyday realities that people navigate. More than anything, however, I learnt about the difference it makes when people ‘own’ a struggle rather than when they are mobilised by others.

This difference, is exemplified by that between Guatemala, where the armed insurgency was unable to work with the indigenous population in a way that gave that population social protagonism, and Chalatenango, El Salvador, where a radical church had cultivated the ethical agency of the peasants. They had organised their own peasant movement and eventually supported the guerrilla option, despite a deep rejection of violence. And in Nicaragua, the Sandinistas, having eventually won power in 1979, were creating a space for forms of social organising never possible under Somoza. At the same time, I saw the ambiguities in their position, as mobilising behind Sandinismo did not necessarily mean the autonomy for peasant self growth that I witnessed in Chalatenango. However, the creativity of much of the social experiments that went on in Nicaragua was inspiring, and the role of the United States in threatening the process distorted its progress enormously. The US brought the contra war to Nicaragua and in the hindsight of history, while the contras and the US did not succeed in overthrowing the Sandinistas, the great social experimentation was weakened. Indeed, the United States under President Reagan, held back the desperately needed social and political transformations in Central America as a whole. I learnt how illiterate rural dwellers, from multiple ethnic backgrounds, had so much to offer the future of the region: a sustainable agriculture, a politics of difference, and a democratising momentum that might have changed the course of history. And Honduras, which was not a ‘theatre of war’ as such, but was a base for US operations in the region, had its own social organisations. It had a strong history of peasant organisation in the 1970s but no armed insurgency, and gradually, a significant human rights and feminist movement emerged there. These contingent moments in Central American history, remind us that the violences which wrack the region today, were very different. In October 2018 a caravan of migrants left Honduras for the United States, around 7,500 people at one point. Many more have left since also from Guatemala and El Salvador, fleeing criminal, sexual and police violences and economic and social misery. They were denigrated as ‘criminals’ by the US President. In the 1970s and 1980s, people organised in various ways, violent and non violent, for change in the Central American region and were met also by a US President determined to retain control over what was considered to be the US ‘backyard’ and for whom all opposition was ‘communist’.

So what did I learn about peace? I learnt that there are always creative energies to be enlisted amongst the poorest people for processes of transformation in the name of equity and justice. Geopolitical interests aligned with local elite interests can thwart these efforts violently and turn people towards what comes to be seen as ‘justified violence’. I also learnt that the armed struggle tends to favour a new concentration of power rather than the potential social protagonisms ‘from below’. In a world, where small and vulnerable countries and impoverished peoples are caught up in big geopolitical conflicts, the chances of change are contingent. I learnt about the appalling cruelty of war and the extraordinary courage and inventiveness of people who know what they are struggling for. The tragedy for Central America is precisely that these social energies were ‘demobilized’ after the war, as exhausted and traumatised people lost the possibility of agency in the peace. Today Central America is one of the most violent regions of the world, and tragically in 2018 Daniel Ortega, former Sandinista leader and President of the country since 2006, used state violence to quell the protests against his government’s corruption and abuse of power, many in favour of what they understood was the original Sandinista vision.

**WD**: I was born and socialized in the Upper Inn valley. At that time, this was the most remote, conservative and least industrialized part of Tyrol, a western state of Austria. Compatriots call this region ‘The Holy Land’ because throughout history Tyroleans were fierce advocates of the Roman Church. Though my parents were secular and liberal one could not grow up there without being highly influenced by this atmosphere and its strict value system.

When I began my studies at the University of Innsbruck in the 1970s, the academic mainstream was dominated by rigid positivism. But Innsbruck was at the same time also a hot spot of intellectual liberation and spiritual renovation of the Catholic Church. Karl Rahner, one of the most influential Roman Catholic theologians of the twentieth century, spent almost all his academic life at the Theology Department of Innsbruck University. His work was groundbreaking for the development of what is generally seen as the modern understanding of Catholicism. I certainly cannot call Rahner a liberation theologian, but his attempt to liberate theology from the strong Neo-Scholastic system, in which he himself was educated, was path breaking. Some of the later tragic heroes of Liberation Theology and its understanding of peace in Central America, like Ignacio Ellacuria and Segundo Montes, who were killed in El Salvador in 1989, were students of Rahner in Innsbruck in that time.

Maybe because I come from a refugee family, I opted for the study of social history and law. These disciplines gave me my principal academic grounding and raised my interest in social and humanitarian questions. At that time I did not even know that peace studies already existed as an academic discipline in England, the USA and Norway. I considered myself a human rights’ researcher, advocate and activist and I followed the idealist-progressive approach of the German mainstream, mostly within the ethical frame of *Amnesty International*, where I later held some relevant positions until the mid 1990s. However, I never formed part of the then emerging German Peace Movement.

Central America was then not a headliner in the news and hence not too popular in Tyrol, but due to a number of Spaniards and Latin Americans, who most of all had come to study with Rahner, there existed small support-groups for the revolutionary movements in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala with whom I got into contact. I remember that the heralds of the *Sandinistas*, especially Ernesto Cardenal, found a very fertile ground in our highly idealist, somewhat romantic and reform-minded Catholic circles. They attracted me more and more. When finally a close friend of mine crossed the Atlantic and joined the *Sandinistas*, I got fascinated by the Nicaraguan Revolution. I followed him soon after the FSLN took Managua and became one of those *internacionalistas* who were in love with the revolution.

It took me quite a time to understand the ambivalence of my double identity as a human rights researcher and a worshiper of the revolution. In the first years the atmosphere in Nicaragua was really breathtaking. What the *Sandinistas* did politically made so much sense in my youthful enthusiastic understanding of creating and running a socially fair state on the debris of a bloody autocratic dictatorship. Only gradually I began to understand the challenges of, for example, agrarian reform in ownership and production. But in spite of all the problems in the realization of the ideological concepts, I did not yet see a fundamental contradiction between human rights and this particular revolution.

This changed when the rumours about the Leimus massacre of December 1981 became public , when the Sandinistas forcibly resettled some 8,500 Miskito Indians and killing dozens in the process. I got involved in the investigation of the case. It showed me dramatically the shadows of the revolution. One of the most popular members of the government, Tomás Borge, stubbornly rejected political responsibility. It confronted me with a reality that required a decision between blind political enthusiasm and an ethical stand. This challenge literally divided the international solidarity and ended friendships. Inside me the human rights advocate took the flag. That left other parts of my personality deeply frustrated and required reflection and reorientation. I expanded my horizon to all the other countries in the region and found new approaches in Guatemala.

While the conflict between the *Sandinistas* and the *Miskito* Indians in Nicaragua left me intellectually confused and emotionally frustrated, I learned much from the Mayas in Guatemala. I visited the country between the periods of worst violence and the peace agreement very often and I got close to various grassroots activists. The dispute between the *movimiento popular* (popular movement) and the *movimiento indígena* (indigenous movement) mirrored somehow the problem in Nicaragua. However, my relationship with the leaders of the indigenous movement taught me what is called *Utziläj k’aslen* in Maya-Kaqchikel. This refers to mental and material well-being and in the cosmovision of these people the one-ness of society, nature, and the universe. Maintaining this unity requires respect towards each other, towards the community and the environment. In the Maya’s view, this environment is not objectivised and functionalised in the service of man. Instead, they see themselves and everything else which exists materially and spiritually, as creative elements of the whole. In the Maya’s cosmology, wherever this respect - for individuals, the community, nature, or the universe - is absent, the harmony of elements gets lost, *Utziläj k’aslen* is disturbed, and the result is ‘unpeace’.

This is rather far from what the state’s authorities call ‘*paz’* (peace) in Spanish. Such a translation is a mockery of its meaning and hence a serious political problem. Understanding that profoundly gave me the insight, that of necessity ‘peace*’* is a plural word, since the notion of peace strictly depends on the perspective of the perceiving subject. Therefore peace must be contextual, relational and dynamically radiating. Peace is never static. In pursuit of a better understanding, I studied post-modern philosophy, system theory, humanistic psychology and basic neuro-science. This allowed me to detach myself from earlier concepts, norms, ideals and beliefs. It opened a completely new understanding of existence and peace to me.

And I discovered peace studies as an already existing academic discipline. That was approximately the time when Johan Galtung completed his violence-triangle[[1]](#footnote-1), by adding cultural violence to the older concepts of direct and structural violence. Thus, in biographical terms, Nicaragua of the early 1980s was the period when I learned to understand the concept of structural violence from the ground. Guatemala then opened my eyes for the impact of cultural violence. This became my main research interest, I gradually transformed into a peace researcher. These experiences in Central America are definitely the foundation on which the *Transrational Philosophy* of what now is the Innsbruck School rests. And it fits so well with John Paul Lederach’s practice of *Elicitive Conflict Transformation,* because both have developed almost simultaneously in the same region and they result from very similar experiences. Those days in Central America were crucial for my future as a peace researcher and practitioner. Without them the Innsbruck School would not exist as it is.

**Topic 2: Many Peaces in Latin America**

**JP**: Wolfgang, you have brought up Galtung’s Violence Triangle and how it illuminated the violences you saw in Latin America. I want to be a bit provocative. Galtung’s concept captured very well aspects of violence in Latin America, as we sought to interpret our experiences of extreme violence in Central America. However, as we reach the end of the second decade of the new millennium, Latin America is, I would suggest, giving us more insights into both violence and peace, that do not supercede Galtung’s triangle perhaps, but point to recognition of complexities between and within his categories. You have developed ‘peace’ as a plural concept, John Paul Lederach has given us so many insights into ‘peacebuilding’, and I have been interested in the plurality of violences. So, I would like to hear more about your journey from ‘cultural violence’ to ‘many peaces’. You have already referred to the philosophical integrity of indigenous communities of Guatemala. They are not just victims of varied expressions of violence, but subjects who contribute their own meanings to peace, just as with the *Buen Vivir* concept which emerged in Ecuador and Bolivia, they have contributed to debates around nature, wellbeing and development.

**WD**: From a 21st century perspective we may have to correct some myths about the development of our ‘peace’ discipline and ask ourselves to what extent we have seen what we wanted to see. The tense relation between a peace out of social justice and the use of violence preoccupied the Catholic Church, as seen in the encyclical *Pacem in Terris* by Pope John XXIII of 1963. Pope Paul VI subsequently took up the topic anew in 1967 in *Populorum Progressio[[2]](#footnote-2)*. The most controversial chapter in this encyclical is entitled ‘*Development, the New Name for Peace’*. In §76 the Pope states, with reference to *Pacem in Terris* and significantly earlier than Galtung’s corresponding formulation:

*For peace is not simply the absence of warfare, based on a precarious balance of power; it is fashioned by efforts directed day after day toward the establishment of the ordered universe willed by God, with a more perfect form of justice among men*.

This message resonated strongly in Latin America in those years. The Bible exegesis oriented towards the poor met the Marxist analysis of society. This movement attained its pastoral and intellectual breakthrough on the one hand, during the famous Second General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate in Medellín in 1968 and on the other through the influential work of Gustavo Gutiérrez on the Theology of Liberation. Dom Hélder Câmara was already popular, Che Guevara and Camilo Torres were dead and a multitude of Guerilla-movements carried their flag radically further, just as Peace Studies as an academic endeavour reached the region. Thus, Galtung’s concept of structural violence was welcome but just another version of an already well known discourse. Evidence seemed to be available everywhere.

Probably this is the reason for the reluctance of the continent’s academia to engage with the turn from structuralism to post-structuralism, as expressed in the concept of cultural violence since the 1990s. It was in those years that I witnessed the conflict between *movimiento popular* (popular movement) and *movimiento indígena* (indigenous movement) in Guatemala. It was characterized by unbelievable ignorance, not only of the Maya culture but also of the available knowledge about the functionality of human relations in general. A bit later the Zapatistas in Mexico made this a central aspect of their post-modern message.

The shift from postmodernism to transrationality in Peace Studies refers to the re-integration of spirituality and holistic principles of energetic peace interpretations into the before strictly Cartesian application of psycho-analysis and structuralism. There are several possibilities to tell this story. Within Peace Studies I perceive John Paul Lederach’s 1997 book on Building Peace as such a turning point[[3]](#footnote-3). He split what Galtung called, until then, physical violence into its individual and relational aspect. Lederach was inspired by the Bible and his practical experience in Nicaragua, but he could have taken quantum physics as well. The crucial point here is that he explored the paradox simultaneity of individuality and relationality in human identity, analogue to the particle-wave-duality in quantum physics. That is, our perception and our conflicts are always both individual and relational. Applied conflict work has to take that paradox into consideration and turn away from vectoral, moral and normative interpretations of conflict. Therefore it needs maps and tools that allow exploring the deeper psychological and relational layers of conflicts. Later I built on that and created transrational peace philosophy as a branch of our discipline that rests on the fundament of Martin Buber’s Philosophy of Dialogue, Gestalt psychology, more general Humanistic Psychology, General System Theory and the seminal work of Adam Curle. It seems that even today such thinking remains revolutionary.

This takes me back to the *Buen Vivir* concept that you mentioned, Jenny. I fear that at least its current use in Ecuador’s 2008 and Bolivia’s 2009 Constitutions is a mild, but not so harmless, loop backward into structuralism. Native American languages, according to my experience, do not know a precise equivalent of the Spanish word *paz* or the Portuguese *pau*. You cannot translate peace as such, for example into Quechua or Guaraní. The word does not exist in these languages. You can only define, with the help of a multitude of terms, the relations, conditions, perceptions and interpretations that you mean when you say *paz* in Spanish. This is not necessarily a surprise, because *paz* or *pau* is, due to its Spanish or Portuguese origin, a colonial term, and not only in Latin America. Its root, the Latin word *pax* itself, means the *pact,* that is the treaty which defined the Barbarians’ submission to the Roman Empire. This is the imperial usurpation of *Pax* – originally the name of a pre-imperial and energetic deity of fertility. Replacing *paz* by *Buen Vivir*, allegedly derived and translated from indigenous cultures and languages, in those Constitutions, is not a helpful alternative. Indigenous languages do not operate with the moral mind-constructs of *good* or *bad* either. This is characteristic of European languages and cultures. You have to introduce other notions, such as *being in calm, comfortable, relaxed and harmonic flow of relations*. How do you make that a ‘legal’ term to frame constitutional and international law? The probability of misunderstanding and abuse of indigenous values is thus very high.

I hope that I am wrong, but when I was recently in Bolivia I got the impression that this question is gaining momentum in the current political debate. From what I learned earlier from the Misquito and Rama on Nicaragua`s Atlantic Coast, later from the Maya in Guatemala, the Zapotecs in Mexico, the Guaraní in Brazil and Paraguay and recently the Quechua in Bolivia – and on many places in other parts of the world - I conclude that peace has to be a plural word and respected as a mullti-coloured expression of life energy within social realities. Whenever we make it a singular we invest it with the imperial violence of conquerors, preachers or other kinds of better-knowers. We are strong and smart enough to handle the complexity of the plural. That’s what Peace Studies is for. It can help us to escape from the epistemological trap of the One Good, One Beauty, One Truth.

**JP:** Yes, I can absolutely see that. This is what has been so limited and limiting in the discussion of the Peace Accords in Latin America, namely El Salvador 1992, Guatemala, 1996 and Colombia 2016 (with its earlier process in 1990-91). While some acknowledgement was made of the pluricultural nature of these societies, in particular Guatemala where at least 40 percent of the population are indigenous, with 23 Mayan and one non Mayan linguistic communities, in reality a dominant single ‘peace’ was agreed between armed actors. The contribution of these communities, and in the Colombian case, the Afro and Indigenous Colombians, to the meanings of the peace to be built was never recognised. Nor, I would argue was the voice of the grass roots rural and urban activist poor in all these countries, such as the peasants I lived with in Chalatenango. The insurgent actors rightly sought ways to put distribution, the development model, and state violence on the agenda, with varying leverage to do so. However, there was an absence, I would say, of precisely their own reflexive processes around the social relationships they had shaped through the armed struggle and the assumptions that that struggle was built around in terms of the subjects and character of the social and political change it sought. The vertical and authoritarian nature of relationships forged through these armed conflicts, mirrored those of the societies they sought to transform. They failed to transcend them through an embrace of plurality within a set of relational propositions which could generate a new approach to politics, production and planet. Relational peace is blocked by the great divides between rich and poor and visions of modernity that even when left governments have come to power, have tended to privilege resource extraction over land rights, for instance.

So here I want to ask you about your *trans-rational* understanding of peace. For instance, you have tried to take Peace Research and Peace Studies beyond their Idealist, Realist and Critical traditions. You have argued that peaces have embodied, sexual-familial, emotional-communal, mental-societal and spiritual-political aspects. Peaces hence are rational and so much more. They are trans-rational and relational. How far were these ideas influenced by Latin American experiences and/or how might they help us think about peaces in Latin America today?

**WD:** My early experiences in Nicaragua already challenged my Central-European beliefs to a certain extent. But during those first post-revolutionary years of Sandinismo, the atmosphere in the country was filled with a lot of basically European Idealism, which allowed me somehow to accommodate to it. The turning point in my biography and my philosophy was definitely the encounter with the Maya population of Guatemala. When I say Maya I do not talk about ancient history but the real people, struggling for their physical and cultural survival when I met them. Finding myself obliged to deal with their totally different cosmovision and hence interpretation of peace, and witnessing how violently it was neglected by the nation state, made me think a lot. Being introduced into concepts like the mentioned *Utzilaj k’aslen* was mind blowing and this finally sent me on the long journey around the world that made me discover all those multi-coloured definitions of peace. The structure that you have mentioned can be more or less found as fundamental peace philosophy, in the *Medicine Wheel* concept, that several North American Natives derived from ancient Maya culture - and with variations I finally found it everywhere in the world. For the model that I have proposed since 2008 under the label *transrational peaces* I relied in the end– similar to Abraham Maslow when he developed his basic needs concept - more on the Indian Yoga-philosophy. However, I would never have got there without the inspiration of the Maya culture. So yes, Transrationality roots very much in Latin America, more precisely in the contradictions and misunderstandings between the different national projects and the *movimientos indígenas* that I have witnessed throughout my life. Therefore I guess, Transrationality is a strong philosophical fundament for the practical application of *elicitive* conflict transformation in Latin America. Where ever I go with it I perceive very strong resonances, be it with the *Restorative Justice* concept that is currently very popular in Brazil or the *Transitional Justice* debate in Colombia. It is closely related to Francisco Muñoz’ *Paz Imperfecta,* that plays an important role in the Colombian process. The concept includes Native American cultural understandings but it goes far beyond them, because it addresses human existence and relations in a holistic way. That concerns everybody, especially in societies that are dealing with deep rooted experiences of violence. It is not a solution, but it can be a useful tool. I think we share a lot here.

**Topic 3. Many Violences in Latin America**

**JP:** Latin America has taught me about the plurality of violences just as it has taught you about the many peaces. At the same time, it has led me to explore the distinctiveness of ‘violence’ as a phenomenon. I sought a way to avoid one of the dangers I see in Galtung’s triangle, that of selectivity around which violences matter. This was not Galtung’s intention of course. His aim was the opposite of selectivity and narrow definitions, but rather to visibilize - as violence - the social injustices and cultural exclusions or what Bourdieu calls ‘symbolic violence’, which are not recognized as sources of human harm and reduced potentiality.

During the period of the Southern Cone dictatorships and the Central American insurgencies, or roughly the 1960s to the early 1990s, the idea of *structural violence* resonated greatly with me and many others. And as you say, it maintains a strong hold on many radical intellectuals and activists in Latin America. Galtung coined this term, as you mention above, in his 1969 text, but even before that, the Catholic Church had recognized the violence of social injustice. I first learned how violence could be connected to poverty from Bishop Helder Camara of Recife, Brazil, whose book ‘Spirals of Violence’ came out in 1971[[4]](#footnote-4). My interest in revisiting ‘structural violence’ and its role in peace thinking and practice, is not to question Galtung’s arguments about how it helps us recognize the harm to humanity from systems of avoidable deprivation, but rather to explore further whether it helps or hinders us in our understanding of violence(s) and capacity to address it/them.

Latin America is still the most unequal region in the world. According to a CEPAL/Oxfam submission to the World Economic Forum in January 2018[[5]](#footnote-5). By 2014, the richest 10 percent of the people in Latin America had amassed 71% of its wealth. From 2002 to 2015 (years of economic growth in the region), the fortunes of Latin America’s billionaires grew by an average of 21% a year, an increase estimated to be six times greater than the growth of GDP. Levels of poverty declined significantly in these years of growth, but have begun to rise again. At the same time, Latin America is home to 9% of the world’s population but accounts for over 30% of global homicides. Violence, measured in homicides, grew in the years of economic growth and were compatible with it.

Helder Camara identified three violent ‘moments’ in his book. The basic violence, what he calls violence no. 1, is injustice, where humans are condemned to a sub-human condition. No. 2 is the violence of revolt. Camera draws attention to the role of youth in this revolt, and it is worth quoting him, as we would probably not recognize his depiction of youth today, when ‘youth’ in poor neighbourhoods have become synonymous with ‘criminal gangs’. For Camera:

*The young no longer have the patience to wait for the privileged to discard their privileges. The young very often see governments too tied to the privileged classes. The young are losing confidence in the churches, which affirm beautiful principles —great texts, remarkable conclusions—but without ever deciding, at least so far, to translate them into real life. The young then are turning more and more to radical action and violence. In some places the young are the force of idealism, fire, hunger for justice, and thirst for authenticity. In others, with the same enthusiasm, they adopt extremist ideologies and prepare for 'guerilla warfare' in town or country[[6]](#footnote-6)* .

Finally, violence no. 3 for Camera, is the repression from the authorities when ‘violence no 2 tries to resist violence no 1’[[7]](#footnote-7). Camera’s solution to the spiral of violence, is to ‘have the courage to face the injustices which constitute violence No. 1[[8]](#footnote-8). The argument is very convincing, and it is one that influences my understanding of peace. Together with Galtung’s positive peace, it is about, I would argue, the struggle to create the conditions to live without violence. However, I am left with a doubt. Do we not, by putting all the burden of addressing violence on changing the ‘structures’, diminish the importance of getting to grips with the multiple factors which reproduce violences as direct harm traceable to an agent not a system, albeit an agent embedded in a system? We do not, in fact, have to choose between positive *or* negative peace, I would argue, but rather we need to recognize that a society experiencing multiple acts and actions of somatic harm, is never going to create the social, economic and political environment to reduce violence. This requires sensibilities towards the individual and collective trauma of violence as well as to the suffering of poverty in relationship to the wealth of the few.

Inequality correlates with violence, but Latin America has taught me that its impacts on what I call the ‘social body’ is what facilitates its reproduction. In other words, the individual hormonal and neurological impacts are exacerbated by the social relationships which engender humiliation, revenge, anguish and fear. I am taking our conversation now into learning I have had from post 1990s Latin America. The concepts of ‘structural violence’ and ‘spirals of violence’ are important and necessary. However, the risk is that they diminish, in practice, attention to violence as a phenomenon when it is attached to acts and actions of somatic harm rather than harm from *apparently* agentless ‘systems’. For me, this brings us to the ‘relational turn’ in Peace Studies, which you mentioned with respect to the work of Adam Curle and John Paul Lederach. Violence like peace, is relational.

I have watched as violences have mutated in Latin America. In other words, how ‘new’ expressions of violence have appeared or become visible. The poor are mostly its victims, but are often drawn in as perpetrators also, particularly young men. Here is one of many relational factors. Masculinity is a relationship between men as well as between men and women. Humiliation is felt acutely in societies where male status is an essential factor of identity. Extreme inequality makes the chances of attaining recognition and value on the terms society respects, almost impossible for vast numbers of poor young men. The search for alternative relational hierarchies and belonging in gangs is one outcome. Drug trafficking and selling becomes an attractive option for redeeming self-worth as a consumer or wielder of dominating power. This, however, is just one example, of how the subjectivity of relational experiences reproduces violences.

As Central America entered the 1990s and ideological frameworks for social justice ceased to mobilise citizens, so the northern triangle countries have been unable to address either social justice or violence. This is true also of Mexico, Brazil, Colombia and Venezuela. Since,1999 Venezuela has had governments dedicated to addressing social justice. So my question is, do you think that in the early 21st century, Latin America is actually teaching peace scholars that ‘negative peace’ (the absence of violence) cannot be so simply juxtaposed with ‘positive peace’ the presence of social justice? That arguably, while we all learnt about ‘structural violence’ and the extreme injustices of the region, we also learnt over time, that we need to understand better the phenomenon of violence itself in order to understand peace or peaces, as you would prefer. Ultimately rather than choose between or focus more on the positive over the negative peace, I wonder how we could bring into the discussion, a recognition that the multiple expressions of violence as a phenomenon, require us to understand the complexities of its reproduction? There could be a connection here with your emphasis on the many dimensions and voices within the idea of ‘peace’. Violence also encompasses many meanings , expressions and experiences. By recognising its plurality and the meanings it carries and generates, could the way be opened for a wider participation in building peace which recognises the multi-coloured visions which can potentially inform it?

**WD:** Of course, physical, structural and cultural violence have to be central topics of social sciences in general. In the case of Latin America it is not difficult to evidence a continuious line of extreme social injustice from the *conquista* to the present. In this way, Camara’s analysis is convincing. The physical violence that long ago established extreme forms of structural violence in the colonies was maintained after independence. This created various forms of physically violent rebellions and revolutions, which resulted in a deeply rooted culture of violence. I think you can approach that question epistemologically and methodologically from different angles, but you will not find too many different answers. Yes, it is our academic obligation to learn and understand that as best we can. I personally prefer to apply System Theory here because it helps us to understand the relational aspect best. But to me it seems that most schools, theories and approaches yield very similar results. I think, we can improve, but we seem to understand the many violences pretty well.

Can we say the same about the many peaces? I doubt it. To me it seems that modern science has a rather poor understanding of the one and only peace it can imagine and proclaim. When peace comes across as merely a plastic word in the speeches of politicians’, the roots and equivalences can be found in as many academic writings. It seems that the modern intellect can be satisfied with the shallowest version of negative peace. It was perceived as inconvenient when post-modern philosophy began to discuss the possible diversity of peaces. If we are not really familiar with the one peace we imagine, how shall we get along with the probability of a whole multitude of peaces? If we further dare to define peace as something real that can be subjectively perceived even beyond the rational aspects of concrete human relations, things get scandalous for a modern mind. No, I do not think that we learn a great deal, if we approach the question of peace through the filter of violence. I am more interested in the different forms of peaces that flourish also in violent environments. I want to know how peaces embrace, integrate and thus transform conflicts. And in this regard Latin America can teach us a lot.

**JP:** Here is a difference between us which is worth highlighting for further discussion. I am not sure we will ever get to peaceful relationships until we recognise how our biological bodies are also social bodies. Our relationships can either enhance our capacity to deal with aggression, to address differences with curiosity, to find identity in our human rather than our group relationships or they can encourage us to turn aggression into meaning laden and generating violences. The former nurtures the recognition of our fellow participants as voices of equal worth in the world and therefore part of a global search for the conditions to live without violence. Latin America absolutely showed me how people act for peace in contexts of violence, and with multiple and meaningful contributions to the idea of ‘peace’. However, I would argue that it is the content of that action that makes the difference. Part of that content is the de-sanctioning of violence itself and making possible the participation of those excluded by it as well as by material structures. This is an iterative process, where action on violence or to de-sanction violence, liberates agency for peace, which can generate the participation needed to transform the structures that generate violence.

**WD:** I am not sure whether this is really a substantial difference or rather different ways to say the same. What if I propose the *transrational* matrix for discussing violence? The physical body is necessarily the place where violence is acted out and suffered. This applies even to structural and cultural violence because the mind is an inseparable part of the body, so that not only physically enacted, but also verbal and cognitive contents fall under this. Sexual-familial violence is notoriously known as domestic violence, feminicide or machismo, it is a major issue everywhere in Latin America. Emotional-communal violence refers mainly to the question of belonging. Whether somebody is allowed to find his or her place in a community and act accordingly, is a delicate question in the world of *caciquismo* and racist environments. Mental-societal violence is well known in socio-political concepts like *caudillismo* that can be found everywhere on the sub-continent, from fascist dictatorships via all political parties and social movements to Marxist guerillas. Spiritual-political violence expresses itself in the complicity of the Roman Church – and lately also Evangelicals – with corrupt and exploitative political regimes. I guess you fairly and roughly agree with my *transrational* pattern for the aim of analysis. After that we would have to discuss the question of identity and identification. Isn’t the notion of identity as such violent, because it freezes the idea of who I have been once and avoids human growth? This sheds light on Nietzsche’s famous claim that there is no doer behind the deed, the relationality of perpetrators and victims and much more, there we may disagree. But I see more accordance than dissent.

**JP** Yes, thats a helpful way of clarifying our discussion, and perhaps also, the challenge of a ‘Latin American Peace Concept’ or conceptualisation. Latin America’s extreme and violent exclusions from participating in the definition, building and enjoying of the social and political community, teaches us also the importance of re-imagining the relational assumptions behind the idea of peace. This, I agree, could overcome the fixedness with which we view each other, and open us all to personal as well as social transformation in ways which encourage both. This leads me to the discussion of conscious agency for such change and its relationship to building peace.

**Topic 3 Peace Agency**

**JP**: Since the end of the Cold War, I have been struck by how violences previously not recognized as such, have begun to be ‘de-sanctioned’, through the social actions of movements. The emerging consciousness about varied violences, from state violences, to criminal violences and violences in the intimate space, as well as the violences which exclude and/or diiminish cultural value and attachments to land, for example, is I would argue the potential seed of ‘peace agency’. An example is the naming of feminicide, as a crime of violence in which women are killed because they are women; this grew out of womens’ activism. Environmentalists, such as Bertha Caceres in Honduras, and Mayan activists against gold mining in Guatemala, have highlighted the violation of land itself. Violence is used to convey messages in the region, from drug traffickers to other traffickers as well as by them as well as state actors to journalists, politicians, human rights activists and defenders, and to women and young girls that they expect to service the powerful. Since the 2016 peace process in Colombia, over 300 social activists have been killed. Violence is integral to criminal economies and governance, particularly in urban Latin America, but also to many ‘legal’ processes of accumulation. And also to the everyday lives of many citizens. I would welcome your view on the search for peace as including conscious ‘agency’ for peace. How in your ‘many peaces’ approach, do you imagine (or not) the diverse kinds of actions that might bring about peace, not as a ‘totality’ across a single, universalizable dimension, but towards plural and open minded peaceful societies. Or how can peace be ‘built’ as a shared aspiration which nevertheless encompasses plurality?

**WD**: Whatever counts in human relations can contribute to peaces – or destroy them. Since we are relationally living beings this is a homeostatic process. Allow me to use breathing as metaphor. When you inhale, you bring oxygen into your lung and from there into your blood and all parts of your body, which is a necessary requirement for life. But if you do not stop inhaling you will die after some moments. Thus, *exhaling*, letting go of particles that the body does not need any more, is as vital to life. If you find the dynamic balance between the two, your physical system will be relaxed - you will perceive peace. System theory calls that homeostasis. This principle of peace does not only apply to breathing, but to all activities on all the layers that we mentioned before. Beyond the individual internal ones it goes externally and relationally to the familial, communal and societal layers. Thus, there is no binding list of activities that are principally peaceful and “good” while others are unpeaceful and “bad”. Good and bad are not too helpful in the world of relations, because yesterday’s good may be disastrous today. The science of conflict transformation provides a principled understanding of the mechanisms that we discussed before for the many violences. But the art of conflict transformation is the situational identification of potentially balancing activities within a conflictive relationship. And since we do it in an *elicitive* way, the conflict worker only provides the frame that allows the parties to find the alternative options of activity and encounter in their (at present) disfunctional relationship. The art of *elicitive* conflict transformation is in its essence the art of the appropriate framework for the parties. From that, it follows that I cannot answer your question. There is no exhaustive list of peace-building activities because peaces themselves are per definition imperfect, conflictive and they demand different activities, methods and tools each time you ask. That is frustrating for a modern mind, but an invitation to creativity if you work in this field. And once more: If it comes to the question how to live peace in a violent reality, Latin America still teaches us a lot.

**Topic 4 (CONCLUSION) The Materiality and Emotionality of Violences and Peaces**

**JP:** A great deal of our discussion has been, I think, around the tension between the material logics behind violence reproduction and the sexual, emotional, mental and also spiritual dimensions of peace, as we have both experienced these logics in Latin America. We come from different schools of thought, but I think we agree on not reducing violence to material dimensions, while they are evidently part of the picture. However, we have learnt there is a need to explore its emotional roots as well, and how they reproduce violence. I call for an ‘Emotional Enlightenment’ as a move beyond the modernist European rational Enlightenment, which would enable us to balance our rationalities with our emotional selves and capacity to reflect on both. I would ask you to conclude our conversation, Wolfgang, with your final reflections, on what then has Latin America taught us about the real possibility of this re-balancing?

**WD:** I think that to a certain extent we discussed ,almost secretly, the epistemological differences of Structuralism, Constructivism, Poststructuralism and Transrationality. Each of these schools can be represented by big names of Latin America thought, such as Paulo Freire, Eduardo Galeano, Augusto Boal, Arturo Escobar, Gustavo Esteva, Francisco Varela, Humberto Maturana, Oscar Ichazo or Claudio Naranjo, to name just a few. Each of them thought, spoke and wrote from concrete personal experiences. That is, each of them stands for a particular interpretation of peaces. Simultaneously, yours and mine biographical relation to Latin America, illustrate also the development of our discipline, Peace Studies, in the last decades. Following Adam Curle I think that Peace Studies or at least applied peace work, cannot be done without an eye on psychology and psycho-therapy. I guess, the parallel development in neighbouring disciplines from Behaviorism via Psycho-analysis to all the different schools of Humanistic Psychology mirrors well what you call Emotional Enlightenment. I see that in Peace Studies, and I call it Transrationality while I try to think and define in as broad and as detailed a way as I can. We may come from different schools and backgrounds, but I think this mighty and beautiful sub continent taught us to see a lot of things in a quite similar way.

1. Johan Galtung, ‘Violence, Peace and Peace Research’ *Journal of Peace Research* 6 no.4 (1969), 167-191 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Encyclical of Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio* (1967) <http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, (1998) Washington: US Institute of Peace. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Helder Camara, *Spirals of Violence* (1971) <https://karunabooks.net/library/spiral-of-violence-camara.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. World Economic Forum, ‘Latin America Is the world’s most unequal region. Here’s how to fix it’. (17 January 2016) <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/01/inequality-is-getting-worse-in-latin-america-here-s-how-to-fix-it/> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Camera, Spirals of Violence, 32 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Camera, Spirals of Violence, 34 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Camera, Spirals of Violence, 54 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)