



Culture, Conflict, and Peacebuilding

Edited by

Christina Beyene · Leonardo Luna
Nkwazi Mhango · Jessica Senehi

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“In a world where we are ever more challenged by profound and increasing opportunities for complex levels of interaction with persons whose cultural constructs are distinctly different from our own, this text facilitates transcendence into unique levels of appreciation for the inherent beauty in difference. Indeed, this unique collection of diverse voices invites readers to listen with their souls along a series of journeys where individual identities, realities, and experiences merge into one: that of an intensely, interdependent humanity. Quite simply, we need to listen to these voices. We need to share these stories. And we need to embrace their inherently human lessons.”

—Imani Scott, *PhD Conflict Analysis and Resolution, Professor of Communications, Savannah College of Art and Design, Editor, Crimes Against Humanity in the Land of the Free: Can a Truth and Reconciliation Process Heal Racial Conflict in America (Bloomsbury, 2014)*

“Culture, conflict and peace-building is a practical and contemporary exploration of the significance of culture in conflict and peacebuilding. The intersectional and inter/transdisciplinary lens used in this valuable, inclusive, and unique collection of diverse essays is grounded in the contributor’s personal stories, wisdom, and experiences. They note that for any society to build a sustainable and just peace the complex role of culture must be woven into local adaptable liberation peace-building processes that support the agency and inclusion of marginalized communities, their stories, and their peace-building practices that deconstruct the power-knowledge syndrome as well as unjust structures that allow cultural and structural violence to create and disenfranchise the Other.”


—Sean Byrne, *PhD International Relations Professor of Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Manitoba, Author of Civil Society, Peacebuilding, and Economic Assistance in Northern Ireland (Routledge, 2023)*.

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We dedicate this volume to Arthur V. Mauro (February 15, 227–August 5, 2023) who established the Arthur V. Mauro Institute at St. Paul's College, University of Manitoba.

To people suffering from conflict worldwide.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

With grateful hearts, we acknowledge the support and participation of all the contributors to the volume who took the time to write meaningful and significant chapters. We acknowledge the inspiration and fellowship of our student and faculty colleagues at the Peace and Conflict Studies Program at the University of Manitoba, and at the Arthur V. Mauro Institute for Peace and Justice at St. Paul's College. We appreciate our colleagues, Calum Dean, Sabena Singh, and Khurram Kazi, who went on part of this journey with us. We greatly appreciate the guidance and support of the editors and staff at Palgrave, in particular Sarah Roughley, Editorial Director, Politics and International Studies, and Project Coordinator, Geetha Chockalingam, as well as Preetha Kuttiappan, Production Supervisor at Straive, in Chennai, who made this work possible.

INTRODUCTION: CULTURE, CONFLICT, AND PEACEBUILDING

The Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS) Program at the University of Manitoba is characterized by having students and scholars from different backgrounds, countries, and cultures. We gather in this academic space to reflect on peacebuilding and conflict causes as central themes in our lives and professional development that we have in common. Diversity is an asset for the PACS Program, not only because people involved learn from others' perspectives, stories, experiences, and knowledge, but also because of the possibilities created by the complexity of bringing diverse cultures, worldviews, and life understandings together.

One of the graduate courses offered by PACS is Intercultural Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding, which we were part of in Fall 2019. The students and the professor reflected on themes such as culture and reconciliation; identity and memory; peace education; personal stories and their relation to culture; colonization, resistance, and decolonization; connection to land; agency; and social participation; among others. Despite significant theoretical development that is relevant to culture and to peacebuilding, there is a lack of concise and recent textbooks that explore the links among culture, peace, and conflict.

We found knowledge that is often dismissed or overlooked in PACS. Much of the literature we encounter in PACS tends to be of a singular and often narrow lens that can exclude others and foster a lack of representation in the field. Therefore, a group of students from the class and

affiliated scholars began a collective space to reflect deeply on the integration of these themes to contribute to the PACS field. In this spirit, after the course finished, we gathered periodically to evaluate common points and possible contributions. It is from this experience that this book emerged. The goal was to assist scholars and practitioners with lenses by which they can explore and interrogate culture as a source of both violence and enduring peace.

Four key directions informed this work: (1) drawing on diverse theoretical perspectives, (2) a story-based approach, (3) critical and emancipatory peacebuilding, and (4) the local turn in peacebuilding. Further, a broad definition of culture is provided, and ideas about cultures of peace are considered. Finally, the organization of the book is presented, along with summaries of the chapters that follow.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Four key considerations grounded this project. First, this work brings together emerging voices in the PACS field, and links major themes from the social sciences to PACS theory-building, research, and practice. Second, we drew on storytelling to inspire a positive attitude toward addressing cultural conflict, and to transform adversarial attitudes into collaborative ones. Third, this work values critical and emancipatory peacebuilding that emphasizes the role of power and emancipation in peacebuilding, critical thinking, personal agency, and social justice. Fourth, this work values the local turn in peacebuilding, and an emphasis on local peacebuilding knowledge, and local initiatives.

Including Diverse Perspectives

These chapters draw on interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary scholarship that brings innovative and significant concepts from marginalized peoples, and from diverse academic and cultural backgrounds. This includes scholarship that seeks a decolonizing approach that deconstructs racism and that considers women and gender studies; queer theory; precarity; disability studies; Southern theory; the environment; Indigenous perspectives; youth studies; and intersections of those. We believe this is a small step toward creating an environment that encourages scholars to keep exploring the relation between culture and PACS. We also valued diversity among the authors themselves, and their personal and professional

experiences. We decided to include personal stories as a starting point for each chapter, which clarifies to readers that each of us approaches any phenomenon from a personal and social location, and that is best understood through story.

Story-based Approach

Through a narrative approach, authors explore the imperative to engage with often silenced or disregarded perspectives, experiences, and epistemologies that enrich our understanding. In particular, authors draw on Marshall Ganz's (2011) approach to inspire social change through "the story of me" and the "the story of us" that lead to the "fierce urgency of now." Because it is central for humans' identities and is an effective way to communicate experiences and emotions, storytelling is a powerful tool for inspiring collective action (Ganz, 2009). Our stories interrelate with social structures by producing and re-producing meaning in social life; culture, knowledge, identity, emotions, morality, time and memory, and even geography are given meaning through story (Senehi, 2009). In this way, authors show how their personal experiences relate with our academic reflections, and also the importance of story in the analysis of culture, peace, and conflict.

Critical and Emancipatory Approaches

Critical and emancipatory peacebuilding has emerged as a multi-faceted approach to peace, based on critical analysis and local ownership and emancipation (Pugh, 2004; Thiessen, 2011). Critical emancipatory peacebuilding attempts to give voice to those at the grassroots societal level and identify the needs of the community, and have space for local stakeholders within peace processes (Richmond, 2005; Mac Ginty, 2015; Paffenholz, 2015) and social justice (Byrne and Thiessen, 2019). Such peacebuilding challenges the status quo and the underlying principles of liberalism while simultaneously providing space for marginalized and local voices to be heard, be of influence, and take ownership of peace processes.

Local and Everyday Peacebuilding

This book seeks to serve as a thoughtful challenge to the dominant frameworks by exposing the wisdoms, actions, and thoughts of those whose stories are often relegated to the sidelines. This often means valuing everyday peacebuilding (e.g., Mac Ginty, 2015, 2021), local wisdom and peacebuilding knowledge (e.g., d’Estrée and Parsons, 2018; Kroeker, 2019; Lederach, 1996), resilience (e.g., Smythe 2013), personal agency (e.g., Mac Ginty 2021), and local leadership (e.g., Eke, 2020). Culture manifests itself through many different forms, shapes, and perspectives that are all equally worthy of being explored and heard. These perspectives do not necessarily need to be discovered or innovated by Western academia, but rather Western academia needs to value existing knowledge outside the current gaze and give space for this knowledge to influence peace theory and peace work. The stories of those who do not fit into the dominant models tend to fall through the cracks, and this loss of critical knowledge is further perpetuated as students fail to see themselves represented in the material with which they engage.

DEFINING CULTURE

This book is based on a definition of culture as a socially complex symbolic system that encodes the social knowledge, values, and practices for a particular community. A community is seen here as any collectivity that is conscious of a shared identity—whether that identity be defined by socially constructed boundaries of ethnicity, gender, region, economic class, religion, ability, profession, or family. Cultural groups may even be quite temporary—for example, the participants in a festival, or students who share a classroom for a year. While a community may identify itself in terms of a shared language, religion, history, or territory, it is not these qualities in themselves that define the group, but rather the shared perception by the community that these qualities set the group apart (Gurr 1993)—that is, the community is socially constructed or “imagined” (Anderson 1983/1991).

To argue that identity is socially constructed is not to suggest that identity is artificial and without inherent meaning or value. On the contrary, collectivities can be seen as legitimate, vital, and of inherent worth because they express the shared understandings and vision of a community (e.g., Gurr, 1993; Handler & Linnekin, 1984; Williams, 1982). A community

is not a unitary subject and identity groups emerge and fade away. But while it exists, a community is conceived of as an enduring entity moving through time.

Cultures overlap, divide, and intersect (Wadley, 1994). Cultures are part of a larger cultural group that might be part of an even larger cultural group; cultures have subcultures, and the subcultures may have subcultures. Cultural identities, such as gender, “race,” and class intersect, creating distinctive positionalities (Crenshaw, 1989).

While culture seems intangible, structural and material forces shape culture. Joan Smith (1994) described how the world economic system constructs the nature of the household. Frantz Fanon (1963) described how systems of colonization construct the so-called native. Public policies and development projects dramatically impact—even sometimes erase—whole communities (e.g., Kozol, 1991; Escobar, 1995; Scott 1998). Communities may be affected by cataclysmic events such as wars, storms, hazardous waste dumping, and unexpected disasters.

Culture is a system of signs, codes, and texts that guide people in carrying out their daily social interactions (Danesi, 2018; Muñoz & Molina, 2010). However, culture is not fixed, nor static. Further, individuals and groups are not mere recipients of meaning who are completely under control by their contexts and systems. After all, cultural information is often contradictory, especially as people draw on multiple cultures (e.g., ethnicity, the culture of womanhood, or expectations for their age), and cultural information may also be contradicted by one’s direct experiences. Persons need to make sense of these contradictions, ambiguities, and dilemmas. Further, people are not completely passive recipients of culture; they may reject, negotiate, transform, and re-conceptualize cultural signs, codes, text, meaning, and values. That is, culture guides people’s behavior, and people also guide culture transformation, in mutual, while unequal, processes.

Cultures of Peace

Kevin Avruch (2009) invited us to see culture as “norms and values,” and forms that are connected to materialist issues and social change. Building on this work, our understanding of culture emphasizes its dynamism. An analysis of a culture of peace needs to recognize that symbolic mechanisms are not static, but in movement. Such mechanisms influence individuals and groups yet the impact on people is not complete in such a way that

people have the possibility of interpreting and changing them. Consequently, we should approach culture as something that not only creates us, but that we also create. In this sense, it may be possible to transform a culture of violence into a culture of peace through elements that involve compassion, empathy, love, cooperation, altruism, solidarity, dialogue, healing, negotiation, reconciliation, and new paradigms.

A culture of peace has been a concept developed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural organization, UNESCO. The UNESCO Culture of Peace program was created in 1964 with the aim of transforming violence and building peace through global, national, and regional actions promoting a culture of peace. In essence, UNESCO promotes global consciousness around a culture of peace and nonviolence through mediation, conflict prevention and resolution, peace education, human rights education, education for nonviolence, tolerance, acceptance, social cohesion, mutual respect, intercultural and interfaith dialogue and reconciliation, and development (UNESCO, 2013). In addition, UNESCO calls for a collective action to promote nonviolent coexistence, to think about peace and conflict as phenomena surrounded by social, economic, cultural, and political dynamic forces (UNESCO, 2013). In general, UNESCO underlines the importance of incorporating several actors such as civil society, scientists, artists, journalists, professionals, and intellectuals to encourage culture of peace.

Much of the literature review related to the interrelation between culture and PACS refers to the 1999 Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace: resolutions or adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations:

A culture of peace is a set of values, attitudes, traditions, behaviour, and styles of life-based on: (a) Respect for life, the end of violence and the promotion and practice of non-violence through education, dialogue and cooperation. (b) Full respect for the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of States and non-interference in matters that are essentially the internal jurisdiction of the States. States, following the Charter of the United Nations and international law. (c) Full respect and promotion of all human rights and freedoms fundamental. (d) The commitment to the peaceful settlement of conflicts. (e) Efforts to meet the needs of development and environmental protection of present and future generations. (f) Respect and promotion of the right to development; (g) Respect for and promotion of equal rights and opportunities for women and men. (h) Respect and promotion of the right of all

persons to freedom of expression, opinion and information. And (i) adherence to the principles of freedom, justice, democracy, tolerance, solidarity, cooperation, pluralism, cultural diversity, dialogue and understanding at all levels of society and between nations; and encouraged by a national and international environment that favors peace (United Nations, 1999).

The idea of a culture of peace from the U.N. Declaration encompasses respect for diversity, dialogue, human rights, gender equality, citizenship, and democratic participation.

This Declaration emphasizes the importance of having access to formal education, particularly, human rights education. In addition, it mentions the importance of compromising governments, civil societies, media, family, politicians, teachers, scholars, and nongovernmental organizations. Nevertheless, despite that this definition acknowledges the importance of pluralism from different levels of society, it is grounded in democratic values as a central issue for a culture of peace.

From a critical point of view, it can be seen as an imposition of liberal discourses and democratic institutions. Therefore, critics propose to understand a culture of peace from communities' perspectives (Cruz & Fontan, 2014). Scholars such as Oliver Richmond and Roger Mac Ginty also discuss peacebuilding models that are grounded in a local perspective in contrast to a liberal peace. In Latin America, this resonates with reflections proposed by the Peruvian Jesuit Scholar, Felipe MacGregor who, in the 1980s, developed the concept of a culture of peace. He focuses on a culture of peace through education where people are encouraged to discover their own security through cultural and pedagogical practices that generate and transmit local knowledge related to peace. In this process, community knowledge emerges without institutions' imposition and rather from traditional and ancestral modes of peace coexistence.

Similarly, John Paul Lederach (1996) applied Paulo Freire's emancipatory pedagogy to conflict resolution training interventions, and called for grounding such training in local knowledge. Building on this work, increasingly, trainers and practitioners recognize the nuances of drawing on a body of local, nonlocal, and global peacebuilding knowledges (and hybridizations of those) to create desired strategies for positive change (Pearson d'Estrée & Parsons, 2018). From a critical point of view, scholars and practitioners working in peacebuilding recognize and maintain the centrality of people's and communities' needs, traditions, discontents, history, symbolism, language, and complexities.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND THE ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

This book seeks to examine culture, conflict, and peacebuilding. Toward that end, the book is divided into three parts that focus on theory, resistance, and (re-)creating cultures of peace. Below the key themes of each chapter are outlined.

Part I Theory-building

The chapters in this section integrate significant social theories with PACS in order to enrich understandings of culture. Further, there is an examination of the role of diverse standpoints and knowledge systems in theory-building—from the Global South, including Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa, and from young people and women.

In Chapter 1, Leonardo Luna explores the contribution of theories coming from the Global South, particularly Latin America, to understand culture, conflict, and peacebuilding. In particular, he examines Southern theory and liberation theory, in light of the local turn in PACS. He challenges the power relations that are encoded in theory-building and the dehumanizing impact this has on marginalized people whose experiences and identities are often defined in damaging ways by so-called experts.

In Chapter 2, Evelyn Nakamula Mayanja persuasively argues the critical importance of centering Sub-Saharan African knowledge and worldviews in order for Sub-Saharan Africans to achieve peace and security. She emphasizes that a legacy of centuries of European, Arab, and Asian hegemony, colonialism, and neocolonialism has disassociated peoples from their cultures, creating what Molefe Kete Asante (2020) calls cultural disorientation and economic, social, and political dysfunctionality. Mayanja calls for an emphasis on African philosophical roots of peace, especially the concept of *ubuntu*, which values human interconnectedness, interdependence, and compassion.

In Chapter 3, Christine Beyene calls for understanding how women and young people are affected by violence, as well as the role of women and young people in peacemaking efforts. She points out how both women and young people are typically characterized in research and practice in stereotypical ways. For example, women are typically represented as victims, or young people are seen either as victims or potential perpetrators to be controlled. The result is that even when they are considered

in peacebuilding theory and practice, women and young people remain objectified. In particular, Byene considers conflict in northern Ethiopia.

Part II Power and Resistance

The chapters in this section are focused on ways power impacts identity-based violence and disempowers social groups and individual persons, as well as how people respond to that for personal and social empowerment and justice.

In Chapter 4, Julian Smythe describes how the women of West Papua (Mamas) resist “annihilative violence”—that is, the political violence and environmental degradation of the region. In the face of these challenges, the Mamas strategized about the actions they *can* take—what Smythe calls “can-ness.” The Mamas demonstrate resilience, resourcefulness, and determination.

In Chapter 5, Kebothale Motseothata explores the role of women in South Africa’s liberation struggle and their sacrifices. She describes how exiled women within the anti-apartheid movement used poetry and culture to resist the interlocking system of gender, class, and racial oppression. She centers Black women’s struggles against the apartheid regime and in building a new inclusive nation and challenging patriarchal points of view about gender and women’s place in the new nation.

In Chapter 6, Nkwazi Mhango share an autoethnographic reflection on how he navigated the power of cultural, social, and political institutions in his life. He was born into a rural household, and from an early age longed to get away from his town where local elite held sway over the townspeople. Despite challenges, he continued to seek equality and autonomy in moving forward toward his aims and dreams.

Part III (Re-)Building Cultures of Peace

The chapters in this section are focused on processes of social change and cultural transformation in response to genocide, racism, historical wounds, and identity-based political violence.

In Chapter 7, Paul Cormier, similarly to Mayanja in Chapter 3, argues that the appropriate response to colonial violence is for communities to learn their own peace culture. In the case of Indigenous peoples in Canada, he describes the importance of earth-based education. He argues that mainstream peace education approaches that emphasize inclusion are

not enough to address violence against Indigenous young people, but rather a paradigm shift is required, and peace education must be seen through an Indigenous worldview.

In Chapter 8, Anya Russian examines how two North Carolina museums are responding to intensified cultural polarization in the United States. She discusses how these museums are a means of critical education and seek to nurture multi-racial unity and inspire positive action through social awareness. She argues that museums' potential for peacemaking should be further recognized and explored.

In Chapter 9, Nerkez Opacin presents research that examined the impact of peace education initiatives in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He argues that experiential learning can be a means of addressing the historical wounds of intercommunal conflicts. For example, visiting places where mass atrocities occurred, hearing the real-life experiences of survivors, and engaging in reflection and dialogue can lead to transformative learning that can challenge entrenched beliefs about the Other, and bridge the divide between groups.

In Chapter 10, Ha Bich Dong discusses the importance of witnessing to the process of peacebuilding. Her work is grounded in her experience of stories about the Second Indochina War from three family members: an American veteran, a member of the Vietnamese diaspora in the United States, and a survivor in Vietnam. She explains that such work is diapraxis, where hearing people's stories and dialogue leads to action, and calls for peacebuilder-witnesses.

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PART I

Theory-building



Connections Between Critical Peacebuilding Perspectives and Southern and Liberation Theories

Leonardo Luna 

I studied psychology in Colombia. I identify academic psychology as a modern discipline that privileges knowledge based on empiricism and experimentation. From a critical point of view, empiricism and positivism are epistemological frameworks that facilitated psychology to be part of the ideology of modernism. It means that psychology promotes establishing a capitalist economic structure and consolidating a state that monopolizes power from a participatory political system and a culture with secular values, which bases its decisions on the development of technology and science (Luna, 2016). Somehow, modern social disciplines help to “administrare” people and subjects. Michael Foucault’s

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concept of governmentality is applicable here. It is the set of institutions, procedures, discourses and reflections, calculations, and tactics that have allowed the exercise of power over the population based on social devices that facilitate the extension of said power (Foucault, 1979). Therefore, the modernization project, via modern social disciplines, defines, classifies, categorizes, manages, and administrates individuals, groups, and populations, facilitating their ordering and control.

In other words, from my professional training, I promoted discourses, strategies, and relationships based on a specific order, hierarchies, and social organizations guided by rational and logical thinking that emerged in European countries in the Renaissance period. Subsequently, I enrolled in a master's degree in social research with solid post-modern and critical theory foundations. This academic experience made me confront the professional practice and epistemological grounds developed in my education in psychology since I questioned the hegemonic ways of thinking, feeling, and acting in the academic world and their relation to power. In this same period, I worked as a psychologist for an international humanitarian aid organization in Colombia, caring for mental health victims of the armed conflict. From that practice and my new academic reflections, I started to feel uncomfortable with how I approached people and communities from a professional perspective.

This uncomfortable feeling increased when I was asked to assess a semi-nomadic Indigenous community in Colombia that did not speak Spanish fluently. My job involved developing a "participatory" methodology to estimate whether community health needs were "compatible" with the organization's mission and whether our actions could fulfill those needs. I say "compatible" because I believe that Indigenous communities in Colombia need development projects and public health services that help them be autonomous and improve their well-being through cultural respect and acknowledgment. However, my former organization responded to health emergency circumstances and did not implement development projects.

In addition, language and lack of team experience were other prominent barriers. We spoke a different language, and no team member had previous experience with Indigenous communities. My questions were obvious: How could I implement a participatory methodology with people who do not speak the same language as me? Why did the organization want to work with an Indigenous community whose main needs are related to development programs? Was the organization looking to