

Re-Centering

Culture and Knowledge in Conflict Resolution Practice

Edited by Mary Adams Trujillo, S.Y. Bowland,
Linda James Myers, Phillip M. Richards, *and* Beth Roy

Through the Auspices of the Practitioners Research
and Scholarship Institute (PRASI)



SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY PRESS

With gratitude to the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
and to the JAMS Foundation for their support.



Copyright © 2008 by Syracuse University Press
Syracuse, New York 13244-5160

All Rights Reserved

First Edition 2008

08 09 10 11 12 13 6 5 4 3 2 1

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements
of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence
of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48–1984.[∞]™

For a listing of books published and distributed by Syracuse University Press,
visit our Web site at SyracuseUniversityPress.syr.edu.

ISBN-13: 978-0-8156-3187-3 (cl.)

ISBN-10: 0-8156-3187-1 (cl.)

ISBN-13: 978-0-8156-3162-0 (pbk.)

ISBN-10: 0-8156-3162-6 (pbk.)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Re-centering culture and knowledge in conflict resolution practice / edited by
Mary Adams Trujillo . . . [et al.]. — 1st ed.

p. cm. — (Syracuse studies on peace and conflict resolution)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8156-3187-3 (cloth : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-0-8156-3162-0
(pbk. : alk. paper) 1. Conflict management — Cross-cultural studies.

I. Trujillo, Mary Adams.

HM716.R43 2008

303.6'9—dc22

2008007923

Manufactured in the United States of America

Contents

Figure and Tables		ix
Preface: <i>Introducing PRASI</i>		xi
Acknowledgments		xv
Contributors		xvii
Introduction: <i>Conflict, Culture, and Knowledge</i>		xxv

PART ONE **Re-Centering Culture**

Introduction		3
1. Wilderness: <i>Scared of the Sacred</i>		
MARLON SHERMAN		7
2. Toward Fuller Knowledge in Peace Management and Conflict Resolution: <i>The Importance of Cultural Worldview</i>		
LINDA JAMES MYERS		20
3. Beyond Mediation—Reconciling an Intercultural World: <i>A New Role for Conflict Resolution</i>		
ROBERTO M. CHENÉ		32
4. The Shirt on My Back: <i>The Daily Continuum of Violence</i>		
MARIAH BREEDING		37
5. The Rape of Black Girls		
ONAJE MU'ID		41
6. Appellate Recourse to the Supernatural: <i>Kithitu among the Akamba</i>		
JELVAS MUSAU		49

4

The Shirt on My Back

The Daily Continuum of Violence

MARIAH BREEDING

For some weeks now, I have been preoccupied with violence; the more I contemplate violence, the more blurred the boundary becomes between violence and other sorts of oppression. Perhaps the best way, maybe even the only way, for me to illustrate this dilemma is with an examination of my current lived circumstances.

I will begin with myself, as I sit here in San Francisco at a kitchen table, dressed for the day, drinking tea. Consider the very shirt on my back, made of cotton picked (for \$2 per day) in pesticide-soaked fields by women in El Salvador (!) and shipped by Exxon (remember the *Valdez*, whose oil spill of 20 years' past still poisons the Alaskan coastline?) through the Panama Canal (an early harbinger of the global economy to come, built by slave labor on first stolen and then decimated land) to mills in South Carolina where it was woven (for minimum wage and with concomitant brown-lung disease) into material that could then be transported back across the Caribbean (*Valdez II*) to Haiti (!) where women assembled a shirt (for \$3 per day) after which it was shipped for the last time across the seas (*Valdez III*) to wind up on my back via a Lane Bryant's 2-for-1 special (Lane Bryant—do their workers have quality medical coverage, earn enough to support a family?).¹

And that's just my shirt. Marx, that incomparable analyst of the violence of labor, identified commodities with poetic precision as “definite masses of congealed labor time”; material goods are wrapped about—shrouded—by a densely packed history of the labor that produced them: what was done,

by whom, under what conditions, and for what wages. Suffice it to say here that each of the commodities my body is adorned with/encased in/protected by have a similar history to my shirt, as do the commodities around me: the mug from which I drain the last dregs of my morning tea, the table on which I rest the mug, the teaspoon with which I stirred the tea that stood in the mug that rested upon the table.

I could go on here, in any one of many divergent ways, dense as thickets in their wildly branching complexity:

There is the electricity (from where, gotten how, and by whom, whose profits power what projects?) that heats the water (through what systems of dams, locks, and reservoirs, built and maintained by what people, under what conditions?) that floats the tea (imported from India, in a trail undoubtedly not a whit less convoluted and oppressive than my shirt's path). Or I could examine the land literally underneath all of these commodities, tracking its trail back through the chains of contractual exchanges in the Anglo-American system to the Spanish conquistadors to the nearly seventy Native American tribes that lived in the greater Bay Area of California before the arrival of the Europeans.

I am not going out of the house today, but if I were, perhaps, to go grocery shopping (what food: genetically modified in secret? irradiated? picked by which undocumented workers, for what wages?), I would have to step over and around the bodies of homeless people, about whom the *New York Times* recently noted:

At the richest time in the nation's history, housing that the poor can afford is at an all-time low, fueling an increase in homelessness, according to the U.S. Conference of Mayors. And with complaints about beggars and bag ladies and mumbling, stumbling vagrants growing as well, cities are fighting as never before to move homeless people out of public spaces.²

And what about the familial and ancestral histories of violence that have vitally, albeit sometimes subliminally, informed my experience of this morning, the ubiquitous underlayment of past and personal violences that have prepared me both to endure and to participate in today's violence? Thick family legends woven of Huguenots fleeing genocide in France lead

to English/Welsh southerners leaving Maryland in the wake of the Civil War with a retinue of slaves too “happy” to leave their masters. There is my mother’s Depression-era job daily administering dozens of X-rays without protection, followed by her death of cancer brought on by glamorously packaged cigarettes smoked from the age of ten. There is a childhood punctuated by physical and sexual abuse, meted out by loving parents who had themselves been locked in closets and sexually appropriated by the adults who cared for them.

I want to move toward articulating a theory of violence that rests on the notion that all of us—even those of us fortunate enough not to be slicing-up/sliced-up-by our neighbors with machetes or bombed by terrorists or invading/being invaded by other countries for their/our own good, even those of us privileged enough to be living overtly peaceful and protected middle-class lives in the wealthiest of countries—exist drenched in violence; exist in a world of institutionalized violence, structural violence, symbolic violence, everyday violence;³ a world where a hundred necessary and utterly commonplace daily acts are laced with either the performance or reception of violence; a world at its very best filled with mornings like the one I have just described.

The so-far-buried-it-is-almost-invisible bedrock upon which all of this continuum of violence rests are the accepted, “legitimate” sites of blatant physical coercion:

- The hands of the state, most notably in the conduct of war and in the treatment of criminals, the insane, and those who threaten the smooth operation of society or the amassing of wealth
 - The hands of “mankind,” via the controlling of nature
 - The hands of the family, most notably in the rearing of children

One result of this legitimated daily and global exercise of raw physical force is that the experience of it—whether as practitioner, witness, or recipient—always has enduring transformative effects, one of which is often an increased capacity for collusion in violence in any and all of its many possibilities. Here it may be particularly important to consider the situation of children and adolescents. As a group, they are subjected to socially sanctioned violence from both state and family. They are under double jurisdiction. In the case of adolescents, at a time when they are becoming capable

of acting as agents of violence, they are being bombarded by the structural and symbolic violence of the larger society. The rash of schoolyard shootings suggests what a powerful and powerless time adolescence is, and how desperately we need to understand what messages about violence have been internalized by youth, and how and by whose hands and words they have learned these lessons. Perhaps here, in the particularly potent crucible of violence received and the beginning of the capacity to inflict widespread violence, we can begin to stop the cycle.

What is at stake here is the situating of public acts of the most extreme and florid forms of violence, from schoolyard murder to state-sanctioned genocide and torture, firmly within a hegemonic continuum that also contains both acceptable, legitimated covert violence and activities and structures whereby their potential ultimate enforcement by violence is so mystified that they are not conventionally recognized as being associated with violence at all. The acceptance of violence anywhere makes possible the rationalization of violence everywhere, albeit with endless qualifiers, caveats, and the reassurance of rules and regulations. When we work from a theoretical framework that accepts the interconnectedness of the most mild of oppressions and the most heinous of violences it becomes possible to move beyond framing violence as an ever-surprising aberration committed by monstrous alien others to a logical and thus understandable—and ultimately preventable—human activity.