

2 Research Interest and Research Question

Modern peace theorists seem not to take sufficient account of the depth of the impact of posttraumatic stress in their study of peacebuilding and reconciliation. Peace theorists also fail to recognize the importance of addressing the effects of posttraumatic stress with appropriate psychological support, and some see little point in opening up the past as a means of healing hurts (Mitchels, 2006: 21).

Up until a decade ago, research focusing on the stress and mental problems suffered by humanitarian workers attempting to help traumatized individuals in complex emergency situations were scarce (Adams, Boscarion, & Figley, 2006) and the main area of research revolved around the wellbeing of peacekeepers and armed personnel, and the traumatic events they were facing (Cardozo et al., 2005). Research on the mental health and wellbeing of peace workers is still limited, but there has been a slight shift of attention.

My research interest rotate around peace work and self-understanding, particularly related to preparation in advance of peace work, as well as self-observation, both during and after fieldwork. As peace workers are prone to experience burnout syndromes, posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms (PTSD) and compassion fatigue, the ability to monitor and observe oneself during such work requires more attention. Narrowing the topic further down, I am interested in how inner peace work through sitting meditation, with a close focus on the breath, can be important features when engaging with 'outer' peace work.

2.1 Why This Topic Now?

Every year in my hometown Oslo the Nobel Peace Prize is awarded, according to the guidelines given by Alfred Nobel, to “[...] the person who shall have done the most or the best work for fraternity between the nations and the abolition or reduction of standing armies and the formation and spreading of peace congresses” (Nobel, 1895). Peace work has changed fundamentally since the will of Nobel was written down. A few wide spread examples are the different peace work policies, an increase in, and also the desperate need of, civilian field personnel as well as the colossal impact the establishment of the United Nations

has had. “Today peacework is multilateral, multinational, multidimensional and multicultural” (Dietrich, 2013: 3), and the challenges met by those who are engaging in peace work may potentially lead to quite serious outcomes if being disregarded.

The danger is emotional as well as physical; ongoing occupational trauma exposure has implications for mental health. With global complex emergencies and humanitarian crises rising, relief workers are increasingly and continually exposed to trauma, both primary involving direct dangers to workers and secondary through exposure to others’ suffering. Trauma exposure creates emotional and psychological risk, and anecdotal literature on relief workers theorizes workers are highly susceptible to posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other trauma-related mental illness (Connorton, Perry, Hemenway & Miller, 2012: 145).

The University of Innsbruck UNESCO Chair for Peace Studies has developed an academic program that combines cognitive knowledge acquisition and personal growth as grounded in humanistic psychology, where the preparation consist in “adjusting oneself physically, psychologically, mentally, and spiritually to the work, and recognizing one’s limits and boundaries” (Dietrich 2013: 12). The students are offered methods such as Holotropic Breathwork, Five Rhythms Dance and Theatre for Living as possible tools for exploring the deeper layers of our selves. Not every tool may work for every person in the same way and therefore they cannot be understood as a universal toolbox for elicitive conflict work. Indeed this would be a contradiction to the non-prescriptive nature of the elicitive approach (Lederach, 1995).

In the beginning of January 2015 I started working for the non-governmental Norwegian Organization for Employees in International Operations (NOFAIO), a network and support group for aid workers, initiated by three former humanitarian field workers in 2013. The idea behind the project is to build networks where former and present humanitarian workers can meet, share experiences and exchange views.³ The organization also advocates that many aid workers face challenges after having returned back home. Challenges related to trying to reconnect with family and friends, feeling out of place, as well as situating the challenges to stress, traumas, burnout, and other general mental health issues of aid workers.

3 <http://www.nofaio.no> The website is written in Norwegian.

2.2 Identifying the Problem

Working with humanitarian crises or relief work, peace workers are increasingly and continually exposed to suffering, and neither the employers nor the employees may have sufficient understanding of the wounds this can create (Connorton et al., 2012). The problem and what draws me to this topic is as follows: most training programs that aim at sending workers out in the field, such as The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), The United Nations Volunteer Program (UNV) and The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), have their main focus on the conflict itself (often already with possible solutions made in advance of arrival), and thus fall short to prepare the peace workers on the importance of self-reflection, sensitivity and awareness on all layers. Peacemaker Rosalie Hughes worked for the United Nations refugee agency and other relief organizations in Rwanda, Kenya and other African countries from 2009 to 2013, and wrote an article in 2015, stating the following: “Aid organizations exist to alleviate suffering and maintain and protect human dignity. They should do better at applying these principles to their own staff” (Hughes, 2015).

The Tantric principle '*as above, so below; as within, so without*'; as the universe, so the soul' reflects upon the notion that whatever occurs at one level also occurs on every other hence, what is inside the peace worker effects what is on the outside and vice versa. Peace researcher Noah Taylor describes it in this way:

The elicitive conflict worker enters the conflict situation from a systemic perspective acknowledging that by simply being in the conflict situation one has become part of it. When universal prescriptive models have been abandoned, all one has to rely on is one's own capacities and the quality and type of presence one can bring to the situation in order to assist in eliciting the transformation of the conflict from within (Taylor, 2013: 10).

Reflecting on what I have learnt about myself through writing this writing, I know that if I try to suppress, hide or push away my wounds, they will only manifest themselves differently within me. Breathing meditation has, as mentioned, provided me with a space to acknowledge, observe and understand how I react in different situations and how I can center myself in the present.

2.3 The Question

I begin my research journey with the symbol of the elicitive conflict worker. On the preceding pages I attempted to connect the threads from my personal perspective with the prevailing problems that the peace worker might encounter in the meadows of the humanitarian/relief/aid/conflict/peace work. My research question, the heart of my research design, has been through extensive feedback loops with the result of one reformulated research question:

- How can breathing meditation, as a transrational method, be a tool for peace work?

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