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This is a peace initiative exploring how culture is embedded with ideology, religion, language art and so on... so seamlessly that we are often unaware of its impact and the way it influences our thoughts and behaviours. I want to have conversations with people on a global level and intergenerationally interested in and concerned about the world we live in and how we can influence it by becoming more peaceful, aware and involved. I will create an 6 week online course on the way our culture influences our ideas of war and peace. We will discuss what peace and peacefulness is and agree plan to get involved in the promotion of peace, hope and justice. I would like to run this course in December 2025.

If you live long enough they say, that life comes back around....

Johan Galtung, Norwegian sociologist and founding member of Peace Studies notes that Peace has two dimensions. *Negative peace as the absence of violence and positive peace in contrast, is defined by the absence of structural and cultural violence.* Galtung, J.(1996)

The Cold War

I have a memory. The school bell rings. I'm under the desk I'm between six and eight years old I'm in school in NY. It's a warning bell to get under your desk when you hear that sound. It's the early 60s. We think Russia is going to bomb.

This is such a vague memory, I do a search for '*under the desk, 60s, Russian scare*' and learn it refers to the 'duck and cover' school drill practiced during the 50's and 60's due to fear of the Soviet Union and a nuclear attack.

These drills were part of civil defence programs were to reassure the public and became less common in the late 60s and mostly disappeared by the 80s. This "cold war" conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union reduced in the late 80s and 90s and eventually ended in 91 with the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Mac Ginty suggests that, *Everyday peace refers to the routinized practices used by individuals and collectives as they navigate their way through life in a deeply divided society that may suffer from ethnic or religious cleavages and be prone to episodic direct violence in addition to chronic or structural violence* Mac Ginty, R.(2014:pp549)

Everyday peace is a reminder that day-to-day things happen but so routinely that we do not question.

Galtung clarifies the distinction between psychological violence physical violence. (*violence that works on the body, and violence that works on the soul*) Galtung, J.(1969:pp4)

This is a important reminder as I think when we think of violence we may focus on physical violence as that is what we see. He also includes in the definition of physical violence the *threat* of physical violence. '*that may even be characterized as some type of psychological violence since it constrains human action*' Galtung, J.(1969:pp5)

In an article JoAnn Brown, reviews how the threat of anticommunist red scare is used to drive the civil defence programs in schools.

'In so doing, they fortified the symbolic and institutional links between education and national defense and bolstered the logic under which federal aid to education was finally granted in 1958, under the legislative title of the National Defense Education Act.' Brown, J.(1988:pp74)

Psychological Trauma and Cultural Violence

So from a young age children were psychologically encouraged to fear the Soviet Union and to believe that communism is bad.

This supports the theory that '*cultural bias significantly distorts the study of peace and war.*' Fry, D.(2013:pp1)

I consider what the teacher says to get us to crawl under our desk and do our best to shield our bodies. Was it something like: *we are good Americans and some bad Russians want to bomb us?*

Galtung argues that '*untruthfulness*' is a type of violence. Galtung, J. (1969:pp170)

This could be have been a teaching moment to show children how to take responsibility and say:

Children, we did bad things. We've bombed other countries, we've nuked Nagasaki and Hiroshima. We're now afraid others will do to us what we did to them. We're sorry.

In this way we teach not just tell the truth but show how to take responsibility for our actions.

Brown quotes a professor, *'worried that school lessons on the dangers of communism and loose talk about civil defense at home might combine to frighten children needlessly. Children were being taught in school that "communists are bad men that want to kill us'*. Brown, J. (1988: pp75)

I'm now in my early 20s. I'm in the New School for Social Research. I'm taking a few classes. And in the school cafeteria, there is a group of white lads passing by all animated in conversation. In the middle, the center of them, is a younger African American lad. And he's looking up at them, he's having a joyous conversation naming the types, the size and the power of military weapons. The enjoyment is written all over his face and he's excited. Their conversation that I hear is something like: "we will beat those Russians, we are more powerful."

Perhaps I was surprised at how young they were and the way in which weapons and war are glorified with no regard as to what weapons do. It felt like it was a game, just boys with their toys...

Galtung introduces *cultural violence* as six cultural domains. *"violence can be built into institutions, economies, and symbolic systems. This analytical shift matters because it makes visible forms of harm that are otherwise obscured by an exclusive focus on physical conflict."*

He gives examples such as *'stars, crosses and crescents; flags, anthems and military parade'* etc....and this reminds me also of the pledge of allegiance we did every day at school. Galtung, J. (1990: pp291)

Direct violence is visible but it's the indirect, structural and cultural violence perhaps more so is embedded with in everyday life and goes unnoticed. He defines direct violence as personal and visible as *ripples on waves...* but *'structural violence is silent, it does not show - it is essentially static, it is the tranquil waters'* Galtung, J. (1969: 173)

I'm not sure if I was influenced by the flag and the Russia scare as it is a memory I'd forgotten and perhaps it was that as a community activist I had different experiences. I attended protests, around issues the community was concerned with. I also attended demonstrations around the AIDS epidemic and the crackdown of the government on LGBTQ people. I remember going on marches, travelling around the country with, people knitting in cloth the names of the many people that died.

I was unaware of the Palestine occupation growing up but it is a clear example of cultural violence. David Cameron, UK Prime Minister in 2010

described the blockaded Gaza Strip as a 'prison camp' and an 'open-air prison'.

Speaking in Ankara, Turkey, in July 2010, he said: '*Gaza cannot and must not be allowed to remain a prison camp*'. He said, '*People in Gaza are living under constant attacks and pressure in an open-air prison*'.

Galtung agree. *by denying West Bank inhabitants what is needed for livelihood; there is desocialization within the theocratic state of Israel with second class citizenship to non-Jew.* Galtung, J. (1990pp297)

When I look back, it looks a privileged life because those are my only two memories I have of 'war'. In that respect it's been a privileged life.

But it's now 2025 and still the Russians are coming! ...

And missiles, weapons, bombing, war means ***peace through strength.***

Peace Initiative Course

The above will be an introduction to the first session in my peace initiative course exploring where our beliefs come from and exploring what peace means.

What do we remember? What was our education and formative years like? Does it influence you now as an adult? Do we make assumptions based on what were told or experienced as a young person?

The online course is to ensure there is a good mixture of people from the states as well as the UK along with other countries around the world. I would like to have a range of ages to have intergenerational discussions.

Community Development

It's the year 2000, I've lived in London for about ten years and move from London to Brighton. I'm a community development worker working in the local authority with local communities. My role is to get people involved, to influence decisions in their locality. It's a low income working class community living in poor council house accommodations. I work hard to raise funds for a project I've learned that is working with Brighton university. It's a Participative Appraisal project, I gather a group together and we're trained to do a community research project. We go door to door to find out what the issues are and what ideas they have to improve their community. I create a stakeholder group to liaise with and to share the research we're accumulating. One of the many key takeaways from this work was the impact of mental health resulting from poor housing, class and race.

Mental Health

In 2008, I'm employed as a community manager for the NHS with a mental health trust. It's a national programme funded by the Labour government to respond to research that shows that Black and Brown people are disproportionately represented in mental health. A key document is Breaking the Circle of Fear suggest that fear of mental health results in late appraisals and with the involvement of police results in being sectioned, which in turn reinforces the fear of Mental Health. The Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health (2002)

I'm trained to facilitate a number of courses to deliver to communities and to NHS staff. I deliver equalities training, namely race equality cultural competency (RECC), Recovery sessions and am accredited along with another colleague to deliver Peer Support training around the south east and later nationally. Prior to that post I had no knowledge of mental health but doing the Peer Support training, training hundreds of people, I discover that the majority of people with mental health challenges are a result of traumas they endured as children that were not attended to. I came to distrust mental health diagnosis as a result as it seemed to me that rather than responding to the issues of abuse in society it was easier to give individuals a diagnosis that made them feel ashamed, and blamed themselves which multiplied the problems.

Year later I would discover Gabor Mate, and his book, The Myth of Normal: Trauma, Illness, and Healing in a Toxic Culture written in 2022 is able to better articulate the confusion I was feeling.

He argues that Western culture's norms of chronic stress, emotional suppression, disconnection, and social inequality create widespread psychological and physical illness. Rather than viewing disease as an individual malfunction, Maté reframed it as a natural response to an unhealthy society.

It is my contention that by its very nature our social and economic culture generates chronic stresses that undermine well-being in the most serious of ways, as they have done with increasing force over the past several decades.
Mate,G.(2022:pp3)

My Course - Peace, Hope and Justice

The peace initiative course is a 6 week course because I am using P.E.A.C.E. as an anagram to structure the course.

I want to include, international views, for example, Gandhi. I know that Galtung was influenced by Gandhi, so I will refer to that and Gandhi's

interpretation of peace as well as Martin Luther King. I want to use Ubuntu, a South Africa philosophy of peace and explore also a international perspective such as Russian and Chinese views of Peace.

Week 1

P - Defining Peace - when you think of the word peace what comes to mind. Use Galtung's suggestion that the word itself has power. *'Peace' may in itself be peace-productive, producing a common basis, a feeling of communality in purpose that may pave the ground for deeper ties later on'* Galtung, J.(1969: pp.167)

Week 2

E - Economy - Have an understanding of the way in which political systems influence economy including decision making. Galtung breaking down barriers, Sen, Freedom and development. Explore structural inequalities in Feminist, Postcolonial and Decolonial practices. And

Empathy - Peer Support is about having a cup of tea with someone and listening, Gabor Mate, Lederach, Dr. Jiang reviewing, these earlier hunter-gatherers and the Indus Valley and how, we've not always been violent, so that what we're being taught is untrue.

Week 3

A - Aspiration - what are our dreams and aspirations? How our values influence us. getting a sense on what are people's aspirations. we'll see whether peace comes out of that or what are the aspirations that people have. And, use Gill and Thompson in terms of spiritual awareness, and wellbeing. Lederach,

Week 4

C - cooperation and compassion - Douglas Fry, Gabor Mate, Lederach, (looking from the other perspective) and vulnerability

Week 5

E - Environment - Using indigenous knowledge to understand our role with nature and environment. Jeffrey Sachs Sustainable development, Permaculture and Roslind Shaw, Galtung (violence against nature)

E - Equity and Justice explore what that means from Galtung's perspective, Mignolo and Gil & Thompson

Week 6

Final session- Ideas, projects to take peace building forward. suggestions that people have to promote peace, and whether we can do something as a collective (to introduce in the first session)

Conclusion

I'm working on a peace initiative 6 week course to explore beliefs we learn as children and how cultural biases influence us our thoughts, ideas and decisions. Explore our values of and develop an understanding of peace and peacefulness. I begin by introducing early memories as in this first section to explore how we're influenced by cultural biases in life. I am interested in developing an international perspective particularly drawing on indigenous concepts of peace such as UBUNTU and include aspects of Peer Support training, around empathy and compassion as well as Thich Nhat Hanh as I have several of his books and use the knowledge and understanding of Peace Studies to create a peace building project.

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