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Sociology in practice: H W van der Merwe's contribution to conflict resolution and mediation in South Africa

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Conflict, repression and resistance had an alienating effect on a micro- and macro-level in apartheid South Africa. This brings to mind Hendrik Willem van der Merwe as a person who united South Africa's enemies. This article explores auto-ethnographic insights in a discussion of his approach to mediation, involvement with the Centre for Intergroup Studies and his establishing of the South African Association for Conflict Intervention (SAACI). His approach differed from others at the time such as the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA). The value of his work is noted and further research advised. The article suggests that scholarly activism (or the activist scholar) is again needed to build peace and justice in the context of South Africa and our continent.

Sosiologie in praktyk: H W van der Merwe se benadering tot konflikplossing en bemiddeling in Suid-Afrika

Konflik op mikro- en makrovlak het vervreemdende gevolge in apartheid Suid-Afrika gehad. Hendrik W van der Merwe is in die media beskryf as die man wat Suid-Afrikaanse vyande bymekaar bring. In hierdie verkenning word gebruik gemaak van kwalitatiewe auto-etnografiese momente om Van der Merwe se benadering en sy betrokkenheid by die Sentrum vir Intergroepstudies en die stigting van die Suid-Afrikaanse Assosiasie vir Konflik Intervensie (SAAKI) na te speur. Sy styl ten opsigte van mediasie en intervensie het gekontrasteer met byvoorbeeld die Instituut vir Demokrasie in Suid-Afrika (IDASA). Die artikel verwys na die waarde van sy werk en suggereer ten slotte dat sodanige akademiese aktivisme kan bydra tot rede- en geregtigheidsbou in Suid Afrika en elders op ons kontinent.

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Sociologists seem to veer towards politics, for instance H F Verwoerd and Fatima Meer. Two Afrikaans sociologists noted for their consistent opposition to the apartheid ideology and its structural outcomes were the late Frederik Van Zyl Slabbert and Hendrik W van der Merwe.

H W van der Merwe (HW) is a well-known name in academic circles and, in particular, in conflict resolution. Perhaps not so well known to the current South African public is the fact that he played a major role in mediation, conflict resolution and communication between political adversaries during the apartheid era in order to facilitate a more just society. He fulfilled this role despite the state's attempts at erecting iron barriers between the citizens of South Africa. In addition to his academic interest he took an active part in micro and macro South African communities and played the role of facilitator between the exiled African National Congress (ANC) leadership, other internal liberation movements and the apartheid government., Many recognised and respected his involvement in communities in KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape.

This article highlights HW's work, his approach to communication, conflict resolution, mediation, intervention and the outcomes thereof. In a conflict-ridden South Africa, he married academic involvement with facilitating consistent communication, mediation and practical conflict resolution over an extended period, something very few South African academics can lay claim to. The article also contrasts HW's approach to other organisations active at the time, such as the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA), and ventures into an appreciation of his work within the South African context.

While Slabbert and Van der Merwe involved themselves in resisting the apartheid rule by different means, many academics at Afrikaans- and English-speaking universities remained aloof of the debilitating conflict and social disruption in South Africa. South African academics frequently preferred to only study these conflict situations and to comment or write about them. An entire vocabulary boasted terms such as "objective", "neutral", "non-partisan", "not emotional", "rational", "independent" and "realistic". This "we-do-

not-want-to-be-involved” language acrobatics took place within a society perceived by the majority of South Africans as unjust and socially destructive. Such an attitude amounted to a mere acceptance of the ruling order, or even its desirability, and (subtle) justification of oppression and this is in stark contrast with the work of Slabbert and Van der Merwe.

Van der Merwe’s persistent and personal involvement, as opposed to the mere study of conflict, deserves reflection. It is my view that now is perhaps the appropriate time to do so as it is a decade since HW died on his farm near Bonnievale in the Western Cape.

1. Aim

The article addresses the role and involvement of HW van der Merwe with the Centre for Intergroup Studies (CIS) and the establishment of the South African Association for Conflict Intervention (SAACI). Comparisons between the work of the Centre, its intentions and examples of practical outcomes and an activist pro-democracy group such as the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA), are relevant. The article concludes with an appraisal of Van der Merwe’s work and some pointers for future reference. The author’s personal experiences inform the article with some auto-ethnographic moments.¹

2. Methodology

The qualitative method is used with elements of description, comparison and auto-ethnography. Literature on HW and his involvement in conflict resolution in South Africa forms part of the material consulted. His autobiography deserves attention.

1 I served as a part-time worker for the Centre for Intergroup Studies (CIS) during 1985/1986 and 1991, and as secretary of the South African Association for Conflict Intervention (SAACI) from 1987 to 1988, the latter closely aligned with the CIS. Serving as organiser, consultant and later Director Research for the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA) between November 1986 and December 1990 forms part of the personal background to this study.

Primary sources were limited to documents available at the University of Cape Town (UCT) archives and related documents in my possession through personal involvement with the CIS. Other documentation relating to the South African Association for Conflict Management (SAACM), which later became the South African Association for Conflict Intervention (SAACI), is also consulted. My involvement as a periodical worker between 1985 and 1991 and thus participant, observer-participant and at times participant-observer at the Centre feeds into this narrative. Articles published by HW in the Afrikaans and English media, and notes kept during the period while I acted as SAACI secretary, were also relevant.

Comparative elements are limited to the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA). Established by Drs Frederik Van Zyl Slabbert and Alex Boraine after their resignation from the Tri-cameral Parliament in 1986, IDASA opted for biased intervention through advocacy of democracy. IDASA by design aimed to popularise the notion of a negotiated transition by bringing together the then perceived main political contenders, the National Party (NP) and the African National Congress (ANC), while to a large extent excluding other internal stakeholders.

Van der Merwe's memoir, *Peacemaking in South Africa: a life in conflict resolution* (2000), was written in an auto-ethnographic style. The strength of this style is that it provides a collage to context and experience at a particular moment in time (*cf* Bryman 2004: 301, 315, Ellis & Bochner 2000: 733-4, 739, Schwandt 2001: 13). Some criticise the auto-ethnographic approach for being limited and authors not well disposed to auto-ethnographic approaches may argue that it is "personalistic"; however, qualitative inquiry has brought together various moments in the research path (*cf* Denzin & Lincoln 1994 & 2000). Despite criticism against it, the auto-ethnographic angle adds value to other research approaches and complements available data while contextualising it in human and personal experience.

Auto-ethnography as a qualitative research angle provides a view, rich in data about an era, personal experiences and observations in a particular context. It throws a unique light on socio-political

developments and outcomes.² For me it is an optic angle worth deploying, in particular to contemporary South African socio-political experiences and the role of a practitioner-sociologist such as HW van der Merwe.

Deploying the “I” of the researcher or author as one tool in the warehouse of research tools, the approach cannot claim objectivity, but rather tends towards rich description. The journey or travel as theoretical enterprise thus embodies dialogue, intersubjectivity rather than static “objectivities”.³ The appeal to intersubjectivity invites dialogue, rather than unqualified advocacy, openness to communication, a willingness to mediate, and intervention without prescription – a tall order for any individual in a deeply divided society – but this was, incidentally, exactly what HW and Slabbert undertook, albeit on different levels.

While the article attempts to carefully highlight some of the activities and achievements of Van der Merwe as a “sociologist in action” dedicated to the practical resolution of conflict, further studies are necessary to provide a more comprehensive picture.⁴ Interviews with those in close interaction with Van der Merwe – community members, peers, fellow researchers, family members and past political actors – could be valuable. These omissions are *per se* limitations to this article.

No personal action takes place in a vacuum. Van der Merwe’s role relates closely to conflict and South Africa’s political dynamics under the apartheid rule. The example set by him and other actively committed social scientists in dealing with conflict in a deeply divided society provides useful space for research that could enhance future

2 Cf Blenkinsop 2006, Crang & Cook 2007: 13, Etherington 2006: 141, Josselson *et al* 2003, Philaterou & Allen 2006: 65, 67.

3 Cf Ellis & Bochner 2000: 739, 1996 & 2006: 439, Schurink 2006: 4, Schwandt 2001: 13.

4 The same applies to the late Van Zyl Slabbert whose career and activities provide a rich area for future research. In addition to various formal academic publications, two of his books reflect the auto-ethnographic style, namely *The last White parliament* (Slabbert 1985) and *The other side of history* (Slabbert 2006). The Afrikaans translation of the latter is *Duskant die geskiedenis: 'n persoonlike terugblik op die politieke oorgang in Suid-Afrika* (Tafelberg/Jonathan Ball).

contributions towards meaningful conflict intervention by social scientists. As such, these deserve further research.

3. Terminology and concepts

Persons trying to understand conflict and simultaneously react meaningfully to ensure a relatively peaceful community, equality and economic justice within their context have options other than violence against the incumbent order. These options are possible even while tension mounts, alienation increases and political disagreement cascades into violent confrontation. One qualification being that in a revolutionary atmosphere, the application of such options (and the concepts discussed in this instance) would have decreasing value as alienation and social conflict, including (mass) violence, escalate.

In discussing terminology, I stand by the definitions used by HW van der Merwe. Given the context of conflict in South Africa at the time, I steer away from post-1996 definitions or variations of definitions of the terms discussed in this instance and the glib if generic definitions found in less reliable Wikipedia-type sources. I do so because it is important to understand the involvement of a person or persons in their historic context with the theoretical tools available and applied by them at the time.

3.1 Facilitation

Facilitation may pave the way for mediation and ultimately enable a settlement, but it needs to be distinguished from negotiation, mediation and intervention. Facilitators are not interested in prescribing solutions or in acting out the formal role of mediator. They are concerned with opening channels for communication. The facilitator appears to be functional rather than committed to a (specific) model of resolution of a conflict (Van der Merwe 1991: 14). For Van der Merwe facilitation calls for quiet, informal services of people not employed by governments but frequently with the knowledge of the conflicting parties. Such an approach

contrasts with a more public role such as the one played by IDASA.

3.2 Mediation

Mediation is an informal process in which the third party tries to bring the conflicting parties together by lowering tensions, improving communication, interpreting issues, providing technical assistance, exploring potential solutions and generating a settlement, either informally or by means of formal mediation (Van der Merwe 1990: 224-5 & 1991: 12-3). Mediators will not cease in attempts to mediate if tensions remain the same or increase. Mediation stands in contrast to negotiation through the involvement of a mediator aiming to enable an acceptable temporary or lasting agreement (Nieuwmeijer 1986: 42). Van der Merwe (1990a: 9) points out that mediation and negotiation relate but they are “two different activities”. Mediation refers to “intervention without force in a dispute by an acceptable, impartial and ‘neutral’ third party to assist contending parties” to reach a mutually acceptable settlement or truce (Van der Merwe 1990: 9).

In summary, mediation is a process of dispute resolution as an alternative to other means where a third party (usually viewed as neutral or non-partisan) assists in reaching an agreement on perceived common interests. In the case of HW facilitation of communication and mediation played a pertinent role depending on the context, and it remained part of a consistent activity on a sliding scale without losing the aim of achieving justice and equality.

3.3 Third-party intervention

Third-party interventions can be neutral or biased. The distinctions between such definitions depend on the morality of the intervener, powers in conflict and the envisioned end goal, which in itself may lay on a spectrum of minimising violence, managing conflict and re-communicating common agreement.

Van der Merwe distinguishes between neutral intervention and biased intervention: “The purpose of neutral intervention is usually to mediate between conflicting parties, to improve communication and to promote a negotiated settlement” (Van der Merwe 1991: 11). He contrasts neutral intervention with partisan intervention, where reasons impel the intervener to advocate the cause of (a perceived weaker) party or to assist such party to protect or achieve the desired conditions fruitful to a settlement (Van der Merwe 1991: 11).

Biased intervention will favour the party perceived to be weaker within the specific context. In this sense, biased intervention is contextual and variable, however, not devoid of morality. Biased intervention frequently aims at achieving relative equality between contenders and opponents; in other words, levelling the playing field or strengthening a weaker centre of power. This is done so that the (previously) dominant power finds itself drawn to a peaceful settlement rather than a violent confrontation. The latter is applicable to contenders aiming at increased revolutionary violence or incumbents bent on maintaining an authoritarian or oppressive system. Admittedly, biased interveners may misread situations, aim consciously to achieve more than reality dictates, and realise that the path between conflict and a negotiated settlement does not lead to final solutions. At this point, neutral interveners, biased interveners and communication facilitators are likely to agree, depending on similar experience or context and the definition of how to facilitate, manage or resolve conflict. The reason is simply that human interaction when turned into destructive conflict has to be managed in order to achieve a better world for those damaged or injured by the conflict – be it micro or macro. HW’s approach was more neutral or at most subtly biased towards the disadvantaged parties depending on the context. By contrast, the public image of IDASA was one of biased intervention.

3.4 Negotiation

Negotiation implies an extended process whereby contending parties come to an agreement or solve a conflict. Negotiation must be distinguished from mediation (where a third party facilitates

an agreement) and intervention, and from arbitration, where a legalised third party, the arbitrator, takes a decision binding on two conflicting parties (Nieuwmeijer 1986: 42). Lobbying as a way to advocate one's point of view, while it may form part of negotiation, is not to be equated with negotiation. Both or all of the conflicting parties may use their ability to lobby, even while negotiating.

4. A politics of conflict in pre-democratic South Africa

Those who decided to facilitate an end to apartheid faced serious obstacles. Historical background is necessary in this instance in order to highlight these challenges.

Organised peaceful resistance among politically marginalised South Africans can be traced back to 1884 and the establishment of the South African Native National Congress in 1912, two years before the National Party came into being (Odendaal 1984). Various organisations made the first attempts at organisational level to “nationalise” the struggle for political liberation. During the inter-war years, peaceful resistance and political activity among black people and socialists (the Communist Party of South Africa [CPSA] and several Trotskyite groups) toned down, partly because of the economic recession of the 1930s (Hirson 1994: 65). Inactivity within bodies such as the Industrial Commercial Union (ICU) related to the dark years of depression and differences on strategy. Another restraint on political activities was that “bread-and-butter” became prominent issues on the political agendas of various parties. The Second World War also had a dampening effect.

The Second World War saw the Smuts government in South Africa siding with Britain, France and the US (where a New Deal of State intervention in the economy just took place). *Ipsa facto* the Smuts government also sided with the Soviet Union, a proclaimed communist state, in the war against Nazi extremism and racial exclusivity. Under such conditions, resistance against the Smuts government would have been tantamount to support for the Nazi cause – or at

least would allow for the local Nazi-orientated forces and sympathisers to exploit the situation. In South Africa, some Afrikaner nationalist groups, such as Lang Hans van Rensburg's *Ossewa Brandwag* and the New Order Party headed by Oswald Pirow, a former Minister of Defence, and the Grey Shirt Movement had open sympathy with national socialism. South African activist Robey Leibrandt returned clandestinely from Germany, hoping to establish an authoritarian state. The National Party (established in 1914) reflected sympathy with these groups despite some political disagreements. Then like now, South African politics were complex and conflict lies frequently under the surface often close to boiling point.

The National Party came to power in 1948 with the political slogan of apartheid ("separateness"), later to become a full-fledged ideology. Apartheid legislation permeated South African life. Segregation was not new, but under National Party Prime Ministers such as D F Malan, H Strijdom and H F Verwoerd, waves of expanding legislation influenced individual and community existence on national, provincial and local government levels, making inroads into people's social and private lives. Ironically, this ideology had strong advocates in people with a sociology background, such as Geoffrey Cronjé, professor in sociology at the University of Pretoria and Hendrik Verwoerd, the first head of the Department of Sociology at the University of Stellenbosch, despite the fact that not everyone accepted these thoughts and their structural outcomes.

Political developments in the 1950s affected South African political dynamics. Since the Passive Resistance Campaign, government repression escalated. The Klip Town Declaration resulted in the Freedom Charter (June 1955), which further heightened tensions between the apartheid government and its contenders (Liebenberg 1990: 92). Government reaction against civic action (refer to it as a "civil rights movement", if you wish) ultimately culminated in the banning of the African National Congress (ANC), the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) and others (Liebenberg 1990: 92, 96).

During the 1950s, there was only a fractional manifestation of what Ted Honderich (1976) would have called "violence for

equality". The South African "condition" at the time was also not resembling what Schurmann (1971) would have called a "revolutionary conflict":

We made it abundantly clear long before the campaign was launched that it was a system, not a race that we were opposing [... the] target of the campaign was unjust oppressive laws. The intention was to disobey these laws, suffering arrest, assault and penalty if need be without violence (Luthuli 1962: 105).

Overturning a system of systematic oppression with violence or without compromise was not on the agenda. In essence, the campaign's basis was the claim for human dignity (Liebenberg 1990: 92).

It appears that South Africa's political history and squandered opportunities for peacemaking go hand in hand. The Defiance Campaign, the Congress Alliance and the release of the Freedom Charter at Klip Town in 1955 did not succeed in bringing this message into the corridors of white power. Organisations advocating freedom and equality were harassed. For example, the Congress of Democrats (COD) and the Liberal Party suffered under banning orders of members and continued harassment from the Security Police (Van der Westhuizen 1994). The liberation movements increasingly embarked on violent resistance to apartheid and the state it represented. Activities by followers of Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe in the 1960s – much denied today by the governing elite – played an important role in defining the future contest for power.

The ANC embarked on an armed struggle in the 1960s, which by 1988 proved to be relatively ineffective. Internal dissatisfaction and international pressure played a more important role. Support for and from the exiles in Britain and the US and the armed strugglers, however, played a role in creating the context for the negotiated settlement that was to come. In reality, "internal" South Africans of all races resisting apartheid since the 1950s progressively deactivated apartheid as a social system. The inevitability of economic interdependence and cooperation played a part in upsetting top-down racial impositions. So did the work done by HW and others such as Slabbert.

Small liberation movements/initiatives, apart from the PAC and ANC, some predominantly workerist in orientation, others predominantly white African in composition, played a role. Contributions currently conveniently dropped from the social radar – if not denied, one may add. The resistance embarked upon by smaller groups, in cases, bordered on the farcical, for instance by a hopeful yet naïve sabotage campaign waged by people not skilled in guerrilla warfare (Du Toit 1994). Names that come to mind are for example the Armed Resistance Movement (ARM). Trotskyite trade unions played a role (*cf* Liebenberg *et al* 1994: 52, 65, 72, 81, 96, 164, 173, Van der Westhuizen 1994a & 1994b).

The 1960s were to see acts of resistance from the PAC. Black Consciousness as a social movement became influential in the 1970s. Currently mostly youthful supporters of the ANC incidentally underplay the roles enacted by these organisations. In turn, the minority government steeling itself against the “winds of change” in Africa embarked on increasingly stronger measures. The situation gradually changed from what Philip Frankel called the “politics of police control” under Prime Minister B J Vorster, to that of a technocratic praetorian state under the executive presidency of P W Botha (Frankel 1984). This transition from a policing state (inclusive of the Bureau of State Security [BOSS]) to a technocratic and militarised state underpinned by security forces accelerated after the 1972 Natal strikes and the 1976 Soweto revolt.

H W van der Merwe and others found themselves in this strained context: political and economic paradigms increasingly became alienated and gradually drifted towards increasing civil conflict.

Reaction by the government resulted in more bannings and restrictions. The Christian Institute headed by Reverend Beyers Naudé and its newsletter *Pro Veritate*, newspapers such as *The World* and the *Rand Daily Mail* became the victims of government repression. Detention became a popular tool to disarm “agitation”. Because of detention and concomitant torture, Steve Biko and Neil Aggett and others were to die. The Natal-based activist philosopher, Richard Turner, among others, was assassinated. The Wits academ-

ic, Webster, would follow the same route, being a victim of the Civil Cooperation Bureau (CCB).

In addition, white communities felt the tightening security screw, even if subtle. At Afrikaans universities, such as Stellenbosch, a university loyal to the Nationalist Government, persons associated with the Christian Institute found themselves isolated and ostracised. Some examples in this instance would be the Catholic theologian Albert Nolan, Andre du Toit (philosopher and political scientist) and Johannes Degenaar (philosopher). In circles such as the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), which showed loyalty towards the apartheid government, those who criticised apartheid policies were ostracised. Stellenbosch theologians such as Willie Jonker and, later, Nico Smith, serve as examples. At the northern universities, persons such as Ben Marais, theologian, and Willem Kleynhans, political scientist, suffered the same fate.

It is not surprising that H W van der Merwe together with others such as David Welsh started asking questions about the fate and future of the (white) universities in South(ern) Africa. An example is a work on the future of the university in the region edited by HW and Welsh (1977) with contributions by Shils, Halsey, Blake, Vann Woodward, Wandira, Murphree, Degenaar, Bozzoli, Hunnings, Bhana, Kgware and others. The questions posed in this work in some cases went beyond *verligtheid* or liberal discomfort. The work addressed the heart of an unjust educational and elitist system. It may help to contextualise the above by referring to a statement by Steve Biko:

There are those whites who will completely disclaim responsibility for the country's inhumanity towards the black man. These are people governed by logic for four and a half years but by fear at election time. The Nationalist Party has perhaps many more English votes than one imagines [...] Their (the white people) state of insecurity, however, does not outweigh their greed for power and wealth, hence they brace themselves to react against this rage rather than to dispel it with open-mindedness and fair play (Stubbs 1988: 90).

Biko is correct: without referring to race or language, the greed for power and wealth remains, and one does not yet find open-

mindedness, *ubuntu*, principled non-racialism and equality in post-apartheid South Africa. Some, however, lived and acted transformatory openness then and now, regardless of their colour or class. One such person was HW.

The mentality described by Bantu Biko above was lived by many conservative (*verkrampste*) and enlightened (*verligte*) Afrikaners as well as English-speaking liberals. Facing such ambiguities, if not outright *pro status quo* advocacy in favour of an oppressive state, committed engagement became a moral imperative for citizens and academic practitioners whether at universities or not.⁵

5. Early years

Born on a farm near Bonnievale, HW returned to South Africa in 1951 after a spell at a missionary station in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and studied at Stellenbosch. Through the Contact Study Group (*Kontakstudiegroep*), where Jan Loubser and Dian Joubert were involved, he came to know Pieter Philander, Adam Small and Dick van der Ross. His interaction with Dr Erica Theron, who tirelessly worked for the upliftment of disadvantaged communities, significantly influenced his later work (Van der Merwe 2000: 26-7).

HW mentions three academics at Stellenbosch who influenced his “dissent”, and the *kairos* where Afrikaner became African (Van der Merwe 2000: 26, 30). They were Professors B B (Ben) Keet of the Theological Faculty, S P Cilliers (Sociology) and Johan Degenaar (Philosophy, later head to a separate department, the Department of Political Philosophy). The elders at Stellenbosch found themselves uncomfortable with future theology students being exposed to Degenaar and his colleagues, since the Kweekskool as an Afrikaner institution’s notion of philosophical grounding was more oriented to-

5 The complexity of making existential choices against apartheid, given the mobilisation of white society and a repressive state, is well summed up by Van Zyl Slabbert in his last media interview: “All I had to fall back on was my own conviction. I went ahead” (Monare 2010: 10).

wards (Christian) hermeneutics rather than the radical questioning of issues, including the prevalent racist political structures.

Many students for years afterwards would concur with HW about the role of these academics and their like (in my case, Johan Degenaar and Andre du Toit, in particular, and later at the University of Western Cape, Andrew Nash and Pieter le Roux – the latter two working within different academic paradigms). Through contact with other racial groups, HW became interested in facilitating contact and dialogue among South Africans. He also mentions his research paper on the coloured community near Piketberg that kindled an interest in applied sociology and him being elected as chairperson of the Stellenbosch Sociological Society (Van der Merwe 2000: 26, 32). His growing interest in applied sociology would lead to a life of mediation in conflict and frequently deployed in conjunction with facilitating dialogue between estranged groups in a divided society. In 1958 HW and his wife Marietjie departed to study in the US at UCLA.

The exposure to University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and the Quaker Movement became life-transforming experiences for HW before his return to South Africa. After serving at Rhodes University, he set off to head the Abe Bailey Institute at the University of Cape Town, later to become the Centre for Intergroup Studies and later known as the Centre for Conflict Resolution.

6. The Centre for Intergroup Studies

The Centre for Intergroup Studies (CIS), based in Rondebosch, Cape Town and registered as the Abe Bailey Institute of Inter-Racial Studies Limited, did not have shared capital. Situated at the University of Cape Town, it was not part of the university and did not receive government funding. UCT did provide partial funding from non-government sources. Funding among others came from the Carnegie Corporation, the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, the Cadbury Trust, and the *Algemeen Diakonaal Bureau* in the Netherlands, Anglo-American, De Beers and a small Quaker Trust (CIS 1985: 1). Other sponsors (reported by

1991) were Johannesburg Consolidated Investments, Liberty Life Foundation, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (Germany), the Chairman's Fund of Anglo-America and De Beers, South African Breweries and the Embassies of Canada, Germany and the US (CIS 1991: 6).

CIS initially maintained a rather low profile, yet ceaselessly worked toward constructive dialogue and the exposure of different or opposing views. This happened on various levels, bringing together students, community leaders, religious demagogues and career-politicians in various meetings on local, regional and national level. These activities included meetings between Black Conscious Movement (BCM) members, white left-leaning students and government supporters during the 1970s and the apartheid government and the ANC-in-exile before 1990 (CIS 1985: 7-8). In Natal the director of CIS played an important role in mediating between conflicting groups (Centre for Intergroup Studies 1985: 9).

The work done by the Centre, however committed, was a drop in a growing ocean of alienation and increasingly violent communal conflict. The dynamics of reform, repression and resistance (liberation politics itself demonstrating levels of liberatory intolerance *versus* authoritarian practices) became dangerously destructive. The 1980s saw increasing militarisation, an ideology of repression softened by *verligte* discourse while alienation – if not outright resistance – by communities countrywide increased. The tri-cameral parliament, an experiment in cooptation of so-called coloured and Indian communities, while maintaining white control under an executive president, faltered amidst national and international resistance. In 1986 Van Zyl Slabbert resigned, calling the entire tri-cameral parliament a sham. Together with another parliamentarian, Alex Boraine, who also resigned, Slabbert established the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA).

6.1 Academia, conflict resolution and social involvement: SAACM and SAACI

In 1986 the Conflict and Peace Studies Working Group (CAPS) started transforming itself into the South African Association for Conflict Management (SAACM). In July 1986, at the third session of the CAPS Working Group (to coincide with the 17th Annual Congress of the Association for Sociology in Southern Africa [ASSA] at the University of Natal in Durban), CAPS held its first “own” conference (CIS 1986). It was entitled the First National Conference on Negotiation and Mediation in Community and Political Conflict. Various people, among whom Paul Wahrhaftig of the Conflict Resolution Centre in Pittsburgh and Elaine Burgess of the University of North Carolina, delivered papers. South Africans addressed various issues. Gerald Pillay, a theologian, spoke eloquently and passionately on “ideological and historical prisons” and the need to escape from it while Ian McCallum, psychologist and ex-Springbok rugby player, shared his views on individual conflict and social consequences. Peter Gastrow and Pierre Cronjé (then PFP members) spoke on the Hambanathi Project (a self-empowerment and reconstruction from “below” in Natal); Mary de Haas delivered a paper on conflict in Natal; Renate Winkler made a contribution on the churches and peace/justice initiatives; Yunus Carrim on consumer boycotts and unions, and Attie van der Merwe on mediation paradigms. At the request of HW van der Merwe, I delivered a paper on police-community relations (or rather the lack thereof) in the Western Cape. Other papers were delivered by Loet Douwes Dekker, University of Witwatersrand, J Rieckert from the Independent Mediation Services of South Africa (IMMSA), Prof Hilstan Watts, Georgina Stevens (Black Sash) and Rowley Arenstein (CIS 1986).

Members at the conference elected a steering committee to prepare for the envisaged national association on conflict intervention. The members of the steering committee were Prof Ampie Muller (chairperson), Mr Loet Douwes Dekker (vice-chair), with the Reverend Athol Jennings and Mr A W van der Merwe as additional members, and I as secretary. Preparation for the establishment of the

Association was slow. The majority of the members were involved in various other fields.

In 1988, the Second National Conference on Negotiation and Mediation in Community and Political Conflict, in conjunction with the fourth session of the CAPS Working Group, took place simultaneously with the nineteenth ASSA congress of South Africa at the University of Durban-Westville. At the end of the conference, the first annual meeting of the SAACM took place and the first National Council was elected. The name, South African Association for Conflict Intervention (SAACI), was accepted. Chairpersonship was shared by HW and Jannie Malan. A F Allen was the elected secretary and additional members were Simon Bekker, A Jennings, Ampie Muller, A J van der Merwe, A Zikalala, C D Kekana, F Horowitz, Gavin Bradshaw, S Colin and L Douwes Dekker.⁶ During the drafting process of the constitution, the word “management” in the name of the association was replaced by “intervention”, the reason being that the concept “management” had negative connotations with power, as is currently still the case.

CIS served as the national secretariat for SAACI. A membership drive followed. In 1989, public launches of SAACI took place in Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, Durban and Soweto. This coincided with a series of national training courses in Mediation and Conflict Intervention (Maci).

6.2 A philosophy and praxis of peaceful but committed engagement

The philosophy underpinning HW's approach was engagement, active involvement, facilitating communication and dialogue, mediation and intervention in justice-building and peace-creation without compromising structural and individual injustice. The main focus was to enable clear communication on as many levels and as consistently as possible.

6 During this meeting I was in The Netherlands for further research and tendered my resignation as secretary towards the end of 1987. On my return from the Netherlands in July 1988 I joined IDASA full time. After my resignation from IDASA in 1990 I took up contact with SAACI again for a short while.

Unequal access to power remained a persistent debilitating phenomenon in South Africa. Partisan intervention had a role to play to equalise the opposing forces. However, HW's approach went further, or was perhaps more holistic. In order to equalise the balance of power between the incumbent apartheid government and the contending liberation forces, a need arose for the facilitation of communication and mediation on various levels. Partisan intervention as a means was recognised and various bodies engaged in it. However, HW realised the need for facilitation of communication and mediation corollary to this, and that biased intervention would be of a temporary nature when measured against a settlement that would empower social justice in the longer term. Faced with the political dynamics of an increasing authoritarian state and resistance, this would prove to be no easy task.

South African political developments in the 1970s and 1980s are analogous to a runaway truck: one calamity cascaded onto another in nearly predictable succession. Excessive dependence on securocratic rule underpinned by increasing security legislation furthered tensions. This led to a cycle of violence that was spiralling out of control. Contestation surrounded concepts such as "justice", "the law" and "legality". People asked questions about the role of legal order and the role of the judiciary in South Africa (*cf* in this regard Dugard 1978, Mathews 1986). HW and others engaged in this debate as described in Van der Merwe & Hund (1986). In the Western Cape, people opposed to apartheid laws that destabilised and uprooted communities rhetorically asked: "Whose law? God's law or man's law?" In the Western Cape, the Unity Movement and New Unity Movement were for some time active in resisting apartheid. Nationwide organisations such as Black Sash and others were involved in stemming the tide of apartheid uprootings. The National Forum (NF), established at the same time as the United Democratic Front (UDF), insisted once more on a revolution of workers without sacrificing origin, language and non-racialism, the intellectual roots of the NF often misunderstood (and misrepresented) by others. At the time, numerous other initiatives sprung up, such as the End Conscription Campaign (ECC) and the Five Freedoms Forum

(FFF). Even in a relatively isolated pro-government university town such as Stellenbosch, Dutch Reformed Church student members in the 1980s militated against apartheid against the wishes of their church leadership and concerned – if not disconcerted – academic patriarchs.

Dutch Reformed Church students – among them myself, Dirk Louw, Abraham (Braam) Olivier, Hans Müller, George van Niekerk, Irene Malherbe, Ari Bouwer and Lizl Kruger – started an organisation called Action for Social Justice (*Aksie Sosiale Geregtigheid*). Letitia Pople, a well-known contemporary Afrikaans journalist, also played an important role in the organisation. The DRC student church newspaper *Dinamiek* with Lizl Kruger and Irene Malherbe asked penetrating questions about minority rule disguised as a new deal, until *status quo* supporters took control of the newspaper in 1987. The questions asked by apartheid critics, a new *quo vadis* at a university that was supposed to enact the Afrikaner ideal, were uncomfortable (“Stellenbosch staan vir ’n idee”, one has to remember). A National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) branch and the Black Students’ Organisation came into being, followed by the opening of an Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa (IDASA) office. Egbert (Egbie) Nel, an ex-Matie then studying at the University of the Western Cape, and I opened the IDASA Stellenbosch office and immediately became involved together with existing groups in organising various activities which did not meet general approval in the *verligtel*/conservative Stellenbosch environment, as can be expected (*oorbeligtheid* and more radical activities equalled crime thought in the small world of the Stellenbosch elite) (*cf* Itterbek 1984). We partook in a consumer boycott, criticised the role of the South African Defence Force in Namibia and Angola (and at home), wrote against conscription and asked critical questions about the role of the Chaplain Services in the South African Defence Force; neither these nor our opposition to *Verligtheid* and activities on campus were welcomed.⁷ The United Stellenbosch Front (USF)

7 The mutations, trials and tribulations of “left” politics in Stellenbosch between 1970 and 1989 are in itself a worthwhile study. Time and space prevent me from discussing the range of activities of the IDASA office in Stellenbosch

followed, its launch marked by keynote speakers, Frederik van Zyl Slabbert and Alan Boesak. On- and off-campus nearly fifteen organisations affiliated to the USF.

The *Nederduits Gereformeerde Sendingkerk* (NGSK), reserved for so-called people of colour, was to declare a *status confessionis*. The Belhar Confession (*Belhar Belydenis*) denounced apartheid in all forms and declared its prophetic mission to strive for God's justice for all (I still vividly remember the day when Frederik Nel, a close friend of mine studying at UWC, Neels Theron, myself and others signed the *Belydenis*). All of this seemingly had a negligible impact on the apartheid state. The South African Council of Churches (SACC) found their head offices bombed. SACC staff members such as Joe Seremane and Tom Manthata found themselves detained and tortured. Others, such as Frans Kekana, detained previously, had to skip the country to avoid detention and possibly torture.

By the 1980s, the locus of state decision-making had shifted away from the white parliament with police assistance in case of disorder towards the State President and the State Security Council (SSC – in Afrikaans *Staatsveiligheidsraad*) banking on military support. The tri-cameral era demonstrated that instead of “reform”, South Africa was nearing the abyss of increasing repression, growing community conflict and even the potential Libanonisation of conflict. Centralisation of power marked the *polis*, not the devolution of power, as the government wanted its gullible followers to believe. Third-force operations (or covert action) aggravated the situation. For some, the country was nearing “the death of politics” and the limitations of pseudo-reform became apparent (*cf* Omar 1988).⁸ Mediators had to do their work under such circumstances. Despite this there was never respite or even favourable conditions for HW or anyone who chose this approach.

By the time that white liberals became disillusioned with parliament in the 1980s, HW had been active for years in a facilitating role. He brought contending ideologues and political opponents

during 1987.

8 *Cf* Schutte *et al* (1998) for more detail on covert operations by the state against political opponents.

together to facilitate freer communication. His attempt was to intervene by means of dialogue and an individual attempt at “third-track” diplomacy. The CIS was recognised for its consistent attempts at intervention on local and national levels. At a micro-level, HW personally intervened in the Western Cape during the re-settlement of “non-white” South Africans by the apartheid regime in the 1970s/1980s. It was, taking into consideration the terminology above, yet re-defined within context, I suggest, an *existential biased intervention*; intervention on the side of the weak and to-be-homeless. HW was not the only one to do so in the Western Cape. I recall Jaap du Rand (University of the Western Cape) who acted by individual choice as a biased intervener, while playing a role as mediator and facilitator during the turmoil of the 1980s, among others, on the volatile University of the Western Cape (UWC) campus. Jannie Malan and Ampie Muller at UWC also deserve mentioning. There were others at the time, whose detailed roles cannot be discussed in this instance.

It is necessary to mention in this instance, in order to provide context, that as early as 1968 the Liberal Party (LP) disbanded itself following the “political interference act” (the Prohibition of Political Interference Act, No 51 of 1968). The Liberal Party evolved from the Liberal Association, with some of whose members HW maintained contact long after the LP had disappeared. The self-dissolution of the Liberal Party was perhaps prophetic:

After 1961 the government viewed liberalism and the LP as the greatest threat to its policy. Its campaign against the LP began to move beyond propaganda: in March Patrick Duncan was the first member to be banned from the political scene [...] Bannings followed with monotonous regularity: Joe Nkatlo in April 1961, Peter Hjul in and Randolph Vigne in February 1963, Jordan Ngubane three months later [...] Eddy Roux was forced to resign from the LP because as a ‘listed communist’ he could no longer take part in any political activity (Van der Westhuizen 1994b: 91).

Van der Westhuizen (1994b: 93) sums up the demise of the Liberal Party and committed liberalism in South Africa:

Later there were white politicians – such as Tian van der Merwe, Van Zyl Slabbert, Jan van Eck, Pierre Cronje, Molly Blackburn and perhaps even Helen Suzman – who thought the way the Liberal

Party of the 1960s did. *But there was never again a white-controlled party that fought under the banner of true liberalism for the unconditional freedom of all South Africa's inhabitants. All hope for that was buried with the LP in May 1968* [my italics, L]

The United Party (UP), in itself only moderately progressive, disintegrated and was absorbed into the Progressive Federal Party (PFP) with strong links in the business world. The New Republic Party (NRP), not vaguely as critical of the Nationalist regime as the LP, appeared, made little impact and was soon to disappear from the political scene.

7. IDASA

By 1986, white liberals (to the extent that they still existed in the National Party-dominated tri-cameral parliament) became increasingly disillusioned. Van Zyl Slabbert, leader of the white opposition party, the Progressive Federal Party (PFP), resigned from parliament. Alex Boraine followed. They established the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA) that same year. On hearing about the intention to establish IDASA (then not yet having a formal name for the to-be institute), I approached Slabbert. I received a phone call some days later and by December 1986 I joined a fledgling IDASA.

One of IDASA's first public actions was to arrange a meeting between South Africans (mostly Afrikaans-speaking, although not necessarily "white") and members of the ANC in Dakar, Senegal, facilitated by Madame Mitterrand's *Humanities Français*, Breyten Breytenbach, an exiled Afrikaans poet, Slabbert and President Abdou Diouf of Senegal. The meeting was widely publicised and condoned by supporters of the liberation struggle. Pres P W Botha, Magnus Malan, the Afrikaans media (for example *Beeld*, *Die Burger*, *Volksblad* and *Rapport*)⁹ and top government officials castigated the *Dakar safari* and *Dakargangers*. At the then Jan Smuts airport, a group of discontented AWB supporters and one of their leaders

9 The *Citizen*, a pro government English newspaper, likewise fulminated against the Dakar exercise.

threatened violence on the return of this group. Despite Dakar attendees' pleas to meet with them face-to-face, police took the arrivals out of the airport as if the Dakar attendees were afraid of one-on-one confrontation with the AWB. The meeting raised the political profile of IDASA and assisted it by playing an advocacy role for a democratic alternative for South Africa. Many regarded IDASA as being partial to the ANC, while HW continued his active involvement by approaching conflict and remedial action towards justice in his own way.

Through partisan intervention, IDASA focused predominantly on the ANC. IDASA and its supporters did not meet with other exiled organisations such as the Pan Africanist Congress and exiled Black Consciousness groupings, for example, AZANLA (Azanian National Liberation Army). The institute did not include other strugglers, such as the National Forum (NF), in its activities, except for a conference in Stellenbosch organised by the Stellenbosch office of IDASA. Neville Alexander was one of the keynote speakers at this conference. IDASA's focus on the ANC and UDF created an impression that other (smaller) liberation organisations were less relevant. In this sense, impartiality was lost in the process (public rumours, the pro-government media and disinformation by security bodies contributed to this, I have to add).

IDASA played an advocacy role. The idea was to make a public intervention and influence the future political course in South Africa by introducing an atmosphere suitable for a negotiated settlement. It was a directed attempt to influence the public and ruling government to steer away from authoritarian politics and embrace transition to non-racial democracy. It was a valuable partisan intervention at the time, and needed to be so as the country was nearing the point of unending social conflict. The Institute assisted in facilitating communication between incumbents and contenders and through IDASA's activities added to a much-needed pressure for transition toward a democracy. However, IDASA could not mediate from neutral ground due to existing perceptions at the time. Moreover, given its activities and deliberate public profile, IDASA could not escape

the label of a biased intervener. CIS under HW's directorship and SAACI took the less public and more inclusive route.

8. SAACI in action

SAACI described its role as "A public, voluntary association of interested people [... aiming at] the establishment of an autonomous body for mediation". HW would later sum it up:

The time has come for the establishment of such a professional mediation service, which would ideally consist of community leaders viewed with sufficient credibility by a broad spectrum of society. They will have to be trained and organized professionally (Van der Merwe 1990: 1).

CIS continued in co-operation with the Quaker community to recruit and train people. In 1990, a National Workshop on Negotiation and Mediation in Community and Political Conflict took place in Johannesburg. The fourth SAACI conference that coincided with a national workshop in Bellville in the Western Cape soon took place. In 1992, the fifth SAACI conference followed. The theme, "Conflict Resolution in Societies in Transition with Special Reference to South Africa", drew attention to transition and changing power relations, but also to the need for continued intervention and mediation. Until 1999, annual conferences focused on relevant issues. The membership of SAACI, given the challenges, remained rather low.¹⁰ In a polarised society not all people are drawn to neutral intervention. Many people chose partisan intervention, with good reason.

Large numbers of membership was not necessarily the aim, but rather to acquire skills and commitment. This may tie in closely with HW's philosophy about peace-making and intervention as set

10 In 1989, membership amounted to 89 people. By 1990, the association saw a rapid increase to 135 members. SAACI membership slowly dropped from over 90 to 38 by 1997. Perhaps a sign of some optimism about the perceived drop in levels of political tension in the South African community played a role. The prevalent transition rhetoric may also have contributed to an early wave of optimism that underestimated the still existing political and class cleavages, which were to remain, and still remain – more so increase - at the moment.

out in numerous publications at the time. The idea was to create an institution of “volunteers and interested (read: ‘committed’) people” that would enable “neutral (in contrast to partisan) intervention” (cf again Van der Merwe 1990: 1). Van der Merwe (1989) argued already in the late 1980s for a national body of professional people that could assist in mediation, conflict management and creative mediators.

9. A philosophy of biased intervention evolves

Other organisations existed at the time in the field of political intervention, mediation or advocacy of democracy, some (not all) of them openly activist in nature. Noticeable examples were groups based in the business world, such as the Independent Mediation Service of South Africa (IMSSA), ICWIM (an inter-church movement in which the Rev (*Dominee*) Willie Cilliers [NG *Kerk in Afrika*], Dale White from Wilgespruit Centre and the Rev Stanley Ntwasa played an important role), Black Sash and others. Other organisations were MERGE, *Koinonia* and the Consultative Business Movement (CBM). More joined the fray, some as facilitators of communication, others as biased interveners or democracy-advocating groups, while others still attempted mediation.

Many were either taking side in the struggle for liberation, such as the Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT), die *Belydende Kring*, Students for Christian Action (SUCA), the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS), the End Conscription Campaign, or became involved in partisan intervention or the advocating of democracy. Christian organisations often openly took the side of the oppressed and their liberation movements. For them the issue was principled justice and equality (not equity), solidarity with the marginalised, the poor and the oppressed. The Christians who took to resistance differed on one issue, without labelling the others as wrong or “misled”. Consensus existed that the time and context demanded an existential choice or *kairos* (moment of truth), which demanded action. Many objected consciously to apartheid military service. In my immediate circle Frederik Benjamin Nel, Neels Theron and

Koos van der Riet followed that route. At the time the CIS facilitated support groups and furthered academic studies in the field. I became involved with the Alternative National Service debate, and CIS facilitated a conference in this regard. The 1980s brought no easy choices. Some chose to resist apartheid structures without recourse to violence; others argued that violence may (have to) form part of a just struggle against oppression.

New political movements (call them social movements, if you like) were established, such as the United Democratic Front (UDF), the National Forum (NF), the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), the Congress of South African Writers (COSAW), and others. Organisations such as Jews for Justice, Five Freedoms, Koinonia, the Galileans (Western Cape), and others ceaselessly advocated the turn to a democratic constitution. Today few of these are remembered, or rather honoured, by the new incumbents to power who act as if the ANC single-handedly inaugurated the 1996 Constitution of South Africa.

The fine line was to be able to facilitate in a neutral (unbiased) manner while aiming at creative interventions. The aim was simply to facilitate free communication and at the same time remain neutral. Yet, simultaneously, it required principled adherence to the common core of humanity. With these as qualifiers, mediation could follow. This was a tall order in the 1980s. Important aspects became clear. Neutral and unbiased intervention was not to work as long as one party (the National Party) had the upper hand. An approach was needed which would empower the weaker actor to enable negotiation on an equal footing.

For some it became a time for biased or selective intervention. IDASA, as an advocate for democracy and a negotiated transition, chose this role in contrast to HW's approach.

In dealing with conflict, the to-be mediator often consciously takes a stand in favour of the weaker agent, the argument being simply that there is no even ground or equal terms on which the stronger incumbent and the weaker contender could negotiate or meet. Compare, for example, how banned community organisations

or restricted attempts to “talk to government” are limited by security regulations or state action (detentions, assassinations, and so on). One can also compare a banned or exiled movement or their leadership’s power relative to the apartheid state, or a minority of any ethnic or linguistic group or class marginalised attempting to speak to the leadership of dominant party in a country. They may indeed succeed in this. In reality, in a deeply divided society, this may amount to little but media exposure for the ruling elite. In conditions such as these, the intervener may take a biased position. The role is still to facilitate, but the neutrality of the facilitator is compromised towards the weaker partner. There are risks in this instance, but if the facilitator is open and honest about this intervention and acts with integrity, it may assist in getting the conflicting parties together.

HW subtly did this by developing an approach where the weaker party was empowered through contact and communication and at the same time channels of communication with the stronger party (the state or incumbent) were kept open or even widened.¹¹ The notion of biased intervention should not be confused with advocacy or canvassing support for the contender. The bias lies in empowering the contender within view of the coming process of negotiation, not supporting the contender to win power. This distinction is important.

At the same time Van der Merwe’s views were anchored in political realism:

The political climate in South Africa is not favourable to concepts such as mediation and negotiation [...] Negotiation should not be seen as a substitute for other pressures which are required to bring about change in South Africa. The two processes of negotiation and coercion is not mutually exclusive [...] the promotion of a just

11 Retrospectively, in 2000 HW remarked: “I continue to side with the weak, the poor, the minority” (Van der Merwe 2000: 220).

society in South Africa cannot be isolated in the long run from the task of peacemaking and conciliation (Van der Merwe 1988: 29).

10. Comparing different approaches

As a high-profiled institution IDASA did facilitate and intervene directly. It further opened dialogue and communication. Through public action, IDASA forced the issue of a negotiated settlement as prerequisite for transition from authoritarian rule to democracy.¹² IDASA intervened consciously so as a biased entity. The institute openly lobbied with all forums for a negotiated settlement years after Chief Albert Luthuli had called for a national convention and the PFP had suggested a national meeting or convention for political contenders on the constitutional future of the country. In the end IDASA was viewed as too much of an advocacy-orientated organisation and could not overcome the public image of bias towards the ANC, and the government-supporting media and cohorts consciously contributed to this.

However, there were positive spin-offs in IDASA's approach: numerous meetings exposed opposing political opponents, the notion of a democratic alternative became popularised, and the idea of a negotiated settlement eventually injected into the South African political discourse. Meetings outside the country served the same purpose, while also involving foreign actors.¹³

- 12 This did not happen without risks though. Apart from public slander and constant observation by security agencies two IDASA staff members were killed and others detained. Offices were broken into and in one case shot at. Staffers received death threats on various occasions. Others were denied jobs when applying for it. In at least one case a Dakar conference attendee, not even an IDASA staff member, Trudie de Ridder, was fired from her post as an educator.
- 13 Internal parliamentary politics were also discussed. In 1988 I led a small group of political scientists, parliamentarians and journalists to Harare to meet with Frontline State observers and exiles to discuss parliamentary politics. I remember Barry Streek, a prominent journalist, James Selfe and the political scientist, Willem van Vuuren being part of the group. Representatives from Frontline States, African embassies and exiles such as Moletsi Mbeki and Steve Tswete attended the meeting hosted by the Cold Comfort Farm Trust. On a critical

Because of parallel but not related activities such as HW and IDASA, the ANC and the incumbent government came to what Luthuli pleaded for in the 1950s a negotiated settlement and a national convention of sorts.¹⁴

The price, for IDASA in this venture, was a loss of neutrality – whether by design or default or simply as result of runaway political dynamics.

The task of serious neutral intervention in terms of conflict remained for smaller, lower profiled and committed people such as HW van der Merwe, CIS and SAACI. The role of SAACI was useful. Its overall success, in retrospect, is perhaps more difficult to evaluate. The association at least succeeded in raising awareness about the need for neutral intervention. It did play a consistent role at various levels with regard to intervention and mediation. If memory serves me well, HW was mentioned in an opinion poll of *Leadership SA*¹⁵ readers as one of the South Africans who did most to assist reconciliation and preparation for a political changeover/transition to democracy by means of negotiation. Others named were Frederik van Zyl Slabbert, Thabo Mbeki, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Oscar Dhlomo.

Through various conferences, national workshops and training courses, SAACI played its role. The role played by the Centre for Intergroup Studies (CIS) and SAACI should not only be regarded in the light of these achievements. The example was set for a body of professional people to be deployed in similar situations inside and outside South Africa. Moreover, the people who participated in SAACI also lived out their commitments in other social arenas.

note, it is interesting that lately – and somewhat opportunistic – more than but a few then verligtes and ex-members of National Intelligence claim in the Afrikaans media that they in fact created the conditions for a negotiated settlement, even as early facilitators of communication while consistently resisting any such earlier moves by their peers.

14 At a much earlier stage Pixley Ka Itsaka Seme proposed to opponents and friends alike an equal society devoid of the malice of racism and ethnicity (*cf* Liebenberg 1990: 84, Odendaal 1984: 8). Whether the “new” ANC post-1999 still adheres to principled equality and non-racialism is another debate.

15 Despite a search for this source, I could not lay a hand on it.

First CIS and later SAACI and its members focused their attention on the need for mediation, neutral intervention and “second-track diplomacy”. Many of these ideas found their way into broader society. Such activities set an example for institutions such as the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) or NGOs (such as the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Conflicts, ACCORD) and the Centre for the Study and Prevention of Violence (CSVR).

The activities of members and associates articulated various issues. For example, Ampie Muller and Jannie Malan designed a course on conflict resolution to be implemented at UWC and other interested universities, dealing with the relations between the police and local communities, torture in detention and community-based mediation empowerment. Subsequently Malan and Muller remained active in the world of conflict resolution. Other areas deserve attention. CIS presented a workshop in 1986 at UCT that dealt with contending ideologies (paper by Ampie Muller), police community relations (paper by Liebenberg) and the phenomenon of torture (paper by Don Foster). The Foster Report discussed at the workshop dealt with detention and torture of detainees. As a result, the issue became public. A debate ensued in various newspapers for some weeks. The Minister of Law and Order at the time, Louis le Grange, found it necessary to react personally to Don Foster and Stellenbosch academics who publicly defended the “Torture report”. In the ensuing media debate, loyal National Party supporters tried to discredit the report as “politics under the pretence of science”. Nonetheless, the debate started. Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hearings subsequently proved that the report may have been “political” (biased intervention?) but not devoid of truth.

CIS and SAACI members, as well as Quakers, popularised to some extent the notion of non-violent (and careful but qualified biased) intervention in a time of increasing communal violence. However, intervention was not directed towards a specific political grouping in the resistance, but towards those who suffered under an authoritarian regime. With reference to the terminology discussed earlier, the notion of “biased intervention” implies rather complicated

choices and not recipe-like actions as if the socio-political context is unchanging. Human conflicts in a material world cannot be demarcated in strict and static moments as the South African experience then and now informs us.

The members and associates of SAACI remained committed to social justice, for instance Loet Douwes Dekker, Jannie Malan, Andries Odendaal, Hugo van der Merwe and Ampie Muller. During the early stages of transition, the Association and its members did not shy away from debates (and involvement) on the role of political leadership in transition, the implications of (re)establishment of social justice, the TRC debates, restitution and various other issues.

HW himself continued to mediate in a less than public role where necessary, persistently facilitating communication while denouncing any violent solution to conflict in South Africa, even if the reality of a violent struggle could not be ignored or wished away.

11. Conclusion

Before I conclude, let me share some reflective notes with the reader while mindful that space and time restrictions do not allow a “full audit” by the author. I meant to write up this study long ago to honour the influence both HW and Slabbert among others have had on my political views but various other projects delayed the finalisation. One could have done more in this study, I admit. I pointed out that interviews with various people who worked closely with HW would have added value and hopefully other researchers would take up such studies. I probably underemphasised the future relevance of HW’s approach and how his and those of IDASA can play a constructive role in future South Africa and the region. But again, this leaves room for other scholars and researchers to act upon. If this article at least reminded us about the role that social scientists can play to alleviate social maladies, I shall be content regardless of criticisms raised by peers and colleagues.

Conflict is universal and in certain instances even healthy. However, violent and destructive conflict bleeds societies to death.

Inter- and intrastate conflict can be remedied in the short term by means of oppression, civil war and extermination. There is, however, a non-negotiable: the violent way springing from “force is the way of the world” is not preferable, not even negotiable, when the vision of a humane and just society is at stake and people choose to and are left with no other option but to act against violent impositions on a day-to-day basis.

When unequal opposing political powers meet, conflict with potentially destructive results can be resolved in various ways. Two of these were touched upon in this article: one being partisan intervention, a route followed by IDASA and others and another being through committed but non-partisan intervention. HW followed the latter. In retrospect, these approaches were complementary but to a large extent independent from each other.

Years later, others are rather opportunistically suggesting that they paved the way not only in achieving a negotiated settlement but also in initiating “talks-about-talks” and transitional arrangements. Among them are Stellenbosch intellectuals, prominent ex-Broederbonders and National Intelligence staff members. These are interesting claims, considering that they were not involved on the side of the disenfranchised in the 1960s and 1970 – rather the contrary. Arguably, they may have acted as latecoming facilitators of communication and as go-betweens, but by far not pioneers in the field such as HW and advocacy groups such as IDASA, however different the approaches between CIS and IDASA.

As far as the contributions made by HW and an institute such as IDASA are concerned, both approaches contributed in turning South Africa away from a violent civil conflict/war that could have lasted for many years and that could have led to the death of South African politics and a Pyrrhic victory for whoever may have ended up in power. Both approaches provide “lessons learnt” to other countries on the continent (and perhaps the globe) that may lead to positive replicable experiences.

One cannot deny that partisan intervention can frequently steer conflict towards stability and order as well as better outcomes for the

parties initially involved in such violent conflict. However, partisan intervention frequently has unintended consequences.¹⁶ One may argue that the time has come for committed non-partisan intervention in African conflicts and/or regional/continental reconstruction. This may or may not coincide with partisan intervention, which may run parallel and independent of non-partisan mediation.

The above holds relevance today for South(ern) Africa and Africa – and even wider. It appears that South Africa (and considering tensions in the sub-region and the rest of the continent) is entering a stage again where neutral mediators and partisan interveners are needed to steer the country, region and continent towards social justice, principled non-racialism and the deepening of democracy in state and society. Any volunteers out there?

16 The one-sided interventions by the USA under Bush (jnr) and its “Coalition of the Willing” interventions in the (Middle) East had destabilising consequences, which are still being and will be felt with predictable negative outcomes in the future.

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