

*Dear Readers,*

*The CCTS seminar that was held on Wednesday 3 June 2009 at the Charity Centre, Stephenson Way, London, marked a departure for CCTS, in that it focused on conflict transformation work in the UK rather than in other countries. 'Community cohesion' is a contested term, viewed by some people as masking an attempt to avoid conflict. This report gives further food for reflection on that debate.*

*Speakers from three organisations made presentations about their work. Hannah Pennock of Peace Direct spoke about the Truce 20-20 Project with young people in East London; Hen Wilkinson talked about the Community Resolve project, which she initiated, in Bristol, and Mark Hinton and Heather Parker spoke about the Foleshillfields Vision Project in a run-down area of Coventry. The presentations were followed first by questions, and then by group and plenary discussions.*

*The result was a lively and informative seminar enabling participants to consider the approaches of the three groups and more general points about conflict transformation work at home and abroad. The seminar was co-facilitated by Alex Moore and Diana Francis. This report was written by Michael Randle.*

## **Conflict Transformation and Community Cohesion**

### **I: Truce 20-20**

*Hannah Pennock, in the opening presentation, said Truce 20-20 is a project which works with diverse groups of young people, between the ages of 16 and 21, in Newham and surrounding areas in East London, developing their skills in conflict resolution and mediation. It is run jointly by Peace Direct and Conflict and Change, a local conflict resolution and mediation organisation which has been operating in Newham for nearly twenty five years.*

Peace Direct is a small organisation, working mainly at the international level towards a world where the work and knowledge of local people is recognized as essential to dealing with conflict. They fund local peacebuilders in places as diverse as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Sri Lanka, Kenya and Afghanistan, and try to ensure that their voices are heard by connecting them to policymakers, and getting their work publicized in the press and other media. Peace Direct's philosophy is that local peacebuilders in conflict areas, because of their intimate knowledge and experience of the particular conflict, are best placed to find ways of resolving it. This philosophy also informs the Truce 20-20 work and there is a direct connection with Peace Direct's international work, in that each group of young people meets and works for a week with an international peacebuilder from a conflict area. Once the young

people have developed these skills through the training programme, and gained insights from international peacebuilders, Truce 20-20 supports them in building their own projects.

The work is located in East London, and in Newham in particular, because of the high levels of deprivation. The area is going through massive upheavals at different levels, especially now, with the Olympics in the offing. New communities are coming in, and there is evidence that young people, the majority of whom were not born in Newham, are dividing into separate groups according to their ethnic or community background.

Truce 20-20 works with groups of around twenty youngsters and tries to achieve a 70%-30% mix of those who are achieving, and know pretty much 'where they are at', and those who have more issues to deal with, and have perhaps been in prison or referred to the Youth Offending Team. The conflicts they deal with are those that the groups bring to them. Some are conflicts with which most of us will be familiar, such as bullying in schools, conflict in families, and conflict with teachers and authorities – very real conflicts but not ones that would necessarily hit the headlines. However, some of the youngsters will have been involved in gangs or had experience of the hard edge of conflicts in East London.

What do young people gain from the project? For some it is learning how to deal with 'red flags' – the situations or events that trigger their anger. It was instructive to hear one youngster who had been excluded from school describe in his own words the progress he had made through joining the project. He said he had become less aggressive, less defensive towards others, and more laid-back, not wanting to engage in conflict.

Over 80% of the young people who complete the training go on to develop projects in the local community with the support of Truce 20-20. This is the crucial part of the work. Thus far Truce 20-20 has worked with five groups of twenty people. That is still not a large number, and the impact only really starts to show when those young people take the work further with their projects. The main thing they do is to train other young facilitators. For example, in January, six Truce 20-20 facilitators put together workshops for seventy young people who were identified by four different secondary schools as having anger management issues. The feeling is that this 'peer on peer' training is far more effective than if outside adults go in and try to connect with fifteen year olds.

The young people from Truce 20-20 have representation on the Conflict and Change Management Committee. In this way they are involved in the decision making and their insights are fed into the organisation. One of the events the young people on the project have been involved in was a 'City Circle' event held by Muslims in London on resolving conflict from Kashmir to London. They have also helped with local murder appeals, and contributed to Metropolitan Police DVDs on Stop and Search.

### **Challenges**

Funding is a major challenge. In Truce 20-20 they were trying to get young people not to see issues in territorial terms, but the funding was tied to work in particular geographical areas. Funders also tended to want them to work exclusively with disadvantaged young people, which was a reactive approach – waiting until the young people were in trouble before intervening, rather than focusing on ensuring that they did not get into trouble in the first place.

Working with the local diaspora community when international peacebuilders come over is important. A challenge is that these groups can be suspicious at first of the international peacebuilders and want to know who they are and who they represent. Building up trust between the parties can be difficult and takes time.

Another challenge is how to reach those on the edges of gang behaviour. The funding is very 'output' driven, and when one is required to fill in an eight-page form about the ethnicity, sexuality, level of deprivation (and so on) of the youngsters, it all loses touch with reality.

### ***Successes***

The partnership between Peace Direct and Conflict and Change had been productive. It would clearly have been a mistake for Peace Direct, as an international NGO, to have attempted this work on its own. The high retention rate of young people involved in the work is evidence of the success of the system of first training them and then having them embark on projects of their own. Finally, having international peace builders come to work with the young people had proved very popular and successful, and it was noticeable that at times it was young people who had not responded so well in the earlier stages of a project who were most touched and inspired by work of those from overseas.

## **II: Community Resolve**

*Hen Wilkinson* said she had set up Community Resolve in Bristol about seven years ago. Her daughter had been at the receiving end of racist bullying, which was very badly handled by almost everyone they encountered, from schools to doctors' surgeries and different public bodies. She herself had trained as a community mediator, when the family was living in mid-Wales. Her aim was to train peer mediators in schools. She had to leave Wales for Bristol with her daughter (who is of mixed race) because the community where they were living was 'very white' and things were not going well. In Bristol she started doing some post-graduate study in conflict resolution and came across the idea of conflict transformation. This was in 1999, so relatively early in the development of the idea. The key people in the field that she was reading were John Paul Lederach and Johan Galtung.

In Wales her daughter had been bullied because she was black; in Bristol she was bullied because she was not black enough. Despite the city's being the centre of Mediation UK, Bristol Mediation and other bodies, there was remarkably little understanding in schools and other environments about how to deal with racism and conflict.

### ***Origins of Community Resolve***

Community Resolve started out about eight years ago with £4,000 and one volunteer. Now they have nine members of staff and a turnover of around £300,000 and they work across the city in schools, local government departments, with the police and in universities. From the beginning it was an audacious plan but it seemed to have worked. The vision she and her colleagues had was of a geyser, which was throwing up good ideas and spraying them all over the city in different environments. They also thought of the organisation as a spider plant, with a core of people training up others from different communities who in turn would start their own projects.

The Bristol Gang Awareness project, as it was originally called, was set up long before the current concern about gangs, in direct response to violence between groups of young people. Community Resolve takes the principles of community mediation and applies them in a much bigger arena. Instead of dealing with a few people in a room, they might be working in whole tower blocks, whole streets or whole areas. It is a multi-layered approach. Many different practitioners are brought together for long-term peacebuilding programmes, rooted in a conflict transformation approach.

They stopped using the title of the Bristol Gang Awareness Project because the label was proving to be a liability – good for attracting funding, but an obstacle to putting across the idea that this was for everybody. Like 'Truce 20-20', they were working with young people, usually in groups of ten, in areas of conflict, discussing with them how they got caught up in the conflict and the dynamics involved. One of the people they worked with is now employed by the project, another young person, aged 22, has just won a Leap award as Best New Community Mediator. The young people act as peer models, doing education work in schools, sometimes in conjunction with the police, and train alongside adults to become facilitators in

large-scale projects. This year Community Resolve has finally got money for an inter-generational mediation project in which older and younger mediators will work together to help resolve problems between parents and teenagers.

They were careful to ensure that the people in the project came from all the local communities they worked with, including Sikhs, British born black, overseas born black, and people of different ages, genders and backgrounds. They acted as what John Paul Lederach calls 'insider partials': people who understand their communities in a way that outsiders cannot hope to. They know the networks and who is the parent of this or that young person, who is connected to whom in this or that way. Two of their workers in their thirties, one black, one a local imam, did not think that they knew each other, but then discovered they had been at primary school together. A Sikh woman who works with them was born and raised in Bristol and knows many local residents, not only in the Sikh community but in other communities also.

This local connectedness was, to her mind, the main reason for the success of the project. True, Hen herself had come in from outside with ideas, but if she had not succeeded in communicating these in a way that brought local people on board, the project would not exist. Next month she will be stepping down as day-to-day director of the organisation (although remaining as strategic director for now) and someone else who has been with the organisation for six years will take on her role. She had said at the start of the project that she would regard it as a serious failing if 10 years on she were still in charge of it.

### ***Current Work***

At the present time Community Resolve is doing a lot of work around youth and conflict – training, working with groups caught up in gangs, giving young people one to one support, whether they are in schools or young offenders institutions or somewhere in between. A short film about the organisation (Google 'Community Channel-Community Resolve' to find it) looks at one of these projects, the Sport and Nutrition Group, in which two young workers in their project meet with a group of ten to fourteen young people, most of them black, to work out in the weights room and to cook and eat a meal together. This is an undemanding project for the participants. They do not have to pay anything, there are no forms to fill in and it is an opportunity for them to come together and offload. However, the workers on the project are able to steer the conversation in certain directions, introduce ideas and do 'a bit of signposting'. Interestingly, two of their younger members will be taking on that group, so it will be 19 to 22-year-olds working with the 14 to 16 year olds: currently the age group among whom there are big problems in Bristol.

Some projects work well. Others do not. Sometimes the funding is withdrawn, and Hen said that she would echo everything Hannah had said about funding being 'so bizarrely territorial', thereby reinforcing all the problems related to territory and postcodes.

Bristol has been experiencing major demographic changes taking place over a short space of time. New communities are moving into areas that have never previously had to deal with any sort of difference. There seems to be limited awareness of the problems this will give rise to, and few preparations in place to deal with them. Central Bristol is very diverse, but within a short distance there are unmixed areas where there is a lot of racism and the BNP are active.

As another example of Community Resolve's work, Hen spoke about the residents in one street who came into conflict with a group of young people who had taken to playing football in a central square. They complained that the young people were noisy and abusive, damaging cars and refusing to move out of the way of people carrying shopping. This had been going on for a long time – the police were there two or three times a day, local councillors were involved, and the housing officers were being bombarded with complaints. But despite the range of people and agencies focusing on this issue, no progress was being made. There were even plans to put up a 'mosquito' device (which emits a piercing, high frequency noise only audible to younger people).

Community Resolve became involved at the request of a local community safety organisation called Safer Bristol. Its workers went to all the houses in the affected area and put a questionnaire through the doors asking the occupants whether they used the area, whether they thought there was a problem and if so how they would resolve it – asking them directly for their ideas. Young facilitators talked to the young people at the centre of the row, to hear their side of the story.

Remarkably, they got back 32 questionnaires out of the 36 distributed, and obtained a great deal of useful information. They then wrote out all the responses, though omitting the names of those who made them, and re-circulated them to all the houses. Then they invited people to a meeting, to talk about what was going on. The interesting fact to emerge was that although ostensibly the trouble was about the young people, the survey revealed that the major problems lay elsewhere. There were class issues and tensions arising out of the fact that some residents were house-owners while others were not, and that some owned cars while others had to rely on public transport. There was a definite element of racism in some of the remarks about the mainly black youngsters playing in the street and it also turned out that residents who did not speak English were being ostracized and picked on by their neighbours, as well as by other young people. That was the sub-text that nobody, including the agencies, wanted to engage with.

The upshot was that, following several successful meetings, a residents' group was set up. People who had never previously communicated with each other began organizing things together on the street, and the young people became less of a problem. So it was a piece of work that provided an opportunity for people to meet and discuss and get to know each other.

### ***Cultural Issues***

Mediation approaches have to take account of cultural sensitivities. Hen cited the example of one tower block, whose occupants had been entirely white. Now around half of them were white, half Somali. Lots of little incidents had occurred, culminating in a big explosion in the park when two Somali women and two white women, a mother and her daughter, started fighting. All the onlookers then 'piled in'. The police were there, along with many local agencies.

Community Resolve were asked to do some mediation, and went to a local Somali resource centre to ask how they would go about it. The tradition of mediation in Somalia is very different. The white woman and her daughter were prepared to meet the Somali women but the latter said they could only do so if their husbands were present. In addition, the Somali women expected to come into the room when everything had been made good – i.e. with no disagreement in the mediation itself – whereas with community mediation in this country people are taken through the process of displaying their upset and anger, getting issues on the table, and working through them. That model does not work in the context of the Somali community.

### ***Other Challenges***

Funding is a major challenge. This kind of work, especially couched in the language used by Community Resolve, is not very well known in the UK. The word 'mediation' is generally understood but it was more difficult to give a fuller account of the aims and methods of this work. Nevertheless they had done pretty well, receiving grants from people like Comic Relief and the Tudor Trust. They also raised money by selling their services to schools. The problem was that they were trying to work with bodies which have no money, such as schools and voluntary organisations. They received some funding from the Council, for example from the Community Development Fund, but were wary of getting too close to the Council and appearing to be 'in their pocket'.

The government's Prevent agenda has provided funding temporarily but Hen was highly critical of it. In some areas of the country, community organisations were refusing the money

on the grounds that the scheme was divisive. Organisations like theirs have three possible options: they can follow the funding streams and bend the work to meet these; they can follow the funding streams but refuse to abide by the conditions; or they can refuse to follow funding streams altogether and risk having no money.

Joint ventures with other agencies worked best where Community Resolve had been allowed to take the lead through facilitating the steering group. Even then, things could go wrong; they could reach an agreement only to discover later that the agency had not implemented it. For example, one couple were being persecuted by local young people for eight years, with police and other agencies unable to stop the negative interaction. Community Resolve worked with all the people involved for several months, and an agreement was reached that Bristol City Parks Department would put a fence round the couple's house, so that the 'eyeline' was broken. However, it had taken the Parks Department nine months to erect the fence, by which time things were back where they started – or worse. Community Resolve is a small organisation which believes in responding quickly, but has to work in partnership with agencies with totally different cultures – the police, for example, and Bristol City Council – one of the slowest in the country. And yet not working with them would mean not embedding the process locally.

Managing their diverse staff team has complications too. They recruit locally and get some very good people, but they many, for instance, have left school at 15, worked on the street selling drugs for six years and then turned their life around. Now in their thirties, they have an excellent knowledge and understanding of the local scene but minimal experience of working in an office or using computer filing systems; still more importantly, after a lifetime of being marginalized they do not always feel entitled to speak out. Community Resolve works hard to empower people from different backgrounds and get them to go out and work in the community but, in this age of the tick-box culture, they also have to find a way of enabling them to work as part of a team and to manage the paperwork trail. The diverse team also brings diverse views, bringing relationship issues within the project that have to be addressed.

Hen said that her experiences with Community Resolve suggest that we in the UK have managed to create apathetic local populations. People often expect others to fix their problems. So if a group of householders are being pestered by noisy 15-year-olds, rather than getting together and standing up to the young people they are on their phones to five or six different agencies to get them to come and sort out the problem.

Hen is now teaching at Masters level about all this, dealing with MSc students and practitioners and getting those groups to think about the problems together. It was hard to measure the degree of success they had had, but she thought that the project had definitely had an impact on the city. It had changed practice in numerous Council departments and schools, and to some degree with the police. So despite the challenges and setbacks, it had been worthwhile.

### III: Foleshillfields Project in Coventry

*Presentation by Heather Parker and Mark Hinton*

#### ***Context of the Work***

Heather said that she and Mark would focus in turn on context, activities and challenges. They worked in the Hillfields area of Coventry, a city with a population of around 300,000. In the 1950s, Coventry expanded to six times its previous size as the car industry grew. It is very much an immigrant city. During the 1950s many Ukrainians, Scottish, Irish, Welsh and Northern English people came in to Coventry, followed by Afro-Caribbeans and South Asians. Hillfields is the part of the city to which, traditionally, immigrants have come, some then moving on to other parts as they become more prosperous. So, for instance, although not many Sikhs now live in the area, there are still many Gurdwaras and Sikh shops.

She and Mark had received an award from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust in 2004 to work for five years as 'visionaries for a just and peaceful world'. They live, and are part of the community, in Hillfields. There is a staff of eight, all part time – or, rather, paid part time! The six people attending this CCTS seminar were members of the core team. All came from the Hillfields community, or lived in it. There was also an extremely diverse group of about 50 active volunteers. Their premises were two flats at the bottom of a block of flats, which were leased to them rent-free by the local Housing Association.

#### ***Nature of the Work***

The aim of the Foleshillfields Project is to bring communities together and to introduce an internationalist perspective, so that people look outwards as well as inwards. They are particularly interested in the divisions based on race, but as they have gone on they have become more conscious of the role of class divisions.

Mark said the project runs all kinds of social events. They organise a monthly women's lunch as well as other events for women, and work annually in a primary school that is 90% South Asian Muslim, or has been so historically. He and Heather began this work in 2002, before the start of the present project. There is a youth group, and a community garden in front of their office. They run occasional music events, and have held some dialogue events, for instance bringing Africans and African Caribbeans together. They have parties and once a week an open house, so that people can just drop in. They have also held some events to explore the diversity of languages in the area. As a small organisation, they can be flexible and responsive. They also, to some extent, do things they like doing! Their internationalist perspective finds practical expression in links with two schools, and an organisation for the disabled, in Kenya. A number of international students also get involved as volunteers every year, some from the peace studies course at Coventry University, some from other courses. Soon there will be interns from Senegal and Japan.

They have also done some work which brings in money, for instance community consultancy work, and they hold fund-raising events. They run well-structured community events and are good hosts – relaxed and welcoming. Getting people to listen to each other is a central part of everything they do. They like to set up events where people are doing things together and chatting informally with each other, but they also ensure that there is a point at which people are in small mixed groups and each person is given an equal amount of time to answer a particular question, which might be 'Where did your granny grow up?' or 'How has racism affected your life?' Relationship building is the key to their approach. They demonstrate a way that people can be together, rather than trying to teach them to behave better.

Mark gave an example of a recent project. For some time he had been wanting to reach out to Jews in the city. In the project they work with many Muslims, and misinformation about Jews that circulate amongst them are a real problem – as indeed they are outside the Muslim community. So they organised a community celebration of Passover, for Jews and non-Jews. Some Jews in Coventry are active on the left, in anti-racism and other work, but rarely get to be visible as Jews. It was surprising how much there was to talk about, and these conversations proved a useful entry point for dealing with racism and other issues.

Then they had a party in which the Jews, though a minority, played a central role. This was a good example of their approach.

They did a lot of talking and listening to each other and sorting out relationship difficulties. They try to strike a balance between doing things together and fighting any necessary fights with one another – ‘fighting towards each other rather than away from each other’.

### **Challenges**

The aim of the project is to be a beacon of hope in what is really a depressing environment. People's sense of hopelessness and despair can be a major obstacle. They want to express it and they want you to do something with it. Some face the threat of deportation and are not allowed to work. They may face violence or isolation at home, unemployment, poverty, drug and alcohol abuse are all widespread problems. It is challenging, in these situations, to maintain the hope that things can be good – that we can create a good community, a good world.

Another challenge is that there is so much to do that there is a temptation to take on too many things and not do any of them well. The team had to decide on what were the key things to do, given their resources. Was it worth Mark spending twenty hours doing a little music event, or would it be more useful for him to be fixing their website, which had been broken for nine months?

Funding was a problem. The JRCT grant was for them to set up the organisation and share a post, and they were in the hugely privileged position of not being bound by outputs. However, additional funds had to be found to cover staffing and other costs and these come in small pots from various sources. No-one on the staff has a permanent contract, instead people get five hours here or there from this or that pot. So the project is under pressure, both externally and internally, to show some concrete outcomes. They also have to pay close attention to relationships within the team, especially given the fact that the two founders of the project are white people, leading a group of workers and volunteers of whom only a small minority are white. They try to create space for everyone to take leadership and influence the project without pretending that they are not the leaders of the project at this point in time.

Another challenge had to do with passion versus organisation. They tended to attract people inspired by the vision but not necessarily so interested in doing the typing and keeping meticulous records.

Mark then invited the other members of the project who were present to contribute.

One woman said she had come from Birmingham, where she had not experienced too many problems. However, after September 11 she noticed that as a Muslim she was being treated differently, and that her community had retreated. She did not feel there was anywhere she could go where she could trust people. She became involved with the project when they ran the course on global citizenship at her son's school and she volunteered to help. This experience empowered her to believe she could do things to achieve change and that a better future was possible.

Another woman said that what she particularly valued about the project was the attention to detail, for instance over the way people were made welcome. She also valued the attention paid to the bigger picture – how issues of race and class affect relationships between people. A third woman had said that one of the big challenges for her was to counteract the divisions caused by oppression, within the team and amongst volunteers. She had also remarked on the divisions between South Asians like herself and East Asians. For her to have come this far – to understand how people are restricted by oppression and to be able to speak out about it at a meeting, as she was doing, represented an important achievement. A participant from Japan said that he used to hate the kids on the street who were the main ones harassing him. (They would come up to him and say ‘Are you selling DVDs?’ – assuming that he was Chinese and selling illegal copies.) But he said the conflict was not only between white people and immigrants but also amongst the immigrant population.

## **Some Key Issues and Debates from the Plenary and Group Discussions**

A full report of the plenary and group discussions which followed the presentations is not possible here. But some of the recurrent themes and questions that arose, and the debates around them, are briefly recounted below.

### ***Culture and Fundamental Values***

How does one deal with ethical issues on which there are sharp differences related to culture and religion? Homosexuality, for example, is regarded as anathema in many cultural and religious traditions, but for many, particularly in Western societies, the recognition of gay and lesbian rights is seen as a benchmark of a just society. A related question was whether, by insisting on certain values, one could be accused of seeking to impose Western cultural and ethical norms on people of other cultures.

One panelist recounted the case of a local primary school which was about to introduce sex education and in a context where 80% of pupils were from émigré families. This was not long after three schools in the city had been in meltdown over the introduction of homophobic literature. Her approach was to go to the school with a well-known local Islamic scholar and work with the governors and parents. They negotiated a deal whereby parents were given the option, within the central education authority's guidelines, of taking their children out of that programme, and a separate one was introduced more in keeping with Islamic culture (though in fact it wasn't just the Islamic groups that had a problem with the programme). There had been a problem but it had been possible to overcome it by anticipating it early enough and working with the right people who were recognized by the community as being on board.

Another panelist said they identified these issues as landmines in the work: if you didn't look at them, and learn how to talk about them, you would step on them and they would blow up on you. Once in Kenya he was shocked at a school speechgiving at which most of the time was spent denouncing the evils of lesbianism. But what he learned to appreciate was the connection between cultural norms/questions of sexuality and colonialism. People said that we in the West used sex as a power weapon. There were parallels with the sexism issue. If you started from women's lives, and acknowledged that they were constantly affected by sexism and said 'Maybe you in the Muslim world can help us with this', you might get somewhere.

However, another contributor disagreed. He referred to the critique by Amartya Sen of a certain kind of multiculturalism which involves turning a blind eye to the abuses which go on within different cultures. We did not have the right to go out to another country and try to impose certain values, but this was our society and we had a responsibility towards each other.

The previous speaker responded that he was not arguing that you should not challenge, for example, female circumcision, but that you should not do so whilst doing nothing about pornography in this country. In the school in which he and his colleague worked, 11-year-old children were exchanging the addresses of porn websites. We had to be aware of Western 'cultural stupidities' as well. The two of them came from socialist backgrounds but often worked with people of faith and had had to re-examine many of their own assumptions.

Did speaking out against certain practices in other countries amount to a form of imperialism, an assumption that Western values were somehow universally valid? In the discussion of this question, it was pointed out that what was now held up as Western culture had in fact been forged in the struggle of colonial peoples, or internal struggles by groups or classes that had been excluded from participation in public life or faced discrimination at various levels. Barak Obama, for example, would not be president of the US today had it not been for Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights movement, which

challenged the racist values and practices in US society. One should also look to the transformative movements in societies where, currently, abhorrent practices such as 'honour' killings were tolerated, and give these movements space to develop.

The point was made that individuals and groups within a society could hold a particular view but at the same time accept that the mainstream held a different view. For instance Muslims and some Christians are opposed to homosexuality on religious grounds while accepting that this is not the prevalent position of the wider society. One participant said her Muslim faith was important to her and that Muslims do not believe there should be sexual relationships between people of the same gender. She would never want to impose her views on others, or wish harm to gays and lesbians. But did the fact that as she did not share, in this respect, the values of the country she is living in mean she should not be here? If she chooses to live in this country, does she have to change her value system? Another participant said it was important to be able to express one's views, whatever they were, and to debate them openly with those who take a different view. What would not be acceptable would be to endorse any form of discrimination against gays and lesbians.

Internalized racism, one participant argued, causes some people in non-Western societies to see their own culture as inferior. But it is not the case that Western culture is at one level and other cultures are at another level below it and must strive to reach the Western standard. It is important to allow every society the space to change its own culture.

### ***Challenging prejudice in daily life***

Another focus of discussion was the importance of challenging racism and other forms of prejudice when encountered in the course of daily life, at a bus-stop or in a doctor's surgery. Sometimes out of inertia, or failure of nerve, one keeps quiet, but it was suggested that it could be just as important to challenge prejudice at this level as to sign a petition or attend a meeting – perhaps indeed more important. One participant, who had spent some time in Sri Lanka, spoke of the extreme difficulty of challenging Sinhalese hegemony among a group of Sinhalese, or Tamil hegemony among Tamils in a Tamil controlled area. You sometimes wondered if there was any point in doing so, and decided you did not want to go there. But it could be equally difficult to engage with people in the human rights or peace movement who felt threatened if you challenged some of their passionately held beliefs and assumptions. The issue, one person remarked, was not just about having the moral courage to challenge irrational fears and prejudices but about doing so in a manner that had some chance of being efficacious. If you could stay relaxed and ask people why they felt or thought a certain way, and maybe have a joke with them about it, you were more likely to get somewhere.

### ***Is relationship building an effective tool in conflict transformation?***

The notion that bringing people together in informal settings would necessarily contribute to conflict transformation was strongly challenged by one participant. Despite the naïve belief, stemming from various experts in reconciliation, that encounters in themselves make a difference, there was no evidence to support this. Often they simply reinforced the negative images people had of one another. Unless people were on level ground and had the endorsement and support of community leaders, the encounters had little value. Another participant related this to the idea that if you ate a samosa or joined in Divali celebrations this would bring about community cohesion. For her, relationship-building was important but it had to involve real communication, including looking at the barriers and divisions, not pretending they were not there.

### ***Social Change and Power***

The issue of power of different kinds and in various contexts, including within political systems, was discussed in both group and plenary sessions.

One participant commented that in the presentations we had moved along a continuum from empowerment, in the sense of altering people's personal capacity to choose how they behave, to empowerment in the sense of giving people more voice and influence on policies. The former could be seen as part of a containment or 'prevention' agenda, as against empowerment to bring about social and political change. If people simply 'learned to behave better', that could be an enemy of change. However, it need not be so, and did not appear to be in the work Hannah was doing.

The point was made that empowerment should not be confused with upward mobility. One way people can get more power in a situation is to become professionalized and upwardly mobile. An alternative model is exemplified by the shop steward whose power derives from the support of fellow trade unionists. The power of community activists, too, was based on the support they enjoy within the community. This was the difference between *power over* and *power with*.

Structural power as a form of violence was discussed. It was difficult for people in the dominant culture to understand it since they did not experience it themselves directly. It was so much part of the way society worked that it never occurred to many within the dominant culture to question it. It was also remarked that the middle class might have more ability to speak in a 'politically correct' way about race, while actually being quite racist and at the same time looking down on those in a different class who used racist words.

## **Closing remarks**

Concluding the seminar, Diana Francis thanked the presenters for their stimulating input, which had provided the basis for an excellent discussion. She also thanked Adrian Platt of Conciliation Resources for his hard work in helping to organise the seminar and all the participants who had contributed to making the day a success.

### **Seminar Participants:**

Amanpreet Ahluwalia, Foleshillfields Project, Coventry

Steve Alston, recently returned from mediation work in Sri Lanka

Nick Chavasse, International Projects Officer, Fellowship of Reconciliation, UK

Diana Francis, independent consultant, Chair of CCTS and co-editor of CCTS Review

Jadranka Foster, independent consultant on collaborative action, formerly of the Westminster Foundation

Jessica Griffiths, of the Campaign Company

Andrew Hardwick, MA student at the Centre for Peace & Reconciliation Studies, & Chaplain to the Retail Sector of Birmingham City Centre

Mark Hinton, Foleshillfields Project, Coventry

Fatima Mangera, Foleshillfields Project, Coventry

Alex Moore, Responding to Conflict, Birmingham

Hannah Pennock, Peace Direct, working on the Truce 20-20 project

Michael Randle, Minutes Secretary CCTS and co-editor of its Review

Carol Rank, Centre for Peace & Reconciliation Studies, Coventry University

Andrew Rigby, Centre for Peace & Reconciliation Studies, Coventry University

Heather Parker, Foleshillfields Project, Coventry

Aya Takeuchi, Foleshillfields Project, Coventry

Hen Wilkinson, Community Resolve, Bristol

Minoru Yosioka, Foleshillfields Project, Coventry

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Conciliation Resources, London

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Action for Conflict Transformation

One World Trust

Fellowship of Reconciliation (England), Oxford

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