CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: RESEARCH AND RESEARCHER

This thesis documents a research process which I engaged in because I wanted to understand better the work that I did as a facilitator of workshops in nonviolent approaches to conflict. At the same time I wanted to develop my capacity for awareness in action. I chose the theme of respect for this inquiry, and throughout my research and throughout this document I have followed four strands of exploration. The first has been an exploration of the notion of respect as a fundamental value for constructive approaches to conflict. The second has been my own attempt to live with the challenge of applying that value to the process of facilitation, working across cultures. The third has been the content of my workshop input, reflecting my positioning of myself in the conflict resolution field; in particular my attempt to incorporate some important insights of nonviolence theory. The fourth has been the process of the inquiry itself, monitoring my own thinking and development.

The relative importance and fruitfulness of these different elements of my inquiry has been unexpected. The one with which I began, the meaning and usefulness of the concept of respect in different cultures, has yielded some insights which are important for my work, clustered around a few issues; but more important has been the question of how to behave in the light of cultural differences: how to be a respectful facilitator - especially given experiences and perceptions of power. Furthermore, the theoretical component of my research, for which I had initially little enthusiasm or, perhaps, confidence, has engaged me greatly and seemed of real importance; which is one example of the illumination yielded by the inquiry process itself and of the discovery of new ways of discovering.

The methodology I evolved for following these different tracks is discussed in my third chapter. The whole inquiry process, from my registration at Bath University's Centre for Action Research in Professional Practice (CARPP) in January 1994, to the completion of this thesis, has taken a little over four years. I was going to say 'to complete', but could not, since as long as I do this work the process will continue. That is one of its effects. I will remain a compulsive inquirer.

In this opening chapter I want to introduce myself as the practitioner, inquirer and writer who has produced this thesis, and to give a brief outline of the work I have been doing, the way I approach it and the challenges it raises for consideration in my research. I begin with an autobiographical self-description, and includes the factors and events in my life that I consider significant for the work in hand. No doubt my choice of what to say will be as revealing as the revelations themselves.

MYSELF AND MY LIFE

Who am I, then, the person who is doing this work and writing this thesis? What has brought me to this point? What are the personal tendencies, assumptions, motivations and values that I take into my work and my research? What clues can I give for the interpretation and weighing of my accounts and perceptions? What do I know about myself which will help me to weigh and evaluate my own initial interpretations and weightings?

Childhood influences and their effect

I was born in Lancashire, into an English-Welsh household, in 1944. My childhood was in many ways very secure. I grew up in a family of stable, though of course imperfect, relationships, lived largely in one place and with a wide and constant network of adult friends, as well as friends of my own age. With this stable setting came a strong and stable set of values and expectations which can be best summarised in terms of liberal, middle-class norms and a radical, Christian ethic.

At my primary school, the values were very different. I remember the marshal music to which we marched in and out of assembly; the nationalist songs and hymns we used to sing; the public canings and humiliations of pupils from the 'wrong' sort of home. The unkindnesses upset me then and now; but the other differences seemed unremarkable: just part of the way things were.

There were, however, complicating factors at home. It often felt to me that I was not dear to my mother (though I see this otherwise, now that I am middle aged and she is dead), which I think

Link to: http://www.bath.ac.uk/carpp/publications/doc_theses_links/d_francis.html

has probably undermined my sense of security. Of my father's love I was never in doubt, and I think in many ways I modelled myself on him, and was by nature in some respects like him. However, this in turn had a major snag, in that the way I was and wanted to be was horribly out of line with how girls were supposed to be. I was, by girls' standards (that is, by the standards tacitly set for and by girls), rough, loud and aggressive. I was a leader, not a follower. I was rebellious, not docile. My parents, I think, did not reproach me for these things, but somehow I have grown up with a feeling that I am not, in some fundamental way, as I should be: that I take up too much psychic space in the world, speak too much and too loudly, am not selfless enough. My daughter Becky's own recent PhD research (Francis, 1996) suggests that the social construction of little girls as 'sensible and selfless' is very strong. As I read her thesis I felt a good deal of my discomfort with myself fall into place. I am aware of the possible ongoing impact of these feelings on both my behaviour as a facilitator and trainer, and my attitude to it, particularly in the form of anxieties around the place and weight I should give to my own input and understandings.

I have a very exacting and critical attitude towards myself, and this too comes, I think, from a childhood in which, it seemed, I was either warmly praised or deeply reproached for what I did. I am sure there was much that passed without comment, and therefore unnoticed and unremembered, which must have fallen into the 'OK' or 'good enough' category, but somehow that space for ordinariness has got squeezed out of my evaluation frame. I remember a rhyme my parents used to recite to me:

> 'There was a little girl who had a little curl
> Right in the middle of her forehead.
> When she was good she was very, very good
> But when she was bad she was horrid.'

This was, as I understood it, meant to apply to me. It certainly coincides with the way I thought about myself - and still do, despite all attempts to pull apart the implied assumptions and framing.

Another powerful element in the development of this 'either .... or' approach was, I have no doubt, my Christian upbringing, with what I took to be Jesus's clear call to perfection - 'be

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perfect' - along with his recorded assertion that whatever we did, or failed to do, to another member of the human race we did, or failed to do, to him. Since the human race and its needs were more or less infinite, failure, I now see, was inevitable. I was brought up to care passionately about other people and their needs and suffering, so this 'failure' was deeply felt. However, compassion and feelings of responsibility also took a more positive form, motivating me to act for change, on the assumption that, if I had the responsibility to do so, I also had the power. My beliefs therefore gave me a strong sense of purpose, and along with it a sense of my own value, both for myself and for what I could do for others.

In the light of all this, it seems unsurprising that I should have grown into the strongly contradictory adult I described to colleagues in my CARPP supervision group after my first few months as a research student at Bath's...... This was the first piece of writing that I had produced to explain myself and my work and research to others as well as myself:

'What I find when I look at myself is someone with a strong sense of being in the world - is that identity? - but full of self-doubt and blame, finding it hard to accept myself in totality, (sometimes even in part,) constantly undermining myself, and grudging about my strengths.

Though lacking in self-confidence, I have never lacked a voice -which means that people think I am self-assured and find speaking easy, which I do not. It often causes me great stress and is followed by new rounds of self-doubt. I think my words are drawn from me by engagement; and that I think is my strength and what I should try to love and respect myself for. I love people. I live in the interactions of the moment. I have a passion for communication and understanding. I care to an often agonising degree about the well-being and the suffering of others.

So my lack of self-respect doesn't impede my engagement as much as it might; but it clearly makes it more difficult and at times distorts it. Sometimes I am able to achieve a text-book balance between clear speaking and sensitivity; at other times I am too anxious to please, or turn to criticism of others (usually internal) as a comfort.'

This personal baggage and these tendencies were clearly a matter of concern for my research, in which balanced assessment, interpretation and evaluation have been crucial. In the above piece of writing I continued:

'Looking at the way I have actually behaved in recent weeks, I think that by awareness and engagement I have largely avoided allowing my own negative feelings to have an impact on my professional practice; but I have had to go through tiresome and tiring struggles with them while off duty. [What I meant was that although I felt fine while I was actually working, I went through unpleasant bouts of self-doubt afterwards.] I sometimes think that too much self-awareness is a burden: certainly when it is not accompanied by self-acceptance.

Which brings me back to the apparent tension between respect and challenge. I need to be able to respect myself *and* challenge myself: challenge myself *because* I respect myself, and respect myself because of what I already am and because of what I want to be.'

If achieving balance in the evaluation of my work is one aspect of the challenge of working with myself, another is the self-care implied by self-respect. My parents, I think looking back, achieved a pretty good balance between care for others and looking after themselves: having fun with friends and with us children, taking holidays, going to the theatre, buying new clothes or furniture when they could afford it. Their attitude to money was that you should consider seriously what to give away, and having done that, manage with and enjoy the rest. I seem not to have absorbed this sense of balance, instead bearing in mind and heart what seemed (and seems) to me the logic of Jesus's 'in as much as...you did it not...' and 'when I was hungry...' as implying that any superfluity of money over need amounts to a theft from the millions of people who do not have enough to sustain themselves. This thought, though for me of religious origin, is reinforced by political analysis and general moral sense. I can find no answer to it, although I do not allow it (and this I say not with pride) to determine - as against influence - the way I live. It means that money and its use is an endlessly difficult subject for me, making the question of fair pay for freelance work extremely hard to deal with. This is one part of the overall challenge of balancing my needs with the needs of others.

My need to achieve such a balance stems from my sense of interdependence. This is not simply a matter of how I understand the world at the cognitive level, but something deeply felt in daily experience. I find it impossible to separate my affairs from those of others. I need to feel good about others in order to feel good about, or in, myself; which means that the question, 'Am I

doing this for them or for me?' is of limited use. To quote from the most famous of John Donne's 'Devotions upon Emergent Occasions' (1929: 538) - male language notwithstanding,

> 'No man is an island entire of itself......Any man's death diminishes me because I am involved in mankind.'

Individual identity is not separate entity. The experience of autonomy is both a fulfilment of individual potential and an illusion, since we exist only in relationship with each other and with other forms of being. So I think, at least; and this thinking was part of my upbringing. My parents not only talked it but, within their limits, lived it. It is a way of seeing things which makes boundaries a constant matter for question and debate, as I found in my research process - even in defining the focus of my research. Nonetheless, to deny the endless interconnectedness of things would be, for me, to fly in the face of experience and understanding: to disrespect what I understand to be the nature of being, and myself in the process.

It occurs to me, however, that convictions and feelings about interdependence are not my only motivators for action; that my desire to somehow tidy up the world - restore order to it (as if it had ever had the kind of order I am looking for) to see compassion and justice prevail over cruelty and tyranny - this desire, which has the urgency of a need, springs also from my own need to make some sense of a world whose hurting and hurtfulness I would otherwise find unbearable: make sense of it by making it make sense. This clearly brings with it the danger that I will find order where none exists, or want to detect progress where none has been made.

If my childhood and personality gave me an over-heightened awareness of the sufferings of the world, it also gave me, through home and church, the habit of integrating intellectual, spiritual and emotional life, together with a value for the physical and the sensual. Family meals were a time for talking, arguing: about theology, politics, what was going on in the world. Church was a place of worship, but also of wrestling with texts and dilemmas, and this wrestling was a matter of both heart and head. The concerns were passionate, focused on both the physical and the psychological needs of human beings. Theory or faith generated and encapsulated emotions and motivations for changing things in the 'real world'. Knowing or understanding was automatically

connected to action; and that 'understanding' was holistic, as the etymology of the word implies, involving the whole being of its subjects.

I have always loved thinking and theorising. My father and elder brother were great readers. I did read, of course, for entertainment and homework; but on the whole I preferred live discussion, and action, to the one-sided conversation of books. (They say what they have to say and I talk back, but I get no answer.) Acknowledging and dealing with this preference has presented me with problems in my research. Now, as then, the reading I have done, though not vast in quantity, has often been intensely engaged with, processed through conversation, and revisited in action. I am by nature a doer. From my mid-teens I have been involved in movements, in pressure-group politics, in 'direct action'. My parents were both pacifists and internationalists. From their values of compassion and respect for life came the twin goals of minimising suffering and maximising well-being, which in turn meant working, on the one hand, for the elimination of war, and, on the other, for an increase in justice. So, in my teens, in addition to involvement with development organisations like OXFAM and Christian Aid, I became a 'peace activist' (as I still am), attending nonviolence workshops and campaigning against war in general and nuclear weapons in particular. I spent a good part of my free time at planning meetings, on demonstrations, speaking to other young people's groups. These activities I continued at university and beyond.

Adult life

I married a week after leaving Oxford and for two years worked (without training) as a junior school teacher - which I loved. I then spent a good many years at home with our three children, with my outward energies channelled into campaigning for peace, human rights and economic justice; later green politics. As the years went by, I got into nonviolent 'direct action' (usually, in practice, frustratingly indirect), for which preparatory training workshops were required. In due course, I trained as a trainer. More substantially, I spent a lot of my time facilitating meetings for drawing up strategies and plans. In these ways I re-absorbed the philosophy and techniques of nonviolence in, and in relation to, action.

When our youngest child reached school age, I became a steering committee member of an organisation called 'The International Fellowship of Reconciliation' (I had been a local member

from my teens), and subsequently became its president. In this way I began to travel a great deal, meeting people from different countries and continents, all engaged in the attempt to live out the principles of nonviolence in their own particular context - sometimes in extremely dangerous situations, where the (often costly) struggle for justice was the central aim: nonviolent liberation struggle in the classic tradition of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King. Many of the most inspiring stories and personalities I encountered were from Latin America, and were strongly influenced by Paulo Freire's work and by liberation theology.

Two leading personalities within IFOR, Jean and Hildegard Goss-Mayr, had spent many years as travelling secretaries, working in Latin America, and later in Africa and Asia, leading training seminars for people (especially Church people) wanting to be engaged in action for social and political change. The evident power of their work to strengthen people's will and capacity for action was an inspiration to others - me included - to undertake similar work, which I did in a small way as I travelled as president, and in my continuing peace movement activities at home.

When I spoke to groups about nonviolence (and I did a great deal of speaking, to audiences large and small), I tried not only to refer to the two great gurus, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, but to tell the stories of some of the little known but amazing people I had met. Then all of a sudden, it seemed, the world scene began to change and the lonely status of Gandhi and King was transformed by the sudden accumulation of new, high profile and large scale examples of nonviolence in action. It began with the overthrow of President Marcos in the Philippines, largely by nonviolent 'people power'. Several of my friends played a key role in those events and the years of preparation which led up to them, including the Goss-Mayrs. At the same time, nonviolent action was playing an increasing role in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. Again, IFOR colleagues were involved. Then came the breath-taking series of nonviolent revolutions that swept Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. People power seemed to have come of age. We were euphoric.

Little by little, however, the picture grew darker. The terms 'internal conflict' and 'ethnic conflict' became horribly familiar. Not, of course, that these were new phenomena, but that they had come close to us in Europe. I began to have conversations with David Atwood, the then General Secretary of IFOR, about the need to go back to some of the founding ideas of our Fellowship

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and add to our focus on justice a parallel and complementary one on healing and co-existence; or, to put it another way, what was being described in other circles as 'conflict resolution.'

We had been very much preoccupied with advocacy and contest - entering into conflict, albeit in a mode which respected the humanity of all parties. Now we began to re-examine the need for emerging from conflict: the 'reconciliation' of our title. We held an internal seminar for staff and steering committee, drawing in Quaker friends to help us in our thinking. One of these, Adam Curle, first Professor of Peace Studies at Bradford University, and a man of immense experience in the worlds of psychology, development and unofficial political mediation, became a special friend and influence for me. At the same time I was beginning to be involved in committee work for Quakers, considering and supporting different mediation projects at the international level, while at home I joined, first as a volunteer mediator and later as trainer, a neighbourhood mediation scheme.

When the fighting began in former Yugoslavia, peace organisations located in Western Europe began to be asked increasingly, by groups in the Balkans, for support in the form of 'conflict resolution training'. Initially through the inspiration and efforts of Adam Curle and David Atwood, a co-ordinating committee was formed in London, so that a number of organisations with similar objectives could pool their efforts to respond to these requests. I subsequently became chair of that committee. Our individual organisations fell in some cases more into the 'nonviolence' and in others more into the 'conflict resolution' category, and as we searched for some common frame of reference for our work I wrote my first, very brief, paper, describing from the nonviolence angle the different stages of conflict which would require different responses and support.

As I approached the end of my second four year term as IFOR president, being clear that I should make way for someone else, I began to wonder what work I should do in place of this substantial, if unpaid, part-time job. Our children were more or less grown-up, and I wanted, belatedly, to grow up too, and enter the world of paid employment. I 'signed on' as unemployed and attended career development seminars. When our careers adviser said 'I think you should go into training', it made sense. Although my experience in both training and facilitation more

generally made me feel, despite misgivings, this was work I could do, I was aware of having no formal qualification of any relevance. When I enquired how I might fill this gap, I discovered that the only professional training diploma to be had came through a correspondence course, so I decided I had better just get on with the work. Then I remembered hearing about the action research programme at Bath University, and decided that this might be a way in which I could find a framework and support for learning by doing: by doing my work in a framework of intellectual rigour and self-challenge, and thereby not only obtaining official evidence of the quality of my thinking about my practice, but strengthening the quality of my practice and my capacity to go on improving and developing it.

By the time I joined the programme of the Centre for Action Research in Professional Practice at Bath University, I had been self-employed for one year under the title of 'Diana Francis - Facilitation and Training'. In that time I had worked locally with mediation and mental health groups and others, on particular tasks and skills, and facilitated 'conflict resolution' workshops in several contexts and places. Shortly before I enrolled at the University I had, with a Dutch colleague, led a week long workshop at the Anti-war Centre in Belgrade: my first workshop in a situation of actual conflict, which constituted an important step in my experience.

INTRODUCTION TO MY CURRENT WORK AND RESEARCH

During the time of my research I have facilitated or co-facilitated many workshops which could be described as cross-cultural, on constructive approaches to conflict. They have been cross-cultural either because I was working with people of a different culture from my own, or of different cultures from each other, or both. They have taken place in Europe, East and West, in the Former Soviet Union, in the Middle East and in Africa, and they have involved people from every continent. My research questions, following the four strands outlined at the beginning of this introductory chapter, have been about the style, quality and usefulness of my work and the cross-cultural validity of the values on which it is based; whether it is useful to work across cultures and if so on the basis of what common understandings; how such cross-cultural interaction can be respectful at all, when I as a trainer am of a different culture from participants

and my culture is, in the world, the dominant one; and whether CR approaches, as embodied in my own theory, have anything substantial to offer for the empowerment of participants in their own situations.

In the face of such questions I have aimed to make respect part of my way of being as a facilitator, expressing itself both in the way in which I conduct myself in relation to participants and co-facilitators, and in my approach to learning and the way I structure workshops for participatory learning processes. I aim to offer a framework for the exploration of the group's own experience and wisdom, while at the same time respecting their desire to learn from what I have to offer, recognising my own depth of reflection and range of experience; acknowledging difference of role while at the same time affirming equality of status, and sharing or dividing power and responsibility accordingly. My writing will contain reflections on the effects of my own personality, my national and racial identity and gender, on my feelings and behaviour in this role, and the ways in which others may perceive me.

This thesis describes a journey of inquiry. Its four strands break into many sub-strands, producing a complex texture of reflections and ideas, based on events characterised by their own complexities and ambiguities. My research has produced more questions than answers. At the same time, I have felt uneasy that the tentative conclusions which I have reached are often confirmations of ideas I set out to test: nothing astonishing or radically different; rather an enriched texture of understanding. I hope it will be apparent that the testing was nonetheless open and genuine; and I have learnt a great deal in small ways, so that my knowing has, I think, become more nuanced and rounded, my respect more circumspect and deep, the content of my workshops more thoroughly useful for particular purposes and my capacity for inquiry enhanced by a greater understanding of what it is to inquire. I hope that fellow-practitioners and others in this and related fields will gain something by way of enrichment and challenge by sharing in my journey as I have described it, and engaging with the conclusions and further questions which the journey has produced.

I write in a variety of modes: introducing, describing, reflecting, summarising, and groping towards tentative and provisional conclusions for my own use and the consideration of others. At

times I shall advocate certain ways of behaving, addressing my self, first and foremost, but sometimes also speaking in terms of what I consider to be good practice, given certain purposes and values. I have tried to include enough framing for these different modes of writing to be clear for the reader; but at times they may merge and become indistinct. That is why I am referring to them in a general way here: to say that I intend these different voices to be there, since each forms part of my response to the process I have lived, and plays a role in what I want to convey about it to the reader.