Adam Curle: Radical Peacemaker and Pioneer of Peace Studies

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Abstract

This article presents a biographical account of Adam Curle, focusing especially on the development of his ideas on peace and peace studies and the impact these had on the evolution of the field at the level of theory and of practice. Curle was the founding Professor of the Department of Peace Studies at the University of Bradford in the UK. Appointed to the Chair in 1973, the department launched its teaching and research programmes in 1974. Curle's influence on the department and his development of a theory and practice of peace and peacemaking is traced and analysed in this article. His theory of peace was based on a synthesis of academic perspectives drawing on psychology, anthropology and development theory, and on the early peace theory of other innovators in the field of peace studies, including Johan Galtung and Kenneth Boulding. His peace practice was based on the experience of large scale conflict in the Nigerian Civil War and the India Pakistan conflict in the 1960s and 1970s, and was distinguished by his use of non-official or track two mediation as a complement to formal diplomacy in such conflicts. His use of mediation was modified later when, in the 1990s, in the context of the civil war in the Balkans, he helped to mobilise support for local people who wished to resist the civil war and to build peaceful communities and cultures of peace. In this way he also pioneered the idea of peace building from below, currently recognised as a leading mode of peacemaking amongst academics and practitioners.

INTRODUCTION

Now that peace studies have become well established in the global academic community, with institutions like UOC operating worldwide via e-learning systems, it is useful to reflect on the origins of the discipline of peace studies and to uncover the ideas and values that inspired its pioneers. This article presents a biographical account of Adam Curle, focusing especially on the development of his ideas on peace and peace studies and the impact these had on the evolution of the field at the level of theory and practice. In terms of theory, he established a broad conceptualisation of peace which merged both positive (fulfilling human needs and liberating human potential) and negative (preventing violence) dimensions. This broad concept of peace,

initially conceived by Johan Galtung, became decisive in influencing the formation of the Peace Studies department at the University of Bradford in the UK, and now defines the majority of peace studies and peace research centres which have emerged worldwide. The article begins by outlining the key stages in Curle's academic career, his transition from psychology and development, and his formulation of a theory of peace which was enriched by the idea, drawing on an eclectic mix of academic, theological, and philosophical sources, that true peace depended on liberating human potential.

In addition to his influence as a theorist and academic, Adam Curle was also a practitioner of peacemaking, especially in the area of what has since become known as citizen's diplomacy or track two mediation. His work as a

pioneer of peace studies is outlined in the discussion below, and the conclusion will show how, as a result of his work in the civil war in the Balkans in the mid-1990s, he also developed his ideas about mediation into a new mode or model which was based on the innovative concept of peace building from below, an approach to peacemaking which continues to influence peace studies and peace action today.

ORIGINS AND IDEAS

Born in L'Isle Adam in Northern France in July 1916, Curle had an unconventional academic career. In 1935 he went to Oxford to study history but switched to anthropology in the course of his first year. He conducted field research in various areas of the Middle East for which he obtained a Diploma in Anthropology, and then spent six years, from 1939 to 1945, serving in the Army, and in this period became interested in the work of the Tavistock Institute for Human Relations, particularly in their approach to the socio-psychological problems of post-war reconstruction. This formative influence on his thinking was to stay with him, and the damage caused by war on human communities, on their culture and psychological health, remained a constant concern. His first academic publication was for the Human Relations journal and described the special problems of prisoners of war as they adapted to the strains of returning to normal community. He was awarded a postgraduate degree in anthropology in 1947, worked for the Tavistock Institute on a project on rural decay and was appointed lecturer in social psychology at Oxford in 1950. During this time he became interested in the link between social psychology and education policy, and in 1952, at the age of 36, he was appointed to the Chair of Education and Psychology at the University of Exeter. Between 1956 and 1959 he served as consultant in Pakistan on issues of education and development policy. Between 1959 and 1961 he was Professor of Education at the University of Ghana, and from 1961 until his appointment to the Chair of Peace Studies at the University of Bradford in 1973, he was Director of the Harvard Centre for Studies in Education and Development.

EARLY IDEAS ON PEACE STUDIES

His role in the emergence of peace research and education, and in the definition and application of specific modes of peacemaking, is significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, the Bradford Department of Peace Studies, founded by Curle with support from the Society of Friends (Quakers) in the UK, was one of the first full academic departments operating the complete range of peace studies, from BA through to Masters and PhD programmes, and has progressively served as a stimulus for groups around the world seeking to establish their own centres for peace research. Secondly, Curle, in his writing and in the pedagogic tradition he established at Bradford, validated a broad definition of what constituted legitimate peace research. He identified three main strands of activity which are relevant to peacemaking; to nurture social and economic systems which engender cooperation rather than conflict; to oppose violent, dangerous, and oppressive regimes with non-violence; and to bring about reconciliation between those who are in conflict. The first strand has been explored within Bradford in terms of a focus on critical research on weapons technologies, the arms trade, arms control, resource conflicts, and institutions for international co-operation and interdependence. The second strand has been represented by work on peace and anti-war movements; and the third has focussed on mediation as a specific component of peacemaking, and it is one to which Curle brought his distinctive style. This third area emerged in large part because of Curle's practical involvement with Quaker mediation, a firm basis of track two or citizen's diplomacy.

The Bradford 'tradition' has then, through Curle's initial conceptualisation, contained both the structural analyses of conflict which appears in the work of Johan Galtung and the subjective-psychological orientation which appears in Burton, Fisher and other problem solving approaches (Woodhouse, 1991). The third strand, the subject of this paper, includes the original conflict resolution content of Curle's work, and how he applied and extended it in his thinking and writing, as well as others working within what has been called the track two approach.

DEFINING PEACE

Curle's initial work on education and development embodied a fairly conventional approach embedded in an underlying belief in progress through economic modernisation, though he also registered an early concern that development should not be measured in economic terms but through social and cultural dimensions, in particular in the emergence of a purposive society capable of fulfilling human potential in social relationships. By the late 1960s he was less convinced about the whole underlying project of development. Above all, conflict and violence were beginning to feature in his work as subjects

demanding urgent attention and especially so because of his direct experience of the Nigerian Civil War between 1967 and 1970, and the war between India and Pakistan. In Pakistan, the events of 1971 swept away the fruit of development in a tide of death, destruction and hatred.

Curle's academic interest in peace was a product of this kind of demanding front line experience where he not only witnessed the threats to development from the eruption of violent conflicts, but where in effect he was being drawn increasingly into the practice of peacemaking, especially in the form of mediation. Most importantly, during the intensive and searing experiences of the Biafran War he felt a compelling need to understand more about why these conflicts happened. Violence, conflict, the process of change especially as this affected social attitudes, and the goals of development began to be seen as linked themes. Three major studies in which these changed perceptions are hardened into substantial analyses are Education for Liberation, Making Peace and Mystics and Militants. Making Peace was written in the course of a sabbatical year spent as a visiting research fellow at the Richardson Institute of Conflict and Peace Research in London in 1969-1970, when he was able to reflect on both his own previous academic work in educational policy and psychology, and his by now considerable experience of major conflicts. Mystics and Militants established him as a leading influence in a small pioneering group of academics in peace research, and involvement in this community was to result in his appointment to the first Chair in Peace Studies at the University of Bradford in 1973. Making Peace represents the deliberate application of ideas from peace research to his own work and experience. In this book he tackles problems of definition, looking at peaceful and unpeaceful relationships and in a general sense at the process of peacemaking; Mystics and Militants, written as a sequel to Making Peace, looks more closely at the personal beliefs of the peacemakers themselves and at the qualities and skills they need to build.

Both books have had a decisive influence on the emergence of peace studies as a coherent area of study. They established Curle as an original and innovative thinker, capable of providing a comprehensive view of the academic validity and viability of peace studies, and were a significant reason for his move to Bradford when that University decided to add peace studies to its set of new study areas. Making Peace presents Curle's definition of peace and conflict as a set of unpeaceful and peaceful relationships, and it is this focus on relationships as the subject of peace which above all distinguishes and characterises his work:

"I prefer to define peace positively. By contrast with the absence of overt strife, a peaceful relationship would, on a personal scale, mean friendship and an understanding sufficiently strong to overcome any differences that might occur… On a larger scale, peaceful relationships would imply active association, planned co-operation, an intelligent effort to forestall or resolve potential conflicts." (Making Peace, p.15)

Peace was concerned then not with the containment of conflict, but pre-eminently with building relationships:

"As I define it, the process of peacemaking consists in making changes to relationships so that they may be brought to a point where development can occur." (Making Peace, p. 15)

Peacemaking consists of moving a wide range of human relationships out of the set of unpeaceful categories identified in the book into peaceful ones. But where other peace researchers have tended to concentrate more on social, political, and military systems as subjects for analysis, Curle generally stressed the importance of the attitudes and values of people within those systems to peace and violence. A good part of Making Peace, for example, concentrates on the skills of conciliation and mediation, tasks with which he particularly identified himself. He thought that the skill of resolving conflict by mediation was little understood and developed because:

"... we do not really understand the roots of conflict, seeing it primarily as an objective state of affairs and not as the states of mind that led to and subsequently sustained or exaggerated that state of affairs. Consequently our approach to conflict resolution is confused and inefficient. We really know very little about it and after hundreds of years of diplomacy... have little scientific understanding of it. Our chief fault is failure to recognise that conflict is often largely in the mind and to that extent must be dealt with on that level; and that even when it is less so, as in the case of political oppression or economic exploitation, emotional factors exacerbate what is already serious." (Making Peace, p.15)

Despite his own preference for analysis which proceeded by concentrating on human feelings and beliefs, he saw peace studies as a venture which could only succeed by recognising and using a wide range of skills and backgrounds. Indeed one of the longest sections of Making Peace is on conciliation, (what he subsequently came to call mediation) where Curle elaborates an approach which is drawn from insights from social and in particular humanistic psychology applied to peacemaking in public conflicts. Much of the conflict of which he had direct experience was founded on fear derived from ignorance of oneself.

"This fear of what self-awareness might reveal frequently leads to the development of a 'public face', a mask; the complement to the mask is the mirage… what we see when we peep through slits in the mask: to the extent that we depend on the mask for self protection, we see a mirage of others.

If they accept us at what might be called our mask value, thus strengthening our defences, we see them favourably. If they do not, they make us anxious and they become unpopular. At this point, through the psychic trick of projection, we are apt to attribute to them the very flaws we dimly sense in ourselves and are attempting to conceal from ourselves and others by the use of the mask.

Mask and mirage are interconnected to the extent that altering one almost inevitably involves altering the other. My view of my enemy is related to my view of myself, therefore I cannot change my attitude to him without a corresponding change of attitude towards myself.

The concept of awareness takes these ideas a step further. At the personal level the idea of awareness corresponds exactly to the degree to which the mask is put aside."

So awareness is a key element in peace; awareness in turn is related to identity, but while loss of identity can lead to insecurity and disintegration, it can also lead to rigidity and intolerance: in fact there are two types of identity, one of belonging, an important but limited tool; and one of awareness, which refers "both to the inner life of the individual and to his consciousness of society".

"It is the task of the conciliator to find ways of stemming the psychological current so that, however briefly, the mask can be dropped, the mirage forgotten, awareness heightened, and the sense of identity broadened beyond the bounds of nationalism." (Making Peace, p. 210-216)

PEACE AS THE LIBERATION OF HUMAN POTENTIAL

Given this approach to peace studies, which evolved slowly from Curle's experience and academic formation in anthropology, psychology, and development education it was natural that he should see peace broadly in terms of human development rather than as a set of 'peace-enforcing' rules and organisations. The quest for peace is not solely a quest for appropriate structures and organisations which are only means to human ends; there is also room in peace research to identify the kinds of social structures which enhance rather than restrain or even suppress human potential.

By the early 1970s, Curle had moved beyond the work which had preoccupied him for most of the 1950s and 1960s. He had become more interested in the causes of conflicts because he was experiencing the destruction they caused, he had been drawn into the role of mediator, and these experiences had led him directly to think about the

resolution of violent conflict and the cultivation of peaceful relationships.

Curle's own values and beliefs fixed substantially on ways of understanding and realising the potential for good in human nature and human relationships. His intellectual debt to the humanistic psychologists in this search was clear in his published work. His desire to 'seek within', to meditate on the sources of peace within the human spirit and psyche, was sustained by his increasing involvement with and membership of the Religious Society of Friends (the Quakers) and by a broader interest in mystical and spiritual exploration which he followed through the works of Ouspensky, Gurdjieff, and later in Buddhist teachings and meditational techniques. The end of all this study and meditation was to find a means of understanding the full range of conditions which led to peace, but the fundamental quest is rooted in a profound optimism in human potential, despite frequent evidence to the contrary.

By 1970, Adam Curle had created an imaginative and broad ranging vision of peace education and research. He had behind him involvement in a wide range of unpeaceful situations. He had mediated in two large scale armed conflicts, experiencing two gigantic tragedies in which hundreds of thousands of people had died. He had experience of racial conflicts in Africa and the USA, of tribal clashes, and of oppressive tyrannies in remote parts of the world. His time at Harvard saw him concerned with development in over twenty countries in the Middle East, North and Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and Asia. He was able to draw from his period as an early staff member of the Tavistock Institute and from two university appointments in psychology. By the end of the 1960s and increasingly during the early 1970s he became aware of the work of Galtung and of Kenneth Boulding, when he realised that his work and theirs was leading, along different pathways, to the same general goals of emerging peace research, concerned especially to find new ways of dealing with violent conflicts. For Curle the peacemaking tool which he hoped would realise this goal was mediation.

MEDIATION IN CURLE'S THEORY AND PRACTICE

Within his broad theory and philosophy of peace, Curle's specialisation was in the skills of conflict mediation and conciliation. Making Peace offers his first reflections on his experiences in Africa and in Pakistan. Curle's In the Middle points to the importance of mediation and reconciliation themes in peace research and practice in the conflict-ridden world of the late 20th century.

"Mediators, as the word implies, are in the middle. This is true in two senses. Firstly they are neither on one side nor the other; secondly, they are in the centre of the conflict, deeply involved in it because they are trying to find a satisfactory way out of it… What mediators do is to try to establish, or re-establish, sufficiently good communications between conflicting parties, so that they can talk sensibly to each other without being blinded by such emotions as anger, fear and suspicion. This does not necessarily resolve the conflict; mediation has to be followed up by skilled negotiation, usually directly between the protagonists, supported by a measure of mutual tolerance and by determination to reach agreement. But it is a good start." (In the Middle, p. 9)

The strength of Curle's form of mediation is that, even in conflicts which are characterised by a very clear perception of differing interests for which people are prepared to fight, the fighting creates its own dynamic where the fighting groups cannot de-escalate from their set positions without appearing to be weak. Mediation is appropriate when the parties in a conflict are willing to at least consider, however tentatively, that third party intervention might have benefits, and at this point skilled mediation may, through the removal of misperceptions and the calming of violent emotions, provide the window of opportunity for negotiated settlement. Curle identified four elements in his mediation process: firstly the mediator acted to build, maintain and improve communications; secondly to provide information to and between the conflict parties; thirdly to 'befriend' the conflicting parties; and fourthly to encourage what he referred to as active mediation, that is to say to cultivate a willingness to engage in co-operative negotiation.

His philosophy of mediation is essentially a blend of values and experiences from Quaker practice, with the knowledge of humanistic psychology absorbed in his early professional career, and both of these influences are tempered by his experiences in the field. His understanding of human nature via religious systems is explored further in True Justice, and his belief that the negative feelings in the human personality (jealousy, anger, fear, hatred, etc.) are not inherent and fixed characteristics in any human being, but are the result of "our failure fully to grasp, and so to develop, the amazing potential of our natural endowment". (In the Middle, p. 5)

A number of studies have contributed to a fuller understanding of the methods and approaches of mediation and third party intervention in conflicts at both official-governmental and at unofficial-citizens diplomacy levels. A very good general account of unofficial diplomacy is provided by Berman and Johnson in the introduction to their book, which includes a definition of what later came to be called track two mediation and a classification of the types of citizens' organisations which conduct it. The definition is from Berman and Johnson, citing Curle:

"Adam Curle, writing of the work of the private diplomat, whom he describes as someone who engages in mediation or conciliation of conflict under personal or unofficial auspices, makes it clear that he is not describing bumbling amateurs impelled by purely good intentions, but individuals who are as 'subtle and experienced as the average public diplomat' ... and as well informed, not in the sense of having access to intelligence reports, but in the sense of knowing the people or comparable situations elsewhere, and perhaps in addition, having a high degree of academic competence." (Berman and Johnson, p. 7)

General aspects of third party intervention were dealt with in an early study by Oran Young, which included an assessment of the role of the United Nations and its agencies, including peacekeeping (Young 1967). Mitchell and Webb have provided an excellent account of how the practice of mediation, which has a history traceable to Greek and Roman times, became the subject of scholarly analysis during the 1970s and the 1980s. This interest emerged from an earlier concentration on the role of negotiators and bilateral bargaining which preoccupied scholars in the 1960s and the 1970s. By the 1980s, this study of negotiation had taken on the win-win, principled negotiation and mutual gain vocabulary of conflict resolution, particularly through the work of Roger Fisher and William Ury on the Harvard Program on Negotiation. At the same time, studies of negotiation strategies led to a closer examination of third party roles in helping to bring negotiations about and in facilitating them. This literature is now extensive and in addition to Mitchell and Webb includes Touval and Zartman's International Mediation: Theory and Practice; Touval's account of mediation initiatives around the conflict in the Middle East, Bercovitch and Rubin's Mediation in International Relations, and a special issue of the Journal of Peace Research published in February 1991, which focussed on some criticisms and encouraged constructive revision of the efficacy of new paradigm approaches in relation to power-coercion-reward models from the old paradigm. As the literature on mediation has grown, and as knowledge has increased from an accumulating base of case studies and reflections, one of the most significant questions which has emerged is that related to the relative merits and possible relationship between two contrasting types of mediation: firstly that of the biased mediator, often acting as the agent of a mediating state with

its own interests (moral and material) in the outcome of a conflict; and secondly that of the unbiased mediator, the neutral, unofficial peacemaker/citizen diplomat operating with the support of an NGO, church group, academic institute or similar non-state agency, without an explicit interest in the outcome.

FROM TRACK TWO MEDIATION TO PEACE BUILDING FROM BELOW: CURLE'S WORK IN OSIJEK AND THE IDEA OF NURTURING CULTURES OF PEACE

Curle's later work, from the mid-1990s, led to a revision and broadening of his concept of mediation and its place in peacemaking. Throughout his academic career, (which ended in 1978 when he retired from the Chair at Bradford), and also through the period of his 'retirement', Curle had been deeply involved in the practice of peacemaking. In the 1990s much of this involvement took the form of supporting the activity of the Osijek Centre for Peace, Non-violence and Human Rights. Osijek, a town in the Eastern Slavonia province of Croatia, was, with the adjacent town of Vukovar, the site of the most violent fighting of the Serb Croat War. This involvement with the people of Osijek, who were trying to rebuild a tolerant society while surrounded by enraged and embittered feelings caused by the war, motivated a considerable amount of reflection by Curle on the problems of practical peacemaking. It was apparent, for example, that the model of mediation specified in his book, In the Middle, and distilled from his experiences in the conflicts of the 1970s and 1980s was very difficult to apply on the ground, in the confusion and chaos of the type of conflict epitomised by the wars in former Yugoslavia. It was still the case that the use of mediatory techniques would be much more likely to produce the shift in attitudes and understanding necessary for a stable peace, a resolution of conflict, than the use of conventional diplomacy alone: "solutions reached through negotiation may be simply expedient and not imply any change of heart. And this is the crux of peace. There must be a change of heart. Without this no settlement can be considered secure." However, Curle realised through his involvement with the Osijek project that the range of conflict traumas and problems was so vast that the model of mediation based on the intervention of outsider-neutrals was simply not powerful or relevant enough to promote peace. He made an important revision to his peace praxis, as follows:

> "Since conflict resolution by outside bodies and individuals has so far proved ineffective (in the chaotic conditions of contemporary ethnic conflict - particularly, but not exclusively, in Somalia, Eastern Europe and the former USSR), it is essential to consider the peacemaking potential within the conflicting communities themselves." (New Challenges, p. 96)

Curle came to see the role of conflict resolution in post-cold war conflicts as providing a variety of support to local peacemakers through an advisory, consultative-facilitative role with workshops and training in a wide variety of potential fields which the local groups might identify as necessary. The task is to empower people of goodwill in conflict affected communities to rebuild democratic institutions, and the starting point for this to help in "the development of the local peacemakers' inner resources of wisdom, courage and compassionate non-violence". (New Challenges, p. 104)

CURLE'S LEGACY

Adam Curle died in Wimbledon, London, on 28 September 2006. His life and work touched many people worldwide, and his academic thinking is now firmly embedded in modern peace theory. Adam Curle's career in peace studies spanned over forty years. During this time he created the first department of Peace Studies in a British university and established the credibility of peace studies as an area worthy of academic recognition. Through his publications and teaching he built up a rich theory of the nature of peace and peacemaking, and was a pioneer and practitioner of the process of track two mediation, which, in his later practice, he transformed into a model of peacemaking based on the idea of peace building from below. He remained undogmatic and eclectic in his thinking. Influenced especially by his peacemaking work during the Balkan wars of the early 1990s: he was one of those peace intellectuals who led a revision of thinking about the process of peacemaking, including the idea that effective and sustainable peacemaking processes must be based not merely on the manipulation of peace agreements made by elites, but more importantly on the empowerment of communities torn apart by war to build peace from below.

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Recommended citation

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