INTRODUCTION

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This book was born in the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks on the United States of September 11, 2001. Seventeen days later, seventy-five people met for a working conference at American University, “Positive Approaches to Peacebuilding: A Practitioners’ Exploration.” In spite of the great turmoil in the country and world at that time, only one participant canceled her registration due to recent events, not she said, out of a fear of flying, but because if there was a war, she did not want to be so far away from home.

A year and a half later, as we readied this manuscript for publication, war clouds carrying American bombers were indeed darkening the skies, over Iraq.

What does this volume add to the global landscape of war making and peacebuilding? The draw for many who attended our conference was a yearning for “something new.” This book attempts to feed that yearning.

It does not offer a peacemaking panacea, though. Panaceas are hard to come by in a world made jittery by terrorist destruction taken to new heights and a world whose superpower clings to the geopolitics of military might. Nor does the book offer a whole new way of doing things—a prescription for abandoning the old. Nothing could be more reckless, counterproductive, and disrespectful of our peacemaking forbearers.

But the “something new” here is different enough to stand apart and bring a distinctive new element to the peacebuilding mix. It is embryonic enough to be dismissed by many and discarded as fanciful by others; but may yet catch the eye of some—those given, perhaps, to adventuring and a certain amount of daring or “divine naiveté.”[1]

Just days before U.S. and British troops were to invade Iraq, a former assistant secretary general of the United Nations and visionary of peace, Robert Muller, was seeing something quite remarkable on the global scene: “As unhappy as I am that war is upon us,” he said, “I’m taking great comfort in what’s going on in our world today. The world community is waging peace.” History will record, he continued, that the twenty-first century began with the global community “in an unprecedented public conversation” about the legitimacy of the impending war. “It is tense, it is tough, it is challenging, but this kind of global conversation has not happened before on this scale. . . . This is a stunning new era of global listening, speaking, and responsibility. . . . This is what waging peace looks like. . . .” (2003).

This speech gave heart to many who were deeply concerned over the Middle East action. Even though this war would surely happen, Muller's vision implied that the world would not be the same on the other side of the war as it had been after all previous wars. This implication gave hope and flight to imagination on the part of some: "*How* will the postwar world be different in light of this new global conversation, and what can *I* do to help realize the promise of this new era of possibility?"

Although as we go to press it is too soon to know just how the world might be different in this now-postwar period, this story provides a timely illustration of the starting premise of this book. That is, without positive vision and an image of a better future that can draw our sights toward a new horizon, stir our energies, and give impulse to our actions, it is hard to know where we are headed and even harder to get there! It is in the writing of new narratives and the envisioning of new vistas that we can keep hope alive and chart a clearer and more sure path to a future of our choosing.

This book is about finding concrete ways for accomplishing these high goals and realizing new possibilities in peacebuilding. It asks no small amount from each of us, as readers. It asks us, first, to join together in valuing the best of our peacebuilding practice to date, some fine examples of which appear on these pages. It asks us, singly and together, to bring our own best imagining to how some new methods and approaches might be introduced or might enrich current practice in fresh new ways. It then invites us to courageously innovate in our own peacebuilding practice—or perhaps extend a supportive hand to others venturing to do so. It invites us into the conviction that a new world order is being born and that we are the co-creators of it. And for some of us, simply getting started—and reading on—may require a certain act of faith, the suspending of disbelief, or a healthy measure of divine naiveté.

Whatever the case, let's get started!

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY *POSITIVE APPROACHES*?

Positive approaches are a group of concepts, theories, and activities for working toward change in relationships, organizations, communities, and other human systems.[2] Developed predominantly in the organizational development, education and training, psychotherapy, and counseling sectors, positive approaches are distinguished from more traditional, problem-focused approaches by the assumptions they hold and the characteristics they share. A primary assumption of most positive approaches is that in all human systems there are things that work well, or have in the past, and that these can be identified, analyzed, and built upon as the foundation for envisioning, designing, and implementing system change. Positive approaches often rely on interviewing for data collection and pay particular attention to how questions are framed, whenever possible seeking to discover when and how things are working at their best.

A basic tenet of social constructionist thought, which informs much of the thinking about positive approaches, is that there is a direct link between image and action and between positive image and positive action. Positive approaches, therefore, have a forward-looking orientation to producing change, rather than focusing on analyzing the ills of the past, and they place emphasis on visioning and creating a positive image of a preferred future.

Rooted in the experiences and lives or histories of individuals and groups in the system, positive approaches are culturally relevant and contextualized to each new situation. They value diversity as a source of creativity and innovation and seek the participation of diverse stakeholders so that the full system is represented in any change initiative affecting them. Positive approaches offer tools for bringing people together to discover shared values and purposes and for helping a diverse group plan and act together on a common future. They promote the distribution of power across the entire system, giving opportunities for any stakeholder to step into a leadership role as the situation dictates. The traditional concept of centralized control and coordination gives way to the idea of multiple centers of control and many points of coordination.

Common Characteristics of Positive Approaches

A number of characteristics are common to most or all positive approaches to social change[3]:

- They share an orientation to the positive power and potential of human beings, and they draw the analytical focus to that positive potential for the purpose of more effectively mobilizing it.
- There is an emphasis on the importance of meaning-making, which is usually done together, in relationship with others in the system.
- There is an emphasis on eliciting and telling stories as a means of conveying holistic wisdom, knowledge, and meaning.
- Focused attention is given to indigenous resources for change—those strengths, capacities, practices, and experiences that are inherent in any system.
- Attention is given to that which inspires and gives hope in the human experience.
- There is an emphasis on generating visual images and exhibiting positive examples.
- The intent is to motivate and mobilize for action.

These common characteristics find expression in a broad variety of forms. Positive approaches to peacebuilding may take the form of a specific technique, method, or practice; a phased methodology or group process; a full-fledged strategy for producing systemic change, involving multiple interventions, phases, techniques, and/or processes; an art form such as music or drama; or as a philosophy of living. In this volume we shall meet examples of each of these forms.

Positive Approaches to Peacebuilding

In this volume we give particular attention to potential applications in peacebuilding of *Appreciative Inquiry,* a positive-change methodology that involves a system's stakeholders in moving through a four-phased process of Discovery, Dream, Design, and Delivery (or Destiny), known as the *4-D Cycle,* to connect to the capacities, strengths, and lived experience within the system, create a shared vision of the future, and mobilize creative action toward its realization. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) originated in the organizational development field in the mid-1980s and is in wide use around the world today in businesses, communities, international development, and social-change organizations of many kinds.

Peacebuilders experimenting with Appreciative Inquiry have at times used the entire 4-D Cycle and at times parts of it, most typically appreciative interviewing from AI's Discovery Phase. *Appreciative interviewing* is the practice of using affirmative questions to carry out inquiry among stakeholders into the positive-core elements in the life of the system. *Positive-core elements* are the essential life-giving—and peace-promoting—resources, capacities, and experiences in the conflict system that can be built upon as foundations for peacebuilding. They include living values and virtues; collective wisdom and knowledge; traditions and rituals; indigenous, cultural, and religious teachings and practices that promote tolerance, pluralism, justice, and peace; and the lived experience of the people and groups embodied in their stories of courage, strength, resilience, compassion, and cooperation in living with differences, as well as their hopes, dreams, and visions for a better future. It is these forces for goodness that positive-change methodologies tap to inspire vision and mobilize action.

Sometimes peacebuilders access these positive-core elements through other forms of *appreciative process* (in addition to or instead of interviewing), such as scholarly research, dialogue processes, rituals, and various forms of artistic expression. As with appreciative interviewing, these other appreciative processes may stand alone as an intervention, or they may be combined with other conflict resolution and peacebuilding methods, including problem-oriented approaches.

A PREVIEW OF WHAT IS TO COME

In this volume we explore positive approaches to peacebuilding in theory and practice. Part one, “Origins and Encounters,” lays the groundwork for examining a wide array of applications in the remainder of the book. In the first chapter, Mohammed Abu-Nimer establishes the foundations of this exploration in the conflict resolution and peacebuilding field by giving an historical sketch of the development of the field, identifying core assumptions and principles of peacebuilding, and describing positive elements in existing peacebuilding practice. Next, Diana Whitney, Claudia Liebler, and David Cooperrider present the theory and practice of Appreciative Inquiry as it originated in organizational development and was expanded and adapted to international development. They conclude by proposing five areas in which Appreciative Inquiry might contribute to the practice of peacebuilding. In chapter three, Claudia Liebler and Cynthia Sampson relate the conceptual and theoretical underpinnings of Appreciative Inquiry to the practice of peacebuilding and show some of the ways in which the AI 4-D Cycle lends itself to experimentation and adaptation in peacebuilding contexts.

The sections that follow present five arenas of practice of positive approaches to peacebuilding. In part two, “Toward Cultures of Peace,” Elise Boulding presents her methodology for imaging a nonviolent world and describes the findings from one imaging workshop. Mark Chupp describes the process for creating a Local Zone of Peace in a violence-prone region of postwar El Salvador. John Paul Lederach offers a short essay with a “non-theory” of how positive approaches operate as a prelude to a case study in which he and Herm Weaver show the power of music and storytelling in putting forward a positive vision of a how one high school could help bring peace to the world. Joseph Montville and Heidi Paulson Winder describe how a project documenting the long history of creative coexistence by Muslims, Jews, and Christians in Muslim Spain and the medieval Mediterranean is being used to promote a vision of coexistence for contemporary Israelis and Palestinians.

In part three, “Social Transformation,” Sam Gbaydee Doe describes a strategic opportunities assessment of Guinea-Conakry, carried out by the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding, as part of a strategy for strengthening the peace-generating capacities in that country. Peter Delahaye and Bharat Krishnan tell how Appreciative Inquiry was used in the Indian state of Nagaland to involve diverse stakeholders, including children in large numbers, in developing a vision and concrete ideas for achieving progress toward socioeconomic development, peace, and good governance in that state. Mary Hope Schwoebel and Erin McCandless describe how appreciative process is used as part of a strategy for empowering marginalized communities in Zimbabwe and then consider the potential for use of Appreciative Inquiry in complex peacebuilding and development contexts.

In part four, “Conflict Resolution,” Michael Henderson tells the story of the Initiatives of Change center for reconciliation in Caux, Switzerland, and how personal stories and stage productions are used there to convey universal truths and positive examples of inner personal change, moral courage, and forgiveness and reconciliation. Thomas Porter and Mark Mancao present a model for transforming conflict within The United Methodist Church in the United States that combines the use of circle practice, appreciative questioning, and the principles of restorative justice. Mauricio Rios and Scott Fisher propose a model for an Appreciative Dialogue Workshop to advance the peace process in a longstanding maritime conflict between Bolivia and Chile.

In part five, “Healing and Reconciliation,” Peggy Green describes her experience with using appreciative questions in facilitating dialogue between gay and evangelical Christians. Anastasia White uses a social-constructionist lens to interpret the process whereby her relationship with a former adversary from the apartheid regime of South Africa was transformed through the rewriting of their respective conflict narratives. Nancy Good Sider explores the role of positive approaches in posttraumatic healing and growth, and presents findings derived from appreciative interviews conducted with peacebuilders who have suffered trauma. Paula Green and Tamra d’Estrée write about the practice of giving voice to the voiceless in conflict situations, and tell how the “infusion” of a dialogue group of second-generation Holocaust survivors into a dialogue group of Bosnian Serbs and Muslims provided the latter group with a model of healed relationship. Amela and Randy Puljek-Shank explore the question, “How does healing take place?” and examine the intersection of Appreciative Inquiry principles and methods with various approaches to healing in the aftermath of conflict.

In part six, “Designing Organizations for Peacebuilding,” Charles Gibbs and Barbara Hartford describe how Appreciative Inquiry has contributed to the development of the organizational design, charter, organizational culture, and peacebuilding program of the global network, United Religions Initiative. Jaco Cilliers, Robin Gulick, and Meg Kinghorn tell how appreciative approaches, including Appreciative Inquiry, were used to advance the strategic visioning and design process for the peacebuilding program at Catholic Relief Services.

In the Conclusion, the editors highlight the major findings of the book, discuss appropriate contexts for the use of positive approaches in peacebuilding, as well as the major challenges to their use, and they propose an agenda for further research and experimentation with positive approaches to peacebuilding.

ENDNOTES

1. *Divine naiveté* is a term coined by John Paul Lederach, which he defines informally as "when you pursue things that along the way don't seem that important, or even advisable, but later turn out to be key and the most important" (2003).
2. This section is based on unpublished work (dated March 2003) by Andrea Strimling and Claudia Liebler in conceptualizing how positive approaches might be used in advancing interfield cooperation in complex conflicts.
3. This section is drawn from unpublished work (dated March 2002) by Claudia Liebler and Cynthia Sampson on a typology of positive approaches to peacebuilding.

REFERENCES

Lederach, John Paul. 2003. Email message to the author (April 24).

Muller, Robert. 2003. "Waging Peace: Taking Comfort from Footholds Gained." As reprinted at http://www.goodmorningworld.org/documents/030319.pdf.