



Scouting and the Concept of Culture of Peace and Inter-religious Dialogue

Dominic Simard,

*Member of the "Association des Scouts du Canada"
researcher (Master's degree) in social and cultural anthropology,
Laval University, Quebec, Canada.*

Research on the discourse of peace in the World Scout Movement¹

Hello, my name is Dominic Simard. I have the pleasure of having been invited to this congress, on the one hand to participate in the "Youth Event" as a representative of the Association des Scouts du Canada (ASC) and, secondly, to provide my specific contribution to the Congress by sharing the progress of qualitative research that I am currently undertaking as part of a Master's degree in social and cultural anthropology at the Laval University, in Quebec (Canada).

In this presentation, I will try to offer an overview of my current research, covering the construction of a discourse of peace in the World Scout Movement and in particular, at the 21st World Scout Jamboree held last summer in England.

First, I will try to define the concept of peace and show how contemporary anthropology tackles it. Then, I will explain more about my choice of subject, my research question and the objectives that it aims to cover. Finally, I will present the methodology that I used with an emphasis on an original approach: participatory photography.

¹ Original title: Scouting and the Concept of Peace/Culture of Peace ..

I will conclude with the results so far and future projects in this research area. I repeat, this research is still a work in progress: it began a year and a half ago and will continue for another year.

Introduction

The title of the workshop today is “Culture of Peace and Inter-religious Dialogue.” It is interesting to note that even the title contains words that express a certain image of what many people understand by peace. Besides the word “peace”, the title contains “culture”, “dialogue” and “religious”. Here, there is already a construction that reflects a certain vision of what peace might be. But let us leave this vision aside for the moment and try to see how anthropology can highlight and define the contours of the concept of peace, which remain very vague.

What is peace?

Anyone interested in the concept of peace must first try to clarify what peace means. Is it something tangible or merely a state of mind? Is it something that comes from within oneself, or depends on relationships with others? Is the concept of peace political, religious, judicial, social, universal or even reasonable? Is wanting to create a culture of peace utopian? I will come back later to the notion of utopia to show how, when considered in a positive and constructive way, it can help us solve several conceptual problems concerning the idea of peace.

Recognising the sources of violence

In agreement with Professor David Adams, who is here today, I must say that the understanding of peace and the establishment of a “culture of peace” must be accompanied by an acknowledgment of the need to begin thinking about the sources of violence in our societies and the adverse effects they produce and maintain.

In this sense, Johan Galtung, founder of the International Peace Research Institute in Oslo, believes - and this may seem surprising at first - that peace is above all the absence of violence, but he considers this latter concept in a broader sense. He thus first examines two facets of violence: personal (direct) violence and structural violence (which is indirect and without an immediate agent but which produces effects similar to direct violence)². This leads us to wonder if we are not currently living in what might be called a culture of war, as Professor Adams says. Think of all the violent stimuli to which we are exposed daily. In this regard, we already know the effects of, for example, youth exposure to trivialised and even glorified violence by certain media such as television, movies or video games.

This overexposure leads to a systematic desensitisation in the medium and long term. Thus, it is no longer soldiers who are socialised to violence but society as a whole, including young people and children. As a result of seeing, hearing and experiencing violence (whether

2 Galtung, J., 1969, Violence, Peace and Peace Research, Journal of Peace Research, 6, 3: 167-191.

physical, verbal or psychological), insensitivity to violent phenomena leads to some form of acceptance and legitimisation of it. It is well known that in many countries today, the State promotes a certain kind of violence and its legitimate use in order to maintain power and stifle any attempt to challenge the established order. At international level, the legitimisation of violence hidden behind a false message of peace seems to be an increasingly common practice.

One must admit that absolute power for a government is often to get the population to accept the use of violence while manipulating social agents and keeping them in a state of fear and coercion. But it is also well known that violence breeds violence. Thus, by allowing itself the right to violence, the State inevitably conveys the message of necessary and inevitable violence. Furthermore, so-called terrorist groups quickly capture the importance of violence as a means to attract attention and to get their case heard. Finally, young people are not excluded from this violent reality, quite the opposite: too often young people learn to use violence to build their reputation and defend their interests; they become insensitive to verbal abuse and easily move on to physical violence. Faced with this, one can understand that searching for the conditions necessary for peace can but be helped by trying to debunk (with methodological precautions) the causes and consequences of violence in our societies of violence as a means to attract attention and to get their case heard. Finally, young people are not excluded from this violent reality, quite the opposite: too often young people learn to use violence to build their reputation and defend their interests; they become insensitive to verbal abuse and easily move on to physical violence. Faced with this, one can understand that searching for the conditions necessary for peace can but be helped by trying to debunk (with methodological precautions) the causes and consequences of violence in our societies.

How can one tackle this?

When social and cultural anthropology examines violence, it can enlighten us on some aspects that I consider crucial in analysing violence, or types of violence. First, we must realise that violence is culturally constructed and cannot be reduced to a universal social structure and must be understood as a “volatile” reality, i.e., it is constructed, negotiated, amended, reproduced, and so on. We can identify some points to remember when starting to reflect on the anthropological effects of violence. Here are a few:

- The use of violence can always be explained.
- The arms or “security” industry is the largest in the world.
- Violence is not senseless or irrational.
- The more powers are centralised, the more a culture of violence is likely to be born.
- Violent situations are often only partially represented and considered out of context.
- Journalists too often fail to examine the causes of violence.
- Violence is a cultural category that is historically constructed and changes over time. The way of seeing, tolerating or regulating violence in a particular society is therefore contextual.
- Acts of violence are derived mainly from a form of established ritual.
- Violence is actually a symbolic act that conveys a powerful message.
- Violence pursues a specific goal and is often accompanied by a structure that legitimises its use.
- Indifference is the worst enemy of human rights.

Following on from these few reminders, however, it should be said that the study of the effects of violence is most often very difficult, for example due to the fact that understanding violent situations is always conditioned and situated. One must therefore be very careful because the transcription of violent events always faces the issue of veracity and authenticity. Finally, this means that violence is a dimension of social life that must be approached with great care.

Anthropology and peace

Social and cultural anthropology essentially aims to understand the ramifications of social relations between different actors and different cultural contexts. In this context, it seeks to highlight the complexity of social and cultural phenomena, but in order to do so anthropology must be based on some empirical foundation. The phenomena that it analyses must therefore be part of social reality, i.e., they must have a social existence. This is the case with social phenomena such as marriage or parenthood: we can observe and recognise that they exist in the anthropological sense of the word. But can the same be said of peace? How can one study something that is so ambiguous?

Since we cannot put peace in a test tube or look at it under a microscope, it should be understood that an anthropology of peace can only come to conclusions about its object of study indirectly, i.e., through the observation and the analysis of types of “peace”, “pacification”, peacemaking interventions and empirical peace processes that exist in the world today.

In the light of these observations, what I propose to do here is what I have called an anthropology of peace efforts, which focuses on an ethnographic description and an anthropological analysis of the contexts in which human actions are undertaken to promote peace or to establish it. It is in this sense that I use the term anthropology of peace efforts: an anthropology that seeks to understand the meaning and force of a peace effort, i.e., one or more initiatives taken together in order to question or reaffirm the foundation of a lasting peace.

The choice of research subject

Now let us talk about my choice of subject for study, which focuses on the discourse of peace in World Scouting. First, because I myself spent 12 years in this Movement, from the age of nine until 20, I consider myself to have a certain Scout ‘culture’ that led me to reflect on the characteristics of this non-formal education, and which has left a permanent imprint on my personal and social development. Secondly, in the winter of 1998-99 in Chile, I was able to take part in what can be called the “crowning moment” of a life in Scouting: a large gathering of Scouts from around the world, commonly known as the “World Scout Jamboree”. This major event, whose official theme was “Building Peace Together”, brought together 35 thousand young people from 157 countries for two weeks. This was my first intensive intercultural experience.

In 2007, I found an ideal context: while I was looking for a subject for my Master’s degree in anthropology, I realised that the World Scout Movement was celebrating its centenary

and in the summer would be holding the 21st World Scout Jamboree in England. For me, who wanted to do research in familiar territory, I had just found the perfect place! With the experience of the Jamboree in Chile, 8 years ago, it was now just a matter of developing a research question that would allow me to start to think again about the idea of peace in Scouting.

Research Question

-Question:

How was the discourse of peace constructed at the 21st World Scout Jamboree? This primary question refers especially to how the theme of peace was prepared, put into action and appropriated by the participants at the event. In addition, the research question should not be taken in isolation: its relevance is measured in particular by its ability to be broken down into sub-questions. For example, how does the Scout Movement define peace? How do young Scouts from all over the world conceive peace? What values are shared and collectively support an image of peace developed at the Jamboree (as well as within the World Scout Movement)?

- Objectives:

1 – To make an inventory of action explicitly directed towards defining and communicating the image of peace at the Jamboree.

Here, I am referring particularly to collecting information in a specific place: the Global Development Village. It is located on the Jamboree site and includes over a hundred information stands and interactive workshops addressing current global issues facing the planet. These issues are divided into four themes: peace, human rights, health and the environment. I therefore concentrated my data collection on workshops addressing the theme of peace. Further information was collected throughout the Jamboree site as a whole.

2 – To understand how the participants received and appropriated the image of peace transmitted by the Jamboree.

This objective concerns the context of receiving an image, the impression made and the encoding of the information received. It also touches on peace as it is constructed in the imaginary of Scout participants (of different nationalities).

- Specific objectives:

1 – To define all the ideals, aims and objectives contained in the concept of peace transmitted by the Jamboree.

This objective relates to the first main objective, this time by more accurately describing the components that define and communicate the image of peace transmitted through workshops, meetings or discussions.

2 – To assess the degree of correspondence between how peace is imagined and Scout values in the discourse of participants.

Here, it is a matter of seeing if the construction of peace in the minds of Scout participants is based on shared values in the Scout movement as a whole. Finally,

the imaginary (where the image is constructed) must be understood as the place that gives birth to values (through normative judgments).

3 – To enable Scouts from around the world to make their voices heard by showing how they contribute to the definition of what peace is, or could be.

4 – To give the concept of peace a more human dimension and a more tangible image.

Concerning this latter goal (4), it should be noted that one of the major contributions of an anthropological perspective on peace has been to show us that, in general, the West does not yet know how to speak of peace. As the French-Canadian anthropologist Martin Hébert writes in an issue of the journal *Anthropology and Societies* dedicated to the theme of peace:

*“We do not know how to talk about it because Western discourse (at least) in this regard remains hampered by an implicit “idyll” that prevents us from conceiving a truly peaceful society other than by falling back on utopian visions that depict static, unanimitistic paradises, divorced from the constraints of human existence.”*³

It is with this general finding in mind that my anthropological reflection on the goal of peace is to circumvent this preconception to give peace a more tangible image. To do this, I think we must reconsider not only our relationship to the concept of peace but also our relationship to the concept that, in the West at least, seems to support it: i.e., the concept of utopia. Other objectives of this research are therefore:

- To deepen the understanding of peace as a utopian discourse.
- To highlight the positive and constructive dimension of utopia, in connection with the concept of peace.

However, before describing the intimate relationship that binds these two ideas (peace and utopia), it is worth addressing the very concept of utopia in order to try to discern its contours and adopt a specific approach.

Utopia in the service of a positive peace

In a famous book first published in 1516 entitled *Utopia* (1516), Thomas More (1478-1535) founds the concept of utopia: from the Greek word “*ouhi*” (no) and “*topos*” (place). More invented this “non-place”, this non-existent island or land. More than a mere “Nowhere Island”, More made it an “island” of peace: “In the stanza that prefaces the two Basel editions in 1518, before the *Utopia* map, More calls the island U-topia: it is the island of happiness⁴”. Thus, in his work, More not only sets out the function of utopia itself, which is to transcend time, but he concentrated seriously on the issue of peace in terms that are still relevant today: should peace simply be considered as a suspension of war or at least as a limitation to it? Or “is it the emergence of another, deeper principle (departing from the logic of self-preservation): the appearance of responsibility for others?⁵”

Far from being a mere static intellectual construct or frozen paradise in the intangible world (an idyllic concept of utopia that seems widespread in the West), the utopia that I am seeking to reaffirm concerns the means, not the end result. By means I mean ideals such as that

3 Hébert, M., 2006, Présentation: paix, violences et anthropologie, in *Une anthropologie de la paix?*, *Anthropologie et sociétés*, vol. 30, no. 1, p.17.

4 Goyard-Fabre, S. (Presentation and notes), 1987, *More, Utopie*, Translation by Marie Delcourt, GF-Flammarion, Paris, p.17.

5 Abensour, M., 2000, *L'utopie de Thomas More* ~ Walter Benjamin, 10/vingt, Sens&Tonka, p. 101-102.

of peace, which enable one to conceive a horizon and establish certain conditions, certain values, from which the possibility of an authentically human life can be put into action in an infinite number of ways⁶.

Methodology: how to tackle this in the field

Everyone who has had the chance to experience a World Jamboree knows how this event features a huge intercultural melting pot through an intense programme of equally interesting activities. For a social science researcher who intends to analyse the discourse of peace during an event that brings together tens of thousands of young Scouts, figuring out how to do so becomes vital to the success of collecting data, especially as a Jamboree only lasts around 12 days.

For my part, having already experienced a World Jamboree, I knew I could not carry out semi-structured interviews (one hour each, for example) with participants at the Jamboree since the time required for this exercise was simply not available (participants already have a heavy schedule of activities). I therefore conducted focus groups at local level with twelve French-Canadian Scouts who attended the Jamboree in England. Interviews were carried out before the event and upon their return. This approach allowed me to better understand the effect of participating in the Jamboree on the discourse of peace and on peace in the imaginary of these 12 young French-Canadians.

On the Jamboree site, I did what is known in anthropology as participant observation, i.e., an “intense social interaction between the subjects and the researcher in their midst.”⁷ I also conducted short, semi-structured interviews with a number of young adults or accompanying members of international service teams (ISTs). All these methods of data collection targeted the same goal: to gain a better understanding of the logic behind the construction of a discourse of peace among the participants at the 21st World Scout Jamboree.

Focus on a novel approach: participatory photography

If there is one thing that remains essential to the success of any qualitative research, it is the need for the researcher to be open, creative and a handyman. In this spirit, I thus created a tool perfectly adapted to the “field” of the World Jamboree and to my research topic: participatory photography. Since the interest of this research focuses on the collective construction of the image of peace, it is relevant to look at this construction in terms of discourse, but we must not forget that a picture is sometimes worth a thousand words. For this reason, I distributed 25 disposable cameras (27 shots) to people that I targeted at the event and to whom I proposed to contribute to my research by taking photographs all over the Jamboree site on what they considered to be “images of peace.” The aim of this project was to stimulate reflection on what some Scout participants identify as “symbols” of peace while pursuing a subsequent reflection and discussion on the images that help to clarify the discourse of peace established during the Jamboree.

⁶ Godin, C., 2000, *Faut-il R habiller l'utopie?*, Nantes: éditions Pleins Feux.

⁷ Bogdan, R. and Taylor, S.J., 1975, *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods. A Phenomenological Approach to the Social Sciences*, New York, John Wiley and Sons, p. 5 (retranslated from French).

Results so far

As I stated at the outset of this presentation, this research, which examines the concept of peace in the World Scout Movement, is still ongoing. It began a year ago and will continue over the upcoming year. Nevertheless, if we look at the initial apparent results, we can identify a number of strong leads, such as:

- The discourse of peace is constructed in reference to values entrenched in the Scout Promise and Law.
- The definition Scouts give of peace is that of a positive peace which opens onto a notion of shared values in the expansion of our relations with others.
- Within the context of a peace effort, the World Jamboree is a place where there is a positive and constructive utopia that is worth investigating further.

Concerning the results of the participatory photography project, this interesting experiment, which involved some twenty Scout participants from eight different countries, has proved to be very revealing in terms of the choice of “images” representing peace. “Phase 2” of the project is now in place: a website comprising photos taken by participants in the project was put online and will soon be in the programme of “Gifts for Peace” of the World Organization of Scout Movement (WOSM). In particular, the site will serve to collect feedback from Scout participants who took the photos featured on it. These young people will explain how the photos they have taken represent peace. A place to contribute to a blog and offer comments is also available to all those who want to continue the discussion on the topic of peace in the World Scout Movement.

I invite you to visit the site, entitled “Gifts for Peace” (<http://donspourlapaix.wordpress.com>), to examine the “images of peace” taken by Scouts (from Africa, Canada, and a young Indian). These young people have a particular perspective on peace in Scouting and it is by giving them the floor and listening to them that we will have a better idea of how they contribute to the definition of what peace is, or could be. Finally, it is through such initiatives that we can ultimately better understand the meaning and force of a peace effort to then establish or reaffirm the foundations of a lasting peace in society.

CONCLUSION

The ongoing research that I have just briefly introduced leads us to focus on social peace and intercultural understanding as a means and not as an end. In this regard, the anthropology of peace reminds us of the importance of reconsidering our relationship with this powerful symbol to try to establish the conditions required to achieve it, beyond the logic of “all or nothing”, i.e., more rooted in so-called positive peace. In view of the fact that the theme of peace is often less studied than that of the phenomena of violence, it becomes very important to propose a description and an understanding of an international social context in which

there is a genuine “peace effort”, i.e., a World Scout Jamboree. This is what I intend to do by publishing a Master’s degree thesis of around a hundred pages covering the construction of the discourse of peace at a World Scout Jamboree as well as within the World Scout Movement.

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