# Assessing Brazil's Culture of Peace

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Visitors are amazed by their first impressions of Brazil. Foreigners have always received a warm welcome. Ethnic mixture has taken place with a frequency and intensity incomparable to that of other countries. The same language is spoken nationwide. During Carnival, people from all socioeconomic classes dance and frolic together without distinction. Cordiality, informality, and spontaneity appear to be Brazilian traits. But this is only a part of a bigger, more complex picture that, unfortunately, also encompasses a variety of serious problems, some easily detected by a visitor and some demanding a deeper analysis of the socioeconomic context of the country. In contrast to idealized images, often reinforced by state-subsidized advertising, there are difficulties that demand crucial analysis and efficient political and cultural actions. This article uses the template suggested by de Rivera (2004/this issue) to make an analysis of Brazil's culture of peace. Although our analysis is mostly qualitative, whenever possible we refer our observations to the template's objective indicators.

Whether due to its vast size, economic importance, population, abundance of fresh water, the Amazon rain forest, or its success in professional soccer (being the world's only five-time World Cup champion), Brazil enjoys an outstanding position on the planetary scene. In the minds of many—including numerous Brazilians—it is the land of "racial harmony," a nation of "cordial people" who live in peace.

In many countries, the desire for peace arose from the intense suffering produced by harsh wars or by the risk of a nuclear conflict. In Brazil, the peace movement arose from the growth and spread of urban and rural violence, particularly when violence and crime began to victimize middle and upper social classes in large urban areas.

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Violence has reached such extremes and devastating frequencies that political and scientific communities now acknowledge violence as a serious public health problem (Yunes & Rajs, 1994). The achievement of peace is no longer an abstract idealistic goal to be nurtured by a handful of dreamers and poets. It has become a real necessity for most of the population and a top priority for the nation's government.

The peace that Brazilians seek is directly linked to reducing crime, such as homicide, burglary, street theft, kidnapping, domestic violence, and vehicular homicide. It is the threat of everyday violent actions that triggers the awareness of the necessity to build a more peaceful society, rather than the existence of any threat of war, international disputes, or foreign invasions. Thus, an assessment of Brazil's culture of peace must include reflections on how society views and seeks to confront this everyday violence. We must keep this in mind as we reflect on each of the eight aspects of the culture of peace proposed by the United Nations (UN) and organized by the assessment template proposed by de Rivera (2004/this issue). These aspects are education for peace, equality of men and women, tolerance and solidarity, democratic participation, free flow of information, human rights and moral responsibilities, conditions for sustainable development, and international peace and security. We consider each in turn.

## EDUCATION FOR PEACE

How violence should be confronted is the constant theme of countless debates taking place all over Brazil—whether at governmental and nongovernmental levels, in media-promoted discussions, or in the context of other social situations and small group conversations. Generally speaking, we can identify three basic approaches to the issue, each stressing a particular point: *repression, structural change,* or a *culture of peace*. The assumptions and possible impacts of each paradigm need special analysis.

The first approach is based on repression and views the solution for the problem of violence as consisting of forceful tactics such as providing more police intervention, building more prisons, and passing stricter laws, such as the reduction of the age—from 18 years to 16 years—that a person can be held acountable for a crime. This perspective can lead us to consider reforms that are needed in Brazil's criminal justice system.[1] It has been the most popular approach, because it *apparently* provides faster results and contributes to a symbolic (but essential) feeling of security and justice. However, it deals with violence only after it has occurred and

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[1]Brazil requires reforms that will enable more efficient law enforcement, particularly reforms that include the establishment of mechanisms of social control over the legal system to drastically reduce corruption and impunity. It is also essential to restructure the police force so it can truly respond to its mission of protecting people. Among the necessary measures, we would stress the need for education and special training of law enforcement agents, better salaries, and the removal of the criminal connections between some police officers (and other institutional agents) and organized crime.

fails to recognize the country's structural deficiencies and socioeconomic injustices that lie at the bottom of social deviance and delinquency.

The second approach posits that violence is caused by the social structure and economic model that characterize the country. Unless exclusion and injustice are eliminated, little can be done to prevent violence. Proposals related to structural political and socioeconomic changes that would result in a more just society are definitely fundamental. However, a distorted view of this model sometimes leads people, including some of the country's leaders, to automatically associate poverty with violence.[2] There is also a problem in associating the key processes for eliminating violence exclusively with complex changes that require long-term solutions and are beyond the ordinary individual's power. The endeavor is so huge that most people feel discouraged and helpless. The acceptance of the social change model as the only way to build a peaceful society may end up generating immobility and a state of fear and paranoia that drives the vicious cycle of violence along the route of persistent and cruel escalation. Hence, although it is necessary to make efficient reforms in the economic, political, and legal systems, this is not sufficient. We need to educate people about a third approach, an approach that focuses on ways to actually promote peace among human beings.

This third approach is education for a culture of peace. It aims at changing populations' and institutions' awareness and behavior, and is inspired by peace as the ultimate human value. It stresses the urgency and feasibility of reducing violence through integrated, multistrategic solutions based on education, health, ethics, and civic involvement, together with the improvement of quality of life. This model emphasizes prevention and the active promotion of universal values such as peace, justice, diversity, respect, empathy, and solidarity.

Whereas a repressive perspective tends to interpret violence as an expression of evil by antisocial individuals and a structural perspective tends to view violence and criminals as societal victims, education for a culture of peace understands violence as a collective problem that can manifest at individual, collective, institutional, and governmental levels. Although the solution to violence requires a serious commitment that encompasses personal, cultural, socioeconomic, and political changes, ed-

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[2]This has given rise to two premises underlying many discourses: (a) Violence is a phenomenon that is exclusive to, or characteristic of, the poor; and (b) poverty is the utmost cause of violence. These premises involve myths that reinforce the Brazilian elite's traditional and deep-seated prejudices against the excluded. It is vital for everyone who wants to contribute to a culture of peace in Brazil to denounce and combat these false and erroneous suppositions. These may be combated by the following evidence. First, violence is present in all social classes, age groups, and ethnic groups, not just in Brazil but all over the world. Second, poverty does not necessarily imply violence. The vast majority of the Brazilian (and the world) population is poor and still struggles hard to lead a peaceful life. Rather than attributing violence to the poor, we may note that economic disparities, social exclusion, and hopelessness, within the context of a hedonistic, consumerist culture, are expressions of a *structural violence* that contributes to the occurrence of *interpersonal violence.*

ucation for peace must allow individuals to realize the actual possibility of contributing to the construction of peace within the boundaries of their capacities, abilities, and resources. The most important resource is each person's deep commitment to the value of peace, a commitment that will translate into everyday actions.

Education for peace enables individuals to question the kind of culture that has formed them and to contribute as their actions build it over and over again. In the case of the Western world, it is a culture that may destroy its people by its materialist values as well as its focus on consumerism and immediate pleasure. Such values are in a clear causal relation with the state of violence citizens of the Western world are living through, violence that ranges from relations between people, groups, and nations, all the way to people's relationship with the environment.

Education plays a critical role in the construction of a culture of peace. There is a troubling tendency in Brazil to believe that simply improving the quality of schooling can rectify socioeconomic injustices. Schooling is viewed as a way to train people to meet job market requirements, as if that automatically would solve people's needs. Considering the crucial role that the school system plays in the intellectual and moral development of the next generations, the challenges in this area are immense. Despite the fact that Brazil is now spending 5.1% of its gross domestic product (GDP) on education (de Rivera, 2004/this issue) and has made considerable progress in enrolling large numbers of children in the public education system, the quality of schooling generally lags behind desired standards. There is currently an 85.2% adult literacy rate (UN, 2002). All children and adolescents must enroll, stay, and succeed in the school system, which should provide the education needed to help build values consistent with a culture of peace. To achieve this goal, the crucial role played by teachers must be recognized. Their role must be valued in Brazilian society by providing them adequate training, improving their self-esteem and financial situation, and raising their awareness of the educational possibilities available to them and to their students.

Research on school violence and bullying in Brazil is a recent development (Abramovay & Rua, 2002) that clearly indicates the need for programs aimed at teaching peaceful conflict resolution as well as tolerance and dialogue, improving the pedagogical strategies, and involving parents and community more deeply in school life (Milani, 2003). In recent years, a considerable number of schools have begun to address issues such as peace, ethics, and citizenship in their activities. However, in general, these initiatives still lack boldness and need to become regular, systematic, and more creative in their methodologies. In this respect, a major role is being played by Brazilian nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), which are offering educational programs based on arts, culture, sports, and professional training at a community level to thousands of young people, opening doors for their dreams and talents (Castro, Abramovay, Rua, & Andrade, 2001).

In a country such as Brazil, where violence has reached degrading levels, peace education must not be treated merely as an internal matter of schools or classroom

contexts solely aimed at children and adolescents. Education must be considered a priority and should be encouraged at all levels, including the family, the media, and the entire social system. This necessarily implies personal and institutional responsibilities that extend to all members of the society.

## EQUALITY OF MEN AND WOMEN

Brazil has achieved concrete progress in developing gender equality. Today, more women than men are admitted to federal universities. The ratio still depends on the course of study selected by the candidate, but the fact per se is surprising when compared to Brazil's historical records. This certainly is contributing in a decisive way to the accomplishment of a better-balanced work market. The progress in education, taken together with the rights granted by the federal constitution and complementary civil laws, enables us to say that at least for a part of the population, the middle class, the situation is indeed improving.

However, when we take into account the poor, we still observe the enormous burden that most women have to carry. Women maintain most of the households, which are generally highly unstable, mainly due to unemployment and to long-standing cultural factors. This situation leaves women overworked and compromises their ability to take proper care of their children and of themselves. The answer to this issue, again, lies both at the socioeconomic level (unemployment reduction) and at the cultural and educational levels, where efforts are needed to change gender stereotypes and social roles within the context of the family and society.

In terms of women's political participation, compared to previous decades, the 1990s and early 2000s have seen improvements along with the process of redemocratization of the country. Although the percentage of women in the federal legislature is indeed shameful—women hold only 5.9% of the seats in parliament (see de Rivera, 2004/this issue)—the number of women state governors and mayors has grown in recent elections. In general terms, we divide Brazilian women politicians into two basic groups: one formed by wives and daughters of traditional politicians and the other by women who come from grassroots organizations and progressive movements. Although there are obvious differences in their backgrounds and viewpoints, they have been working together to promote the advancement of women.

## TOLERANCE AND SOLIDARITY

Several traits demonstrated by most Brazilians harmonize with the values of tolerance and solidarity, such as openness to what is new and different, flexibility, optimism, helpfulness, and sense of humor. Brazil has the potential to become an exam-

ple for humankind of successful integration between ethnical and cultural groups and the achievement of unity within diversity. However, the road is long. Ethnic mixture has not prevented the perpetuation of racial prejudice, which manifests itself both in the forms of structural and interpersonal violence. Discrimination based on skin color is, in many aspects, stronger than in the United States, although it assumes a camouflaged and disguised character that, in turn, makes it more difficult to be combated. According to the 2002 official national survey (Ministério do Planejamento, 2003), 40.4% of the population was classified in the ethnic category of "miscellaneous," which encompasses the mixture of White, Black, and indigenous ethnicities. Moreover, many of those who claim to be White also have a Black or Indian ancestor in their family trees (Freyre, 1980), even though the numbers vary according to the geographic region (Ministério do Planejamento). Brazil has never experienced apartheid as in the United States or South Africa, public schools and policies have been democratically open to all ethnic groups since the end of slavery, and traces of ethnic hatred cannot be found (Freyre). In 2003 the Brazilian government invited a few African descendants, both men and women, to be part of the group of higher staff executives taking office as ministers of the Republic. Also, important cities, such as São Paulo (among the five biggest urban areas in the world), have elected an African descendent as their mayor.

When speaking of "Brazilian culture," we must stress that we are not referring to a homogeneous group. There are differences among regions, social classes, subcultures, and other various groups. We are aware of the dangers of generalization, but our aim is simply to point out some of the main characteristics and trends that can often be identified in Brazilian society and that Brazilians usually perceive as a constitutive part of their own identity. Unfortunately, Brazil suffers from a large gap between wealthy and poor. The ratio of wealth between the richest and poorest 20% is almost 30:1 (UN, 2000). This discrepancy is the result of a long history of colonialism, slavery, and political corruption. However, we see hope for change. There is a slow but progressive change in the political scenario, where democracy and popular pressure are already paving the road to governmental interventions and reforms aimed at the improvement of such a negative economic ratio.

One policy that is improving solidarity is the promotion of organized volunteer programs. Between 1997 and 2001, a governmental agency, Solidary Community, established volunteer work centers in 34 cities, in 17 states in Brazil (http://www.programavoluntarios.gov.br/centros-rel.htm). Its projects include activities such as literacy training among the poor. In February 1998, the Congress passed a law regulating volunteer work. In the state of São Paulo, 1,080 interviews were conducted in 2001 to find out about beliefs and actual practices concerning volunteer work. The results showed that 92% of the interviewees believe that volunteer work is highly important, and that 20% have actually participated in such work. Those who participated were particularly characterized as more highly educated people between 26 and 40 years of age (http://www.programavoluntarios. org.br).

A national survey revealed that 22.6% of the Brazilian population is actually involved in volunteer work (Landin & Scalon, 2000, as cited in Moniz, 2002). Of that group, 16% spend as many as 6 hr per week working in institutions. Although the number of volunteers is still small, it has been steadily increasing over recent years.

## DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION

After centuries of colonial and oligarchic domination as well as decades of military dictatorship, Brazil is finally providing the world with a wonderful example of democracy. The 27.4 score that Brazil received on an objective index of democracy suggests that political participation is higher than that in most other nations in the Western hemisphere (see de Rivera, 2004/this issue). For example, a blue-collar worker was elected the president of the nation, due both to his evident capacities and to the will of the majority of the population, who got tired of old promises and demanded significant changes in the country. This example of democracy needs to be actively supported because real change presents an enormous challenge and will occur only if many people contribute to bringing it about.

Citizenship is a basis for a culture of peace. One of the biggest challenges to building a culture of peace in Brazil is enabling citizens to exercise their full and universal civil and human rights. This kind of transformation requires a redefinition of the concept of *citizenship*. As long as Brazilians view it as being solely about demanding rights and calling for the government to resolve society's problems, they will be limited to a *reactive* kind of citizenship. The people of Brazil need to go much farther and to promote a *proactive,* participatory citizenship. Peace can be achieved only when all Brazilian citizens practice proactive citizenship*,* a stance toward life characterized by an assertive awareness regarding their rights and responsibilities as individuals and institutions (Milani, 2000). *Proaction* means active participation in the process of seeking collective improvements (Jesus, 2001) and taking responsibility for everything that affects the Brazil and other countries as well.

The biggest problem is presented by cultural and historical traditions that allow for corruption, different forms of sabotage, and impunity. The issue of internal security is problematic. For historical reasons, the police are divided into two branches, one called "military" and the other "civil," with artificially separated tasks and a lot of competition between the branches. Both reject unification into one force, so recent efforts have been directed toward bringing them closer and creating some joint actions. Unfortunately, organized crime, especially related to drug trafficking, has grown in its financial, military, and political strength, spreading its tentacles inside governmental institutions in the legislative, executive, and judiciary sectors.

There can be no real democracy without justice—not only the eradication of striking socioeconomic and educational disparities, but also a drastic change in the unequal application of criminal justice law. If a poor Black person and a middle-class White person commit the same crime, they are very likely to get different verdicts. Thousands of Brazilians convicted of petty theft rot in jail, while some organized crime bosses win seats in the House and Senate, enjoying parliamentary immunity. In terms of the fight against corruption (a brutal and invisible form of violence), the nation has made significant progress in the last decade, primarily due to the work of the attorney general's office and the press. Even so, impunity is still the rule.

## FREE FLOW OF INFORMATION

The Press Freedom Index of 65 out of a possible 100 (see de Rivera, 2004/this issue) shows that the Brazilian media is relatively open and the Brazilian press and televised media are currently playing a constructive role. Although substantial contradictions can be identified over the years, with the media frequently neglecting truth to support the government for its own benefit and profit, courageous editors and journalists are helping lead the country toward the never-ending construction of democracy. For example, the press helped lead to the impeachment of President Fernando Collor de Mello in 1992 and to the election of a working class individual with no college degree, Lula da Silva, to the presidency of the country in October 2002. The latter historical event was the result of a campaign where all political parties had the opportunity to present and discuss their programs and ideas, with the support of the media.

Hence, despite the many contradictions, we can say that Brazil now experiences a freer flow of information, which is step-by-step overcoming private and governmental interests and subsequent censorships, and consolidating the media's role to serve in more effective ways the construction of a democratic nation.

## HUMAN RIGHTS AND MORAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Brazil's federal constitution grants people democratic rights, such as nondiscrimination regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, religious beliefs, and so forth. At this level, a great step has already been achieved. In the public and private sectors of society, we also observe that the democratic tradition is little by little struggling to become part of Brazil's culture. However, the score of only 21 on the human rights index (de Rivera, 2004/this issue) reveals that the country still needs to work very hard to improve the actual application of such democratic rights, particularly in regions where economic and educational deprivation remains the reality that people live in.

The development and application of moral values at all levels of decision making and action is essential to attaining better human rights and is a basic challenge to establishing a culture of peace in Brazil. Ethics cannot continue to be a superficial coat of paint added to the social edifice merely to cover up structural flaws in the design to make it more attractive. It must be the primary concern—the cornerstone of all ventures undertaken in the country—particularly in politics, governmental issues, business, and the media. These sectors have a special responsibility because they exert a strong influence on the lives of the Brazilian people, in addition to having a strong moral and psychological impact when they set a bad example for the rest of society.

Recognition of a moral dimension is an important condition for human rights. Nicolescu (2000) affirmed that

> The sacred … translates as a feeling—the "religious" feeling—…which connects beings and objects, [and] consequently inspires, in the depths of the human soul, a feeling of absolute respect for others, with whom people are connected because they all share a common life on one and the same planet. … When this element is violated, disfigured or mutilated, the story becomes criminal. (p. 147)

The restoration and further development of the ethical and moral principles of humankind that have emerged throughout history must be considered and applied on a universal basis, without traces of any religious fundamentalism, dogmatism, or proselytism (Beust, 2000). This can be done because many of the basic moral principles, even when they have originated in very different cultures and historical times, propose similar and compatible ethical and moral guidance (Ghai, 1990).

Very often the moral dimension is neglected and educators, parents, and institutions try to take a stance of "value neutrality" (that is impossible to achieve by definition) in their relations with children and adolescents, avoiding mention or discussion of the existence of values. However, what they inadvertently do teach and support is the "absence of values" as a primary value or motivational orientation in life. This has led many young people all over the world to believe that their responsibility for their actions is constrained to their own standards of "right" and "wrong" (Meyer & Lausell, 1996), and that natural or universal limits are to be denied. All moral judgment, therefore, depends on the relativistic results of pragmatic, hedonistic calculations of the pros versus cons, or gains versus losses related to choices in life.

One of the main challenges for achieving a culture of peace is to adopt a paradigm that transcends the barriers between traditional science, philosophy, and spiritual traditions. By recognizing the precious contributions of all those sources of human knowledge and wisdom, researchers, individuals, NGO's, and government will be able to construct new theories and sets of principles that, at the same time, will acknowledge and respect cultural differences and will establish,

through continuous dialogue and negotiation, a consensus about universal moral values such as the respect for the expression of life and diversity.

## CONDITIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

By economic indexes, Brazil is beginning to do well. Although its per capita GDP is still a modest $7,625, it has registered a 1.5 % annual growth rate in recent years. It is a rich country in terms of natural resources. If we compare GDPs, we find its total wealth is already equivalent to that of France and Russia (see UN, 2002, Table 12), and its industry is becoming competitive in several areas, such as automobile and aircraft production. The country is diverse, and each region has either potential or actively growing economic activity related to its historical traditions and physical characteristics. The south and the southeast, where mega-cities such as São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro are located, are by far the most developed areas of the country. The volume of their agricultural and industrial production makes this part of the country comparable to modern Western industrialized nations. The other regions are experiencing growth to a certain degree. This is related to the extent of natural resources (e.g., mining and hydrological power plants) and the encouragement of industrial activities. However, such areas are still poor, and the major reason for their slow development lies in the unfair administration of the country, the widespread social inequality at different levels of society, and the traditional dominance of the wealthy over the poor.

Brazil has the potential for sustainable development. The government's and the population's awareness concerning environmental issues has grown over the years, but the struggle against powerful economic groups still demands constant efforts by both the community and the administration. This is especially true in places like the Amazon Region and other remaining forests where local populations demand economic development and are made to believe that the only way to achieve it is through aggressive exploitation of natural resources. This kind of pressure also affects the indigenous communities. According to Brazilian law, native people should have special rights and protection. Unfortunately, many tribes do not have their lands legally recognized and even those who get that official recognition have to struggle against constant invasions of their territories. However, it is worth mentioning that the present government is actively working toward the regularization and defense of indigenous lands. For example, this is occurring in the north of the country, in the state of Roraima.

Oppression has persisted since the beginning of Brazilian history and culture. Although some progress has been made, particularly in the area of women's rights and the crusade against corruption, there is a long and difficult road ahead. Brazil is among the countries in the world that have glaring disparities between the rich and poor, and the Gini Index of inequality of 60.7 reveals Brazil to have the highest

inequality of any of those present at the September 2001 Clark University Conference on Assessing Cultures of Peace (see de Rivera, 2004/this issue). The form of capitalism practiced in Brazil exploits people and social programs still receive less funding. Brazil is a rich nation of poor people ranking 73rd (of 173) on the UN's development index (see UNPD, 2002). Most Brazilians are extremely poor and barely make enough to get by. Of that majority, the most marginalized are those of African descent who also suffer from the burden of racism. Although a deep process of miscegenation has occurred in Brazil's history, resulting in the fact that the majority of Brazilian people carry an obvious mix of different genetic pools (particularly from Native American, European, and African origins), this has not resulted in a prejudice-free society.

The marginalized people, though, not only suffer from social and economic exclusion but also are morally excluded. They are blamed for violence, for the nation's lagging position in the world economy, for having too many children, and for allowing their children to wander in the streets. Furthermore, their chances of social advancement are slim because no mechanisms have been created for that purpose. By contrast, government funds are systematically invested in private sector ventures, favoring those who already enjoy numerous privileges.

The inequalities and exclusion in Brazil are so strong and persistent that some call the shocking statistics on violent deaths, in some urban districts and agrarian conflict areas, an "undeclared civil war." To prevent such confrontation from breaking out, Brazil must combine a number of strategies such as the following: government policies aimed at effectively eradicating poverty and redistributing income, agrarian and judiciary reforms, support for small and midsized farming and other businesses, better quality education and health systems, affirmative action for people of African descent, and a better quality of life for those living in the neediest cities and districts.

In sum, Brazil is a rich country in which the major problem is to find an efficient way to integrate both government and civil society to change its extremely unfair distribution of economic resources and education opportunities.

## INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND SECURITY

Other than past and well-resolved disputes with Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay over small pieces of territory in the 19th century, Brazil has not been involved in wars, except for a short participation in World War II after Germany sunk a Brazilian ship. The idea of international or generalized civil war sounds extremely alien to Brazilian people. Only 1.4% of the GDP is spent on the military, and, although the Brazilian army is the most powerful in South America, it has really never been called to act or intervene in open conflicts. Its major goals are mostly directed at preserving frontier areas and participating in other missions related to maintaining

the external security of the country. As we noted in the section on democracy, the issue of the police and internal security is more problematic.

Historically, Brazil has absorbed refugees and immigrants, but the current high rate of unemployment creates a pressure toward limiting those numbers.

## ACHIEVING PEACE IN BRAZIL

The major prerequisite for achieving peace and nonviolence in Brazil is a perspective shift toward an emphasis on the culture of peace model as the main guideline and cornerstone for decision making and actual interventions at all levels of society, including the level of the individual and his or her conduct and beliefs. This culture of peace can be constructed only with everyone's active involvement through extensive mobilization and systematic, persistent effort. We also acknowledge the important role played by socioeconomic structural characteristics of the country and endorse the idea that, "Although poverty is not a direct cause of crime, interventions that reduce poverty can reduce conflict and increase hope in ways that may reduce violence" (McAllister, 1998, p. 40).

When governmental officials, political and community leaders, the media, policymakers, employers and educators, and a significant part of the country's people adopt the culture of peace paradigm, Brazilians may hope for a better country to live in. But every person and institution will still face major challenges, especially with regard to the promotion of citizenship (civil rights and responsibilities), social justice, education, and moral values. These profound changes can be achieved only if individuals and institutions concentrate their efforts on making those changes desired, agreed upon, and accepted by most of the society, so they become a shared vision of a better future for everyone. Every single step taken to improve each of those aspects of communal life will be a step forward in the achievement of a culture of peace.

We focused our reflections in this article on challenges, that is, on what must be done to enable Brazil to be recognized as a culture based on peace. We did so to counterbalance the tendency of coming up with the easy and quick observation that Brazilians are a "peaceful people." However, we do not intend to give the impression that Brazil is a hopeless case or that our society has more elements of violence than of peace. We are not pessimistic or cynical, nor are we naively optimistic. Bringing about global social change as a proposal for achieving the culture of peace requires sincere faith in people and their infinite potential, together with optimistic realism. Many who call themselves "realists" are actually people who only see the negative aspects of life. We must be fair, developing the ability to recognize the positive and the negative sides of specific people and societies, while bearing in mind, always, the complexity of the multiple dimensions of violence, conflict, and war on the one hand with peace, cooperation, and solidarity on the other.

Brazilian culture contains undeniable elements of violence as well as peace. It is beyond anyone's power to determine what is the most prevalent, due to the complexities and topics discussed earlier. However, this is probably not the most important question. Instead, Brazilians should ask what concrete steps can and must be taken to enable the culture of peace to prevail, and what indicators should be established and used to monitor this process. Mahatma Gandhi taught that every morally correct action is in itself a victory. Therefore, every effort to preserve and strengthen peace is, and always will be, welcome.

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