

Deep Democracy Institute

Diploma Thesis

Peace, conflict and politics from the soil

By Emmanuel Karisa Baya

Marafa, Kenya

May 2021

“They say a hungry man is an angry man and a hungry man is not a peaceful man, so here we are building peace from the soil”.

Emmanuel Karisa Baya Founder, Magarini Children Centre and Organic Demonstration Farm

Appreciations

I am deeply grateful to my teachers and mentors Max Schupbach and Ellen Schupbach for bringing DDI to East Africa in my country Kenya. I am the way I am because of the many ways they are role model and inspiration not only to me but to many in Kenya and around the world.

I want to thank my main coach Ellen Schupbach who has been the main support in my learning path and in my life as a whole. I have no words to express all my deep sincere gratitude, but I know she can feel it.

I want to thank Maryanne Wachira, then co-ordinator of DDI East Africa, who was so encouraging and welcoming when I first made contact with DDI, from a tiny advertisement in a crumpled-up piece of newspaper I found in the rubbish.

To all my fellow East Africa DDI student and learners, you have been amazing for your continued encouragement that I go for the Diploma, you believed in me, supported me in every summer and after summers, in our WhatsApp and email string. Your words of advice and strength are always fresh in mind as they are deep in my heart, thank you so much.

I thank all the DDI learning community around the world, those whom we have meet in DDI intensives and seminars and those who I have not met in person but who also meet with my teachers Max and Ellen. I feel you all as we are in the same hands of our teachers.

I have learnt a lot from you direct, in fact you all are part of my learning path and this Diploma. If it were not for you DDI learners, this work of DDI Diploma many have not come to reality. You all contributed to this achievement, thank you all.

I want also to thank all participants of the DDI intensive in Berlin Germany 2016 and all the DDI teachers, present during this intensive for holding the space and supporting the group process that I proposed on the topic of racism in the room and was picked. This was a huge learning experience for me, and it changed my life and ways of communication. Thank you,

Benjamin Kafka, for your courage and care during our deep interaction within that process. This was a very rich experience I won't forget it in my life, thank you Benjamin and all.

I do not want to forget the Process Work international community especially those who attended and participated in the Worldwork in Warsaw in Poland 2014 where I meet for the first time Arny and Amy Mindell the founders of Process Work and all other Process Work teachers including Gary Reiss who was my therapist during the Worldwork. I learned from this community and they made me to love Process Work even more and to keep learning from my DDI teachers. All this experience and learning has brought me to this moment where sooner or later I will be a Diplome – the start and beginning of deep learning from all the people thank you and thank you.

I want to thank the friends who supported me with resources especially financially to enable me to conduct my research for this topic of my thesis: *Peace, Conflict and Politics from the Soil*. With their support I manage to move and conduct the research interview with the old men and women of the Griamma community. As you read this you can smile because you contributed in a very big way to the success of this work. I do not have to mention your names because you deeply know with love that you did wonderfully helping me, you supported me to this achievement and enabled this training, so thank you. There are those who paid for my international travels to intensives and those who took me for lunch during intensives. Thank you so much for your love and support.

I want to thank Deep Democracy Institute and her faculty members, for the scholarships to attend intensive training in the different parts of the world ranging from San Francisco to Bangkok Thailand. For sure you saw the potential in me and you invested in it through these scholarships has led to this great achievement, this Diploma and being a diplomate I co-own with you. I am your student devoted to learning, and to practice my learning. I know deep in me that this learning is a lifetime learning and I signed for that. Thank you so much for accepting me as a lifetime learner.

I want also to thank my team at Magarini Children Centre and Organic Farming Demonstration Farm. They have been my ground for practices of all what I learn in DDI, they are strong and devoted team thank you so much and to all the children and community in Marafa Ward for

being my practice ground for all my political ambitions, I come to politics either to win or not win. My intention is to create a deep democracy with people, so that they can release their own potential in a democratic way and not undermine the x energy – the difficulties - as these very difficulties may have a deep learning and inspiration that can make us reliable in our dream as a community.

To my thesis adviser Julia Wolfson for your patience, encouragements, I know you are part of this process and I thank you so much.

Last but not least to Jescar Mbuche Shehe who is my wife for her love and support letting me travel to learn and taking care of all the project and our family of six daughters. I do not know how to pay you, but I feel your love care and support and believing in me. Thank you and much love.

Contents

APPRECIATIONS.....	2
PROLOGUE: BURIED IN THE RUBBISH	8
How I came to know Process Work and the Deep Democracy Institute	8
PART 1	11
MY STORY, MY LEARNING PATH.....	11
My context and life situation.....	11
My learning passion	14
My learning path with the Deep Democracy Institute (DDI)	15
THE FOCUS OF MY RESEARCH: MY COMMUNITY, MY CULTURE, MY QUESTION	19
Research for conflict in me, my community and world.....	19
Learning from the elders	20
PROCESS WORK CONCEPTS APPEARING IN MY STUDY.	21
Dreams	21
Unfolding a symptom	21
Life myth	23
Dream 1.....	23
Dream 2.....	24
Integration	25
Altered states.....	25
Group process.....	26
MY ANCESTRAL ROOTS AT THE HEART OF MY RESEARCH	27
How I went about doing the interviews	27

Interview questions	28
THE INTERVIEWS, THE ELDERS	30
Charo Baya Kithunga Jefwa	30
Dama Chula Mbitha	31
Joseph Kenga Chembe Fondo Biryia	32
Dama Ndilo Ngala Jidu	33
Loda Makombo	34
Dama Gona Fondo	35
PART 2	36
WHAT I LEARNED FROM THE ELDERS.....	36
Political system	36
Conflict and group process	38
Learnings about Conflict Resolution from the Elders	42
The role of women	43
Education.....	44
Formal and informal education	44
Sex education.....	45
Framework for gender relations	47
Pronouns and identity	48
Impact of colonisation	49
Soil and peace.....	50
Dreams as communication with ancestors.....	53
Peace building, shamans and altered states.....	55
FINAL REFLECTIONS.....	59

REFERENCES	62
------------------	----

Prologue: Buried in the rubbish

How I came to know Process Work and the Deep Democracy Institute

In the year 2011 I was in my home. During the evening I was walking in the training centre on my community. I love passing where the garbage is, so that day I went through the garbage area. My eyes were attracted to an old piece of newspaper. I took time to go for it. On it was written:

Deep Democracy Courses

Offered by Deep Democracy Institute.

They are being held in Nairobi.

There was a telephone number. I took my small mobile and tried to call. Fortunately, someone answered! I said:

My name is Emmanuel Karisa Baya, I am holding a very old newspaper. It might be very old, maybe very new, but because of where I have seen it, it looks very old. I got this contact. And I want to know more about the courses offered by the Deep Democracy Institute.

The one on the other side said,

I cannot give you a deep explanation of what you have found. If you have more time, next week we are having a seminar in Nairobi. You can find a time and come and learn about it yourself.

I was so motivated, I said, OK! I need money to travel to Nairobi, I need money to stay there for three days, I need money for my costs for my seminar. What will I do? So already I started: *I need this, I need this, I need this!* So, I contacted some friends and requested for them to help me with money. Fortunately, I got money to travel to Nairobi on the overnight bus. I found there in the training it was so, so amazing on my side. That made me not miss any seminar that happened in Nairobi since 2011, or online since Co-vid.

The first seminar was about *Visioning, Strategy and Results - a leadership training*. Getting to know about deep democracy, highlighted for me how democracy should be. In school I had learned about democracy, that democracy is government for the people by the people, so that is what I had in my mind. But *deep* democracy, it was not by the people, it was by me, in me! That inside *me* needed to be democratic!

How the teachers Max and Ellen Schupbach, took me to a peak experience, I came to realise that democracy as it is, it should be deeper in the heart, conceived right in the heart, and then given out with the love and heart. Then it becomes democracy. Giving space, listening to all voices, not marginalising the other, but giving a space for every voice. And I thought, WOW! This is what I need myself, because I have been marginalising some voices in me. And now working on the marginalised voice, I could discover the existence of potential in me, and I can say it changed my life by discovering that.

I came to realise that process-oriented psychology or Process Work as it is also called, is about the people. It's about us, but mostly it's about me, as an individual, because if I can marginalise other voices in me, it will be easy for me to marginalise other people, not giving them space.

I learned to listen more, how to really bring people to their potential. And I realised, that bringing this, I can be a very influential person in my community. So, every step I learn, every seminar I go to, I put it into practice in my own work in my own community and try to understand the people. I did not choose to be a Process Worker; it was meant for me. Now in May 2021 I am a different person than I was that day in 2011.

I understood that creating a better world, creating a better me, is a lifetime process. That is the lesson I learned, and I continue learning. And that's how I came to know about deep democracy. I have support of my elders and ancestors. I see they are the ones who showed me this, and they are the ones who feel this is most important for being in the community. And I'm happy that now I am learning, and I am in the process of doing my Process Work diploma. In my community in Kenya, I will be the first one to have this kind of education, of leadership which I feel is most important for everyone to know about. So that is how I came to know about deep democracy and Process Work at large.

I am writing this thesis during Co-vid times. Here I am, in this small office. Once I get out of the office, I have to wear a mask. Our livelihood is changing, our own life is changing, even how we speak to people is changing. It's a shift of identity. The inner charger is going low, because we are struggling to go with the consensus reality at present. So doing my thesis is recharging my inner battery!

PART 1

My story, my learning path

Why I wrote this thesis.

My context and life situation

My name is Emanuel Karisa Baya. I am a deep democracy student, and this is my writing. My research topic is peace, conflict and politics from the soil. And first I want to share how Process Work has contributed to my personal development and helped me become aware of how life has been before me, and how life is in this current phase, and also showing me how life might be in the coming days. My research goes deeper into these questions. I interviewed six elders from my community to learn from them how it was in their time, and how they see present and future times.

I am a farmer, and I love farming. I do organic farming in terms of taking care of the soil, taking care of the environment. Through doing this I have realised that when you take care of the soil, you are taking care of yourself. The soil will grow your food, and this food will nourish your own body. So also, long as you take care of the soil in an organic way, not polluting with chemicals, it has the natural way of rejuvenating its own fertility.

This fertility is passed on to our relationships, creating care for self and care for others. This is building peace. And that is why my thesis title includes *peace from the soil*.

As a farmer, I have been wanting to support and help children who are vulnerable, in terms of building a community and their ability to take care of the soil in the future. Giving these children the skills and care, by taking care of the soil, is taking care of themselves, and learning the skills to building community by creating a life of sharing among the children, is to build a life of sharing and community in the future. That is the birth of Magarini Children Centre and Organic Demonstration Farm, which I founded, here in the deeper rural coastal province of Kenya.

Being the founder of this initiative and org, I support and often have to fight for girl children education. I myself grew up in an area where girls were not given the opportunity go to school. So I wanted to make sure girls get to go to school. Now, as a parent of six girls myself, I have seen the importance of girls getting the chance to go to school and the opportunities that come from that.

At the same time, I have seen in my community a lot of early pregnancies. I realised with the high increase in teen pregnancies, we have left the principle in our culture, to teach sex education at an early age so the young people can understand themselves. So in our Children Centre, I take the opportunity to tell girls and boys about sex education so they can make informed decisions for their life.

As a farmer, I have seen a lot of conflict among farmers themselves – between crop growers and pastoralists. These farming conflicts also involve religions. To illustrate, I want to share a small conflict that had been in my community for some time, and how I solved it from the soil.

Farmers used to grow their crops in the field. And pastoralists used to bring the cattle to those fields, and that destroyed the crops. There was big conflict between the crop growers and pastoralists. The pastoralists are Muslims and the farmers are Christians, people used to say this is a religious conflict. But after going deeper into the soil, I realised that the root cause was crops being destroyed by the pastoralists, and animals being killed by the crop-growers. So I wanted to learn how these people could meet.

First, I knew we are all supported by the soil. The animals eat from the soil, and the grass grows in the soil. That is common ground. But it was hard to bring them together because pastoralists move around. So, I went to see how the pastoralists live and I found out that every evening they sing and dance. They have a singing culture. I found out that the crop growers also have a singing culture.

So, I went to talk to the crop growers, and asked them to compose songs telling the importance of animals, and how they are important to the lives of the pastoralists.

And I went to the pastoralists and asked them to compose a song, saying that crops are very important to lives of crop growers. So the crop growers composed songs for animals, and the pastoralists composed songs for the crops. But in their own language! Then, we brought both communities together one day and we started to share. We are all supported by the soil. We cannot live without the animals or without the crops.

By singing and dancing together, we gained mutual understanding, and then a deep silence. Into that silence, the elders among the crop growers said:

We are not going to bring our farming here past this boundary,

And the elders among the pastoralists said:

We will not bring our cattle past this boundary.

This is why I call it *conflict from the soil and peace from the soil*.

This is how in my study, peace from the soil has to do with sex education, farming, conflict resolution and community building.

As a student of the Deep Democracy Institute and Process Work, I found the essence of my own personal life and as a farmer in ideas from Process Work: my *life myth*, and how the community realised their *dreaming*, and how the community has been growing in terms of a *group process* culture.

Life myth is the larger pattern of my life that is with me always. I don't organise it. It's already there.

Dreaming means how a communication from the future, comes to you, and shows you your own dream and the dream of your community and how to realise it.

Group process is a method for taking care of deeper feelings and needs of a person, a group in terms of deeper listening and solving a conflict or bringing an awareness or understanding in the group and amongst individual people.

It has helped me to go deeper and realise that the essence of the soil as a source and roots of my own personal dreaming and how I realise the dreams of my community, are one process.

My learning passion

My deep passion and topic of study has always been about peace and conflict from the soil. But then I came to a new discovery. Something happened in my own life since I came to know about deep democracy, and Process Work. I came to politics after getting to know about deep democracy.

I came to politics not exactly to be a winner, or to be elected as a winner, but to show my learning on how we can understand and have a continuous leadership that is manifested from the people, and deep from the people in how they live in their own community. That's why I came to politics. Once I came to politics, one part of me saw the soil as a mirror in terms of political life, and how the system of politics manifests in my community and the world at large. I feel they both have missed the component of the soil.

And another part of me felt, OK - if I need to build a peaceful environment and help for all people to discover their full potential then therefore people need to see how the soil can build this peaceful environment. And it can build this peaceful environment in how we take care of the soil. And how we take care of the soil is a deeper process that brings an understanding of our own healing. And as this is happening, we can build the peaceful environment. And then, the environment should also be in our heart, because as we build peace within ourselves, we can also understand the other.

So in solving conflict, the soil is the mirror also. Because in this world, in these communities, there have been conflicts. And since I came to learn about deep democracy, I am thinking of conflict in three ways:

1. We have the natural conflicts that no human being can have control over.
2. We have the artificial conflict that has emerged because of activities of humans.
3. We have self-conflicts inside one person, inside you. You can have a conflict in your own life, and how to solve that? The soil can be a mirror to show how this can be done.

So, from this I discovered my topic is *peace and conflict from the soil*. For me, even my learning process is also mirrored from the soil. So how to come up with a sentence, that improves this, as a topic? Perhaps *peace, conflict and politics from the soil*.

My learning path with the Deep Democracy Institute (DDI)

When I went to my first seminar, I had personal problems at work. I had a huge conflict with my boss, who gave me insults. I felt, I cannot do anything, I'm a failure, and there is nothing I can do, I cannot even describe all that is in my work, so I cannot even write a good report. Something in me was I'm *useless. There is nothing I can do*.

I came to Process Work, and I said to myself:

Ok - when you say, how do you identify yourself? Do you identify with this person who is a failure, who does not do anything? And if you look at this person, and just look at him, can you see anything good? Ok try to walk like a failure. Just do that.

And when I did that, there was something ... something felt good somehow, and that something was the first thing I discovered. Because I could feel, I could advise Emmanuel in that state. As Emmanuel's inner advisor, I could say:

No! I'm just here to show you, you can do everything you need to do, and there is no-one that can push down on it. So you can be yourself, and once you be yourself, you will discover your deepest potential out of that.

Then I asked my teacher, Max Schupbach:

How do I answer my boss who always tells me this?

Then my teacher said,

There is a cartoon figure that walks like a failure. Act like a cartoon figure.

So I played with my teacher, like a cartoon, and it was fun! He played my boss, and I played the cartoon. And then we switched roles, and in that seminar, I could learn that this conflict was solved.

I came back to my office; I was the program coordinator of an NGO. I came very early in the morning, I was sitting in my office, and my boss came as usual. He knocked and came to the door. He looked at me and said,

You are there! What have you done! I know you are a loser.

So I started laughing, and I said:

I know, you are right my boss, because there is nothing I can do.

and then he started laughing. He went to his office. And then he called me, and he said,

Wow! You look changed!

I said,

No, I haven't changed, I'm just me, Emmanuel, as stupid as always. But I have switched the role, I have seen something great in you. And if you would love to share your knowledge, or support me to be the staff you want me to be, I am ready to learn!

And he was shocked! And with that, he showed me and trained me to do many things, and to write reports, and in a period of months I became good at it.

In this situation, I realized that giving voice to all the roles that were present with a playful and embracing attitude allowed a big shift to occur. In the following section, I will show how this way of working with conflict is very similar to the traditional conflict resolution practices of my culture.

So, when I now look over my situation, what is valuable in my culture? Before, I used to say,

My community is uncivilised. It's not yet civilised.

Then, when I became a process worker, I was now questioning:

What is it to be civilised?

Then I saw a huge potential in what I am interpreting as *uncivilised*. My elders have the vision and the experiences in how they have lived their lives, and they are still alive, they are eating,

so they have a lot of experience. How can I learn from that and how can I get it? So, I started to see the potential in that part. Not in the civilised way, but in the uncivilised way.

So, with this essence, I came to realise,

I need to know more how these people have been solving their conflicts, building the peace they have been enjoying, having the sustainable way of politics with their Council of Elders.

All these things that look uncivilised, or under-developed, now I get to understand from Process Work what development means, in terms of people's livelihood and how they have been living. Arny Mindell taught me:

You cannot push down the culture. Because it will come back as a ghost. If it comes as a ghost, no-one owns it. So, it is good to acknowledge that it is there, so that it can give you the wisdom to solve what is ahead.

My encounter with Process Work through my teachers gave me the experience of the beauty and the wisdom in things about me that I thought were bad, and I thought were rubbish, like the rubbish bin where I found the torn piece of newspaper that led me to the Deep Democracy Institute seminar.

Conflict is such a big part of my life, in terms of trying to understand conflicts. Even though I was part of a peace building movement, and learned about conflict, I didn't see those conflicts getting solved. Through this one little experience with my teacher Max Schupbach, not only did my conflict with my boss get solved, but the whole thing got turned on its head, and my boss got to learn from me, and I got to progress and evolve myself.

I asked myself, what is the Process Work approach to conflict? I have to find out more about it. My way of finding out, is to go back to the core of my own culture, to go to the elders of my own culture, and put on Process Work glasses, and look through Process Work lenses at my own roots, and see what I learn, that may even be able to contribute to Process Work.

One of the core roots of Process Work, comes from Arny and Amy Mindells' experiences in Kenya with shamans, in Australia with indigenous elders and teachers, (see Arny's book

Shaman's Body). My own culture and my indigenous ancestors are also part of the spirit of Process Work. So, in this research, I would like to pick up that aspect of Process Work and find out how the indigenous elders of my culture have important lessons to teach that may correspond with Process Work ideas on conflict work.

The focus of my research: my community, my culture, my question

Research for conflict in me, my community and world

I wanted to do research on how the people of the Giriama people in the coast province of Kenya, maintain peace and solve conflicts, using the soil, from their own perspective. So, I was thinking to do a research in terms of visiting elders who I could interview and listen to and learn from and make my research findings.

I feel deep in my heart that in my community, and in the world at large there is something missing, something that is needed. So many countries, so many organisations have developed tools of solving conflicts and building peace, but still for me, it's not working!

I want to find out:

What is missing from today's peace building and conflict methods in the world, that could make conflict work more sustainable?

I wanted to go to the elders, believing that they had a way, a method, a tool, in how they used to build peace, how to solve the conflicts, and how the political systems were sustainable. How did they do it? And if I find out how they used to do it, then I can use it for myself:

Wow, here is this, and with the knowledge and the current situation in the world, we can say, this is where we have been lacking, according to the wisdom of the ancestors and the elders.

I am sure the elders will tell me what they used to do in that time, and they used to do what their elders were doing. How did people live with peace, in terms of peace from the soil? How did they manage to take care of the soil in terms of taking care of their own heart, taking care of the people and each other in terms of conflict resolution, in terms of political structures? What is the dreaming of my ancestors, my elders, that can make a contribution today, to conflict resolution and conflict awareness? My goal is to be able to understand the dreaming level and essence level of the community in terms of soil and peace building:

conflict resolution, sex education for young people, and the political arena. All this is highly relevant to me in my work with children, in the organic demonstration farm, and my political interests.

Learning from the elders

I know in the Griamma community, and in these clans, they had a Council of Elders coming together. The Council of Elders gave the community a huge mirror to see itself. How did they develop sustainable ways and rules in how to govern the community? I want to find out how they did this.

I see the powerful shamans who have been supporting the community in how to solve problems, and also learning from their sisters, and combining this with the healing part. How they used to heal is so connected to the soil. And this is a living experience that I see shamans do in my community, especially if they are healers. They cannot do the healing, without a huge tree that has been there for generations. They say:

We have to speak with this tree, to tell us at least three generations before us, and three generations after us. And how this generation can heal as those before us have been healing. If we can do that, then we can heal this sick pattern, or ourselves.

With that I feel there was a deeper connection with the people with their art, with the trees, and the healing for solving conflicts. But how exactly did they do this? I've seen it, but I want to ask them, how did they do that? If I say, you can communicate with the tree, or the tree can tell you three generations back, and three generations ahead, how is that done?

That is why I feel I need to expand my awareness in terms of healing and conflict resolution. I'm wanting to bring three things together to expand my understanding and give me even more support with my conflict work and political work. I want to bring together the shamanistic approach to healing, the elders' approach to conflict, and Process Work awareness approach to conflict.

Process work concepts appearing in my study.

I have chosen three areas of Process Work theory to give a ground to my research. These are: *dreams*, *altered states*, and *group process*. The reason I choose these three, is because they appeared consistently through my discoveries with the elders I interviewed. I will describe them from the viewpoint of my own experience.

Dreams

Arny Mindell's theory of dreams includes not only night-time dreams, also day-time dreams, sudden high-speed images and impressions he calls *flirts*, as well as the connection between night-time dreams, day-time problems, body pains, symptoms and illness. This relationship is the *dreambody*. Arny Mindell calls the practice of getting information from the dreambody *unfolding a symptom*.

Another aspect of dreams in Process Work is the *life myth*. This is a constant and consistent pattern that goes with you through life and can be seen and experienced in the earliest childhood dream.

First, I will share my experience of the connection between a real day-time problem and a body symptom, and how I worked with it in a process-oriented way. Then, I will share my earliest childhood dream and what it means to me.

Unfolding a symptom

The problem. I had a big problem. I lost some papers I needed for a legal case I was helping a friend with. He was innocent but was going to be charged for theft. Then I got a really stiff neck. So I stopped and tried to unfold the symptom. Maybe it has a message for my situation, I wondered. This is my experience of unfolding the body symptom.

Unfolding. When I close my eyes, something happens. I see an image, of something that I used to do in my childhood. I used to do a kind of play, using my body, standing with one leg, running with one leg, dressing with one leg. It was very painful to make sure you bend this one, you run 20 metres there and back, 40 metres is very difficult, and painful on one leg.

Watching this right now, I see that the body is showing me an opportunity. I used to run on one leg and during that time, I had the same body that I have now. And now I'm here, I'm older, but it has taken me back to have this difficulty that is ahead of me, and get information how it can be overcome, how I can focus ahead.

Gaining insight. What I have just realised unfolding the symptom of a stiff neck, is a connection in my life to this stiffness. What is the connection to this difficulty I have in my life with the legal papers? What is it, that connects to this stiffness, this difficulty?

Following sensory information: my familiar identity. In the dreaming body, I feel there is a connection to all that happened in my body in consensus reality – meaning, what is being agreed as the outer reality at that very time is also within my body. Like now I am relaxing, I'm sitting, everything is good, with me and my body.

Unfamiliar, emerging identity. But when it comes to this disturbance, showing me what is real in my consensus reality life and what I can do in the future, to attain a goal, and when I was just trying to bring myself, unintentionally, my head rose up. It could rise up straight, even though I had a stiff neck that wouldn't move!

So my body already knew my dreaming, that I have to focus not only on what is just in front of me, but also to focus on the way to win the game. I used to run, and to see the end of the difficulties, so the wisdom of the body is just to let you know, to tell you what to do about what you feel is very difficult.

New insight to bring back into life. I was not able to move my neck. It was so stiff, but it was just showing how this stiff neck is there to make me focus on the future, focus on this dreaming of freedom. Not the painful steps but passing them through is even more difficult, but with the hope that this is the way to freedom, the body is ready to go through these painful steps with the hope that soon it will be the consensus achievement that you will have gained after this trouble. So my body symptom, as painful as it is and was, has given me that freedom and knowledge.

The joy message! My stiff neck is like the one leg running in my childhood - stay focused on the prize, even if it's painful!

Life myth

I agree with my teachers Max and Ellen Schupbach when they say,

The childhood dream is the path of your learning path, there is the path of life myth, and gives you what is unfolding every day. It is not me wanting to do this, but it is already there.

Dream 1

When I was young, I was always dreaming at night of one thing. I was taking care of goats. I had goats in my dreams. Then I lost the goats, I could not find them. I was running, running looking for them. I was getting so scared, I was very disturbed and disappointed at the same time, because I have lost all the fortune, because these goats were money. So I was running and running again.

And then it happened that one goat had also lost her friends, and she was also looking to join the other goats, so she was running maah meeeh maaah meeeh maaah meeh so at that I said wow, I'm looking for them, and so is she, the friend, so I will follow this one. I was running after her looking for them.

Then all of a sudden, I saw a very big flock of goats, very huge, there was so many more than what I had, I had only four or three, and here there were so many, in the very strict care of a very high man, he was very tall and huge, and he was holding a stick in his hand and he was looking. That man was terrible, but I had the courage because part of this flock was mine, and I had lost the money, so I went to him and said,

Hey, you have my flock, you have my goats, because my goats have just joined here. And he never gave me any attention.

He was just moving, not looking at me, so I became very sad and I started crying and crying and crying, and asking and begging always. This man never talked, and I went running and looking for him, just to get my flock back, and then he looked at me, and he said,

Ok! I don't know which one is yours among the flock, so have the whole flock, and have this stick and take care.

At this moment I woke up, after getting the stick and flock. I woke up.

I've been working on this dream in my lessons with Max and Ellen, and reflecting on this in my own life. I see this man in my life most of the time, and especially when I am really in difficulties, and in very strange situations in my life, I see myself crying and crying, and I see this man comes to me, and normally he doesn't speak much to me, but he gives me something, and it's amazing. And this basic dream pattern shows up in other dreams too.

Dream 2

When I was 34 years old, I was working in my farm, and during the night-time, I dreamed I was crying for a key. And so many people in my dream were looking, there was a huge mango tree, and on top of the mango tree was a golden bag. And everyone was fighting to get that one. So you had to fight for it. And so many people. And I was the smallest among the giants, and very strong people. I was just crying and telling the people:

that bag belongs to me! That bag belongs to me!

And I was fighting and fighting, but all my strength was like dropping a drop of water in a hot pot.

Then from nowhere, this huge man who I saw taking care of the flock appeared, and I said,

Why? That bag, I need the bag.

He said *ok*. He took the bag and gave me the bag. It had a key to open it. So he gave me the key and I was so happy, and one year after that dream, I managed to travel to another village, another town, another country, and I thought, wow, maybe this was the key I was given by this man and I didn't know how it happened, but it happened. So I see this man in my life from time to time.

The huge man in my childhood dream who gives me the whole flock, and the stick, shows up in my more recent dream – the man who gives me the bag and the key. The pattern of the childhood dream shows up in the huge man coming to my rescue.

Integration

And now I can connect my one leg running, the stick, the stiff neck, the key.

My parents died when I was very young. It was very painful. I was always looking for my parents, for my family. But I was given a flock that is hundred times bigger than any family! I got to be the parent of this huge flock! The Magarini Children Centre. And this wise figure is taking care of me through it all. He is an inner ally, he helps me keep going, no matter the difficulties, and keep my eye on the goal. That's what's right about the energy of the stiff neck. Even the goal of writing this thesis – the dream helps me trust that help will come. These connections are showing me the meaning of my life!

Altered states

What I have seen in Process Work is how altered states are welcomed and worked with. Altered states in my community is being mad. You are being mad. And when you are being mad, there must be a purpose. So being mad is a way of communication. You are not yet dead, but you can communicate to the other level of people, spirits, god or nature. Getting all that, you can bring it back to the people.

This was very deep in my community in terms of peace building, healing and curing of diseases. And healing the body at large. Shamans had a very big role to play. And this role of being altered, which I learned through Process Work, has made me very much aware how my culture used to value this. Shamans are powerful figures in my culture, they are respected. They went a step or two steps further with communicating with the spirit, with communication with gods directly, communicating with the ancestors. They get all the information and bring back.

Group process

I may say until now, in my community, I have had a good understanding for people. I know how to live with them. What I learned about *group process* from Process Work, has been part of our culture, maybe with a different name. Maybe with a different angle in how they did it, but how they used to bring people and listen, every evening, and the elders could bring the family and they would listen from the youngest to the oldest, everyone could give voice, and this helped the elder in the family to understand the children, to understand the people, and by doing so, understand the community. And that is how elders in my community were elected or were appointed by the community, based on how strong they could hold a group process: allow everyone even if very angry, to be given an opportunity to speak and express emotions. The elders would say:

OK you are angry, what can you do if you are really angry, what can you do? Do it here now and give yourself permission.

This to me was how these elders managed to create a peaceful community. For me it's not just a learning for one day, it's a lifetime learning. And that's how I took all these deep democracy trainings, these deep Process Work trainings. You cannot know yourself fully when you are alive. But as long as you live, you discover yourself. And the more you live, the more you grow older, the more you can reflect. As Arny Mindell said, at the Worldwork seminar in Warsaw Poland:

You cannot forget or leave the history behind. We can use the history to know exactly what we don't need to replicate or repeat. To bring ourselves to an understanding of the deeper meaning that history has to tell us. And from there, we know how to create a better world.

My ancestral roots at the heart of my research

I belong to the Griamma tribe, in the deep remote area in Kenya. The closest city is Mombasa, by the ocean.

I wanted to know how these old people in the past built peace. How did they live in peace? How did they solve their conflicts, and what was the role of the soil? How was the politics during those times? How can I learn from them and foresee the future in terms of sustainability? I wanted to find out from the shamans and from the elders, and then reflect on what I learned to make sense of it all, from the view of Process Work.

How I went about doing the interviews

I wanted to learn from my elders, both men and women. I conducted six interviews. I interviewed three senior men and three senior women, between 75 and 120 years life experience. One woman I interviewed is 110, and two women are 120. One man I interviewed is 75 years old, one 110, and the third man is 86 years young.

We are now allowed to move freely after the Co-vid lockdown, so I could now visit the elders for interviews in person. The Kenyan health authorities requested that we check with ourselves if we feel right to travel, how to protect ourselves from contracting the corona virus, and how we prevent others from contracting. In my community I went to four locations in the same district where I live. These areas were about 30 kms from each other. The elders were busy harvesting, so I had a three-to-five-day period to do and complete all the interviews.

My mother tongue is the Griamma language. I conducted the interviews in my Griamma language. I travelled with two helpers. One helped me translate from Griamma to English. The other person helped me with recording.

Interview questions

The questions I prepared beforehand covered the three levels of experience described in Process Work, to help me gain a better understanding of the connection between soil, conflict, peacemaking and politics.

- Questions to access consensus reality information were to help me learn about the story, the fact and every-day world situation.
- Questions to access dreamland information were to help me learn about the interviewee's subjective perspective, as well as examples of specific conflicts and how they played out.
- Questions to access dreaming information were to help me learn about the deeper wisdom flowing through from the ancestors to future generations.

I used a semi-structured interview method. I had prepared questions, but also, I wanted to open to the flow of the conversation, to allow for the inner wisdom of the elders and shamans to move freely. So I was not fixed to the order or even necessity for any of the questions. I used these possible questions as a guide.

Question: What made you peaceful, what made peace to be more sustainable during the time of your fathers and grandfathers? What information do you have about that?

Question: What was the role of the powerful women, who could talk with spirits and what did women contribute to peace building?

Question: How did you manage to solve conflicts between your family, and between you and outsiders who came to visit you, in the Griamma community during those times?

Question: How did you connect peace with the soil? How was the soil important to you?

Question: The worst conflict they ever had to deal with: one that went well, one not so well.

Question: Did you have any kind of god, a worship, what was your inner work that sustained you?

Question: What from your view, do peacemaking, conflict, soil and politics have to do with each other, if anything?

Question: What would you say to the next generation about peace making, conflict and the soil?

I had these questions ready. The questions that I actually used arose in the experience of being with the person in his or her home, the feeling between us, the atmosphere in the moment, and my own awareness.

I went to the elders, wanting to know about the role of elders during the early days before the missionaries and colonial days. I wanted to learn from them how the role of the elders was conducted, and compared to these days, where I live and where he lives, what was the role of the elders?

I asked each one: With all the knowledge and wisdom you have, what can help us as this generation compared to the last generation and the future? What message do you have to tell us, so we can understand the future and how to be sustainable?

I asked: What was life like in earlier times, and what are you anticipating for the future for this generation?

I also asked: Think back to your time around ten years old, when you can still remember your leaders. About a century ago, before the introduction of formal education, before missionaries and colonisation of the church, before colonisation by the British. What was the role of the soil, in terms of peace building, conflict resolution and the political system at that time, compared with today?

Every woman and every man I interviewed spoke almost the same about the themes, so this verified for me the unity of the collective wisdom.

The interviews, the elders

Charo Baya Kithunga Jefwa

My first interview was with Charo Baya Kithunga Jefwa. Charo said he did not go to school so he does not exactly know his age but according to the national identity card, he is sure he is above 100 years. When he explained when he was born it was clear to me he is 110 years old.



He is a farmer and he keeps chickens, goats and cattle. Here he is on his farm in Sabaki, in Malindi district. He also grows some crops: beans, corn, cassava. He lives in his home. He has a large extended family and a big home. He has three wives. His firstborn son is 70 years old.

Dama Chula Mbitha

Dama Chula Mbitha is 120 years old. She lives in Majahazini Magarini location in Magarini sub county.



She lives with her family. She has three sons, the youngest is 77 years old, the middle one is 75 years old, and the oldest son is 89 years old. She keeps cattle that she gave her grandsons to take care of. She no longer farms herself, but she has a small allotment to grow traditional vegetables for herself. She was born in the area of Sosoni and married to Pumwani. She has local chickens and ducks. She has always lived throughout her life with her family. Her husband died 30 years ago, and she remains with her children. She has two married daughters, not living with her.

Joseph Kenga Chembe Fondo Birya

Joseph Kenga Chembe Fondo Birya lives in Nyamala Sinene in Adu location in Magarini Sub county. He is 76 years old, not very old! He is a farmer he has cattle, goats and chickens. He lives with his family in Nyamalasine. He has a family.



He has been with the Griamma community and his interest has been very much in healing trees, until now he is getting trees that heal sicknesses in the body. He wants to create an archive for interested youth so future generations will have the knowledge of trees and healing properties. He got a lot of information from his grandmothers and grandfathers. He practices this on the side, next to being a farmer. He is not a formally recognised shaman but he has much wisdom.

Dama Ndilo Ngala Jidu

Dama Ndilo Ngala Jidu is 110 years old. She lives with her family in Ramada village, in Ardu location. She is a farmer and has been farming her entire life. She has some cows, goats and chickens. She lives with her family in her home village. She was born in Mutangani in Malindi district. When she grew up, she left Malindi, and went to an area called Garschi where she got married and came to Ramadfa.



Loda Makombo



Loda Makombo is a man 87 years young! He is a farmer. He lives in Ramada sub location, Adu location in Magarini sub county. He is a farmer. He grows corn and green peas. He has cattle and goats. He lives with his big extended family: children and grandchildren. He loves dancing and singing; rituals in his cultural way. He has a big purpose for that. He says:

I do my rituals and keep my promises to nature ever year. I stayed very long without getting a child for my wife. So I have to do ritual by the grave of my grandmother and grandfather. So I did a ritual and said if I get a son I will do a ritual on the goats, and bring them home.

After making this ritual he got a son. The ritual was to kill a goat and send the blood to the grave of the grandfather, and then get a stick from the mokona tree and erect it in his home. The tree had the name of the grandfather and grandmother.

Dama Gona Fondo



Dama Gona Fondo is 110 years old. She lives with her son in Ramada Adu sub location in Magarini sub county. She is a farmer. She grows sweet potatoes and she has goats and chickens.

PART 2

What I learned from the elders

In this section I am combining what the elders shared with me from their early years, about the political system, conflict and group process, education, and soil and peace.

Political system

The political systems during the older days was owned by the people themselves. At the household level, the man was the head of the household. In a homestead with many households the oldest man was treated as the head of that homestead. One elder described the political system of the Griamma people, and how they elected leaders:

During those times, we had a political system that was right inside our hearts. Every community had between four and seven clans. Every clan would have a large house. Each clan would choose their leader for the Council of Elders. One elder would go to another elder within the clan, and say, "According to the spirit of our ancestors, it is you who are to be the next leader of the community. The spirit has appointed you".

Then the clan would gather together in a community gathering and the community would endorse, and say, we agree. The elder can say no, but that would not be easy. Because being chosen is a special way of honouring the ancestors, it wasn't easy to say no. But if the elder doesn't want to, he says,

I accept, but I feel there is another elder wiser than me.

And the clan says:

We honour your reasons, and if he agrees, we accept him.

The Council of Elders were then led by one wise man or shaman. This elder must be old and have lived long to see many things that he can advise or lead the men selected to form the Council of Elders. All of them must be accepted by the community. It was rare for a

community not to accept an elder. Two reasons that the community may not approve the selection is if the elder are allegations of witchcraft or adultery.

The Council of Elders was approved in a big community celebration. Rituals were conducted with singing and dancing and then the elders take their role to build peace and solve conflicts in families and in communities. Every visitor who come to the community from a different community will be taken to the elders before being allowed to stay there.

These elders were paid nothing, and they did not expect any payment. At times, urban members of the community honoured the work of elders by giving a calabash of traditional liquor or wine as an appreciation. This was share among the other elders in the Council. They were the most respected people in the community. Their decision was fair and firm. They were like living ancestors. They trained the community and lead the way to make the dreams of their communities realised.

One old man I interviewed, compared today's political system with his youth. He said now, there are very young people in political positions, with little life experience. They either bribed their way to the position or got it as a result of their education. He sees today's education as non-inclusive, promoting *me not us, I and not we*. He believes this selfishness leads to corruption.

He said,

I am very sad today seeing the youth in darkness. They are not willing to learn from their fathers. In the homes, the fathers also have no time for their children. During my time parents wanted to teach what they had learn from their grandparents and parents. Today, the children think they know everything after going to school for eight or twelve or sixteen years. They think they have education, and valuing their culture is being primitive. My father taught me how farm, keep animals like cows. I learned from him the values of our culture which is now gone. Chiefs are employed, and some even bribe to get the job. They have no deeper healing of their own process from their school years. There is no democracy in the hearts of the people like in the olden days. Today, democracy is in the pocket of few because of bribes, and age is not considered as aspect of wisdom. If you have the formal education, you qualify to get the job

regardless of age or wisdom. I can say democracy is a path that citizens have to go through by learning from their culture and add the formal education. This could be better.

Conflict and group process

When the elders I spoke with were children and teenagers (around 1900 in the Gregorian calendar) the role of their elders was to build peace in the community. Their role was to solve family conflicts, conflicts based on land disputes, conflicts based on women - a man goes to another woman who belongs to another man. There were also conflict between the community and external people. When male elders reached a certain age, according to how they speak to people and bring people together, they are selected by the existing elders and then the people in the community approve the selection. If the community does not approve, you are not allowed to sit in the Council of Elders.

The culture I was told, valued respect, and all youth, women and men learnt how to behave with each other according to these values from their parents and grandparents. During those times, there was a specific way for youth, elders and all the people used to solve their differences.

Animals were also used to make peace between communities and between people when they fought. When no-one was injured in the fight, there was no fine or compensation. But if one of the parties was injured and blood came out, rituals were conducted, and the one who injured his friend was fined with goats or cattle according to the decision of the elders.

In solving fights like this, where one was hurt and blood came out, the parties had to go to the Council of Elders, which was like a court during those days. The elders would bring together the families of the two youth. Before addressing the conflict with the people involved, the conflict was analysed to be sure it was truly a relationship conflict between these two young people, and not a systemic-intergenerational conflict. For instance, a conflict in the family system, between their grandparents that was still unsolved.

If there was a physical wound as a result of the conflict, and wound was not healing, the elders did rituals on the day of solving the conflict. They asked the one who wounded the other or

his friend to bring a black small chicken about two months of age. The one who wounded, had to go to the forest to get special leaf of a wild Sisal and make a very thin rope, and put some red, white and black beads on the rope. The person was asked by the elders to put or tie the saisal rope on the hand of the one who was wounded.

This process was called Kutsinzira, after two days of this process the wound started to heal without any medicine, because the spirit of the ancestors and the spirit of the trees are together they all have a heart that is full of love and forgiveness and permeate peace would be obtain and these youth and their families will live as friends, brothers and respected people of the community, never repeating the conflict.

If the conflict was not a historical conflict, the elders would agree for a day where they will solve the conflict once and for all. The elders came together and brought all the parties together to talk, no idea was isolated from the hearing. They used to bring something like a *group process* where every party speaks, and both parties listen, until they come to a consensus, until they agree.

They say anything not addressed to its core will cycle. Cycle in Process Work is the return of a topic again and again in stronger and disturbing ways, until it is processed to the root:

If an idea is given out and it is not dealt with, it will come back again.

So they did not leave anything unsolved, and came to an agreement. A conflict may take four, five to seven days before coming to a concrete consensus. They will take that long, because they know once they hurry, they will leave other things unsolved. So, it is better to go as long as necessary to make all those parties come to consensus.

It touched me to discover that the group process was a very important process in my culture. The family group process was called *Dhomeh*, which means a place where all people from the family meet in the evening, both men and women, but sit separately. They choose a topic, the topic might be, a young boy misbehaving. Everyone is allowed to contribute, even that boy, who will not be condemned. People are taking roles, and the boy sees how he is taking a role in the family, a *ghost role* from one of the ancestors. Ghost role in Process Work is an energy that is not directly owned by an individual but oppresses the group.

And once they agree, if there is a punishment, both parties will be happy to take the punishment, or to pay the penalty, and then they will be able to have that solved and buried. It will be in the memories of the elders to know, we have such a case, maybe in future there will be a similar case, and this will help us know how to solve it. So that is one way they maintained a peaceful society.

The role of the male elder in that family was to prevent conflict. They did it by speaking about things that may cause conflict, in the *Dhomeh*. Everyone sat together. The role of the elders was to create awareness on things that cause conflict.

If conflict did arise among family members, they were brought together that evening. The elder was in the role of conflict facilitator and got straight to the point:

You are in conflict because of your plot, or farm, or had a quarrel, with your friend, I want to hear from both sides.

And he would be facilitating the conflict, so they would start:

My brother took my goat without permission.

And then other party will say:

I did that, or I did not do that,

Going back and forth, listening, as in a group process, the elder would be listening to this process. And he would then frame the conflict:

Now I have been listening. Your grandfather also had this conflict, and they solved it in this particular way. The brothers shared. You could not say "it's mine". During those times, they lived in community together, and had a big farm, that they worked together, and whatever is there is owned communally. If the goat is raised in the community hub, it then belongs to the family. One can use, and say, "I have used a goat that has ownership to my younger brother for this and this reason. He can also use my goat because we are brothers and help one another".

Everyone is allowed to speak, and the elders who have been taken away from the community into the forest, will be listening and pointing out what is relevant to the group. And the community members listening and participating in the group process, can say:

Oh, now we understand. He is so aggressive, because he is like his great great great grandfather.

A Process Work view might see him as a *ghost role*. As a last resort, if the person insists, then they used the principle: What belongs to me, belongs to me. The elder then says:

If you really want to be independent, ok, your grandfather was also like that. We can't stop you. If we try to stop you, we might be offending the ancestors. That's good. If you are married, the family will bless you, and show you a plot where you can live, on your own, as an elder with your own family. From there you can join the family, but you are not obliged.

That is how they solved family issues.

In a conflict outside the community, the elders were known to be wise people who could help. Elders were appointed from among the elders, to go to the conflicted people, and find some elders from their side. The role of the senior elder was to listen to both sides. And they will speak their conflict while they are conflicting and give everyone the opportunity to express his or her anger and everything, he or she needs to get justice for.

The elders then looked at the history of both communities:

We have seen two communities coming from one root, one ancestor who made a big family.

Elders give frame and suggestions, for instance:

We give you one month to practice what we said. If it doesn't work, we will come together again and make another step.

This was done with a lot of care. They generally agreed. Then they would drink the local liquor, to seal the deal. Utsoro, a special meal that is fermented and when it ferments it changes to alcohol. Something very special, not for every day.

This is how they valued themselves and valued the soil. Give respect to the soil by saying, we are standing on the soil, and eating this meal, so our conflict is solved by eating together.

Learnings about Conflict Resolution from the Elders

I learned many things from the elders about conflict resolution. Two important aspects related to the above:

- Providing an open and embracing space for all the voices to speak and be heard is itself healing.
- Making enough time to continue until the conflict is resolved improves the atmosphere and brings hope as conflicts do not fester or recycle. It is empowering for conflicting parties to know that their issue will be addressed and worked through to completion.

The work of Arny Mindell, specifically *deep democracy* and *worldwork*, has helped me to better understand the wisdom and practices of the elders, and vice versa. I have learned that this form of group process is worldwork applied in my culture. Deep democracy conflict resolution in groups and one-on-one relationships addresses seen and unseen forces in the field, names roles and ghostroles, and supports their interaction. The examples the elders shared with me reveal this cross-cultural knowledge that can help the world to see how we can help solve conflicts and problems that we have. It's a communication between the ancestors, and it's a communication between those who have already been living here, and those who will be living here tomorrow.

The role of women

Women were not permitted to be part of Council of Elders. For a man to be elected onto the Council of elders, he had to be married. Women played a role in nurturing the elders to be powerful leaders.

The role of women in the community was very fundamental as women were connected to nature. They were caregivers to men, youth and older people. Women were the most respected peace builders. They also had the role of liaising between people and the ancestors. They interpreted what trees say to the people from season to season. Women were highly respected as powerful traditional healers.

To become a traditional healer, a shaman and a fortune teller, the person has to be able to understand the life of the spirits and their language. The woman did not choose this role, but was selected by the spirit of ancestors themselves. The woman had to pass through various stages until she could become a powerful shaman.

The woman will become mad, she will be very mad, but her madness will be different from what the elders called lunacy. She will be altered and for fourteen days. She will not eat, only drink. She will be in the forest the whole day and in the evening she will come with different types of plants that heal different sickness. She will no longer be able speak her language, but will be talking in a spiritual language that only a shaman who went through the same process can understand. She was alone in the forest, and so gaining this knowledge and training was done by the spirit themselves, who chose her.

When the training was over, the woman could also go to the ocean in the rocks and stay there for seven days. Eight people will be searching for her. A qualified shaman will find her as the spirits will tell the shamans where she is after seven days. The shaman will bring her home for an adjustment period of ten days. During these days, she will only be writing with her finger on the soil making some kind of drawing that only a shaman could tell what she is saying. After this process, these women will be highly respected. They can interpret dreams. They can predict things that will happen in years to come.

Examples of these powerful women were Mekatili Wa Menza for the Griamma community and Mepoho in the Chonyi community.

They had a powerful role in community building and also as healers. They communicated with special trees. For instance, they prayed and performed rituals under the Mugandi Muyu (fig) tree. They also could treat all kinds of infectious diseases. They could tell if there will be a long drought or famine, just by how the wind blows from one direction to another.

Education

In the community the elders both men and women had the role to teach the younger men and women all the moral values of the culture and every older and elder had to care and protect the younger generation so that they grow knowing who they are and that there are the elders of the days to come.

At that time, the Griamma people had their own system of education that they inherited from their fathers. Passing on the education to their children was an honour to the ancestors, who joined them as living spirits in educating the next generation.

Formal and informal education

One old man said he had two things he wanted to share. The way things were before formal education was introduced, and what changed after formal education came out. Before formal education, people used to live so peacefully, and valued the soil in terms of growing food:

We used to make it more fertile, we had large forests. People cultivated four or five acres, and we left the rest. We worked on this plot for at least seven years. Then we left that part to develop into a forest again.

So the people were living together in terms of building peace, by providing food. And the children of that time, and the old men and the women, really valued working, and that was the only education given to the children. And they valued it.

Since formal education was introduced into schools, there was a big conflict between formal education and traditional education. Many people did not allow their children to go to school. Why? Because they said,

the education is destroying our children. They will not know how to farm, they will not know how to take care of the soil.

So it was until when people were forced to leave behind so many parts of their culture, and go with the formal education. So in the transition from informal to formal education, there was a very big pain among the people, leaving their own culture, to the culture of formal education.

Most of the elders said that the biggest mischief that was done was that the formal education ignored the culture of the people from all those years, and only introduced the formal education. They feel it is not good, because it is not sustainable. They could not introduce their own education to the children and the relevant age, because at that age they were now going to school to get formal education. So that was a conflict. On elder's advice for the future:

Those people who are learning, and got the formal education, people like you, and now you are seeking to know the informal education, you can cooperate and pick what is good and put it here, and pick what is good and put it here, so there is a balance of both cultures for next generations.

Sex education

One important aspect from the elders is sex education. This is especially important to me, in my work with young people from early childhood to becoming young women and men. We know that today, the rates of abuse and exploitation are very high, and often happen away from the public eye. There is a lot of shame, secrets and taboos that are barriers to open truth telling and healing. So sex education where you can talk openly and get accurate information to be safe in age-appropriate ways, is crucial for healthy relationships and reducing harm.

I learned from the elders that sex education was introduced to the boys and girls at the age of nine. In the homestead there were two elders. A woman and a man. And it was the role of the elder in the homestead, to give sex education. The women elders to the young girls, and the men elders to the young boys.

During those times, there were traditional dancing competitions. They used to go to practices, but they never touched one another in terms of sex, because they were all aware what is happening when they have sex before marriage. It was in those times very important for a girl to remain a virgin until she is married. And if she got married, and had sex before, it was regarded as a disaster, an abomination. The role of the elders was to get to these boys and girls first, with sex education. The young boys for example were told:

Now you are growing up. You can see some hair growing and you can see things you did not have before on your body. That means you are becoming a man, you are becoming more mature. So there are a few things that you will feel, that you didn't feel earlier, you might see a woman and be interested, and want to have her to have sex with. Loving and admitting that, to that person, is permitted. But it is forbidden and it is an abomination to have sex before marriage. So you can love, play, dance, you can do everything but you cannot have intimacy with another woman if you are not married, or after marriage with a woman who is not your wife.

So that was the education given to both boys and girls. They were all aware of this, and used to respect their elders, their parents and community. That was before the formal education was introduced.

Sex education is not new to the Griamma community. The government now is copying the elders' sex education, to be introduced to schools, because it was there before, and it worked. I learned from one woman, who grew up in Griamma community:

When I was growing up in Griamma community, my main teacher was my grandmother who taught me many aspects of the culture. In that time people did not have formal education, but we had our own system of learning inherited from fathers and mothers, and passed down from daughter to daughter, son to son, grandmother to grandchild.

Framework for gender relations

At the traditional dancing rituals, men and women could mingle together. Sex before marriage was not allowed, so that the woman would not get pregnant. Men were taught that it is not part of our culture to have sex before marriage. If a woman was still a virgin before marriage, the man paid the dowry to bride's family. There was no money during these times only sharing of food animals like goats, sheep, cattle were kept in the homesteads, the animals like goats and cattle were there to pay dowries if a man is marrying a woman.

Of course, there were people who went against that rule, but it was rare to hear that. If a young man got a young woman pregnant, there was an arrangement that was followed:

You have gone against our life and culture. You will get married, but there will be no celebration. The dowry has to be paid.

To check if the woman was a virgin, after the wedding, and after having sex, the couple had to check for a sacred blood that comes from the woman. The blood was taken to the grandmother, who showed it to the family and the people, to prove that the granddaughter is pure. Then they performed singing and dancing rituals to celebrate.

This was part of those times, it is not something we do today, but in those times, it was seen as a good thing to make sure young women were not left pregnant on their own.

At that time, the man could not choose a wife of his own. Today, people decide who they want to live together with, and stay together with. Today, you can choose who you want to love. The rule worked in those times, but not today because the lifestyle changed. Today there is greater diversity of people coming together and interacting. Even so, I admire the discipline they maintained. If we can bring our discipline to our courtships, then our heart could guide us to the right people, who we want as a partner, and the relationships may go easier.

If a rape happened, the girl was supposed to go straight to her grandmother. All the youth were known to each other. She had to tell the grandmother:

I have been raped by so and so.

The girl was taught to say no to a relationship that is only for sex. If you want to find out if he is serious, he must go to the family and tell about the relationship. If he is not serious, he will not go to the family. So that meant he only wanted to have sex. The young woman could tell the grandmother:

I met a boy and when I see him my heart jumps,

and the grandmother will laugh. Then she asked:

Does he have a grandmother, does he have a grandfather?

If not, he is free to talk to any older person. Before they tell the parents, it goes to grandparents. Children are named after their grandmother and grandfather, these relationships are very strong.

In the context of this day and age, I see the importance of sex education and guidance in romantic relationships. Of course the content and application will look different according to today's customs, and roles of men and women have changed with current times. However, the background purpose to care for the individuals and culture could continue with educating both girls and boys about fundamental issues regarding sex and their bodies, so they can care for themselves, each other and their families as well as possible. I feel supported by this in my efforts and determination to bring sex education into my Children Center.

Pronouns and identity

Pronouns also indicate how gender relations were understood in the culture. Addressing an elder as *old man* is a show of respect, and a show of acknowledging his age and wisdom. The pronoun *you* is a collective name, addressing the person not as one person. The pronouns *they* and *them* are still referring to one person. This shows that the person has many identities, and a lot of life experience. The pronoun *they* refers to people you respect. When the person is in front of you, you address not as one you, but as *they* or *them*. Even when you greet them. The pronoun shows that you are addressing a person who has seen more than you, with all the wisdom they have accumulated in their entire time of living.

A person who marries your daughter, a person who married your aunty, you also don't address as a single identity, but as two. That identity comes from the relationship. Mutual relationship. *Mutsedzao* is a Giriama word for the English mother-in-law and father-in-law.

Today, we are also in a time of expanding pronouns, to accommodate a greater diversity of relationships.

Impact of colonisation

One elder who lived through pre and post colonialism, spoke much about the lives of people during the British occupation. He spoke about good and bad things they did. He compared what he sees as good aspects of colonial education with today's formal education, and with what he got from his grandparents and ancestors.

During the time of colonial and pre-colonial occupation, the British government sent people who came with the word of God. The old man remembers that his first education was from a missionary, who spoke about good things, but at that time, the Griammas were not interested. So the missionaries left peacefully, and took their education to other communities.

Those who were educated by the British and the missionaries were the ones who got the white-collar jobs, when the Kenyan government was established by the British.

The old man said:

I regret, my people and grandfathers refused that education. They did not see the future in terms of this education. You need that formal education to have a good living, to have a good job. If they could have agreed to it, maybe we could be in a better situation now. Most of the local traditional leaders did not have a space to accommodate new culture. So it was very hard for the culture of the British to accommodate our culture of the Griamma people. There could have been a mutual space for us to bring what is important. We missed that. It is because our own leaders, who were not willing to share what was important to them, with the British. At that time, the missionaries regarded our culture as a sin.

The old man also spoke about the impact of colonisation on farming:

It was also a time of a great change. People used to work the soil with their own hands. Now we work the soil with machines. We have no chance to say no, because the government insisted on machines. I went to school for one week, but my parents said, "Never again step a foot in that school. If you go there, you will no longer be working in the farm". So this education was not given a priority in my time.

What I really admired with this colonial government, how they maintained peace and order. Compared to today, a person might get killed, but no justice. In colonial times, they followed up to the point of justice. They did not accept bribes.

The old man spoke about his view of life today, compared with the life he lived:

Today it is so uncertain, you never know about tomorrow, because people have stopped relying on each other. There is a lot of individualism. You cannot tell who is a friend and who is an enemy.

Each of the elders spoke of living together and depending on one another as their own natural way to live as a social people. One said:

We need one another, and cannot live alone. This is what I want to value. We the Griaama people were regarded as the most peaceful and welcoming people, willing to share what we have even with a stranger, share the food for them to live.

I want to bring this to the younger people, that we cannot be on our own, you need a friend, you need to stay together. Also, during health and sickness. It is the same with the soil. It is sacred.

Soil and peace

The soil was valued and protected as in those days, they said that a living soil is medicine to the heart. Soil and heart are connected.

The farming in those days was very successful in terms of taking care of the soil. They never used chemicals. Soil was of great value for food, animals and care of people. Soil was sacred for the community, and sacred for communication.

Peace was maintained in the community by every member and they did this by coming together to give thanks during harvesting and after harvesting. This ritual was followed by prayers and the soil was put in sacks with special tree sticks with the names of their ancestors who died long ago, as their spirit demanded to be brought home to the soil.

The soil was and is the main source of life and also is alive itself. The entire community took care and protected the soil by using the traditional ways of farming. They cleared a forest for the purpose of growing food, and used that area for seven years. After that, it was left to grow into forest again. Nature was in control. They knew that if they do not go by nature, some serious problems may occur for future generations in terms of pandemic or hunger.

The soil was also a source of communication. It was used to communicate to the elders and children, and in this way the value of the soil was taught to the youth who would become the next elders. In their homes, the old people did not sleep in beds. The old people slept on the ground, close to the soil, on the skin of a cow, so they could listen to the soil, and hear who is coming. They could hear every people or persons walking to their home territory. They could differentiate the steps of enemies and those who come in peace for peaceful talks or visits. The elders were the first to discover the steps. They could tell if is a neighbour that they know or if they are new people from a different community. Are these people coming friendly, or are they invaders coming not coming for peace, not for happiness? One old man would be relied upon to communicate with the neighbours. And so they could be ready for invaders.

Healing trees were taken care of in the forest. The old people could listen to trees and listen if it is time to prepare for farming. They could hear if rains are near. They communicated with the trees. One elder gave me the example of murihi muzae. She said:

*When these trees shed leaves, we would know, we are getting to a drought season.
But when they start to give out leaves, we know it is time to prepare our farms because soon rain is coming.*

The forest and soil were also assisting to get medicine. This was the natural system for the community to know the seasons.

The soil was sacred. They used to make pots. A special skill and sacred, to get soil and make it into a shape that could be used by the community. It was used to store water, and for cooking during those times. They had different and many names for soil, depending on the function. For example, Soil for pots was called kilongo. A type of clay soil. Different soils were used for different functions.

The elders also had the role of education youth on how to build peace from the soil. According to the culture of the Griamma, elders used to educate the community on nature and the seasons. They could tell if there will be rain or drought through their life experience and from their ancestors and nature. The community lived from nature: from the food they planted, they also hunted, and gathered wild fruits. This made them very close to nature. Trees were the main teacher. I learned from one old man, that when the Murihi tree starts to shed its leaves, they knew there will either be drought or they are approaching the dry season. So people would be ready to go to areas where water will be available such as areas with permanent rivers.

This natural communication was a symbol of togetherness. Their ancestors lived with the trees, and the trees knew them. They passed information from one generation to the next. They knew every tree by name, and they were together with the ancestors in spirit as they believed spirit never dies and there is life after death. The ancestors will always stay to help and guide their people who are alive so that relationship of the fathers and mothers who are alive and those who died was always respected. Even those who are alive could pray or do rituals, believing that this way, they could get answers to their problems or a pandemic.

Precious learnings:

- If you listen for the wisdom of nature, you can find solutions. Listen to the trees, and stay close to the soil. Value the precious information that is in the field.

- The soil is truly our common ground. Caring for it, we can learn to make space and care for others, and receive the wisdom about how to live, and how to live together.

Dreams as communication with ancestors

In those times, the elders spoke of using night-time dreams, which were very crucial in how they used communication. Night dreams were very important in the community. It was a communication between the dead, or the ancestors, or the spirits, to the living people. When one person had a dream, they had to share it with the whole community. They would say,

maybe an ancestor wants us to do something.

If they could not interpret the dream, then they went to a shaman. A shaman was a very important person. This shaman would say:

I need some time

and then go into an altered state, or do some inner work, to give the interpretation. And then he will say:

Maybe your ancestors, maybe the father of your grandfather, he wants this communication to be done, because there is a disaster coming within the family line. And this family line had this disaster in earlier times, and we want to prevent it happening again.

So they will do everything necessary to please the ancestor. Then there will be peace, and the disaster will not come to the area.

Dreams were also connected with large forests. They said that in the large forests, is where the spirits live and stay. They called these large forests *gayas*. If you are very old, you cannot work and farm and take care of goats. The people will take you to this large forest. And they will build a house. And every clan will have a house for the elders who will stay there. They will be fed, they will be clothed, until maybe they die. But they don't say "they die", they say:

They join the ancestors.

The community had a special way of taking care of the elders. They were taken to the forest. In the interviews I learned that the Watha people were hunters and gatherers. Because the Griamma were farmers, they went to the Watha and said:

We want to use this forest that has been your home, your healing, we want to plant food. We will cut some trees down if you will allow us.

They did some rituals, the Watha gave the forest, and the Griamma grew their food. Watha people only ate meat and hunted in the forest. They are no longer hunters and gatherers. They have moved into lifestyle of growing food. The old man said:

I've discovered in this world that water is what we share in everyday life. We all need water, we all use water. And this water makes us one.

Here, the old man is speaking of the deep democracy of water.

That was the process for old people to join the ancestors. The process was to go to the forest. People in the community used to go to the forest to seek advice and opinions from the elders. When there was no rain, some elders prayed for rain. In English they are called rainmakers, but in the Griamma language they are called *vula*. So these *vula* people will have isolated themselves to communicate with the gods and start praying. They will say:

We need to have this kind of food, we need to have this kind of animal, so we can please the gods. Once you give us, go back and rain will come.

One elder said:

We were taught how to value ancestors, and how to communicate with ancestors. Build a small house, gather sticks and give trees the name of the ancestors. We could address the ancestors with a problem. These rituals formatted communication to the ancestors with prayers.

Also some powerful women who used to be very valued by the community because of their talents of communication, being shamans. One old woman told me:

A shaman could be a woman, or a man from a special line of shamans, a special line of healers. But not all families had shamans. One of my grandfathers was a healer, and now he needs to pass on that healing system to the community. So he chooses one grandson or nephew to communicate with community. He would be in an altered state for seven days, getting mad and only drink a little water. And he would pick certain leaves from special trees and plants and bring them back. Then an expert in the community would say, "This leaf is for this sickness, it is used in this way" and so on. This process was called a "Kuronga".

Not all people have the ability to get to this altered state. The first thing is to respect this person's ability to get altered, because he or she has the link to the spirit. The elder will tell you what you can do with your problem.

The elders I interviewed told me that after the kuronga, the elder would come back and say something like this:

This conflict is not a natural conflict. It is caused by our late grandfather. Rituals will be done, these families will be brought together and make peace.

They also told me that the shamans could help people because they had their own places in the forest. People who were sick and had problems would go into the forest and get healing. This communication between spirits and community was natural and protected the people. This was the everyday education. One old woman elder told me:

Not like today, when there is a school where you get taught things. The formal education has washed away all the culture. If it could be even more sustainable, in the future if the formal education and this informal education could be combined so children know where they come from and the wisdom that their elders knew.

Peace building, shamans and altered states

Shamans were middle people, communicating between ancestors, gods and the people. They moved between everyday consciousness and altered states. Shamans communicated about conflict and peace, and harvest themes. They performed and taught rituals in altered states

of consciousness. Shamans had a very big role to play in my culture. And this role of being altered, which I learned through Process Work, has made me very aware how my culture used to value this, and this is how shamans came out, because shamans have a powerful role in my culture. They are respected.

Before becoming a shaman, the person first has to go mad. They have to be in an altered state. They don't eat food for 14 days, only drink water. They live only on water. Some go to the forest, others go to the wilderness, some go to the ocean, and stay there for 14 days.

During these 14 days they communicate with the spirits and the ancestors, and they were shown special trees that heal different situations. Shamans got the knowledge of healing a human body from the altered state communication. Whenever there was a disorder, the shamans would pray. Whatever the problem or issue to be solved, peace was maintained.

Peace was contributed to in many different ways. The shamans contributed by being in an altered state. They were really respected because not everyone could go into this altered state, and communicate what the spirits want from the people, and communicate to the spirits what the people want from the spirits.

One type of shaman was a traditional doctor and healer. They get this wisdom from the ancestors. Maybe their father, or great grandfather was a traditional healer. So all types of trees that heal, will be in one package passed from one generation to another generation and so on. The traditional healer worked together with the shamans, who are like fortune tellers, who can say:

Ok you have a problem with this and this, so you need to this and this, the one who will give you all the healing.

Another kind of shaman is a bridge from the community to ancestors and goats. Most of these were women, and they were very powerful women. They tell the dreams of the community in terms of food, drought, disease or pandemics, and how they can prevent it using the trees. They say the trees communicate directly with the shamans who bear the dreams of the people. Food and shamans had an important role in peace building.

I have seen in Process Work is how altered states are welcomed and worked with. Altered states in my community is being mad. You are being mad. And when you are being mad, there must be a purpose. So being mad is a way of communication. You are not yet dead, but you can communicate to the other level of people, spirits, god or nature. Getting all that, you can bring it back to the people. This was very deep in my community in terms of peace building, healing and curing of diseases. And healing the body at large.

Shamans went a step or two further with communicating with the spirit, in communication with gods directly, communicating with the ancestors. They get all the information and bring it back so it can be helpful. So if my body is aching in every place, and I don't know why, a shaman knows because he communicated to the gods and to the spirits, and can tell me:

You can use this type of tree, you can use this type of tea, this type of leaves, and your body will come to normal.

Altered states are part of huge communication in terms of life and death, in the culture of Griaama. And this has given me an experience of how deep and important this can be in terms of communicating to the world, and bringing peace, because of this inter-relational knowledge which I see is very much connected to Process Work's view of the field. Field effect means that the personal, relationships, conflict and community, and the entire world, are all interconnected and influencing each other, and there is a larger, invisible force that is organizing everything.

In Process Work, I have discovered myself and my roots. Process Work names, addresses and works with information on three levels of reality - consensus level, dreamland level and the essence level. This helps me to understand and see even more clearly the wisdom of my roots and the elders. This type of thinking was embedded into the entire culture. That is why Process Work always felt so natural for me, and why I feel at home in the theory, concepts, and practice. I see the dreams were very crucial in earlier times. People who could dream and share their dreams in the community were really valued in my community. Why? Because the community had this indigenous knowledge of communication, between those who had already been living on that land, living on that soil, they are still there, only they cannot talk verbally. But in night dreams they can talk with this person who is deeply asleep,

and then they can leave all that is needed. But when this person wakes up, these ancestors are not there, so the person has to share this information to the community. And the community now realises Wow! This is what we are now. This is what our ancestors are telling us.

So, this shaman will be able to translate that dream, that knowledge, through the communication with the ancestors, the spirits, and give back, and the community will know where they are as a community. The spirits might be saying, sooner or later there will be a disaster, so how they can prepare themselves, or they might have a solution to the current problems they are facing, or it might be a dream that that ancestors used to have for this community, and now we have diverted from the original dream of our ancestors, we are doing different things.

When they understand the dreams, or don't understand the dreams, they go back to the shamans. Why do they go back to the shamans? Because the shamans had the opportunity to go a step further to communicate with the ancestors, to communicate with the gods, to communicate with the spirits.

During this time, all the men were regarded as very wise people and leaders, not only could people choose them, they would also look for community elders according to the lifestyle of that old man or woman. Can he solve conflict? Is she respected by the community? What is his lifestyle in the community? What today we might call conflict facilitators was a natural part of living together.

Final reflections

In this study, I wanted to bring together the shamanistic approach to healing, the elders' approach to conflict, and Process Work awareness approach to conflict.

I'm touched and also feeling so open, to see how our Griamma culture has something to do with the great inventions and discoveries of Arny Mindell's process-oriented psychology. From my research I have learned and discovered that dreams, altered states and group process which are very crucial in terms of Process Work are so important in my culture, and always have been. Now hearing from the Griamma elders, and reading Arny Mindell's book, *Shaman's Body* I realise this was already there in the Griamma culture. For me, and my people, being aware of who we are, and our roots, is important to identity. Being aware of our roots and identity allows us to dream what the ancestors used to do and want to do.

In this thesis, I wanted to make these lessons from my elders and ancestors, and how they correspond to Process Work, be known to my audience, so you can learn and see the connection of my culture to the practice of Process Oriented group process. We know now that before formal education in many cultures there were resemblances in how we communicated with the dead. I have attempted to shine the light of Process Work on my own experience and to show possible connections between my culture's way of using group process, altered states and dreams.

One of my goals in this thesis was to be able to understand the dreaming level and essence level of the community in terms of peace building, conflict resolution and the political area. I learned how my elders and their communities had a system already in place to work with conflicts and peace building and that people used that system to understand one another and love one another using working together, singing together, and composing songs together. They have always been connecting to the wisdom of the field in these ways, and following it for help in everyday life here on Earth.

Electing leaders was done in a communication with the spirits and with the hearts of the people. A wise man or woman can say,

We can see this old man is a wise man, and we will appoint him or her to be the leader of the community. And the spirits will help this person to lead, and the community members in that time will listen deeper to their own heart and to the spirits.

By agreeing together, they are giving this person power to be a community leader and make decisions with the people.

How did they develop sustainable ways and rules in how to govern the community? I wanted to find out how they did this. First, in the mutual respect given to leaders during that time. Even though the people who were ancestors were gone, there was a communication with them. People were preparing their children by telling them what their parents and grandparents had been doing. This was installed into their hearts for the next generation.

I am learning two-way knowledge: how elder knowledge can contribute to today's knowledge, and how today's wisdom from Process Work can contribute to my understanding of my own culture. I have learned from my elders, how the interconnection between the individual, nature and events that seems to be random also may have a meaningful connection and purpose.

I am a Griamma. Process Work has helped me to understand my cultural identity and to recognize more deeply what my culture has within it, and what has gone before me. Through this awareness, I have been able to do my own inner work and have gotten to know the channels of communication between me, my culture and my ancestors. Maybe it is because of this connection between my culture and Process Work that it always felt very familiar to me, and I quickly picked up methods and ideas because they fit so well with my personal and life experience of how things are.

These channels of communication have made me become more aware of how conflicts were solved. And in my learning about group process in Process Work, I have learned that group process is an amazing way that conflict can be resolved because every need is acknowledged. And every person has the right to give, or to play a role. Being aware of this, I have seen that the group process aspect has been one very fundamental way of peace building and solving conflict among the community, among families, and with outsiders. I have learned from the

elders in my community that they used to have this systematic way of bringing together those who have conflict, and how this forms a group of people.

The connection between Process Work and my culture touches me. Process Work and this knowledge from my culture together is giving us a way forward in how to build a world with less conflict, and how we can solve conflict.

The communication from our ancestors will lead this community to be on track according to their roots. And this I see is a very valuable cross-cultural issue that we all need, if we are to build a better world for all of us, because we are in a world of dominations, as happened here in my culture, with Christianity. All of these are cultures, each is important for building peace, but they should not condemn one another. That is what I learned from the culture of Griamma, and from Process Work I am confident that recognizing, revering, and following the wisdom of ancient traditions, in particular in this case, the Griamma, will change how we relate to one another on the global stage in the present times, and in the future.

As Arny Mindell says:

We cannot live the past in the present, but we can learn from the past to not replicate what happened and build a better future for all of us.

And now I have come full circle. Through Process Work I have discovered that the dreams I had in my childhood show me the life path that I was born to follow. The wise and powerful man in my dreams was always there for me in my times of great struggle when all seemed lost. The elders in this study have taught me that my own culture is also my wise elder, helping me learn from the past to build a better future. And Process Work has given me renewed inspiration to bring the fruits of that learning to the next generation in my community.

REFERENCES

The research for this thesis was done in accordance with the tradition of oral transmission. Most of the information was received in interviews, workshops, seminars, and personal conversations and consultations.

Literature

Mindell, A (1993), *The Shaman's Body: A New Shamanism for Transforming Health, Relationships and Community*, San Francisco: Harper.