

Dealing with conflicts Muwci style

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1st of April, 2002

In what regards conflicts, I certainly have nothing to boast of. I live with several unresolved conflicts on campus, all with faculty. And I hope Chaty didn't mean me (I yet didn't dare ask her) when she talked about how teacher injustices can hurt, and I hope she has forgiven me for my overdrawn outburst a bit more than a year ago.

So instead of dispensing blame, I would like to deal out praise.

I have been most impressed by how students in two separate recent events dealt with conflict.

The first was in that Global Affairs Extra on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The way Mohammed went into his part of the presentation, it could only become a fight. And that's what it did. It showed in a very – if negatively – impressive way how deep-rooted the resentments between the two sides are. If even UWC students engage in so aggressive an exchange, how bad must it be out on the Jerusalem streets! This is how it went for more than an hour.

Then.

Jonathan laid the ground when, obviously struggling with himself while saying it, he remarked that a difference should be made, a line should be drawn between his government and himself. What 'they' do is not what 'he' wants even if they pretend to act on his (as on all other subjects of theirs') behalf. And then Iftach came in. Very emotionally – extremely effective in this context because he wouldn't have been heard otherwise – he went on to almost shout that something else was needed, that we had to get away from personal stories, that he could tell us as many personal stories as we wanted of friends and relations killed or harmed, that both sides were suffering, suffering terribly because of that brutal war.

All of a sudden, the atmosphere in the packed room had changed. For a short while, the spirit of some higher common cause was present. And the discussion was lifted onto a different level.

It did somewhat revert to the older, more aggressive, more un-understanding tone soon after. But for the rest of the event, there was no longer that feeling of unbridgeable hatred in the room.

That wasn't merely engagement with conflict – that was conflict resolution at its best (if only successful for a short while).

The other instance occurred at tonight's College Meeting. And what I am going to write now is in no way directed against David – I am in fact sure (without having asked him) that he fully agrees with me. The way Hans took issue with David and with faculty abuse of power was most admirable. A conflict cannot be dealt with adequately unless it is brought out into the open (something that I personally am notorious at leaving until it is too late). And you may have to fight for your issue to remain one and to be recognised as such, even against fellow students. To stand up to authority – even if David is usually rather benign – most certainly needs a lot of courage.

Such courage is exactly what we need if we are to start dealing with the real problems of this world: oppression, racism, sexism, exploitation, poverty.

I have been most impressed by some of what students did or said at the conflict workshop last week. And I think it's a very worthwhile exercise that we ought to develop and pursue further. But playing at having a conflict and resolving it is one thing – let us, where we can, learn from the shining real world examples right in front of our eyes.