Understanding the deeper dimensions of culture, especially in contexts where “culture” and “tradition” have become mobilising and legitimising ideological factors for ethno-nationalism in ethnic conflict situations, requires appropriate methodologies, which are able to uncover underlying forces, which cause conflict.

The paper examines some methodological and ethical issues in carrying out social and participatory research in a situation of ethno-political conflict. It looks at the multi-dimensional role of the researcher as a facilitator, peace-builder and information gatherer. Of importance here is how these roles contribute to firstly, a more enlightened understanding of deeper structural, socio-cultural and psychological forces, which contribute to political conflict, and secondly, how social and participatory research itself is used as basis for peace building at the community level. Particular focus will be on the use of the Participatory Collective Appraisal (PCA) methodology which I developed and which is now being used by a number of Fiji civil society groups for community empowering and peace research and projects. The PCA is a much more refined version of the conventional ethnographic method of “participant observation”.

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