

# **20 PIECES OF ENCOURAGEMENT FOR AWAKENING AND CHANGE**

**Peacebuilding in the Region of the Former Yugoslavia**

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**Edited by**

Helena Rill

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**Centre for Nonviolent Action  
Belgrade–Sarajevo, 2007**

# Contents

## **PREFACE**

- 7 Martina Fischer

## **INTRODUCTION**

- 13 Tamara Šmidling, Helena Rill

## **I NONVIOLENCE**

- 19 Nonviolence – Political Action from the Stance of Harmlessness, Ana Raffai

## **II ACTIVISM(S)**

- 43 Making Waves or – How to Turn a Mire into a Place  
where Something Is Happening? Slobodanka Dekić
- 50 Reflections on Activism, Svetlana Kijevčanin
- 64 Nationalism Entails Discrimination, Ksenija Forca and Majda Puača
- 75 One Should Use These Unexpected Chances, Vesna Teršelič

## **III PEACE EDUCATION**

- 95 Peace Education – a Book or a Webpage? Iva Zenzerović Šloser
- 110 Peace Education as an Initiator of Social Change, Ivana Franović

## **IV DEALING WITH THE PAST**

- 127 Is Dealing with the Past Slow and Difficult in Our Regions? Goran Božičević
- 137 Without Dealing with the Past, All of It Is on Some Sort of  
an Abstract Level, Refik Hodžić
- 147 One Injustice Cannot Be Made Right by Causing  
a New One, Nenad Vukosavljević

## **V WORK WITH PARTICIPANTS OF THE WAR**

165 Veterans in Peacebuilding, Vladan Beara and Predrag Miljanović

## **VI TOWARDS RECONCILIATION**

181 Trauma and Reconciliation, Amela Puljek-Shank

205 We Have Done It from the Depths of Our Heart and Soul, Branka Rajner

## **VII CIVIL QUESTIONS**

215 Civil Society or Ubleha? Paul Stubbs

229 From Visibility of Non-governmental Organisations towards  
the Visibility of Peace Work, Tamara Šmiding

241 Ethics and Peace Work – the Unbearable Lightness of Acting, Ana Bitoljanu

251 Like a Soundtrack from a Very Weird Movie, Svetlana Lukić

## **VII GENDER AND PEACE WORK**

267 Gender Essentialisms, Politicalisation and Peace Activism  
in the Region of the former Yugoslavia, Darija Žilić

282 Feminist Media Theory and Activism: Different Worlds or  
Possible Cooperation, Danica Minić

## **IX DEMILITARISATION**

311 Challenges of Demilitarisation, Milan Colić Humljan

343 **ABOUT THE AUTHORS**



# Preface

**Martina Fischer**<sup>1</sup>  
Berlin, April 2007

It has been more than fifteen years now since the state of Yugoslavia has broken apart and a cycle of organised violence, expulsions and atrocities started. Although different areas were affected by different degrees of violence and destruction – Bosnia and Herzegovina for example was exposed to a long and cruel war, which in other countries (like Macedonia) could be stopped in its beginnings – the entire region still suffers from the consequences and has to deal with the legacies of the wars and human rights violations. Societies in the Western Balkans have to cope with numerous traumas, enhance social healing processes, follow through the prosecution of war crimes, establish functioning mechanisms that guarantee the rights of minorities, co-existence of individuals and groups and participation of all citizens in democratic institutions.

In the Western donor community there seems to be a general perception that the mission in the Balkans has been accomplished and that international interventions in this area have been a success story. This may be true if one only considers the fact that the region did not suffer a relapse into war in the past five years. But to say that the overall process of peacebuilding has been successfully completed seems to be a bit too simplistic. This book provides a more differentiated view on the remaining challenges.

Whereas some countries of the Western Balkans are considered as stable and sufficiently committed to human rights and democratic values to start negotiations on Association Agreements and potential memberships with the

\* .....

1 Dr. Martina Fischer is Deputy Director at the *Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management* in Berlin. (editor's note)

European Union (for instance Croatia and Macedonia), others are still far from this. Some countries still have to cope with very fundamental challenges. In Bosnia, even ten years after the Dayton Peace Accords brought an end to the fighting, the state-building process is still incomplete. Significant parts of the political ‘elites’ and huge parts of the population still have difficulties to identify with Bosnia and Herzegovina as a nation state. The situation in Bosnia is also interlinked with challenges and problems in neighbouring regions, especially Serbia and Kosovo. The future status of Kosovo is still unclear, due to power politics at the regional and international level, that create severe obstacles to the implementation of the plan that was recently presented by the Kosovo contact group (and even if the Ahtisaari Plan were implemented, the future of Kosovo’s minorities would still remain an open question). Macedonia seems to experience a process of relative stability after the implementation of the Ohrid Agreement, but – similar to other Western Balkan countries – its reality continues to be characterised by ‘parallel societies’ living next to each other. Tensions between these parallel societies have a certain potential to increase if they are fuelled by events in neighbouring regions. This is why many peace activists in the region of the former Yugoslavia argue that to characterise the current situation as ‘peace’ would definitely be too optimistic (see, for instance, Ivana Franović’s contribution). Some would rather call it a kind of ‘cold peace’.

Most societies in the Western Balkans are still marked by numerous and intersecting lines of conflict. This has to be mentioned, not in order to foster the widespread international understanding that the Balkans are ‘per se’ a conflictive context (which is a biased and naïve view of history). One should not infer that nothing has changed and no progress has been made. Yet, it does draw attention to the fact that transitions from war to peace need more than a decade, and still a lot of effort is needed to achieve fundamental processes of conflict transformation, individual and collective healing. This is why prerequisites, obstacles and limits of ‘reconciliation’ – issues of dealing with the legacies of the past, dealing with trauma, overcoming nationalism and distrust – are at the core of many contributions in this book.



Obviously, initiatives for fact-finding and creating a sober assessment of the past are needed on various levels, the state as well as the civil society level. At the same time, facing the past is a painful process both for individuals, groups and institutions. Peace work in post-conflict societies faces a serious dilemma: leaving the past un-addressed will necessarily mean that things are swept under the carpet. *Forcing* people to deal with the past, on the other hand, is not effective as it will not change attitudes. On the contrary, it might lead to rejection or depression. Talking about the past, present and future has to be balanced in a way which avoids exhausting and alienating people. As practitioners' experience shows, there are people in the region who want to address the past and are searching for opportunities to ask questions and join in discussions on these topics, even if remembering is a painful process for them. But they seem to form a minority still. In their daily work, practitioners also have to cope with many backlashes and frustration. In particular, it is difficult for them to make their voices heard and to counterbalance the more powerful official discourses.

The official discourse usually deals with the past in a context of 'victimisation' or fosters myths of heroism and justification of war. Especially if it comes to the question of taking responsibility for the past, state institutions, politicians in parliaments, governments and public administrations are still very reluctant and/or lack the will for taking serious steps. Decision-makers seem to have little interest even in the publication of reliable data. Many of them either strive to avoid any public debate on dealing with the past, or they tend to exploit issues related to the past for fostering group identities which serve their respective power politics. Official discourses are also still beset with nationalist propaganda – often actively supported by the media. On the other hand, some media and media institutes contributed to distribute more reliable facts than official sources usually offer. A problem remains that so-called public media are still basically state-driven (and private media merely following commercial interests are not so much committed to disseminating serious information). This perpetuates a situation where each side presents its own truth, and data

are merely used in order to prove the special victim status of the respective side rather than to paint an objective picture.

In all countries of the former Yugoslavia civil society organisations have set up initiatives for fact-finding, awareness raising for the past and reconciliation. Others are active in peace education and try to address existing conflict lines. Many of them work with a high level of engagement, but most of their activities are not in the spotlight of the media. A problem that all civil society initiatives have in common is the chronic lack of support from media and official politics. Nevertheless, some practitioners are convinced that ‘a tenacious and committed political struggle’ will lead to a decrease of nationalism in the region and that the struggle for social change has to continue (see the contribution of Ksenija Forca and Majda Puača in this book). Others point to a ‘syndrome of tiredness and burnout’ (as Tamara Šmidling and Helena Rill put it in the editors’ foreword). The challenge that these practitioners face is how to reach a broader public that is still not willing to reflect the past out of their own accord. This can certainly only be reached if civil society organisations’ initiatives link up with initiatives that necessarily have to be launched by individuals and groups in political parties, governments and parliaments (as Refik Hodžić, spokesperson of the Hague Tribunal, points out in an interview in this book).

In this book, the *Centre for Nonviolent Action (Centar za Nenasilnu Akciju – CNA)* has collected statements, analyses and experiences by practitioners who are engaged in dealing with the consequences of war and peacebuilding in the region. The enormous value of this compilation is its *regional approach*, which means that the authors do not only live and work in different parts of the former Yugoslavia, but also gained huge expertise in implementing regional peace work and cross-border initiatives. All these authors reflect their work very honestly and many of them do it rather self-critically. They describe the difficulty to define criteria for success and failure, and they point out dilemmas and unavoidable trade-offs they face in the context of their daily work. By virtue of this approach, the book contributes significantly to international debates on the outreach and limits of civil society organisations in peacebuilding.

First of all, I would therefore like to *congratulate the contributors* who together have created an exciting and lively book which is inspiring for readers from the region and activists from other post-conflict areas who are reflecting on their practice. Furthermore, the book is also useful for people who work in international organisations or international volunteer services, as it offers an important resource of practical knowledge and a clear view on general dilemmas of post-conflict peacebuilding. Congratulations and acknowledgement finally go to the team of editors, members of the *Centre for Nonviolent Action*, who decided to publish this book now, in 2007, which marks also the organisation's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

The *Centre for Nonviolent Action (CNA)* has been actively involved in transnational peace work since 1997. Its work has continuously focused on peace education and conflict transformation, training and public awareness raising for (past) violence, discrimination and injustice. CNA started out as a training organisation in Sarajevo. Since 2001, it has offices in Sarajevo and Belgrade. People from the former Yugoslavia (Bosnia, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Kosovo) have participated in CNA training workshops for nonviolent action which also initiated substantial cross-border networking.

CNA soon grew into a team of committed young people from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Croatia and Montenegro – women and men with a diverse set of backgrounds and biographies, ranging from conscientious objectors to war veterans – who all wanted to contribute to transforming conflicts in the post-war zones of the former Yugoslavia. The CNA team developed and offered various training formats (basic trainings, advanced training and ‘training for trainers’) that transferred the concept of nonviolence (*nenasilje*) into the regional context and aimed to spread it widely throughout the Balkans. CNA's trainings have contributed to create an impressive cross-border network of experts from the education sector, the media and the NGO community. Starting in 2002, CNA has increasingly focused on activities that aim to initiate and support a self-critical process of ‘dealing with the Past’. For this purpose, CNA organised public discussion forums in which war veterans from all sides spoke about their personal experiences and opinions. Beyond the public forums, all of

CNA's educational materials – from training manuals to recently published film documentaries for TV and video screenings – aim to motivate people to reflect critically and honestly on their role and their personal responsibility before, during and after the wars.

From the very beginning and during the various phases of CNA's work, the Berghof Research Center has supported CNA with supervision and advice on strategic and organisational development, self-evaluation and fundraising. In addition to this, the Berghof Center staff have conducted several external evaluations. It has to be mentioned that this relationship has been (and still is) one of mutual learning. Thanks to CNA I learned to understand that the reality in the societies of the former Yugoslavia is much more sophisticated and has many more facets than academic studies have revealed so far. This is due to CNA's approach which first and foremost puts emphasis on human beings and their needs, and does not focus primarily on structures, models and figures. I also learned a lot from this book. That is why I feel it is a great honour to contribute this preface. Given the event of CNA's anniversary, I want to use the opportunity and say: "Thank you so much for the past ten years of engagement! It is still a long way to go to achieve co-existence, tolerance and lasting peace, but please hold on, take care of yourself, and make sure that the 'struggle continues'..." "

# Introduction

Tamara Šmidling  
Helena Rill

Sarajevo–Belgrade, March 2007

The publication before you represents a collection of various experiences and thoughts in the field of peacebuilding in the region of the former Yugoslavia. It consists of contributions, articles and interviews by people from our region who share their commitment to peacebuilding – from different perspectives and various positions and approaches.

The book is the result of our longstanding aim to systematise at least a part of our experiences gathered through years of peace work in this region. Knowing that other people working for years in this challenging field, approaching the issue from different perspectives and with different focuses, also share lessons, dilemmas, and thoughts we decided to shape this wealth of experience in writing.

We used several basic guidelines which influenced the ‘identity’ of this book and we expect it to be criticised, discussed, thought out, and questioned from different positions, a philosophy we wish for peace work in general too.

The first and most important guideline for us was to set up a framework that could entail this kind of work. We had no dilemmas about defining our work as **peacebuilding**, which seems to us to be the most appropriate way to describe and unify some quite different fields and areas of work – from dealing with the past, the protection and promotion of human rights, education for peace, struggles for free and critical media space and the creation of a just system, to theoretically thinking about the basic categories and foundations on which we act. Peacebuilding, for us, is simply the best way to describe what we do, and we see it as an absolute priority of our societies, as a field of plurality in which different aspects, affinities and priorities, that have a common goal of lasting

peacebuilding and building a just society, intertwine, complement each other and even conflict.

**The regional dimension** is another important guideline that crucially influenced the contents and form of this publication. Considering that regional work and across-the-border cooperation have been a part of the CNA identity from the very beginning of its activities, we wanted to open a space for people from different parts of the region and their contributions to be heard and to emphasise once more the importance of *regional* cooperation on *regional* problems whose treatment is crucial for peacebuilding in our regions (let us only mention dealing with the past as a most prominent example) Unfortunately, in spite of our efforts, there are no voices of people from Kosovo in this book, which certainly imposes itself as a subject for thought but also for action.

The third guideline for creating this book was the intention of creating contents which avoid the trap of the so-called memorial, occasion-related literature, which is mainly consisted of listing *projects* and *project efforts* and *achievements*. We wanted to mark the tenth anniversary of our work by publishing a book that would primarily critically review the processes and approaches of peacebuilding and deal with **problematizing and naming the obstacles and dilemmas, as well as experiences gathered** in this work. In other words, we wanted a book that could help work on peacebuilding in the future, which would be conceived in such a way as to respond to these dilemmas and obstacles and keep us from continually bumping into walls. If this book contributes to the revival of a new social energy in the future, or helps in any way to find new approaches and ideas in peacework we will be able to say that working on it was worth it.

Finally, the book is not a result of a concrete piece of research and nor does it aspire to represent an all encompassing scientifically-theoretical approach to peacebuilding. It is mostly a collection of activist and, to a lesser extent, theoretical thoughts and as such should contribute to bringing these two positions closer to one another and to their mutual inspiration and empowerment. Bearing in mind the insufficient literature on peacebuilding in these regions, we consider it to be very important to note and preserve

the **immediate history of peace work** in them, to note trends and different approaches and thus take up a part of public space by first hand texts. Along with that, considering the type and amount of information that can be found in the book, which describe strategies, approaches and methods of some very different aspects of peace work, as well as the everyday contexts in which a large number of peace activists operate, we can say that the book also makes a contribution to a new field – **as an ethnography of peace work.**

It also makes an important step not only in increasing the presence of peace work in public, but also as a significant contribution to treating this type of work as a serious undertaking that is not always and only inspired by the dictate of money and donors, but by a sincere wish, energy and need to attain a just society.

The texts in this book have been written during the past year and vary in length and style. Some of them rely more on theory, some on immediate activist experience, some of them are reflexive and informal, whilst others written in more formal, academic language. Together, they project a picture of the diversity of approaches, perspectives, personal affinities and also viewpoints on the world and society around us, and as Iva Zenzerović Šloser says in her text, referring to peace education, but which is also easily applicable to peace work as a whole, ‘it is difficult to think of peace in a linear form a printed book requires’, peace work is ‘more a hypertext, a web page, globally networked, with many links in various directions’. The diversity of the book is also underlined by a number of interviews done by members of the CNA team with peace activists from Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, having estimated that their views very much deserve to be a part of this book, even if in a form slightly different from the one originally conceived.

The desired diversity and colourfulness was, however, not easy to achieve. While working on the book we contacted many people from different parts of our region and invested much energy in getting a solid collection of texts, which do not aspire to be a general cross section of everything that has been done and is still done, but that can provide certain insight into some of the basic currents of peace work. More than once we have remained ‘empty handed’, because even with extensions of deadlines, heaps of emails, numerous telephone

calls and our pronounced readiness to be as flexible as possible, some of the texts simply never arrived. As a result there are a number of notable absences and missing concepts in this book, such as grassroots work, culture as the field of affirmation of peace work and so forth, but these failures also pointed out many ‘symptoms’ which peace activists are afflicted with. The most important, and certainly the one that is the greatest cause for concern, is the perceptible sense of fatigue, burnout and accumulated stress which, together, lead to a situation in which it becomes very difficult, or even impossible, to put gathered experiences into writing. Tiredness, frustration and chronic lack of support are unfortunately ongoing companions for this type of work and deserve, to say the least, serious treatment and the active addressing of the syndrome of ‘tired and burnt out peace activists’. However, this could be the subject of a separate essay.

The real reaches, as well as the extent to which the final ‘product’ corresponds with the initial idea, we will be able to write and talk about after you have read the book, but it is worth mentioning once more that there is an idea/wish/striving for it to contribute the affirmation of peace work *as such* and, at the same time, critically view the strategies, approaches and positions that we select while dealing with this type of work.

We owe much gratitude for publishing this book to the authors of these texts, Ana Bitoljanu for her friendly support and suggestions, to Rachel Muir for her wholehearted assistance, invested energy and proofreading, Berghof Foundation for Conflict Studies for financial support, Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, Dr Martina Fischer for understanding, assistance and great support, Lada Stevanović for being there to answer an indefinite number of questions, friends from the CNA and numerous other people who in many ways helped this idea to come to life.

Finally, we are obliged to say that opinions expressed in the texts are those of individual authors, and that the CNA team does not necessarily share these opinions. Yet the existence of such differences achieves its real meaning only when we communicate and discuss these differences. This is our humble contribution to that.



nonviolence





# Nonviolence – Political Action from the Stance of Harmlessness

Ana Raffai

## **(De)blockage**

There was a time when, before setting out work, writers would invoke muses to inspire them to be able to finish the work they had commenced. I am a child of secular times, so at the start of this text, instead of invoking muses, I reflect on my blockages. Why do I find it difficult to write about nonviolence in an unfettered way? I suppose the reasons vary; two of them are most visible to me. The first is the violence around me. We follow the development of the war in the Middle East and Far East in the media. I am inundated with a feeling of frustration and helplessness. There are quite a few individuals, organisations, networks in the world that publicly and unequivocally oppose the business that is war. In the USA and the UK (to mention only demonstrations in the countries that are nowadays the leaders of the warfare pack) prior to the outbreak of the war in Iraq, hundreds of thousands of citizens came out to the streets in the biggest anti-war protests since World War Two, only to see the political leadership of these countries attack Iraq as though none of their voters had said anything. Iraq has been devastated, and the war is spreading, and it seems that every effort against the advance of violence is futile, which is frustrating and makes me feel powerless. This slap in the face of democracy is repeated when over 60% of citizens of Croatia, according to the current polls, do not accept joining NATO, but still that doesn't worry the elected executors of power who continue to work on joining this military association. It feels discouraging when the majority of citizens cannot make the elected management structures

of a state act in accordance with their voters' will. In both of these instances, a public display of dissent is clearly not enough. Particularly so at the present moment, which it seems, is not the right time for peace talks. And presenting nonviolence as a realistic alternative in this context, instead of a vision with no practical value, is far from simple.

The blockage that has to do with the seemingly inefficient nonviolent vision is increased when I'm aware of the violence I produce myself. I notice it and then feel bad about it, or fail to notice and feel even worse when someone else warns me about it. There is no clear space, a place or a community that would be a realm of nonviolence. Not even within me is there 'immaculateness' by violence, which would give me the right to, being 'perfect' and 'nonviolent', demand nonviolence or at least advocate it on the grounds of my infallibility.

So, I have at my disposal neither the environment, nor a context that would assure my actions are nonviolent. Nor am I devoid of errors as a subject of action, so that I could, working on social changes, feel a life-long citizen of 'the state of peace', i.e. one that acts infallibly from the position of a completed state and with the moral right that would bestow in another kind of world; we could call it 'the state of unrest'. On the contrary, it feels as if the space is so saturated with violence that it is considered, however morally judged against, 'normal' and here I am, with this text, trying to justify my objecting to this 'normal' by claiming that there is a realistic alternative that calls for the transformation of social conflict to begin on its grounds. Even I, who advocates it, am no more successful in terms of this alternative than others who are perhaps less aware of its existence.

I would like to, through this text, relying on my own experience of searching for ways to live nonviolence, note some moments or points of orientation that are useful landmarks for me. I would also like to articulate some points that lead me in my nonviolent action with the goal of making this text helpful for those who have decided to try their hand at nonviolent strategies, or to be an encouragement for those who are just getting to know nonviolence on this occasion.

## What is nonviolence and how does it start?

At the roots of this notion is experience. I want to look back on those who instil life into the word *nonviolence*, i.e. women and men who have made a Copernican turn in concrete life situations of extreme violence, have chosen a path other than violent defence which was resorted to by a great majority of others in their surroundings. This is the path that we wish to promote here. “When I was clear about the fact that I would not kill another person, even if it was the only way to save my own life, I choose not to kill rather than to save myself – that’s when I turned a new page in my life”, a peace activist from Osijek said on one occasion, a woman who started her peace engagement in the midst of the war in her city in 1991.<sup>1</sup> She hadn’t been driven by circumstances. Unless we accept that circumstances had become so unspeakable that they have helped fine tune the antennas for the possibility of breaking the closed cycle of violence, which is what may have happened to Rosa Parks<sup>2</sup> when she sat in the front of the bus in M, tired, and thus, tired as she was, refused to conform with the (unjust) racist law according to which she, as a black woman, was forbidden to sit in the company of white people.

In both cases, it is about disobedience to the existing conditions that the majority will consider to be the only possible and realistic ones, whilst the opposition is labelled as non-realistic, ridiculous and perhaps insolent as well. Who do you think you are to change our current course of events? And in both examples, the people who decided to no longer accept the given frameworks, rules of the game, accepted another thing: that in a situation of violence, they would rather endure than inflict pain on other. The initial spark for nonviolent action is the decision to ‘spend’ courage on the refusal of violence. This effort is an eye and spirit opening one in terms of new options of getting out of a

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- 1 Quotation after K. Kruhonja, workshop entitled ‘Reconciliation in the context of peace building’, *Miramida Plus!* 9, 2001.
- 2 Rosa Parks is a black woman, a seamstress, who in 1955 broke the law and took a seat on a bus in the area reserved for white people. She was arrested for misdemeanour, which gave rise to nonviolent resistance of black people against racial discrimination. Compare M. L. King, *Freiheit*, Wupertal, 1984, page 3.

situation from which there is seemingly no way out. But, the first step is to say NO to violence.

For that reason, the very notion of *nonviolence* has its justification. It expresses the initial step, the initial point that is, at least in majority of cases, a NO to violence that surrounds us and that, as learned patterns of behaviour and thinking, we reproduce. And as long as society, globally speaking, in the great majority of cases is organised on the principles of violence, it does make sense to define alternative with a word that begins with a NO to the violent paradigm.

The notion of 'nonviolence' can also be interpreted with an exclamatory intonation as WE DON'T WANT VIOLENCE! WE OPPOSE VIOLENCE! – and thus see in it the will for something else, for protest or resistance.

On the other hand, most of the theoreticians of nonviolence hold it against the notion of 'nonviolence' that it is too much of an expression of what we do not want. In a way, whenever we mention nonviolence, we promote, at least at the level of the word itself, violence as well. And we do not say anything, or very little, about what we do want. Adding adjectives or nouns to the word nonviolence is an attempt to fix this shortcoming. Thus, in French, there is the expression of *alternatives nonviolentes* (nonviolent alternatives).<sup>3</sup> This emphasises that it is about the new, alternative paradigms offered by nonviolence. In Croatian, there is the expression of *aktivno nenasilje* (active nonviolence) that indicates that nonviolence is realised through action, i.e. in practicing the values that are the contents of the nonviolent stance. Along with this, the notion of active side by side with nonviolence removes the misconception that nonviolence equals passivity. In German, on the other hand, there are two terms that are most often used to denote nonviolence: *Gewaltlosigkeit* (nonviolence) or even more frequently in the form of the adjective *gewaltlos* (nonviolent) and another, more recent, and in my opinion more appropriate term, *Gewaltfreiheit* (freedom from violence) or *gewaltfrei*, in its adjective form. I find *Gewaltfrei* to be a more appropriate word because instead of the suffix '-los' meaning 'without'/'devoid' *gewaltfrei* has the suffix '-frei', meaning 'free of': be free of the necessity, of the use of violence. The value foundation of

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3 Compare. Title of the organisation Fr. MAN (mouvement des alternatives nonviolents)

nonviolence is even more clearly expressed in the third, and the least used expression, *Guetkraft*, literally translatable as ‘the force of goodness’.

All these notions stand for two words that Gandhi uses to name nonviolence. The first of these is *ahimsa*, a Sanskrit word that, literally translated, means lack of harm, not to harm anyone. We translate it as respect and, what’s more, absolute respect towards everyone and everything that lives. Ahimsa covers what we in education for nonviolent action call the *stance of nonviolence, the stance of respect towards others and affirmation of self*. The other word was coined by Gandhi himself, because in his nonviolent struggle he needed a word that would denote the mode of action. This word is *satyagraha*. Literally translated, *satyagraha* means the force of truth. Satyagrahi are people who struggle because they hold on firmly to the truth they have realised, they rely on the power of love, justice and truth and thus choose nonviolent means in their actions. In other words, they find different forms of struggle that are in accordance with the stance of respect towards other people.<sup>4</sup>

### Connection between political action and spirituality of nonviolence

Institutionalised value systems, such as religion, for example, emphasises the importance of one’s own ethical values or principles and their implementation in practice. In Christianity, for example, the Bible on numerous occasions encourages the practice of values we adhere to with our stance; in the epistle of Jacob, it is said that ‘faith without action is dead’ (Jacob 2, 26).<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, there is a reality in which the vision has still not been realised, when the principle is still not turned into practice. Religion allows for that discrepancy and interprets it through a theology of human imperfection or human sinfulness. It does make sense to allow time for the process of maturation because we cannot value effort only by its success. The same goes for nonviolent action: no one will ever be perfect in a way that they could say for themselves: there, I am

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4 J. Semelin, Christian Mellon, *QUE sais-je? – la non-violence*, Paris, 1994, pages 7 and 8.

5 Compare the entire section of Jac 2,14-26 how he sees the relation between stance (faith) and practice (action) and how he defines action.

nonviolent. This is about affirmation of self and respect for others, this is about exercise that slowly becomes *habitus*/mode of action. These attempts we describe as the *zone of nonviolence* are realised when I affirm myself assertively<sup>6</sup>, and respect others empathically<sup>7</sup>. Sometimes we manage to be more in the zone of nonviolence, and sometimes less.

Still, apart from this similarity to religions, according to J. M. Mueller<sup>8</sup> nonviolence is different from a religious system in that it is important for nonviolence to be realised through nonviolent strategies. Otherwise it would make no sense to call it nonviolence. Thus we reach the second key issue in understanding nonviolence, the question of HOW I do something? HOW I communicate, not only WHAT the contents of my message are. How do I reach my goal? How do I realise myself? How do I build society? The question of HOW over and over again. Turn your attention to public discussions, the focus of concentration in a conversation, making your point in decision making. In all these cases, the attention of participants of the interaction will be directed towards the WHAT. The arguments, goals, benefits or disadvantages... Rarely, very rarely you have nurtured discussions, dialogues in the true sense of the word, in which you will encounter, apart from acuteness, composure. Pauses along with speed. Space for silence along with a bunch of sentences. You can carry out a short query and watch any show on TV under a magnifying glass of these two questions: how much it is important WHAT they're saying in a discussion, and how much the speakers are aware of HOW they communicate. I recognise nonviolence where there is a *correlation between the road/way and goal*.

This is one of the basic rules of nonviolent action. Gandhi speaks, picturesquely, of the relation between the seed and the plant: a birch tree cannot sprout from a grain of corn. You cannot suddenly create a society of peace and

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6 Asserto Lat. – I assert myself, another word for assertiveness in Croatia is *prodornost* (compare Rječnik stranih riječi).  
7 Ein patho (Gr) – to empathise, to feel standing next to; another word is Croatian for *compassionate*.  
8 Compare Video recording of the interview with J.M. Mueller, *Les colombes de l'ombre – acteurs nonviolents en Israel Palestine*, production CANVA, Carcasonne.



justice in violent ways. Because the violence itself contains injustice and unrest towards someone. ‘Peace is not the goal, it is the very road to peace that is the goal’<sup>9</sup> – violence carries in it the injustice and the seed of a new conflict.

It may sound unusual to make connections between spirituality and politics at all. In our region politics is much more often linked to criminal than to socially accepted behaviour. The combination of politics and religion that I know in my surroundings are the major Churches (Catholic and Orthodox) which usually results in advocating populist political options (e.g. talking the faithful at religious gatherings into voting for the party complying to the political stance of the representative of religious community in question) promoting national exclusiveness, and its political result is nationalism. So, in the context I currently live in, I’d rather speak of linking social action and spirituality. But there are other possibilities. The examples of political leaders such as Gandhi and Martin Luther King, as well as activists led by inspiration of nonviolence have shown that it is not necessary to, while being engaged in politics, lie, possess, deceive, talk idly. On the contrary, spirituality is not a purpose in itself, but it is, according to their judgement, the core of politics. Inspired by values they will work towards changes even when they don’t find personal gain in their engagement. And, vice versa, without the exaltation or vision, political action is in danger of being violent. I don’t see spirituality as necessarily adhering to a certain religious code, i.e. confirming the righteousness of churches and religious communities. I see it as values and inspiration that are on the other side of short term success. The belief that it is politically correct to be honest, to tell the truth, to accept the democratic way and to listen to the will of electorate strikes one as idealism, in the contemporary world. But, there is something that is spirituality as ‘that which gives spirit or breath’ to politics, and it is found in the word inspiration. Inspiration is possible when action stems from the belief that what we do is true and good. This is when inspiration is a fruitful soil of new ideas for solving the old problems. Every nonviolent action is a creative miniature in the mosaic of nonviolent acting. Therefore it cannot be repeated. Every one of them is original, and it surprises

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9 Gandhi, *Tous les hommes sont freres*, Gallimard, UNESCO, 1969, Section ‘Goal and means’, page 149.

and inspires for new creativity. In our politics there is no creativity because there is no faith that creativity is linked to inspiration, and that inspiration is linked with honesty and sincerity. Political engagement of the *satyagraha*, the ones who practice nonviolent strategies, is led by the conviction that 'politics is wrapped around us like a snake that coils around our body and we cannot release ourselves from it, despite our best effort. I want to battle against the snake'.<sup>10</sup>

### Structural violence and some road signs of nonviolent action

The first things that the word violence brings to mind are physical violence, fighting, war, potential physical abuse. Violence for which we can define the perpetrator (agent) we call *direct violence*, be it physical or another way of inflicting damage ('harmfulness') or disrespect to oneself or another person.

In the 1970s, the practice of liberation of Latin American societies (Helder Camara/Nicaragua) as well as conflict studies (J. Galtung/Norway) reached a similar realisation: that apart from direct violence, there is also violence for which we don't know the agents, it's constituted by everyone, because we support an unjust constitution or we are a part of structures that perpetrate violence legally, but not justly.<sup>11</sup> Some, due to their positions in society, are more responsible for that violence and they wish to maintain the existing conditions because they live well in it. Others are victims of institutions. The ones at the bottom of the power ladder also contribute to their remaining in unfavourable positions through their passivity. Hildegard Goss Mayr portrayed the violence in society through a triangle standing upside down, resting on its point.<sup>12</sup> Various groups and individuals support violence because they perform what is asked of them uncritically; this is about violence that H. Camara calls *institutional violence*, and J. Galtung *structural violence*. 'The mother of all violence is injustice, unjust division of goods within a society', H. Camara maintains.<sup>13</sup>

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10 Gandhi, *ibid*.  
11 Compare Galtung, *Kein Zweifel: Gewaltlosigkeit funktioniert! Werstatt fuer Gewaltfreie Aktion*, Baden, 1995.  
12 Compare. H. Goss Mayr, *Evangelje i borba za mir (Gospel and Struggle for Peace)*, Zagreb 1993, page 55 etc.  
13 *Werkstaette fuer den Frieden*, work material of Pax Christi 1999, pages 32-33.

Structural violence within a community/society is constituted, along with the unjust division of goods, by the ways in which power is distributed in a society, ways in which decisions are made, and in which discrimination of one group over another is maintained. Structural violence is not as obvious to everyone as is the case with direct violence. It is more difficult to recognise it in times of peace, because it requires values to be accepted such as equality and equal rights of all citizens, social rights, social sensitivity for the less powerful in society, the right of all citizens to work, individual's right to choice. Along with it, it is as a rule supported by theories or an ideology that 'interprets' the existing constitution of the society as the right one. An ideology that affirms the violence of the structures is called *cultural violence*.

All three forms of violence are linked: cultural violence conceives structural violence, structural violence provokes the reaction of the subordinated one so that they take up arms and attempt to reach the just goal of liberation through violence. H. Camara calls this chain process a *spiral of violence*: violence of the state provokes the violence of the rebels that is then justified through violence of repressive legal organs of power, violence of army and police against the rebels. Since this doesn't solve the problem of oppression, rebels increase their violence, and the state responds through yet more repression. Thus the conflict escalates.

For this reason one of the road signs in the strategy of nonviolent acting is to initiate actions that move in the opposite direction and break the spiral of violence. Starting with the knowledge of the problems of escalation of conflict and being aware of our own responsibility in supporting structural violence, nonviolent fighters strive to focus on a problem against which they struggle and the means they use in this struggle. Spirituality of nonviolence comes into focus here since, in the conflict, it *focuses on the problem, without diminishing respect towards the person of the opponent*. The key rule of conflict transformation is thus: 'be firm with the problem and mild with the person'. It is very human, and probably the experience of most of us will confirm it, that in a conflict I see the opponent/enemy as the embodiment of my suffering. I don't even want to see them, and in my imagination I'd much rather wipe them off from the face of the Earth. However, the strategy of nonviolent resistance observes the point of

acting, i.e. how to achieve a long term solution of the problem. In the long run, removing the perpetrator of injustice is not a solution. Injustice and everything that supports it structurally is our 'real enemy'. Otherwise, by removing the opponent and not solving the problem, the problem between us will still remain. The examples of changing the leaders in certain offices in dictatorship regimes prove it, since the problem remains regardless of those personas being gone. Focusing on the problem helps like an immune property against the *mimetics of violence* (R. Girard).<sup>14</sup> Wherein we maintain our desire to, however much damage the opponent does to us, we won't inflict damage on them. However much the opponent fails to see us as people, we want to see them as a person who, does know what we are fighting against, but still remains a person who has the right to live and who can change. Many nonviolent actions use some rituals from the sphere of spirituality or soul-searching, such as: prayers, meditation, fasting, and sermons or, from more secular sources: songs, humour, dance.

When J. Fox, a Quaker in the peace service in Iraq, was viciously murdered at the end of 2005, his Mennonite friends have not once expressed their grief over a loss of a friend through any act of counter-violence.<sup>15</sup> They haven't demanded for the 'evil perpetrator/s to be justly punished' because they know that the punishment is a way of solving secondary problems which only helps to increase the violence which Fox gave his life for. Nor have they demanded revenge or belittled those who killed their friend even though he had worked for the people of Iraq. Instead, they kept reminding themselves of the violence of the war, supported by the wealthy countries involved in the war in Iraq due to their interests, and terrorist violence that is very similar to the former in its ways and goals. They kept reminding themselves of the problem, not the 'culprits' and protested against violence, and not against its protagonists. In their prayer proclamation on the occasion of Fox's killing, they said: "We call

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- 14 From: *Que sais je? – la non-violence*, after Rene Girard, *La violence et le sacre*, Grasset 1972, pages 78 and 79.
- 15 The Quakers and Mennonites are in our region the best known members of historical peace churches. This term includes churches originating in the Reformation (16<sup>th</sup> century) that explicitly added Christian nonviolence to their beliefs.

a prayer for everyone suffering violence in Iraq, a prayer for those who kidnap people for political reasons or merely to make money out of it, a prayer for those who wouldn't leave people of Iraq stranded."<sup>16</sup>

### Resistance or defence

Every violent behaviour is 'contagious' in one way or another: we are tempted to respond in kind to a blow, on the basis of the right of an innocent victim. However, by exercising this right, we actually become more and more similar to the ones we fight against, and in time a question legitimately arises of: what right do we have to ask for a third, unbiased, party's sympathy, if we are increasingly resemble our opponent in our ways of fighting.

Some road signs in the struggle against structural violence can be provided by the terms *defence and resistance*.

Nonviolent actors prefer to use the term RESISTANCE for their acting, whilst armies usually use the term DEFEND. I deliberately use the word struggle for both ways of acting because there are similarities between them: they both require preparation and organisation. In both cases, groups are organised and have their strategies of action, goals, and analyses and how to reach those goals. In both defence and resistance the protagonists need to be bold and brave because there is risk involved in both situations – even the risk of losing their lives. And yet again, there's a great difference between what is readily visible, which is the use or refusal to use any arms as a means of struggle.

The difference is also that the defence is interpreted as a response to an attack. By the very fact that one side has been attacked, that side has the right to defend themselves. The ones who defend themselves find explanations for their behaviour in the actions or unjustness of others. Is there such a thing as an unjust defence or a just attack? The attack comes first, followed by defence. Resistance seeks justification in reasons immanent to it. It can, but doesn't have to, be a second step to the first step of the attack. We resist and thus act because

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16 Quotation after an e-mail news of 11 March 2006 was sent by the German Mennonite Peace Committee (dmfk.menno.peace@t-online.de).

of values we care for, because of an awareness of justice and our attempts to change the unjust conditions.

Thus the jeopardy in case of defence comes from the other side, with which, at least as long as the defence lasts, there must be no communication. Quite the contrary, when it comes to resistance, nonviolent communication is one of the basic means of action. Through communication, we influence our opponent, through communication we influence the public, wishing to gain its favour. Defence assumes that our side is being just, and that the opponent is being unjust (because they are the ones who attacked). It is therefore difficult to confess to our own injustice nowadays, after the war, when we are assured we were defending ourselves. The construct of defence reverts us to the anger towards the enemy, the anger of ourselves having been attacked, the anger of the injustice of someone having entered our lives, our villages, our homes, our living rooms, having touched what belongs to us and NOT them.

Resistance in these situations draws attention to the problem of entering itself, and not to the person who has done it. Thus it is not considered just for anyone to enter, be it the attacked one or the one defending themselves. The solution is in meeting our need to have security in our own space, in nurturing our lives and our identities. The solution is that the road/way to finding solutions is not contradictory to this solution. The power even now is within those who cannot demolish even when their own people do, and do not exile people when you yourself are being exiled – and due to their faith/value that they follow. And because of the farsightedness of the strategy: resistance is aware that there will be bills to pay after the war. It knows that the pattern of destruction against the enemy destroys the ones who perpetrate violence, too.

### **Nonviolence or violence: a choice, not necessity**

It's difficult to de-mythologise defence as long as the generally accepted opinion is that the offended ones have a moral right to reach for violent methods in order to defend themselves. It is not popular, sometimes it sounds virtually mad or insolent, to advocate the point that every behaviour, and thus also violent behaviour as defence, is a matter of choice. This statement stems from the logical

train of thought that a free, mentally more or less sound adult has, in every situation of their lives, a chance to decide what to do, even when this freedom is narrowed so much as to make this choice poor. Citing choice does not have the goal of blaming those who defended themselves, their families, what they deem valuable, with arms; some would call these things holy. The arguments I will list in favour of violence being a choice, not a necessity, are a protest against the ideology that is immanent to the western culture (compare cultural violence), that glorifies, legitimises and legalises violence (compare J. M. Mueller)<sup>17</sup>. It's not the people who were shooting that irritate. But we are allowed to oppose those who often lead others to it (whilst they themselves are preserved from violent defence). At the same time they speak of wanting peace, but claim that peace is not possible to attain because they estimate that violence is inevitable. I am irritated by the avoidance of one's own responsibility, propagating heroism that is, I presume, only good and just in the movies. The media in all the countries of the former Yugoslavia, more or less the same ones that were active during the war, failed to critically examine the ideology of the necessity of violence. The very notion of cultural violence is scarcely known as well.

A nonviolent stance is a protest against the armed defence being unquestionable and the idea that it goes without saying, even if we were to see and live with all the consequences of wartime violence, from psychologically spent defenders to raped women, from dislocated families to orphans, from torn relations and devastated villages. As if the experience of the war had not taught us to simply condemn violence, instead of only opposing the 'unjust' violence. Isn't the argument about the necessity of violent defence essentially a reflection of a belief that violence is efficient? This belief should be exposed as fake confidence, and as opposing the religions that exist in our regions. Regardless of the fact that religious institutions are not the leaders in promoting nonviolence in their respective communities. Promoting nonviolence is a protest against stupidity in which we repeat the same losses. We are not victims of a fatal destiny that ties us to our predestined warfare. In my opinion, those who still manufacture thoughts, images

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17 Compare video Les colombes de l'ombre.

in our heads, such as there is no way other than a just war, along with everyone else who approves of their ideologies, are more responsible for maintaining faith in the necessity of violence but ‘just’ defence than those who fought in the war themselves, and I think the former are still a majority in our societies.

## Reaction or initiative

Initiative is a term that defines choice more closely. When I say choice, I point out WHAT the result is, when I say take the initiative, I speak more of HOW to reach the choice. Initiative is a tool of nonviolent strategy. Someone who has the initiative directs. Students in demonstrations in Belgrade in the early 1990s took initiative by talking to the police; protesters who always come up with the new ways of making their message interesting to the public have the initiative. In the procedure of nonviolent communication, the person who initiates a dialogue using I-messages is the person taking the initiative. Nonviolent resistance is a way for a group to communicate their demands. Regardless of whether it is a conflict initiating resistance or resistance awoken by someone’s assault, it is always important that by nonviolent action a group does not respond to the assault but responds from their own demands; instead of referring to behaviour of others/other groups or opponents, it estimates what is negative and struggles against the negativity.

In the biblical text with the well known motive of ‘turn the other cheek’<sup>18</sup>, a protestant theologian Walther Wink exegetes at least two characteristics of initiative: *surprise and affirming one’s own dignity*. For centuries this text has been interpreted as a call for suffering violence. Wink, however, sees in, based on the interpretation of the verb *anthistenain*<sup>19</sup> as a call to the oppressed to

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- 18 Compare from the Gospel of Matthew: “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’. But I say to you, do not resist an evildoer. If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.” ( Matthew 5:38-39)
- 19 *Anti* means against and *histemi* in its noun form means nonviolent rebellion, armed defense. The verb was used to denote military conflict, a moment when two armies collide. The word refers to a potentially lethal excess or an armed uprising. Thence Wink translates: “Do not do evil in return for evil, or do not strike back with the same force” (Compare W. Wink, *Jesus and Non-violence*, Osijek 2005, page 8 etc.)



resist by doing something unexpected. The one who strikes does not expect to be provoked by their victim by the victim's exposing themselves. However, this exposure contains a great amount of confidence. And even more surprises for their opponent.<sup>20</sup> Recognising the moment of initiative is a matter of awareness that there is the possibility to start something new and unexpected as an individual or a group. To initiate communication, to make the first step. All else is a practice creating new experience.

### **MYSELF as a field of action**

What is it that can help me remain on the path of nonviolence, if that is my choice? At the beginning of this essay, I mentioned the nonviolent stance being inseparable from the mode of action. Every time I can nurture within myself, be aware of and rouse the will for my part to be the part of nonviolence. In some cultures there is the belief in the power of word; you can't break a word you've given. Meditations particularly emphasise the importance of words as means of making things present. I would say, from a rational point of view, that word influences my actions if I invoke its meaning to my consciousness as my will. I can't vouch for my infallibility at every moment of tension, but I can invoke nonviolence to modify my actions at any time. We have the power to direct our stance, our stance influences our action. Our action affirms our stances. Many times have I encountered some kind of disbelief in how much it is really possible to live nonviolence. I don't share this scepticism about how non-realistic it is to live goodness, love and then also nonviolence. I have worked with people a lot and through that work I have encountered and learned to recognise goodness and value in them. I think the problem is not people's capacity for good and for peace. Because I think they do have it. The question is how much time do we take and invest in bringing our capacities to our awareness and developing them; that is how I would describe *working on oneself*. How much it matters to

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20 Master's striking the slave is cited. To turn the left cheek means to provoke your master to strike you, but no longer by the back of his hand, by a stroke that expresses a socially superordinate one over the subordinated slave. In order to be able to hit him, the master now needs to use a boxers' stroke, that was only appropriate in a battle of equal opponents.

us. I believe that the delight in trainings in nonviolent action is very much a consequence of the fact that they are spaces in which magic occurs, as one of the participants of a training in Macedonia put it, a magic of dealing with one's own self and communication of acceptance.

When I am in a conflict, the capital gained from working on myself is a gift to the community. Nurturing oneself as a whole being is a space of nonviolent action. Communities that live inspired by nonviolence, of Ghandian type, for example, therefore have a time of day when they pray, sing, discuss, meet, dance together in order to maintain or increase their nonviolent capacities. Focusing on a problem along with consideration for respecting a person, resistance as an awareness of one's own needs instead of attack as defence, choosing the way and not the necessity of nonviolence – these are all aspects that we can find in the notion of *composure*. I think that striving to build oneself has the goal of making me be 'together with myself' as often as possible. I see composure as a means of nonviolent action, as a powerful state of an individual, and then also harmony and organisation within a group. I see composure as a sense, a goal of doing something. A great spiritual contentment is achieving composure; the experience of being able to manage your day/time independently and in an aware manner and to, regardless of difficulties that might surround you, be able to live profoundly content, I would even say happy, if I see happiness as my wishes coinciding with what I currently live.<sup>21</sup>

**Some examples of nonviolent action in the region of South Eastern Europe (the Balkans)**

The benefit of our shared war in the Balkans is a vaccine of peace work in these regions. Still, after fifteen years of work in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, groups were organised that systematically and in the long run promote the values of nonviolence. The individuals themselves can do something towards peace every time. Organised groups become a social factor through persistent work. Both of these are required, I wouldn't value

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21 Compare the same root of Croatian words for 'happiness' and 'to meet' (sreća and sresti).

being organised more, bearing in mind that I know how much the pioneers of new ways of thought had meant in my life and in the environment I live in. They have influenced other people.

In this section, I would like to view the actions of groups. Limited space and my information being partial will have the effect of this choice being arbitrary; much like a brainstorming of ideas I will remember some examples and neglect other. I ask the readers in advance not to hold the fragmentary selection of this overview against me, because my goal is not to point out some at the expense of others, but to list some examples that encourage change.

In Croatia, where I live, an anti-war group Antiwar Campaign, acted from the beginning of the war (1991). Its members have managed, through their nonviolent actions, resisting dislocation of non-Croatian citizens from state-owned apartments, to enact a new law much more favourable for the wronged tenants. In the years after the war, violence is mostly invisible, partly due to overall impression of warfare events, partly due to peace influence in society being systematically prevented. However, even at that time, non-governmental organisations worked on protecting human rights, women's human rights, through their first systematic education, working on the laws on, for example, civil military service. All this we view today as results of social change: while during the war, it was risky to refuse to carry arms as a conscientious objector in some parts of Croatia, nowadays more than half of the recruits serve in this manner and their number is on the rise. Human rights are commonplace in the public discourse; women are more visible in public. The first area where nonviolent articulation of one's own demands in public was accepted was the area of environmental protection; from protests against power plants in Istria to preventing construction of oil pipeline in the Adriatic Sea as a protest against the 'Alpe Adria' project.

Approximately at the same time, at the beginning of war, the Antiwar Action in Belgrade was established, and in my opinion, the strongest agents of antiwar movement in Serbia today are Women In Black. Thanks to them, massive peace demonstrations for ousting Milošević regime were nonviolent and creative. In the north of Serbia, in Vojvodina, a de-militarised zone of Trešnjevac was organised and in Novi Sad peace activists acted through continual street

actions for the rights of women and against xenophobia and nationalism, around various non-governmental organisations such as Women's Studies 'Mileva Einstein' and EHO 'Ecumenical Humanitarian Service'. In Sombor, at the beginning of the war, the Sombor peace group continued its activities, i.e. association of 'Ravangrad' and didn't cut contact with their partners in Croatia, e.g. the Peace Centre from Osijek, not even during the fiercest warfare events.

This Centre has collected documentation on the war crimes of Croatian soldiers in East Slavonija as early as 1992 and presented them to the public, which was until recently perceived as an act of treason. Along with the change of district attorney, this documentation becomes a source of information.

In order for nonviolent action to take place in public, citizens need to be informed and educated. As of the end of the war, there is a continual supply of alternative education for peace in Croatia. Its results can be seen, for example, in peace demonstrations 'My voice for a legal state': many of the present are my former students of Peace Studies; a part of them is active in organising the protests themselves. It was similar with anti-war demonstrations against the war in Iraq. The latest protests, last year, entitled 'Matija Gubec' managed to, in spite of a relatively small number of participants, abolish the law that prohibited demonstrations in front of the Croatian Parliament building. Finally, there is an action going on in the Croatian police entitled 'Violence does not live here' and one of its products is a brochure that helps prevent domestic violence against women and lists contact addresses of women's non-governmental organisations among others. What preceded such development among police structures was the work of associations through education and cooperation with the police.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, except for non-governmental organisations, there are individuals within religious institutions that have, as early as during the war and at the price of risking their own lives, publicly protested against the war between the Croats and Muslims. The others work on the promotion of shared living and, even though they are individuals, they have the support from their peers within religious institutions. One such permanent manifestation is the choir of 'Pontanima' from Sarajevo that has already received recognition from their hometown even though they had suffered insults and threats both

from their own community (Catholic context) and dominant political structures (Muslim context). However, their strategy was: personally influence contacts in the media and through them and the media – the public. Nowadays, the image has changed and they are the pride of all Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the tradition of Franciscan peace culture, a House of Peace on RAMA is in operation nowadays. In Banja Luka, Pax Christi has acted for many years and one of their activities was to be present while the apartments were being given back to dislocated Banja Luka citizens of non-Serbian origin, which included direct physical contact with the police and opponents of the law being implemented.

Eventually, I will go back to Croatia where our association is a mentor of the work of teams of several peace organisations. In some villages, profoundly damaged by war, the very existence of a peace organisation of multi-ethnic membership is a provocation and the initial phase of their action starts with the question of how to respond to being vilified by local people in power. Anti-war initiatives, such as, for example, publishing a poster in Berak, end with a police interrogation as a rule. A similar thing happened to the activists of an antiwar protest against Mladić in Niš. However, the example from Berak could be an encouragement: along with the development of the organisation and its becoming recognisable, it also becomes an address for the representatives of local government to turn to when they need to organise the local population.

Finally, nonviolent action in public, in my opinion, is also performed by Radio 101 when they broadcast their ‘bad good’ news on Sunday evening, i.e. positive news from the world, and is therefore, unfortunately, still an exception among the informative programmes. I’d also like to mention the influence of public figures, for example musicians such as Edo Maajka, whose lyrics promote living together and the beauty of diversity.

The changes brought about by these and many other efforts towards nonviolent transformation of unjust conditions are not the only benefits attained in solving a concrete problem. Gradually, they become commonplace in citizens’ awareness. Fifteen or so years ago, radio listeners would not have invited non-government associations to solve a certain social problem so matter-of-factly,

and rarely has it occurred to anyone to turn to the associations when they hadn't known where to look for their rights to be respected. And what I consider to be of particular value in this process and that the listed actions can claim as their merit, is the fact that individuals who are organised or actively participate in them experience the fact that general passivity is not eternal, that they can struggle without jeopardising their opponents. Such groups and individuals are a long-lasting virus of nonviolence in the society and I do not believe that there is an antivirus system against them. They will only continue to produce even more sophisticated viruses of peace.

**Summary**

If we summarise the presented road signs through which we can recognise nonviolence, it is 'a doctrine of the principle of behaviour that advocates the absence of any sort of violence in any area... and denies violence as a means of political action'.<sup>22</sup> It is particularly important, in a special situation such as conflict, to show that the transformation of conflict follows the principles (ahimsa) that support strategy (satyagraha). A new paradigm of action is offered in a culture in which a rationalist approach to communication and interactions is dominant. The novelty is the approach in which it is important HOW we reach our goals, and not only WHAT our goal is, because this approach believes that the very nonviolent path in itself leads towards a just goal. In the nonviolent transformation of conflict it is important to be aware that we can be very brisk in sorting out the problem, and mild towards the opponent who is, at that time too, a person who has the right to be respected and to maintaining their integrity.

In social conflicts, nonviolence means to consciously oppose structural and cultural violence without adding links to a spiral of violence and thus de-escalating conflict. It is possible if I develop resistance, and not accept defence, be it in its military form or its teaching, that it is just for a victim to strike back at offenders. Nonviolent action doesn't require the power of the victim because it rests on the awareness that when I have the initiative I also have many more chances for a

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22 Compare Larousse French dictionary after *QUE sais je?* – *La non-violence*

solution without violence, much more so than when I wait to react to someone's move. In every situation it is possible to choose which way we want to respond to violence, i.e. the necessity of violence is not recognised for the very reason that it is necessary to personally take responsibility for one's own action in order to find the way out of the entanglement of violence. Finally, the basic and the strongest instrument of nonviolence is a human being, a person who strengthens his/her capacities for nonviolence working on them and particularly by sharpening their 'togetherness'. These are the foundations for building nonviolent political action.

Considering the listed guidelines, nonviolence refers to other parameters and is placed in a different context than violence. Unlike the prejudice that the one who will not 'fight until sacrificing their own life to a just cause' neglects justice, nonviolence does indeed fight for the truth. The truth that transcends one-sidedness of the eagerness of a violent struggle. Nonviolence does not need to be, in order for it to be realised, forgotten in the struggle for justice, goodness and peace that belong to all people, even to our current opponent. Violence needs to renounce that memory, in order to be efficient. On the contrary, one needs to always remember that nonviolence advocates the values of humaneness. Therefore:

*Who is right does not matter  
but who is benevolent.  
The one who cares about peace  
matters more than the one who is right.  
The one who cares about friendship  
is the one who is right.  
The one who has understanding  
is the one who is right.  
The one who cares about joy and harmony,  
that one is right.  
V. Krmpotic<sup>23</sup>*

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23 From: *Stotinu i osam* (A Hundred and Eight), "Nije važno tko je u pravu", 69<sup>th</sup> poem in the Volume number 64.







activism(s)



# Making Waves or – How to Turn a Mire into a Place where Something Is Happening?

Slobodanka Dekić

Activism is a word I find difficult to define, and it has turned out that it's also very difficult to write about. It represents a part of my life that I call 'what hangs suspended in the air' – elusive, and yet I know it's there around me. It usually emerges when someone asks me 'what is it that you do?'. That's when I pause, because I only know what I don't do, i.e. I know I don't have a 'profession', working hours, paid vacation, nor years of service. But I've never said 'well, you know, I do activism'. Firstly because it would be extremely complicated to explain what it is (just as it was when I had to explain people I studied anthropology/ethnology – 'what's that now?', 'oh, well, you know, it's a science about the development of the human race, society...', followed by glances of pity...). Secondly, I don't want to say I work with a non-governmental organisation (because I don't, at the moment), and also in order to avoid looks, additional questions and comments for which I simply don't have the guts for anymore.

But putting all this aside, the real reason is that I believe it doesn't matter what you do, so much as how you do it. I don't want to have a profession – profession doesn't matter, what matters is the idea. And this is a text about that – how, after six years of being in it, I experience activism.

**To make waves** – verb, to create waves, every activity that disturbs a seemingly peaceful environment. For me, a step out, criticism, re-examining the generally accepted values of (a mediocre) environment. Activism.

**Mire** – an environment in which nothing ever happens. Everything is 'healthy', 'normal' – as it should be. An environment in which silence is golden.

Essentially, an ideal challenge for making the waves and for those who dare to make them.

**Motivation** – there are many things that influence whether you will step out and say that the emperor is naked or just simply withdraw to a corner. I believe that I, and my motivation to find myself in this activism story were primarily influenced by the social situation and environment in which I grew up and in which I also live today. In a way, it all started with the street protests in Belgrade in 1999–2000.<sup>1</sup> I wasn't in the streets in 1996–1997 because back then I thought all that hadn't made much sense. I kept that point of view until I lost some people and some places, until I had heard some other stories from Croatia, Bosnia, from Kosovo. This only intensified an ugly feeling of anxiety and the need to overcome and change all that. The feeling of being enclosed has lasted until this very day and is overcome with more or less difficulty. There still are innumerable visual, realistic stimuli. I can't take a regular bus and go to certain towns, towns I'm fond of. I have a problem with that. I live in a city with probably the largest number of tombstones raised for people the same age as myself. I have a problem with that. I live in an environment in which a great number of people are afraid to speak and express their identities. THAT I have a huge problem with. Finally, I have a problem with an atmosphere charged with fear of all that happening again.

Every time I'm out of here, everything seems normal. Everything's alright, there's no stress, no quarrel, no fear. The news is relaxed, always distant, somehow, people don't look at you funny (they don't look at you at all). And these are all somehow arranged building blocks and systems, not too much smart talk is required and the less you notice (and there *are* things to scratch your eye) the better. Unlike the Balkans, where there is no system nor had there ever been one – *'what one generation builds, the next one tears down and burns to the ground'* (quote from a hundred-year-old man from Treskavica). And yet, I come back here every time I leave and I know that this is the only place I can

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1 During the rule of Slobodan Milošević, civic and students' street protests were organised on many occasions. The protests of 1996/97 started because of election fraud. Hundreds of thousands of citizens demonstrated in the streets of cities and towns in Serbia for over three months. The protests of 1999/2000 were initiated after the NATO bombing, with the purpose of ousting of Slobodan Milošević regime. (editor's note)

function in. However much there is no system, it's only here that I have the feeling that I can be a part of the story that builds it, I hope in a unique way. This building process is very frustrating, often resulting in chronic nervousness, depression, everyday cursing and feeling of futility. But also holds a feeling of immeasurable contentment when you pause and feel the moment or see a hint of a change from that which used to be. An additional hint of happiness is given by the very fact that I see those changes in *my* environment, which encourages me, restricts me... whatever, but is simply a part of me.

For this reason, the Balkans are the trigger for my activism – often inexplicable love and connection with these regions and people. In time, the question of staying here became a matter of pride – why should I move from here because someone doesn't like who and what I am and how do I look. I think the obligatory ingredient of activism in these regions should be a deconstruction of that popular saying (ah, the populus, the people!) about the 'smarter one giving way'. Perhaps they shouldn't give way anymore.

**Idea** – I can't view activism as a profession. I experience it as a way of life, a decision to make some choices and live in accordance with ideas, principles, identities that are important to you and that you consider to be a part of yourself. Still, this is a pretty broad definition that has led me to a dilemma more than once. For example, if every action that is done in accordance with principles, ideas and values is essentially activist, does that mean that groups of sports fans could be considered activists? Are the supporters of 'Rad', 'Partizan', 'Zvezda' and other football clubs who gathered in 2001 in the Square of the Republic to 'clean' Serbia of faggots, dykes and disease activists or 'crazed, illiterate mob' (as they are often qualified)?<sup>2</sup> If someone were to tell me that

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2 The date in question is 30 June 2001 when the first Pride Parade of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender population was supposed to take place. The procession was supposed to be formed and start in the Square of the Republic and move towards the Students' Cultural Centre where an all day programme had been planned. However, this procession never formed, because hundreds of football supporters and supporters of the right wing organisations stopped the participants of the parade from as much as approaching the Square of the Republic by means of severe physical violence. Even though a dozen people were injured, no one has been charged with these assaults. (editor's note)

one of those football fans also came out in the street to defend their beliefs and principles and that thus they also claim their legitimate right to activism, I'd probably go mad. However, some facts do remain, such as the one that 'they' had been organised within the timeframe of two or three weeks. They made their counter-posters, clearly defined their thoughts and ideas and managed, on that day, to gather around those ideas at least ten times the number of people than those who came to the parade itself. They were supported by the majority who stood aside and enjoyed a free show, they had a system on their side too – the police only reacted after they themselves had been assaulted. Does all this make them activists? I was there at the time and to this very day I can't shake off the sense of fear and anger that collected under my skin that day. The Pride Parade in Belgrade had a great influence on me, both in terms of personal processes and in terms of motivation to be in activism. At that point I was still not aware of my identities, I haven't come out as *queer*, nor had I been 'visible', recognisable enough to be beaten up.<sup>3</sup> But I got very scared because for the first time I saw what could happen to me, and even worse, that when it starts to happen, there's absolutely no one to protect you. This whole event hasn't stopped some of my personal processes but on the contrary, I think it even encouraged them in a strange sort of way. Fear and anger became intertwined with pride during this time. Therefore, I often unwillingly recall this event, to try to analyse it soberly because I feel that only in this way I can avoid relativisation of what I do, and in a way, to provide an answer for myself about why I do it. Because, if 'they' too are in fact in activism, how come that I'm always on the side that gets beaten up, humiliated, at the same time not even trying to abandon the role of a victim?

Six years after, I am actually not even interested in 'them'. The most important thing for me is to know whether I have done anything in the meantime to prevent the 2001 Parade in the Square from ever happening again. I'm not asking this question due to my being a super-sensibilised person, born with lots of understanding for all the suffering in this world. No one is.

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3 The people who were beaten up were identified by their attackers as 'faggots' and lesbians exclusively on the bases of their appearance. In other words, anyone who looked even slightly different from them was beaten.

I simply have a problem, and the problem is called 'I can't live my life freely'. This is a matter of freedom of each and every one of us to look, walk, talk, be called, express themselves in a way they feel inside. On that day this freedom was denied to some, on 11 July 1995 to others,<sup>4</sup> on some other day it will be denied to yet another... And the sole question is whether I will allow myself to be abused and humiliated ever again, or whether I will do everything in my power to stop this from happening to me or to other people. There is not much point in throwing the ball to 'their' court – sports fans, enemies, chetniks, ustashas... whoever they may be. I don't want to waste my time on attempts to decipher or question motivation of sports fans to do what they did on that day in the Square. I start from the fact that they wanted to 'clean Serbia of disease', that they truly believe this, and that this is an idea that stirred so many of them to action on that day. Because, I can always question the motivation of people who call themselves activists, nonviolent, broadminded, tolerant, sincere... and whose not being there that day (and some other days after that) failed to show that they live all of these values. A culprit can always be found, but it is very difficult to look at things from another perspective, i.e. from oneself. What am I doing to stop this from ever happening again? I feel that the problem of 'awareness' of local activists lies in this very question, in the opinions that are often heard and/or read in the corridors of third sector – 'us, the urbane' vs. 'those rednecks'; 'us normal' vs. 'those primitives'; 'us, the aware' vs. 'them, the backward' etc. Activism in itself is not an exclusive invention of non-governmental organisations and the people in them don't have exclusive rights to call themselves activists. Many, unfortunately, have no right whatsoever to call themselves that.

I believe that non-governmental organisations, at least in these regions, have represented one of the rare places in which something different could be heard or done. But I also believe that they have remained at a single stage of

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4 The day on which the Serbian army committed genocide against Bosniaks in Srebrenica and surrounding villages. Eight thousand people were killed for having had the names like Sead, Muhamed, Ibrahim, Osman... Except for the names, there were no other 'criteria' for deciding who was going to die and who was going to survive.

development for much too long, with no clear idea of how they should open up and in what way to do it. The fact is that very many activities take place but it seems as if they fail to reach the broader public, which in turn creates this same feeling of futility – why am I doing something if no one notices it, there are no changes, or I even become a laughing stock? Some people probably find this enclosure adequate. Certainly it is being maintained by the inertia and lack of interest from the broader community, but as long as *this* step forward is not taken and some waves not made in *this* mire, the number of those who will peacefully watch beating and slaughtering because they are okay with it, because they're afraid, because they couldn't care less will be far greater than the number of those who are ready to make waves in an even bigger mire.

I personally try to make that step forward through the very principle that I don't want my non-governmental organisation to be my sole space in which I will act as an activist, or projects to be my only 'tool'. I try and wish to do some other things, 'professions', but with my own idea behind it. Sometimes it's terribly hard, because it's as though I had got used to a certain structure, language, patterns of communication (I often agree with my friends on activism and the NGO scene being a sort of a sect), but it's important for me to somehow persevere in it, to try to express myself in various ways. Truth to tell, what I would like the most is for someone somewhere to offer me a job at a school. Working with children and 'working' in the common room during the recesses looks like an exquisite activist challenge.

**Pride** – Not only because of my personal pride, but also because I think it represents the most beautiful, most faithful, most honest story about what activism is and how it starts, I conclude with one of the accounts of the Stonewall revolution that gave birth to the Pride parade.

I was lucky to be a part of the second wave of lesbian and gay movement during the 1960s and 1970s (...) We kept getting messages of how we 'look gay', but unless we held hands or were seen leaving a gay bar, our sexual preferences weren't the things to 'give us away' – it was our different mode of gender expression. (...)



Everyday life was very hard and there was no other choice but to fight. And it shouldn't seem strange that the people who would tear down all gender rules in a visible way were the ones to lead the Stonewall rebellion. This historical uprising against police terror took place in one of New York gay bars, Stonewall, on 28 June 1969, around 1 a.m. Patrons of the bar were mostly drag kings, queens, transsexuals, of Afro-American or Hispanic descent, who were expected to take humiliation, brutality and swearing in silence. But, on that hot summer night, everyone who was at the bar at that moment struck back at the police with such force that they had to withdraw. This conflict lasted for another four nights giving birth to the Stonewall movement'.<sup>5</sup>

From 1969 until today, Pride parades take place in July, parades to celebrate the Stonewall event. For me, Stonewall represents everything activism is – the day when those who couldn't fit into the system in any way, showed that they had pride, ideas and motivation to make waves in the mire.

They showed that one shouldn't keep silent.

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5 **Feinberg, Leslie**, *Transgender Warriors: Making History From Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodman*, **Beacon Press**, 1996.

# Reflections on Activism

Svetlana Kijevčanin ·····

*“The difference between fantasy and reality is action”*

*Peter McKee, peace trainer and psychoterapist and my supervisor*

*Belfast, N. Ireland*

## Personal overview

This text is an entirely personal reflection on my own activism, and in that sense does not aspire to discuss theoretical or scientific concepts. When I started to write it, it occupied my thoughts a great deal, and I soon learned why. Activism is, in fact, my life; I live through action, acting, activities directed towards creating positive changes and attempts to make the world a better place to live in...

Still, no matter how much the theoretical concepts were not my main focus while writing this text, *activism* as I describe and experience it can nevertheless be recognised in the theoretical concept of *praxis – informed, committed action* written about by Paulo Freire: ‘...action, that is meaningful and linked to certain values. Praxis is not only action based on thinking things through. It is an action imbued with certain qualities, these being a commitment to the general welfare of people and a search for the truth, as well as a respect of others. It is the action of free people, people who are capable of acting for themselves. What’s more, *praxis* always involves risk, but also creativity, and it is directed towards others and dialogue based’.<sup>1</sup>

When I say ‘activism’, I primarily link this notion to my peace work and connection with the Group MOST (bridge), the *Association for cooperation and mediation in conflicts*, dating from 1992... But today, whilst I look back on my life with some distance in terms of time, with experience and years, I realise that my activism started much earlier, through active pioneer roles which

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1 Taylor, P. (1993) *The Texts of Paulo Freire*, Buckingham: Open University Press. 169 + vi.

meant that in 1975, I was the president of Pioneers' Organisation in Split, and carried the pupils' ceremonial birthday baton to comrade Tito on the waterfront in Split in 1976, I was an active pioneers' instructor during primary school education both in Split and in Belgrade, and then, in 1978, a president of Youth Organisation of Belgrade, president of Students' Organisation at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade in 1983, member of the team of Youth Workshop in 1984 and a leader of The First (and last) Pioneers' Voluntary Work Camp<sup>2</sup> 'Rtanj' in 1985. By 1992, I had created many actions, programmes, trainings, campaigns with my women fellow... up until today, when my activism lives through my work with students in creating a new generation of youth workers, through the Parents' Council I preside over in my son's high school, through Tenants' Council of my apartment building in Dorćol...

And for me, it's all the same activism: or to be more precise, the charge that moves me is the same, the faith in people and general well being, and the modes for action differed in accordance with the context and the time in which they occurred... It is obvious that a popular phrase, slightly modified, applies to me: 'you either ARE or are NOT... an activist!' I am, and it largely defines my being, my identity and the meaning of everything I do.

And whilst I'm trying to align my thoughts on activism into a sequence that would make sense, I can see that, at least chronologically, I make a distinction between – distant past: pioneer activism, more recent past: peace activism in the times of war, and today: activism in the present time of peace...

I intend to say a couple of words on each of these eras.

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- 2 Youth work actions, were organized voluntary labor activities of young people in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The actions were used to build public infrastructure such as roads, railways, and public buildings, as well as industrial infrastructure. After the war, actions were numerous and massive and the youth brigades made significant contributions to the rebuilding of their country, which was badly ravaged by war. As the country was rebuilt and its economy stabilized, youth work actions went out of fashion. However, they were revived in the late 1970s, in an effort to organize youth in political and cultural activities, as the work actions proved to play a large role in the socialization of those involved. (Editor's note. Source: Wikipedia)

## Pioneer Activism

I usually mention this period when I attempt to answer foreigners' question of: what was it like to live in the time of Tito? It was normal, it was nice, because this is the only childhood I have, the only childhood I recall, and all my memories of that time are mostly nice. And they are very much marked by activism but also by my family, physicians working with the Yugoslav National Army, moving from one place to another. Novi Sad, Split and Belgrade... I think those moves were important. Getting to know people, my 'Vojvodina' and 'Dalmatian' accent, living in the lowlands followed by time at the seaside, different mentalities, all of this (apart from 'brotherhood and unity') probably defined me as someone who values the richness of diversity and likes people as they are, regardless of where they come from and what they look like, what language they speak...

Even though it took time for me to view and analyse my pioneer activism with an 'emotional distance' and accept that it was a part of a political ideology, I cannot renounce it, because it is a part of me and because I know I have done everything as a pioneer with sincerity: wore the red scarf and was proud of it, even carried the ceremonial birthday baton (albeit the primary school one), sang in the choir in white shirt and navy-blue skirt with the red scarf and navy-blue hat with a red star on it and dreamed of participating in the Youth Day ceremonial spectacle as a performer one day. My dreams would've come true if I hadn't broken my leg in the second grade of high school and – alas! – had to see the whole ceremony from the seats in Partisan stadium... And regardless of the fact that the system in which I was growing up, even the country I was born in, collapsed, I cannot deny the basic values I was growing up with, such as, for example: 'study hard and help others, work and be humble, and someone will note your effort sooner or later', that made me what I am today.

But there are other opinions...

"Someone might say that the movements during Tito did the same thing that the work with young people does today – supporting young people to become active members of society to the full. However, movements such as Tito's Pioneers and Tito's Youth Organisation had the goal of fitting these young

people into a very structured and controlled society, whilst the basic intention of the contemporary concept of working with youth is to provide support for young people to find their own place in the social community, and thus these two concepts differ greatly. The former entails social control, i.e. directing and controlling the youth in order to make them fit in better, and accept the current ideology and principles as firmly as possible. The latter concept provides the young with support in their development, and a possibility for self-discovery. The concept of social education enables young people to better understand themselves and their environment, supporting them in becoming autonomous personalities, and not blind followers of an ideology”.<sup>3</sup>

At the risk of sounding defensive, I will have to reply to this opinion: Yes, it’s true that all of it was lead ‘top-down’ towards a higher ideal, and we the pioneers may have been unaware of it, and maybe I myself was an obedient and good student, but this pioneer activism gave purpose to my childhood and notions and values I adopted then have remained for life, and not in a negative way either.

It might be unrealistic to think that everyone was expected to be the same, that everyone should be active, everyone should be a pioneer, and no one should be different and stand apart! And yet, formed within that system, here I am, here and now, with my history of pioneer activism, with the spirit of a pioneer woven into my current life and is very present in everything I do; probably in a different way, but present nevertheless!

My mother too was a participant in voluntary work camps and that’s where she met my father; my father-in-law was an exemplary worker more than thirty times... It might be true that the voluntary work camps based on young people’s sweat and their labour manipulated the masses and took advantage of their volunteer work, but half of Yugoslavia was rebuilt in that fashion after World War Two, with the vigour and sweat of voluntary work camp participants... Even though already fading slowly, my pioneer activism was crowned by The

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3 N. Padison (2005) *Striving to formally recognise the youth work in Serbia and Montenegro – Experience of FSBP, “NGO in Europe”, “Hajde da...” group.*

First Pioneers' Voluntary Work Camp on Rtanj in 1985, when, along with another nine adults (the camp headquarters) I was responsible for three hundred children and young people aged from 7 to 14, from all parts of our former country. That's when I made inseparable friends with the commander of the sister-brigade Boljevac-Kavadarci, and for months after the camp, received handfuls of postcards from all parts of the country with greetings from the little camp participants... My shift lasted for twenty one days, and I can't help making an analogy with the youth camps we organise nowadays... This pioneers' action of ours had the same name as the earlier, youth ones, but it wasn't meant to take advantage of the children, rather to assist their upbringing through their stay in a collective, temporary separation from their parents and socialisation, socialising and social evenings we organised...

I still work with young people and now the principles of this contemporary work can be expressed in slightly different terms. For example, what is very important in the work with young people is not only to carry out certain tasks, but rather to establish connections between the ways in which something is done and *to what end*, and being aware thereof, which is defined through the principle of – process oriented; then, a practitioner is observed as a means in the process of education and he/she becomes the activator and catalyser of the development of activities in the community. The principle of social education (above mentioned) promotes the necessity of respecting oneself and the others, both in terms of attitude and in practice. The nature of working with young people is based on humanist principles of acknowledging and respect of, and the mutual acknowledgment of others, tolerating differences and empathy as being basic activators of human development. Contextual understanding underscores the significance of it being reflected in reality and the processes taking place in a certain society, so that the education must be multicultural, and the learning directed towards the participant with the emphasis on experiential learning. Holistic approaches to education are of great importance, as is the understanding and transformation of conflict and the development of community.

Promoting the listed principles to the full, I would like to underline the fact that at the time of my pioneers' activism too (on my pioneer's honour!), I did

believe in individual affinities and searched for them, nurturing the personal creative expression, even though we used to sing 'All The Way from Vardar to Triglav' and even though everything bore the mark of collectivism... We had some good times, unforgettable times, it never mattered who was from where, and what's more, we all used to learn some Macedonian, swapping interesting words from different parts.

I only became aware of my 'mixed descent' and atheist upbringing with the fallout of the former Yugoslavia.

### **Peace activism in the times of war**

The second stage in my personal classification, which I have marked as the 'more recent past', has been the past fifteen or so years, or at least the ten years of wars in the Balkans, which usually entails all the ugly, sickening and horrible things that all of us who decided, or to whom it simply happened, and who spent time in this/these regions went through. But it is these very ten years of hardship that some people, myself among them, link to the struggle and to active participation in endeavours to change something, to find meaning, to believe in people...

And how did my peace activism start? In 1991, I was a young psychologist, unemployed for four years, and a mother of two small children. In the former Yugoslavia, the only country I had, the war and the fallout began. People were leaving, my brother amongst them, and it seems to me now, my entire generation. This is when an unusual thing happened: my friend and former professor Tinde Kovač-Cerović invited me to attend a strange seminar on mediation and nonviolent conflict transformation. The seminar was lead by Diana Francis, an English woman, who enchanted me entirely with her nobility and knowledge. (We remain in touch to this very day, and she has remained my role model and my friend, she was my 'peace guru'. I still admire and love her a lot.). After the seminar, some new vistas opened before me, new views on conflict in general, so that the conflict in our country too assumed another dimension; I understood that this was not only happening to us, even though I had a hard time accepting it. Wishing to share this unique experience with our

colleagues and to introduce them to these ideas, we organised the first local seminar for the interested people who ‘shared our ideas’. And this is how it all began, this is how the MOST group was created, the group that has since, in the fifteen years that followed (these past fifteen years), made and still makes an invaluable contribution to the promotion of the ideas of peace and tolerance among people, through various aspects of education. Forming the group MOST and the start of peace activism in a time of war was my conscious choice, unlike my ‘unconscious’ pioneer one, it was my/our only possible response to the existing situation of the fallout of the country and the aggression that overcame reason... It was the only true way, because any other way would not have been in accordance with my values and beliefs.

Only a minority were able to make themselves heard at the time, the ones who had the courage to raise their voices against the violence; this was our reaction, our response to the overall passivity of the majority, and it hadn’t been easy to be exposed in one’s beliefs, through nonviolent actions that were not to the taste of the governing political establishment. It had seemed to me that we were the elite, because there were so few of us... A colleague of mine used to like to say that ‘there are as many of us as musicians in a chamber orchestra’. Even though we were characterised by most as an elite of ‘foreign mercenaries’ and ‘war profiteers’, such qualifications never concerned me nor distracted me from peace activism, because I knew the reasons for which I was doing it and I knew that activism was my only genuine response to the situation in which we lived. At times I was sorry for the fact that due to the ‘contempt’ of the government who were prone to defining us, not as NON-governmental, but as ANTI-government activists, and therefore most of the population was not able to see all of our useful activities, publications and products, because it was always the same group of people who gathered around our promotions and meetings... It hadn’t been easy, but it was my choice and a sign of my non-consent to remain a part of the ‘silent majority’... It was up to us to move and mobilise this ‘silent majority’ to join us... And we succeeded, but only after many years...

Even though we were a minority, in terms of numbers, in the Balkans, I have had a strong feeling of belonging to the global scene, thanks to cooperation with



peace activists from the entire region of the Balkans and the entire world. This has helped me to banish the feeling of being enclosed by the sanctions, isolation, and helped me to feel like a citizen of a planet who, thanks to the language, can be in touch with the world in which there are people who think as I do and who are ready to fight for peace.

Yes, activism for me also means the people with whom I share ideas, values, and I pass them on through various forms of work. MOST and my activism in this period are all my colleagues, all my friends without whom I wouldn't be what I am now, and nor would MOST be what it is. When I think of those beginnings and that time, I think of us all who not only worked together, but also socialised, supported each other, shared good times and bad times... And it somehow seems that it was this very bonding that has kept us going for all these years. Somehow, we have built each other together, both professionally and personally, we have grown together... With our commitment and with all of our hearts we were doing the same thing: helping people get through their hardship, and believed it to be possible. In 1992, we started coming up with workshops that were to help children without parents, who were displaced by war in Croatia and Bosnia, and were trying to get through the crisis of moving to a new city and altered conditions of living. And through helping the children at the collective refugee centre we too have restructured our lives, finding meaning in activism.

We have continued to work with new ideas, new projects, and a series of trainings throughout the entire former Yugoslavia has commenced. The process has taken place in such a way as to firstly consider the context, identify the problems and needs in field work, and then to create the 'intervention' programme that would meet those needs. This is how all of our projects came to be: 'Through play to realisation – a cognitive encouragement programme of work with junior and senior adolescents at the collective refugee centre', 'Goodwill classroom – programme for constructive conflict transformation for junior and senior primary school students and high school students', 'Multiculturalism and local initiatives: programme of acknowledging differences and diminishing prejudices and discrimination'. 'The smarter one

does not relent – manual: a guide through conflicts towards an agreement’, ‘Practicing democracy – constructive debate as a model of competent political confrontation’, ‘Dialogue is the key – empowering youth activism in suburban parts of the city’. We have created programmes, realised them immediately, but also trained other experts, assistants and people interested in the realisation of these programs. We have held trainings, but also attended various trainings in search of learning new things... An opportunity to go to a seminar ‘somewhere in the West’ meant a lot to me because this is how we kept in touch with real lives taking place elsewhere, with no wars, in contrast to our bleak isolation. And however much these trips meant for me, I knew that I belonged here, not only because of my family, but also because of the need to be here and work where there was work to be done, and so I always returned.

The situation in which I, for the first time in my life, asked myself ‘is it worth it to stick to peaceful ways, when the reality *denies* us entirely?’, the situation that for a moment shook not only the ground I stood on but also my mission as a peace activist, was the NATO bombing<sup>4</sup>. I had the impression that everything we did and everything we kept doing could not overpower the force of aggression. But, persistence and the awareness that we do sometimes ‘take one step forward and several steps back’ prevailed and, in spite of that moment of weakness, probably conditioned by realistic physical danger, participation in the revolutionary events of 5 October imposed the need for activism to prevail over the need to preserve both personal and family integrity. Going out in the streets on that day, we were prepared to face great risks and understood with not a hint of a dilemma that the most important thing was to just be there.

Many of us have left immediate peace activism because it calls for lot of self-denial, a lot of giving and commitment to others, dealing with hardship... But many, just as myself, have remained persistent, because working with other

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4 The NATO bombing of Yugoslavia (code-named Operation Allied Force by NATO) was NATO’s military operation against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia that lasted from 24 March to 10 June 1999. The cause for this intervention was brutal violation of human rights as well as ethnic cleansing conducted in Kosovo by the army and police force of FRY, as well as some paramilitary formations. Apart from military targets and infrastructure in the territory of FRY, civilians and civilian objects were also hit during the NATO bombing. (editor’s note)

people and the conviction that there are indeed other solutions apart from war have helped us to survive in difficult times. And even though the Balkans are a region in which the war ended, deep in my heart I'm still a peace activist, I follow the same mission, I connect people regardless of their origins, religion, gender, age or status, by staying here, in Belgrade, the site of important events, surrounded by people I love people and who love me.

### **Peacetime activism: from intervention to prevention...**

I remember a meeting at MOST after the warfare had stopped and we began wondering if there was any sense in continuing to be in peace activism in the time of peace, when there was no direct need for creating peace and intervention programmes. But, we agreed in unison that it did indeed make sense and that it was important to reach out to the broader population, especially to the young, and show them alternatives to violence, peaceful solutions... and to promote peaceful and constructive ways in approaching conflict transformation through prevention and education programmes.

In this regard, my activism hasn't stopped, it has merely assumed a different shape and form. A statement of 'there's nothing in activism I haven't tried or done' applies to me. I have thus, as an activist, in my education segment, tried my hand at working with groups of various profiles and ages: from direct work with refugee children, through trainings with teachers, psychologists, young politicians, journalists, students, youth groups, to other activists... I have always sought new forms, new expressions of my activism and thence the variety and innumerable unforgettable products. Giving trainings was a dominant and important segment. But passing on skills and knowledge to others through experiential learning is but a part of the entire image of activism. And an equally important segment is documenting these experiences, so that trainings are accompanied by writing manuals and publications, reports and compendiums. Some of these things saw the light of day through published publications, and a lot of it remained in the form of notes, reports... Nowadays,

in the period following the wars and the ‘revolution’ of 5 October 2000<sup>5</sup>, where I am wealthier for having had these past experiences, and whilst my children have grown up, some other changes happened to me as well. Having chosen my activist path once and for all, rather than the academic one, summing up my experience as an assistant professor at the university as well as my activism at the local level, I mustered the courage to step into international non-governmental organisations, from my local organisation, the MOST group: firstly UMCOR, then CARE and now the Swedish NGO Forum Syd.

My position was mostly that of a manager, but was always ‘filtered’ through my local experience as an activist. And even though I switched ‘sides’, and moved from the organisation that was a recipient of grants to the donor one, supporting the development of local non-governmental organisations, I knew that I knew people and the ‘scene’ and that my experience as an anti-war activist can only be one of assistance. At CARE, I lead peace projects with young people of various ethnicities using the elements of theatre in education. My latest job is as a manager within FSBP, at the International Faculty for Youth Work. This job encompasses all my previous experiences: my academic background, my manager skills and my fifteen long years of activist experience of working with people, searching for peaceful solutions, inexhaustible enthusiasm... I now feel competent enough to transfer these experiences to creating a programme dedicated to educating young people for activism and working with other young people, completely acknowledging the needs of individuals and communities in which they live, their individuality and personal expression, striving to create conditions in which young people would be able to realise their potential to the full. My current mission is directed towards establishing and recognising the new profession of youth worker.

The experience of working with international organisations was not crucial in the sense of ‘subduing’ my activism. What’s more, it was a useful experience in terms of learning rules and procedures that facilitate the realisation of

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5 On October 5 2000, the Slobodan Milošević regime in Serbia was finally ousted. The regime fell after a massive protest gathering and demonstrations against election fraud, attended by citizens from all over Serbia. (editor’s note)

a project, and that had not been developed at local organisations. Thus, if you are an activist, the spirit remains no matter where you are and is only a matter of the mode or expression in which the activism is displayed, but the initial assumption is that you have activism as a personal experience and personal choice as your mission, a guiding notion. And this is what brings me to the dilemma of the difference between 'natural born activists' and 'created activists'... i.e., whether mere education or work at an international NGO can 'form' or 'produce' activists or local sustainable NGOs? Is it enough to only work 'on contract' at an international organisation for as long as the funds last, and then, when the funds of foreign donors are no more, is it realistic to expect the 'employees' to take initiatives themselves and start fundraising for this work and to, in other words, move to the status of 'activist' from that of 'employee'? I think this assumption can only work for people who have had activist experiences or are activists at heart... The latter option seems to me to be less probable, because the state of 'security' in the sense of regular monthly income needs to be replaced with uncertainty, great energy for writing projects with uncertain outcome, all of which are the risks of activism... Such a situation can be quite a test for differentiating between the 'real activists' from the ones who are not and perhaps a recommendation for international organisations for their planning and expectations that their mission is automatically going to be continually carried out by 'local people'. Indirectly, the essence of this dilemma is the matter of money, because, ultimately, the decisions we make and choices we make are also related to the matter of making a living. In terms of such choices, some paths carry more risk than others. Definitely, though, activism as a choice, not only as a personal mission but also as a way of earning a living, is 'a road less travelled – a harder road', but the one that I chose and the money was never the sole motivation.

But, what are all the things that were motivations?, when the results are sometimes not visible, and successes are sometimes very minor compared to the hindrances and difficulties. It can become demanding and hard, at times... and sometimes it is an exhausting 'one on one' kind of work, needing a lot of persistence and perseverance, a lot of travelling and fatigue followed by a strong

sense of discontinuity, particularly due to the contrast with family ways of life. Activism and family seem to be the meeting of the two things that cannot possibly meet. And yet, I have and live them both! True, the children no longer ask me ‘When are you leaving again, mum?’ but instead ‘How long are you staying this time?’ which can, at times, be hard to hear and bear. But I haven’t given up. Not even on hearing the comments by people from my surroundings, ‘What business do you have going down South, with some Albanians or others? Don’t you think it makes no sense, why don’t you mind your children and your family!’ I often hear, ‘What you do is worth nothing... you can’t do a thing against the global trends, political influences and affairs, things that are determined at much higher levels...’ But I keep going, and I think it does make sense, and if I didn’t believe in what I did I wouldn’t spend my days ‘god knows where’... And, as long as there is a single young person, a participant of a programme I lead, who says he/she sees value and meaning in acknowledging differences, in socialising with people ‘from the other side’, that they find pleasure in searching for personal values and researching the unknown, it all makes sense, in spite of the inevitability of global events that ‘take place somewhere out of our reach’, and on a global level perhaps defines some other ‘rules of the game’...

Due to everything mentioned above, there probably are not many true activists, which is, of course, my personal opinion, because my standards for ‘being an activist’ are very high... It has to be a personal orientation and a way of life, or otherwise it will not be genuine, or will be short of breath; it will be but a transient adventure in the life of an individual. Even in the small gestures of everyday activism, participating in the parents’ council of my children’s schools, organising the action of cleaning the backyard of the building I live in or collecting money for replacing the window panes in the building, people around me are prone to define it as a state of madness or a lack of better things to do.

But I only act in accordance with my basic principle of ‘act what you preach’ and I live my activism! Every other thing would be hypocrisy!

And lastly, I offer you a quote from the book by my teacher Diana Francis, *People, Peace and Power*, dedicated to us, the activists, who “can be growing strongholds of change and source of support for everyone who, through their usual strength ‘reshape’ and ‘change the world’ ”.

“Expressing my lack of trust in the modernist concepts of security and arrogance that contributed to the Western globalist philosophy and domination, I believe that what is needed as the possible answer is not to reject all values and striving or denying personal or collective responsibility for well being of other human beings and our planet. It is equally important to be aware of cultural premises and sensitive to cultural differences in a world that at the same time seems to be smaller and more divided than ever before and to be aware of the burning need for philosophical and practical affirmation of respect and acknowledgment as universal values without which we underestimate our own humanity and all prospects of a peaceful coexistence.”<sup>6</sup>

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6 D. Francis, (2002) *People, Peace and Power*, Pluto Press. London & Virginia. chapter: Making a difference: Challenge and Change, page 255.

# Nationalism Entails Discrimination

Ksenija Forca  
Majda Puača

Writing a text on nationalism in Serbia represents a great challenge for us, considering the fact that our growing up has taken place at a time when one collective identity is being ‘torn down’ and a new one is being created, constructed. Yugoslavianhood remains to exist merely as a nice memory of childhood when the language (an imposed one, for Macedonians, Slovenians and Albanians) that was spoken had dialects that were later to be named separate and different languages. In the period of living in a shared state, it seems that the differences were accepted as the wealth of the people. Tito spoke of ‘socialism casting away minority and majority, it seeks equality between minority and majority, and then there is neither minority nor majority, there is one people...’<sup>1</sup> Later on, this period was perceived as a conspiratorial attempt to destroy nations and national interests. For ‘Serbs’, Tito was ‘an ustasha<sup>2</sup> traitor’, and for ‘Croats’, he ‘sold Croatia to chetniks’<sup>3</sup>.

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1 [www.titoville.com](http://www.titoville.com)

2 ‘Ustaša’ is the name for a members of the Croatian pro-fascist movement developed from the organisation ‘Ustaša – Croatian Revolutionary Organisation’ under the leadership of Ante Pavelić. The title also refers to people in power in the Independent State of Croatia (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska, NDH) and members of military wing of the movement, ‘Ustaške vojnice’. They implemented politics of ethnic cleansing in the region of NDH. Among many ustasha crimes, the existence of concentration camp of Jasenovac is prominent, in which the Serbs, Jews, Roma, anti-fascist Croats, Bosniaks, etc. were tortured and killed. In spite of the fact that a certain number of Croats supports ustasha ideology to this very day and consider being ustasha a part of their identity, the term ‘ustasha’ is nowadays primarily used as a derogatory term for all members of Croatian people. (editor’s note)

3 ‘Četnici’ – the title for members of great-Serbian, nationalist and monarchist movement. The official title of Četnici during the World War Two was Yugoslav Army in Homeland and they were lead by Dragoslav Draža Mihajlović. They are responsible for numerous crimes perpetrated during the World War Two against Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs who were not supporters of this movement. Nowadays, the term is used as an offensive name for all members of the Serbian people, in spite of the fact that a certain number of people still proudly demonstrates their adherence to Chetnik ideology, and the fact that a law of 2004 makes chetniks and partisans equal (the Law on Rights of Participants of Wars, Military Invalids and Members of Their Families). (editor’s note)



## Construction

*“The ideological matrix of current Serbian nationalists rests on the archaic nationalism of the late 18th century, anachronistic anti-communism, as well as on, perhaps the most dangerous, awoken clerical fascism propagated by the Serbian Orthodox Church.”*

Zoran Petakov

The period of adolescence of the generation we are a part of, ran parallel to the beginning of the wars in the former Yugoslavia. It was a time of taking sides on the bases of ‘us’ and ‘them’, and disappearance of brotherhood and unity. Insisting on self-explanatory new-old traditional social values, such as patriotism, orthodoxy, patriarchy and heterosexuality, but also repulsion felt for ‘others’ and different, i.e. everything that didn’t fit into these criteria, was gaining ever more momentum in Serbia. These processes were intertwined and ran almost unconsciously for most.

Construction of a new-old national identity proved to be an important part of creating a ‘Serbian’ system of values in the 1980s and 1990s, when nationalism became a dominant ideology imbued with the idea of a ‘Great Serbia’ that is still a dominant fantasy and the goal of radical nationalists. In Serbia, notions such as nationalism and national feelings are even nowadays often identified with each other and not perceived as negative.

In theories of nationalism, a distinction is made between nationalism and national feelings. National feelings are based on the need to feel belonging to a certain people, culture, society, region. Like national feelings, national identity is in itself a construction – it is neither biological, genetically given or innate nor it can be introduced into a structure of a human being in any way other than ideologically.<sup>4</sup> It is defined as a political ideology or a movement that considers nation, i.e. ethnic community, to be a foundation of a human society and thus advocates creating states on a national principle exclusively. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century it imposed itself as a dominant ideology in the world and often played an important role in significant events in accordance with other ideologies, such

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4 Dušan Kecmanović, *Psihopolitika mržnje (Psycho-politics of Hatred)*, Prosveta, Beograd, 1999.

as the outbreak of World War One and World War Two, i.e. a series of ethnic conflicts of which many last until the present day. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries it also served as a foundation for racism and fascism, and in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century it began to be expressed as religious fundamentalism and imperialism.

These definitions are, as in the case of nationalism, formed in relations to 'others', which makes them susceptible to a logic of 'differentiation and belligerence' which in nationalism perceives 'other' as hostile and/or of lesser value.

Thence the extreme level of intolerance in Serbia, the brunt of whose force was most often felt – and still feel 'others' – women, the Roma, national minorities, persons whose sexual orientation is not heterosexual and everyone who in one way or another does not conform to the desirable social norm.

The beginning of the wars and the afore mentioned processes prompted the initial feminist reactions and women's anti-war initiatives in which women from the gay/lesbian movement, which was being formed at the time in Serbia, took part. These initiatives were mostly realised in the form of antiwar protests that at the time put their participants at great risk (bearing in mind that the war was a taboo), but also peace gatherings outside the borders of the former SFRY, where women from the former Yugoslav republics gathered together expressing solidarity and refusing to conform to social dictates that were striving to make enemies out of them.

Economic instability and insecurity provided a fertile soil for manipulation of national feelings and its own instrumentalisation with the goal of gaining power and maintaining positions of power.

Control of thinking and 'manufactured consent' were, among other things, established through the control of the media and an absence of 'real' and diverse information. The fact remains that at school we were not taught to think in a critical way and ask questions, and it is logical that at wartime patriotism is encouraged along with love for fatherland and an appeal to defend it. A large part of the society automatically accepted a system of values promoted by the structures in power, not knowing of alternatives and different opinions and ideas that didn't get any space in media. Those who didn't conform were at risk.

In creating the Serbian national identity that exists today, a key role was played by the myths linked to historical events, such as The Battle of Kosovo<sup>5</sup>. Key elements of ideology apparatus of the Serbian state/Republic in the 1990s were constituted by the trinity of: the Serbian Academy of Science and Arts (SANU) – the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC) – the Writers' Association, as well as numerous politicians, media, schools, sports fans, intellectuals and public people who promoted the idea of 'Great Serbia'. These same institutions support the current government in a very similar ideology nowadays, due to which they are a subject of criticism of all anti-nationalist organisations, groups and associations. However, such criticisms, reactions and protests rarely gain the desired media space, and nor the answers to their questions. A part of them nevertheless reaches a certain number of people through several alternative Internet websites in existence in Serbia, where everyone has the right to post news (providing they don't instigate hatred and discrimination). This aspect of information dissemination becomes an increasingly used mean of attaining space in media.

## Stereotypes

*“Nationalism cannot even be defined outside of the relationship with ‘others’ because it defines the community itself exclusively through opposing its own interests to someone else’s, and defines nation as an organic unity with inner traits and character, as opposed to the other, also organic unities with their respective traits and character.”*

*O. Milosavljević*

National identity can be based on different foundations: a soil where we were born and/or where our ancestors were buried: ‘where Serbian graves are, Serbian land is’, then on culture, language, social values, blood relations, the idea of: all people in a country are a single organism and so forth. It is usually

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5 The Battle of Kosovo was fought on St Vitus' Day (June 15, now celebrated on 28) in 1389, between the coalition of Serb lords and the Ottoman Empire. The Battle of Kosovo is regarded until today as a milestone in the Serbian national identity and has been evoked several times during the wars in the former Yugoslavia. Source: Wikipedia. (editor's note)

constructed in relation to some other and entails a series of enemy identities that imperil 'national interests'. Propaganda uses the old and creates new stereotypes about 'them' and 'us'. In creating these stereotypes, the greatest part had immediate political interests. During the 1990s, most of the new-old values and 'Serbian collective identification' were formed as a contrast to 'enemies' – 'two faced and bloodthirsty' Croats, 'stupid' Bosnians, 'filthy and uneducated' 'Shiptars'<sup>6</sup>, 'Gypsies', Romanians, Bulgarians. It can often be read that Serbian nationalism in the 1980s and 1990s was 'defensive', formed as a response to the 'offensive' and 'aggressive' nationalism of Croats, Bosnian Muslims, Albanians etc. According to the beliefs of 'Serbian nationalists', 'national interests' are jeopardised by: feminists, lesbians, gay men etc. All of them are 'an import from the West' or 'are originally from other, enemy nations, e.g. Croatia'. This could also be heard at the first Gay Pride in Belgrade in 2001, when certain groups called participants 'ustasha'. Carriers of enemy identities alter the language, alter traditional values and expand borders that are, as well as the state borders, established through pain and bloodshed. Tradition is cited as an argumentation that requires no further explanation: 'That's how it always was and therefore it is good'. It is believed that in Serbia had never existed Serbian women wishing emancipation and people that are attracted to others of the same sex, then violence against them is legitimised in order to make them return to the 'right path'. It is not natural for 'our nation' to be like that because it was not like that once upon a time (never). It is also believed that the true and only borders are the ones from the time when Serbia had the largest territories, at the time of Dušan's Empire in the Middle Ages.

For years now, in Serbia, nationalist pro-fascist organisations, but also numerous political parties, manipulate this social system of values and collect political points through populism, glorifying the mythic past and through further elaboration on conspiracy theories and for centuries long injustice directed against the 'Serbhood'. How strong position nationalism holds in

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6 'Shiptars' – offensive title for Kosovo Albanians, often used in the regions of the former Yugoslavia. (editor's note)

Serbian politics is confirmed by the fact that not one post-Milošević government has distanced itself from the nationalist politics. Constantly indulging the national oriented electorate, insisting on preserving ‘traditional’ Serbian (patriarchal) values and Cyrillic script, introducing catechism to schools and generally increasing involvement of the Church in politics (clericalisation), that during the government of ‘Christ-loving legalist’ Koštunica assumed all characteristics of clero-fascism – point towards a worrying increase of backward tendencies in Serbia. In this atmosphere, the patriotic ‘St.Sava-nationalist’ organisations such as Otačastveni pokret Obraz (Fatherland Movement Dignity) that don’t believe in ‘pluralism of interests among the Serbian people, but instead in its unity, in a unified system of values and in one shared destiny for all Serbs’ – win over ever more supporters. In such an atmosphere, it is quite logical that ‘defiant’ inditees of The Hague and fugitives are considered ‘Serbian heroes’ and fighters for ‘Serbian national interests’, threatened by ‘Judeo-Masonic anti-Christians’. Of course, there is a certain number of those who point out that ‘Serbian heroes’ keep the political/cultural progress of the entire country at a stall with their lack of readiness to take responsibility for their actions (crimes).

Serbian nationalists, who base their nationalism on patriarchy, fundamentalism and the exclusion of diversity, rightly believe that feminists and activists of LGBTTIQ<sup>7</sup> movement wish to change that tradition. A system of values that entails heterosexuality as a norm, marriage as the only and basic community for realising needs, in which man is superior to woman and children, sexuality with the sole and exclusive purpose of procreation, is not in compliance with an existence that entails freedom and choice. What feminists, and particularly lesbians and gay men ‘threaten’ to bring about is a disruption of family as a procreative community from which the state draws economic and labour force. Nationalists believe and spread the story of a Jewish/Masonic/ gay conspiracy that in a premeditated way, and using various means, ‘strikes’ at

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7 LGBTTIQ – Acronym for ‘Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, intersexual and queer’ persons.

our nation in the sphere in which it is most vulnerable, the sphere of morality and privacy. As well as all 'other nations' marked as 'enemies', the grouping of 'feminists-lesbians-faggots' has a strategic plan to destroy 'Serb' nation. Among others: the former keep multiplying in order to surpass the number of 'Serbs' (similar theories can be found in university textbooks on Sociology of family, for example), and the latter stop procreating in order to help the ones on the outside from the inside. Whilst on one hand sanctioning abortion for reasons of the alleged white plague is promoted, there is not a sufficient number of kindergartens to accept all children applying for them this year. It seems that not many see a problem in the fact that huge means are invested in lighting-speed construction of ever greater numbers of Orthodox churches, while the investments and means for construction of schools and kindergartens are permanently lacking.

### **Street and public places**

A certain number of groups and associations in Serbia through their policies and actions try to point out the mutual connection of all sources of discrimination and oppression where, along with nationalism, a significant role is played by patriarchy, militarism, clericalism, racism. A part of the action is related to anti-nationalism because it represents a right to not identify with any one national identity, but also the right to identify ourselves in any way we want to as long as we don't jeopardise the others. In the society we live in, it seems it is necessary to have an identity. From birth we encounter a network of identities of which some occupy a high and respectable place on a social ladder as opposed to the others. The greatest privileges are held by white, rich heterosexual men. Also, depending on the geographic location in which our ancestors were born, we too, usually, inherit the same nationality, which brings along privileges, compared to the members of ethnic minorities.

Of course, anti-nationalism from nationalist perspective is always perceived as anti-Serb. If anti-nationalism insists on promotion of diversity, it is perceived as a promotion of the corrupted West that threatens to destroy 'our' traditional patriarchal values.

Anti-nationalist political actions speak of the right to choice and (non)identity which does not seek to be defined in relation to the 'other' that is of lesser value in the hierarchy where 'ours' comes first.

A large number of anti-nationalist and antiwar actions took place in the streets. The street, as a place for the promotion of values we advocate, still proves to be a brilliant field for surveying the public opinion.

Here we would like to mention some of the actions and how the Serbian public reacted to them.

Every year, to mark the anniversary of the massacre in Srebrenica, Women in Black, with the support of anti-war activists, organise a peaceful protest in the Square of the Republic, in Belgrade. This 'standing' in silence and in mourning reminds the public of the crime that took place 'on our behalf'. Every year various incidents take place during the protest, varying from verbal insults to young nationalist throwing teargas at this peaceful gathering. They, as a mirror of the society, send a message that crime is not only recognised, but also perceived as necessary for freeing Serbian national identity from the restrictions of a Bosniak one, in this particular case. We are traitors who 'had not been killed enough'. Similar verbal assaults take place every time when the attention of the public is drawn to the fact that it hadn't dealt with nationalism and a clero-fascist system of values. Along with being qualified as 'traitors' and 'foreign mercenaries', the assaults include a range of insults and discrediting on the bases of sexuality and gender. We are 'whores', 'lesbians', 'fat', 'ugly', 'not fucked enough' and the 'shame of the Serbian nation'. What makes us the greatest enemies of the nation is the fact that we are rebelling women who instead of 'baking cakes', 'giving birth to sons', 'being obedient to their husband, fathers, god', come out to the sphere of public-political life and promote a different system of values.

Association Queer Belgrade organises cultural-political festivals, performances, actions, during which safe spaces are created for all 'others' and serve as an example of the strength of self organising and resistance to discrimination and exclusivity, where it works on changes and attaining rights and liberties. These actions include placing large banners with political

messages on overpasses across motorways in Belgrade, in order to be seen by a great number of people. These banners are most often removed as soon as a couple of hours later. Along with this, in cooperation with Stani Pani Collective, a series of actions for graffiti writing were organised, in which political messages were written, mostly against fascism, nationalism and current political trends. These graffiti, among them the latest ones that criticise the stunning release of a Serbian Orthodox Church priest accused by five underage boys of sexual abuse, are most often sprayed over after a few days, and then the ‘signatures’ of Serbia or firesteels<sup>8</sup> remain in their place. This example demonstrates that, notwithstanding the horror of the greatest part of the public, some individuals would rather believe the institution of church than children, and perceive the attack on the church as an attack on the nation. This case also reveals how untouchable this institution is, whose priests, often under suspicious circumstances and through procrastination in court processes, are released of charges and at the same time occupy an increasing number of positions in the institutions (schools, Broadcasting Agency, Negotiating Team for Kosovo...) where they (in a secular state) do not belong.

Next to antinationalist graffiti, or the name of the group who wrote them, words such as: ‘Shiptars’, ‘faggots’ and the like are often added, which undoubtedly has the goal of discrediting them on the bases of the logic of perceiving ‘others’ and those who are different as enemies and of lesser value. Towns in Serbia are inundated with graffiti reflecting this system of values: ‘Šešelji, a defiant Serbian hero’, ‘Serbia belongs to Serbs’, ‘War is better than independent Kosovo’, ‘Every Serb is Radovan’<sup>9</sup>, symbols of swastika and firesteel.

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- 8 Many believe that the phrase ‘Samo sloga Srbina spašava’ (Only unity can save a Serb) is found on the Serbian cross and national coat of arms in the shape of four firesteels that are reminiscent of four Cyrillic letters S, which is not in accordance with the truth. The four shapes similar to Cyrillic letters S are inherited from Byzantine heraldry and most likely represent the four letters V (Greek letter vita) from the phrase: VASILEVS VASILEVN VASILEUVN VASILEUOUSI (Emperor of emperors reigns over emperors).
- 9 Radovan Karadžić is a former leader of Serbs from Bosnia and Herzegovina, politician, psychiatrist and fugitive indicted for war crimes and genocide by the ICTY in The Hague. Karadžić is still considered a war hero by many nationalistic orientated Serbs. (editor’s note)



Joint actions of various peace, LGBTTIQ and feminist groups, that once a year or more often if required paint over such graffiti, are very important because they show that there are some radically different opinions in Serbia.

However, it also happens that activists – radical in areas such as labour rights, direct actions and the like, succumb to the patterns of nationalist and patriarchal elitism and machismo. Such politics are manifested in glorifying their own success, work and actions and denying, belittling, degrading and aggressively attacking every initiative coming from elsewhere. Most such groups have never publicly distanced themselves from nationalism. Cooperation with them, which is important because of a very small number of activists and huge social problems, is made very difficult due to aggressive communication, where one of the most successful ways of situation changing is – insisting on principles of nonviolent communication.

Such groups, that often call themselves anarchist, concentrate their actions on ‘starting a revolution’ whereby they, more often than not, exclude the possibility of supporting antinationalist manifestations and actions, always finding ways to discredit organisers and deny their participation. Their ‘revolution’ mostly addresses labour rights, but neglects the fact that it is among this very working class, and quite often among them themselves, where nationalism, misogyny and homophobia are the most widespread.

## Necessity

Considering the role it played in outbreaks of some of the bloodiest events in history, nationalism is linked to ethnic intolerance, ethnic cleansing, chauvinism and militarism. On the other hand, for ideological reasons, it is given a positive tone when it is manifested in the form of liberation movements against large imperialist powers or when it encourages the progress of culture and technology through peaceful competition of national states.<sup>10</sup>

Due to everything listed above, we believe it is necessary that all political forces engaged in social changes that include human rights and liberties, and

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10 [www.en.wikipedia.org](http://www.en.wikipedia.org)

not only the most imperilled minority groups, should clearly and resolutely take a stand and struggle against nationalism. The listed actions, as well as a wide range of others, and starting a dialogue on the socially devastating consequences of nationalism have to take place on both the personal and political levels. Only through a tenacious and committed political struggle can the level of nationalism be decreased, so that in the near future it can become a negligible part of political culture of the country. Only then will the position of marginalised social groups begin to reach equality. The struggle continues...

# One Should Use These Unexpected Chances

## Interview with Vesna Teršelič

(director of Documenta-  
-Centre for Dealing with the Past, Zagreb)

**To start with, can you tell us something about your activist beginnings? How did you begin and what were your priorities in your activist work at the time?**

**V.T.** Well, there, let me look back at my activist work that started rather early, in 1985, at the time when I was completing my studies at the University. What was happening around me really started to bother me... all my professors, and the public, and the people I knew – friends, family – they kept talking about change, any change, social change at a conceptual level, and in reality nothing was moving. I chose such subjects for my studies – philosophy and literature and physics – so that I too was within this conceptual and theoretical context, and during the studies of these things a need for practical work arose within me, a need for change. I wanted to see concrete aspects of real change because that was a time of turmoil, it was the time following Tito's death, when it was already clear that the ideology of the Communist Party was voided and that a search for some new ways was going on.

I clearly remember my unrest and the need to work on some initiatives. And that's how we, in more or less a students' circle (and I'm not talking only of students of the Faculty of Philosophy, but also students of electrotechnics, science students, students of some technical faculties and some other faculties of humanities), used to debate a lot and the first thing we spun was cultural in nature – the TTB group. We made several performances, one of them with empty banners (it was called 'Empty Demonstrations'), that was in 1985, we did a protest with very strong body language; we gave speeches without words, handed out

empty sheets of paper and carried those empty banners, because all we could see was a public space void of contents, with no human contents whatsoever – there’s this ideology, that no one finds interesting any more, an ideology that’s on its death bed, and nothing else emerged to replace it. Then we had a fancy dress party, and also a public reading of the Constitution on a tramway. It was an interesting experience because the Constitution of SFRY had a fairly lengthy section on human rights, so we read that section out loud and people’s reactions were really interesting. They asked us: ‘Alright, you’re reading this stuff about human rights, but it’s not like you really believe that, right?! I mean, what’s the matter with you, it’s only declarative, it’s only there in order to be violated’. Then we would start a dialogue with them, we would read it on a tram, we read it in an underground passage in Zagreb and had interesting discussions with people. At the time, we didn’t really plan to announce and report that particular action ahead of time, for instance, and soon there was a problem of how to organise such events that were important and interesting to us, without being harassed by the police. Any sort of public event could only be announced by an organisation or an institution, a party, some kind of a legal entity. We didn’t have any legal personality and that’s where the discussion emerged of how it could really be important for us to legally regulate our status. It so happened that at the following step, in 1986, we found a colleague in the Association of Socialist Youth, a friend of ours, really, who showed understanding for it and gave us an opportunity to gather at a certain space and to somehow try to articulate who we are, and we decided to be the working group SVARUN (working group for ecological, peace, feminist and spiritual initiatives).

In that series of initiatives, that were more or less formalised, significant was the fact that we had many experiences in the meantime (a year and a half) in which we were apprehended by the police because we hadn’t really managed to attain any status whatsoever. We were simply perceived as too subversive, even by that organisation that sort of let us in but never really received us, and we were never given that opportunity.

When we had protests against nuclear power plants (we organised signing petitions against the construction of such plants), we were in the position to

be apprehended by the police, even though a kind of reservedness was obvious in their conduct, I would even call it affection for that initiative. We could feel that they too were against the construction of a nuclear power plant Prevlaka in Croatia, and we saw it from the fact that they usually let us carry out our action for an hour or so, enough to have the petition signed, and then they would apprehend us, in accordance with their official duty, they interrogated us in quite a civilised way, in fact. And that really turned into a kind of a ritual. However, after every action we simply had to count on a few of us being taken to the police. Later it turned out that the Communist Party also addressed our issue, the Youth Association I mentioned was only a transmission of Communist Party, they held meetings to discuss us, and we realised that this, I would call it a totally benign constructive activity, was perceived as some kind of peril for the Association of Communists. When we finally regulated our status, we were still working under the name of Svarun, until 1989, when a moratorium was proclaimed on construction of nuclear power plants in Yugoslavia.

The next step was to found the Green Action. A women's group, Trešnjevka, also started from that basic group of people in 1988, and the first SOS hotline for women and children victims of violence was established, and then we founded Green Action in 1990, which still exists and is in fact the strongest environmental organisation in Croatia. Unlike the students' group in Svarun, in which people would graduate from university and start to work, a new list of priorities emerged here and that's when we tried to include experts and scientists. We wanted to set up a slightly different platform, we opted for just one of the goals we had in Svarun, and Green action took some ideas and initiatives that started at Svarun (such as, say, the green hotline, because it was our belief that there had to be a phone number in Zagreb that citizens could call to report everything they felt was polluting the environment). A very stable Green hotline grew out of that later, a service for citizens actually, and there is an entire network of green hotlines nowadays, there's a continuity of the initiatives that can be traced. Another continuity of initiatives that can be observed is linked to conscientious objection. Svarun also contained a definition related to peace initiatives, and the initial series of actions we had were about

conscientious objection and we demanded that, along with doing the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) service in a military way in Yugoslavia, there had to be civil service too, and that this other option should be separate from military service. This was the time when a number of Jehovah's Witnesses were in prison for having refused to do their military service and in 1990 preparations for the war were underway.

**How did the announcements of those new events influence you as an activist?**

V.T. It was something we were aware of, and I would say that rationally we knew very well that this was where the danger was. A clear threat coming from the JNA was of particular importance for us and we discussed it quite a bit, primarily with our colleagues from Slovenia. Distancing from and criticising the JNA was articulated in the public space of Slovenia for the first time. So, we had this link with Slovenia, and in terms of nuclear plans and anti-nuclear initiatives we actually had a sort of Yugoslav connection, the actions were organised in Ljubljana, Zagreb and Belgrade, we had activists who were engaged in Bosnia and Macedonia. We developed quite a number of contacts and connections which meant a lot to us later on, during the war. So, we entered 1990, when the uprising or rebellion of Serbs in Croatia (the very name of these events is also very important, because people from different sides use different words to name them), aware of the fact that the JNA no longer had political control, that it was one of the strongest armies in Europe and that a danger of the misuse of weapons was very great; that the army could very easily be put in a position to shoot at people. But I could have never, at least I can responsibly say this of myself, save for that rational analysis that I was very aware of, I could never have taken it to the level of what it had really meant. When the uprising/rebellion of Serbs in Croatia started, the threat of the possibility of JNA weapons being used by any side in the conflict hadn't become real for me in a way in which I could imagine confronted the armies there, and I couldn't have imagined how bloody the war could really be. There was a vague feeling that it could be a bloody war and I have to say that it wasn't before summer of 1991

that we decided to formalise the initiative that we called the Antiwar Campaign (ARK) and prepared the charter of ARK in which we defined ourselves in terms of values and offered the charter to be signed. Because this charter said that people in these regions would continue to cooperate regardless of the outcomes of conflicts and wars and that we wanted to continue communication and cooperation, that we were all for nonviolence and solidarity and respecting human rights.

### **Where was the platform signed?**

**V.T.** It was signed not only in Croatia, but also by all people who were interested. There were signatories in Slovenia, Serbia and Vojvodina, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Italy, Germany. Signatories were dispersed in various countries. And it was a very small, very invisible initiative. The first time we sat down was in August that year, and that was when it became clear that we had chosen a very unfortunate and clumsy name, because it was clear as early as in August that many people had been killed by then, and it was also clear we couldn't stop the madness of war. But we sort of bonded with that name, especially since there was this charter with its signatories too. During discussions, which lasted for days, we planned and discussed what we were going to do next, our friends from Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Vojvodina took part too, more or less actively. I can't say we gave birth to a plan that covered an area wider than that of Croatia, but it was contextualised in a regional way at any rate.

That is when we agreed on some basic directions of our activities and it was clear to us that we would work on nonviolent conflict transformation, that we would support conscientious objectors and affirm conscientious objection as a right of every person; that we would insist on respecting human rights; that whatever we did, we would face the threat of no one publishing any information about it and that we would need a medium for it. We agreed on the name of our medium, our magazine, *Arkzin*, and issue zero was published a month after this meeting. In the first issue, there was an article that was identical in our magazine and the Centre for Antiwar Action from Belgrade – 'Do You Know What War Crime Is?'. We felt this article was very important for everyone who

was already at the front, be they policemen or members of some paramilitary unit, or JNA soldiers. I cannot say how many people read this text, but we felt it was very important to send out this information and I have to say that all these three directions, plus the publication, was something that was nurtured at ARK. And for me personally, ARK was the most important thing at that point and I simply reacted to the war. My motivation wasn't the need to do everything in my life nonviolently and to choose nonviolence as an approach to life. It is of a different nature and when I look at my colleagues throughout the world I quite often see that there are these two different motivations – that one of them really stems from decisions usually made quite early in life and one chooses this road of nonviolence because they see the world in such a way. I, on the other hand, if it hadn't been for the war, would have done something else, my life path would have been different, which is of course something that very many people in these regions could say. I wouldn't be in peace work, I wouldn't have learned so much about conflict and ways of conflict management if our politicians would have been engaged in negotiations in 1990 when there was still time and possibilities for such a thing, instead of adding oil to the fire. The Antiwar Campaign was soon to become the Antiwar Campaign of Croatia, because telephone lines and all other connections between Serbia and Croatia were cut off and we basically had to define the outreach of our work. We maintained communication with our colleagues from other countries all the while, as much as we could, and we invested a lot of energy and money in keeping the communication channels open. It had become quite clear that we were acting in Croatia after all and we had to choose that. On principle, we saw ARK as an initiative affirming nonviolence and tolerance and respecting human rights on the one hand, and on the other hand ARK became an incubator in which more than twenty initiatives were brought to light during the years, projects, organisations, and it turned into a network.

Parallel to that, there were initiatives in Rijeka and other cities and my first impression was that I would spend a year with ARK, then it got prolonged every year and in 1995–1996, after a longer or shorter conversation with myself I realised that that was it, that I could of course still do one thing or



another in terms of environmental protection or women's rights, but that what I was primarily dealt with was linked to peacebuilding (in a narrow or a broad sense). I saw that this was what really was going to be among the most needed activities, but sometime after the year 2000 I saw that in peacebuilding I was still most intrigued with the causes of war conflicts, and my old conviction was that after the wars ended, it would have to be determined what happened and that what had happened would have to be viewed and portrayed in a very complex manner. This is an old wish I have.

I don't see myself as a pacifist because I do see room for armed intervention when there is a threat of genocide, or when genocide is in progress, or when we witness mass or constitutional violation of human rights. I remember the 1980s in Yugoslavia and the reactions to constitutional violation of human rights in Kosovo, that was absolutely unacceptable and the ways in which police units from all parts of Yugoslavia of the time took part in a repression that led some people to death and others to prison sentences that lasted for years, and the torture accompanying those prison terms. To some it merely meant that they had been to Priština or another place where the curfew was in force and where every person of Albanian nationality seen in the street after 8 p.m. could have been halted, arrested, taken to prison. Policemen had their hands 'untied', because a police force with no supervision and with a green light to abuse power will indeed abuse it sooner or later. That is why I feel that this was a mistake that we all made together, citizens of a country that later disintegrated through a series of wars. In fact, we all have some responsibility for mistakes made before the 1980s, because I believe if we had reacted more loudly to violation of human rights in Kosovo, all the events that ensued might never have happened.

Another important thing, at an entirely personal level, is the fact that I am originally from Ljubljana, Slovenia, and that conversations often took turns towards different sides in World War Two, just as in many other republics and now states, not so much in my closest family where everyone leaned more towards anti-fascism, and some of them even towards communism (there were members of the Communist Party on my dad's side, and even though no one on my mother's side was a member, they were all anti-fascist). My grandfather

was a prisoner in a camp, but the manager of the factory he worked for rescued him, that man was a Volksdeutscher and I think a different perspective was created there. On my mother's side of the family, they were always very clearly distanced from communists, communists were not perceived as safe players and there was always doubt about what they were able to do, wanted to do, would do and what they could do to people. They were always critical of the party. I remember my early childhood days very well, one of my first memories was the evening when it was announced that president Kennedy had been killed. So, the first memory of my life that I can register is a memory of political violence. Another important thing was that my grandmother's neighbours had supported the White Guard in World War Two, the Italian fascists' allies in Slovenia, and they were very much punished for it; it was talked about at their home. I often, and gladly so, went to visits there, that's where I read the Bible for the first time, and they also told me some other things. Along with that, I would simply overhear talks about what had happened to them, at the time I couldn't connect it into coherent stories, not until when I was older, but what had happened was that, after World War Two, both the mother and father of that family were taken to a kind of prison/camp, the mother lost an eye there and the father hung himself, and she was left to look after three children on her own, which was very hard. So, there was always this awareness that they didn't really have the option of talking about it in public and I was constantly aware of being some things that you could talk about, and others you couldn't talk about, and that things were much more complex than we could see at a first glance.

As a child, I felt extreme resistance towards violence on the one hand, and on the other hand I was also an aggressive child. So, there were all those vivid complexities. By going back to the subject of processing the violent past, I actually went back to something that had been a very important subject before I got interested in the environment or peacebuilding (I can't say the same went for women's rights, because this instinct of wanting to be equal was also something I recognised quite early on), which I later conceptualised with the help of global trends such as dealing with the past.

Nowadays, we established *Documenta*, a year and a half ago, through an agreement between four organisations in Croatia, even before we formally founded it and regulated our regional partnership with the Humanitarian Law Fund (FHP) from Belgrade and Research and Documentation Centre (IDC) from Sarajevo, I really feel I am doing something that definitely should be done for the periods of World War Two and the period of crimes after World War Two as well (however we choose to call them – communist crimes or crimes committed by the Communist Party or by some other name), and for crimes committed in the 1990s. It is something societies in these regions and the people who live here, as individuals, require and need, in order for it never to be possible again to inflame and add oils to the fire of our existing conflicts, that we sometimes talk about (more often – not talk about) – in order for it never to be possible again to allow them to become armed conflicts. I think this is the important task.

### **What do you feel is important about dealing with the past?**

**V.T.** When it comes to dealing with the past, establishing facts always comes first. Primarily facts about the killed, and then also about other ways of molesting those people, about breaches of the Geneva Conventions, and that is a broad task that is now in progress. I have to say that in that same 1990, my friends and I somehow expected that scientists and government institutions would negotiate on an agreement, that they would certainly do something about the conflict, an uprising/rebellion had started and what would the following step be? We thought that politicians and scientists were working on it, and it turned out that nothing was happening whatsoever in that regard, so in 1991, when we decided to start ARK, we started it out of that selfsame despair, because it was evident that no one was doing a thing. We had no clue about how it was done, we knew nothing of nonviolent conflict transformation, but we said – if someone else doesn't want it, then we would begin to work on it. It was clear to us that we would need a lot of time to figure out how it should be done. So that, for example, the turn of the centuries was for us the time in which we ended an era of expecting that governments and institutions of science in our countries

would establish the facts and we saw they simply wouldn't do it. I wouldn't say they didn't know how, I think that there are many people in Croatia and other countries who do know how, but won't. And it still remained up to some citizens' initiatives. At one point we simply said – alright, they won't do it, we think it should be done, and then we will do it if it is in any way possible in cooperation with government and science institutions. And whenever we have the opportunity we will simply remind them that a whole series of things that have to do with dealing with the past are really the responsibility of government institutions and that it is them that should do it. So, it's not out of the intention of doing something instead of them, even though it is provided for by the law as their responsibility – e.g. things that relate to court procedures of war crimes, this can't be done by any citizens' initiative. It is of extreme importance that we are getting closer to the rule of law, that state attorneys and prosecutors offices function, that courts are moving closer to the standard of fair trials. Of course, we work on monitoring the war crimes trials, not with the intention of doing the work of the judiciary for them, but in order to offer some supportive criticism.

**As you see them now, how much are the institutions really involved in this work on dealing with the past at this point? How pleased are you by their level of involvement?**

V.T. Depends on the place. I can speak of Croatia, I still can't speak of the quantity and quality of cooperation because we still haven't done that much in that respect. We are a very young organisation but we have, say, organised a round table in February on documenting the events in the defence war and we made a list of institutions (prior to organising the round table), both science and government institutions, and organisations of civil society that dealt with that, either as institutes, departments of a ministry, or as associations of families of the missing, or associations of war veterans or victims. We may have overlooked someone, that can always happen. But we have invited them all and we 'combed' through things for several months and we tried to get a picture of who is doing what.

The whole gathering was conceived as happening in the form of a dialogue and most of those we invited responded, which made it a very representative convention of everyone really interested in establishing the facts, especially facts about the killed and the missing persons, with a special accent on the killed persons. What we agreed on at that meeting was that it was really necessary to establish the names and circumstances of *all* people killed in the war in Croatia, regardless of their national or ethnic affiliations and their political orientation. Now we have a general consent that we wish to work on that and once we've started setting up an electronic data base on the breaches of the Geneva Conventions in Zagreb (which will resemble this data base that the IDC and FHP have now), we wish all those institutions to cooperate because we don't want to gather information that the Croatian State Archive had already gathered, we don't want to collect once more the data on the missing persons that colonel Grujić had already collected and that are now stored at the Ministry of Families of Defenders and Inter-generation Solidarity in Zagreb. We would simply like cooperation in which various information, that has already been collected, can be connected and completed in places where they are perhaps not as plentiful as they could be. I really believe that it is important that information exists on the circumstances of the death of every person who was killed, but also a photograph of the grave if the location is known; it is important to have that as a part of the documentation.

However, there is a group of victims, primarily victims of the war on Serbian side in Croatia, on whom the information has not been thoroughly collected. For example, for a group of victims during and after military police action Oluja (storm) in August 1995 and the months following it, data was collected by the Croatian Helsinki Committee (they are one of our founding organisations) and that's where we have a research work to be done (we are already doing it, in fact). In all segments of this work, we try to cooperate with everyone and remain in a dialogue with everyone dealing with it. But it doesn't have to be the practice of all regional partners. For us, it is primarily important to open new paths of communication and nurture the ones that have already been established, which means that this indeed is a large segment of our work – communication.

We also wanted to know more about the attitude of the public about facing the past, so that we could scan the situation at the point of *Documenta's* starting out, and what we saw as a pleasant surprise from the surveys that were carried out was that around two thirds of the participants, at a general level, were ready for dealing with the past and that every crime could be processed regardless of who committed it, whilst a third of the survey participants had dilemmas and reservations about processing the crimes on their own side.

**Why did you decide to address dealing with the past regionally?**

V.T. Because the factual truth can no longer be reconstructed, it can't be determined what exactly happened, unless we view it from a regional perspective. National perspective is not enough. Let me just illustrate this with one or two examples: how can you reconstruct what happened in Oluja if you don't take into consideration testimonies of Serbs who were on the run from Krajina and now live in Banja Luka, or Serbia and Vojvodina? It is very important to have the possibility of viewing things from different angles, both at the personal level and the level of communities, societies and government and science institutions. In order to view exactly what happened, it is very important to take into account the other perspectives as well, bearing in mind that it is up to us to establish what happened to everyone who lived in the territory of Croatia, and to the IDC to establish what happened to those who lived in the territory of BiH etc.

**It seems to me that such a regional initiative is also very important at a symbolic level, that it is an excellent message to those individuals and groups who still wait for 'the others' to start something first. What do you think of that?**

V.T. Of course, but the question remains of how visible it is. This is your own insight that you have from your personal perspective and from CNA. I would say that the public doesn't really see it, I would even say that we are far from being recognised, that this information is simply not available, nor perceived, because this is the sort of information that is not easily absorbed. For all those

who divorced physically (we have all of us divorced physically as well, and many have divorced mentally too and didn't want to be in Yugoslavia), this idea of joint efforts on this most sensitive of all issues, and that is of interest to many people (people react quite differently to discussions on women's rights or environmental protection, human rights, peace initiatives – this is by far the most interesting subject), is not at all an easy subject. If there are ten people at a table, all of them will very soon become involved in it, it carries emotional importance for all of them, they all have some strong attitudes about it, strong emotions are linked to the subject. Of course it is a subject that is highly disturbing. It was proved during the survey of public opinion that people see the subject as disturbing at a personal level, but also see it as very important for building a stable peace, that these processes are hard, but necessary. An obstacle that exists is that in the process of building the new states, separate identities were also built, and things which surpass these established borders are neither welcome now nor easily observed. Even when we have information on regional cooperation functioning well, it is not perceived as important or as something that should be given additional validation by mentioning that initiative in any way. I believe that for a long time to come, for many in the public sphere, both those who do not really participate in a public dialogue nor make themselves heard and those who are constantly present in the public, we will be an initiative that is hushed up more often than not. And I'm neither disappointed with it nor particularly frightened because what I find the most important is that in a near future, inside next couple of years, when all three centres will have had the opportunities to publish their results (at least those relating to human losses, and perhaps even those with regard to the breach of the Geneva Conventions in our respective states), that this collection of facts will simply have become an unavoidable factor. Therefore, it is not important how recognised and respectable we are, what matters is how much those collected and organised facts will become a part of some joint heritage of factual truth, how much they will make it possible for us to stop arguing continually, quite counterproductively so, about the facts and how much space will it free for different interpretations. Because, for me, it felt that creating space for

different interpretations was of enormous importance, but I am very sorry when discussions still lead to arguments about the facts.

**Which brings us to the next question on the visibility of peace work in general...**

V.T. Most of the ventures of peace organisations slip through their fingers for the very reason of being dialogue based in their nature. What happens is that some people and institutions that were previously not in a dialogue are doing so now, and a dialogue is successful when those who lead it see it as their achievement, and not when they attribute it to a peace organisation. What it really does is to annihilate the peace organisation that organised it and moves it out of the picture, and that is, in a way, the best thing that can happen, although it is hard for peace workers to bear and in fact makes the sustainability of a systemic peace work questionable as well. I believe that, in the regions that were so burdened with violence in various periods, systemic work on peacebuilding is essential and necessary and can't be left to the incidental and random development of neighbourly relations, but should instead be constantly nurtured at the level of civil society organisations and government institutions – at the very least through government intuitions' announcing competitions and then allocating some funds from the budget to the work of organisations of civil society as well.

The paradoxical thing about that is that if peace work becomes the most successful in the world, then it will be embraced, owned by those who never wanted to even talk to someone else the day before. They will see it as their own success, and peace organisations will remain there as a kind of a reminder that they had entirely rejected communication before. So, not everyone will be visible but will in the long run perhaps become the unwanted witness of some ugly faces (and every one of us has many ugly faces). Perhaps someone who is in a dialogue at the moment is not so fond of remembering the times when being in a dialogue was out of the question.

Another problem is that long term peace work with a lasting direction is relatively unattractive in terms of the media. We can communicate better



with journalists, think more creatively about our actions and make them more interesting for media presentation, but something that has to be done for a long time doesn't have its peaks where something presentable is achieved – it is really very hard to portray it in the media. There is an objective limitation there. Another part of this unfortunate relationship between peace initiatives and the media is the general speeding up of all affairs in the world in which it is becoming virtually impossible, even for the owners of the media who are perceived as the ones with most power, and especially for editors and journalists, to systematically cover a certain field. Be it a subject or geographic area or both. And for systematic coverage of the work of peace initiatives, as well as with many other areas, it is simply necessary to cover what happens at all times. What journalist will cover the work of the CNA for example? No way, I think. Truth be told, there is this small chance of identifying one or two journalists who you're friends with anyway and who you communicate with about some dilemmas that you have. But you can't only talk about what you're doing. If you keep nurturing the problem based way of presenting your work, through some issues that you found intriguing, you could perhaps maintain the attention of a benevolent journalist, but even the most benevolent journalist has her or his editorial priorities. Even in the field of dealing with the past, where there is a relatively high interest, one mustn't forget that concentration span of even benevolent journalists on what you're telling them is approximately one minute. So, if nothing important was said within that minute, and nothing *new* – that's not newspaper material; if something is old news, it won't sell, this whole machinery can't move on. I wouldn't accuse anyone there, I would only express my regret that nowadays even once highly respectable companies such as BBC have no reason whatsoever to be proud of their independence, as they did have as recently as in the 1990s, and that is, unfortunately, a time we left behind. Still, it is very important to criticise and to remind that there can in fact be very strict standards of journalists' independence and information, but that in a fast world that is getting ever faster there are no real opportunities for such a thing. It is important to adapt and find a way of occasionally making something of sufficient interest for journalists.

**Where do you find satisfaction for your activism? You have been active for a very long time, where do you see potential sources of satisfaction for those who carry out these peace processes, particularly processes of dealing with the past?**

V.T. My primary satisfaction is in the fact that I believe that we are doing something that is essentially necessary, something that needs to be done and in seeing it moves forward a bit in spite of all, and I think that factual data on those who were injured or killed during the wars will contribute to it after all, improve our chances of turning towards a dialogue on how that was possible and what we could do – individuals, scientists, government institutions – in order for anything like that never to happen again. It is not mere repetition, nothing is repeated, because every new armed conflict has its own causes and its own profile. For me what is really important is something that is useful and necessary. I would feel very useless and as someone living a superfluous existence if I had not had that distinct everyday feeling of what I do being important and necessary. Although... I don't have that feeling every day, there are days when I am prone to depression and I have doubts about whether the sequence of steps should have been as it had been or not. Doubts can be very productive, or they can merely lead to depression. There are various paths there. I am very fond of working with people, be they my friends of years ago or collaborators or opponents of years ago (because I work a lot with people with whom I share absolutely no standpoints whatsoever, and particularly not those related to values). I am glad when I work in an environment where there are others who also strive to make useful steps and for whom it is important to make something that is good for others or something that they have recognised as a general good. Because, it is easy for me to cooperate with veterans now that ways of communication are open, when we can agree that peacebuilding is important to one as it is to others. We will not agree in terms of value components of peace that we see, nor will we agree in terms of exact steps, but at the level of vision we are very close to each other.

What I also find beautiful is this constant learning, constantly finding new motivations and viewing everything that stands behind our choices. Today I still

absolutely stand behind my stands and choices, I wouldn't have made any other choices today if the situation were as it was in 1991; some people took guns in their hands, and others, like myself, built the anti-war campaign. The defenders can't have an ecstatic opinion about it, of course. It is normal that they stand behind their own path, their own choice, but this possibility of dialogue is very important for me, and in a way I see my life and my way of life as 'doing what it takes for social change not to go in a destructive, but a constructive direction'.

Twenty years ago, I think I had great expectations. The 1990s were the time of the fall of communist ideology and a space was opening for great possibilities. We, in the post-Yugoslav countries, with the exception of Slovenia, ruined more chances than we used creatively. But this doesn't mean that we should stop our creative searches now; when I'm really down, when I'm doing something for days with survivors and hear all the worst possible stories about abuse, torture, killing, lack of reaction of the state institutions that not only don't think about the trials but also haven't even completed the preparative investigative activities with regard to a murder that happened fifteen years ago – I get away for a while, I go home, see a concert or something. The arts and spaces of creative expression are my ways out, that's where I can hide for a bit... On the other hand, I think that this very option of working intensely is my chance to live in a time that is not exactly gratifying. Now, we are not talking from the context of countries that are particularly unfortunate stories. No. This is in no way a particularly unfortunate part of the world, let us make one thing clear, especially not from Croatian perspective. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, things can also be presented as relatively unpromising. When we look at the ways in which the genocide in Rwanda is processed, or the ongoing genocide in Darfur, where nothing serious is done for it to be stopped, when I see the options someone in Africa has, it becomes quite clear to me that we are not in a particularly great mess. It is because of this very speed and density of living that it seems there are not as many reasons for optimism as twenty five years ago; and it could just be my process of ageing. Our choices are slightly narrowed now. Every injury, especially the most bloodthirsty ones – murder, rape – leave permanent consequences and traumatised people who went through them; we are

traumatised as families, as communities and as society as a whole. And we are often traumatised in the relationships of *one against the others*, in which we don't help each other hasten this process of recovery that hasn't even started for many. This enormous suffering is neither seen, nor recognised, let alone taken responsibility for. Because what we often encounter is that all these wartime events are portrayed as some kind of a natural disaster, as though there had not been anyone to prepare it, 'the war happened to us' is not a context in which we can count on some serious recovery.

So, I simply draw my energy from that, because I think I do something that makes sense, something that is very slow, that is largely not going to be either visible or recognisable, but I believe that this is what is of most use for some long-term recovery *potential*. It seems to me that the essentially important thing is to contribute to acknowledging people and recognising their suffering and their injuries, to see how to support each other now, because I don't know if anyone remained unaffected. Of course there are perpetrators, and the responsible ones, and it is very important to say – who is to blame, who is co-responsible, who carries the greatest burden of responsibility, who carries a smaller one – it is very important to determine this in court and to say something about both political and ethical responsibility. In fact, to point out to all communities, in a very clear way, who the victims were and who needs to be ashamed; shame is also a very strong mechanism. On the other hand, it is very important to see how to create more room for creativity in all its forms, because I think this is where our horizon is narrowed down and where it needs to be opened up again. Ultimately, one should use these unexpected chances that are always there.



peace education



# Peace Education – a Book or a Webpage?

Iva Zenzerović Šloser

## What could be education for peace?

This text on education for peace is mostly written for those who want to learn more about peace education, for those who have partly encountered its contents and methods, as well as those who have been participants thus far. I hope that those with more experience in this respect will find its contents worth discussing, and see it as altering and furthering education for peace.

The phrase *education for peace* may sound fairly imaginary – idealistic and abstract at the same time, but self-explanatory as well. Just as at a first glance we all feel we know what peace means, the term *education for peace* may sound self-explanatory, it tells us a lot about its general meaning, but not its contents. Well, then, let's analyse it further and give some more concrete guidelines through an analysis of its context, contents and methods of work.

One of the possible ways of understanding the term education for peace is that it encourages and empowers citizens to take an active role in diminishing violence, whilst encouraging social justice at all social levels, from personal to institutional.

Peace is not merely the absence of war and escalation of violence. As those who want changes, we perceive peace not only as a condition, but as an ongoing journey – a road towards building a society with less violence and more social justice.

Education for peace is a part of the work on the broader context of social change.

In sociology writings, social change is viewed as a 'change of institutions, behaviour and social relations within a community', or as 'activities of public advocacy with the goal of positive changes in society'. (Source: wikipedia)

If nonviolence and peace are the social change we wish to see then education for peace helps us to encourage awareness of the need for these changes and offers knowledge and skills whose use can help such a change to occur. Changes towards a society with less violence and more social responsibility (even justice) include awareness of the problem, skills for nonviolent reaction to injustice, and even sanctioning discrimination and violation of human rights.

In our regions social change can involve a wide range of changes: a wish for legal states' functioning, sanctioning war crimes and crime in general, encouraging social responsibility of economic companies and many, many others. Social change also means meeting the individuals' and groups' needs for a higher quality of life and/or life with less discrimination; it is also encouraging gender equality, affirmation of all types of diversity, encouraging rights of all minorities – from ethnic to sexual.

Social change would also be a change in the manner of decision making, encouraging public debates on important reforms and changes, involvement of those whom these changes affect in decision making, encouraging, establishing and implementing public policies, and changing discriminatory and inadequate laws.

Let's go back to social change in the context of education. In our work we believe that change begins with individuals so that programmes of education are often conceived in such a way as to begin with understanding oneself and becoming aware of our own approaches and behaviours. Through becoming aware of our relations with other people and analysing them, we open a space for analysing social relations.

Of course, in order for a change to be visible it is important to encourage changes at many levels, from intrapersonal (knowing and understanding oneself) to interpersonal (understanding one's own relations with others) to institutional. Harmonised activities of work with individuals, but also cooperation and changes within institutions, policies and bad traditions, are important in terms of visible social steps forward towards a society with less violence and more social responsibility.



The range of influence of education for peace moves from possibilities of change at a personal level, influencing one's immediate surroundings, to influencing institutions and society. Influence varies greatly depending on the concrete social situation in question, tension and conflicts in society, possibilities for public action and debate, develop mechanisms of institutional cooperation, but also in terms of activities accompanying the education.

The outreach of the change depends on what the focus of our work is, whether we dedicate more attention to individuals, encouraging them to act in their environment or to act towards institutions. Of course, we cannot separate these processes from one another and a change at a personal level is to a certain extent followed by influencing one's own environment.

However, can we be content with a slow, barely visible change in situations in which it seems to be a high time we've done something concrete?

Education itself begins and ends at an individual level unless it is followed by activities. This fact alone is valuable, but in terms of changes it is not important just how much we as individuals know, but what we do with that knowledge. Whether if it is the education of citizens, educators, politicians, it will not influence changes unless it is followed by other forms of action: organising, advocacy, campaigns, public policies development.

On the other hand, programmes of education for peace also have a limited reach or a very slow influence on the changes of the system we know because they are often experienced as subversive, since they question patterns that are considered to go without saying and are generally accepted, deeply rooted and slow to change, such as:

- patriarchal, traditional constitution of society – by advocating gender equality of men and women;
- competitive patterns of behaviour – by advocating team work and cooperation;
- perceiving military force as a guarantee of security of a certain state or territory – by advocating demilitarisation and right to conscientious objection to carrying weapons;

- vertical hierarchy organisation of institutions and society – by advocating horizontal hierarchy of responsibilities;
- ways of decision making such as voting, compromise, political trade in which the interests of the powerful majority prevail – by advocating consensual decision making and respecting the voice of minorities;
- citizens' representation by elected politicians in all spheres – by advocating direct participation and the greatest possible influence of citizens and the public on creating public policies, as well as making decisions of importance for all members of a community and/or state.

Programmes of education for peace most often have the goal of:

- raising awareness on the types of violence, injustice, discrimination
- raising the level of awareness and building participants' capacities for nonviolent action – work on understanding violence and skills of nonviolence;
- encouraging and empowering participants for change of relations and nonviolent action in their environment;
- questioning and changing hierarchy models of organisation of society (organisation of institutions, families, states);
- questioning our own identities;
- becoming aware of our own prejudices and stereotypes;
- becoming aware of our own behaviour in violent and stressful situations;
- becoming aware of violations of, and raising the level of knowledge about the protection of human rights.

### **Context of the work – from a war to the post-war period up to the present day**

The approach and contents of education for peace significantly depend on the context of the work – the time in which it is taking place, the space in which it is done and the people it is carried out with. Globally speaking, it is very different to work on the same contents and skills in Denmark, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Afghanistan, Skopje, Rijeka, Tuzla or Novi Sad. Looking at the regions of the former Yugoslavia, there is still a big difference between working

in environments directly affected by the war or in larger urban environments in which there were no direct conflicts.

The difference stems from different perceptions of peace. In the environments directly affected by war, peace is still defined through basic security ('peace is when I can go to the football pitch with my mates'), whilst in environments that were not directly involved in the war, peace is more related to the matters of degree of democracy, openness of society, social justice, and discrimination against those with less power, the other, the different.

Different perceptions of the notions of: violence, prejudice, discrimination, acknowledging diversity, building trust also derive out of this difference, so that work with different groups, in different environments and at different time is different, to which proper attention needs to be paid.

Immediately after the war activities in Croatia and the region, the goals of education were to establish communication and build trust between different people. Even to this day this goal has not entirely been attained, but conditions are gradually being met and the focus has changed and shifted towards building communities, creating conditions for work on joint (over-the-border) projects, opening job positions, participating in governance and joint decision making.

### **Where are we educated for peace?**

Education for peace is easiest to carry out in the form of workshops and trainings. These names themselves immediately indicate that there is a dynamic approach behind them, creativity and practice. Since it is important for the process to be interactive, programmes of education for peace can seldom bear presentations, lectures, seminars – forms in which it is difficult to establish a dialogue. Using passive models of transferring knowledge does not empower participants to make a move themselves, and does not encourage them to actively approach problems.

We shouldn't overestimate the reach and influence the education processes themselves. They have a certain impact on individuals, but how much they will impact on their surroundings and society depends on many other things – on

the amount of support participants get after the trainings, and other activities following the education.

Contents, and even more so methods of work on education for peace are applicable in a wide range of activities and processes because nonviolent communication and a focus on cooperation and team work lie in their foundations.

Knowledge and skills of education for peace are used in organising and leading group meetings, strategic, operational and action planning, leading and organising a wide range of projects. Some of the contents are not unlike therapy work and many other types of group work.

Contents and methods of education for peace enter, or have already entered institutional programmes at all levels (from pre-school to higher education ones); this is an almost unquestionable fact. What remains open is the matter of their monitoring, evaluation, adaptation, improving.

Programmes of education for peace in Croatia, and also in other regions of the former Yugoslavia, have stemmed directly from the war. People who resisted escalations of violence, along with mutual support and support from international volunteers, have conceived the initial programmes and activities (e.g. MIRamiDA trainings, Centre for Peace Studies, Zagreb). For this reason, education for peace in Croatia for example has a strong activist approach and it is slow to become included into institutional and academic programmes. Education for peace has not gained much momentum as a notion in Croatia, and its contents and methods are used in education for democratic citizenship and education for human rights.

In the countries of the former Yugoslavia there are three programmes of more extensive peace education – Peace studies, very different among themselves, mostly lasting for one year.

In Macedonia, the Peace Studies Programme is at an exclusively academic and theoretical level as a post graduate programme entitled Defence and Peace Studies; in Belgrade an informal programme of Peace Studies – a combination of activist and academic approaches; and Peace Studies in Zagreb, also an

informal programme, in which activist approaches prevail over the academic ones in terms of the selection of subjects and modes of work.

Peace Studies in Zagreb operates as a programme for all interested citizens. From 1997, 40 participants have enrolled every year. Peace studies represent a mutual opportunity for study, exchange of experiences and the re-examining of peace topics among participants and the programme leaders. They are a place to come together and articulate current actions, campaigns, public policies and theories of peacebuilding, dealing with the past, human rights, ethnic, gender and sex identities, environmental protection, citizens' organising, globalisation, social responsibility of corporations and many others.

### **Who do we work with?**

The selection of people we work with (target groups) is important, considering what our goal is, what we wish to attain with the education in question, and which changes we wish to influence.

We often address the groups by ourselves, as initiators of more extensive projects or education programmes, and sometimes groups who are already organised (teams, organisations, initiatives) ask us to design a programme and adapt it to specific needs and goals.

Groups should be homogenous – consisting of people of similar profiles, professions, positions – if we work on a focused goal (starting certain activities, changes within a certain community, organisation, territory). If our goal is broad, e.g. increasing the level of knowledge and raising citizens' awareness, and the more heterogeneous the group is, constituted by different individuals, the richer the process of exchange of experiences, the more successful the learning and changes.

We frequently encourage gender equality as an important goal of peace education, so it is important for the groups to be well gender balanced. If establishing communication between certain groups is important (ethnic, groups within a community, other groups in a conflict), it is also important for an equal number of people from both sides to be present. In this way we get a reasonably good balance and prerequisites for work on conflict transformation.

Through the composition of the group, but also through the team of facilitators, we send messages important for peacebuilding.

In order to work on social change, it is important to support and empower those who wish to solve problems, but also to change those who have the power to solve those problems.

### **Conditions appropriate for education for peace – methodology and methods of work**

From the theory of education there comes a phrase which states that it should be ‘about peace’, ‘for peace’ and ‘in peace’. In the activist world we often say that ‘we live what we do’. Regardless of which principle we are closer to, each of them tells us, in its own way, how important are the methods we use are they in accordance with the values we promote and the contents we speak of.

This principle enables us to do a whole education, we often don’t see it directly, but we feel it; among other things it helps us to exchange more easily and adopt certain contents within a context.

It is unacceptable and inefficient to teach about violence by using rhetoric and methods of violence, about participation by not making it possible for everyone to be involved in the work, about respecting diversity by not acknowledging people who sit with us, about the importance of conflict transformation by ignoring the conflicts before us.

Several things that help us work ‘for peace’ ‘in peace’:

- When we work we sit in a circle, not because we are a sect (which we are often told), but in order to be able to see each other. The circle enables an open communication and equality in discussions.
- Making agreements about the work, a list of rules at the beginning of the work. The list contains things participants expect to happen, things that will help them to feel better in the process, as well as things they don’t want to happen in the process of work, from the trivial – mobile phones switch off, asking to speak – to the ones important for building trust – for confidential contents to remain within the group. Agreements on the work enable us to create a safe space for learning and sharing experiences.

Since everyone is involved in its creation, it helps to create a safe space between participants, specific to each particular group, as well as taking responsibility for the process. The agreement of the work should be enable, among other things, an open but focused communication, respecting the equality within the group, encouraging those who have more difficulties becoming involved, but also protecting those who can't or don't want to speak at a given moment.<sup>1</sup>

- Encouraging an open and direct communication, talking about concrete examples supported by arguments, encouraging dialogue instead of debate. Dialogue and open communication enable us to view the topic we discuss from many viewpoints, to give a chance to different perspectives and opinions to be heard, to open a space for changing the participants' standpoints. Using debate, participants find it much easier to get entrenched in their position leaving no room for changing their opinions or finding solutions. It is also not advisable to use the institution of 'wrong quotes' because if we believe every opinion to be legitimate then there are no incorrect answers, merely differing opinions. By all means, this should not be carried out to the point of absurdity of dialogue and the relativisation of values, so one has to bear in mind the goal of the workshop and values we advocate, but it is important for different opinions to be respected, even the ones we don't agree with.
- Combining methods of work. Interactive and experiential approaches enable us to combine various methods of work, not only in order to make the process more dynamic, but also for it to provide us with a range of various modes of expression in order for every participant to have the opportunity to find the one he/she feels an adequate, and to find the way in which to express their views, ideas, suggestions in the best way.

Some of the methods we use in our work:

- individual work
- work in small groups

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1 The rule of 'pass' is often used by those who do not want to or cannot speak at a given moment.

- moderated discussion in a large group
- brainstorming
- drawing, modelling, acting
- role-playing
- Evaluation of workshops. It has a twofold function. One is: to give participants the chance to give their views in the end of the workshop/training, to add something if they hadn't had the chance to do so during the workshop, to say how they felt, what they had learned, to criticise the process, work of the group and/or facilitators. On the other hand, evaluation is precious for the moderators of the process in order for them to get feedback from participants and include the information and criticism in further processes or preparations of workshops that will follow up.

It is not crucial whether we abide by these guidelines in detail or not, working in a group makes it important for us to respect and accept people we work with, to be open and adaptable to the needs of the group as facilitators and to accomplish progress in a given context.

### **Contents that 'educate' us for peace**

In attaining the goals of education for peace we are helped by subjects and contents that enable questioning of assigned patterns of behaviour and organising, that enable us to re-examining our own identities, our own prejudices and social stereotypes, which ultimately gives us knowledge and skills for nonviolent action.

Most frequently these are: nonviolent communication, understanding and nonviolent conflict transformation, building trust within the group, work on team work skills, considering and adopting different ways of decision making, work on prejudices and stereotypes, questioning identities, questioning gender stereotypes – positions of men and women in society, understanding violence and nonviolent action, becoming aware of our own power, analysing relations of power in society, encouraging power of cooperation, raising awareness on the protection of human rights, getting to know mechanisms for protecting these rights.



Along with the afore mentioned, depending on the specific needs and interests of the group we work with and processes we encourage, we can work on a wider range of subjects, bearing in mind the context in which we work and the methodology we use.

Thus we can include work with media, work on specific public policies, strategic, operational and action planning and other subjects, bearing in mind the importance of interaction, participation and complete learning. Using a methodology of education for peace for subjects that are 'not typical' offers challenges and calls for the creativity of moderators.

### **Peace education and institutional level**

From the academic community often come criticisms of the inability of articulating education for peace and using it in institutional programmes. At the same time, initiatives meet resistance from within institutional frameworks and valuable programmes mostly remain informal, so they are difficult to certify and it is hard to realise continuity and quality in their implementation. It takes stronger and more open communication between activists and academic communities to push things forward.

Theoretical contributions and writings about the experiences and development of education for peace in Croatia are insufficient, activist materials collected in the past 15 or so years are still not archived. It is possible that this is a level without which it is difficult for us to enter an 'equal' dialogue as activists.

On the other hand, even though progress has been made, the importance of experiences of activism in education is still being recognised, but slowly.

There are talks about the importance of a lifelong learning, the development of schools as communities (from the inside), the importance of opening towards a community, project and problem curriculum, gender awareness, and education on human rights. Discussion on these randomly chosen, and also many other 'novelties in education', remains enclosed within academic symposia and conferences. Only in a very small number of cases do they become a subject of an argument-backed public discussion, and the people it concerns seldom get

actively involved (as well as professors at all levels, activists, trainers, ministry employees, employees of institutes, offices).

## Recommendations of the Platform for Peacebuilding

The Platform for Peacebuilding was initiated in Croatia in 2005. Signatories of the document of the Platform include around 50 civil society organisations, a dozen cities and municipalities as well as individuals.

The Platform represents the actions of peace activists in Croatia during the last five to ten years, as well as being an opportunity for a series of agents from other social spheres to become involved, such as the academic community, public institutions, business sector, trade unions, political parties, the media, and policymakers.<sup>2</sup>

Among other measures, the Platform introduces the following short term and long term measures and recommendations for peacebuilding and education policies:

- It is of particular importance for the efficiency and sustainability of peace education for its principles and contents to be integrated into various existing education areas.
- To ensure that the school systems and decision making process in education take into consideration various local needs of users, education staff and institutions, e.g. differences of mother tongues; trust, communication and cooperation impaired by war; the needs of disabled persons and the need for continuous training of teachers and capacitating school institutions for the promotion of culture of nonviolence and cooperation.
- To increase financial funds for peace education and to include peace education in all national education strategies. Funds should be allocated exclusively for education in peacebuilding from the budgets of local communities (counties and cities) but also at the national level.

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2 *Plate-forme*, according to French original, denotes a programme with practical recommendations that provides a basis for cooperation.

- To ensure preparation of school and university professors, care givers and expert staff for peace education, which entails including of peace education into compulsory programmes of professional training for teachers and pedagogues.
- To increase the possibilities for verification of informal programmes on peace education at the level of the state and counties
- To increase the visibility of peace education in school system – e.g. by establishing annual awards of the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports for promotion of nonviolence and human rights, to be awarded to primary school, high school and higher education institutions.
- To increase inclusion of parents into the work of schools and develop awareness raising programmes on the role of parents in upbringing and education process. It is necessary to establish a partnership between schools, parents and students in creating and implementing the curriculum.
- To systematically encourage the creation of positive images about members of national minorities and the values of living in multicultural environments.

### **How to harmonise recommendations and possibilities?**

As has been mentioned earlier, parts of the system of values on the methodology of peace education in Croatia attempted to become included in the processes of institutional education – in the curriculum – and through the work on National Education Standard and various individual programmes of education of teachers, in higher education programmes – through the implementation of Bologna Declaration.

Along with values and contents, both processes foresee a small number of participants in education groups, in order to enable individualisation of the teaching process. At the very first step we encountered the complexity of implementing the set of goals because changing education brings with it a reorganisation of the entire system. It entails, to say the least: a greater number of classrooms, a greater number of teachers, teachers trained for the work in smaller groups, a familiarity with the new methodology of work, and

particularly an awareness of the new range of subjects whether they relate to peace education, education for human rights, education for democracy and/or learning social skills.

At the level of values and goals, the whole thing sounds wonderful, and one of the trends is also

“teaching that is not only based on words, but such a teaching that gives and creates spaces in which exist certain positive experiences. The students should be enabled to have experiences and develop skills during their upbringing and education that are required later in adult life: experience of responsibility, justice, solidarity, decision making, consistence and cooperation; skills of judging, thinking, observing and acting independently; discovering their own talents, and accepting others and difference”.<sup>3</sup>

However, what happens with expounding goals into tasks, contents and methods?

It is important to strive for the subjects and contents of peace education to be included into the institutional education as a whole, and not partially, in pieces that fit into the system. In this way, building in pieces without consistency, and often without sensibility, will mean that positive steps forward will not happen, and things that are written into programmes will not happen in reality.

I'll give the example of upbringing goals: developing responsible behaviour towards oneself and others.

Example:

The upbringing goal: developing responsible behaviour towards oneself and others.

Its upbringing tasks: distributing class obligations and duties.

Knowing the process of building responsibility, it is clear that it is not attained by students being assigned tasks and duties, but by creating conditions for the students to be encouraged to undertake certain tasks by themselves, and that they are not responsible for their shortcomings, only the teacher, but the group suffers from their shortcoming. In that sense, the task is contradictory

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3 Croatian National Education Standard; [www.mzos.hr](http://www.mzos.hr)

to the goal, we can nominally say that we implement it, but there is no real progress. As long as teachers assign the tasks themselves, students will not learn to take responsibility for their actions.

Developing responsibility towards oneself and others also includes, as a method of work, workshops on peaceful conflict transformation and in that sense there is progress in terms of introducing peace education. Including only some parts, unfortunately, is not enough, and realistic steps forward will not happen unless the conditions are created for taking the approach of the complete learning (in this case, peace learning) which is consistent, grounded in values, elaborated with sensibility for peace/nonviolent action, and in which tasks come from goals, and methods of work follow the contents.

### **Instead of a conclusion**

Even though there has been a lot of effort in terms of systematization of this text, some important new fields are opened in every part of it in almost every moment. If we return to one of the first sentences – the reason for it can be that peace (and thus education for peace as well) is a really extensive concept that moves through various levels – from philosophical and theoretical to a very very practical one; from our most individual needs, fears, thoughts to public and political mechanism. It is difficult to think about peace in a linear form which we need for a printed book, education for peace is more a hypertext, a web page, globally networked with many links in various directions.

Yet I hope that this text makes a small contribution to ‘sorting out’ the terminology, values and contents of peace education. If not, then it is at least a clear signal that we need to dedicate ourselves to that task, through public, expert and experiential – oral and written discussions.

# Peace Education as an Initiator of Social Change

Ivana Franović

I would not by any means name the conditions in the region of the former Yugoslavia peace. True, the conditions of the overall global scene is far from a lasting peace, but it should by no means *pacify* us, but rather worry us, make us wonder, move us. I state the former because of my firm belief that peace does not denote the absence of war and direct violence, an opinion that all peace activists<sup>1</sup> I know share, as well as workers, promoters, theoreticians, researchers... Some theoreticians and researchers of peace call this absence itself a *negative peace*, which I would sooner name a *negative definition* of peace because it speaks of what peace is not, but doesn't provide information on what it is.

Johan Galtung offers the following two definitions: 'Peace is the absence/reduction of violence of all kinds' and 'Peace is nonviolent and creative conflict transformation'.<sup>2</sup> David P. Barash believes that peace is when all living beings feel as being *at home*.<sup>3</sup> UN Secretary General Kofi Annan says that peace is constant work on creating and that it means a lot more than the absence of war, that it means release from hunger, it means justice, human rights, education and good governance – 'peace means giving people an opportunity to live a

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- 1 I will use feminine grammatical gender in this text, automatically meaning masculine as well, unless specified otherwise. Using both genders in the texts makes it more difficult to read, and I have therefore decided to use only one, the feminine, for the simple reason of dominance of masculine gender in both written and spoken word. (Translator's note: the author's note refers to Serbian text but is retained here for obvious reasons)
- 2 Galtung, J. *Peace by Peaceful Means: Peace and Conflict, Development and Civilization* (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 1996).
- 3 Barash D. P. (ed.), *Approaches to Peace* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

decent life'.<sup>4</sup> According to Betty Reardon, feminists see peace as a 'condition of social justice and equality; equality between women and men as the foundation for equality among all peoples... as an end to racism as well as sexism'.<sup>5</sup>

There are no universal definitions of what peace is. It seems to me that one of the reasons for this is certainly the fact that peace is both the *process* and the *outcome*, it is *built* in a society, it is *worked* on, every society/community should define it, and due to socio-political processes being dynamic, the definition should always be re-examined, redefined and built upon. I hope another reason neither lies in the need to be pragmatic nor 'realistic', so as not to be accused of idealism and an Utopian approach. Once upon a time, many achievements of mankind sounded impossible to attain, even Utopian, but some have dreamt of them, worked on them – and realised them. I definitely believe that peace can be created and realised (otherwise I wouldn't be a peace activist) and I don't want to stop others who still have enthusiasm with those *accusations of Utopia*. Even though there are few reasons to be optimistic.

Galtung often draws a parallel between violence and ailment/disease, i.e. peace and health. The best picture of how 'healthy' a society is (in this Galtung sense of the word) will be given by the minority or marginalised groups of that society – ask them how safe they feel, how accepted they are, whether they have equal rights as the majority, whether they have basic rights at all. Which society will pass this test? I can, with certainty, claim that none of the ones in the region of the former Yugoslavia will, and I would love to discover which other society could boast of a pass mark.

One of the 'cures', or as Galtung would put it *therapy*, is certainly *peace education*. By peace education I mean education that is unequivocally biased – education that studies, trains, supports, encourages, finds, teaches, works – for peace and against violence. And it mustn't be merely 'informational', but

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4 From the text of the message to, among others, Eighth Annual Festival of Nobel Peace Prize, Fifteenth Annual Forum of Nobel Peace Prize and others. The whole text can be found at <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2003/sgsm8608.doc.htm>

5 Reardon, B. "Feminists Concepts of Peace and Security", in: P. Smoker et al. (ed.), *A Reader in Peace Studies* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1990).

defined in terms of *experience* and *value* (by no means neutral) – to encourage changes within a society and changes within ourselves as parts of this society and to move us towards working on those changes; to criticise, re-examine and have the following question as crucial: Where are we in all of that?; What is our responsibility?; and What can we do?

Peace education in our region is mostly informal in character; several local and international non-governmental organisations work on it in the form of *trainings*, *workshops* and short courses. Peace Studies are also offered (Zagreb, Skopje and Belgrade). It does not exist as part of regular education (primary and high school), although there have been attempts of introducing it through ‘civil upbringing’.

In this text I will attempt to address peace education through a prism of experience collected during years of work with the Centre for Nonviolent Action (see Figure 1), addressing some segments that I believe we would have to cover and trying to provide an answer to the question of why we need it.

### **CNA peacebuilding training**

The Centre for Nonviolent Action peace education programmes strive to encourage motivation and commitment to nonviolent social change, but also becoming aware of the needs the people have for it. The basic programme lasts for about ten days and brings together people from the regions of the former Yugoslavia: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia, Kosovo, Macedonia. The group of participants consists of not more than twenty persons of varying age, ethnicity, profession (journalists, activists of political parties or non-governmental organisations, education and social workers etc). This is an *informal* peace education that we most frequently call *training* and which is *active* and *participatory* in nature, where participants are not in the position of passive receivers of knowledge, but instead actively learn through experience and actively learn from each other, through different discussions and simulations of real life situations. The *subjects* addressed at the trainings



are: violence, understanding conflict, dealing with the past, peacebuilding, nonviolent action, creative conflict transformation, gender roles/behaviour, identity and national identity, diversity, discrimination. The programme is open and flexible, conceived in such a way as to follow the needs, possibilities and motivations of the group of participants, but is also intense, demanding in terms of energy, for the very reason of the role that everyone is expected to assume. For more information on the programme, please see CNA web page at [www.nenasilje.org](http://www.nenasilje.org).

## Necessary segments of peace education

Every peace education whose goal it is to encourage social change, and not only to transfer certain skills, has to cover multiple segments of importance for peacebuilding. I will now describe several segments that I feel are a priority in terms of work on peacebuilding in *our parts*, and at the same time will point out the greatest potential of this work.

### Sensitizing for violence

In order for us to work on peace and against violence, it is very important to know what violence is. What is often meant by violence is only direct and physical violence (the most obvious one) and more often people expect training to teach them how to deal with such situations. However, what we focus on are the more *covert*, less obvious types of violence: *structural* (the one that is built into the systems of governing themselves) and *cultural*<sup>6</sup> (the aspects of culture that make violence possible and acceptable), that create a fertile soil for the spreading of direct violence or more or less openly encourage it. If it weren't for the structural and/or cultural violence, there would be no war as the most extreme form of direct violence, because the widespread structural and

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6 The terms of *direct, structural and cultural violence* were for the first time introduced by Johan Galtung. See, for example, J. Galtung, *Peace by Peaceful Means: Peace and Conflict, Development and Civilization* (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 1996) or J. Galtung, C.G. Jacobsen, K. F. Brand-Jacobsen, *Searching for Peace. The Road to TRANSCEND* (London – Sterling, VA: Pluto Press, 2002).

cultural violence (oppression, discrimination, violation of basic human rights, exploitation, poverty, tyranny) is a fertile soil for the escalation of conflict into violence of a large scale. If we wish to work against these types of violence, the first step is certainly to recognise them, to map where it exists within our societies. We are mostly aware of the violence that we've experienced ourselves or that people close to us have experienced, but often we are not aware of the violence we have no direct or indirect experience of, that we don't feel the weight of or simply do not consider it as violence. I believe that it is very important to address experiences of violence in a very diverse group that could be close to a cross-section of society, with as much diversity as possible and more importantly – with representatives of minority or marginalised groups. From such a diverse group, we can learn a lot about violence: whether it's violence to call Albanians 'Shiptars'<sup>7</sup>, Croats 'ustasha'<sup>8</sup>, Serbs 'chetniks' or 'shkiye'<sup>9</sup>, Bosniaks 'baliya'<sup>10</sup>; whether it's violence to claim that doing the laundry is women's work; whether it's violence to define Serbia as a state of the Serbs; whether it's violence that azan is not heard from the only mosque in a city with a Christian majority whilst the church bells are heard; whether it's violence if The Hague tribunal exerts pressure on the state to extradite war crimes indictees; whether it's violence that men have to do military service; whether a military intervention with the goal of preventing a humanitarian catastrophe from happening is violence; whether it's violence if the police refuse to act on the court order for eviction; whether it's violence to accuse the German people for World War Two; whether it's violence when the police use water hoses to drive protesters away; whether it's violence to abuse the role of victims; whether it's violence to look away, to turn one's back and pretend one never saw anything? Interaction with other people and exchange of experiences broaden our views, they can even produce a feeling of solidarity or empathy and open the space for us to call violence its real name, not using euphemisms.

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7 See footnote 6, page 68.

8 See footnotes 2 and 3, page 64.

9 The word 'shkiye' in the Albanian language is a derogatory word for Serbs. (editor's note)

10 The word 'baliya' is a derogatory word for Bosniaks. (editor's note)

### **Conflict as an opportunity for change**

Conflict is often experienced as something unpleasant, something to be avoided, something to stay away from, or is even made equal to violence. By avoiding the conflict, we will not solve a problem, we can only make things worse by piling up discontent or frustration with something, until we or the other side explode – at any rate, not until then does the danger of violence exist. Peace education needs to empower us to *open* the existing conflict, to deal with them and to look for ways of creative transformation, not to run away. Conflict is an excellent indicator of something not being right in relations/structure/context and gives us a signal that we need to change something, but also the chance to change that in time.

### **Responsibility – a model of active responsible citizens in democracy**

I see the *awakening* of responsibility of every individual for society she lives in as one of the most important goals of peace education. We are often prone to transferring all the responsibility for discontentment with the society we live in and the bitterness we feel to ‘politicians’<sup>11</sup>, i.e. those in positions of power and thereby *wash our hands* from what is happening in society. I don’t wish to defend political elites, they mostly don’t deserve it at all, but we do need to be aware that we were those who elected them. Perhaps we didn’t vote for them, but they did win at democratic elections and thereby got the legitimacy to be representatives of society. But, just as they were given the legitimacy, it can be taken away from them if we are discontent with their actions. Democracy and civil responsibility are not mere turning up at elections and circling our favourite men (or scarce favourite women). Howard Zinn describes it nicely: ‘However democratic the elections are, they only represent occasional moments of people’s participation and are far between in time. And during the long

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11 In this case I cannot follow the rule of using feminine gender meaning both genders, because it would create a false image of equality that does not exist – for the simple reason that the domain of politics is predominantly in ‘men’s hands’.

periods in between elections, people are passive and enthralled.<sup>12</sup> I would add: and they also forget that they have the power to change anything, and not only power, but also responsibility. Because by shrugging our shoulders or averting our eyes we become direct accomplices in the structural violence perpetrated by the levers of power over ourselves or marginalised groups, our neighbours.

By all means, we need to be aware that responsible people who assume functions of responsibility do have a large burden to bear, and that however they may try to seem responsible and not to abuse the power they have, they are not *superhumans* who can wave a magic wand and thus solve all problems. They need help and support from other citizens. If everyone made a small step towards improving the atmosphere of living, to the extent they are able to, we would live in a happier world. This for me is democracy. Peace education can contribute a great deal to making these small steps.

And another thing, if we act irresponsibly, we cannot expect 'our' politicians to act differently. Peace is built *bottom-up*, in this hierarchical constitution of the world, from people – towards the authorities (the amount of peace we will have depends on which ones we elect).

### Peace activism

The work on peacebuilding and social change is often, if there is an awareness of it to begin with, perceived as the work of the 'non-governmental' sector (heaven forbid it should be like that!). We don't have to be a part of an organisation to be peace activists – we should be that in our everyday lives, whenever we can and however much we can. One of the effects of peace organising is expanding the sights on all the things peacebuilding is, and what it is that we can do within our own workplace (as professors, as journalists, as politicians, as clerks...) or within our families or, simply – as citizens.

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12 Zinn, H. *History Essays on American Democracy* (Novi Sad, Svetovi, 2004), translated by Andrej Grubačić.

### Power of the people – power with and power for

Power is more often than not experienced as something ‘negative’ and the initial associations of power are: government, state, authority, money, force, bureaucracy, bearing in mind only forms of power *over* and abuses of power. I see studying, empowering, enlivening and encouraging to be other types of power or other approaches to power as a task of peace education: power *with*, or power of cooperation, and power *for* – power for change, for action, for creating, for building. People often feel helpless when faced with governing structures, corporations, military machinery and other *abusers* of power, and we forget how much all these structures are sensitive and vulnerable to various forms of association and cooperation between people – to pressure, boycott, strike, clear and massive statements of discontentment. Oh, yes, if they only wanted to, people could change a great deal, because it is they who really have the power – on the condition that they associate.

I often think about what our recent history would look like, (and is therefore also in our present), if the majority of people *had refused* to be mobilised, to take guns in their hands. I suppose that political elites would be forced to find a solution (war is never a solution!). And that is not impossible – they cannot arrest all conscientious objectors and ‘deserters’, they simply don’t have a structure that could handle mass rejection, they don’t have enough prisons. It is another matter of what the prerequisites are for such mass refusal to take place, and whether ‘ordinary people’ wanted those wars.<sup>13</sup> I see the answer in the necessity of peace education – in the deconstruction of *images of enemies*, in building mutual trust, in *cooperation* of people from different social groups, in *reaction* to social political events. And I repeat: peace is built bottom-up!

### Deconstruction of images of enemies

In our everyday reality, there is a hyper production of images of enemies. Most frightening is the efficiency of levers of power and control. *The more frightened*

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13 I hear the stand of “if it had been up to the people, there would have been no war” too often, which I doubt.

we are, *the more contracted*, the easier it is for political, economic and other elites to do what only they benefit from (of course, they claim the benefit is universal). By accepting this *game*, mostly unawares, by allowing ourselves to be frightened by *other* and *different*, we directly contribute to spreading structural and cultural violence. The most widespread consequences of *accepting this game* are apathy, non-reacting, silence, withdrawal, denial.

We have allowed that the enemies are almost by definition Croats and Serbs, Albanians and Macedonians, Serbs and Albanians, Bosniaks and Croats and so forth; *they* endanger our interests, and it is because of *them* that we live hard and fight for survival. Do I exaggerate? At the time of the preparation for the wars and during the wars themselves process of the dehumanisation of others is much more pronounced than in this 'peacetime'. And, I would say, it is only more perfidious now. Mind you, neither Bosniaks, nor Hungarians, Albanians, Serbs, Yugoslavs, the Roma or any other persons with pronounced national identity – are my enemies. They are much closer to me than those who attempt to turn them into enemies and intimidate me with them.

We often ask people at the trainings to write down all the prejudices and descriptions that they have ever heard about *others*, mostly focusing on ethnic and national groups. Almost nothing new can be heard on such occasions, because we are all mostly familiar with those images, our media space is loaded with them: Serbs are chetniks, they want a Great Serbia, warriors, arrogant, raucous, criminals, 'we want what's everyone else's but won't give what's ours', criminals (with occasional definitions of merry people, gourmands, hospitable); Bosniaks are baliyas, fundamentalists, mujahadin, they manipulate the role of victim, and are stupid, primitive, conservative (as well as hedonist, emotional, laid back); Albanians are Shiptars, filthy, backward, vengeful, 'they multiply like rabbits', they want a Great Albania (as well as good confectioners, true to their word, businesslike, home keepers); Croats are ustashas, Tudjmanists, more Catholic than the Pope, footmen, cunning, don't understand Serbian (and cultured, lonely, gentlemen); etc.<sup>14</sup> *Admitting* to each other that our societies are

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14 See documentation from one of the CNA trainings.

*afflicted* with this syndrome is a great step. Others are very well aware of the existence of such images, and do not deny them, and by creating an image of *multiculturalism* and *tolerance* and our openness for diversity<sup>15</sup>, we really create a space for confidence and build it. This is one of the most effective steps towards the deconstruction of those images. The next step is certainly mutual empowerment to deconstruct these images on a *daily basis*, to react when people close to us calls Albanians ‘Shiptars’, or Serbs ‘Shkiya’, to warn them that if something they have said/done offends or humiliates someone, to paint over graffiti on our or our neighbour’s building that contains hate speech, to write to the editorial staff of the paper that published an article full of hate speech and to complain, call for responsibility... and we can do many other things, just not close our eyes and not keep silent. It is of equal importance to no longer allow the projection of those images on ourselves and others.

### Dealing with the past

From peace education in the region of the former Yugoslavia (of course, elsewhere too, but now I’m focused on this region) I very much expect to *address* the past wars and interethnic relations in the recent past, and thereby our own present which still *lives* in the past. If the goal of peace education is to open roads for peacebuilding and to support this process, it *has* to deal with reality, and not merely a hypothetical, and thereby utopian image of a world with no violence and war. In order to *create* such a world we need to take on the heritage from the past, because in the building of such a world we do not start from zero,

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- 15 My experience tells me that we are very much prone to believing this false image of how *multicultural* and *open* our societies are. One of the arguments that serves as evidence for that image being real is often “well, we visit each other on religious holidays”. Through this we deny, for example, the fact that on the neighbour’s building there’s a graffiti saying ‘Hungarians out!’ or ‘Hang the Serbs’ or whichever other that serves the function of maintaining the image of an enemy and that a part of people in our society does not feel safe or even feel threatened. And the consequence of denying is a lot more closed doors for building confidence. One of the images I consider to be particularly dangerous is the following widespread one: they are like this and like that, ‘but there are also some good ones’ (among them). We’ve turned out to be tolerant, no less!?

but rather from a deep negative position which has been left by the past, and which can neither be skipped nor forgotten.

'Dealing with the past' is a very broad field and it is clear that peace education cannot cover all of its aspects, but it can very much contribute to the process. The space of this text is not sufficient for a more thorough discussion on the role of peace education in this process, nor does it have such an ambition, therefore I will focus on what I see as one of the priorities.

The role of peace education can be 'informational': to inform about what the term means, which mechanisms exist or could exist, what experiences there are in other parts of the world, to discuss how much they are applicable to 'our case', and so forth. I find the 'practical' role more important in this process: to find out from each other what happened and even more importantly – to hear how we experienced it, to say how we feel with what we know; not to leave any room for denial or manipulating 'the truths'; to wonder what we consider to be necessary for ourselves and also society, to move from the dead end street of hostility; to try to understand one another and to try to be in the 'other's' shoes; to say where we see responsibility, but also how we see our own responsibility for the past...

One of the key points is certainly to view the responsibility of one's 'own side'. It is enough to take a look at the leading media from these regions and realise that all 'sides' are entrenched in the role of victim, and thereby fail to view their own responsibility, because 'the victim cannot be responsible', and then all responsibility is transferred to another. Or even if a part of the responsibility for some of the crimes or injustice is accepted, hands are washed by a comment about 'others having done it too'. By viewing the responsibility of one's own side, we really build the destroyed confidence with those people who want peace as much as we do and it is one of the strongest steps towards deconstruction of the image of the enemy, and thereby peacebuilding, too.

These are but a few segments that I feel a *value defined* peace education would also have to cover. I consider the following segments important but will not address in detail in this text: sex/gender roles in society (the position of women and sexual minorities very much speaks of how much a society is



imbued with structural and cultural violence); militarism (by becoming aware of how much our everyday lives are militarised); the role of multinational companies (or the consequences of globalisation); differences (how much we only declaratively claim to accept diversity, how to deal and live with all the differences that seem at odds with each other); and also reconciliation, truth, forgiveness, justice, tolerance... And all those nice words that have lost value by being abused. Let us wonder what they mean to us and how much we live them before we use them.

### Limitations

The main shortcoming of the peace education I speak of is its 'non-massive' quality, i.e. the fact that a relatively small number of people go through it. Peace Studies courses are optional in nature, they are offered mostly in the form of postgraduate studies and don't cover the entire population. Non-governmental organisations' programmes also cannot cover the entire region, as there are not enough of them.

Due to the fact that society doesn't see the benefit of peace education, it is not recognised as necessary. And one of the goals of peace education is to awaken interest in it, in seeing the necessity of it, which is recognised by the few people who have undergone it, and that evaluations of such programmes point out.<sup>16</sup> I will quote a statement of one of the participants as an example: 'I wonder how I could have ever worked as a journalist before this'.

Part of the responsibility for the social failure to recognise the necessity of such education falls to the groups and institutions engaged in peace education. Unlike corporations that are successful in their work of convincing us that their product is necessary for us, these groups, institutions and individuals largely don't approach society as a market, and many are even repulsed by such an approach (like myself, for example). Of course, we neither have to, and I hope we will not either, accept advertising peace education as though it were washing

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16 External evaluations of the CNA Programmes of Peace Education are available at [www.nenasilje.org](http://www.nenasilje.org)

powder. But we would indeed have to find a way to reach the broader public and try to (I almost said recover) establish the understanding of peace as a most important social value.

A large number of people who would be interested and highly motivated to take part in such a programme often don't have the means of finding out about it unless they use the internet, because most of the advertising arrives via the internet (as the cheapest means), in contrast to newspaper ads, and not to mention TV.

Moreover, peace education, as any other education – costs money, and this is one of the major limitations. The costs of almost all such programmes are covered by international grants, but that will certainly not go on forever. One of the solutions is to introduce peace education to regular schooling, but in order for that goal to be reached, we need to work hard on social change. For instance, which government in our region would make a decision to introduce such a programme to schools?, a programme that would teach people how to challenge it when it gets carried away and deals more with its own interests than those of society in general, or when it abuses the power it has?

However, I do not propose a complete transfer of informal peace education into formal education, because it would carry several consequences. The most important one would be the lack of a *regional approach*, which I see as fundamental for all of the segments I have previously listed, and I find it difficult to imagine regular schools introducing programmes that would have such a regional approach. Because work on peacebuilding has to have an over-the-border dimension along with the local one.

### **'The future is not certain, but is possible'<sup>17</sup>**

Peace education cannot solve all of our existing social problems. It can provide insight into the roots of the problems, to make us question and move us and

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17 Zinn, H. *History Essays on American Democracy* (Novi Sad: Svetovi, 2004) translated by Andrej Grubačić.

thus give social change a chance. It is a *necessary inciter* and this should be its main goal.

I am aware that there is an enormous amount of apathy and that the majority of people do not believe that any change is possible. Myself too, even though very 'active' for ten years or so now, I have hardly seen any steps forward on a large scale, and I cannot see sufficient reasons for optimism there. However, I have seen many very big steps forward on a small scale, some brave people doing amazing things in their communities, and out of them, and there are more and more of them. And that gives me a lot of hope that it is possible to build a better world.

Finally, I cannot find words that would be more suitable than those written by Howard Zinn:

...the word 'optimism', already used here, makes me feel a bit uneasy because it introduces a cheerful, almost pleasant tone into the greyness of our times. But I use it nevertheless, not because I am quite confident that the world will become a better place, but because I am certain that only *such* sort of confidence can prevent people from giving in before playing all the possible combinations. This metaphor is intentional; it is indeed gambling. Not taking part in the game brings along with it impossibility of any gain whatsoever.<sup>18</sup>

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18 *Ibid.*



# IV

dealing with the past



# Is Dealing with the Past Slow and Difficult in Our Regions?

Goran Božičević

We'll get many answers to the question of *What is Dealing with the Past*. Mostly complementary, sometimes contradictory. There is a whole range of activities linked to dealing with the past (DwP). We can argue about some, but a consensus is easily reached around the statement that the goal of dealing with the past is discovering the truth.

Equipped with that commitment, I was surprised to hear Brandon Hamber<sup>1</sup> at the conference of the Victimology Society of Serbia<sup>2</sup> in October 2004: *'The goal of dealing with the past is NOT so much to reach the truth. There are many truths we will never reach. The goal is – to narrow down the space of lies and manipulation. And it is there that we can do a lot'*.

Relinquishing the idea of discovering the Truth, the one and only, real, absolute, seems to me to be an extremely important in the process of reviewing the success of working on DwP in the war struck the post-Yugoslav countries. Relinquishing an 'everything' in order to realise from a 'next to nothing' that a great number of big 'somethings' has gathered, is an important prerequisite of a healthy relationship towards DwP in our regions.

The notion of DwP often coincides with the notion of transitional justice, because it is about concepts that are very much overlapping, but are not entirely identical. The globally influential *International Center for Transitional Justice*<sup>3</sup>

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1 [www.brandonhamber.com](http://www.brandonhamber.com)

2 [www.vds.org.yu](http://www.vds.org.yu)

3 [www.ictj.org](http://www.ictj.org)

speaks of a 'range of approaches that societies undertake to reckon with legacies of, widespread or systematic human rights abuse as they move from a period of violent conflict or oppression towards peace, democracy, the rule of law, and respect for individual and collective rights'.

I would add that with DwP, apart from the aforementioned social level, we also talk about the individual level, so that we say, for example, 'he/she must/is not ready/refuses to face the past'.

The phrase 'Dealing with the Past' emerges in the regions of the post-Yugoslav countries at the end of the 1990s, and in 2003 peace activists in the region admit that they still do not address DwP.<sup>4</sup> Even though the term of DwP entered the public discourse, most of the agents of civil societies in the region, and especially the rest of the population, are not familiar with it and don't quite understand 'what exactly all that is about'.

DwP entails an entire range of action, and yet it nearly always involves unveiling the unknown facts that are opposed to the so called 'truths' proclaimed by the state and introducing these hidden facts to the public attention comes into the foreground. Opening the space to the voice of the marginalised, the news of the crimes *committed by our guys*.

Speaking of what DwP is or can be, the following should be mentioned:

- reforms of state institutions, primarily judiciary
- lustration
- sanctioning perpetrators of the crimes, the ones responsible, particularly the ones who gave orders (familiar discussions on *command responsibility*)
- hearing the accounts of victims at community and society level
- importance of independent investigative journalism
- reparation/compensation to the victims
- documenting of events
- reconciliation/trust among the divided communities

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4 Regional Research Quaker Peace & Social Witness, 2003, [www.kucaprijateljja.org](http://www.kucaprijateljja.org)



It somehow implicitly goes without saying, but still remains unsaid, that in the post-Yugoslav countries DwP stemmed very much from needing to *deal with the present* – working on protecting human rights, making records of violation of these rights, active opposition to repression on the part of state or para-state structures (evictions from the Yugoslav National Army owned apartments in Croatia, for example, informing the public of covered up crimes, exiling the population, bombarding of Dubrovnik, siege of Sarajevo, crimes in Sjeverin etc.).

At one point, everyday work of hundreds of female activists (there were some of us men too, but it was a minority) on dealing the much too cruel present<sup>5</sup> from which the masses fled<sup>6</sup> started to overflow into the work on DwP because fortunately all wars ended, the regimes became democratic, peace was given a chance.

At the beginning of the year 2000, most of the known work on DwP on civil scenes was grouped in Serbia, more precisely in Belgrade (B92 with TV production and Samizdat published edition, Women in Black, Humanitarian Justice Law Centre, Documentation Centre Wars 1991–1999) etc. At that time in Croatia, commitment of Vesna Teršelič is certainly visible, but even more visible is the lack of organised work on DwP in Croatia.

It is interesting to note that from 2003/2004 the situation in Croatia changes rapidly and for the better. Much to everyone's surprise, the new prime minister

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- 5 I witnessed an almost passionate delight of an activist colleague from Belgrade on the occasion of screening of the series 'Unit' on TV B92, about the so called Unit for Special Operations. "Let the people see what we had been fighting against for all those years and what Milošević regime had done and how".
- 6 Flourishing of TV PINK in Serbia and turbodiesel folk, for example. I remember an account of Veran Matić from Belgrade based B92 about the reactions of viewers to the first showing of the documentary of crimes in Srebrenica. One of the angry viewers who called sounded pretty articulate and we talked for almost half an hour. I asked him at that point: 'Why do you so persistently refuse to accept that it had really happened?' He answered: 'And how am I supposed to live with it, if I accept it?'

makes some encouraging moves in terms of DwP,<sup>7</sup> the initiative of including war veterans/defenders in peacebuilding gains momentum with the meeting at Mrkopalj School of Peace,<sup>8</sup> organisations of families of missing persons intensify their cross-border cooperation.

Unfortunately, in Serbia it not only stagnates, but also takes a step backwards after the blow to democratisation processes, suffered with the murder of Prime Minister Đinđić in March 2003. Too quick and too advanced for the bind of a deeply SANU memorandum nationalist ideology infected politics and organised crime, Đinđić became a part of history much too soon.

We find a positive coincidence in the processes of coming closer together within the regional 'triangle' of Belgrade–Sarajevo–Zagreb (more precisely, Humanitarian Justice Law Centre,<sup>9</sup> Research Documentation Centre,<sup>10</sup> Documenta – Centre for Dealing with the Past),<sup>11</sup> and also in the very act of

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7 Although incorrect, the claim that more has been done in less than a year from HDZ's (Croatian Democratic Alliance) return into power (late 2003) than in all of the ten years preceding it is as indicative as it is provocative:

- Remuneration was made to the surviving members of Zec family (through which the responsibility of the state for the killings was indirectly recognised).
- Remuneration was paid to the widow and son of Milan Levar, protected witness of The Hague Tribunal.
- Monuments to Jure Francetić and a memorial plate to Milo Budak were removed on the same day (which a series of non-government organisations and individuals hadn't managed to do for years).
- Quickly and expeditiously, six high officials and generals linked to the establishment of so called Croatian Republic of Herzeg Bosnia were sent to The Hague, as well as two more generals linked to the operation 'Oluja'. Not 'thousands' were there to see them off, as one of the six, Slobodan Praljak, predicted the night before, but 'dozens'.
- At a recently held conference of Humanitarian Justice Law Centre with the subject of dealing with the past, state attorneys of Serbia and Montenegro and Croatia sit together and discuss similar problems.
- Ivo Sanader is the first Croatian Prime Minister to visit Serbia and Montenegro: "There Are No Alternatives to Cooperation" (from my paper presented at the VDS Conference in 2004).

8 Initiative gets the name of IZMIR during 2005 – Initiative for Building Peace and Cooperation, and is registered at the national level in the Summer of 2006.

9 [www.hlc.org.yu](http://www.hlc.org.yu)

10 [www.idc.org.ba](http://www.idc.org.ba)

11 [www.documenta.hr](http://www.documenta.hr)

forming Documenta, through the precedent and joint forces of four, probably the most important peace organisations in Croatia.<sup>12</sup>

At that time, in the talks about preparation of receiving the extensive documentation of the International Crime Tribunal for war crimes in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, ICTY, it is important to take note of three pronouncedly different approaches, that also depict the differences between social realities in the three countries.

In the answer to the question of ‘Who is supposed to look after the documentation linked to the wars in the 1990s’, the voice from Serbia is sharp, warning and decisive: ‘Not the state, by no means! Exclusively the non-governmental sector’. The gap between human rights organisations in Serbia and the post-Đinđić Serbia is huge, confidence in the institutions of state (unchanged since Milošević’s rule) is nonexistent.

Bosnian-Herzegovinian answer is in fact the answer of Sarajevo and depicts a process of key DwP processes becoming independent on the institutions of state. It could be articulated as ‘No longer the state. Independent documentation centres (stemming from state institutions)’. Croatian demand is loud and depicts the increase of confidence in a functioning legal and democratic state. ‘Only the state has resources that can insure accessibility of the documentation in question to citizens and organisations interested in it. It is simply much too expensive for any financial source that is not part of the state budget’.

Relations between the non-governmental sector and the state are largely a paradigm of the conditions of ‘our nations’. In Serbia, the lustration, even though announced, never took place, nor the mere Law on Non-governmental Organisations. Bosnia and Herzegovina has been denied, and still is, to such an extent that a link to state institutions was an important value statement for a number of non-governmental organisation. In Croatia, for a couple of years now, several million euros a year is allocated to civil initiatives from the state budget.

Let us complete the overview of current DwP processes in the region.

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12 Croatian Helsinki Committee, Centre for Peace Studies, Centre for Peace, Non-violence and Human Rights Osijek, Citizens’ Committee for Human Rights.

Surprisingly, it begins exactly where we had all wrongly assumed there was no need for it to begin with – in Slovenia. One of the sins of non-governmental sector in the post-Yugoslav countries is in fact – having forgotten Slovenia, with which cooperation is minimal and symbolic. It took ten years for the case of ‘The Erased’, fates of 30.000 people who lost their right to residence in Slovenia in February 1992 and thereby also a series of other rights, to see daylight. Along with them, the Helsinki Committee of Slovenia this year provokes criticism of the lulled public by presenting cases of disputable killings of the YNA recruits in 1991.

In Croatia, a long road has been travelled from ‘there are no war crimes in a defence war’ over through ‘there have been some individual excesses’ to ‘war crimes were perpetrated by individuals and they should be held responsible for them’. Croatia has just matured enough to read in its most influential daily about at least a hundred civilians, of mostly Serbian ethnicity, having been murdered in Sisak in 1991. Croatian public and judiciary are just about entering a phase of processing trials of those crimes (while still taking the time with it). Are we going to live to see the exposure of how extensive was the para state apparatus devoted to the ‘human relocation of ethnic minorities’ and who of the surviving actors will be reached by the processing trial of this *joint criminal venture*?

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, there has been a lot of high quality work on the very foundations of working on DwP. The Research-Documentation Centre<sup>13</sup> has the documentation of over 350.000 victims of which over 96.000 of killed and missing with names and surnames. Their software and computer database are among the leading ones throughout the world, and their personal commitment to documenting is infectious. A range of non-governmental organisations, but also state institutions, have come a long way from renewing inter-ethnic communication – through return of refugees – building institutions – to clashing with economic reality that has little to do with the war and a lot with local thievery and globalised capital. The Centre for Nonviolent Action has gathered war veterans of all the armies at war in these regions for quite a time

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13 [www.idc.org.ba](http://www.idc.org.ba)

now and mobilised them in peacebuilding.<sup>14</sup> The real energy is however among the artists, and Bosnian-Herzegovinian war films are not only awarded but also provocative and attractive.

But the so called 'post-Dayton' structure of the state and political system itself is the greatest obstacle<sup>15</sup> to successful DwP which will, I am convinced, gush as a torrent with the first more significant revision of the Dayton Agreement, currently impossible to imagine by many.

Serbia is a region where – compared to the needs – there is the least work on DwP. It is not about there not being the will for it, or diligent organisations within the civil sector. It is about a drastic increase of the needs and that they keep increasing.

How come?

Serbian society suffers severe blows to its own retrograde self image that has very much generated the bloody conflicts of the nineties. An important move forward happened with finally letting go of the denial of asserting the existence of Yugoslavia and accepting the name Serbia and Montenegro, that didn't last long. It is not much of a comfort for Serbian national ostrich that the Radicals in Vojvodina note the increase in support and influence. Montenegro has decided to 'leave' OF ITS OWN ACCORD, and as far as Kosovo is concerned, even the most extreme speak by making parallels to the division of Germany in 1945. Turning to 'strengthening parallel ties with the Republic of Srpska' is not sheer political marketing or a mere quest for compensation. It is a normal continuum of national regrouping, a reminder that the wars are not over (the fighting itself might be, but the uniform is still worn in the mental framework of the people).

Macedonia is the only one that remains a relatively bi-national state, i.e. with a significant Albanian national minority, and was saved from the war conflict by, paradoxically, perhaps the very fact of being surrounded by 'not quite

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14 Centre for Nonviolent Action has gathered members of the Yugoslav National Army, Army of the Republic of Srpska, Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatian Defence Council and Croatian Army (editor's note)

15 Half of the country has been turned into cantons and the other half of it has a national definition in its title?

friends', i.e. countries all of which, explicitly or implicitly, negate Macedonian sovereignty and laysies claims to at least some of its parts.

Thus, in the far south of ex-Yugoslavia we have an international virtual protectorate, which in today's world of all things virtual, denotes actual power. There will be no war over there and whether there is going to be prosperity is not protectors' priority.

In short, the process of DwP has arrived to 'our regions'. The world is more connected than half a century ago, and we are starting to face our own bleak past more than our grandfathers – if they had wanted or been allowed to – ever could.

Dealing with the past came from the outside because it is a world trend, not because the world is interested in the outcome of this process in our regions. Even the core purpose of this process is still being argued over, so that the OSCE is openly against it. Dealing with the past is disturbing, it opens all wounds, it makes waves in communities in which a significant return of the exiled finally occurred. Many have a problem with it, those in power more than anyone. And whilst a number of activists prepared to deny disturbing the communities, professor Žarko Puhovski from Zagreb, even emphasises this particular aspect of NGO work on DwP. It is however about the disturbance of a fake peace, truce to be exact. A house seems stable because no one is there to shake it, and not because its foundations are stable. The outcome of DwP process, to be honest, is of interest to a not so great number of people in the post-Yugoslav states. However, an increasingly large number of people are realising that without DwP no milk and honey will begin to flow, so that there is an increasing search for whoever can be sacrificed and for ways in which the issues of personal responsibility and guilt can be procrastinated.

Dealing with the past is going to take a long time, years and decades. What is important is that it has started to roll, that the agents are trained, international cooperation established and intensified, the process itself brought closer to the victims or their families and that veterans are included in the process. Having concluded this, let us look for a moment at the hindrances to the success of the process itself. If we understand exactly why the process is difficult and slow, it will be easier for us not only to adjust our expectations, but also to direct our efforts (the assumption is that this text is read by those interested in DwP).

Reason one: The Wars are not over.

The status of Kosovo, the Republic of Srpska, war criminals and rapists still on the loose in spite of indictments by the Hague Tribunal, politicians who are still in power even though they had been instigators of war in the nineties, borders which some find porous and others impossible to cross, counting only the victims of 'our' nationality, thousands of persons still missing – these are but a few of not only uncomfortable but also dangerous remaining loose ends from the 1990s.

Reason two: Civil society is, if not bribed/bought, then at least disciplined. If it is true that the majority of positive, transformative social energy is within the non-governmental sector (luckily, it is not true) let us see what this sector really KNOWS. Writing projects, reporting on them, fitting into assigned priorities, doing fundraising, showing how it learned to be an industry, an entrepreneur, instead of being critic, a corrector of the powerful, the one that sets bad policies straight, regardless of whose they are.

Reason three: Answers are painful, but could also be surprising. Dealing with the past is a thing addressed by, even though not quite normal, ordinary people and not masochists. The process itself is painful, bleak, full of encounters with the dark side of human being. How to dig through the past and remain sane? Motivation and results are the best prevention because every glance towards a family of victims shows whether or not they are satisfied by what has been done, be it justice, recognition or, less frequently, reparation. However, satisfaction is still too small for any healthy human being, so it is no wonder that a third of the interviewed in the QPSW survey in Serbia in 2003 mentioned being chronically ill.

Reason four: The culture of violence and warfare remains dominant. There are reasons for contentment because the compulsory military service is being abolished little by little or the practice of civil alternative service is on the increase in an unprecedented way. Be that how it may, it will take generations for the children to stop playing with guns, for the patriarchal models to be seriously abandoned, for the weddings to stop being celebrated by shooting, and for those 'others' to stop being mentioned in drunken nights at the pub, the others we will get even with sooner or later.

Reason five: A lot has been invested in the wars themselves and their fruits are still enjoyed.

The label of 'ethnic conflict' had dangerously blurred the view of the real causes and triggers of the war and wars. The desire to redistribute power, to rule, agreements and negotiations, partnerships between those who are overtly enemies but covertly accomplices, has nothing whatsoever to do with ethnic issues.

The masses had to be moved, tethered up, dislocated, exchanged, settled, and ethnic identities turned out to be, and were proven to be, the most adequate for mass manipulation. How many counterintelligence service (KOS) members had walked through Serbian villages in Croatia before they started to rebel, through which channels have the weapons been sent, where it had got to and where it hadn't got to, how the Croatian Defence Council bought mortar shells from 'Muslim' positions from the fierce rivals of the Republic of Srpska Army – the answers to these questions will surprise many.

Reason six: The dangerous sway of the absurd so called War on Terror overshadows our problems from the 1990s by far.

How much sense does it make to address our regional garbage if we might already be in the Third World War? How to justify the need of going to The Hague, when at the same time the exemption of American citizens from the International Court of Justice is demanded, not even to mention Guantanamo?

To conclude: DwP in the post-Yugoslav countries is NOT slower or more difficult than it was realistically to be expected. In many areas it is even faster and more successful than after other similar violent conflicts. Be it that as how it may, the success of the process itself has the untiring, continual and unstoppable commitment of hundreds of individuals who have worked on that process from as early as the late 1980s (the so called pre-war time) or (most of them) from the early 1990s a lot to thank for. The process itself will not move on without their, or to be more precise, our engagement.

According to Roberta Bačić, with a twenty year long experience of working in Chile: 'The saying 'Time heals all wounds' is not correct. The time itself heals nothing. It is the PROCESSES in that time that heal wounds. And only if we do something we can expect the desired change. Otherwise, it's nothing.'



# Without Dealing with the Past, All of It Is on Some Sort of an Abstract Level

## Interview with Refik Hodžić

(spokesperson of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia)

**What is your understanding of dealing with the past? What is it that we really deal with in the process?**

**R.H.** I think it is obvious that dealing with the past is really a process in which we need to create a space for ourselves within which we can deal with what is, unfortunately, a recent and a horribly bloody past. Let me go a bit more in depth with this. If it were a ‘rosy’ past, so to speak, then we could imagine dealing with it (if there would be any need for us to deal with it at all) not being traumatic. Unfortunately, we need to face the fact that at one point we had simply moved in an unwanted direction in terms of our lives, the history of this country, and the future of ourselves and our children. We had simply strayed off a normal path, conditionally speaking, and moved into some sort of darkness. Now, of course it is horrible to look into this darkness because we know it’s filled with blood, fear, evil, injustice, but in order for us to be able to return to this path that leads to, I don’t want to use platitudes now, but a path that leads to a more normal life in which the priorities are personal happiness and freedom, wellbeing of ourselves and our children, and some sort of economic and cultural prosperity – we have to, unfortunately, revisit this darkness and see what *exactly* happened, to establish *all* the facts in order for there not to remain any indecisiveness about what really happened and who is to blame for what had happened to us. Let us all agree, first, on the things having happened to us being *truly* horrible, and that in a way a truth about innumerable crimes

exists within all that, a system of evil that was harnessed in order to solve the fallout of the state. So that, once we've revisited it and managed to address all these elements – by establishing the truth of what had happened, and then, in a way, pointed out the culprits responsible for so much evil and so much crime, we could simply focus all that negative feeling that each of us has when it comes to our recent past. That's when we would be able to assign some real parameters to it all. The worst is the fact that without dealing with the past, all of it is on some sort of an abstract level, the notion of guilt, the notion of responsibility and the notion of truth. It is all within some sort of relativity which opens a huge space for manipulation for all who still see, in that same past, some kind of a springboard for what they do, be it politics, crime or something else that's harming every one of us, as well as society. So, to sum up, dealing with the past is a process in which everything that happened is given real parameters with which society can deal with in order to overcome them and to be able to really put the past in the context of the past, and not have it as something that, in fact, determines the ways in which we function today and the ways in which our society develops. And in order for us to be able to get away from this abstract level and to turn it into real parameters – who?, when?, how?, why? – it takes a great effort for the society to revisit this darkness of the past, because, I repeat, it is full of fear, full of shame, full of pain, full of trauma and evil, and for every human being it is natural not to like to feel all the things I've just listed. That's where the answer lies to the question of why this process is so hard.

**What do you see as priorities in the process of dealing with the past in the region of the former Yugoslavia?**

**R.H.** This whole process should be seen as a multilayered one, which it in fact is. Dealing with the past contains three main elements.

First of all, *establishing the truth about what had happened*, a detailed truth that will be founded on evidence and facts that are, to use court vocabulary, beyond reasonable doubt, in order not to be any ambiguity about what had happened. So that, say, when we speak about Srebrenica or any other toponym that is nowadays, unfortunately, a synonymous for crimes, we won't have this

kind of a problem in which we face several different truths, manipulations that still provoke reactions among people that not only prevent determining the truth about what had happened but also any sort of interaction on any matter whatsoever. Determining the truth in an objective way is a priority above all priorities. We would thus create a very healthy foundation for understanding the work of The Hague Tribunal whose actions have so far contributed to our having an invaluable amount of evidence on what had happened, both facts determined through court procedures and evidence that, in the form of documents, statements and various material, speak of our recent past. We must make use of it; our historians, our scientists, interested people and civil society in search of that truth and in an effort to reach the truth. I think we must make use of this achievement of the Tribunal because it would be tragic for us not to do so.

Another two priorities that stem from determining what had happened are sanctioning the perpetrators and the reform of institutions respectively. One without the other cannot work and therefore these two mechanisms have close ties with determining the truth because they originate from it. A basic prerequisite for the rule of law in the former Yugoslavia region, but the real rule of law, is that people who in one way or another took part in all that had happened should be removed from the institutions ( here I primarily think of crime campaigns, instigating hatred that enabled such widespread brutality). I also think that the reform of the institutions from the inside is a *prerequisite* of all prerequisites in order for the third point to be realised, punishing the war criminals. We now have the opportunity to see how local institutions in the region of the former Yugoslavia have begun to address it, but it is obvious that as long as institutions, and not only judiciary institutions that directly implement that task but also other institutions of the states in the region of the former Yugoslavia, on whose efficiency judiciary itself depends, do not remove from its lines people who have their part in the crimes in a direct or indirect ways, the processing of war crimes in local courts will remain partial, incomplete and, in a way, a mere pretence that something is being done, whereas the real results are not possible.

**You pointed out why you think that trials for war crimes are important and that it is about a kind of individual responsibility. With regard to that, how do you feel about collective responsibility? Why is this notion perceived as controversial?**

**R.H.** I think it is essentially a matter of lack of understanding what a criminal responsibility really is and what moral and political responsibility is. Let me not, as everyone who addresses this issue does, go back to quoting Karl Jaspers and his division of responsibility when it comes to this issue, but I do think that individual responsibility is above collective responsibility and the concept of 'everyone is guilty of war crimes if a perpetrator of the crimes is from that group'. This was, in fact, used by perpetrators themselves and they use it to this very day, which is a sort of manipulation that gives them the shield for the pack they hide among and in which they feel fairly safe, because collective responsibility indicates that there is no individual, ergo – I am safe as long as there is no individual responsibility, because I know I am in fact the one who is guilty. For this reason I think some time will have to pass in which we will have to insist on the priority of focusing on individual responsibility in the sense of criminal responsibility. When we muster enough strength to truly address in determining the truth about what had happened, then we will be able to speak of various degrees of moral and political responsibility, and to open a discussion on collective responsibility will be inevitable as well.

**In respect of this, where do you think the evident, and frequently present, solidarity with perpetrators and initiators of crimes comes from? How should we deal with it and what has been your experience?**

**R.H.** I think the answer to this question is fairly complex and I feel that getting an accurate and detailed answer would call for a more serious analysis. First of all, it is obvious that the influence of propaganda directed against the Tribunal by government institutions, the media, non-governmental organisations controlled by the people indicted by the Tribunal or potentially indicted, as well as political leaders from the former Yugoslavia territory, both at the highest and local levels is very strong. They managed to convince people that war equals

war crimes, that everything that had happened in the war can be marked as a war crime if you belong to a certain ethnicity (by this I mean this sort of hysteria about The Hague Tribunal being anti-Serbian or having a mission of undermining Croatian sovereignty etc.). I believe this served as a foundation for fear provoked among people, and then manipulating them by focusing on indictees as heroes that arose from that war that is now completely identified with war crimes, and, lo and behold, since they had fought in the war and been 'exemplary fighters' there, they are being tried for war crimes. Focusing on these people as national heroes – who now once more put their lives at risk for 'our cause' in front of the vicious international community – has created a fertile soil for manipulation. Thus it was managed, along with a propagandist covering the whole situation by the strongest media that were controlled by the regimes at the time, for an atmosphere to be created in which people could have been convinced that the 'best among the best of us' will actually pay before the horrifying and hateful The Hague Tribunal. I think the media are largely responsible for such a perception and a truly abnormal situation in which honourable and honest people identify themselves with multiple killers, rapists, people of lowest moral values who were able to kill children, not thinking about who these people are and why they are tried and what are the actions that constitute the counts of their indictment, but instead they are considered heroes for the very fact of being indicted. This manipulation by the regimes and politicians who have had very clear interests in such manipulation since they had wanted to protect themselves, and on the other hand, the media that were factors of these same regimes, or have wholeheartedly supported this entire story for reasons of some false patriotism, or have themselves been victims of that manipulation, have created a situation in which, in my opinion, it was possible to see how people identify themselves with perpetrators of the worst war crimes.

**Do you have any ideas on how we as society can deal with it here?**

**R.H.** A lot of people say that it may already be too late for that. I don't think so at all. I think it is terribly important for us to, while examining this issue, go back to basic values, these being: what is just, what is unjust, what is acceptable,

what is not acceptable, what is good and what is evil. We need to start from these basic values and it is terribly important for us to free a space for people who had suffered the most, for them to open our eyes as a society and for us to understand and accept what we really are dealing with. For us to understand that war crimes and their heritage are not some abstract subject residing somewhere far away from us, that they were very concrete events with very concrete victims, very concrete consequences both for them and for society, meaning ourselves. This is where the answer to how to deal with it is; the key to the entire story is in the fact that we, as citizens, or civil society as a desirable catalyser of this process, realise and accept what this is all about. That it is not an issue limited to a certain group of people that we try to neatly place into one folder by naming them 'victims', and then victims are this shapeless mass who make a non-stop fuss, continually nagging about something, continually asking for something, whereas we, were it not for them, would be on our way to a happy future. What we need to be clear about is that the consequences of the crimes are real, that we live them today, that all that's happening to us today in terms of sluggishness of transformation of society into a democratic one, into a society that will really have the values such as, say, human rights, rule of law, culture as a motor of society development built into its foundations... that all this is on a stand-by, that it's all at a halt due to the fact that we hadn't dealt with what is a tumour that devastates this society, that seemingly cunningly and silently gnaws on us from the inside. What we can't forget is that this tumour can go wild at any time, and that unless we deal with it and cut it out, operate on it, all that we think of as of making a progress is but an illusion that can, as we have had the chance to see, cave in within a single month.

### **How much is manipulating victims of war present?**

**R.H.** It is one of the basic problems when it comes to the whole process of dealing with the past, and unfortunately, our inability as a society to provide adequate compensation to the victims for what had happened and thereby address one of the elements of the whole process of dealing with the past. First of all, I think that, the voice of victims is not articulated through associations of

victims. This is my opinion. I think that we, at least in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also in the region, have a group of people who are gathered around associations of victims and who have created a 'scene' in which some of them do some fantastic things for victims, but quite a number of them do them for their own personal gain and this whole mass of people on whose behalf they claim they work do not really get a chance to say anything, say their opinion on various issues. Politicians masterfully use putting the victims to the foreground, at any time they find it convenient to do so, in order to buy those self-proclaimed representatives of victims for peanuts and in such a context we once again have a situation in which victims of war crimes are still victimised, on societies' margins, in which victims of war crimes do not have an equal treatment in society – not to mention the lack of any real compensation or help on the part of society to adequately overcome this trauma. One of the biggest problems in the whole process of dealing with the past is victims manipulation. There is unfortunately no room for victims, except for some honourable exceptions when certain organisations and associations provide space for their membership to speak their mind in democratic terms and voice their concerns on matters of interest to them. A great number of them are really in the service of politics.

**You have been working with matters of dealing with the past for quite a while now and in various ways. How do you perceive the current situation in the region in the context of dealing with the past? What is your experience – how much have the things changed, has any progress been made? Where are we in this process at the moment to begin with?**

**R.H.** There has obviously been some progress. However, I think we cannot view the situation outside of the context of various initiatives that have as their goal integration into various associations such as the European Union. On the other hand, the realistic situation of this region needs to be taken into account, actually the possibility of overcoming what has happened here.

If we look at it superficially and compare nowadays with 1997, 1997, 1998, we will certainly say that certain progress has been made, that nowadays we

have various mechanisms of transitional justice that do function, some better, some worse, but they are there – from trials for war crimes to various initiatives of civil society, truth-telling etc. But, we need to look once more at how all this is going on without any support or engagement from government institutions. If we are to look at it globally and compare successful examples, examples of various mechanisms of transitional justice that have succeeded, we will see that the role of government institutions was crucial, institutions that not only took part but also actively supported and created space for such a process. In our parts, unfortunately, not in one of the states created by the breakdown of the former Yugoslavia, is there a sincere effort of government institutions to get involved in this process. For this reason I think that the progress that has been made, however real it may be, is in fact based on very shaky grounds when it comes to its long-term success, which cannot occur without the involvement of government institutions. I think I don't have to elaborate on this in particular. If we look at the core of the matter we will see that there still are some deep divides within society, different perspectives on some facts, even a large degree of fear and mistrust among people, which is a direct result of actions of our leaders, a direct result of actions of government institutions.

### **What is the relationship between dealing with the past and peacebuilding in the region?**

**R.H.** To be honest, I think these two processes cannot be viewed separately, that they are intertwined to such an extent that it is impossible to think about some sort of lasting peace and building a lasting peace if we don't have a sincere process of dealing with the past happening before that, or at least parallel to that. I think that I don't need to list examples of how a lack of such a process after the World War Two in the region of the former Yugoslavia resulted in unprecedented brutality in the 1990s, an indescribable hell of brutality that, however not normal and impossible it may be, tried to justify itself by what had happened in the World War Two. Without the process of dealing with the past, and I repeat, a truthful and effective process, then the heritage of this evil will make these societies decide that these will no longer be the facts and



parameters that will define our present and future. Without this, there is simply no stable and lasting peace. I think that, in a way, we will forever fear that the conflict could start from seemingly harmless and stupid situations but as long as we rely on the method of oral history, so genuine and characteristic of us, to transfer to our children the stories of what had happened and these same children have nothing of an objective truth by means of which to compare the stories they hear at home to accessible facts, we will be creating a fruitful soil for possible conflicts, lack of understanding, quarrels that will always have some very direct connections to the past.

**My impression is, I don't know how you feel about it, that there is a kind of an overdose with the stories of the war, that, particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina, our public space is full of the past and stories of the war, that people no longer find ways of accepting it...**

**R.H.** I think people don't see the point, because we evidently have an overload of information about the war. However, the context in which they are presented is not a context that would give people a reason to believe that they do a constructive thing if they think about what had happened and that the fact that they have to listen and think about it will have any sort of positive result. As with anything you see no point in, regardless of how much you are affected by it and are personally concerned, you will in time get bored and tired with it. What determines this discourse of discussing the past is that the past is still being used to the purpose of hatred, the purpose of reheating the fear, the purpose of deepening the divides, and people are fed up with it. The consequence is that even the initiatives that have something else as their goal are not accepted now, initiatives with the goal of providing opportunities for some issues to be addressed in an adequate way and to thus absolve them and store them in the past, rather than in the context of the present. It happens due to the fact that people don't understand it, that it hasn't been explained to them, and at the same time they receive quite different messages from the politicians who baffle them and give them no grounds to believe that such a thing is possible. It all results in the exhaustion of the sort 'just please don't talk war to me anymore, don't go 'war

crimes' on me'. And I'm sure that, if the information were presented in a context in which people would really be able to believe that it is a constructive process that we will all benefit from, it would be completely different.

**In the end, what are your personal dilemmas and fears related to all this?**

**R.H.** I really think that without true engagement of government institutions, this process that is at this point given a 'push' by the civil society, will not yield results that would contribute to our really dealing with the past in the long run, and in a way that it is necessary for it to be done if we are to change the basic discourse and values that exist in communities at this point and point them in a direction of true respect of human rights and true existence of the rule of law which is, I feel, in the interests of us all. I think that without it we will constantly have this polarisation, this schizophrenia, in which civil society forces that story and really does all in its power, but that because of its nature, which is basically pretty heterogeneous, it doesn't share the shape of the social, as it were. It doesn't have the dynamics that involve an entire society, all of us, and there is no readiness to think about it at the level of – 'look, this is happening and this is what we need', but instead it is initiatives that are sort of scattered, all over the place, not linked one to the other, and are also of a usually limited influence. At the same time, we have the official establishment that pushes an entirely different story, another line in which wartime discourse is still dominant in the sense of relations between ethnic groups; there is absolutely no consensus about the past and it is being very very aggressively emitted to the community, the society. So that I honestly think that, considering the development of political circumstances in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the region, I am not optimistic. Even though we can consider that we have done much more than many other post-conflict societies in the world have done when it comes to this process, in the end we will not get the work done at any rate. And we will have generations that will, in the best case scenario, be happy not to discuss it openly, and on the other hand cultivate 'truths' in some sort of a private context, 'truths' diametrically opposing the 'truths' of others which can only lead to one thing – conflict of opinion and any other conflict.

# One Injustice Cannot Be Made by Causing a New One

Nenad Vukosavljević

Who is it that needs to deal with the past to begin with and why? What would that entail?

The majority would probably think that it is the ‘enemies’ who haven’t dealt with the crimes they have perpetrated. The ones ‘on the other side’ should be punished, the ones who planned, ordered and carried out crimes. And then a step further would be made in the sense that ‘they should also face collective responsibility for supporting criminal undertakings and stop collectively representing themselves as victims’. ‘They should say goodbye to the myths of their people being inculpable and distance themselves from nationalism and desire for retaliation’. ‘They should apologise to us in order for us to be able to even think about reconciliation’.

It is all true, let us not delude ourselves that we do not know what this is about. It is all clear and it is all known. Everything can be listed precisely, what needs to happen in order for us to process, overcome and learn the lessons for the future from the past. The only catch is the fact that there is little willingness to apply this in one’s own society or in an ethnic group that one belongs to. It is not even so much about ‘we don’t want to be the first to do it, they should be the ones’, which can often be heard, but primarily about how implementation of the aforementioned in one’s own backyard (the only place where it can be directly applied because one has the power to do so) takes courage, honesty, boldness, and risks, and one has to be prepared for inconveniences and pressures, as one changes oneself and the society around. ‘Go on, leave that’, it is easier to point fingers to the ‘evil ones’ on the other side who do the same. A finger to a finger! For how long?

We have had the chance to learn many lessons from the World War Two, but we haven't learned them. It is said, 'Another war happened to us!' Well, it didn't happen to us because the positions of the Sun and the Moon were aligned in that way but because our society was not prepared to recognise the evil that had swollen; because we hadn't learned anything from the previous war, except to remember crimes against 'our people' and harbour a desire for revenge, just as we do now. The seed of evil had fallen to a fertile soil, and not on Mars either, but in our/your/their country. And where is it now?

### War crimes

The term of 'dealing with the past' is very frequently used in the public of Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. Its meaning is more often than not reduced to merely accepting the established facts about the perpetrated war crimes and, in accordance with that, the need for the responsible behaviour of the public. Sanctioning war crimes should attain the goals of unveiling the truth about those events, realising justice, at least partially realising the rights of victims and their loved ones and creating conditions for the process of reconciliation.

Responsibility for war crimes is individual, and thus the trials are directed towards punishing individuals that were directly involved in them. Responsibility of all who have, in their ways and to a different extent, contributed to creating a social climate in which it had been (and still is) 'justified' to perpetrate crimes against 'the enemy people', remains in the shadows.

The process of punishing those directly responsible largely takes place outside the region in which the crimes were committed, in most cases the indictees are on trial in the Tribunal for War Crimes in The Hague, far from the eyes of the local public, and in spite of numerous media reports from the trials. The Hague Tribunal set before itself a goal to punish the most responsible, taking upon itself the right to estimate which processes are the priorities and which ones should be under the jurisdiction of the courts in the countries of the former Yugoslavia.

There are some objections that can justifiably be made of the work of the Tribunal, and they mostly relate to the fact that in the initial years of its work the Tribunal entirely neglected the need for communication and presence in

the public of the countries of the former Yugoslavia. The consequence was a lack of understanding of the importance of the work The Hague performs, and this provided space for the creation of images which portrayed The Hague as a politically biased court. The image of the ICTY<sup>1</sup> bias exists in all of the countries of the former SFRY, and, as a rule, the bias always appears to be to 'our' detriment. I have never heard of someone thinking that the court is biased in 'favour' of his or her 'own' people. Just imagine how beneficial it would be if the court released all of 'our' criminals, and severely punished 'theirs'; we would really 'profit' from that! Or, for lack of that, it would be most convenient if it were in everyone's favour, so that there would be no trials for crimes at all! Yes, it would be beneficial, but only in favour of our detriment!

In ideal conditions it would certainly be better if trials took place in the region where the crimes were committed, but unfortunately the situation was such (and in part still is) that local court systems haven't been able to independently solve such serious processes. All in all, it seems that the benefits from The Hague Tribunal greatly outweigh its disadvantages, because what seems to be the most important thing to me, is that its work has led to the removal of numerous politicians from political office in the post-Yugoslav countries, who not only carried responsibility for crimes, but were also very active after the wars in terms of destruction and obstruction of building a democratic and civil society to the extent that such building was possible.

Trials for war crimes, their significance and success can and must be estimated with regard to the goals that the Tribunal itself states within defining its own mission:

*In accordance with the resolution through which the ICTY was founded, its mission is fourfold:*

- *to bring to justice persons responsible for violating international humanitarian law*
- *to provide justice for victims*
- *to discourage further perpetration of crimes*

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1 International Crime Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia.

- *to prevent revisionism, contribute to establishing peace anew and encourage reconciliation in the region of the former Yugoslavia.*

Along with the factual accuracy that undeniably exists and contributes to establishing the truth about those events, the act of sanctioning crimes has torn down numerous attempts of governing political elites responsible for the war to impose themselves as inevitable guarantors of peace in the post-war times and thus establish a system of impunity. The often stated sentence of ‘whatever had happened – happened, let us leave it all to the past and turn towards the future’ is motivated by extremely base urges to save the skin of the ones who have launched this thesis and is nothing other than a call for collective amnesia. What worked for the rulers and murderers of Latin-American dictatorships in numerous cases, providing amnesty for their own evildoing and slighting and underestimating their victims, didn’t work for local rulers here, which is of great importance for our societies, because it sends out the message for the future that crimes cannot go without punishment. Only the occasional ones have escaped justice by dying before or during investigation or during the trial itself. Unfortunately, there are hundreds and thousands of people who have never been called on to take responsibility for their crimes.

Satisfying justice with regard to the victims is something that only they themselves and their loved ones can judge. Numerous objections to the length of sentences indicate the existence of at least partial discontent with them.

What about the goal of the ICTY of ‘establishing peace and encouraging reconciliation in the region of the former Yugoslavia?’ If the assumption of the founders was that the very existence and work of the ICTY will bring about peace and reconciliation, then it could be said that the assumption was wrong.

In the past two or three years, the special courts for war crimes in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia commenced their work. They take evidence material from The Hague Tribunal, currently in its final phase and with no right to open new investigations and merely complete the ongoing trials. The first fair trials have been completed; the trial for the mass murder of prisoners in Ovčara near Vukovar was carried out at the Court for War Crimes in Belgrade.

The work of local courts on war crimes was all but nonexistent until a couple of years ago, except for several farcical trials in Serbia and Croatia. Local prosecutors' offices in Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, only act in the places in which the crimes happened during the war and were for the most part in the position of starting investigations of (even today) local powerful people. Those who gave orders for persecution and murders during the war have become mayors, chiefs of police stations or 'successful businessmen' as war heroes in the post-war times. Following the logic dictated by ethnic hatred, crimes always meant what had been done to 'our people', not what their 'heroes' had done. Thus those who were not included in indictments of The Hague, even though they had been, say, camp commanders, still walk freely and meet their one time victims in the streets.

Some very encouraging signals that the war crimes will be treated equally regardless of the names of the perpetrators is the cooperation of the war crimes prosecutors' offices of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Croatia and Montenegro, that have begun to exchange data and evidence.

### **War is not a crime**

Along with the broad subject of truth, crime and punishment, a question remains that demands an answer and that is seldom even asked: Who is responsible for the war, and the misfortune of millions of people?

If we leave the matter of crimes to the court, as well as that of genocide and aggression that is included in the international humanitarian law and dealt with by it, does that mean that in the war with no crimes against civilians and prisoners everything would be in order? War in itself is not a crime? Killing soldiers is not a crime? Attacking 'legitimate military targets' is not a crime? Encouraging war and hatred? Who is to blame for that? Who is responsible for that? How could we prevent that from happening again? How should we deal with that guilt and that responsibility?

When these questions are asked, the comments on 'relativisation of guilt' are often heard, a dangerous thesis that tries to hide war crimes behind a collective instead of individual responsibility. Why would guilt for the war be collective?

Those who claim collective guilt put themselves among the group of the guilty. Just as guilt for war crimes cannot be collective, it cannot be collective when it comes to war.

Contrary to that, responsibility is a category that can relate to society and a collective. Through our being and actions, we belong to the community we live in, and thus we carry a part of responsibility for the direction of the development of the society and its (dis)harmony with ethical principles we have adopted at a personal level and (dis)harmony of social currents with publicly proclaimed basic social values around which there is no consensus or majority support.

And for the very reason that social values and their establishing are in a living process of movement, our responsibility exists, because everyone can influence this living current, starting from the most banal act of voting on elections to taking responsibility and risks of social engagement.

Even though the assumption of social responsibility certainly does not exclude global responsibility, for the time being, I would linger on the social one and wonder: 'What kind of a society do we live in, if war in itself is not a crime?'

In accordance with that, where and when does dealing with the past begin? It is not enough for me to stop at condemning crimes, even though a large portion of the society in Serbia, I live in, is not ready to take that step even nowadays, but rather strives towards getting even and 'throwing the ball to the other's court' when it comes to the perpetrated crimes, as if the crime perpetrated against 'us' could justify or minimise the ones perpetrated 'on our behalf'.

In my opinion, the goal of dealing with the past has to be to learn a lesson for the future and prevent violence, and the road towards it leads through accepting personal and collective responsibility, understanding and eliminating ideological and other sources of evil that lead to perversion of our social values. Dealing with war crimes is but a first step and in itself cannot be the end if what remains after it are images of enemies in our societies, feelings of hatred, lack of understanding and injustice, even division within the society between the reckless ones who refuse to take responsibility for the evil (who are popularly called 'patriots') and those who advocate dealing with it (affectionately called 'traitors'). If the truth be told, and for the purpose of the struggle against



misrepresentation, acting in accordance with one's consciousness cannot be called treason, but genuine patriotism.

### **Heroes and criminals in a good war**

Dealing with the past must be a social process, and not merely a court procedure. It has to be effective in the sense of peacebuilding, building the new, honest social values, building the broken communication and trust between different ethnic communities, establishing a stronghold against political destruction, xenophobia, nazism, fascism and chauvinism.

The frequent way of experiencing the notion of 'dealing with the past' in the public, leads to the conclusion that it deconstructs peace rather than builds it. Speaking of Serbia, it could be noted that, eleven years after the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina and seven years after the war in Kosovo, several characteristic groups and ways of dealing with the past are present in the public.

- Younger generations mostly experience this issue as a burden and a heritage of the past that they can see no links to. In fact, they have no awareness of this having anything to do with their life perspectives or current problems of society.
- Those who claim that the past should be forgotten or repressed to the background. Many of them indeed find it troubling to gain insight into their personal misconceptions that makes them responsible (not automatically guilty) for the evil of the past, so they rather opt for escapism through which they do further injustice to victims without even realising it. The social pattern in this is not to be neglected, that gaining insight into one's own mistake represents an unforgivable weakness.
- Those who feed on hatred either justify or shamelessly deny both perpetrated crimes and any responsibility of individuals and the collective whatsoever.
- Those who understand both the guilt and responsibility, but keep silent in order to avoid personal inconvenience and attacks or because they believe that establishing the truth would harm our country and society.

- Those who publicly oppose shameless denial of responsibility, believing they are doing good for the society they live in.
- Those who see taking responsibility as uncritically adopting the 'other' side's interpretation of the past and fall into the trap of adopting the model of generalised guilt, but in the opposite direction.<sup>2</sup>

Such stratification of society, not only characteristic of Serbia, has the consequence of sending out the same threatening message to neighbouring countries that the war had been lead against. The mechanism of creating the image of the neighbours hasn't changed much and it still functions according to the principle of the loudest and the most aggressive; what we hear about each other are the voices of the most shameless and most aggressive amongst us. In this way, the feeling of opposition and hostility is maintained, which for the most part makes both the peacebuilding process and the process that could be called reconciliation harder.

In spite of the trials for war crimes, that have to a smaller extent recently started to take place at local courts as well, we face a realistic peril, especially with regard to The Hague indictees, as some of the most responsible will come back to their countries and be welcomed as heroes after completing their sentence.

A dilemma existed among some peace activists in Croatia about the approach to Gotovina, who was seen by the broader public as a hero of the defensive war against Serbian aggressors. Namely, Gotovina has been indicted by The Hague Tribunal for war crimes, which the greater part of the Croatian public found unacceptable, because he is 'a hero, not a criminal'. One of the ideas of the public

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2 This is how a liberal politician in Serbia has recently commented on the footage of killing of Serbs from Krajina during the military campaign Oluja (Storm): "Are all of the victims from the procession of refugees innocent victims or do some of them have their own responsibility for what happened? Was establishing the so called Serbian states in the territory of Croatia followed by ethnic cleansing against the local Croats? Had they been robbed of their possessions and had there been crimes against them too? Only a truthful answer to those questions leads to a real understanding of Oluja and its consequences". Even if the people who were killed were personally responsible for a crime, killing them would still be a crime! What does a murder have to do with the matter of collective responsibility, does it perhaps justify the murder? General Mladić was allegedly also lead by the logic of avenging the killing of Serbian civilians in the villages around Srebrenica when he commanded 8000 people to be killed.

advertising of peace activists in Croatia was to act with the message of ‘both hero and criminal’. This very example emphasises the necessity of asking the questions about co-responsibility for the war and about nurturing the myth of ‘just war’.

The idea that peacebuilding in the region and the process of reconciliation can take place, in spite of the existence of the ‘just war’ as a generally accepted social value in any of the societies here, seems absurd. The very acceptance of such a grotesque thesis about ‘just war’ entails in itself the seed of the future war, and the thesis exists in all of the countries that have been at war in the Balkans, and is more or less accepted, or applied to the latest wars. Whilst Serbia has this bit of luck in the midst of the misfortune – that the consequences of the wars lead ‘for the just cause of defending the Serbian people’ are so catastrophic, that it is obvious that those who had allegedly meant to be protected gained nothing but misery from this war – the message in Kosovo and Croatia after the wars that did attain set political goals is that the wars and the violence paid off, that the war was good!

The lessons derived from the more recent history emphasise this thesis and the calls for recognising one’s own responsibility are brought to the level of malevolent blabbering of enemies of the people. Condemning the war crimes of one’s own side seems to be the ultimate act of peace activism and an attitude against the war on principle remains a value some future generations will have to become committed to.

Maybe, for example, Croatia’s membership to NATO in the near future can provide conditions for development of the awareness on the war as an authentic crime in itself.

## **Victimisation**

Why is dealing with the past so hard, at least in the segment of dealing with crimes committed on one’s own behalf? A large number of people, regardless of the region, react with a counter-question, when will ‘they’ admit and apologise for crimes against ‘us’. Both when they objectively are victims and when they are not but draw this feeling from their ethnic affiliation, people feel like victims, they feel injustice against their people and as a rule have a series of good and

meaningful reasons to found such a statement. The problem emerges when the sense of injustice and objective circumstances in which they were victims (or feel like that) is felt as a part of identity. They tend to disperse certain circumstances and generalise them through projection on the entire people. Thus one becomes a victim and the righteous and the others are, thence, evil and aggressors. This generalisation and simplification intends to attain, consciously or not, two goals: the first is to release themselves and their own side of responsibility by accusing others and assigning the identification label of the evil or aggressors to others; the other is a powerful position of a victim who deserves unreserved support; a position of the morally pure who were, are and will remain such.

What mostly goes unnoticed, is that the real victims in this process become an all purpose currency; in other words, ‘the more our victims, the better, because we get more arguments through that’<sup>3</sup>. Never mind the fact that many of those who are victims or belong to victims’ families get actively involved in the construction of these generalised and ‘geneticised’ images of victims and perpetrators (entire peoples) through which they unconsciously undermine and relativise their genuine position of a victim who seeks a just punishment for the responsible with a reason.

Such a process is primarily encouraged by nationalist governing elites who have an enormous influence on building the public opinion. Unfortunately, the majority simply repeats and uncritically adopts what they are being served through the media. The more heterogeneous the attitudes within an ethnic group the better, because the hardship and responsibility for creating one’s opinion is at least partly transferred to individuals. Many will still repeat what

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3 An example is an attitude towards the Research-Documentation Centre from Sarajevo. The director of the Centre who was formerly a representative of the State Commission for collecting facts about war crimes in Bosnia and Herzegovina, founded in 1992 in Sarajevo, has of late been exposed to attacks and belligerence, having made public systematically collected and checked data on the number of victims of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Instead of the often mentioned 300.000, the current registered number (in July 2006) is 97.163 of the killed and the missing. It sounds paradoxical that someone should be attacked for the number being ‘smaller than it should be’. No, it’s not better if the number of victims is smaller, it’s better if there are more of them, primarily on ‘our side’. That is the logic of the majority today, or perhaps these are less citizens, and more individuals in nationally passionate sheepfolds?

the political parties they approve of tell them, but at least there won't be a single dominant standpoint.

Thus the court procedures for crimes are partly rendered meaningless too, because what goes in the favour of the statement that 'we' are the good ones will be experienced as a confirmation, and those who disturb such an image refused as politically motivated and malevolent towards 'our people'.

At the same time, such 'identity' setting of the notions of *victim* and *violence* excludes the possibility that perhaps the very same people or group of people were victims in one situation, and perpetrators of injustice and violence in another. At the mention of this, many would jump up and cry that this is making aggressors and victims equal.

How would it even be possible to make aggressors and victims equal? By failing to see that the situation and what a person (or a group) does in it determines the role of a victim and the role of an aggressor. A person who committed crime and injustice is an aggressor, but that same person or persons, were perhaps victims in another situation. One does not exclude the other, these two categories do not annihilate each other and they are neither genetically determined nor are they the identity related definitions we often try to represent them as. Isn't it aggression and violence when nowadays some people who were in the past undeniably and objectively victims, call for collective and non-selective revenge and punishing the others, when they justify discrimination. It is difficult to stand up against it when it is known that these same people had gone through horrible suffering and pain, but one has to oppose injustice and calls for violence, however inconvenient it may be. Because one injustice cannot be made right by causing a new one. At the same time, one must not neglect the fact that it is exactly some victims of injustice and crime that significantly contribute to creating an identification definition of an entire people as a victim. If we turn the due respect for the victims into a myth of inculpability of our side and additionally slight other victims because they 'deserved it by being on the opposite side', we can be certain that we have created excellent preconditions for a new war.

This mechanism is not new, nor does it appear for the first time after the latest wars. Concretely, the Serbian side has, by harbouring myths of the just wars for freedom, created a self image of an inculpable, just and freedom loving people, an image uncritically adopted by many, mostly through education and also through the media propaganda during the past fifteen or so years, so that now they find it more difficult to accept crimes perpetrated by the Serbian army/armies in the past wars. So, on the Serbian side, there is a certain historic process and experience that has lead to the possibility of realisation that things cannot be viewed as black and white. The definition of a victim cannot be projected on the entire people. Although, in spite of the possibility of this realisation, it hasn't yet reached the awareness of many.

The set of circumstances in Serbia and neighbouring countries is not the same, so that the process of victimisation (identification definition as a victim) is also not in the same development stage. Due to the fact that the greatest burden of the recent past is born by Serbs and Serbia, because its leadership played a crucial part in starting the wars in the region, the ways in which they had been lead and then hiding those responsible for crimes, one gets the impression that the public in Serbia would be content if the talks about the past just stopped or if everyone just covered themselves with ashes and left determining guilt and responsibility for some 'better' times. Still, such a thing is not possible and this is the chance that Serbia has to finally shatter the senseless myth about the character of Serbian people and such similar nonsense once and for all.

Since a great part of the trials for war crimes is taking place outside the country and under the supervision of the United Nations and is not seldom presented in Serbia as 'The Court of the West', and the pressures for sorting out the wartime past also come from the West personified by the NATO who lead the war against SR Yugoslavia in 1999, it is logical that there is a huge resistance to the process because it is experienced as imposed and particularly malevolent towards the Serbs.

Political steps in that direction are literally coerced because there is no awareness about the fact that dealing with the past is primarily necessary for our own sake and the sake of our society and then for the sake of respecting

the victims and building neighbourly relations and a better future, and not in order to fulfil the demands of the USA, whose government proves through its politics that they see themselves as above international law, and acts as if the whole world were its own private possession where it has the exclusive right to administer justice as it sees fit, i.e. according to its economic interests.

At any rate, statements such as the answer of the former NATO spokesperson to the question of whether he expects the investigations related to claims of war crimes against civil population of SRY to begin at The Hague Tribunal, who said ‘Why, we fund them (the Tribunal)!’, certainly do not represent an encouragement for a fair dealing with the past in Serbia, or abandoning the role of a victim. The man was sincere, which may not have been bad, but it is bad to demonstrate power and act on the principle of the rule of the stronger. If that is how it is done in the West, why would ‘we’ be to blame for having tried the same? To that I say, they are not my role models nor do I think they should be anyone’s, responsibility for peacebuilding in the region is upon those of us who live here and we don’t do it for anyone other than ourselves. Let us clear our own backyard, maybe even with the help of our neighbours, and then, after we have sorted that out, let’s see where to go from there.

### **Dealing with the past as a contribution to peacebuilding**

The main challenge is represented by establishing dealing with the past as a generally accepted social process in which interests of citizens are recognised in going through the process and thereby transforming their society into a more just one, with more solidarity, freedom and honesty. Once established as such, the process would certainly contribute to peacebuilding and not its deconstruction as it often happens nowadays.

Firstly, in order for the process to be generally accepted, it is necessary to build a broad alliance with various social groups, at the same time not making compromises in terms of the values we advocate but rather looking for shared interest and building trust and cooperation. Peacebuilding and dealing with the past cannot be carried out by a handful of citizens’ initiatives and groups for peace and human rights, they can set an example, create an initiative, but the

process must be a lot broader in scope. For lack of public support, it seems to me that many who are committed to encouraging the process of dealing with the past fall into a trap of building an image of enemies and frequently enter the role of a victim themselves and a role of the lone righteous in a society in which immorality prevails. When this happens, it couldn't be called productive in terms of the very goal of the work they do.

However senseless fighting the windmills may seem at times, once 'patriotism' justifying crime and glorifying one people whilst belittling another is condemned, the potential for building a broad social alliance in peacebuilding and dealing with the past is huge for one simple reason. Namely, people who do not want to see themselves as unjust and immoral, even when they advocate ideas that imperil other groups, they are not aware of it or try to justify it by equal treatment ('they did the same to us'). Accusing and devaluing the ones who don't share our opinions will not attain the building of a broad alliance of support, this instead is achieved by communication and cooperation, and at the same time by transparently displaying all differences in attitudes and making them the object of communication, not running away from conflicts but rather working on them constructively.

Working with the veterans from the wars from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia and Montenegro I could clearly recognise that the motives of a vast majority of them (apart from a couple of dishonourable exceptions) were to fight for something they had perceived as just at the time. If it is easy for us to understand the motives of a person whose home and family were directly endangered to get actively involved in warfare, it seems more difficult in the case of the others. Still, their motives were 'to defend my own people', their country, their extended family, the ideal of freedom. I have never directly heard or sensed in a single person that they had gone to the war in order to commit crimes, to conquer territories and exile people, even though after the war many have realised that they had been in the service of the machinery that was doing exactly that.

When we condemn the actions of that machinery or those machineries we cannot put all people, who had found themselves in them, in a single bracket, and more than that we cannot judge them as such today. Those who have



objective criminal responsibility should and must be brought to justice for it, and let us leave people room to change. They carry the burden of responsibility that belongs to them and it would be good to support those who are ready to accept the responsibility and to act differently today in accordance with it.

The influence of the former soldiers, through their legitimacy, is very strong on different sides, and along with that potential they also have a great responsibility of acting today in such a way as to prevent this evil from ever happening again. People should be given a chance, and as I have seen through the work with the veterans, many do not want to lose that chance.

Acting from the position of the moral who recognised the evil that was about to happen and publicly stood to oppose it is of no great help today, and when you put yourself on the pedestal for those reasons whilst slighting others for having been 'naïve and stupid' is very selfish, and from the perspective of peacebuilding, also stupid, i.e. counterproductive. I have to emphasise that with this I do not advocate the position that any attitude is fine and should be respected, but I distinguish between conflicting opinions and giving oneself the right to judge others and characterise them, especially when projecting it on entire groups. On the contrary, my standpoint is that reacting and acting against chauvinist ideas is necessary and that it is this very citizens' readiness to stand up against such ideas in alert and resolute ways that reflects the degree of 'mental health' of society itself.





work with participants of the war



# Veterans in Peacebuilding<sup>1</sup>

Vladan Beara  
Predrag Miljanović

## Introduction

During the fallout of SFRY and wars in the region of this country, especially after the completion of the bombing of SR Yugoslavia by the NATO forces in June 1999, we faced the existence of a large number of traumatised people who came to us, as well as psychiatrists and psychologists, seeking psychological assistance. The waiting rooms were crowded by lost, anxiety ridden people who expected not only someone to listen to them and understand them, but also to help them alleviate the apprehension that flooded them. The war was over, the armies receded from Kosovo, NATO soldiers entered Kosovo and Serbian ones celebrated ‘victory over the aggressor’, as the controlled media would have interpreted it. In fact, they celebrated that they lived to see the end of the war

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- 1 The text before you is comprised of the parts of the book *Where have you been, my son?* by Vladan Beara and Predrag Miljanović, addressing the problem of wartime trauma in the former participants of the wars and the possibilities of their contribution to peacebuilding. Courtesy of the authors of the book, we have reproduced some of its parts which we are certain can significantly contribute to a better understanding of the problems that war veterans face, and the importance of their inclusion in the processes of peacebuilding and dealing with the past in the region of the former Yugoslavia.

The activities of The Centre for War Trauma of Novi Sad (Association for Mental Health Protection of War Veterans and Victims of Wars 1991-1999) are certainly among the group of pioneer initiatives in providing psycho-social support to veterans from Serbia and Kosovo, affected by post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In the entire region of the former Yugoslavia there is next to no readiness of state institutions to address this problem, and therefore this type of initiative gains even more significance and represents a very important support for peace activities that also strive to affirm and encourage a more active inclusion of the population of veterans in peace processes. For the very reason that we consider the work on healing the trauma to be peace work at the same time, we are very glad to have the opportunity to convey at least a part of their rich experience. (editor’s note)

in one piece, and then return home. For many Serbian soldiers, the result was more than defeating: during the ten years, some of them took part in some of the five lost wars: Slovenia in 1991, Croatia 1991–1995, Bosnia 1992–1995, Kosovo 1998–1999, NATO 1999.

Following the end of the bombing, in June 1999, a group of psychologists and psychiatrists from Novi Sad founded the ‘Society for the Protection of Mental Health of War Veterans and Victims of Wars 1991-1999’. The society was founded with the goal of providing psychological assistance free of charge to war veterans, refugees and all civil victims of wars in the region of SFR Yugoslavia. We have noted that there was a large number of war traumatised people who had no one to turn to for adequate psychological-counselling help. A classic medication based psychiatry service was neither trained nor motivated to provide this type of assistance. A psychiatrist in a medical institution has a maximum of fifteen minutes per patient and uses them primarily for diagnostic purposes and in order to adjust the dosage of medication. On the other hand, many psychiatrists and psychologists have found themselves under the influence of the burn out syndrome, having lived in Serbia during the past ten years, and so were not in a position to provide adequate counselling assistance to people traumatised by wars. Humanitarian organisations provided help primarily for refugees, as well as women and children who were traumatised, whereas on the other hand they avoided any sort of contact with men traumatised by wars, i.e. war veterans. War veterans are a population that many identify as war criminals in and of themselves, and thus any type of assistance to these people is understood as a peril to the credibility of the organisation trying to help them. Participants of the wars, the men, are left to their own devices and those of their families. They try to adapt to peace conditions, and the difficulties and frustration they encounter during this are, as a rule, amortised by their families who suffer along with them. These people, if they largely fail to adapt to the peacetime environment, turn to alcohol, drugs, criminal activities, and can ultimately turn to terrorist activities, individually or as a part of a group.

In Serbia and Montenegro (provisionally!) there are more than 400,000 men, participants of the wars, as well as populations of bombarded towns

and villages, of whom 10–15 % exhibit signs of being traumatised (which is a conservative percentage), and many of them are at the same time unemployed, are military wartime invalids, with no family or with a significantly damaged family environment.

### **Emotions of a traumatised veteran – when they return from the war**

Always, and at all meridians, trauma has the following emotions as its accompanying elements: guilt, depression with self pity, anxiety, hatred, anger, shame. I will elaborate on some parts of my experience with working with veterans.

**Guilt** is primarily related to something immoral that the veteran did or to something morally just that the veteran failed to do. Guilt is often seen among the veterans if they have been through situations of battle, for example, in which their comrades died. That is when they often accuse themselves of having had to do this or that, and had they done this instead of that, the situation would have looked differently... Sometimes the guilt is linked to situations in which they killed someone. One veteran who was in Vukovar, as a nineteen year old boy during his military service, killed a Croatian soldier in close combat and hasn't been sober for twelve years since that moment. Some veterans feel guilt for having taken part in immoral activities, such as torturing prisoners, raping them or desecrating corpses. A veteran felt horrendous guilt for having taken part in a football-like game, where a severed human head was used as a 'ball'. Some of the veterans feel guilt because they witnessed something, for having let something happen, for not having had reacted differently. Many veterans, the victims, have a feeling of guilt for having let something happen to them.

Feelings of guilt are often displayed by veterans in Serbia, when they display aggression towards their children, their wives, their friends, in situations when they feel such aggression hasn't been deserved. A veteran once felt guilt when he, after a psychotherapy session, started to laugh after many years of not having done so. After that, an intense feeling of guilt ensued, followed by these thoughts: 'These people were killed, and here you are, laughing...'. Some veterans begin to feel guilty when they experience improvement during a session because: '... How can I not feel guilt after all that happened?! Only now am I a proper bastard!'

The traumatised veterans are frequently hypersensitive; they have 'short fuse' and react with impulsive aggression towards their wives or children for insignificant reasons. A veteran once came to therapy after he had taken his child in his arms who was crying incessantly, and threw it on the bed. Such feelings of guilt are encountered by almost all traumatised veterans in Serbia, except in cases of some forms of personality disorders.

A colleague from Israel once asked whether there was the feeling of guilt among the veterans in Serbia for the suffering and misery of the innocent. We think that a large number of war veterans in Serbia feel that those who tried to 'forcedly carry out secession and exterminate Serbian people in their territories' are the ones to be held responsible for the wars, and they feel the guilt on an individual level for what they personally did or failed to do. The feeling of 'collective' guilt is encountered in Serbia among those people who feel the Serbian side is responsible for the wars and that the Serbian side should by no means have done it.

**Being depressed** is the sense of the world being unjust and the emotion accompanying it. Depression is, we would say, a dominant emotion among the traumatised veterans. Most frequently experienced is the feeling of injustice related to the sense that 'everyone committed crimes in the war, and we the Serbs are the only ones to be accused', or '... we never killed women and children, and they did, and yet now it is us going to The Hague and they never';... or 'the Croats got help in ethnically cleansing Croatia from the Serbs, Albanians were helped in ethnically cleansing Kosovo, and yet it is us who are tried in The Hague for ethnic cleansing'... The traumatised people expect the culprits to be punished for their crimes, but they have the feeling that other sides avoided the punishment, and that it is only their people who are being punished. It is interesting to note that many Croatian veterans have the exact same feeling, believing that Serbs are turned a blind eye to, and that it is only them, the Croats, who are tried in The Hague. The sense of depression emerges here as a consequence of not being able to stand the injustice of the world and slighting living in such a world. It is often: 'Poor me, the world is treating me so unfairly.



The sense of injustice is often linked to the feeling that their wartime merits are not understood and not valued. Having returned from the war, many veterans expect their suffering to be rewarded, or at least 'adequately treated, with respect'. Instead, they encounter their suffering being treated as their personal matter, and society doesn't seem to care much about them. Not only are they not rewarded, but also they are often unable to realise even what they are entitled to by law. Sometimes they are involved in court procedures with institutions contesting their degree of disability, which they experience as major injustice. Some veterans have lost their jobs. A mobilised reserve soldier, a baker, was wounded in the war in his right arm. He remained disabled. When he recovered, he learned that he was fired from the bakery he worked with, because 'who ever wants a baker who is not able to bake bread'. The veteran, a young man of twenty three, a wounded person, says: 'What do I have of life – I can't get a job as a disabled person, I can't find a girlfriend as a disabled person, what's left for me to expect...?'

Some veterans remained disabled and are still at the rehabilitation centre in Stari Slankamen, because they have nowhere to return to, and it's been twelve years now.

Depression can also ensue as a consequence of self-denigration, belittling or humiliating oneself for what has happened to them. Wounded veterans often tend to see themselves as less worthy because of something, or even to discount themselves as human beings. It often happens that they say: 'What am I now, a freak...' and the like. A man who thinks of himself as a freak feels depressed. Self denigration comes from various failures, especially in terms of situations they could easily control before and now they fail to do so, due to their inability to calm down, control themselves and the like. Self denigration often happens after being rejected by families, loved ones, friends, or even persons they don't even know.

**Hatred** is usually linked to enemies who have perpetrated all sorts of crimes in the war, but can also be displayed towards members of their own side if their conduct was 'unjust, immoral, improper...' Hatred is felt towards people you no longer see as people but as animals who deserve to be destroyed and

exterminated. Veterans sometimes hate them for their having killed someone of theirs, for having tortured them when they were their prisoners or for having come across their atrocities. A veteran, with profound hatred towards Croats, 'opens' up within the group after a while and tells of a case from a burned and looted Serbian village in Croatia, where they found a child nailed to a door. Another veteran, a member of the Serbian special forces from Kosovo, profoundly hates the Albanians. He says they found devices for torturing prisoners in a cellar of a house in an Albanian village. The veteran says: 'I haven't imprisoned a single Albanian since'. Another Serbian veteran, filled with hatred towards Albanians, says: 'It once happened that they left a child in a cradle and fled from us. We approached, took the child, only to find that the cradle was mined. Everyone in the room died. I have hated them ever since and I would kill the lot of them, seeing as how they are capable of doing such things, sacrificing their own children only to conquer us'.

Hatred is felt for someone who is no longer perceived as a human being, who is viewed as a beast, a villain, for what they do, think or speak and because they are like that, we have the right and a duty to destroy them. Some veterans felt hatred towards the murdered Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić and the Republic Government, because they saw them as a traitors' government cooperating with The Hague, getting ready to extradite them all. Unfortunately, many traumatised veterans rejoiced, and some of them even celebrated, when the Prime Minister was killed.

**Feeling hurt** is a feeling for people who are considered to have belittled, humiliated, tricked us and made fools out of us with their actions. War veterans often feel hurt by the politicians, who they believe have dragged them into the conflict, and now wash their hands and deliver them to The Hague; they started the war and then signed 'capitulation' at the negotiators' table. Some veterans feel hurt by their compatriots who avoided being drafted and participating in the wars. These veterans reason: 'While we were fighting in the war for them, they were developing their businesses, getting rich. Now they have it all and laugh at us, at us who are torn to pieces...'

**Anxiety** and tension felt by the traumatised veterans is usually related to fear of losing control if the tension increases. Then, the veteran feels, they can lose control and thus, through uncontrollable behaviour, they can hurt someone. Also, a fear of going mad is often encountered, because they recognise the tension within them as a sign of approaching madness. Our experience, as well as the experiences of our colleagues from the Military Medical Academy from Belgrade, tells us that the dominant issues of traumatised persons is exhibited as anxiety disorder with panic attacks. After the completion of the NATO bombing, the number of people seeking help for symptoms of panic attacks has increased dramatically. Panic attacks happen at the time when the person believes they are in serious danger, that they have to calm down at once or else something horrible will occur – they will go insane, die, have a stroke, they'll be embarrassed and rejected by all. Therefore they panically try to calm down and seek help.

Some veterans fear that they will, if their tension increases, lose control over their behaviour and start to kill people around them, that they will attack some of the people living with them or harm themselves. Some veterans simply live in apprehension, anticipating the end of their abilities to endure the tension, when they will end up as inmates of a lunatic asylum, forgotten or rejected.

### **War veterans as pillars of peace**

*'Those who were never hungry don't know the true taste of bread'*

*Charles Bukowski*

Those who were never in a war don't know the true taste of peace, we could say. Even though it is sometimes believed that war veterans are warlike in their essence, we feel it is not as simple as that. A traumatised veteran is a person who values peace highly, but has great difficulties living in it normally after their experiences from the war. The wartime experience often moves a person to think of things that surround them, which they didn't even notice – such as a peacetime life. '... Before the war, I never even thought about peace...', a veteran says and continues: '...It's quite different after the war. Peace means more to you. When you've seen the things that had happened. A worst peace is still better than war'. 'We think little about peace because it goes without saying.

Only after it's been disturbed do we begin to think of how much peace means to us and how we can't do without it. When peace is disturbed, suffering and trouble ensue and that is when we see its significance'. . . 'How much time does it take for you to become upset, a second, and it takes hours for you to calm down. You tear down a bridge in fifteen seconds, and you build it for years. How much time does it take for you to restore peace? Before the war we never even thought about it. Had the subject been broached earlier, the war would never have happened. We only start to think when the consequences arrive. When you are already familiar with it'.

- There is no true peace after the war... Whether it's peace of mind... The consequences remain.
- When we've found ourselves in the war, our outlook on life inevitably changes. We learn what can happen to us, what we can endure, we face the transience of life, mass death; many lives are extinguished within a single day, you look the other way and the man standing next to you is gone, you don't know if you're going to have lunch with the same person you've had breakfast with. Sometimes you don't even finish your breakfast. You realise you have no control over something you thought you did have control over. Once you've managed to survive the war, you realise how much peace is worth. It would be good not to learn this from your own personal experience.

The voice of immediate participants of the war needs to be heard, because they know what war is, they have seen the suffering of people, their mates, they have lost parts of their bodies. Participants of the wars are not allowed to speak in any country. If that happened, there would be no wars to start with.

- Veterans are rightfully bitter because no one ever asks them anything. Every one of them needs to say that they want to be asked in order for them to realise they are not 'nobody'. It seems to me that people are afraid of hearing the accounts of war veterans, afraid of hearing how much of an evil that is. People are so traumatised that they fear hearing such experiences. Only the person who has tasted a hot chilly pepper can explain it.

## Crime and punishment

**Complexity of our wars as phenomena. Who is it creating the true image?**

**Who is it who knows the complete truth?**

'People, let's punish the crime only because it is a crime, not only because it is a condition for accessing Europe' – a man once said.

The wars that were led in the region of the western Balkans from 1991 through to 1999 can hardly be viewed in their entirety and thus evaluated properly. People usually tend to judge wars on the bases of the information that they have. It is usually then that they make their judgement, the judgement that is always and necessarily limited, and only after that do they search not for facts that would check that judgement, examine it, but rather those that would confirm it as accurate. That is when they receive the information from the war selectively and fiercely defend their standpoint from any critical questioning. Sometimes they are prepared to kill everyone who does not feel the same – those who 'vilify and lie'. Thus you can see that many people, who at the start of the wars and under the influence of nationalist propaganda, concluded that Serbs are entirely just, that they only defend themselves and don't harm anyone (good guys), simply neglected the masses of facts speaking against this for a long time during the war and after it. They haven't taken into consideration the numerous prisoners' camps, nor Srebrenica, Ovčara and other massacres; burnt down villages, devastated cities, the looted and the killed... In the same way, those who have perceived the Serbian side as the "editor in chief" of these wars, in other words as the 'bad guys', have also selectively adopted information that corroborated their thesis of Serbs as bad guys, and simply overlooked the information on the nationalist strivings of other peoples, of massacres committed against Serbs, of hundreds of thousands of refugees, of the tortured prisoners of Lora, of the killed civilians of Gospić, Bilogora, Knin, Kupres, Kravica and other villages around Srebrenica... All of them feverishly clung to their own conclusions and strived to maintain their judgement – as if letting go of it would mean letting go of one's own self.

People who try to speak about the war from a broad a frame of reference as possible, sooner or later face being perceived as radical nationalists by some, and as national traitors by others. This is not only a trait of the uneducated, but also of some highly educated collocutors. Many people tend to reject those who say anything different, to place them in a category that discredits them as speakers and sever ties with them before they get to know their standpoint in more detail.

Working on psychotherapy with participants of the wars, you get to hear of various experiences that expand your frame of reference and help you learn the reality more broadly and more completely. The problem lies in the fact that this process is often hurtful and doesn't do much for a peaceful night's sleep. But in turn you learn that whatever you have learned about the war is modest and insufficient for you to be able to claim you know the phenomenon of the war.

### **Obstacles to reconciliation**

There have been innumerable crimes in the region of the western Balkans. You will never learn about the majority of them. Some mass crimes were unveiled, some culprits will be tried, and many of the 'smaller fish' will probably pass unnoticed.

Many crimes were committed with great atrocity and sadistic hatred; hatred that is transgenerationally passed from one generation to another, for centuries. In these regions, children grew up believing that 'if we don't get them first, they will kill us all, just as they did that time in the war...' These are the beliefs people carry from their childhood, inherited from their grandmothers and grandfathers, more often than not themselves the traumatised victims or even participants of massacres.

There are many crimes that were never punished, and for this reason there are not healthy foundations for reconciliation; and instead, under the cover of the communist ideology of brotherhood and unity, the remembrance of a traumatic past was attempted to be repressed. The punishments for massacres carried out by the communists were often not even legally founded and justly measured punishments, but were instead massacres against those disagreeing politically and against class enemies. Many were punished unjustly, in order to be able to nationalise their properties more easily.

Crimes were perpetrated out of hatred and revenge, most frequently, often out of fear, and often under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Some people simply had the chance to manifest their psychopathic leanings and jumped at it.

Reconciliation is a long and difficult process. There are many obstacles in this path; I will name a few that I consider to be very important, and overcoming them – essential.

- 1. The matter of truth about the war** – Almost all participants in the war, and many who think and speak about the war, in fact strive to make their view of the war affirmed as the only and indisputable one. In order for this their judgement and experience to be accepted by both ‘ours’ and ‘their’ sides. Thus, it is a logical consequence of the fact that people who are not heard are the ones talking about the war. To make things even more difficult to resolve, it seems that the two basic epistemologies among many people are – narcissistic and authoritarian ones. The narcissistic epistemology can be reduced to: ‘A thing is true because I have experienced it or concluded so’; according to it, everything that is not a part of my experience I don’t consider to be of any importance. The authoritarian epistemology could be reduced to: ‘A thing is true if an authority says it is true’, and therefore, everything that is not said by a leader, a professor or some x–y is not relevant’. People most frequently make a judgement about the war, and then selectively pay attention to the facts that will confirm their judgement, and avoid the ones to test it. The prerequisite for reconciliation is, therefore, accepting the standpoint of there being many various ‘truths’ about the war and that it is important to set one of them out and say: ‘This is the right one and the others are wrong’. Accepting different experiences and views on what had happened is a prerequisite for a more tolerant dialogue.
- 2. The matter of humanity** – The psychological preparation of a population for a war entails propaganda activities. Through propaganda, the dehumanisation of adversaries takes place. Its goal is to motivate one’s own population to kill. You are not allowed to kill a person, but you are allowed to kill an ‘ustasha, chetnik, a commie, a baliya, the beasts...’ Members of the

other side are devoid of the status of human beings and they are represented as non-humans, beasts, villains. In fact, not only is one allowed to kill such creatures, not only is it good, but there is also a duty to do so. Reconciliation entails restoring the humanity of those we need to be reconciled with.

Forgiving the 'sins' entails restoring the image of another as a human being, regardless of what they have done. Some people have committed crimes, but there are still just people who have done something. Their act makes them candidates for punishment or medical treatment, but does not make them devoid of humanity. After all, haven't we been taught for thousands of years that the ability to perpetrate crimes belongs only to humans.

**3. Individualisation of responsibility and punishment** – The standpoint that some people have perpetrated X or Y, whereas others haven't, and by justly punishing the former, it makes it possible to realise that the justice has been met. That the enclosed gestalt is an enclosed whole.

**4. Emotional problems – guilt** – Guilt as an emotion hinders the healthy process of overcoming trauma and accepting responsibility for what has been done. It is a feeling that a person has when they believe they should (under no circumstances) have allowed themselves to do something, and since they have, they are evil and bad, a damned one who deserves to be punished. A person who imposes guilt on themselves usually:

- tends to punish themselves, over and over again, in order to relieve the painful feeling
- avoids all contact with the victim and thus misses the opportunity to repair the damage
- seeks contact with the victim, but in order to redeem themselves; thus, not to repair the damage, but to extort, receive forgiveness, in order to relieve the painful feeling of guilty conscience.
- drinks in excess, takes drugs and various medications in order to alleviate the painful feeling
- concludes they are bad, that they will never change and will continue to act the same

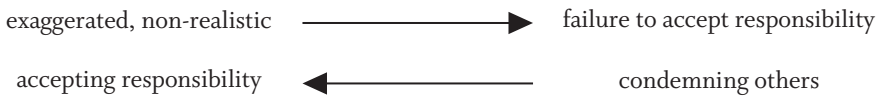


- attacks the victim all over again, transforms the guilt into hatred on the principle that: ‘It’s not me who is bad, it’s you who is bad for **constantly** imposing the feeling of guilt upon me’.

These are some of the reasons for which I consider the feeling of guilt to be a bad foundation for overcoming a traumatic experience and establishing good neighbourly relations. Feelings of guilt either lead to self-destructive or destructive activities. Contrary to that, feelings of regret are constructive and can lead to a healthy reconciliation. With feelings of regret, a person knows that it was their actions that were bad, not they as a person, and they are thus more prepared to work on themselves in order to prevent it from ever happening again. The feeling of regret makes it possible for a person to accept responsibility for what they have done. The feeling of regret and accepting responsibility can be described by the words: ‘Yes, I did that, I am sorry for that, but that doesn’t make me non-human. I wish to repair the damage and I am trying not to ever do it again’. Regret makes it possible to see one’s own responsibility in more realistic terms and that of the other agents in the situation.

It is thus that the damage can be settled, that the damaged ones can be helped, instead of seeking redemption. Regret makes it possible for a person to apologize, ask for forgiveness, instead of begging, mourning and making non-realistic promises with the sole goal of relieving the painful and heavy condition.

Regret is constructive because instead of punishing oneself with punishments with suffering, the person takes more care of compensating for the damages and changing one’s behaviour in the future. The guilt oscillates between:



There certainly are more hindering factors, but an attempt to elaborate on all of them requires a more serious study than this text.



VI

towards reconciliation



# Trauma and Reconciliation

Amela Puljek-Shank

## Introduction

I cannot sleep. I see things all the time in front of my eyes – the fighting, blood, the peoples' faces. I am scared. It is this fear that lingers in my head and my mind and I just cannot shake it. The war ended eleven years ago but I am basically still at war.

I have lost eleven family members in the war and I cannot stand or talk to people from the enemy side – I truly and fully hate them. I do not know if I will feel happy again.

I had to learn how to survive and to listen very carefully where the shells are going to land. I needed to fight for water and food on top of trying to stay alive. This state of total tension lasted for four long years and living in fear and rage at the same time destroyed my soul and my heart. I really became like an animal. All of my thinking and reactions were decreased to the simple command – to survive. Finally, when the war was over, I felt so empty, so hollow that I wanted to die. Twelve years after the war I am still trying to find the meaning in life. It is better than in the first years after the war but I am working very hard in trying to stay normal and sane.

These are some of the experiences that I had the privilege to hear as I lead training and teaching sessions on Trauma Awareness and Reconciliation. All of the participants came from countries where violence raged for decades and for many of them the teaching offered a new learning, that their thoughts and reactions that they have expressed above, were normal responses to abnormal situation (STAR Manual, 2002 and Trauma Awareness and Transformation Manual, 2004). All of them were deeply traumatized and needed a safe environment to heal their traumas. For the first time many of them recognized

that they were dealing with traumatic experiences that changed them forever. These experiences made them feel that at that moment they could not live with the enemy, could not talk to the enemy and could only think of getting revenging upon the enemy. The thought of any kind of contact and even possible reconciliation was not possible. There was a complete destruction of human relationship and deep mistrust that was not possible to bridge.

Something needed to happen for the healing and restoration of relationships to take place. What needed to take place was a healing of the human heart, mind and soul of the individuals and groups that survived violent conflict. Healing traumas is in many ways a life-long experience and it is a commitment and matter of personal choice – both for an individual and groups. The decision to heal does not come naturally and it needs to become intentional work for many years and for many generations to come. It is not natural since the natural reaction to the pain and hurt is either to strike back or to flee. In either case the traumatic experience teaches us that we cannot trust those who hurt us and therefore we are on guard and ready to strike back.

In the training and teaching sessions there were the questions: ‘What kind of society do we want to live in?; Where do I want my children to grow up and how do I want my children to grow up?; Do I want to take revenge and hurt the other, even kill the other so that I can live in peace?; Is this going to bring the peace that I am longing for and safety and security as well?’. These questions outlined the reality of the healing process – in order to break the cycle of violence one needs to take a risk and embark on a journey of healing and possible reconciliation. This journey is really a journey that is not straight, it is difficult, painful and hurtful in many ways. It is a journey less traveled and one of the most difficult journeys in life to embark upon. I wrote ‘possible reconciliation’ since many victims do not choose to reconcile but they rather choose the process of healing because they want to get better. Later in the healing journey the thought of possible reconciliation might come up and that leads again into another journey that brings with itself many new and unexpected journeys. This road again is a matter of personal choice and it is a process as well – that might last for a whole life. So, both journeys, the journey

of trauma healing and the journey of reconciliation are separate but also joined; they are matter of personal choice and they are a process. They can be done separately without ever touching one another but then, I dare say, we never fully become healed and reconciled. Both journeys are intertwined.

### **The volcano, destruction and rebirth**

A metaphor that comes to mind when thinking about trauma is a picture of a volcano eruption. Before the eruption, the volcano is working within – the fire is active, lava is hot and it is constantly boiling. There is always a certain kind of volcanic activity present (and this is an active volcano we are talking about) that builds up pressure within. After some time this pressure fills all the space within the volcano and is bursting with the need to ‘spend’ the pressure. After a while this constant level of energy, that cannot be ‘spent’, collects within the volcano, within a closed space, and it starts to build up to the point that it brings an eruption. The eruption of the volcano is very dangerous and destructive – it burns everything on the ground and life is gone. Everything is gray, dark and burnt. The place where lava is present is hot and a lot of poisonous gases are emitted into the air. The place becomes poisonous and death and destruction prevails.

When looking at this picture the first thing that comes to one’s mind is the fact that there will be no life in this place again. Destruction and death prevail. However, after a certain time, the cooled lava and ashes turn into fertile ground that together with rain feed the soil and help to create life again. The seeds of the vegetation that have survived (by some miracle) start to sprout again and bring to life lusher and greener fields and vegetation than before. A place of death and destruction becomes a place of rebirth and life.

Now let’s take this picture closer to ourselves and our life experiences. Many of us had very negative and hurtful traumatic life experiences and many of us found a way to live through these experiences, to survive them and find new meaning in life. After these experiences we have become different people – we had changed forever. We saw life and ourselves in a different light. Like in the volcano’s example, destruction was severe – the hurt and suffering brought excruciating pain. We felt that we would never be able to live again and that

there is no reason to hope and love. However, somewhere deep inside of us, the seeds of life were not destroyed and despite our desire they started pushing us to learn and live again – to hope and love. These seeds helped us to heal and find new meaning in life as well as a new sense of purpose. We rose from the ashes of volcanic activity (from its poisonous gases and destruction) and somehow without our knowing how, hope and love poured the rain of life over us and we rose from the dead – we started to learn how to live again.

The word trauma or traumatic experience is a very loaded word. There are many assumptions about this word – the person is not normal, is crazy, not able to handle the difficulties or not able to get over it. These perceptions create stigma and prejudice for those who are struggling with trauma which in turn helps sufferers to perceive their problems as something abnormal and as personal weakness on their part. However, traumatic experiences have been present in peoples' lives throughout the centuries and are nothing new or unheard of. The usual ways of dealing with the traumatic experience were to not talk about it, deny it and repress it or try to forget about it. This way of dealing with the traumatic experience is common across cultures. Traumatic experiences are ones that individuals or groups have survived and they came as a result of violent conflict, rape, physical violence, sexual violence, refugee life, childhood abuse, natural disasters and other life experiences. A traumatic experience creates traumatic stress that is a surprising event of piercing intensity that is outside the range of usual human experience that would frighten almost everyone (Bartsch, 1996).

Returning to our volcano metaphor, in order to deal and heal our trauma we need to work through our traumatic experience. There are two ways of walking through trauma. The first one is remembering and repeating the story of traumatic experience over and over again in which the pain and suffering are locked and do not have a way of getting out of the person or a groups' body, mind and soul. A person and a group are trapped in this cycle that can go on for a long time and sometimes even forever. In this case the trauma creates negative energy that recycles itself within a person or group in a way that creates an eruption which is violent and destructive. We all know people and groups who have not recovered from the traumatic experience(s) and thus were never able to



get out of this vicious cycle. They got stuck in their pain and there was no way out of it. A violent eruption ended in conflict or war that in turn fed the violence back which would erupt into violence again – and the cycle goes on where we re-traumatize ourselves and thus the violence continues.

A second way of working on traumatic experience calls for healing of trauma in a very holistic way. It calls for healing of our mind, body and soul. This requires serious work and dedication on the part of an individual and a group and it becomes a *personal* choice on an individual and group level to heal the trauma instead of repeating the trauma through generations. This personal decision does not drop out of a clear sky. Instead, it comes through a process of “having enough” of violence and destruction. It comes through the desire to become human again that can live in harmony with ourselves and with others. Once the choice has been made it becomes clear that this will be a long process that can last for years; it is not quick and it does not give fast results. This process can last for twenty, thirty or more years and it requires dedication, commitment, trust and honesty. Above all it requires honesty with oneself and eventually with the other. In this process we are changed and we will never be the same people again. This process also requires practice which means that we continue to practice the process of healing through our lives no matter what life brings along.

Figure one shows the cycle of forgiveness and reconciliation done by Olga Botcharova. It is very helpful to look at this model since it gives us the necessary steps for the process of reconciliation to begin. It is important to understand that this model is not engraved in stone so to speak. It can be expanded, added to – according to our own group or personal experience, according to our own cultural and historical characteristics. What is very useful about this model is that it has two cycles – the first cycle is called Seven Steps to Revenge and the other cycle is called Seven Steps to Forgiveness. It is important to emphasize that trauma healing is both a decision and a process; that trauma healing is not unidirectional and the key is that we have a choice – meaning that we are the ones to decide if we want to heal our trauma and embark on the journey of forgiveness and reconciliation (Good Sider, 2001).

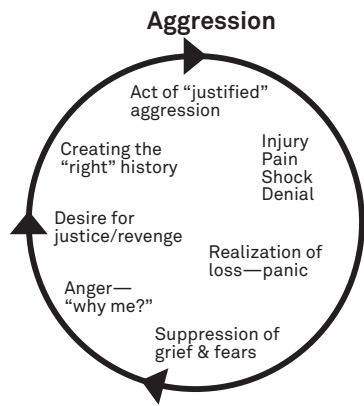


Figure 1: Seven Steps to Revenge – Source: Botcharova (2001)

In the first cycle Botcharova has outlined the seven steps that each of us find in ourselves when we are injured, or if an act of aggression has been done to us.

his inner cycle outlines our human nature – it outlines the way we naturally react when we are threatened and when our and the life of dear ones is at stake. Our natural reaction to an act of aggression is to act defensively in order to protect ourselves. The more dangerous the situation is, the more we are locked in the mode of defensiveness. Logical thinking does not function and what is leading the mode of defense are our instincts – we feel that we are in danger and therefore we need to protect ourselves. Also, the deeper the injury is, the deeper the pain is, and thus we feel very strongly to take revenge and hurt the other back in the same way that we have been hurt by them. In order to be able to hurt the other we dehumanize the other and we create an explanation and a story as to why do we have the right to do an act of aggression to the other, that by this time has become our enemy. Thus, the cycle stays closed because we were hurt and to protect ourselves we hurt the enemy back, who in turn to protect themselves, hurt us and thus the cycle goes on for generations and centuries.

What is important to be understood here, for all of us who have been hurt and suffered major losses and traumas in our lives, is that it is natural to feel injury and pain; it is natural to suppress our losses and fears so that we can survive in the middle of a dangerous situation; it is also natural to feel a desire for justice and revenge; it is also natural to justify revenge to ourselves. When I say natural I mean that this is a very defensive mode of thinking that helped us to survive and be able to continue living. It is natural to feel the above named things and dream of revenge. Many times victims need to go through the cycle over and over again in order to understand what happened to them and why. We all need to tell our stories to ourselves and others many times – in this way we are trying to understand what we have survived, what we have lost. We are trying to make sense of our pain and we are trying to put it in a proper place in our hearts and heads.

The danger of this closed cycle is that one can get stuck in it. A victim can very easily become an aggressor and continue the cycle for generations to come without the possibility of this cycle of ever being broken. We become locked into our own pain and suffering and we are not being able to come out of it. We cannot see anything else but injury and loss. We get stuck in “egoism of victimization” (Mack, 1990). What keeps us in this cycle is our belief that since we have been hurt we have the right to hurt others and thus we create narratives that would help us justify hurting others. In order to be capable of hurting or even killing the other we need to create a good, valid reason for doing this. This is why we create “right conflict narratives” so that we can ease our conscience. We are not able to see beyond our pain, we are not taking responsibility for hurting others and we feel little guilt about committing violence to the other (STAR Manual, 2001).

This is the moment when we lose our humanness and dehumanize ourselves. This is the moment when our trauma, pain and suffering take control over us and when we lose a sense of belonging, self-respect and dignity. This is the moment when we completely stop recognizing the sacredness of our own life. This is when we become a beast and thus an enemy to our enemy who in turn dehumanized us as well. Rafael Moses has described this state in the following words: “Dehumanization, then is a state in which one human being

or group so brutalizes the others that the victim loses self-respect and human dignity. I postulate that the dehumanizer must already have lost the quality of humanness – and, therefore, of self-respect and human dignity. He could not carry dehumanizing acts otherwise... I believe that in the individual must have inter-psyche readiness to be dehumanized in order to dehumanize another; this cannot happen however, unless certain process in the large group (often nation) paves the way for it (Moses, 1990)". So, the cycle is closed and thus the cycle of violence is created.

### **The way out**

However, I believe that humans are created with brains for a reason. We are capable of "higher" thinking – meaning that we are not only bound to be led by our instincts, our fears, and our pain. We have been granted the gift of reason and thinking that has the strength to pull itself up above the pain and suffering and be able to see that inflicting injury and pain unto others is not the solution either. All of us have this powerful gift that helps us to learn that by hurting and killing the other we are destroying ourselves as well. This is when we ask ourselves what kind of life am I creating for myself and the future after me? Many of us learn that by hurting others our pain and trauma are not gone – they are continuing to be present and even deepen. In our minds and hearts we keep the memories of hurting the other and these are not fun pictures. When our conscience starts to bother us and when our heart is calling us to reevaluate the wrongs we have done this is the moment when we are starting to think how to get out of the cycle of violence, how to break this closed circle.

Botcharova offers us the way out – the next step is to one of mourning and expressing of grief. In this moment we acknowledge to ourselves, maybe for the first time, how badly we have been hurt and how much we have suffered. This is the time when we are naming our losses and deeply mourn and grieve for people, life lost, moments and memories. This is a very difficult step to take since it calls us to turn towards ourselves and heal our broken heart and soul. The focus is not on the enemy anymore, the focus is on us and our pain. In this moment we take control over our lives, where trauma and pain do not rule our

life anymore. To take the road of healing is very difficult and it requires courage and strength to carry the process through. During this time we need support, love, and understanding of those who are closest to us. We need people to support us in this process.

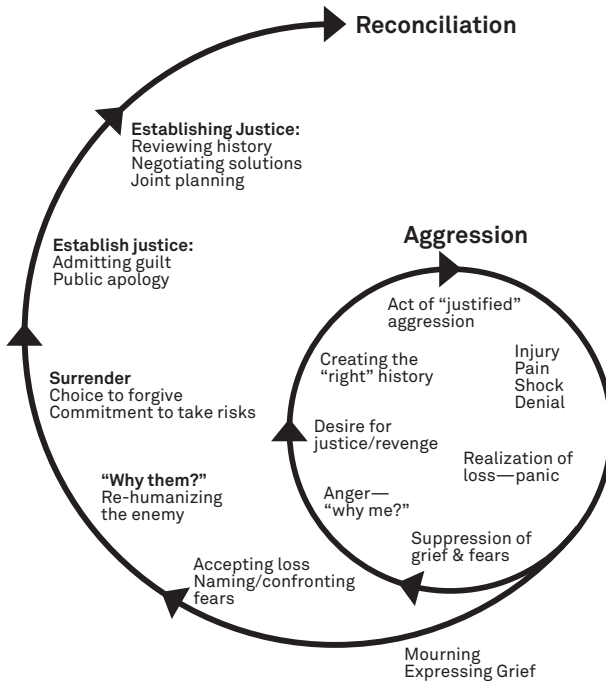


Figure 2: Seven Steps to Forgiveness (Botcharova, 2001)

One of the people, that I have worked, with told me that he chose the role of healing at first because he recognized that he was losing himself in his anger and hatred. His desire for revenge was so strong that it almost destroyed him – this was the only thing he was thinking about. In one sane moment he saw that

he was close to the edge of drowning and loosing his sanity – and getting totally lost in becoming a total beast that was bound only to destroy as many enemies as possible. In this sane moment he had in front of him a picture of what his life will look like and what he saw was total destruction of his soul and heart, an utter loneliness and separation from everything that is life-giving and joyful. In this moment (he could not even explain what gave him the strength) he walked away from the abyss of self destruction and decided to mourn what he has lost. He took the step out of cycle of violence. His explanation was that he did not want to destroy himself – he said that hatred was an acid that was eating his soul piece by piece until the moment that he could become “soul-less” – the man without a soul.

Many times when we take this step we do not think about how we want to reconcile with the enemy at some point in the future. The only thing that we think is that we want to save ourselves, as in this example. This journey, in many ways, is a spiritual one – the moment when we are restoring our soul, our own humanity. During this time we are learning about ourselves in a totally new way. We are learning who we have become in the worst moment of our lives. This is the moment when we meet our suffering and pain fully and meet with our trauma for the first time. Facing oneself with this is not fun and it takes a lot of courage to be present with ourselves. This is when we learn how to forgive ourselves and how to help ourselves heal. This is when we learn how to be compassionate to ourselves as well. We are starting to develop the discipline of forgiveness and reconciliation with ourselves.

### **The cycle of victim and perpetrator**

This chart very clearly outlines how each side – the victim and the perpetrator can get stuck in their cycles and also how each of them can become a victim or perpetrator. This chart has been helpful for me to understand how people are capable of committing such horrors and are still able to continue believing that what they have done essentially has been for the best of them as an individual or as a group. This chart also helped me in better understanding how somebody can become a perpetrator and that there is potential in each one of us to

become one. The danger is when we are not aware of this potential and let life circumstances make decisions for us. The cycle of the victim and perpetrator is simplified here, even though it is complex in itself in this chart. There are numerous other factors that contribute to our being stuck in one cycle or the other or in both (moving from one to the other at different times in life). Some of the factors are our family upbringing (what stories we have been told about the other – about the enemy), our social context where we group up, our belief system, our emotional and spiritual self-awareness, development and maturity.

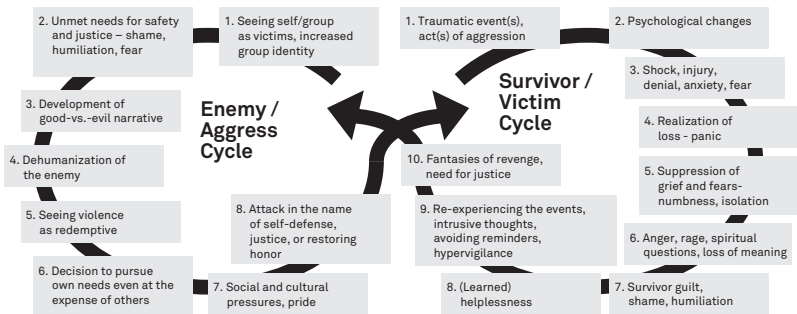


Figure 3: Enemy/Aggressor & Survivor/Victim Cycle (Yoder, 2005)

## The acceptance of traumatic experience

Accepting the traumatic experience does not mean that we are forgetting it. It is the acknowledgment of its existence and horridness that we cannot forget – and we should not forget, but what we are doing in this process is choosing how are we going to remember it and what are we going to do with this life experiences. Many people have the notion that if we accept and make peace with the traumatic experience that we decided to forget. We can only forget our trauma if we get amnesia – which happens to some victims since traumatic experience has been so horrific that in order to survive, the brain totally shuts down and victims do not remember at all their trauma and are not able to talk about it. It takes a lot of work and time with victims to be able to recall the

experience without going crazy. However, most of us remember what happened to us and the memory of it is not going to disappear, but our thinking about it and understanding of it will change.

The decision of what do we want to do with our traumatic experience is an important one – we make the decision to put it in the proper place in our heart and head and accept it as other life experiences. Once this is done we have to decide what to do with the knowledge that we have acquired – the experience and the unbelievable resilience of heart, mind and spirit. I deeply believe that we have the responsibility to share this knowledge with others – to help them in their healing process. The other reason why we need to share this knowledge with others is that we have succeeded to get out of the cycle of victim, we have survived our trauma and are now thriving. We have become wounded healers – the wounded healers of others. Wounded healers are those people who find new ‘meaning in their life, purpose and faith in or through traumatic experience. They take care of themselves and allow themselves to be taken care of. As a wounded healer we carry our wounds with us but do not inflict them on others. Rather we use them to help carry the burdens of others and enable them to heal’ (Bartsch, 1996).

Each time we help others in their healing process we consequently help ourselves – we heal our trauma even more and deeper. The natural question that comes up is “Do we get healed from our traumas?” I believe we do. When we are healed “once and for all” it is the moment when we become truly aware of suffering of others to the point that we feel moved to help. This is when we are able to bring ourselves to rise above our pain and suffering and be there for others. The moment when we fully realize and feel the suffering of others is the sacred moment in a person’s life. This moment is sacred for the precise reason of teaching us how to become more compassionate, loving and caring towards others. We move spiritually into very deep levels of our soul and learn how precious and sacred life is and how each (but really each) person has the right to live this life in peace. This is a deep spiritual change that makes better people of us – some of us for the first time learn what it means to truly love and care for the other even if we do not know the other.



The healing that has taken place does not happen only on a psychological level, but on a biological and spiritual level as well. The process of healing does not mean that we heal only our heart and mind but we need to heal our souls as well. All three areas need to embark on the journey of healing in order for a person to be healed. It is not possible to heal one area without the other two and achieve the complete healing. This is why the healing journey is very difficult and sometimes is a life-long commitment and process. In this process support of family and friends is essential as well as peoples' faith in God, or for those who do not believe in God, belief in love, or a better tomorrow, better something that gives hope and meaning. All of us believe in something and all of us deeply believe that we all deserve to live in peace. Traumatic experience at first becomes the curse but after the healing takes place it becomes a gift that teaches us how to live our life, how to love and care for others – even for our enemies. Once we come to this stage in our healing process we have gone full-circle. We have been *victimized* and after telling our stories we have moved to become *survivors* that are integrating our trauma into our life where we have acquired the knowledge and are embarking into the stage of *wounded healer* (Bartsch, 1996)". This is the moment when we have empowered ourselves and have taken control over our life and our traumatic experience. We have taken the power away from the perpetrator the moment when we have decided to heal our trauma regardless of the presence or absence of the perpetrator's apology. This is the moment when we have come out of the cycle of victim and are ready to ask ourselves the question "What next?".

### **Reconciliation – are you crazy?**

If we are about to create the truly full and honest reconciliation with others we need to address and work on trauma and reconciliation, separately and together at the same time. This is a paradox but as any paradox can be explained and justified to a certain extent and on the other extent it cannot be explained and justified. It can be justified from the prospective that if we would like to live in a peaceful society we do need to address and work on our traumas and move in the direction of reconciliation. This is easier said than done since most people

assume that working on trauma and reconciliation means sugar-coating the pain and suffering, bypassing the truth, being nice to each other and pretending as if nothing happened. In this case both sides end up being very civil and pleasant with one another and they continue to live side by side but not with each other – not together. We basically end up in the corner where, yes we know what the other side did to us or our group throughout the centuries, and yes we will never forget and as soon as we sense the possible danger we are all up and in arms (verbally and literally) defending ourselves and everything that is dear to us.

From the above perspective, the paradox of trauma and reconciliation cannot be justified since the possibility of loss and suffering is huge and it is only normal to defend oneself. I believe that Archbishop Tutu put it right “Reconciliation is not about being cozy; it is not about pretending that things were other than they were. Reconciliation based on falsehood, on not facing up to reality, is not true reconciliation and will not last (Chapman, 2001).” Reconciliation is a very loaded word. Many people will also say that reconciliation is not possible for the precise reasons of not being genuine, truthful and honest. There are many examples in the world between nations and people that worked on reconciliation and ended up in even deeper conflict. However, no matter how deep the conflicts are, deep down everybody would like to live, to see the day, to witness perfect reconciliation – the perfect moment of forgiveness and truth, the perfect moment of healing. We all ache in our bones for this moment to come and we are imagining that this perfect reconciliation is possible and real. We continue to believe in it despite the reality around us. There is something within us that forces us to believe it is possible to live life in the perfect peace, where the sheep and the wolf are lying together.

In order to achieve the perfect reconciliation that creates perfect peace, we need to practice. I have come to understand that reconciliation is not going to come by itself; it cannot be created out of thin air and out of nothing. For reconciliation to exist and become a real presence, a force that changes the order of the universe, it needs to be practiced, i.e. it needs to become reality. When I say practiced I mean that we need to learn how to do reconciliation. This means that we need to practice over and over again how to reconcile with ourselves

and others in order to carry the reconciliation through – until the end. To become “masters” of reconciliation we need to teach ourselves to be disciplined in this skill. I have learned (and I am continuing to learn) that this skill needs to be practiced on an ongoing basis. At first it is strange and unbelievable, and frightening as well. It requires us to hear the other, hear their pain and suffering, recognize the human in the other. This pushes us to start to see things in a different light, start to see the situation from the other’s perspective. This is when we start to develop a relationship, become connected with the other – our enemy. This is the time when we humanize our enemy and ourselves.

By recognizing that our enemy after all is a human being that deeply suffers and feels the pain and hurt as we do, we recognize the human in the enemy. Through this process we regain our own humanness back – we recognize the human in ourselves. The very moment when this recognition happens both, enemy and us, become human beings again. We gain this self-respect and dignity that both of us have lost. We are restored to the human family and in a very paradoxical way we have opened ourselves to another level of healing. The tricky thing here is that many of us believe that our enemies only become beasts – but not us. However, in every violent conflict from the moment when we are forced to think about hurting or killing other this is precise moment when we lose our humanness and dehumanize ourselves. So, having the strength for the first time to look the enemy in the eye forces us in many ways to look at ourselves – at our own responsibility, our own actions, prejudice and wrongs.

### **The deeper we go the messier it gets**

This is the process when we take responsibility for what we have done to the other and the other takes responsibility for the wrongs done to us. We both end up owning the wrongs, naming them, and apologizing. This is the moment when both sides start to develop trust towards the other – that the same pain and suffering would not be done unto us again, that history will not repeat itself. Also, this is when we recognize that we are not going to harm the other either. This is the place where we start to think about the future together with the enemy that in the process has ceased to be the enemy anymore. The person

or the group has ceased to be the enemy but it does not mean that has become our friend. This does not need to happen. What does need to happen is respect for the other (former enemy) that comes from deep within. With this respect we acknowledge that the other has right to live the life and when we fully recognizes the sacredness of the life in the other at the same time we recognize the same within ourselves. This is the moment of opening the door for making the peace with the other.

At some point in this healing journey, when we have healed enough and are able to look beyond ourselves and our pain, we start to notice our enemy. For the first time in our life we might be noticing that this enemy is suffering and hurting too. We are able to see this in our enemy because we were able to see our own pain and hurt. This is when we are able to feel compassion for the other. In this moment our enemy became human again – it is not a beast anymore.

All of these processes are very slow and gradual. Nothing happens all at once and sometimes it takes many years and decades to rebuild the human in ourselves and in the other. We literally rise up from the ashes. During this time we became capable of hearing the enemy's story. This is the moment when we embark on the road of forgiveness and maybe realize that we would like to reconcile with the enemy. Forgiveness in this moment represents a time in the journey when trauma does not have control over the victim's and offender's lives. Forgiveness is rarely a one-time event and it takes years to be completed. Both victims and offenders go through and revisit forgiveness in various ways at different times in their lives. This process is very dynamic and is always changing (Schmidt, 1995).

There are myths about forgiveness where for many people forgiving means forgetting; to forgive means to accept the offense; forgiveness is automatic; forgiving is a quick, one-time event and to forgive means the relationship is reconciled (Miller, 2000). Forgiveness is not something that can be forced or pushed. Forgiveness comes deep within us when we are ready to forgive. When we are forgiving we are ... acknowledging that remembering is essential for forgiveness; we are acknowledging that naming the abuse as wrong and

unacceptable is essential to forgiveness; we are acknowledging that anger, hatred and bitterness follow naturally from the abuse of power; we are acknowledging that forgiveness is a process and we acknowledge the distinction between forgiveness and reconciliation (Miller, 2000).

Distinction between forgiveness and reconciliation is that forgiveness is not conditional, it comes in at its own pace. This means that we forgive when we *desire* to forgive, not when somebody tells us to do so. The readiness to forgive happens when we have healed enough within ourselves so that our pain and suffering are not blocking our ability to see the life around us in a new light. In this moment our heart has caught up with our head – this means that heart and head are now walking at the same pace and they are not at odds with each other. The head is able to understand the heart and the heart is able to understand the head. Maybe for the first time in our healing process we are becoming a complete person. Trauma has the ability to split a person in half where one part of us wants to live a normal life and forget that we ever had any kind of traumatic event that took place in our lives. The other part of us just cannot get over what happened to us. If we do not work intentionally on healing our own trauma(s) these two states within ourselves will always be at war and will not bring peace to us that our soul is so much longing for. With the choice to heal our traumas we arrive to the stage in this process where head and heart are able to meet each other and accept each other as changed due to the experience that has taken place. We have become a new person and are able to accept our changed selves.

It was very helpful to read what Ron Kraybill has written on the topic of healing in his article “From Head to Heart: The Cycle of Reconciliation.” In his article he says:

People in conflict frequently wage an internal battle between head and heart. By “head” I mean their values and conscience; by “heart” I mean their emotions. People think they ought to be reconciled with others, but their hearts are not ready. Bystanders often ignore this internal split or do things that make it worse. Religious settings are especially hazardous. Well-meaning friends, pastors, even mediators respond in ways that strengthen

the “head” message, but ignore or disparage the cries of the heart... The key to enabling heart reconciliation is the knowledge that it is a process with a rhythm and dynamic of its own. To the brain’s concern with what ought to be, the heart responds with what is. The head functions like light in space – touch a switch and it’s there. The heart functions like a radiator heating a room – it takes time to get the job done. The head can set direction for the heart, but the heart must arrive at its own pace... True healing involves a unity of head and heart (Kraybill, 1988)

Is the process of healing done once we have forgiven those who have hurt us? Is the process done once the both sides have acknowledged the wrongdoings to each other? No, the process is not over and it continues. The other big word that both sides need to deal with is the question of justice. What kind of justice needs to happen to satisfy my need for right punishment? Is it jail time for those who hurt me, is it death of those who hurt me? Very often when we think of justice after the terrible trauma that we have survived we often think of all possible ways in which we could punish the other. The justice that we imagine is severe punishment (sometimes only the death of the perpetrator would be a just punishment) through which we would empty all our pain, hatred, anger and deep-down hurt. We would pour out all the poison that we have accumulated over the years of suffering. This just punishment would free us from all the hurt and we would be clean and empty from all the poison. We would be able to continue our life normally and we will be restored.

I would argue that restoration would not be complete; that it would not be a healing one and that we would be left with wounds that would every now and then open and cause pain. Why? Because we have not forgiven, we have not let go of trauma and we have not integrated the trauma into our life experience. We are still in the stage of mourning our losses and grieving. The moment we decide to forgive is the moment we have started to ask for a different kind of justice – not a retributive but a restorative one. The justice that we are asking for is asking from the perpetrator to take full responsibility for the wrongdoings and to become very active in righting the wrongs – together with the victim. This justice requires a full look at the past and what has taken place. It requires

facing up to the reality of the past to the full extent. There is no room for negotiation here and minimizing of the wrongs. This process calls for full openness and vulnerability in admitting the wrongs and changing the present and the future.

### **Righting the wrongs**

The traumatic event that we have survived forced us to see what is important in life. It forced us to see what the present and the future could look like and what is important to happen so that we can live peacefully with the other. The moment we recognize how big a price we (as an individual or group) have been paying for generations and how high the costs are, we realize that this is what the future will look like for those who come after us – our children. In order to change the present and the future we decide to call for truthful reexamination of the past and we are ready to face not only the perpetrators' responsibility but also our own in allowing violence or conflict to be passed from generation to generation.

This is the moment when we choose for justice not to be based on revenge and retribution. Instead justice becomes based on forgiveness and restoration (Ellis, 2001). The restorative justice that we seek becomes concerned for the victim and offender; it becomes concerned for the whole community; it addresses harms and root causes; it addresses victims' needs and perpetrators' responsibility for repairing the harm; it promotes healing and it restores the community (Heart, 2004 and Mike and Zehr, 2000). Restorative justice restores our souls, both the victim's and the perpetrator's. The healing happens to both in different and similar ways.

Restoration happens when we walk through the history of violence or conflict that connects both sides step by step. In this process we look at the stories that we have been told differently – maybe for the first time. We recognize what have we been told by our parents and grandparents; how much we have been raised with fear, mistrust and animosity towards the other. This is when we hear the narratives that we have been raised on in different light. In this process we might for the first time realize how much the story that we have

been told is not that simple. How there is no black and white picture. Instead there are many shades of gray where both sides have contributed to the violence and have helped in continuing it.

The “Integrated Framework for Peacebuilding” (figure four) by Lisa Schirch has been very helpful for me in understanding the need to address past, present and the future in the process of peacebuilding. In my understanding, working on peacebuilding requires working on trauma and reconciliation and this figure helped me to map the timeframe for the process of trauma healing and reconciliation.

### Integated Framework for Peacebuilding

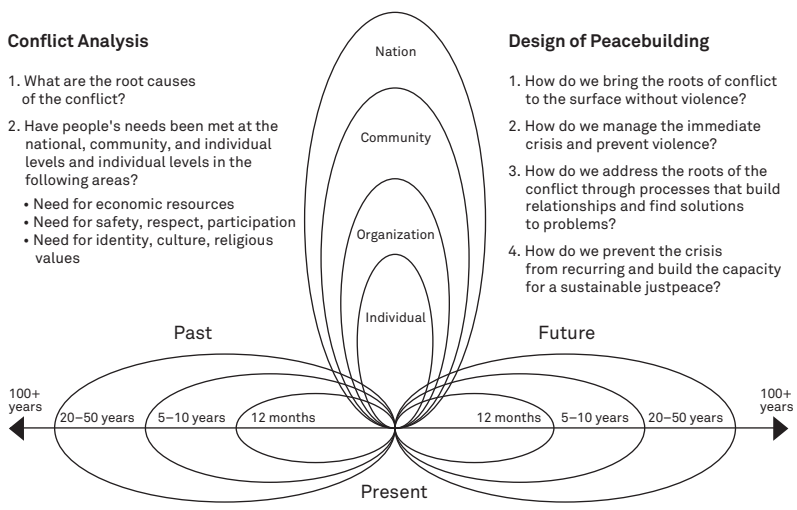


Figure 4: Integrated Framework for Peacebuilding (Schirch, 2002)

The figure was helpful since it displayed the picture of how deep we need to go when we are working on reconciliation. The figure also tell us that we need to roll up our sleeves get to the serious work that requires work on all levels



– work on individual, organizational, communal and national level. It tell us that between the parties in conflict working on one level, without addressing the other levels that have been impacted by the conflict, will not bring truthful examination of the past and present. Thus the future created will not carry in itself a long-term peace. The important questions that need to be addressed here are: what are the causes of the conflict? Have people’s needs been met at the national, community, and individual levels in the following areas: need for economic resources, need for safety, respect and participation and need for identity, culture and religious values? (Schirch, 2002).

We might be looking at the period in history of five to ten years or we might be looking at the period in history that is twenty years old or even more than a hundred years old. This figure taught me a good lesson – two people or groups in conflict might look at the past, present and the future from different angles or better to say from different time periods. What I might see as the beginning of my history of suffering and pain for the other might be only in the middle of their story or history of suffering and pain or not even present in their story. This is very important to name since it tells us that we have different points of reference when we talk about history, about who did what, who committed which atrocities and so forth. I call this “needs reality” – since each individual and group carry their wounds, pain and suffering from different times and have a need for these pains and suffering to be addressed by the perpetrator and taken responsibility for (Puljek-Shank, 2003). This figure teaches us to tread very cautiously and seriously in the process of reconciliation.

This walk through history requires reexamining the battles won at the expense of the other that we celebrate (chosen glories) and the traumas that we mourn from generation to generation and are not able to let go of (chosen traumas), (STAR Manual, 2001). In this process, both sides learn that victories have been won at the expense of others and that what one groups celebrates is a tragedy for the other. We also learn that our stories are coming from long ago (some of them are many centuries old) and that precisely because of our inability to mourn our losses and grieve, we have prevented healing. Walking through history is a very painful process that leads us into an unknown

direction. In this process we are establishing truthful narratives (by working together with the other). These truthful narratives reflect the reality and understanding of what happened from both sides.

Reconciliation entails

an honest acknowledgment of the harm/injury each party has inflicted on the other; sincere regrets and remorse for the injury done, readiness to apologize for one's role in inflicting the injury; readiness of the conflicting parties to 'let go' of the anger and bitterness caused by the conflict and the injury; commitment by the offender not to repeat the injury; sincere effort to redress past grievances that caused the conflict and compensate the damage caused to the extent possible; entering into a new mutually enriching relationship; the sense of justice changes over time, and such change is necessary to engage in the reconciliation process; reconciliation as a gradual, slow, and complex process. (Assefa, and Abu-Nimer, Abdul Aziz Said and Lakshitha S. Prelis)

Reconciliation requires a commitment: there is no turning back once the commitment is made. The road is not straight. It is very bumpy and at times dangerous. There are no easy ways out and we are recommitting ourselves to the process throughout our life. Even though we have opened ourselves to the healing of our trauma and we might even heal we still continue to live life. Life in itself is not static. It is very dynamic, ever-changing and full of positive and negative surprises. In life we will probably encounter again the time when we will need to heal and work on forgiveness and reconciliation. However, it will not be the first time. It will be the second, third, fourth, fifth and so on. The more we practice, the better we get in our practice. There will be a time when we will be hurt again and we will find ourselves again within the inner cycle of revenge. It is natural to find ourselves here – again. After all it is human to feel pain and hurt. It is also human to desire protection and revenge for inflicted pain. But the difference is that in our hearts and head we have made a commitment to the process of forgiveness and reconciliation. This means that after we spend some time in this inner cycle we are able to get out of it quicker than the first or second time and that we are able to name our

losses and mourn them. We will be able to recognize how we feel and why. We will also know why we want to heal again. We have made a commitment to ourselves that life is sacred, that we do not want to end up hating and hurting, that we want to live and nurture and that we want to love and hope. When we acknowledge this commitment it means that we have chosen to practice on an ongoing basis the important skill – the skill of reconciliation.

I would reflect that this chapter is a short summary of the process of trauma healing and reconciliation. Both of these topics have many subtopics and would require more space to be explained in detail. Both topics are very complex and difficult to work on and my hope is that reading of this chapter will provide helpful insights and questions for the reader. I would finish with the quote that has many times strengthened me in my healing and reconciliation process – ‘If we are not able to say good by we are not able to say hello again’.

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# We Have Done it from the Depths of Our Heart and Soul

**Interview with Branka Rajner**  
(director of the Human Rights Bureau, Tuzla)

**How did you first become involved in activism and peacebuilding?  
What was your motivation back then and when did it all start?**

**B.R.** I got involved in peacework as early as 1995, while the war was on, at the moment that I felt that I too had something to do in that war. I'd had it up to here and I'd had enough of it and I wanted to do something useful. Luckily, I met a Swiss man who was a peace worker, Uli Kern, who supported me and suggested that I should establish an organisation. Then we gathered at my place, wrote the statute, founded the organisation and decided to start this thing we have been in for over ten years now. All these people I started with were my friends from Tuzla who had a similar way of thinking and wanted to be in this whole story. So, from there, we have been an organisation to this day. We shared a way of thinking, we wanted to change things, to end things, I don't know how possible it was back then, during the war, but I think it was the right time for us to start. That's when we opted for the field of human rights protection, and not only protection, but also the work on making people familiar with it. Another focus was the work on reconciliation – all sides should be heard and all that happened should be viewed. During the entire war, I kept listening to all the news – from CNN, through Bijeljina to Serb Sarajevo, and listening to them I began to understand that people need to see both sides, and that they can't reach a joint solution without it and without normal communication. I can also say that we, in Tuzla, were lucky enough to have the reformists win the elections before the war, which meant that we had no national parties

and thereby the authorities were more open. People were not exiled from Tuzla on purpose, or with guns; there was no ethnic cleansing and it created a possibility for many international organisations to come to Tuzla quite early on, which opened the pathways for us for cooperation and finding information, it facilitated, naturally, our work, because we were not perceived as 'enemies'.

I have to point out how important my meeting and work with the Centre for Peace Studies was, i.e. Goran Božičević and Vesna Teršelič, as well as all those programmes and Miramidas<sup>1</sup> they were doing, because for me the beginning of the work with them was also the beginning of regional cooperation. I think it completely pointed my life in a certain direction, that it was a kind of a foundation what I had opted for before. They were the first people I met in terms of regional cooperation and I have to say that they helped me a great deal in terms of realising that I am not alone and that there are other people who deal with this and think as I do. This regional cooperation started alongside them, they also cooperated with people from Serbia, so in this way I also established contacts with people from there.

**What did your work on reconciliation look like, from the war onwards? What kind of reactions and challenges did you encounter?**

**B.R.** When I started working and when I realised that I wanted an organisation dealing with human rights, I knew right from the start that I also had to go to the Republic of Srpska. I knew that I had to cross those borders of entities and see how those people felt. Are there any people there who share my convictions and who would work with me? Is there anyone who wants it? What are their stories? Ultimately, I wanted to hear the other side out. I have to admit that as early as in March 1996 I was among the first people, along with several others (Jasna Malkoč

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1 MIRamiDA – The first trainings in peacebuilding in the post-Yugoslav countries, initiated in 1995 as a project of the Anti-war Campaign of Croatia. The joint title of a series of workshops in the region of South-Eastern Europe, held from 1995. Subjects: nonviolent communication, conflict transformation, gender and sex; civil society, human rights etc. Participants were mostly from the post-war regions and the lecturers were mainly local experts with or without academic training. They address various social groups (source: *Miramida Reminder*, according to Glossary of Terms of Peace and Civil Initiatives Taras and Boolyba, CICD Zagreb, 2001). (editor's note)

of the OSCE and Julius from Switzerland), who went to Srebrenica. I wanted to see Srebrenica, what it was like, what my feelings would be on going there and whether there were any options of working and cooperating or initiating anything at all in such a town where so much evil took place.

**And what was the feeling, what was the first impression?**

**B.R.** It is something I will certainly never forget; starting with this very difficult journey, *checkpoints*, harassment, the lot... And when we got there, I dared not say I was who I was, that I had an organisation or that I was a peace activist, I just said I was a translator instead. We went to the municipality building, to schools, we talked to people... I have to say the reception was fairly cold; they were expecting some kind of humanitarian aid from us and wouldn't speak about what had happened in Srebrenica. All this, if I may say so, repressed feeling, I don't know how to describe it, but it was very difficult indeed. I can still feel a rock in my belly from all this. People somehow looked as if having 'eyes in the middle of their heads', they wouldn't look us straight in the eye, they bowed their heads down in suspicion. Of course, it cannot be compared to nowadays, but you had a feeling of being in a twilight zone, as it were. As though you entered a dark environment which you thought of with discomfort for days afterwards.

But this was just a beginning and a kind of a challenge. After that, we kept going there and looking for people who were prepared to collaborate in any way.

**You mentioned in a conversation once how important this experience of work with women who returned to Srebrenica was for you...**

**B.R.** Yes, what turned out to be important at the time was to find Serbian women ready to cooperate. When we met several women who expressed that readiness and were rational and smart enough, we realised that at that point working with women was the only possible thing to do. Somehow they seemed to look further in the future, they realised that whatever had happened - happened, but that one must go forward, both for the sake of the children and their own sake. I suppose this instinct was stronger among women than it was among men who were still somehow set in their political and warfare orientation. Women would open up

more, and when we found several women who were prepared to talk to us and Bosniak women from the Federation, we started creating teams and groups of women with whom we continued to work for almost two years that followed.

**What were the frameworks of this work, what did you talk to them about?**

**B.R.** Our basic goal was to open communication amongst those women. To view how the women were victims on both sides; to make them talk to each other about their problems. And then, working with them (not only women from Srebrenica – we also worked in Bijeljina, Brčko, Bratunac, Zvornik, Doboј) we gathered Bosniak women from those towns, Serbian women who went to these towns from the Federation and composed the groups we worked with. We worked in workshops, communicating, and we prepared them and made decisions easier as to whether to go back to the places they had lived before or not. We pointed out what was in store for them if they decided to go back, we pointed out that it wasn't enough to merely make a decision, but also to face the fact that it was no longer the city they had left, that it was a completely different place now, that their children would sing 'Bože pravde', or another anthem, that the laws were different and that they needed to become familiar with this new legislation, and thus we let them know what kind of an environment it had turned into. In a certain way it helped them make up their minds as to whether they were going to go back or not. We have ever never forced anyone, nor have we believed that the return was inevitable; it was just letting them know that they had the option of staying and living where they chose; ultimately, it is their human right.

**The Bureau is certainly one of the first organisations that started to work on this concretely, not only declaratively but also directly with people. What has changed since then and how does the future of this process seem now?**

**B.R.** Official states have changed, entity policies in our parts, hate speech decreased, there are no major obstructions, and we are also no longer 'enemies of the state'.



**Have you personally experienced being perceived as an ‘enemy of the state’?**

**B.R.** I have, I can’t say it happened too often, but it has happened. Especially when I took part in talks with members of parliament, as a member of a delegation, who looked at me as though I were some sort of ‘international mercenary’ doing some sort of things against the state, against the current government, or as though we were organisations who took money for their projects, money that actually belonged to the state. I mostly encountered this at these higher levels of government.

Ten years ago, when I was crossing all these new borders, I had various uncomfortable situations. I was accused of being a sell-out, and asked what was it I wanted from them?, what was it I looked for from them?, and told that I was Alija’s<sup>2</sup> soldier... Police stopped us when the licence plates hadn’t been changed yet and we were asked ‘What are you doing here, you must be a traitor when you work for Alija’, being harassed by policemen and people wanting to spit on you, these are things that no longer happen nowadays, it is the past. That’s why I think we have made progress, and a lot of progress at that, especially when I remember going to Foča with Vesna Teršelič, and then meeting university students there, and the dean badmouthed us, slammed the door and said ‘I will neither hear nor see you’. Still, when you have a coffee with him two hours later and he apologises, you realise these are great things and a motivation for you to move on.

At the same time, I don’t believe that there is no hope and that these ethnic divisions are cemented. I personally think that there is hope, that there are people who feel good where they are among those people who returned (I myself have encountered them during my work). What I think we failed to do was because we either had no money, or society still didn’t support it, or we didn’t know the right way – but we promote this positive examples of returning.

\* .....

2 Alija Izetbegović (1925–2003) was a Bosniak activist, lawyer and politician, who, in 1990, became the first president of Bosnia and Herzegovina. He served in this role until 1996, when he became a member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, serving until 2000. He was also the author of several books, most notably *Islam Between East and West*. He was one of the signatories of the Dayton Peace Agreement (1995), alongside Slobodan Milošević and Franjo Tuđman. (editor’s note)

They have never been promoted, and there is a whole series of examples where the refugees, for instance, Bosniaks who returned to the Republic of Srpska, were welcomed fantastically well, they have established contacts with their neighbours, they live comfortably, but are not prepared to talk about it. They fear something might go wrong, because the official government, politicians or the public as a whole still can be very rigid when it comes to that, they won't allow these positive examples to teach people good manners. There is always much more talk on problems and incidents, and as long as there are no problems, it won't be talked about. When I suggest that someone should speak of it in public, they answer, 'let it be, don't tamper with this, because it's good'. They are afraid of putting Serbs in an uncomfortable position, and here the Serbs also fear doing something for Bosniaks that could make them subject to being condemned by their neighbours who do not share their opinion.

I feel that is something that is left unfinished for us and that it needs to be worked on.

**How much do you feel peace work is visible, i.e. how much of an effect does it have in these regions?**

**B.R.** I believe that peace work is not sufficiently visible because we haven't promoted it enough ourselves, both in the media and anywhere else in the public; and the public is not interested in it either. A multitude of positive, especially individual experiences, tells us that this work does have its effects and I don't know whether anything should be changed there but I am certain it shouldn't be stopped. Only long-term work with concrete people has lasting effects.

**What do you mean by us not having promoted peacework enough ourselves? Where did we fail, in your opinion?**

**B.R.** I don't think we failed. Firstly, we didn't start the peacework in order to become stars or public figures. We have done it from the depths of our hearts, from our conviction, and I myself never felt I should go very public with this, that this was something I should be famous for, well paid or privileged in any way. It is something I chose to do and that I do in the way that I do it. But in

retrospect, I realise we should have talked more, promoted it more in the public, drawn more attention to positive examples and good people. Because there are few books and few talks about it.

**What did cooperation with institutions mean for you all these past years? How much do you see it as important for peacebuilding?**

**B.R.** It was very important for us, because we considered we couldn't be completely successful without it. The entire work of the Bureau since 1995 was about the cooperation of both entities – working with judges, working with schoolteachers, working with children. We always had to have the institutions' authorisation for work, because schoolteachers couldn't attend seminars, Miramida's or anything, unless they had approval of either the ministries or their school principals. Children attending training camps or judges, who really had the need to communicate with judges from the RS, never had the chance of organising such a seminar or a meeting. Thus we proved to be an excellent link between them and they realised their communication through us.

It was always myself personally who went to the meetings with people from the institutions and explained in the simplest terms possible what it was that I wanted, what it was that I was doing and what they stood to gain from it. I tried to explain that it was useful for all and I have to admit that they didn't refuse me. Only later did the official faxes and the like happen, but when it was about approaching them for the first time it was I personally who talked to people. I have a feeling that people trusted me, perhaps because I myself believed in what I was doing all the while, it is important to convince those who are sometimes sceptical of our work too.

**How much is peace work in these parts based on 'projects', and how much in 'true' communication? Do you feel that the work of the organisation itself has changed?**

**B.R.** In my opinion, peace work is a lasting orientation and cannot be a project. Projects help us carry out some ideas and activities more easily. I believe that people who are in peace work do it everywhere and at every place, and that they

are truly committed to it. Unfortunately, it can be merely 'projects', but that is short of breath and with little success.

And of course, many things have changed. On one hand, there are changes among the donors who have become significantly bureaucratised themselves, and on the other hand, in order to justify the investment, they have become more demanding.

I've had that happen to me, starting from my activist urge full of enthusiasm, I've reached the point of being executive director and writing reports, and I have a hard time accepting it, I confess. I get to spend less time with people in field work and more time with papers. The organisation has expanded in the meantime, and we have other people doing that work too, and I feel as though I have left that path in a way. I remain what I am, I advocate what I feel is important, projects are as they are – still in accordance with the mission and what we wish to accomplish, but I personally don't have enough time any more.

### **What is your motivation for doing this work for such a long time?**

**B.R.** Mostly these small successes. When you see people are happy, when someone comes up to you to give you a hug and say thanks for helping them – it is a huge motivation for me to go on. When people talk, when it happens that people from two local communities, one domicile and the other consisting of the ones who returned, who once looked at each other over their guns, sit in the same car and come over to the Bureau because we have worked with them for several years, and then they gather around a shared problem that bothers them, and don't look at each other suspiciously all the while, this is what gives you additional strength to continue.

Many people say we have helped them, and I sometimes feel I have personally gained the most: from the pleasure of having been of use, to plenty of encounters with wonderful, humane, smart, selfless, creative people. I have learned one should not give up even when it seems there is no use, because eventually it turns out all the work has not been in vain.

VII

civil questions



# Civil Society or U b l e h a ?

Paul Stubbs .....

## Reflections on flexible concepts, meta-NGOs and new social energy in the post-Yugoslav space

*“To speak for others is to first silence those in whose name we speak”<sup>1</sup>*

### Magical panacea or emperor’s new clothes?

Nowadays, in the post-Yugoslav space, it appears that we may finally be able to discuss the concept of ‘civil society’ in more critical terms, following over a decade of uncritical usage in which the term became synonymous with all things virtuous, progressive, democratic, and just. There are some specific, parochial reasons for this, notably the possibilities opened up by a post-war discursive problematic in which the ‘magical’ claims for civil society as a panacea have lost both their strategic importance and their ideological currency. In the global context, the rise of what, in shorthand terms, I will name the ‘critical globalization movement’ has, sometimes in some incarnations, laid claims to being the precursor of a meaningful ‘global civil society’, although more often it has dismissed the concept as insufficiently radical. Moreover, the movement has been explicitly sceptical of the tokenistic consultations with so-called ‘civil society stakeholders’ increasingly embraced by powerful supranational agencies such as the World Bank which appear, at best, to be half-hearted responses to the long-term legitimation crisis which they face.

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1 Callon, M. (1986) ‘Some Elements of a Sociology of Translation’ in Law, J. (ed) *Power, Action and Belief: a new sociology of knowledge*. London: Routledge, p. 216.

For me, the concept of 'civil society' has always appeared most interesting, if also most problematic, at the interface or 'contact zone'<sup>2</sup> between the specific, in this case the post-Yugoslav, space, and the global. This contact zone is highly charged precisely because this was not a simple case of a concept being imported from the all-powerful West into an empty space even though, at times, it may have appeared as such. I well remember workshops in the late 1990s where some local NGO members revealed that they first encountered the concept in the languages and practices of one international aid agency or another. Rather, it is a classic case of a set of translation practices in which the term moves, often in complex, unexpected ways, across sites, spaces, scales and levels<sup>3</sup>. In this process, agents and agencies are of vital importance in the transformation of the 'raw' or 'bland' concept into a set of meaningful and more or less powerful policy prescriptions, project designs and technologies of implementation. Perhaps even more importantly, a new group of intermediaries, brokers or, beyond the literal meaning of the term, translators emerge, gaining power and influence from their abilities to work across and between languages, contexts, sites, levels and agencies.

Here, I want to address some of the complexity in the usage of the term 'civil society' in the post-Yugoslav space. In particular, I want to explore some of the ironies in the trans-national movement of the concept into and out of that space over time. I also want to touch on, and attempt to go beyond, the by now well-known problem of the reduction of civil society to Non-Governmental Organisations by exploring the role of some of the meta-NGOs which have arisen in the post-Yugoslav context. Finally, I want to outline some of the pre-conditions for a reinvigorated public sphere in terms of new forms of social energy.

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- 2 'Contact zones' involve „the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect”, Pratt, M. L. (1992) *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge, page 6.
- 3 I am using the concept of 'translation' here based on work by Noemi Lendvai, cf. Lendvai, N. Lendvai, N. (2005) 'Remaking European Governance: transition, accession and integration.' In Newman, J. (ed.) (2005) *Remaking Governance: Peoples, politics and the public sphere*. Bristol, The Policy Press, and as developed by John Clarke, cf. Clarke, J. (2005) 'What's culture got to do with it?', Paper presented to seminar 'Anthropological approaches to studying welfare', Aarhus, Denmark, November.



## Why, when and where, civil society?

One of the principal advocates of the importance of the term civil society, over a long period of time, has been the British political philosopher John Keane. He has recently suggested<sup>4</sup> that the resurgence of the concept of civil society from the late 1980s amongst public intellectuals stemmed from seven overlapping concerns, events or processes: the use of the term by dissidents in Eastern European communist societies in the aftermath of the crushing of the Prague Spring; increased awareness and use of computer-mediated communications within network-based movements and organisations; rising concern with the ecological consequences of unfettered growth; the fall of the Berlin wall and the new hope of a progressive post-communist political order; the rise of neo-liberal economics and concern with the problems of unfettered market capitalism; the disillusionment with post-colonial progress; and the emergence of collapsed states and new uncivil wars, not fought exclusively between armies for territory but involving civilians targeted for being the wrong ‘ethnicity’.

Opponents of this position would focus, I think, less on the complexity of the inter-relationship between these seven strands but, rather, on the flexibility which the concept affords for those keen to hold onto power. In an influential essay, Aziz Choudry captures this when he points out that, in the context of the millions of words utilised on the concept by different theorists:

“...other than general agreement that it spans all forms of organisations between the household and the state, the notion seems to mean all things to all people. I cannot see how uncritical adoption and use of this term advances peoples’ struggles for basic rights, for self-determination, liberation, and decolonisation, and against imperialism and the neoliberal agenda in all their various guises<sup>5</sup>.”

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4 Keane, J. (2003) *Global Civil Society?* Cambridge: University Press.

5 Choudry, A. (2002) “All this ‘Civil Society’ talk takes us nowhere”. ZNet Daily Commentaries, 9 January web: <http://www.zmag.org/Sustainers/content/2002-01/09choudry.cfm> (accessed 5 May 2006).

The flexibility of the term is, perhaps, the most interesting part of the story. The term floats rather easily between different levels and scales and, perhaps even more importantly, between ideological and political positions. A neo-marxist frame strongly influenced by Gramsci has little in common, of course, with a neo-liberal frame influenced by de Tocqueville, Adam Smith or Hayek. And yet, both would ascribe an important role to the concept of ‘civil society’. Perhaps even more importantly, the nuances of neither position really impacts on the use of the term in ‘aid-speak’ which “builds on a combination of normative theory and positivism ... according to which technical solutions to problems identified are available or will have to be invented if missing...”<sup>6</sup>

Elsewhere, I have traced the usage of the concept in the former Yugoslav space and, in particular, in the language and rhetorics of the social movements in 1980s Slovenia<sup>7</sup>. In that text I sought to argue that the concept was absent in other former-Yugoslav Republics and, indeed, played a somewhat diminished role in the context of new nationalisms even within Slovenia itself. In retrospect, this understated the spreading of the concept within the Yugoslav space, at least to emerging young urban elites in Zagreb, Belgrade and, later, in Sarajevo, during the late 1980s or very early, pre-war, 1990s<sup>8</sup>. Hence, a ‘new wave’ of groupings and movements organising, however informally and spontaneously, around issues such as women’s rights; ecology; peace and anti-militarism; as well as student movements and sub-cultural artistic forms had encountered the concept of civil society and, albeit unevenly, embraced it as a key concept in parts of the former-Yugoslav space *before*

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- 6 Secher Marcussen, H. and Bergendorff, S. (2004) ‘Catchwords, Empty Phrases and Tautological Reasoning: Democracy and Civil Society in Danish Aid’, in Gould, J. and Secher Marcussen, H. (eds.) *Ethnographies of Aid – exploring development texts and encounters*. Roskilde International Development Studies, Occasional Paper 24; pp.95-6.
- 7 Stubbs, P. (1996) ‘Nationalisms, Globalization and Civil Society in Croatia and Slovenia’, in *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change* 19; 1-26. Web: <http://www.gaspp.org/people/pstubbs/paper%205.doc> (accessed 8 May 2006).
- 8 Stubbs, P. (2001) ‘Politička ekonomija civilnog društva’ in Mestrović, M. (ed.) *Globalizacija i njene refleksije u Hrvatskoj*. Zagreb: Ekonomski institut; 95-110. A revised version was published in English as Stubbs, P. (2001) ‘New Times?: towards a political economy of ‘civil society’ in contemporary Croatia’, in *Narodna Umjetnost (Croatian J of Ethnology and Folklore Research)*, 38 (1); 89-103. Web: <http://www.stakes.fi/gaspp/people/pstubbs/paper%209.doc> (accessed 8 May 2006).

the wars which began in 1991 and 1992 and before it was imported from Western Europe and the United States by representatives of the new humanitarian order. The complexities of translation are, perhaps, best illustrated by the distinction in Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian languages between the term ‘civilno društvo’ (which for me comes closest to the English notion of ‘civil society’) and the increasingly utilised, concept of ‘građansko društvo’ (literally, ‘citizens’ society’). The complexities of adherence to one or other, and the degree of radical differentiation which authors make between the two, in the former- and post-Yugoslav space, is beyond the scope of this text although none of the arguments for or against either term, or for maintaining them as very different or essentially the same make sense outside of complex historical contextualisations and explicit translations from, at least, English and German languages<sup>9</sup>. For John Keane, interestingly, the term embraces both dimensions, referring both to the ‘pluralisation of power’ (and hence the fullest possible expression of citizenship) and the promotion of peaceful strategies or, at the very least, the problematisation of violence (hence, in opposition to ‘uncivil wars’ which are, sometimes at least, ‘civil wars’ as they involve citizen populations actively)<sup>10</sup>.

In the ‘contact zone’ of course, encounters are rarely, or rarely *only*, about words and their meaning but are, almost always, more or less explicitly, about claims-making, opportunities, strategic choices and goals, interests, and resource maximisation. In the ‘contact zones’, all kinds of complex negotiated interactions occur, on multiple stages, as well as off-stage, in which, in fact, multiple belongings and flexible identities are, in and of themselves, extremely useful devices. The philosophical question about whether the actor or activist in civil society who has become skilled in presenting different faces to different audiences is, somehow, less *authentic* or *honest* than the activist who remains

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9 I am grateful to Aida Bagić for alerting me to this point and to key texts. Some of the literature in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian language(s) which is relevant to this point includes: Pokrovac, Z. (ed.) *Gradansko društvo i država: povijest razlike i nove rasprave*, Zagreb: Naprijed; Pavlović, V. (2004) *Civilno društvo i demokratija Belgrade: Politeia*, cf. p. 15; and Maldini, P. (2002) ‘Gradansko društvo i demokracija u tranzicijskim društvima’ in *Politički misao* 29 (4); 129-145.

10 Op. cit, p. 8.

consistent to a single idea or ideal is, in my view, less important sociologically than to root both of these strategies in their social context. Marx's point that people make history but not always in contexts of their choosing is, perhaps, the best statement of the problem of civil society activism in the context of the wars and their aftermath in the post-Yugoslav space. This is not to deny the 'post-colonial' character, or power dimension of 'contact zones' but, rather, to quote again Mary Louise Pratt who first introduced the concept, it is to foreground "the interactive, improvisational dimensions of colonial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed by diffusionist accounts of conquest and domination"<sup>11</sup>.

### NGO-ization and the rise of the meta-NGO

When there is a slippage from 'civil society' to 'NGO' (Non-Governmental Organisation), the process of which has been described by using the concept of *NGO-ization*, the nature of the encounter changes dramatically, in ways which certainly appear to limit the possibilities of meaningful challenges to dominant power relations. The concept of NGO-ization was probably first used by Sabine Lang in her work on women's organising in Western Europe<sup>12</sup> although it has also been used by activists and researchers in Croatia including Aida Bagić, Vesna Janković, and myself for a number of years. Aida Bagic, perhaps closest to Lang's original usage, uses the concept to refer to the shift from 'social movements' to 'organizations' as the dominant form of collective action, pointing to the increasing importance of 'modern' NGOs which emphasise "issue-specific interventions and pragmatic strategies with a strong employment focus, rather than the establishment of a new democratic counter-culture"<sup>13</sup>.

A rich array of academic and activist writing has charted the negative effects of NGO-ization in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and Kosovo/a

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11 Op. cit, pp. 6-7.

12 Lang, S. (1997) 'The NGOization of Feminism'. In Kaplan, C. and Wallach, J. (eds.) *Transitions, Environments, Translations: feminisms in international politics*. London: Routledge; 101-120.

13 Bagić, A. (2004) 'Talking About Donors'. In Gould, J. and Secher Marcussen, H. (eds.) 'Ethnographies of Aid – exploring development texts and encounters'. Roskilde University Occasional Paper in International Development Studies, 24; p. 222.

and elsewhere<sup>14</sup>. Some aspects of this have been extensively addressed and hardly bear repeating here, including: the influence of donors' agendas on topics covered and on type of organisational structures preferred; the rise of short-term 'project cultures' or *projectisation*; the emphasis on professionalisation and technical skills at the expense of broader social goals; the empowerment of a young, urban, highly educated English speaking elite; the need to focus on project 'success' in very narrow terms; and the increasing distancing of elite NGOs from grassroots activism. In addition, of course, in the context of war and complex emergencies, a new division arose between the much maligned (mere) 'service providing' NGO sector and the supposedly superior 'conscience- or advocacy-oriented NGOs' focusing on human rights, women's rights, and so on. The ability, willingness, and incentives for the latter to network with counterparts across the region and, indeed, the globe also mitigated against new domestic alliances or the development of deep participatory democracy.

The impacts of high levels of external assistance on the internal economy, in terms of the artificial rise in GDP in urban centres, the large gap between the salaries of international and local staff of international NGOs, and between these local staff, local NGO activists and public servants, and the physical impact of road signs advertising donors, the offices of large INGOs, and the ubiquitous white jeep, are less often discussed outside of out-of-office jokes. The marginalising of trades unions and other kinds of interest groups, or their channelling into the notion of NGO, is also less often addressed.

The extant literature has not, always, been particularly nuanced, either in terms of the differences in the development of the NGO sector in each country at different times nor, more importantly, on some of the more positive aspects of external support framed in terms of NGO development. Without wishing

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14 Amongst others cf. Sali-Terzić, S. (2001) 'Civil Society' in Papić, Ž. (ed.) *International Support Policies to South-Eastern Europe: lessons (not) learnt in Bosnia-Herzegovina*. Sarajevo: Muller; 175-194. Gordy, E. (no date) 'CRDA and Civil Society in Serbia'. Paper for Muabet Project, Brown University. Web: [http://www.watsoninsitute.org/muabet/new\\_site/gordyWatsonreport1.pdf](http://www.watsoninsitute.org/muabet/new_site/gordyWatsonreport1.pdf) (accessed 8 May 2006). Dević, A. (2004) Faces, Phases and Places of Humanitarian Aid: Kosovo four years after. In GFC Quarterly 11. Stubbs, P. (1997) 'Croatia: NGO Development, Globalism and Conflict', in Bennett, J. (ed.) *NGOs and Governments*, pp. 77-87. INTRAC/ICVA.

to overstate the case, there was evidence of a more sophisticated relationship between key NGOs, new coalition groupings, opposition politicians, and some external donors, at the time both of the defeat of the ruling HDZ in Croatia in elections in January 2000 and in the ousting of the Milošević regime in Serbia in October 2000, notwithstanding the subsequent trajectories of the key groupings, namely the student organisation *Otpor* and the neo-liberal G-17 think-tank<sup>15</sup>. Indeed, the space opened up for intellectuals, particularly in Serbia, but to an extent elsewhere, who would have been unable to survive inside the country without external support which was channelled through NGOs, cannot be denied.

More sociologically, the negative picture is in danger of treating local actors as mere 'puppets' or 'cultural dopes' under the domination of all-powerful external international actors. In reality, of course, whilst room for manoeuvre was limited, and some inevitable compromises were made, the trajectories of diverse activists in NGOs cannot be reduced to notions of *selling out* or being rendered *ineffective*. Indeed, the templates, processes and skills learnt or developed in NGOs may well have a longer-term relevance both in terms of individual career paths but also in terms of overall social development.

The crucial point is that, like Rome, 'civil society' cannot be built in a day. Of course, much of my work in the last twelve years has been critical of the notion that 'post-communist countries in transition' (the phrase itself, of course, already smells of neo-colonialist patronising) have no 'civil society' and, therefore, need 'capacity building', presumably from the Western countries who possess such a civil society in abundance. Whilst there are, surely, things that one society can learn from another, short-cuts to a democratic culture, and crude transplantations from elsewhere, are rarely effective in the way intended, and often have unintended negative consequences. Steven Sampson's point that you can transfer organisational forms but not values, really strikes home in

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15 Solioz, C. (2006) 'Strengths and Weaknesses of Civil Society in the Balkans'. Paper presented to World Movement for Democracy Assembly, April. Web: [http://www.ceiseu.org/Events/Istanbul\\_5\\_Apr\\_06/doc/Istanbul\\_2006\\_Apr.pdf](http://www.ceiseu.org/Events/Istanbul_5_Apr_06/doc/Istanbul_2006_Apr.pdf) (Accessed 8 May 2006)

this context<sup>16</sup>. This is certainly the case when the building of, often elite, and sometimes single- or two-person NGOs (as when a leading academic states “Of course, I also have my own NGO”), becomes a false proxy for a deep democratic culture which takes a half a century or more to build or, in the aftermath of the ‘survivalisms’ of various kinds of authoritarian regimes, and of war, surely needs a couple of decades to rebuild. One could still argue that the Yugoslav exceptionalism was a promoter of a kind of civil society, and did have much to teach others (indeed, the forgotten history of the non-aligned movement as an alternative international development apparatus is in urgent need of remembering and critical appraisal<sup>17</sup>), without going so far as to argue that it was the last word in deep democracy. Times have changed and, whilst remembering is highly important politically, all but the most ironic nostalgia is rarely so<sup>18</sup>.

In the contemporary post-Yugoslav space, the only entities worse than newly composed NGOs are, perhaps, the emerging meta-NGOs. I take the term meta-NGOs from Jonathon Bach and David Stark who use it to refer to “organizations (whose) primary purpose is to provide information and assistance to other NGOs”<sup>19</sup>. My usage is somewhat broader than theirs, although on the same lines, since they trace the rise of usually only one NGO in each post-communist country (their examples come from Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia)

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16 Sampson, S. (2005) ‘Some things cannot be handed over: Western democracy in Bosnia-Herzegovina’, Paper for panel ‘Beyond lessons learnt’ at the Conference for Bosnia-Herzegovina, Association Bosnia 2005, Geneva. Web: <http://www.bosnia2005.org/conference/doc/beyondlessons.pdf>

17 Cf. Gupta, A. (19992) ‘The Song of the Nonaligned World: transnational identities and the reinscription of space in late capitalism’ in *Cultural Anthropology* 7 (1); 63-79. Web: [http://www.stanford.edu/dept/anthroCASA/pdf/Gupta/gupta\\_song\\_nonaligned.pdf](http://www.stanford.edu/dept/anthroCASA/pdf/Gupta/gupta_song_nonaligned.pdf)

18 Cf. Boym, S. (1994) *Common Places: mythologies of everyday life in Russia*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, in which she distinguishes between ironic nostalgia which is ‘inconclusive and fragmentary’ and the more common *utopian nostalgia* which is ‘reconstructive and totalizing’. In Boym, S. (2001) *The Future of Nostalgia* New York: Basic Books she reframes these, somewhat, as ‘reflexive’ and ‘restorative’ nostalgia.

19 Bach, J. and Stark, D. (2003) ‘Technology and Transformation: facilitating knowledge networks in Eastern Europe’, UNRISD Technology, Business and Society Programme Paper 10, web: [http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/httpNetITFramePDF?ReadForm&parentunid=35352D4B078518C0C1256BDF0049556C&parentdoctype=paper&netitpath=80256B3C005BCCF9/\(httpAuxPages\)/35352D4B078518C0C1256BDF0049556C/»file/bach.pdf](http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/httpNetITFramePDF?ReadForm&parentunid=35352D4B078518C0C1256BDF0049556C&parentdoctype=paper&netitpath=80256B3C005BCCF9/(httpAuxPages)/35352D4B078518C0C1256BDF0049556C/»file/bach.pdf)

whose role and resource legitimacy derives primarily, if not exclusively, from their on-line tutoring of other NGOs. Whilst they chart some of the dilemmas and tensions this produces, I would take the argument much further. I do so based on an understanding of the complexities of contemporary modes of governance and the existence of a meta-governance, or the 'governance of governance', in which new forms of political authority seek to steer through new partnerships which "provide the ground rules for governance" and which "act as a 'court of appeal' for disputes arising within and over governance"<sup>20</sup>. Somewhat unexpectedly and ironically, leading roles in meta-governance in some of the post-Yugoslav countries are being played by meta-NGOs who claim, and are sometimes invested with, authority over not only other NGOs but over the disciplinary arts of governance and governing themselves.

Consider how quickly and effectively, having learnt that they had not been successful in obtaining one of the grants for 'institutional support' provided by the Croatian quasi-governmental agency the National Foundation for Civil Society Development, a small number of 'leading Croatian NGOs' (the concept is, of course, both meaningless and replete with meaning) monopolised the public sphere to protest at their exclusion. On prime time television they complained that they had been overlooked, "in favour of groups in remote parts of Croatia which we have never even heard of". Not one of their charismatic, for which read demagogic, leaders seemed to pause long enough to consider the irony of their Janus-faced position regarding the state ('you are authoritarian and against us; but you should have funded us'), much less to acknowledge the – all-too-real it seems – possibility that, having been the recipients for so long of support from international donors, tied less and less to any meaningful conditions, they had lost the ability, the will, or the humility to feel the need to write a half-decent programme proposal<sup>21</sup>.

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20 Jessop, B. (1997) 'Capitalism and its Future: remarks on regulation, government and governance' in *Review of International Political Economy* 4; 561-581; p. 575.

21 Kašić, B. (2005) 'Čokolade sa logum i okus moći', in Zamirzine 27 January, web: [http://www.zamirzine.net/article.php3?id\\_article=1702](http://www.zamirzine.net/article.php3?id_article=1702) is a prime example of the meta-NGO thinking. My own, rather unfortunate, intervention on this issue can also be found in the Zamirzine archive!



Of course, this kind of meta-governance requires more complex strategic positioning than simply complaining on television. It requires a kind of *talking up* or amplification of the real problems of state power in society; a *talking across* the real issues of ordinary citizens (such organisations long ago closed down their legal help lines and made their offices largely invisible if not impenetrable to the casual passer-by); a *talking down* from a position of patronising superiority to all but their core of insider members, friends and supporters; and a new hierarchy or chain of links to intermediary and grassroots organisations and individuals who exist in a classic role as peripheral to the new power centre.

### **Conclusion: In search of social energy and ubleha**

In a recent text charting the history of *Zamir* from a transnational social movement and Bulletin Board system to a nationally-based NGO and internet service sub-provider<sup>22</sup>, I sought to contrast three generations of activists in and around this seemingly ‘virtual civil society’: the techno-hippie, the techno-technocrat, and the new hacktivist generation. The text was based on interviews with, and was, in my view, a pretty accurate ideal typification, of the first two categories. However, it was clear that my lack of knowledge of the third group, framed as it was by my limited understanding of the critical globalization movement, meant that the political implications of hacktivism were not addressed. I still need to catch up, or maybe I am just too old and respectable. However, it is, perhaps, worthy of note that radicalism and revolutionary militancy is, once again a saleable commodity, at least in Croatia, as part of the new literary elite buys translations of Hardt and Negri’s *Empire*<sup>23</sup>, eagerly consumes McKenzie Wark’s ‘Hacker Manifesto’ either in English<sup>24</sup> or Croatian, and queues patiently

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22 Stubbs, P. (2005) ‘The *ZaMir* (for peace)Network: from transnational social movement to Croatian NGO’, in Brooksbank Jones, A. and Cross, M. (eds) *Internet Identities in Europe*, Sheffield: ESCUS, conference papers. Web: <http://www.shef.ac.uk/escus/papers/conferences/internetids.html>

23 The English text is Hardt, M. and Negri, A. (2000) *Empire* Cambridge: Harvard University press. The Croatian translation is Hardt, M. and Negri, A. (2003) *Imperij* Zagreb: Multimedijalni Institut, Arkzin.

24 McKenzie Wark (no date) A Hacker Manifesto version 4.0, web: [http://subsol.c3.hu/subsol\\_2/contributors0/warktext.html](http://subsol.c3.hu/subsol_2/contributors0/warktext.html)

outside net club MaMa (aka the Soros-funded multi media Institute) for the latest event, or else consults its web pages which combine Open Source skills-building with the writings of theoretical superstars such as Slavoj Žižek, Judith Butler, Hardt and Negri, Terry Eagleton, Noam Chomsky and, of course, George Soros. This movement does need addressing, and I need to learn more, but this dilettantist pseudo-radical lifestyle consumerism (as opposed to a reactionary consumerist lifestyle I suppose) does not give me much hope. It starts to look like the bastard child of 'civil society' and 1968-avant garde intellectual militancy.

I do not want to end on a cynical or negative note. I do think there are other concepts and theorisations which take us further than the somewhat tainted concept of civil society. One such possibility is Alfred Hirschman's notion of 'social energy'<sup>25</sup> which he uses to help explain how, when and why materially disadvantaged groups organise collectively and 'get things done'. He suggests that the three key components of social energy are 'friendship', 'ideals' and 'ideas'. In my view, the concept helps in understanding the shift in social energy in the post-Yugoslav space away from 'grassroots nationalists' and the smaller group of 'elitist anti-nationalists' towards a renewed grassroots community development and mobilisation which brings together smaller informal groups, some older representational/identity organisations, and informal community leaders. Crucially, the elitist claimants to 'genuine' civil society, whilst no longer a source of positive social energy, continue to prevail in the public sphere.

Elsewhere, a group of action researchers, including myself, have sought to trace something of this shift in terms of the concept of community development and mobilisation, the conceptualisation of which borrows from Saul Alinsky and, even more so, from the inspirational writings and work of Paulo Freire<sup>26</sup>. A somewhat rationalistic strand of the current re-emphasis on community development derives

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25 Hirschmann, A. (1984) *Getting Ahead Collectively: grassroots experiences in Latin America* New York: Pergamon Press.

26 Stubbs, P. (2006) 'Conceptualising Community Development and Mobilisation', in MAP (eds) *Community Development and Mobilisation in Croatia*, forthcoming. An earlier version of this text, in English and Croatian can be found on web: [www.map.hr](http://www.map.hr). Paulo Freire's classic text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* has been translated into Croatian, Freire, P. (2002) *Pedagogija obespravljenih* Zagreb: Odraž.

from Jurgen Habermas' notion of the importance of a genuine participatory 'public sphere'<sup>27</sup>, notably in Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wright's conceptualisation and charting of 'empowered participatory governance'<sup>28</sup>, whose three central principles are: (1) a focus on specific, tangible problems; (2) the involvement of ordinary people affected by these problems and people close to them; and (3) the deliberative development of solutions to these problems.

Finally, in all of this, lest we end with idealistic rationalism, there is a need for irony and mimicry<sup>29</sup>. The whole 'civil society' business needs to be deconstructed with something of a comic tone. Nowhere is this better done, in my view, than in the text 'Ubleha za idiote'<sup>30</sup>, described by its authors as "an absolutely unnecessary guide to civil society building and leading projects for local and internationals in BiH and wider". Here is the ultimate ironic definition of 'civil society':

**Civil society** Not only the opposite of military society, although many think it is. It is no, either, politics, the social, the economy, neither is it only urban; what it is – nobody knows but it sounds good; it is also one of the RVRs

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27 For Habermas, the public sphere is "made up of private people gathered together as a public and articulating the needs of society with the state" Habermas, J. (1989, first German edition 1962) *The Structural transformation of the Public Sphere* Cambridge: Polity press.

28 cf. Fung A. and Olin Wright, E. (eds.) (2003) *Deepening Democracy: institutional innovations in empowered participatory governance* London: Verso.

29 The notion of 'mimicry' here is derived from Homi Bhabha's post-colonial theory, hence "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference. ....Mimicry is thus the sign of a *double articulation*; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other as it visualizes power. Mimicry is also *the sign of the inappropriate*, however, a difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an immanent threat to both 'normalized' knowledges and disciplinary powers. Bhabha, H. (1994) *The Location of Culture* London: Routledge. I am grateful to Mariella Pandolfi for alerting me to this concept recently.

30 Šavija -Valha, N. and Milanović-Blank R. (no date) *Ubleha za idiote* in Album web: [http://www.album.co.ba/autori/zajednicki/nsv\\_i\\_rmb.htm](http://www.album.co.ba/autori/zajednicki/nsv_i_rmb.htm). I am grateful to Elissa Helms for sending me the text.

**RVR** A word on a higher register. The beginning and the end of all RVRs is simply *ubleha*

**Ubleha** Auto referential, the highest category of civil society and of contemporary political philosophy. ... *Ubleha* is not stupidity, it is unthought out, and unthought through. (My translation)<sup>31</sup>.

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31 The concept of ‘*Ubleha*’ is, appropriately not translatable.

# From Visibility of Non-governmental Organisations towards the Visibility of Peace Work

Tamara Šmidling

*“You know the trouble with activists? They assume that having the vision and speaking out for nonviolent social change is the same as having the technique and skill to”.*

*“On the other side of the coin”, I responded, “having the technique and skill does not necessarily provide the vision”.*

*From the book Preparing for Peace, John Paul Lederach*

## **A kind of an introduction**

I have been trying to complete this text for a while now, to put it within a framework I would be content with and that would reflect both my many years of experience in the field of peacebuilding and some of my basic intellectual preoccupations with this type of activity. Several things/terms make this work significantly more difficult because it feels that each of them in particular deserves to be addressed in a separate text – peacebuilding, civil society, non-governmental organisations, as well as the visibility of peacework and its effectiveness. It is not in the least incidental that I keep spinning within this very vicious cycle of *these* notions, because for some time now I have felt fairly discontented with their scope and contents I/we read into them, their basic (predominant) concepts and the ways in which they describe and conceive ‘themselves’. And the root of this discontent lies in my intense feeling, but also finds itself based in my continual communications with some very diverse people

and a constant ‘scanning’ of media production in Bosnia and Herzegovina (and more broadly, in the region of the former SFRY), that peacework, in the minds of the people and the public in general, is in 99% of the cases closely linked to ‘NGO activities’ or (in an only seemingly more acceptable variant) activities of the so called ‘civil society’. At this point I find it easy to imagine the justified objections of the kind of ‘Well, what seems to be the problem there?’ or ‘It is logical for it to be like that considering that no one else wants to deal with some ‘hot’ issues!’.

And that’s exactly the point where the greatest challenge for myself as a peace activist lies, a member of a NGO and the writer of this text (in that exact order) – how to think out and criticise such a condition without becoming a part of the story in which non-governmental organisations, as the most exposed and most promoted part of the ‘civil society’ are always an easy and convenient target for ‘attacks’ from all sides and all ideological positions (from national-chauvinists to anarchists and back, through the entire social scope) and how to preserve oneself from the lethal smugness and belief that there is no room for criticism and that it is **heresy** to criticise the modes of work and approaches of non-governmental organisations whose activists often perceive themselves as a sort of ‘cultured heroes/heroines’ who bring light where the darkness had reigned before them.

My choice in such a situation is criticism (I have a feeling that it is criticism that we largely lack), and also the sort of criticism that doesn’t come from the positions of ‘theory’, but instead gains its momentum through everyday, immediate experience of *practices* of peacework and work in a non-governmental organisation. It is important for me to emphasise that I consider my own work and the work of the organisation I am in to be a part of this story, and by no means a morally superior exception.

The situation in which increasingly bureaucratised<sup>1</sup> NGOs remain and survive in the public as carriers of peace processes and at the same time not being very keen on dealing with self-reflection and an open social dialogue with

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1 In this text, I use bureaucratised NGOs to describe the situation in which a large number of organisations find themselves, organisations with administrative work abounding, writing reports and project proposals, corresponding with ministries in charge, banks and other institutions, the work that take up a large portion of capacities and potential.

‘the rest of the world’ doesn’t seem to be promising in terms of peacebuilding in our region; not even to mention the painful lack of *vision* or at least their conspicuous *invisibility*. Unless phrases such as ‘democratisation, NATO-isation and Europeanisation (i.e. EU accession)’ are counted as a vision. I will attempt to explicate the three basic theses in this text:

- The necessity of peacework as a basic priority of our societies (or the need to be treated as such);
- The lethality of understanding that NGOs are exclusive carriers of these processes (or the erroneous belief that with the imagined cessation of the work of NGOs the peacebuilding will stop too);
- The need for new paradigms of peacework that will make the work itself *visible*, i.e. its results, instead of its most exposed/most powerful agents and the phraselike ‘newspeech’ and a multitude of ‘efficient models’.

### **‘What do you do? Peacebuilding, pardon my French...’**

*‘I see peacebuilding as a broad range of social activities that create and empower vertical and horizontal social connections, further meeting people’s needs, create space for constructive, nonviolent conflict transformation and influence increasing the sensibility of social institutions for social justice and generally influences the creation of a culture of peace and dialogue. Peacebuilding is a lasting process of reshaping social relations that enable a different use and more just distribution of power at the levels of individuals, institutions, communities and the entire society and culture.’*

Marina Škrabalo

One of the greatest (or at least the more specific) challenges I have encountered during my peacework is to explain to various people what it is that I really do. The challenge lurked in all sorts of places – from numerous border crossings in our much divided region and communications with customs officers, the police and other ‘uniforms’, to chatting to my own curious parents and family who were never ever satisfied by various theoreticians’ definitions, no matter how ‘clever’ and precise they were. I have wholeheartedly tried to explain (especially to people close to me) that peacebuilding, for me, doesn’t mean working in a

NGO, but rather living in a way that entails constantly finding some small, everyday strategies for criticising the existing knowledge, rebellion, subversion of certain relations of power, non-consent to certain matrices (even if they were promoted by wise people).

What seemed to be more interesting than my attempts to explain what I do were their very different and often mutually quite opposing views on peace work such as: a) something 'beautiful and good', but that, really, come on, no one who can do anything concrete in his/her life ever does;<sup>2</sup> b) something that is a part of the package along with 'transition, democratisation, Europeanisation and NATO-isation', and is therefore, mind you, necessary, whatever it really is; c) something they think they have no clue about, but there are those who are in the know about it ('Those NGO people') and do it (the meaner among them would call it 'whistling in the dark') for some quite handsome money unattainable by average citizens (increasingly often called by numerous economic experts, in a very patronising manner, 'transition losers').

And however I try to keep the focus on peace work during such conversations, and not on non-governmental organisations, the conversation would very often move in exactly that direction, which I saw as a clear message that peace work (as well as some notions such as – activism, civil/citizens' society etc) is 'doomed' to be perceived through the role and contribution of NGO and largely viewed through their very poor image. I also found it to be a very strong and intense incentive for me to re-examine yet another matrix, the one I partly belong to myself, which is the matrix of acting through a peace (but still also a non-governmental) organisation.

Instead of dealing with 'lack of information, ignorance, lack of sensibilisation' of my collocutors and instead of lamenting over the 'low level of political (and general) culture of our citizens', I will rather critically view the clumsiness or downright

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2 I have to emphasise that I have encountered this perception mostly among people from Serbia whose notion of the wars lead in the region of the former Yugoslavia is still fairly vague and inevitably marked by constant balancing between the 'state of denial' and 'state of justification'. Non-existence of broader awareness of the horrendous consequences of the wars and thousands of victims, of devastated cities and villages, lives destroyed, has as a consequence the non-existence of awareness of and the need for existence of something that is called peacebuilding. 'Aren't we living in peace?' is one of the most frequent questions, the answer to which is usually not even expected.



nonsensicalness of the explanations and (self)reflection that peaceworkers are ready to give and share with the society they live and work in and communicate with daily, as well as the enclosure of public space (shaped by the neo-liberal logic of ‘time is money’) they have at their disposal for such explanations. Reaching out for highbrow language of ‘non-governmental organisation, civil sector, project management, grassroots and middle level peacebuilding’ to explain a relatively simple thing that the answer to the question of ‘why are we in peacebuilding and in what ways?’ does very little for recognising, accepting and higher visibility and recognizance of this type of work without which I sincerely believe there can be no real progress of our society and that should be understood as priority of all priorities.

In order to achieve this broad acceptance of peacework, we need to think and conceptualise the answers to several questions: What it is that we wish to achieve? In what ways do we wish to achieve it? And lastly, but not least importantly, why do we want to do it? However banal these may seem, I think it won’t hurt to remind of these questions, to demand other’s answers to them and to offer the world one’s own answers and thoughts.

The existing discourse of peacebuilding is saturated by the answers of the sort – ‘We wish to fight against discrimination on ethnic, religious, racial, sex bases through organising education and public campaigns, because these are the types of discrimination that affect a large number of people and make our society non-democratic, fairly violent etc.’ In such ‘typical’ answers, reflection on the following subject is somehow lost – what is this overall society that we *really* want?, what do we mean by peace values?<sup>3</sup>, how ready we are to talk to those who think differently?, in what ways and how do we think of the language we use?, how ready we are to share our failures, shortcomings and things we overlooked with others?, what is our very personal motivation to work on peacebuilding? (if we abstract the famous ‘philanthropy and caring for others’ – where are we in all that?)

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- 3 How aware are we that the same words can have completely different meanings – for example, ‘solidarity’ and ‘social justice’ can entail completely different notions to different social groups with diametrically opposing concrete manifestations? How prepared are we to move forward from the statement that ‘we share the same values’ that hardly holds water, and instead try to comb through our own value premises?

I think one of the possible pathways for recognising and attaining a broad horizontal and vertical social support for peacebuilding is exactly to make these, often covert, aspects of peacebuilding, visible and open for discussion, the aspects that are usually pushed to the side because we don't consider them to be attractive enough for our presentations to donors or the media, or we experience them as irrelevant in the context of continual attempts to provide grants for our work, or we believe that the 'dirty laundry' comprised of our failures, mistakes, dilemmas and fears should not be displayed, because we would thus expose our weaknesses.

In my opinion, promoting the idea of necessity of peacebuilding means to be in a dialogue with the world surrounding us, to be able to explain what, how and for what reason, to continually reflect on the basic concepts of one's own approach and to be ready for a change 'within oneself', to at least the same extent to which one expects to see a change 'around oneself'.

## NGO – honours or horrors?

*'Civil society is not a magical concept that means the same in every time, context or society; it is not a magical panacea, it needs to be put into a context.'*

*Paul Stubbs*

In its narrow sense that usually includes non-governmental organisations and 'other forms of association and connection of citizens', has increasingly been a subject of critical examinations by theoreticians working in the region of the former Yugoslavia in the past years.<sup>4</sup> Even though the birth and development of civil society in our regions is mostly linked to the period of the beginning of the wars, the late 1990s are signified by a period of a complete boom of civil society (particularly so in Bosnia and Herzegovina)<sup>5</sup>, we would be well advised

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- 4 I particularly point out the works by Paul Stubbs and Vlasta Jalušić that I found to be very inspiring and refreshing.
- 5 A good and concise overview of terms and problems linked to civil society engagement in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the field of conflict transformation and peacebuilding is made in the article by Marina Fischer, with the title of «Civil Society in Conflict Transformation – Ambivalence, Potentials and Challenges», in: *Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation*, [www.berghof-handbook.net](http://www.berghof-handbook.net)

to remind ourselves of the fact that in the so called socialist period in the regions of SFRY there also existed various, more or less developed forms of civil associations, initiatives and activities. It seems important to accept the concept that the civil societies in these regions are not, after all, models imported from 'the West' at the time when the bloodthirsty wars began, because this opens a perspective for a broader and much more contextualised viewing of the very notion of 'civil society' in which the manager-structured non-governmental organisations are not necessarily predominant (as is the case today).

I see the basic problem with the premise in which NGO and NGO-ised concept of civil society are treated as 'paramount to social change' in the problem-ridden trend that, in parallel to the above mentioned 'equalisation' of peacework with activities of (peace) non-governmental organisations, also unfolds the (also undesired) transposing and 'weaving into' the very weft of peacework of some problematic principles on which NGOs act. In other words, I find it difficult to believe in effective 'value oriented peace work' based on principles of a society of solidarity, social justice and equality, that would be conducted by competitive market oriented, highly hierarchised and professionalized NGOs.

Thus, probably even without a clear awareness and intention for it, peacework has to a certain extent become a field of competition; a field in which culture of dialogue and exchange of approaches has not been established; a culture of giving and accepting feedback; a field of whose reaches and results it is difficult to speak of due to the habit of not documenting anything from peace practice but save for the reports to donors; a field in which information is not exchanged and in which insufficient attention is paid to strategic, long-term approach and building solid associations with other, current or potential, agents of peace processes.

It is fair and necessary to pay the deserved recognition to NGOs for their enormous efforts and significant achieved results in certain fields,<sup>6</sup> as well as

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6 I find it particularly important to mention organisations that work in the field of dealing with the past and human rights protection.

to acknowledge and value in acceptable ways the great energy and endeavour that hundreds of activists have for years invested in peacebuilding work. It is equally, I would say, important to critically view the practices so far and to break the unwritten rule according to which the most concrete criticism of the work of NGOs never come from the so called ‘insiders’, people active in the NGOs, because it is considered to be disloyal and non-collegial, if not even condescension to impassioned ‘enemies of justice and freedom’.

Taking into consideration the current non-enviable positions in which large numbers of organisations currently find themselves in, which entail complete financial dependence on international funds, narrow possibilities of conceiving adequate activities without the influence of ‘external’ factors, non-existence of adequate legal regulation defining the legal status of these organisations, the increasing professionalisation and bureaucratisation of the employed followed by the lack of ‘activist zeal’, it is not difficult to conclude that the perspective for their further work and existence is fairly bleak. Still, this shouldn’t lead to the conclusion that it necessarily indicates a bleak perspective for peacebuilding.

We can act in more ways than one against such inevitability, of which I will name but a few:

- empowering and encouraging activism and activists instead of exclusive production and training of managers and coordinators;
- empowering public dialogue with the basic motivation of promoting an inclusive principle in peace work, instead of exclusivity of any organisation/association;
- search for visions instead of constant building of skills and techniques.

### **And finally – visibility (or what seems to be the problem?)**

It is expected and customary that, when speaking of the visibility of peace work, in most of the cases we speak of quality and quantity related approaches of peace work in the media, or more broadly, in public spaces (ranging from streets, squares, parks to, unfortunately scarce, public discussions, theoretical and activist reflections and discussions). To put it in a very simplified manner, either things that are present in the media (particularly on television, as, for

a vast majority of people, undisputed arbiter separating the ‘important’ from ‘unimportant’, ‘necessary’ from ‘unnecessary’) or what happens in the streets we walk everyday – is what is called visible. Our perception, i.e. degree of visibility of these events, will depend on the entire series of factors – the number of people who gathered, our previous knowledge and interest in the problem the attention is being drawn to, our political orientation, degree of empathy and sympathy for carriers of action, our environment’s and other people’s reaction to one and the same event, and so forth...

A good part of my motivation for writing this text is in the need to try to expand this understanding of visibility with some other aspects, i.e. to try to view it from some other angles as well.

Visibility in the media, i.e. in a broader public space, can be seen as a type of *presence* of peace work in the public sphere, i.e. as a way of *attaining greater visibility* and influence. This would mean that a constant and well thought out presence of peace initiatives in the media is a good way of contributing to creating public opinion with the goal of increased acceptance and acknowledging the values and the need for peace work, but also that the *real results and impact* of peace activities (and thereby their *total visibility*) will also depend on many other factors that will be considered in the paragraphs that follow.

The most visible peace work will certainly be work that gets the most results, that is the most effective and that, through its approach and choice methods, contributes the most to working on identified problems that can be and are very diverse, for example: establishing a dialogue between various social groups, conflict transformation, restorative and transitional justice, environmental protection, human rights, dealing with the past, economic and political progress, education, research, trauma healing are but a few of these. If what we do meets its purpose, reaches the selected social spheres and has a concrete effect in the society one acts in, we can say that it is realistic to assume that such peace work will be visible and recognisable. The problem, as expected, arises when we try to define the criteria on which we can claim that the goals are achieved, and that our peace work is appropriate and effective, which is a question that often arose at both ‘activist’ and theoretical levels,

but one that still remains with no satisfactory and all encompassing answers. It is difficult to measure, in terms of both quantity and quality, the effect of peace work as a whole, and even more difficult to measure the effects of specific activities and initiatives. The situation is, at the same time, not made easier by rigid frameworks imposed by donors, accepted at face value by local agents, the frameworks demanding the achieved results to be expressed in mathematically precise indicators, which is not realistic, to say the least, bearing in mind the very nature of peacebuilding as a very long-term process oriented activity.

Is there a possibility of viewing peace work and its success or lack thereof a bit more broadly, as a whole composed of many different activities, initiatives, ideas, burnouts, that we (our organisation, group, movement, collective) contribute to in an important, specific, but not exclusive, the only right one and self-contained way? Would we be prepared to, for instance, instead of trying to count the participants of our programmes for war veterans who continue to be in peacebuilding and turning these numbers into some usable parameters (preferably in percents), reach out for an attempt to see how many veterans (at some kind of a global level of our region), and in which way, appear in the role of agents of peacebuilding and how that is looked upon by the society, what kind of echoes these attempts encounter, what we can learn from these collective experiences? If in 2001 there were zero peace initiatives that involved war veterans, whereas nowadays there are six or seven of them in different parts of the region, we can conclude that some things change for the better, that they become more effective and thus also more visible. If we, on the other hand, stop at this conclusion alone and continue to look for 'our part and our percentage' in it, with no wish to make a critical overview of this process and have a dialogue with other agents of the same process, then we hit a dead end, I'm afraid, and we patter in the dark, lost in our erroneous belief that a mere increase in the number of veteran peace initiatives also means improved quality of action.

For this reason, it would be most useful to make a coordinated and continuous effort directed towards establishing a set of criteria of effectiveness of peace work, that would be discussed in public and observed through a prism of specific social contexts.

If, therefore, we observe the category of visibility in the sense of efficiency and adjustment of peacework to a concrete situation, and at the same time we have some well defined criteria of success of this same work, it would not be possible for good peacework to be invisible at the same time. Still, it would not mean that we too, we the carriers of peace processes, will become more visible and have more of an influence on creating public opinion.

This other aspect is worth empowering through additional activities, but only after we have become assured that we did our best in the following fields:<sup>7</sup>

- coordination and sharing information between peace workers;
- building a local, national and regional (global) peace community;
- leaving the narrow strips of cooperation with the likeminded ones and those who share ‘our’ values;
- articulating goals and changes we advocate;
- dialogue with governing structures including those ‘against’ us.

Only after, or parallel to, the afore mentioned activities, contents could be added to the greater presence in the media that not even the best conceived and most sensitive media approaches could provide for our peacework in and of themselves.

I end this text by remembering a fairly widespread question/dilemma that I have heard many times from many peace activists: ‘How can we make this work visible, when peace activities almost never make the *news*?’<sup>8</sup> It seems important to me that, before we (lightly) accept the logic that ‘whatever is not in the media never happened to begin with’, we should try to work seriously on the quality and roundedness of our approaches to peacework. Only when we become sure that we have done everything to make our activities conceived in a way that meets the needs of the social context to the greatest extent possible and that they largely correspond with other past and current activities collected in the field; that the value basis of our work is clear and real (instead of merely

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7 According to quotes by Tamara Mihalić, in the concept of her yet unpublished work.

8 Meaning they are not shocking, scandalous, sensational enough, or, to put it more mildly, are not ‘TV-genic’ and dynamic enough.

declarational) and that we are prepared to have a dialogue about it; that we have thought well about the language we use – only then can we be assured that our work will make the *news*. And the news, as is well known, spread through all channels possible, of which printed and electronic media are but one, even though possibly the most influential and the loudest, but certainly not the only possible channel. By saying this, I don't mean to advocate non-cooperation with the media or to relativise the significance of media presence of peacework. What I wish to support with this thesis is non-conforming with the set rules that turn agents of peacework into activist *celebrities* and an attempt to create a different type of media presentation that would be placed outside the highbrow discourse of the so called 'elite of the third sector' and a discourse supporting the advertising philosophy in the field of peacework.



# Ethics and Peace Work – the Unbearable Lightness of Acting

Ana Bitoljanu

*‘Ethics may seem like an intellectual abstraction,  
but we are all, in our own ways, ethicist’  
Rethinking War and Peace, Diana Francis*

In societies where everything is relative, it is good’ to have a constant, even if the constant is this very thing: everything is relative and everything can be relativised. Thus even the red traffic light is seen as an option, to stop or not, depending on many factors.<sup>1</sup> What is then to be said about more difficult issues – are heroes heroes or war criminals?, are victims victims or manipulators?, and how many of them were there to begin with?, are non-governmental organisations defenders of democracy or foreign mercenaries?, is it citizens’ will or a hidden political agenda? and so on and so forth. The answers are, naturally, not easy and are often not of the ‘either or’ variety. In all of it, it is even more difficult that the ethics is not, or it shouldn’t be, relative or subjective.

## Why isn’t there any?

In these regions, among people who are in peace work (and otherwise too), the words ethics, morality, ethical are seldom heard. They are not in the project proposals that are mostly written in a more or less universal language full of well known bits and descriptions, along with *copy pasting* parts of the previous

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1 “Possible options depend on the size of the car, shape and form of its plates, combination of the driver’s being underage and social status of his parents, etc” Father Metodij Zlatanov, *Essay*, Nedelno vreme, 12 March 2006

project proposals (which in itself should tell us something), even though the concepts of peacebuilding point to importance of ethical awareness and responsibility towards a community<sup>2</sup>, as well as to the fact that establishing the rule of law in the post-conflict environments is tightly linked to establishing ethics, i.e. renewing social norms.<sup>3</sup> There certainly are more complex and profound reasons for this situation that will, I hope, soon become of interest to some more encompassing and complex research, and become a subject of open discussion and questioning for those who are terrified by ‘theory’. A community that doesn’t become aware of the need for establishing an ethical framework within which it will work and act can hardly hope for a sustainable, constructive work; it will rather move in the direction of building and deconstruction, whereby it will not always be clear which is which, i.e. when something is built and when it is deconstructed.

Let’s take a look, somewhat superficially for the time being, which are the possible reasons for avoiding ethics. Several possible reasons are unveiled through conversations with people. Some of them are linked to the way in which activists themselves think about ethics, and some of them are linked to how the society we live in thinks about it and thus, in a way, indirectly influences the attitudes of activists, because we work with people from various groups and environments that, whether we want it or not, determine us in various ways.

Ethics is often perceived as, primarily, the Christian ethics, due to the long tradition of using the words ethics and morality in a religious context and alongside religious terminology (where they can, of course, be found nowadays as well). In these, ‘our’, regions, such perception that ethics equals religious ethics is frequent, and it rather hinders viewing its importance and significance to the full. On the one hand, there is a piled up experience of failing to respect religious ethical values by the very dignitaries of the church but also people who declare themselves as religious in general. On the other hand, there is a direct

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2 Eastern Mennonite University, Center for Justice and Peacebuilding – Core Values and Mission  
3 John Hopkins University, School of Advanced International Studies – Approaches: Peacebuilding

involvement and responsibility of both Catholic and Orthodox churches<sup>4</sup> in the wars and conflicts that affected countries of the former Yugoslavia in the past fifteen or so years. Due to all this, most of the activists from the region do not want to have anything to do with anything that bears religious connotations. Not even with positive potentials for peace work that every religion carries, not even individuals or smaller groups within those religious communities who have tried to oppose the 'main stream' and were marginalised for it... Major religious communities, at the time when they readily accepted the cries for war and tried to fight for their own murky interests, completely forgetting teachings and basic religious and ethical values at that, have lost the right to be adequate ethical role models in the society; what they say, even when it sounds correct, is taken with scepticism, and a lot of time will have to pass until cooperation becomes normal between non-governmental organisations and activist groups with various religious organisations or groups. Unfortunately so.

Then there is the opinion that, in order to address ethics, one should have some, preferably institutional experience; a school, a course, a certificate etc. Ethics is thus linked to 'academism', or its negative connotation, because academism here is opposed to activism, opposed to 'us' who deal with practical work (in fact the 'real' work, often *grassroots*, in poor conditions and in the field) and ethics is something addressed theoretically by various professors provided for at faculties and institutes and 'there's not much use of that'. On the other hand, theoreticians seldom, or insufficiently, recognise values of practical work, they don't recognise the need for systematic sublimation of knowledge and experiences attained in this way, and so they, for most part, deserve the afore mentioned criticism. This gap between practice and theory is very destructive, because ethical judgement that is not valid in practice should also be debatable in theory, and practice that fails to raise everyday individual activities to some sort of a clear and, as much as possible, theoretically supported system of values

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4 By this I don't mean to amnesty instigators of war, members of Islamic religious community, who were also quite numerous and who are just as responsible for wartime events, but only to point out the possible link between perception of ethics and the Christian ethics by people living in the region of the former Yugoslavia.

will never manage to establish a mechanism of spreading ethical ideas in order for them to become normative.

Thirdly, ethics in our transitional societies are experienced as just another heritage from the past, an unfortunate system we need to distance ourselves from, sometimes in a deliberate and well founded way and sometimes by pure inertia. A system in which, at least seemingly, it made sense and significance to refer to someone's individual morality or someone's professional ethics (for example, a journalists' code or physicians' ethics). Nowadays, with all the characters who realise their personal interests as politicians, businessmen, journalists etc, to think in ethical categories, to refer to them, or, heaven forbid, call for responsibility of someone in a position or with certain power, not only sounds out of place but, even more horribly so, sounds naive and is met with ridicule. By choosing to be in peace work, activists rarely receive widespread support from their environment, so that once we have neglected offensive and disparaging titles such as 'thieves', 'mercenaries' or an explanation that what they are doing is 'idle work', what remains is a paradoxically, but truthfully so, better variant of being labeled 'naive', 'don quixote's', 'utopians', 'what sort of a profession is that?!'... Thus, by working and trying to balance these and other pressures, it is quite understandable that activists do not want to further burden their position by insisting on some sort of ethics, particularly if they haven't thought or are not quite clear about what the value of such ethics is (even though they will often openly defend some typically ethical values, but under different names).

Thus, ethics has become yet another word that has lost its contents, that has 'worn out'. It is unpopular because of its exaggerated (ab)use and manipulation in the past decades, it is unpopular because it needs to critically observe and look for different values, positioning itself in opposition to instant culture, consumerism, insensitivity towards others etc. It is also unpopular because, at the moment, in our societies, it carries very small comfort to those who are 'unsuccessful' and haven't managed to find themselves and sort things out for themselves in these murky times (and 'sorting things out for yourself' entails constantly doing all sorts of unethical things). We therefore face quite a journey

of re-introducing ethics into everyday vocabulary, going hand in hand with the difficulty of establishing and the use of the concept of social responsibility.

### **What it is about, or where there still is a bit of it...**

In the past several years certain progress has been made in establishing ethical behaviour/work in peace work, even though discussions linked to the ethics of peace work have moved more towards defining relations between external and internal agents (or was it just heard as the loudest?) and the matters linked to 'ownership' over the process and results of the work itself, and not so much towards defining principles and ways of work or ethical principles. The ethical principles of peace work are largely not talked about, and nor are they questioned enough.

Ethical codes appear in organisations, here and there, as codes of professional responsibility – a sort of formal statement on the values a certain organisation advocates. They appear more often if it is about a particularly delicate field of work or fields that are in a way easier to define through the description of work, activities or specificity of groups, for example in work with children, the media etc. At the same time, since what is mostly defined are the values, it is bashfully hinted at that in cases in which there would be doubt about someone's work being contradictory to those values, there is an Ethical Commission (or another ethical body) that would deal with it. These ethical bodies, conceived in such a way that they have an advisory and/or supervisory role, are seldom heard of, even though the efficiency of these codes depends on the very extent to which they are supported or sanctioned. In practice it is often the case that there is no procedure if a violation of these values occur, so the impression remains that these commissions/bodies have not yet entirely begun to function.

What is talked about, however, and what does belong to the ethical body, are values of peace work, i.e. the question of what it is that we strive for in our work. We should thence move towards 'in what way do I strive for these values and what happens when there is a discrepancy in terms of the ways I work in the name of some values and the values themselves?'. There is mostly a

consensus, at least in terms of listing certain values. At the same time, even if it is relatively clear what it means to work on social change, to advocate inclusion and participation, cooperation, solidarity or non-acceptance of discrimination and violence, the very mention of democracy, tolerance etc. causes a mass of problems (both in the assumption that we all agree on and implicitly includes these terms and their contents, and in questioning how individuals or groups perceive them), so that due to the impossibility of a consensus they are more often than not avoided. Among the values that are usually listed, I find cooperation the most interesting, cooperation is so praised and so desired but very difficult to find in practice. This kind of discrepancy between value and practice smells of the enclosure of groups and individuals dealing with peace work, both among themselves and towards others. Furthermore, this enclosure leads to various groupings, most frequently on the bases of approaches to work, whereby organisations and individuals mostly stick to a narrow field of cooperation, often forgetting that different approaches do not necessarily lead to a drastic or complete discrepancy in terms of values.

One such discrepancy in terms of values, is not being aware of our partners' roles in the work. Participants, agents of peace work, often communicate with each other through superior and inferior relations, on the bases of differences in scale, resources, direct or indirect involvement, influence, etc. In this way, dominant negative social patterns are copied, positions of 'power over...' are established and the part of participants is reduced to mere implementers. Thus the field of peace work is often a competition, even though one of its main ethical values is to bring together and support jointly desired changes (working on social change is often listed as the priority value of peace work, and through acknowledging the importance of partner relations, the potentials of all participants who contribute to peacebuilding are developed and nurtured, regardless of how great this contribution is).

Another major discrepancy is in the different relations towards local communities. These differences can perhaps be seen in a superficial way through conflicts about the issue of loyalty. Mostly the people who work for major and/or foreign organisations say that it is necessary to be loyal towards

funders and/or matrix organisation, that it is a starting point and that it means to work in a responsible manner (which is most frequently more or less clearly written down in the description of the job position). A good many of the people who, mostly, work for local organisations say that even if we allow the concept of loyalty to begin with, we owe our work and our loyalty primarily to the people we work for and with, i.e. community. The third group will absolutely refuse to have anything whatsoever to do with loyalty, due to potential peril that it, in itself, excludes the possibility of criticism and self-criticism, i.e. loyalty calls for a sort of blindness and unquestioning. What is intriguing is the fact that even if there is some clear system of activities that could also be an ethical system (where one more or less knows what to do, what is desirable and what is not desirable and where there are some written materials about it, such as a 'work code'), it's these selfsame major and/or foreign organisations and people. Probably because of how numerous they are, because of how hierarchically positioned or the range of work they do, they come the closest to having a clear concept and at the same time a possibility of sanctioning, if that concept is not respected. It is quite another matter how much this concept is appropriate in the environments in which they work and how the 'local' agents relate to it.

Another problem that emerges in the relationship of ethics-peace work is lack of clarity about what peace work is, or rather, *all things that are peace work*. The answers to this question range from attempts to narrow down and clearly define it such as 'peace work is so and so...', to generalisations such as 'everything, peace work is every, even the smallest, action that influences, helps and maintains peace'. Additional confusion is created by the fact that a part of people who are perceived as someone who is in peace work don't experience themselves like that for all sorts of reasons – 'if you are paid, then that's not peace work, you're just doing your job like everyone else', 'if it's not clear what peace work is how can someone be a peace worker?', 'I don't see myself like that because it sounds too formal, somehow too Western', 'the field of peacebuilding is so wide and all encompassing that I can't define it like that, I only work on a small portion of it'...

Establishing a more universal system of values of peace work, or rather, the need to turn it into something tangible which we could refer to, seems quite important to me, because the real purpose of ethics is for it to be applicable and to manage practical behaviour. For the time being, most of us work according to our own feelings, according to our own ethical beliefs. People, certainly, know what is good or bad on an individual level, they will seldom do something bad and say, 'ok, this is not good, but never mind now...', they will rather do something believing they are doing something good, that that is how it should be done. By working in a certain way we believe to be the right way, we try to establish some sort of standards that we expect others to respect and implement, because they are 'right, desirable, good etc'. And that's exactly where the greatest discrepancy is found. A moral system hasn't been achieved, various organisations work in various ways, and there are often differences between work within a single organisation, which doesn't always or necessarily have to be bad in itself if it weren't for the personal or inter-organisation conflicts in which both sides act as morally correct and therefore, of course, superior. Thus various agents which deal with peacebuilding often point out to one another, with not much success, what is desirable way to work, thereby every now and again entering an antagonist relationship as if there were not enough problems in this field without that.

In such a situation there is almost no control mechanism that would help us to work better and prevent the unwanted consequences of certain peace work. We judge how we work and how others work on a daily basis, but since we don't have enough room for a constructive criticism and discussion about it, it is all reduced to private talks. Even when we think that someone or some organisation does counterproductive things under the guise of peace work, there is not much that can be done, not to mention the step back, i.e. *the most important* and real question is how come we are so sure that what someone else does is negative, how do we make such conclusions? In rare cases when it is about, for example, an obvious discrimination against a group or about open sexism etc, it is relatively easy to react or say that the way in which the work is done is bad. However, most of the problematic situations are by no means as



evident and clear. If it is left up to me and my consciousness, about how I am going to work or approach people in the community, certain groups or problems, it is by all means undeniably legitimate that everyone else has that right too, regardless of the ways they work or whether I agree with it (particularly not whether I agree with it).

### **A bit of demistification for the end**

When people work on problems of peace work they deal with ethical issues at the same time (the other way round too, of course), often not knowing or not linking the two. If we look at what is, for example, relevant for applied ethics<sup>5</sup> and what its contents address, we will see that a large part of it overlaps with the interests of the field of peace work or peace education, and there are certainly some shared points:

An ethical question is relevant if every thinking person has to face it. We face some of these questions every day, others fortunately don't include our everyday decisions, although they can come up at a certain point of our lives. They also represent a sort of question to which every active participant has to think about in the social processes of decision making. For applied ethics, such questions are: the treatment of ethnic minorities, equality of women, use of animals for food and research, preserving the environment, abortion, euthanasia, the obligation of the rich to help the poor, refugees and their treatment, civil disobedience, sexual differences and sexual equality etc.<sup>6</sup> Sounds familiar, doesn't it?

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5 Applied ethics is a branch of ethics that attempts to practically implement ethical principles in specific social or individual problems. Peter Singer is considered to be one of the first philosophers to use the term 'applied ethics' as an expression for practical ethics. The fields and issues that applied ethics address are: human rights, social responsibility of economic subjects, bioethics, ethics of medium, education, research, computer, sports, military, international, marketing, ecological, legal ethics etc. Applied ethics belongs to a most expansive fields of humanities today.

6 Peter Singer, *Praktična etika (Practical Ethics)*, Signature, Belgrade, 2000, Foreword.

When we look back a hundred years or so, we can easily get the feeling of immeasurable joy, wonder and excitement at what man has built. When we look back, we can just as much get the feeling of immeasurable fear, wonder and despair, at what a human being has done, but also what a human being failed to do. Therefore, it is important that we respond to the main alibi-statements of today about there being no tried and safe ethical patterns and therefore no patterns should be respected, by establishing some sort of patterns even if they are not tried, even if we change them. The world we live in, unfortunately, does not get any better, and the future is not at all safe and certain. Ethics offers answers to some of the question that trouble us. A global change for the better obviously takes much more of everything, and probably mostly recognition, support and linking of those who work on that change, as well as erasing imaginary borders between 'different' fields.

# Like a Soundtrack from a Very Weird Movie

## Interview with Svetlana Lukić

(editor of the programme *Peščanik*<sup>1</sup>, Radio B92)

**You've been active in society for years now; in a way you've been dealing with peacebuilding, dealing with the past. Can you tell us more about your engagement?**

**S.L.** I didn't plan for my professional work to take place in this way, however, I was lucky and unlucky enough to start in journalism at the time of Milošević's rise to power. In the programme I had been doing at Radio Belgrade at the time, *None Like Myself* it was called, I had warned about that man. The war was starting, I had made some documentary reports from the fronts and then I was suspended, and fired from Radio Television of Serbia (RTS). I was taken aback by the wars of the 1990s and all other subjects simply became marginal compared to this main one, the most horrible one, and I've gone with the flow. Everything else seemed to me to be picking flowers in a burning forest.

I'd hoped that after the year 2000 judiciary and executive authorities would begin to function, but they haven't. If the wars of the 1990s were not subject of the media, they would be forgotten. This government uses phrases in its press releases that cover up the essence of things, for example: 'fulfilling our obligations to The Hague', 'locating Ratko Mladić'. Then you have the news that say that we have fulfilled yet another obligation to The Hague. You don't find explanations of why this man is indicted anywhere, or in a quite marginal way, and then it's logical that young people, who don't remember what happened and people who

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1 The programme *Peščanik* (Hourglass) is broadcast on Radio B92 since 2 February 2000. So far, there have been more than two hundred seventy programmes or around eleven thousand interviews with people who believe that a civil Serbia is possible. The programme is co-edited by Svetlana Lukić and Svetlana Vuković. (editor's note)

tend not to recall what happened, don't know why someone has gone to The Hague. In the news it is said that someone took a trip to The Hague, and that his son received the keys to his new car. I wish I could see the explanation of why general Pavković<sup>2</sup> had gone to The Hague on the state television, because a large number of people, even those who agree that the obligations to The Hague should be fulfilled, don't know what he's charged with, and we're talking about the gravest of the crimes against humanity. So we continue to do, me as well as many other people from the non-governmental sector and the media, what the state and its public service, the state television, haven't taken upon themselves to do.

**Have the relations of the media with respect to the past, to dealing with it, changed and how much so?**

S.L. I think they have, and for the worse, too.

**In what way?**

S.L. The media that was independent during Milošević's time and played an honourable role in that particular time went commercial overnight. It's quite a logical thing in transition, but it means you have to win over as many viewers as possible. For this reason you'll tend to hush up some things people don't like to hear. That's how we got the *Big Brother* show. In order to increase viewers' and readers' ratings, in order for the financial auditors not to put pressure on you, you'll keep silent about many things. There's self-censorship involved. I don't believe that this executive government told any of the editors – do not go into much detail about why someone was indicted – rather, people just do it

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2 Colonel general Nebojša D. Pavković, the former chief of the General Staff of Yugoslav Army (VJ). At International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia in The Hague he was indicted of crimes against humanity (on four counts: deportation, forcible transfer, murder and persecution) and violating the laws and customs of war (killing); he is tried on the joint indictment for 'joint criminal endeavour' shared with the former president of Serbia Milan Milutinović, vice president of Government of SRY Nikola Šainović, defence minister Dragoljub Ojdanić, Commander of the Third Army of VJ Vladimir Lazarević and commander-in-chief of Serbian police force in Kosovo, Sreten Lukić. After several years of fierce refusal to do so, Nebojša Pavković gave himself in to the Tribunal on 25 April 2005. (editor's note)

spontaneously, because they want two million viewers instead of two hundred thousand. And since they allegedly know what sort of country they live in, they adapt to the viewers. That's how we lost media independence, in a way.

On the other hand, there's the state television that was supposed to be a public service, but instead became a partisan bulletin that is ever more shut down for the subjects related to the recent past. It was clear at the first more serious test, when the editor in chief of RTS commented on why he hadn't broadcast the integral footage with the Scorpions<sup>3</sup>. Instead of a speech on concrete crimes and individual people's accounts, we have an administrative speech that neither encourages thinking nor inspire empathy with the victims. Thus, on both sides of the media spectrum, we have an increasingly bad situation.

One finds it difficult to personalise a war crime. I know it is easier to speak about it in terms of numbers. I often have the feeling that I can no longer live with it. Sometimes it becomes unbearable because you remember the faces of those people, the landscapes, you remember mutilated people, refugees. And yet, you are obliged by it, in a way. I honestly believe that everything that happens in this society is directly linked to the past. The explosion of the military ammunition warehouse, that took place in Paraćin<sup>4</sup>, is linked to the wars that have been led, Milošević, crimes, the bombing of Yugoslavia, the cessation of negotiations with the European Union and the increase of the overall poverty we live in. The cessation of negotiations with the European Union happened because of Ratko Mladić who was in Srebrenica, a place that is an equation, unfortunately a very simple and bloody one. It's simply impossible to move on without sorting out the issues of the 1990s.

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- 3 The notorious unit that has taken part in many crimes amongst which the massacre in Trnovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, recorded by video camera, where in July 1995, they viciously shot six Bosniaks of Srebrenica in the back and killed them. For this crime, they were tried at the Special Court for War Crimes in Belgrade. Even though the International Crime Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia submitted evidence that the unit acted as a part of the Ministry of the Interior of Serbia, the prosecutor of War Crimes Court in Belgrade characterised the unit as 'paramilitary' in their verdict as well. (editor's note)
- 4 In the vicinity of Paraćin, around three and a half thousand tons of ammunition went off in a military warehouse in October 2006. (editor's note)

**How do you see the reach of your work, what is your perception in terms of answers to the question of what this society needs?**

**S.L.** I think it is necessary for us to name things. Someone said in an old film – we finally have to speak about the things that we dared to do. Meaning, you have done a good thing or a bad thing, and now you need to name it in order to be able to move on. The reach of such an attempt is not that great because we keep reverting to the most elementary of the facts. There is no progress in talks until their basic premises have been established. In that sense, a tolerant discussion on two of the so called basic sides of the question that could be heard a year ago on the state television talk show – is Ratko Mladić a hero or a war criminal – is impossible. This question is *forbidden*, because it makes relative the things that simply mustn't be made relative.

Amongst our public, there is an uprising of ideologists of the third Serbia, the third path, who keep levelling things out – go on, sit down, make an agreement, no problem. I can't see how there is no problem, if some of us don't accept God's commandment of 'don't kill'. What are we talking about then? So, our reach is not great, but not too small either. In time you realise that, unfortunately, you live in a country of constant attempts of renaming certain terms. They say it's fulfilling obligations to The Hague, and we say there was a massacre in Srebrenica. They say they will locate and collect operational data, and we say – arrest Ratko Mladić. We already have a problem in terms of language, such as whether someone will be called 'Shiptar'<sup>5</sup> or Albanian in the papers. Perhaps in the UK people can make fun of political correctness, but it is still not recommendable here, because, until recently, people have been killed because of their wrong names and surnames. *Peščanik* listeners sometimes object to my constant explaining that one and one equals two. Well, yes, and what are we supposed to do?! Everything is levelled out, everything is questioned, everything is made relative and the most horrible things more so than anything.

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5 See footnote 6, page 68.

**Let's go back to your long experience of working in the media. What challenges, problems, and obstructions have you encountered?**

**S.L.** Svetlana Vuković and myself have been suspended at Radio Belgrade several times on account of our documentary reports from Vukovar and Sarajevo, and eventually we got fired. After that, we continued to work at Radio B92, where there was complete freedom. The context of work with that company has now changed. Now it is the context of *Big Brother* and talk shows that we're not comfortable with, and nor are they comfortable with us. A sort of an unspoken agreement was established that we are the only ones responsible for the bit of space our programme has. This is the only way in which we can function and once this equilibrium gets disturbed, the two of us are done with B92. And regardless of this, B92 is still the only radio station in this country that consents to broadcast *Peščanik*.

The programme is re-run in many of the towns in Serbia, but with great difficulties. Changes in the composition of the local coalition in Užička Požega led to the programme being abolished. Then the listeners protested, and the programme started to be broadcast again, but at 8 p.m. when people don't listen to the radio any more. In many parts of Serbia the broadcasting of the programme is hindered. I have no other evidence for this except for the fact that for months now the listeners have been reporting hindrances in the reception of the programme on Fridays from half nine to eleven. Among the bigger cities this happens in Niš, but Vojvodina is in the line of fire the most. This is an interesting question – why do they have a problem with a radio show when they have 101% approval for the new constitution.<sup>6</sup> What can disturb such an amount of brotherly harmony? I love radio, but I know its reach is small. Regardless of that, we are constantly being attacked by party officials, from G17 plus to DSS<sup>7</sup>. On RTS, there was a show that was practically dedicated to *Peščanik*. And why – because through texts in *NIN*, *Nova srpska politička misao* (*New Serbian Political*

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6 Referendum on confirmation of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, held on 28-29 October 2006. (editor's note)

7 Democratic Party of Serbia (editor's note)

*Thought*), along with programmes on RTS a theory of two extremist Serbia's is established – one is personified by the Serbian Radical Party and various clero-fascist organisations, and the other by advocates of civil values in Serbia, who constitute the majority of people appearing on *Peščanik*. Opposing these extremes, there is the Third Serbia personified by DSS that is the only normal, tolerant and conciliatory option.

There are many ways to influence editors of free, liberal media, but there is not one way to influence myself or the other Svetlana. Some of our one time allies are upset when we criticise them. There certainly are mis-estimations of the programme, particularly in my comments, but telling us off as journalists – ‘don't you analyse Ivana Dulić Marković<sup>8</sup> now, the woman has been attacked by the Serbian Radical Party’ – is out of the question. At journalism courses I often say that there is no other side to *Peščanik* and there will never be one, as long as by the other side we mean sides connote attitude where war crimes can be negotiated. When the head of the Radical party, Tomislav Nikolić,<sup>9</sup> says that Miroljub Labus<sup>10</sup> is not a Serb and asks why we need a non-Serb in the Government of Serbia, it's a classic, radical-fascist statement. We register this and we say – that's a load of rubbish and ask why the state attorney hasn't reacted. But Toma Nikolić is not my subject; I don't want to underestimate my listeners with that! I have a problem with Miroljub Labus starting to prove he is in fact a Serb after such a statement. You make a question legitimate by answering it. Toma Nikolić doesn't make false pretences; he's a fascist and talks like one. But you present yourself as a liberal democrat, and by justifying

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- 8 Dr Ivana Dulić-Marković was the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management from 2004 to 2006 and Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Serbia. She is a member of the G17 Plus Party. She declares herself as an ethnic Croat which made her the only representative of this minority among government ministers. (editor's note)
- 9 Tomislav Nikolić is the Deputy Party Leader of the Serbian Radical Party. He is temporarily serving as the leader of the SRS because Vojislav Šešelj, the current leader, is on trial at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. (editor's note)
- 10 Miroljub Labus is a economist and politician, professor at the University of Belgrade. He was the Deputy Prime Minister of Serbia, serving under Vojislav Koštunica, but resigned on May 3, 2006, after the EU suspended enlargement talks with Serbia, over Ratko Mladić. He also resigned from the position of President of G17 Plus. (editor's note)



yourself you legitimise the question that creates problems for those who, unlike you, aren't of Serbian nationality.

It is not my *right* to pose questions to Serbian Orthodox Church, it is my duty. They left the church, entered society, came to my own back yard, came to all of us and I have the right to ask them questions. I have a duty to check how they are funded, whether it's okay or not to have a postal stamp which they collect the income from, whether the paedophilia case trial to Pahomije<sup>11</sup> has started or not, whether they have the right to make statements about the monarchist constitution of the state. I don't think we're always right, but I reject the objection that we have no right to talk about the Church. It's a different matter that we live in a country in which all values are devastated to such an extent that people have the need to hold on to whatever seems sound enough. But if I refuse to believe anything at face value and just because someone said so, I am not going to make a concession when it comes to our church. It is my right to ask why the Prime Minister goes to Hilandar three times. Why he brought Matija Bečković<sup>12</sup> along, whether we have a new, co-opted government member in charge of the Prime Minister's cold feet, and who paid for all of that. There are too many questions here that no one asks and I'm worried by that.

### **What are you trying to accomplish with Peščanik? What is your goal?**

**S.L.** We are trying to keep some issues current, some that would rather be forgotten, to ask questions that others don't ask and that are not asked continually or directly. So our aspirations are not huge, except to remind people of what really happened from time to time, to say – people, hey, what's going on in the Church?, do you think that's alright or not? Most of the citizens have difficult lives, people have two jobs, we are all traumatised, and people have

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11 The Bishop of Vranje was indicted on the counts of sexual abuse of two underage boys. Municipality Court of Niš released him. (editor's note)

12 Matija Bečković, a member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and the Arts, is among the group of the most renowned Serbian poets and is one of the leading ideologists of Serbian nationalism. He is close to Prime Minister Koštunica and his Democratic Party of Serbia, whose politics he actively supports. (editor's note)

neither the money nor the nerves to follow the media. We draw attention to some things that shouldn't be forgotten and that are worth thinking about.

And secondly, it is important for us that young people are beginning to listen to *Peščanik*. We have this brilliant boy that cooperates with us, and I'm amazed by how supernaturally intelligent and educated he is for his generation. And I say to him – Igor Mandić<sup>13</sup> will be here, and he goes – who's Igor Mandić? In generational terms, he doesn't know him. Or a question of a colleague of ours, who's totally alright – why did you attack Isidora Bjelica<sup>14</sup> – who's Isidora Bjelica? She doesn't know who that is because she was a little girl in the 1990s. There is a whole generation of people who are coming to the public and don't know what had happened.

When those children say war, they mean the bombing of Yugoslavia, because that's the first thing they remember. The slightly older ones remember the events starting with exile of the Serbs from Krajina and they remember the bombing. And unless someone tells them what happened in 1994, and 1993, and 1992 and so on, they would really have the reason to wonder – why is everyone at us, we really are the biggest victims, we got six hundred thousand refugees and then they bombed us out on top of it all. When we play the songs for them that we recorded in Pale and Sarajevo in 1992, they can't believe these songs really exist, to them they sound like a soundtrack from a very weird movie. Recently we released a DVD archive with footage of 1989, 1990, 1991 and for them, it's like when we were children and someone started telling us about World War One or World War Two.

**When I hear some things you or guests on your programme say at times, I get so overjoyed and I go – wow, yes, that's just it! It's like**

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- 13 Igor Mandić publishes literary reviews, social-culturological feuilletones, essays and debates. He is a longstanding contributor of many radio and television stations. Winner of the award of Croatian Journalists' Society for his life's work in 2005. He is among the group of intellectuals who clearly and openly confronted nationalism and fascism in Croatia. (editor's note)
- 14 Isidora Bjelica, author of over 40 books, columnist in 'Kurir' and 'Tabloid' newspapers, who says of herself she is an admirer of Dimitrije Ljotić, a fascist collaborationist during World War Two. (editor's note)

**I'm getting support, in the sense that there are many people who think that way, but they're simply not present in the public, they don't get heard.**

**S.L.** For a while, we had considered stopping the programme, for various reasons but I won't go into them now, and we thought we'd try to do something else, and then we succumbed to the pressure to carry on and at times I'm a bit sorry about that. We did it for the people who experience this programme in a way you're describing it, primarily out of Belgrade, where the media situation is disastrous. For years now I've worked with the ANEM<sup>15</sup> Training Centre and I got to know most of my colleagues from the local electronic media and I know that there's an enormous amount of censorship going on there. Most of the media have turned into partisan media. So that through our shows, our listeners are connecting things, people can say – I'm not mad, hang on, I'm really not mad. And it is for their sake that we keep boasting of a hundred thousand people listening to us. Through this number, people realise they're not just a small group of a dozen likeminded people, but that there are many more. And when we received the award of the City of Belgrade, our listeners experienced it as a validation by the state that their value system is respected.

We travel a lot with *Peščanik*, last year we went to around twenty towns and experienced some incredible things. You go to Bela Crkva and sit in a packed auditorium in which the temperature is like sixteen below and that no one has set foot in for the past fifteen years, because no one goes to see them, and those who might go can't fill the space. In Požega, there were more than two hundred people, over five hundred in Čačak, a hundred people in Lazarevac. And I'm terrified by the fact that, when we get on our way to Belgrade, those people look at us as though we came to visit them in prison and now we're going back to freedom whilst they stay there. In Belgrade, we don't have a clue about what Serbia looks like, not just economically, but generally, it's a vacated place and people who live there are frightfully lonely. More often than not someone goes

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15 Association of Independent Electronic Media (editor's note)

to visit prior to elections, and in the meantime these people who think like we do live in a state of isolation.

**Do the two of you have any dilemmas about your work? Such as is this the right way or not?**

**S.L.** We don't have any major dilemmas. I've been in sports for a long time very seriously, and what I've learned from that is that your job is to invest all of your effort, energy and a most sincere wish for the thing you're in to work, no matter what. I can't live any other way. It could be that all those years changed us as persons, in the sense that we've grown more intolerant, more reduced. From 5<sup>th</sup> October I've been asked to be editor in chief of Radio Belgrade Channel Two, but I couldn't do it. I'm not interested in making programmes in which the obligatory presence of the Radical Party is 35%. Even if there were gazillions of them, I'm not interested. The programme I do is largely a sort of a column. And that's why I stopped meddling with B92 News because I know that news wouldn't exactly be the proper news, right? For example, at the time when people in Paraćin have their windows crashing and are petrified because that thing roared across half of Serbia, they were victims of a horrible accident there. However, I couldn't help myself and I said – I can see they're having a horrible time, but I wonder what it was like for people in Sarajevo for a thousand days and a thousand nights. Because those people in Paraćin and Jagodina, who experienced a horror of that one night, the majority of them are the selfsame people who say that Ratko Mladić should not be extradited to The Hague, that Sarajevo should have been bombed, et cetera. Perhaps it would have been more tactful of me to wait a bit with that remark, but I don't want to wait, what do I care, let them think about it for a bit. Apart from that, there were no casualties in Paraćin.

That's the problem we're having a hard time dealing with, when you learn about a person who's a picture of a victim, who had his whole family killed in Kosovo the day before, when you learn from Serbs, his neighbours, that he had been one of the biggest criminals during the war. That's not easy, he is a victim now, but he's also a criminal. The problem is what to tell Serbs who came here from Kosovo.

**From the role of a victim, one often finds justification for doing all sorts of things.**

**S.L.** There's no adding up there. They did this to us in Jasenovac, so we'll do this to them now. It's not a sports match.

**What is the satisfaction you get from your work?**

**S.L.** Imagine being a journalist in Sweden. The year is the same, but we live in completely different times. Professionally, we are lucky to live in a historic time, however tragic this time may be. In a direct way, you take part in this time, you can influence some people, and to be quite candid about it, no one would be in journalism if they had no aspirations of influencing the public. I think it's a huge satisfaction. We could have withdrawn, done something else, but we decided to take part and we do it as best we can. Secondly, our listeners are a huge satisfaction, when you see that people care, that you're not mad and alone with your attitude. And I'm really angry with my colleagues when they say – we have fought for fifteen years, and now there's no reward for us. You actively took part in ousting a horrible regime, and survived, you've done what you believed in, other people needed that and they showed you how much it meant to them – I can see no greater satisfaction than this.

**What is the media attitude towards the hate speech, towards others and the different, towards nationalism? Has anything changed during these past fifteen years in that respect?**

**S.L.** Yes and no, occasionally it's yes. We have a problem with the definition of nationalism. When you say nationalism is bad, they say – well, the French are nationalist as well.

After 5 October, the situation was somewhat better. A survey by the Belgrade Centre for Human Rights showed that only the attitude towards the Roma remained unchanged. People understood that it wasn't politically correct, that it's no longer trendy to talk about 'Shiptars', 'ustashas'<sup>16</sup>, 'baliyas'<sup>17</sup> etc.

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16 See footnote 2, page 64.

17 See footnote 10, page 114.

However, the political elite started to use this terminology again, Palma from Arkan's<sup>18</sup> party re-appeared in the media, Velja Ilić<sup>19</sup> acts in the way he does, not to mention the Radicals that are now a constitutional party. Everyone began showing up in public, from Nacionalni stroj to Obraz and we've had a series of incidents at football matches. People receive the messages that are sent to them. After 5 October the message was it wasn't right, it was wrong, you were rude and seen as stupid if you act in a racist way. For the past two or three years, we once again have the message of legitimate behaviour being the one for which the young lieutenant in a military parade saluting to the poster of Ratko Mladić stands as a metaphor. Mixed messages are sent out to the public. On the one hand, Legija<sup>20</sup> is in prison, and on the other hand, Prosveta, owned by the state, sells his books. Such schizophrenic messages are continually sent. Same thing with Mladić – we have to extradite him but no one knows why, and we roll the red carpet out in front of general Lazarević when he goes to visit the patriarch and the Prime Minister.

### And what is the part played by the media in that?

S.L. I think some, primarily printed media, directly promote such language. For almost three years, you couldn't find the word Shiptar in the newspapers. Those same papers ceased to use the word Albanian all of a sudden and reverted to the use of the word Shiptar and Shiptar terrorists. When speaking about the Albanian, our Prime Minister exclusively calls them Albanian separatists. In that respect, the tabloids are unspeakable, but *Politika* is no better either. Look at the part it played during the referendum campaign. That newspaper,

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- 18 The Party of Serbian Unity was founded in November 1993 and its leaders were the commander of paramilitary forces, the late Željko Ražnatović Arkan, as well as his best man, Borislav Pelević. (editor's note)
- 19 Minister of Capital Investment of the Republic of Serbia, known for his excesses in the media. (editor's note)
- 20 Milorad 'Legija' Ulemek Luković is a former Serbian militant who served in numerous military groups. He is indicted for his participation in the murder of Zoran Đinđić on 12 March 2003. He is sentenced to 15 years in prison for his involvement in the deaths of four members of Serbian Renewal Movement and attempted murder of Vuk Drašković in June 2000, as well as to 40 years in prison for the murder of Ivan Stambolić. (editor's note)

to put it mildly, promotes animosity toward others. Some go much further. A paradigmatic example is the manner of speech of the famous sports' presenter Korać, who, during the 1990s, commented on our football games with Croatia using the war rhetoric. The football pitch was a battlefield in which we were going to see the end of ustashas. After 5<sup>th</sup> October he went silent for a bit, but ever since his boss became Aleksandar Tijanić, who himself is a paradigm of hate speech, primarily that of misogyny, he was back in the saddle again. I saw him presenting the Olympics, when he couldn't say the Croats were ustashas, but let his racist charge loose against African Americans and women. Even on B92 there are people who see rude language and hate speech as equal. So, if Toma Nikolić said Ivana Dulić Marković was an ustasha, and she goes on to call him – you insolent piece of scum – that's, like, the same, they got even.

The Professor of the Faculty of Philosophy, Miroslav Jovanović, recently pointed out on our programme that if there is a racist or fascist outburst in a match played by a Serbian and a Croatian club, you can see certain logic there. Both sides were brought up like that and we were in war with them as recently as yesterday. These children, the football fans, probably live next to torn down houses and near fields still contaminated by mines and, for them, the Serbs are to blame and vice versa. But, if supporters of football club Borac from Čačak put on Ku Klux Klan hoods and make a racist excess against a player of their own team who is from Africa, then things stop looking all that clear. I can't remember us ever being in a war with an African state. They've had no bad experiences with that man whatsoever, he lives in their town and has a child called Nikola. So, by default, it's intolerance towards anyone who is other. It's enough he's different from myself and I'll attack him.

### **And then our Prime Minister gets terrified.**

**S.L.** And our Deputy Prime Minister complains of insufficient help from the non-governmental sector when the radicals attacked her, and she's in the government. Well, I mean, I'm supposed to ask you for help if something like that happens to me, not the other way round. An odd person from Nacionalni stroj will get arrested, but Nebojša Pajkić still sits at the Faculty of Drama Arts.

Demimonde who speaks of a green transversal like in a cartoon is a lecturer at the Faculty of Politics. Not to mention the Faculty of Law. We have an increase of anti-Semitism in a country with practically no Jews. The President of the parliament owns a publishing house in whose bookstore in the city centre one can see *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Scion* displayed in the shop window. The president of the state feels that Nomokanon<sup>21</sup> has the right to state their opinion democratically. And then, when you say not everyone can get the space to speak, they tell you are an extremist. Many of them don't know, and many of them pretend they don't know that even in a democracy there are limitations to freedom, and not minor ones either.

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21 Organised by students' association Nomokanon at the Faculty of Law, a forum was held in May 2005 with the title of 'The Truth about Srebrenica' where support for Ratko Mladić was openly expressed. (editor's note)



VIII

gender and peace work



# Gender Essentialisms, Politicalisation and Peace Activism in the Region of the Former Yugoslavia

Darija Žilić

In the early 1990s, the former Yugoslavia underwent a twofold transition – from socialism to capitalism, and from a multinational federation to a number of new (largely ethnically based) nations-states. These transitions were mediated by strong politics of ethnic and gender identities – women became denominators of differentiation at ethnic, cultural and political levels. The past decade in the former Yugoslavia has been marked by war, resulting in an ambiguous process for women. Whilst on the one hand women were directly affected by violence as its victims, they were also forced to assume more responsibilities in the home, both as heads of families and their providers. Therefore, in the turmoil of war, we have witnessed a twofold process – victimisation of women takes place (sexual abuse, for example) but also women’s empowerment due to the questioning of gender related relations of power at a local but also a broader international level. And it was no other than feminist analyses of conflict that shed light on close ties between war, political economy, nationalism and dislocation with their various effects. Namely, the body, household, nation, state and economy represent places in which violence against people is possible in pronouncedly gender related ways.

Nationalists need myths and those myths are based on ‘the birth of nation’ and on ‘our culture’ as the oldest and the best, ‘male’ and ‘heroic’. Overtaking the origins by male nationalists is present at ‘national’ as well as ‘sexual’ symbolic level and this through the demand for ‘pure’ origins and ‘the birth

of nation' shaped by nationalist ideals. Rada Iveković, in her text entitled 'Unrepresentability of Female in Symbolic Economy: Women, Nation and War After 1989' points out that women's bodies are a confirmation of order and represent the lineage, nation, race and religion, thus assuring social symbolic order (2000:9). The notion of nation was most frequently iconographically linked to the female figure. Women's bodies represent the boundaries and territories to be defended, and women are also perceived as instruments of achieving 'pure lineage'. But, it is interesting that they cannot guarantee pure origins since they symbolically represent a blend, and blending has a negative connotation for nationalists. Namely, nationalist homogenisation is achieved through national 'brotherhood' as a feeling of unity for practical purposes, and through a father figure of the Father of the Nation. A basic principle of nationalism is exclusion of other that indicates negation of origins of others. It is a demand for purity and monism, national and sexual. The Father of the Nation or political leader is represented as a son, and philosophical reasons for identification of the nation with male figure are more profound and already known – in our masculine world, only male is universal, never female. Universalization is, on the other hand, as representation, another figure of thought that is directly linked to male power (but it should be pointed out that 'male' and 'female', in today's times of position of insecure gender identities, is equally imprecise in defining the epistemological concept). As Z. Einstein writes, regardless of whether the nation is spoken of as homeland or motherland, it is imagined as a brotherhood, never a sisterhood. Representing the nation, women's characters don't represent a female, but male collective, through which the realistic existence of women is erased from the domain of representation, and representations of women as cultural symbols of a community in question become fields of cultural and political struggle over her identity. It is thus women's duty to reproduce nation, and a woman who gives birth is a link between nature and nation as a family. Jean Behrke Elshtain wrote that ever since Christianity glorified love, mercy and forgiveness and placed them above other human virtues, woman waited at home for her man who went to war, and she also becomes a justification of man's going to war to begin with

(1982:32–35). Ethnologist Reana Senjković wrote about how women were used in the war propaganda of the 1990s – woman either personified nation, either as good (supporting war efforts of the nation inviting to mobilisation) or as wicked (leading her lovers to death), (2004:281–282).

This very issue will be discussed in this text, of how nationalism can use women, but also how women can deconstruct the ‘national story’, but in both cases still remain outside of history, out of great historic narratives. The examples will mostly be related to societies of states created after the fallout of SFRY.

When three years ago the second edition of the Centre for Women Victims of War of 1994 under the title ‘Women Renew Their Memories’ was published, the editor, activist Vesna Kesić, attempted in her afterword to give a political answer to the question of why women’s and particularly feminist organisations, partake in peace initiatives and antiwar movements. She especially tries to avoid gender essentialism, assumptions that women are ‘peace-loving by nature’, because such explanations take us back to biological and patriarchal roles (2003:7). Kesić finds her answer in the fact that women are against war and nationalism because they are moral and political beings and because they are politically responsible – namely, feminists oppose wars because they are irrational and bring about irreparable material and human losses. Radical feminists, on the other hand, maintain that women oppose militarism by nature and that they are peace-loving because, for women, nurturing and feeding relations are fundamental, instead of those of destruction. They state that it is innate for women to be more peace-loving and are therefore morally superior to men, and arguments for this are found in practices and behaviour of the matriarchate past. It is my opinion that such a stance is not well grounded and that it is essentialist, but regardless of all, what is more important is that pacifism is ranked highly in the feminist agenda of priorities. Namely, feminist theories of peace advocate the notion that war technology and technology of social exploitation in general are destructive, and thus examines violence in personal, interracial, international relations and shows that violence is rooted in the ideology of masculinity. Still, it also needs to be said that essentialist explanations are not good interpretations of war either because they create

stereotypes (e.g. on the origins of wars – when it is suggested that wars stemmed from an ancient hatred). It is thus necessary to influence change, to change awareness, the role of women and all that because political action makes sense. When writing about links between gender and war, theoretician Nira Yuval-Davies says that the war is an experience that brings gender defined refugee status because as many as 80 percent of overall refugee population is constituted by women and children (2003:208). Rapes also come with war, but also the loss of the entire basis of their previous way of life. An interesting analysis of feminist stances on war was offered by a well renowned feminist activist, a professor-researcher at Department of Sociology of University of London, Cynthia Cockburn in her book 'The Space Between Us; Negotiating Gender and National Identities in Conflicts' (1999). She uses the achievements of three scientific fields; international relations in which spaces are finally opened for recognising contributions of women, peace studies and conflict studies, as well as political sociology and its contributions to democracy and identity. Along with the model of ethnic/national oppression, she sees 'gender regime' as one of the causes of wars, i.e. oppression of one gender over the other as a structure that spreads inequality and discrimination ad infinitum, fixes identity among eternal dualisms and is thus one of the causes of war. Through such a prism, we can see war as a 'continuity of violence from bedroom to battlefield, over our bodies and sense of self' (1998:8).

Feminist theory analyses women's role in the wars as determined by assigned gender roles socially allocated to women. Thus biological (essentialist) exclusion of women from war activities is preserved, and also used as a justification of a general division of labour between the sexes. Nataša Mrvić goes as far as to write that perceiving war from the perspective of women's experience is important because differentiation between the conquered and the winners is based on the difference between sexes (1998:128–129). The war intensifies marginalisation of women, makes them more helpless, victims of abuse, rape. At the time of war differences conditioned by different socialisations of work come to the fore – whilst men mostly worry about lack of information from the fronts, women are occupied with looking after the children – women are exposed to

changes of social status, even crises and the loss of their own integrity. Women become a marginal social group for which it becomes increasingly hard to be affirmed independently, but also head of the family. Thus they still remain in the domain of private. Namely, gender differences in political socialization rest on traditional patriarchal cultural patterns and widespread misconceptions and stereotypes that consider politics and public life to be areas reserved for men. It should be pointed out that Cockburn wrote about women's organisations in which there are women of mixed ethnicity. One of the examples is Medica-Centar for therapy of women in Zenica in central Bosnia, founded in 1993, that gathered a team of women gynaecologists, psychologists, with the purpose of helping women and children victims of rape and war conflicts. Bosnian Muslim, Croatian and Serbian women worked with the organisation.

However, I feel it is important to clarify the link between women and peace activism. Is it essentialist, and does it mean that women are predestined to be peacemakers or is it conditioned by some quite concrete reasons, or social circumstances? Thus activist Lepa Mladenović pointed out in her text on *Women in Black* that she dare say that women from Belgrade constituted majority in early peace initiatives (2004:43–47). She doesn't explain it through a particular connection between women and peace activism, but through quite concrete reasons. Namely, women have the experience of doing unpaid work in volunteering, they deal with non-competitive activities, but it was also because the fact that, due to their gender position, they found it safer to act against the regime (they hadn't been drafted). She goes on to say that almost all peace initiatives in 1991, during the early year of such protests, were started by women and that they often had no support. Mladenović also follows what happened after these peace initiatives turned into party related ones – that's when the men joined in, and peace activists begin to found non-governmental feminist organisations and organisations for social justice. Sonja Licht and Slobodanka Drakulić, writing on women's peace activism in the 1990s, established in the introduction to their analysis that in antiwar and peace activism throughout history women were very significant (2002:115–135). In the final years of Yugoslavia, women were already involved in feminism, some declared

themselves in such a way, and it is interesting how it is in that very former country that feminism had the most influence.

One of the prerequisites for action in the antiwar turmoil of the 1990s was that there still was a social-political context fairly present in the universities, because women still managed to be visible in social life. Women in the 1980s were enthusiastic to accept democratisation of the country, and in some fields and professions, such as, for example, journalism or organising new initiatives of the civil society, it was women who were the ones to mark the beginning of the process of democratisation. Another prerequisite is related to a strong feminist movement, particularly the final wave of it in the early 1970s – it shouldn't be forgotten that the first after-war feminist conference was held in Belgrade in 1978, where communist organisations and women's groups met within one day. The third prerequisite listed by Licht and Drakulić I consider to be very interesting and we could say that it is fairly neglected in the research, and is connected to, as we will mention again, being mixed. Namely, women felt the weight of the fallout of the country more, they had greater influence in their families, and it should be emphasised that there were as much as 5% of ethnically mixed marriages and that a danger was felt about what was going to happen to those families when a country does fall out. In late 1980s, there was a number of spontaneous developments of women's lobbies, women's parliaments, independent women's societies. No other but the afore mentioned ones were the organisers of first antiwar demonstrations. That's when movements of mothers in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia emerge. Mothers went to the parliament in Belgrade and demanded their sons to come back home from Yugoslav People's Army. This movement was used to a significant degree in order to deepen ethnic tensions. However, it is important to warn of the existence of nationalist women's groups in Croatia at the time of the war of 1991–1995. They provided complete support to national state projects and were welcomed by the state exactly as symbols of mothers or else as icons of the community. Đurđa Knežević, in her analysis of activities of such groups points out that 'mothers appear as ideal symbols for an authoritative community in which duties of individuals to the community prevail over their individual rights' (2004:79–86).



They provided support for these societies in various ways – by voting for parties carrying out nationalist projects, increasing the organising of activism oriented towards humanitarian aid to ‘our cause’ and ‘our boys’. Knežević maintains that in the first years of that era of 1992–1995 there was mass political support from the government for nationalists. Politicians received them, the media covered their work, and Croatian women nationalists spread outside the borders of the nation so that as many as two tours of speech-making of Croatian women’s groups were organised. It is necessary to mention that this support was given to them exclusively for political reasons. Namely, when the national state was stabilised, support and concrete assistance to those groups slowly goes missing. Thus the role they had in ethnic-national mobilisation slowly becomes erased. Apart from that, it goes without saying that their role turned into a background one, that they were only helping, while on the other hand the role of the state is put to the foreground, represented by a strong, dominant male figure that provides our boys with arms. It is my opinion that this example once again shows that even such women’s nationalistic groups become marginalised in patriarchal communities, and different examples shouldn’t even be mentioned in particular. A problem between women’s and feminist groups is also of interest. Namely, some women activists do support the same traditional roles of mothers and guardians of the home.

One of important issues that needs to be analysed is linked to activities of women’s groups, their links with donors. I would at this point particularly mention social scientist Elissa Helms who has done exquisite research in which through analysing the actions of women’s groups in Bosnia she got some very interesting data (2004:185–205). Helms maintains that such gender essentialisms are supported by both nationalist parties and feminist groups, but also international donors. Namely, she notes that women’s non-governmental organisations she encountered in Bosnia do use a form of gender essentialism in presenting themselves to local communities and international donors. And this relates to the very fact that they emphasise a positive role of women in an essentialist manner, presenting them as peacemakers and nurturers, and of fewer nationalist leanings than men, but also more prepared for dialogue

than men. Thus, women are essentialised, and that means they are limited to women's work (Richard Fox calls it 'affirmative essentialism' (1997:37) and that women's roles are thus fixed. A consequence of this is that it is positive for them to be in the public, but in a regulated way, and that they shouldn't undermine their connection to the household sphere that is still pronounced, and defining themselves as feminist is also avoided, because such explicit definition directly undermines the patriarchy that allow access into that so called men's political sphere. And it shouldn't be forgotten, as Anđelka Milić writes in her first analysis of the women's movement, that ultraconservative anti-propaganda of feminism commenced even before World War Two and put the 'battle against men' into the foreground of feminist engagement, i.e. imaginary 'conflict of the sexes', making the point that feminists thus endanger the very foundation of sociality, and that feminism as a whole represents a distorted teaching propagated by basically disoriented and amoral women (2004:94). It is interesting how women encounter difficult approaches in politics and thus often define their work as humanitarian because that casts away the political aspects of it, notes Helms. Women's groups whose activities she researched don't want to be political to begin with, and even if they do raise some so called women's issues, they are suggested that it should remain aside at least for the moment, because there are other more pressing matters. Along with it, they themselves marginalise these subjects and these issues in order to address the more important ones such as return of the refugees, war crimes trials, ethnic reconciliation. Therefore they consent to gender essentialism, and the deconstruction of patriarchy is moved to the side, as less important, even though it is the very base of both wars and conflicts. Thus gender roles of women remain untouched and they continue to identify themselves with motherhood and household and are removed from the formal political sphere. However, women are still essentialistically linked with peace because it is believed that, colloquially, 'there would not be a war had the women been in power'. In such an image, men are depicted as warriors who started these wars, and women, who hadn't been part of the conflict, as peacemakers. It is interesting that such a stance is also supported by international community. Namely, as Helms

writes, donors often support the stereotype according to which they believe that women are more capable of acting in an interethnic communication and in carrying out projects of ethnic reconciliation. In order to receive funds, these non-governmental groups use already tried discursive strategies. Namely, while connecting with refugees, they point out that these activities are not political, but humanitarian. It is necessary to note, writes Milić, that a large number of groups belong to the type of humanitarian activity anyway, which is not in the least surprising bearing in mind the degree of elementary level of imperilment of the population, particularly of women's populations. Such groups have a wide range of action, are not unaware of how political their activity really is, but are trying to not make it known clearly because they would thus symbolically enter the field of politics – such strategy was 'confessed' to Helms by a coordinator of a non-governmental organisation from Podrinje region. However, I believe that it should be pointed out that humanitarianism also represents an ideology trying to present itself as neutral, but is still the embodiment of certain political interests. In this way, citing humanitarianism, women are placed outside the political sphere of power and become entirely harmless. Of course, the question poses itself of how the participation of women can contribute to not only peace, but to the improvement of women's positions, or whether these essentialisms exclusively passivise women or do still have some positive, emancipating elements. Namely, women are having a hard time entering the scene of major politics as it is, so is this not a way for them to participate in a public sphere because maybe some activists will ultimately raise the issue of women's rights after all. In all Eastern European transition societies a process of re-patriarchalisation took place, 'return to family' and in a symbolic image mother is again presented as a housewife and father as a breadwinner. And it is important to state that this process is very much regressive because it contributed to undermining the heritage of socialist systems in which there has been a certain degree of democracy of gender relations. Thus women are marginalised in all parts of social life, and misogyny and sexism are particularly widespread at both political and cultural levels. Social context in transition is marked by gender hierarchy and gender segregated divisions of work

particularly in public life. And in all of that women remain on the sidelines, so that every form of public action of women should be seen from multiple aspects.

The question remains of whether feminists make a mistake when they easily discard the concept of motherhood because will motherhood then be left to be thrown to the jaws of nationalism that draws its symbolic power from it anyway, as we pointed out at the beginning of this text? Namely, the already mentioned Nira Yuval-Davis states that women disappear from public discourse because in the disputes on nation and nationalism women are placed in the private sphere anyway, a sphere not considered to be of political importance. This is paradoxical – on the one hand in national rhetoric women are defined through motherland and it is emphasised that the wars were being lead for the sake of ‘women/children’, and later in theoretical elaboration of nation and nationalism it is often resorted to giving all the importance to intellectuals and completely denying women. However, a problem that the feminist scene also encounters is also a matter of the public and thereby of being political. Namely, instead of acting in public and raising new issues and problems that were repressed by that same public, in such a way as to change social paradigm, a substitute for public is introduced, an enclosed community creating its own discourse and its own internal relations. In such a way a distance is again made from the political, because a turn is made towards the inside, it all becomes a sort of a private matter of individuals and the public becomes something outer, opposed, and is thus corresponded with in a specific way. Also, it needs to be stated that the problem of studying political socialisation from a gender perspective is paid very little attention to in the theoretical and practical repertory of humanities. Namely, almost all theoretical schools that examine the relations of politics and the individual are androcentric. When we speak of the connection between women’s movement and political action, we also need to point out dilemma that appears therein.

Therefore, I emphasise that it is extremely important whether activists treat their group activity and affiliation as political, social or non-political. A relation to political structures in society is also of importance here. Whether it is about alternative political profilisation, cooperation with women politicians or about

activists becoming engaged professionally as well, and ultimately it is about whether women's groups need to get rid of non-formalised, semi-private discourse.

One of the most important subjects is feminists' stance on peace. Namely there are two fundamental feminist standpoints. Feminist theory analyses women's roles in the wars as determined by assigned gender roles imposed on women by society. There is an equal rights theory that has the standpoint of women and men having to be equal when it comes to their roles in the war. Opposing the war is a main part of another wave of feminism, so that structural and ideological links between militarism, war and patriarchy are researched. In the current feminist movement there are conflicts about women's participation in the war. On the one hand, women's pacifism is insisted on, and on the other it is considered that all social positions must be accessible to women, including those in the army and police. A fundamental pacifist stance is against shooting, but there is a dilemma about whether or not, if we say 'yes' to military actions, we face our own pacifist policies and thus betray peace politics. On the other hand, if we are against it, our stance seems idealistic and we cannot accept that in some situations it is not possible to justify it. The many layers of this issue were written about by Lepa Mladenović when she analysed feminist policies in the antiwar movement in Belgrade. Feminist theory analyses both sources of women's resistance to militarism and the gender nature of militaristic values (2004:161). She pointed out the ways in which the army plants military spirit into the ideology of masculinity founded on a system of metaphors belittling all things female and glorifying all things male. Still, women's pacifism must not be shaded with essentialism, i.e. sentimentalised as an innate women's trait, because women have been and still are, not only pacifist, but militarist in their beliefs and activities. And it is also important to record the existence of women's peace activities, preserve memories, present them to the public and make them socially visible.

Sociologist Anđelka Milić in her research of the women's movement in Serbia and Montenegro carried out in 2002 notes that women are apt to act through forming a kind of women's ghetto, developing a spirit of exclusivity. She then particularly warns of self exclusive behaviour of women, i.e. the need to

deal with themselves, to enter severe mutual confrontations due to the slightest 'straying from the path' (2002:93–101). It definitely adds to enclosure that is sometimes a trait of actions of women's initiatives and groups, but there are some excellent examples of how to preserve remembrance of action in wartime circumstances.

The best example for it is the already mentioned collection of the Centre for Women Victims of War from Croatia. First we need to point out the context in which this group was created. At the beginning of the war there was a gap in the women's scene. Namely, feminist groups either disappeared at the time, or adhered to the newly created political options, meaning some of them agreed with the policies of governing ideology. There are as many as sixty women's groups active in Croatia at the time; in 1989 the Autonomous Women's House was founded, followed by the Centre for Women Victims of War in 1992 and Women's Infotheque. It is interesting that the latter never had a humanitarian profile that was specific for it at the time. This is an important point because, as has been emphasised earlier in the text, it was often the most important trait of women's groups. The beginning of the decade was marked by predominantly humanitarian work. When the Centre for Women Victims of War was founded in 1992, the principles of its actions were that women would be assisted and supported regardless of their origins, nationality or religion or any other part of female identity. In the latter half of the decade, organisations and initiatives emerged that turned to peacetime problems, so that a period began marked by diversification of work and raising issues and subjects that were no longer or not at all linked to the war and its consequences. Interests turned to systematisation of knowledge, organising gender studies in which peace work could be taught, which was written about in magazines as well. Namely, as Vesna Kesić wrote, peace and peacemaking have gained a great political importance nowadays, mostly under the pressure from international community, but the merits of women's groups who opposed the war and nationalism are still not talked about and are excluded from collective memory. Many have laid claims on women's activism, but they never gave it power in the political process. Women, it should also be mentioned, were never involved in peace talks, nor in talks on

preventing the war. Peace had not been established as a process throughout that also required an understanding the past, work on dealing with the past and manifold perspectives. However, it should be pointed out that, for example, women's groups from Croatia and the region initiated the first women's peace exchange and talks as early as in 1993 in Zagreb and in Geneva, then there is the first dialogue between feminists from Belgrade and Zagreb in 1995 in Istria, as well as many other meetings that are considered usual nowadays. This was at the time treated by the public as a 'traitors' activity', even though it was always about meetings of women whose basic motifs were to stop the war and violence and establish a peaceful and neighbourly coexistence with women from neighbouring countries. Thus the publication of the collection 'Women Renew Their Memories', ten years later, is an important project. In the collection we find various reports on when the Centre was opened, writings on the structure of the Centre, their mode of operation, followed by personal accounts, documents (various letters and press releases), and the list of all members, collaborators and supporters of the Centre for Women Victims of War and their publications. Personal accounts of how activists, after many years, self reflect are of particular importance and how they re-examine their states of doubt, crisis, burning out for the first time, all in order to provide a picture of an era and to present their work to the public. Personal testimonies of the interviewed women who have undergone the trauma of war are of great interest. Personally, I interpreted an interview I found in the collection of 1994, the account of Goga M. (The text 'Manifold ethnic identity – story of Goga M.' was published in the collection 'Tomizza and Us', Pučko otvoreno učilište Umag, 2001) and thereby encountered a multitude of dilemmas – how to approach the interviewee, do I have the right to interpret her account and the like.

Also, the importance of ethnographic research and interpretations need to be pointed out. Namely, ethnography as a sort of cultural criticism questions the position of culture in the times of war and conditions of war as an area in which cultural images of self, community, and territory is constructed as well as those of patriotism, solidarity and stances on the enemy. Such research is usually focused on the analyses of the material on everyday life in

war and exile, particularly the testimonial discourse and oral history that is still underestimated in the art of history. For this very reason such accounts are avoided as historical evidence, and we are lucky that anthropologists and ethnographers introduce them to the scientific realm and thus make the lives of women in the war visible too. Aida Bagić noted well that these accounts are not identical to memoirs, because they are 'fragments, mostly short accounts in which we open our own process of reminiscing' (2003:157).

Finally, a conclusion remains that the Centre was a place of political action of resisting the war and nationalism. It was also a place for activists to meet themselves, meet others; and connect with different accounts. The intention at the same time is not to provide an idyllic image of women's activism, but instead failures are also noted, such as the impossibility to reach consensus...

The ultimate goal of the project 'Women Renew Their Memories' is to renew the gender aspects of public reminiscences of women's participation in peace endeavours. As one of the editors, Vesna Kesić, stated, the purpose is to show how women were excluded from the memory of recent past, and are thus very easy to exclude from contemporary social and political processes as well. Thus a stable peace in the countries of the former Yugoslavia is not possible to achieve without the participation of women, because they are the carriers of memories of continual peace efforts. And we also need to warn once again that this is not about essentialism, but about speaking up about women's activism in the 1990s, to note the action of peace activists. We must point out that even the so called western feminists note activism from 'our parts'. In her already cited book 'The Space Between Us' Cynthia Cockburn presented the travelling exhibition 'Women Build Bridges'. Namely, she, in cooperation with women from various projects, photographed and interviewed women; these photographs were presented at an exhibition and it toured 18 countries and provoked great attention. Groups of women of various ethnic identities are most frequently presented in the photographs, photographed from various angles, and the photographs testify of their gestures, smiles, dialogues... This unique visual recording speaks directly about the process of living, shared re-examination,



unstoppable dialogue that is the only one to leave the space between us free and preserves memories, but also documents women's peace activism.

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# Feminist Media Theory and Activism: Different Worlds or Possible Cooperation

Danica Minić

- *Our activists feel they don't need theory.*
- *Except for one, girls from Women's Studies don't come to our activities.*

The goal of feminism is a social change of unequal relations between men and women. This is one of the rare statements around which there is a consensus not only amongst feminist theoreticians and activists, but also among the many diverse schools of feminist theory. A multitude of different voices, sometimes in an inspiring discussion and other times in a crude preservation of positions, often begins with the following well-known questions: *What should we do?* What are the possible strategies for change? Where do they lead? What are their possible consequences?

The cited quotes are off-the-cuff comments of a theoretician and an activist from Belgrade. They perhaps don't even remember their quotes but, for some reason, I have. In both cases, I have perceived them as indications of possible disagreements or a lack of cooperation between activist and academic parts of the women's scene in Belgrade. If looked at more closely, these two comments do have one thing in common: they both suggest that the other side does something wrong in their feminism. Activists don't read and so don't have the knowledge that is also required for activism, whereas theoreticians are not committed to 'really' helping women and taking part in protests. The first lack theory, and the second practice. Whether these comments are lone examples or whether they really speak of the relationship between the academic and activist women's scene in Belgrade could be the subject of further research; they are

simply cited here as 'scenes from life', as a kind of experience that someone else might relate to.

However, attempts to put academic feminism into activism very often show that contradictions between feminist theory and feminism as a practical policy are much more than individual frustrations. An example of this sort of merger between theory and activism is the so-called action research that entails research in service of social change that will be of use to certain groups discriminated against (Einsiedel, 1996; Steinberg, 1996). Ronnie Steinberg, a feminist sociologist, offers a brilliant overview of the problems that feminist scientists face when doing research in a political context and with the intention of realizing concrete changes, such as the introduction of certain policies or legal solutions.

Starting with her own experience as an advocacy researcher (with an interest in women who occupy traditionally female occupations that are paid less) Steinberg lists a series of differences between action and academic research. Whilst the purpose of academic research is a contribution to theory and production of knowledge, action research has a goal of concrete social change. Moreover, researchers at universities have much more freedom in their work and more control over their research. Action research depends on its donors and the researcher often does not have full control over the design of the research and the use of its results, and often there are more time-related limitations. The context of the research is also different. Since the results of action research should lead to certain practical changes, they always need to be defended in an extremely hostile environment consisting of opponents of the demanded changes.

The consequence of these contextual differences is an essential contradiction between feminist theory and research in the function of activism that Steinberg identifies in her experience of research and activism in the field of equality at work, but that is also more encompassing and relevant in the case of feminist media theory and activism. As she puts it:

[...] whilst feminist advocacy researchers are critical of science and very much feel the limitations of scientific pretensions to objectivity

and universal truth, we use these methods because they legitimise our competence and because they legitimise research results that we bring to the political arena. Considering the ease with which any social science study can be torn to pieces by others with a different set of ideological convictions in a hostile context, I believe that it is often better to rely on conventional methods of social sciences (page 249).

This means that feminist action research often has to accept methodology and an understanding of science that completely opposes feminist methodology largely based on criticisms of conventional methods of social sciences (Smith, 1987; De Vault, 1996, 1999; Gorelick, 1996; Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000).

This is not just a matter of formality or taste, but also has serious consequences in terms of research. Feminist methodology is critical towards scientific positivism that sees science as neutral, objective and distanced from the object of research. This is where the first problem stems from for feminist advocacy researchers: since they have to defend their research in an environment of scientific positivism, their position is contradictory because at the same time they should be both 'neutral scientists' and advocates of an openly political project. Furthermore, feminist methodology sees science as a production of knowledge at institutions and by researchers who are socially, ideologically and politically positioned, which shapes their choices in science to a varying extent. Such criticism includes the researchers' influencing the results of research through the very process of research, and the fact that the results are to a varying extent formed by his or her situation, experiences and world outlook. The problem that advocacy researchers face when they defend their research in a positivist environment is that they cannot cite this argument, because their competence will be slighted by opponents who only recognise empirical, measurable evidence. Thence, Steinberg concludes that the only way for research results to be defended and turned into concrete changes is for them to be based on rigorous and conventional methods that cannot be debated. This, however, often does not solve the cited contradictions.

A book by Margaret Gallagher (2000), a feminist media researcher, about contemporary women's media activism, shows some of the cited contradictions,

but this time in the field of feminist theory of media and activism. On the one hand, it emphasises that the purpose of women's media activism should not just be a mere increase in the percentage of women present in the media, but rather in the meanings and significance given to their participation in the media. In order for a change to happen in the media, it takes social and political transformation in which women's rights and women's right to communication are 'understood, respected and implemented.' On the other hand, she also emphasises the advantage of quantitative methods and 'hard data' in feminist media activism and the necessity of speaking the language that media professionals understand:

The facts and numbers are the daily bread of journalists and people who make programmes. In the discussion about what images of the world that we receive in the media contents lack, 'the hard data' – along with concrete examples – will reach media professionals with immediacy that can never be attained by an abstract argument. (pages 20-21)

Further on in this text, I will address this and other contradictions between feminist theory of the media and activism caused by their mutually different contexts. This text is conceived as a mapping of the main activities and strategies of contemporary women's media activism on the one hand, and problems that feminist theoreticians of the media perceive in certain activist practices on the other hand. In both cases, I will focus on several main fields of significance for feminism: language in the media; pornography; greater and/or different presence, visibility of women in the media and the question of what this entails ('more positive', 'more realistic' or 'more diverse' representations of women). This text does not aspire to provide some sort of all encompassing overview of either feminist theory of the media or activism, but rather to point out some of the key problems in relations between these two fields.

### **Feminist media activism and its theoretical frameworks**

Whilst the contrast between feminist activism and theory indicated in the introduction is justified, it still requires two important reservations when it comes to feminist media activism. Firstly, feminist media activism and feminist

scientific research of the media have often been intertwined since the beginning of this type of activism in the late 1960s up until the present day. In the overview of early women's media activism and main branches of feminist media theory that followed, Van Zoonen (1994) says that early activist media criticism (in the USA) has started an entire wave of feminist academic media research that had the goal of providing evidence that would support the criticism of the women's movement. Nowadays as well, the monitoring, i.e. quantitative research and analysis of media content are often an integral part of feminist media activism both globally and in our region.

Secondly, the contrast between activism and theory can in this case be better explained as founded on a more profound divide between various theoretical (and activist) schools of feminism. A substantial part of feminist media activism is consciously or unconsciously based in the theoretical groundwork of liberal or radical feminism and the accompanying understanding of the categories of the media, gender and representation. Contradictions between feminist media activism and theory thus do not (only) indicate some sort of a general contrast in itself, but rather stem from the criticism of liberal and radical theoretical frameworks and activism by another school in the discussion: feminist theoreticians of media and culture whose approach is founded in post-structuralist theoretical frameworks and whose criticism will be the subject of the following part of the text.

In the already mentioned overview, Van Zoonen suggests the possible typology of new subjects that feminist media theoreticians have brought into studies of media and communication.<sup>1</sup> In this typology, liberal and radical feminism and their criticism of the media are tightly linked to the accompanying women's media activism. According to Van Zoonen, liberal-

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1 In her overview, Van Zoonen displays some reservations with regard to the typology she offers and points out the problems brought about by creating typologies: erasing the overlaps and syntheses of different schools; repression of geographical specificities; the fact that some of the authors perceived as part of certain schools do not perceive themselves as such, etc. Along with liberal and radical feminist approaches to communication, her typology also includes socialist feminism. I mention the former of the two schools because they were among the foundations of main currents of feminist media activism.

feminist criticisms of the media and activism have addressed the subject of stereotypes and gender socialisation the most, whereas radical-feminist theory and activism focused on the problem of pornography.

One of the earlier and significant feminist works on the subject of gender stereotypes in the media, that has been followed by numerous pieces of research in service of activism, is the work by Gaye Tuchman (1978). She is the author of a famous thesis on the symbolic annihilation of women in the media that is related to their absence there, except in stereotypical roles and genres such as soaps. According to her, the media does not reflect the enormous social changes in relationships between the sexes and the fact that a large number of women are no longer housewives, but are now employed. The consequence of this *distortion* of reality is that girls don't have female role models outside of stereotypical women's roles. A desirable change would be for the media to begin to present *more realistic* images of women, i.e. to reflect the already existing reality of social change.

Such theses have laid the foundations of innumerable projects in women's media activism. Some very frequent feminist subjects are included here already, such as: insufficient representation of women in the media (in terms of equality at work and the media contents), stereotypes, distorted reflections, and demands for more realistic images of women. As Cuklanz and Cirksena (1992) note, a liberal-feminist approach to the media often includes quantitative research of representations of women, from the decision-making places to various roles in which they are represented in the programmes themselves. A frequent demand that follows this type of research is for numerical increase in terms of both the power of women within media institutions and as invited guest experts to encourage a diversity of roles in which women are represented.

As far as radical feminism and pornography are concerned, activism has been very closely linked to academic research. Andrea Dworkin, a radical feminist activist, and Catherine MacKinnon, a radical feminist lawyer, have lobbied for enacting anti-pornography laws. In order to attain that goal, they needed evidence of the influence of pornography on men's violent behaviour towards women, and the evidence could only have been collected through

research. Their first attempt to ban pornography was based on the thesis that it should be perceived as a criminal act of violence against women in the porn industry, and that encouraging and legitimising sexually based violence against women in general, through pornography, influences men to be violent against women. Considering that the results of two large research projects had contradictory results in terms of the influence of pornography on men's violence against women, the proposal of a law against pornography did not succeed.

Their next thesis shifted the focus to pornography as violating the civil rights of women, and so they began legal procedures against the production or displaying of pornographic material. The thesis on pornography as violating the civil rights of women meant that the promotion of women's sexual submission in pornography threatened and hindered women's possibilities for equal rights in various segments of public and private life. This argument is close to arguments against racist hate speech as violating the civil rights of certain groups. In both cases, the advocates of this thesis stated a series of examples of situations in which racist hate speech or pornography were used in order to hinder members of certain groups exercising their rights. One such example with regard to pornography was related to displaying pornography at workplaces in traditionally male occupations, where it was used as a means of pressure and showing the minority of women that they did not belong there. This proposal was accepted in two American cities, but has otherwise caused great divides in the American feminist movement. Liberal feminists who defended freedom of speech fiercely opposed it, and since in several cases the proposal won some rather strange allies in the shape of right-wing religious groups, it also faced rejection by gay and lesbian groups that feared that such a law would be used against representations of gay sexuality (See: Cornell, 2000; Lederer and Delgado, 1995; MacKinnon, 1992, 1993; Segal and McIntosh, 1992; Strossene, 1995; Van Zoonen, 1994).

Even though the subject of representations of women, gender stereotypes and pornography have remained the focus of attention of feminist media activism since the pioneer actions in the USA in the 1970s and 1980s, this form of activism also underwent certain changes in mid 1990s. The most significant



change is the globalisation of feminist media activism and the standardisation and networking of activist groups that followed. According to Margaret Gallagher, this boom in media activism was contributed to by the UN Fourth Global Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, where the media was recognised as one of the critical fields of importance for equality of the sexes.

In the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a section relating to the media states a series of recommendations about: increasing representations of women in the media and decision making positions; work on training women for media professions and enabling women to have greater access to the media; repressing sexist media contents and stereotypical representation of women; encouraging the production of programmes addressing subjects of particular importance for women; encouraging balanced and diverse representation of women in the media; promoting awareness of the problems of gender discrimination and gender equality in general. These recommendations were forwarded to national governments, the media and civil sector, and trainings for media professionals, professional codes and adequate legislation were listed as mechanisms for their realisation (Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 1995).

The Beijing Platform for Action and the conference 'Women Empowering Communication' in Bangkok, that preceded it, stimulated the globalisation of women's media activism, the networking of activist groups and the standardisation of their projects. Contemporary feminist media activism is thus characterised by a combination of the following activities: observing, i.e. monitoring the media; educating media professionals for gender-sensitive journalism as well as the broader audience in the field of media literacy; advocacy, lobbying and dialogue with the media about concrete problems and possible changes; establishing codices and guidelines for gender sensitive journalism. According to Gallagher, media advocacy is 'based on the conviction that the public can play a role in determining which stories are told and in what way' (page 8).

The most significant action that stemmed from these two gatherings was the Global Media Monitoring Project. This project consisted of monitoring

representations of women in the news in all media during one day and has been carried out three times already (1995, 2000 and 2005) through the coordinated work of women's organisations in over seventy countries. In this global monitoring, some women's organisations in our region took part from as early as 2000, and even more of them in 2005 (WACC, 2005). The results of this quantitative research in 2005 were divided into four parts: gender representation of news subjects (people who the news was about or whose statements were in the news); gender representation of journalists in various subject fields in the news; gender dimensions of journalist reports (how many of them had women as central figures, either as persons the reports were about or in terms of subjects of particular importance to women); and gender dimensions of journalist practices (this part primarily relates to the examples of empowering or undermining stereotypes, and (not) approaching general subjects from a gender perspective).

The report on the results of this global research is too broad in scope to be summarised here, but it is important to mention that these results are seen as an evidence of the under-representation of women and as a tool for future lobbying for changing this condition. Finally, in the context of the subject of this text, it is important to emphasise the understanding of the media and the matter of representation of women that stands behind this project:

Women – 52 percent of the world's population – are barely present among the faces that are seen, voices that are heard and opinions that are represented in the media. The 'mirror' of the world provided by the media is like a circus mirror. It distorts reality, exaggerates the importance of certain groups whilst pushing the others towards the margins. When it comes to reflecting women, women's world outlook and perspectives, this mirror contains a big and persistent black spot. (WACC, 2005)

Establishing concrete problems in representations of women through monitoring of the media is usually a function of making a guide for gender-sensitive journalism that will be used for trainings with journalists and as possible self-regulatory mechanisms in the media. However, Gallagher states that the research of 1995 showed a huge vacuum in the field of media policies

when it comes to guidelines for gender-sensitive journalism. In this research, already eleven years old now, that included sixty electronic media in twenty European countries, only nine of the media had any sort of policies in terms of the gender dimension of their contents. These guidelines were mostly too general to be efficient, and only four electronic media – the public media in Finland, Sweden and the UK – had more specific guidelines. Developing guidelines and instructions was therefore a significant field of activism of women's and other non-governmental organisations dealing with the media.

Two possible illustrations of the guidelines of this type are an internal guide for journalists of the BBC and a manual of the Media Diversity Institute (MDI). I cite these two examples because the BBC often appears as a paradigm of public television and its journalists are invited to train activists and journalists in our region, and MDI is also very active in this region through seminars on media diversity. Also, a part of the MDI guide on gender is on the website of the women's organisation B.a.B.e. from Croatia.

The BBC guide for journalists lists under-representation, stereotyping and offensive terminology as problems that are shared by all groups historically discriminated against. Obstacles to the improvement of representations of these groups involve restrictive measures repressing offensive representations as well as measures encouraging broader and more diverse representation. But whilst restrictive measures are expressed in more detail, affirmative ones are given as a principle: in order to improve representations of marginalised groups, they need to be represented in 'the entire scope of genres' and 'the entire scope of roles'. Restrictive measures are more concrete and suggest that: a person's group affiliations should not be stated unless it is of significance for the story; different groups should not be mixed; offensive assumptions and generalisations about various groups should not be allowed; and traditionally offensive terminology should be replaced by terms used by members of certain groups to describe themselves.

All of these guidelines refer to women too, but representations of women are additionally regulated in sections on 'Taste and Decency' and 'Violence'. When it comes to under-representation of women, the guide specifically states that older

women are very scarcely represented in the media, and that non-sexist language is one of the ways to avoid supporting the attitude that certain activities are only reserved for one of the sexes. Thence the examples of non-sexist titles of occupations as an alternative for older terminology (e.g. fire-fighters, police officers, tax inspectors in place of firemen, policemen, etc.). Guidelines on 'Taste and Decency' and 'Violence', furthermore, demand non-stereotypical representations of female and male sexual behaviour, the same standards in portraying female and male nudity, and paying particular attention to representations of violence against women. Guidelines warn that programmes that contain representations of violence against women and children require great care and that it is forbidden to encourage the idea that women should be exploited or degraded through violence, or that women are, except in exceptional cases, willing victims of violence.

A part of the MDI manual dealing with gender is somewhat more specific than the BBC guide, when it comes to advice for gender-sensitive journalism, and apart from that, it does not define the regulation of this field in the context of 'decency'. MDI guidelines suggest that: journalists should re-examine the lists of speakers they most frequently invite to comment on various subjects and that they should invite more women to discuss a whole range of subjects; journalists should not comment on women's appearance unless they would do the same with men in a similar situation, i.e. unless it is specifically relevant; journalists should not state assumptions about the right role of women and should look for 'women whose lives are different from the norm in terms of what women are supposed to be'. Moreover, MDI suggests that journalists consult women's groups and see which subjects are important to them. As possible subjects of this sort, MDI suggests subjects of violence against women, sexual harassment, prostitution and sex-trafficking.

I can't speak about women's media activism in our region in general terms – however we define the region, either as the space of the former Yugoslavia or the Balkans – because I am familiar primarily with activism in Serbia, and then also Croatia. However, examples from these two countries lead to an assumption that women's media activism in the region is increasingly a part

of regional and international networks and largely similar to global activities mentioned earlier. The examples for this are facts that organisations from Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina have taken part in Global Media Monitoring in 2005, that some of these organisations are members of REWIND-net, a regional network of women's documentary centres also dealing with media monitoring, or that the already mentioned manual of the MDI found its way onto the website of B.a.B.e. in Croatia. Women's media activism in Serbia and Croatia includes several types of activities: public protests against concrete examples of sexism in the media; monitoring of representations of women and subjects related to gender in the media; workshops for journalists on gender-sensitive journalism; workshops for members of women's organisations on communication on gender subjects by means of the media; writing guides for journalists. Organisations dealing with the media activism in these two countries are: B.a.B.e. and Women's Infotheque in Croatia and AŽIN, LABRIS, ASTRA, Žene na delu, Hora, Peščanik and the Association of Women of Prijepolje in Serbia.<sup>2</sup>

Women's groups in Serbia and Croatia have protested against sexist contents in the media on many occasions. Some of the protests that provoked a lot of public debate in Serbia were related to: a billboard advertising tyres by using a photograph of a nude ballerina with her legs spread open and the slogan 'Adaptable to all surfaces'; a paparazzi photograph of Nataša Mičić, acting president of Serbia, with the focus on her exposed legs at the moment of stepping out of a car; and sexist comments about women in one of the programmes of TV Pink against which fifty-five women's organisations also filed a complaint based on the new Law on Information, i.e. its article prohibiting

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- 2 This brief overview of feminist media activism is a part of the research for my doctoral thesis 'Gender and media diversity on television in Serbia and Croatia after 2000' (Department of Gender Studies, Central European University, Budapest). As I have started this research recently, the list of organisations and their activities that I list is certainly not final, and it is more than likely that during the research I will find out about more groups and actions that are unfortunately not mentioned here. I would also like to mention a special issue of the magazine *Genero* (Centre for Women's Studies Belgrade, 2004) with the subjects of *Women and the media* as an academic approach to feminist media activism in Serbia.

hate speech and providing a possibility for a registered group to file a complaint against the media spreading hate speech (Minić, 2004).

In my opinion, these protests had positive effects not only because they attracted the attention of the broader public to the issue of sexism in the media, but also because they made the subjects of gender inequality more visible in the media. Even though associations of journalists generally do not recognise sexism in the media as a problem that needs to be paid attention to, in the several past years some very small but perhaps promising steps forward have taken place. LABRIS has organised a seminar for journalists in cooperation with NUNS (Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia), and NUNS has recently founded a women's group which tries to collect data on the position of women journalists in Serbia. In one of its reports, the Press Council of Belgrade Media Centre has also broached the subject of misogyny in the media (Press Council, 2005). Also, the debate about the photograph of Nataša Mičić as a culmination of public conversation about her with persistent focus on her appearance, legs, hairstyle, beauty, etc. – from the moment it became clear that she was going to become acting president of Serbia – opened the subject of the way in which sexualisation of women in public office is used aggressively in order to discredit them in their professions.

However, the ways in which women's organisations have articulated their protests often demonstrate a lack of critical or theoretical awareness of the arguments they state. The most drastic example is a mistake made by some participants in the campaign and the complaint against TV Pink who more than once said they advocated 'a decent Serbia'. Having used this statement, consciously or not, to flirt with the conservative and patriarchal understanding of decency, they found that it backfired. The PR department of TV Pink went through websites of organisations that filed the complaint against them, and found several lesbian organisations and the 'Cunt Manifesto' on one of them, and later published the most 'indecent' bits in several newspapers and said: Look who's asking for a decent Serbia (Minić, 2004).

Even though public protests are still a part of women's media activism in these two countries, they have also increasingly turned to a dialogue with the

media of late through the linked activities of monitoring, training for journalists and writing manuals. The listed organisations have carried out media monitoring in particular subjects: violence against women and coverage of female members of parliament in the media (Women's Infotheque and AŽIN), subjects related to LGBT persons (LABRIS) and sex trafficking (ASTRA). Along with monitoring representations of women in the media, B.a.B.e. have included analysis of the gender dimension of media legislation and perceptions of media content by women viewers in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia in their regional programme (EQVIWA) that has been running for a number of years.

Media monitoring was followed by trainings for journalists, so that ASTRA, AZIN, B.a.B.e. and LABRIS have organised accompanying workshops for reporting on the subjects that had previously been the focus of monitoring. Whilst LABRIS and ASTRA have published manuals for journalists on subjects covering LGBT people, as well as sex trafficking, one of the more recent publications of the B.a.B.e. organisation is a manual with the purpose of raising overall levels of literacy about the gender dimensions of media. The programme *Women Can Do It in the Media*, created by women's organisations Hora from Valjevo, Peščanik from Kruševac and the Association of Women from Prijepolje, included workshops for women journalists as well as making a code for gender-sensitive journalism. Finally, workshops that were part of EQVIWA projects have resulted in the making of three documentaries in Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina with the subject of 'women and the media'.<sup>3</sup>

However, neither the trainings nor the manuals are numerous in these two countries and a more systematic and broader approach to this type of activism is still lacking. In this respect, EQVIWA can perhaps be mentioned in particular as a project that is not only regional and long-standing, but also takes place at several different levels. Also, these projects mostly deal with printed media and neglect electronic media which is a serious shortcoming considering the

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3 Titles of these films are: *Dream Job (Posao snova)*, Danijela Majstorović (BIH), *Ballerina and the astronauts (Balerina i astronauti)*, Martina Globočnik (CR) and *Boys and Tomboys (Muškarci i muškarače)* Sandra Mandić B92 (SR)

influence of these types of media (again, it is only EQVIWA that deals with electronic media). Cooperation with journalists and journalists' associations is in its initial phase but still very limited. These types of activities in women's organisation are nevertheless on the increase and require more attention in the future. It will be particularly interesting to see the extent and the ways in which these women's organisations influence, or fail to influence, the current work on and implementation of national policies for gender equality in Serbia and Croatia, as far as the question of women and the media is concerned.

### **Criticisms of repairing the media and their theoretical framework**

The idea of the media as a (distorted) mirror, and questions about the effects of the media on the socialisation of violence against women, are often in the background of the feminist media activism described earlier. Criticisms of these assumptions in the approach to the media often, although not solely, come from the perspective of post-structuralist theory. The subject of these criticisms are: activists' focus on the representation of women in terms of numbers and stereotypes, certain approaches to pornography, offensive terminology and hate speech as well as demands for 'more realistic' representations of women. This criticism is also founded in quite different starting assumptions and understandings of media representations, meaning, and group identities.

Activist criticisms of the media as a distorted mirror is seen as problematic here because it presupposes the existence of a clear and unequivocal reality that the media can then reflect, either correctly or incorrectly (Van Zoonen, 1994). From this perspective, representation is not a reflection of reality but a social practice of searching for and assigning sense and meaning to reality, and a practice that is significantly determined by relations of power within society. Socially practical dimensions of representations do not only consist of the interaction of various participants in defining certain events, identity, relations etc., but also of dominant definitions' seeking to reproduce the already existing relations of power within a society. The media are thus seen as a field of a cultural and political struggle between advocates of dominant and marginal definitions of reality (Curran, 1991; Hall, 1997; Murdock, 1992).



A different understanding of the meaning of the media content and also, indirectly, of media effects follows from this. If the media are a field of cultural and political struggle, meaning is then the object of this struggle, even in the very process of production, within the media text, and in the process of reception. Coding and decoding (Hall, 1973) of the media's meanings is filled with contradiction and prey to polysemy. Audiences accordingly can resist the dominant meanings of any given media text. Ultimately, groups and group identities are seen as culturally constructed, heterogeneous and cross-sectioned with hierarchy relations and various group affiliations. Women, thus, are not a unified group but are divided according to ethnic affiliations, class, sexual orientation etc. (Fraser, 1997; Stevenson, 2003).

Activism focusing on representations of women in terms of numbers and stereotypes is criticised for neglecting a series of other factors that influence representations of women in the media. When it comes to calls for greater representation of women in media professions and in decision-making positions, feminist media theoreticians and journalists point out that this approach often mixes representation of women in terms of numbers with changes in media contents towards greater representation of women's perspectives and subjects (Baehr and Dyer, 1987). According to Loach (1987), in order for greater numerical representations of women to be followed by changes in contents, it is necessary to change values, procedures and practices of media institutions. Van Zoonen (1989, 1994), also points out that the production of media contents is collective in its nature and that it is naïve to expect that individual women in the media will manage to change a lot. According to her research in Holland, professional values, attitudes of co-workers, ideas on the audience, and social political contexts, are but a few of the obstacles a journalist who wishes to contribute to bettering the position of women will face.

Making conclusions about media contents on the basis of quantitative research on the number of women present and their stereotypical roles is also criticised because of its very narrow focus and lack of theoretical explanation for such under-representation (Cuklanz and Cirksena, 1992). According to Van Zoonen, feminist research on stereotypes was useful because it has

provided material that feminists could use to exert pressure on the media. As a theoretician herself, however, she maintains that such research is theoretically problematic because it often neglects the specifics of genres, the media audience's experiences, the relations between characters in narratives, and other similar issues. According to Van Zoonen, they also assume a linear relation between stereotypical representations in the media and acceptance of stereotypical identities by the audience, not leaving the audience any room for an active reading of the media contents.

When it comes to the subject of pornography, most of the criticism is directed towards the approach of radical feminists in America. Criticisms of this approach moved in many different directions, claiming that attempts to pass anti-pornography laws were violations of freedom of speech, or that this approach conflates representations of an act with the act itself. In this text I am predominantly interested in another type of criticism that points out the frequent mixing of feminist anti-pornography arguments with traditional censorship of explicitly sexual material based on Christian and patriarchal morality. According to McIntosh (1992), feminist attempts to ban pornography have confirmed and strengthened patriarchal stigmatisation of sexual explicitness 'developed along with the morality of the middle class during the nineteenth century' (page 163). According to her, feminism has not managed to move the bases for prohibiting pornography from the accusations of obscenity towards accusations of sexual submission because by the very acceptance of the concept of pornography it accepts a restrictive patriarchal sexual morality. Criticisms of the legal regulation of pornography often saw not less, but more, i.e. different, female pornography as an alternative.

As in the case of pornography, the regulation of offensive terminology and hate speech was met with much criticism by feminists and other theoreticians. Whilst advocates of legal sanctions against hate speech claimed that hate speech is at the same time an act that hurts groups that are discriminated against anyway, the opponents of such laws have protested in the name of freedom of speech and once more emphasised the difference between speech and act committed out of hatred. In the book on hate speech, Judith Butler (1997), a

feminist theoretician, considers that such speech *can* act, and violently, i.e. that hate speech can also be an act of violence, but nevertheless opposes its legal regulation. According to her, it is naïve to assume the law's neutrality and to fail to see that such a law that sanctions speech can be abused, most of all in relation to the already marginalised groups. Such a law also narrows the field of possible ways of fighting against hate speech that are not based on state intervention and reduces the actions against hate speech to the act of persecution. Butler advocates the thesis that words that conventionally express hatred and can act violently, can have their meaning altered in a different context. She states examples such as 'queer', 'black', 'dyke', 'woman', where the meaning of these words is separated from their power of degradation and re-contextualised in more affirmative ways. Instead of legal regulation, she supports a strategy of critical appropriation and altering the meanings of offensive terminology and hate speech.

Finally, demands for 'more realistic' representations of women are fiercely criticised from the perspective of post-structuralist feminist theory. Criticism of normative regulations of representations of women and other groups is founded in post-structuralist understanding of identity as fragmentary and historically specific. According to Van Zoonen, more realistic representations of women are not possible because there is no historically and geographically stable gender identity as a reference point of such supposedly more realistic representations of women. The examples of transgressions of female/male differences, such as Prince or Grace Jones, and the historical specificity of differences between men and women suggest the unsustainability of normative criteria of 'realistic' representations of women, and of how the media should represent women in general. Normative regulation of representations of women is seen not only as an impossible project of establishing universal criteria of representation, but also as politically harmful because every fixing of identity leads towards new exclusions, this time within a particular group. Speaking of strategies of affirmation of lesbian and gay identities, Butler (2002) thus poses a question: 'Which versions of lesbian and gay identity should be made visible and which internal exclusions will this visibility establish?'

Considering that these theoreticians, on the one hand, do not deny that the representations of women and men that support discriminatory relations within society are dominant, and on the other hand criticise normative regulations as a way of changing such a condition, the question can be asked: which alternative strategies of acting towards cultural change do they see? In the case of these theoreticians, the focus is shifted from normative intervention to the power of critically re-appropriating dominant meanings and using them for the benefit of marginalised groups suffering from discrimination. In accordance with the tradition of British cultural studies, theoreticians such as Van Zoonen (1994), Ang (1996) and Fiske (1987), emphasise the cultural competency of the audience, their activity and power of 'negotiating' with the media text, as well as resisting dominant meanings. In a somewhat different way, Butler (1997) also sees critically re-appropriating dominant meanings and their re-signification as a strategy of acting against discriminatory cultural values. Instead of affirmations of group identities leading to yet more exclusions, Butler and many other feminist theoreticians see the deconstruction and destabilisation of identity, differences, hierarchy couples, such as male/female, heterosexual/homosexual, white/black etc., as a strategy directed towards pluralist inclusion of differences.

Nancy Fraser (1997), who also sees deconstruction as a strategy that has the potential to transform both minority and majority cultures, perceives two problems related to this strategy. Speaking of the possible problems of this approach, Fraser notes that feminist deconstructivist cultural policy is 'very far from direct interests and identities of women, as they are culturally constructed at this point' (page 30). Fraser sees another problem with this approach in the lack of normative perspectives, i.e. in the fact that from the viewpoint of deconstruction all differences and all identities seem equally repressive, fictitious and exclusive. According to Fraser, this is a serious problem of deconstruction as a strategy, because in order for democratic cultures to be furthered it is necessary to be able to make a judgement between those identities that strive towards the homogenisation of differences and those that are open to their inclusion.

Her remarks are particularly interesting if the strategy of deconstruction of identity is viewed in the context of feminist media activism. Fraser's statement on the distance between deconstruction and direct interests and identities of women is in a way linked to the statements of Steinberg or Gallagher on how feminist activists *have to* speak the language that the environment they act in understands and accepts. Her criticism of the lack of normative perspective in the strategy of deconstruction reopens the issue that activists address. If representations of women in the media are often sexist, what sort of representations would be better? In the final section of the text I will attempt to suggest what these two groups of feminists interested in the media could learn from one other.

### **Finally...**

This text stemmed from my personal fascination with disagreements between (certain schools of) feminist media theory and activism, and the impossibility, or the refusal, to define myself as being entirely for or against one of these strands. Since I am interested in both theory and activism, I find equally convincing both Van Zoonen's arguments about the unsustainability of criteria for more realistic representations of women, and Gallagher's arguments about the potential of media advocacy and conviction that the public can influence which stories are told and how. I consider it important for media activism itself that activists be aware of, and acknowledge, criticism generated by certain activist strategies. However, it is better to make even the smallest steps forward in terms of changes than none at all, because the ideal ones are not attainable. Instead of firmly advocating one position, I have always found it more interesting to try and find a way to combine certain arguments and experiences of these two different strands. For lack of some ideal convention in which feminist media activists and post-structuralist theoreticians would peacefully and constructively talk to each other, rounded off by a final debate between Liesbet van Zoonen and Margaret Gallagher, and perhaps featuring the occasional comment via video conference from Judith Butler, this text has been written as an attempt at a virtual dialogue.

One of the points of feminist action research workers that deserves attention is pointing out the importance of awareness about the environment one acts in, as well as knowing the language understood by this environment. Both Steinberg and Gallagher believe that their efforts towards change will be more efficient if they are advocated in the language of the environment they act in. In both cases, this means supporting arguments with numbers. Both authors recognise the limitations imposed by this approach, but still see 'evidence in numbers' as an instrument of attracting attention and adding weight to their arguments. This point is important not because it speaks of the power of 'hard data' as a language that the media understands, but because it speaks of activism as acting within certain constraints. Unless we think that we should utterly renounce the mainstream media, then accepting certain compromises is probably the only way to act in such an environment.

Awareness of the environment in which one acts is also important in order to avoid certain unwanted compromises. Some of the frequent compromises when the media is open to feminism are: approaching feminist criticism of sexual objectification of women's bodies from the angle of 'decency'; increasing the number of women in the media without making more room for subjects of particular importance for women; sensationalism in covering the subject of violence against women; and representing feminism through its most moderate currents along with exclusion of the more radical ones. Some of these problems are pointed out by the aforementioned theoretical criticism of feminist media activism. This criticism is necessary to acknowledge in activist practice, because feminist media activism only stands to lose if it flirts with patriarchal sexual morality, if it fails to clearly articulate that a greater number of women (even though necessary) does not automatically mean more room for women's perspectives, and if it fails to approach the subject of the representation of women with an awareness of differences between women.

If feminist media activists acknowledge theoretical criticism of their strategy, what the theoreticians could learn from them is to place their thoughts of strategies of resistance in a slightly more concrete 'environment'. Also, a question is posed of who they speak to about strategies of resistance, considering

that they use a language that is anything but accessible. Such a requirement should naturally not be posed before someone who deals with theory academically. The reason for this requirement might still exist, because feminist theory, as well as any theory that advocates social change, is highly politically motivated. Steinberg speaks of this dimension of feminist theory and research:

Many (feminist sociologists) have expressed great curiosity and, sometimes, even envy towards my work and its direct influence on women's salaries and those of minorities employed at poorly paid, traditionally women's workplaces. The wish of feminist sociologists for direct participation, as researchers, in the attempts towards change is not unique, but it is to be expected that feminist sociologists will feel these frustrations more because it is difficult to deal with feminist research with its explicit accent on social change as with an activity in an 'ivory tower'. At the same time, I feel romanticism and lack of understanding of challenges in these conversation, frustrations and insolvable contradictions that follow research striving towards social change in a certain political context. (page 251)

One of the reasons for writing this text is what I see as a theoretical and political romanticism in advocating certain strategies of resistance and change. Thus Fraser recognises the problem of deconstruction being very far from current 'immediate interests and identities of women', but it deserved just a single sentence within that text. Van Zoonen, as well as some other theoreticians who refer to British cultural studies, emphasise the power of the audience to negotiate with the dominant meanings of a text and resist them. Even though empirical studies of the reception of media texts have confirmed this, these theoreticians perhaps overestimate, and even celebrate, the audience's power to resist. Butler advocates changing the words' meanings, the words denoting hatred, for example, as if it were an act that an individual can personally decide to perform regardless of others and the environment. Criticising the strategy of re-signification that Butler advocates as too individualist, Vasterling (1999) and Salih (2002) point out that this strategy can only be successful if others take the change of meaning as well, i.e. if there is at least a limited semantic consensus

around the change of meaning. This requires a collective action, organisation of this action and acting within a concrete social and political environment, which Butler's strategy of re-signification does not really address.

When it comes to normative approaches of representation, I agree with Fraser when she criticises deconstructive strategies for lacking any normative perspective, and maintains that in order to improve democratic cultures it is necessary to be able to differentiate between those identities that strive towards exclusion of differences and those that are open to them. Fraser (1995) also criticises Butler in a similar way and asks: 'Why is re-signification good? Can't there be bad (repressive, reactionary) re-signification as well?' (page 67). In other words, why would re-appropriating feminism by nationalist movements for the purpose of representing some other ethnic community as backward due to the bad position of women in that community be just as good as a group discriminated against critically re-appropriating hate speech? If it is impossible and harmful to establish criteria for how the media should represent women, does that mean that cultural values that support gender discrimination are equally acceptable as those that oppose it?

Normative perspectives and mechanisms are necessary not only because it is a way in which public interest is defined and implemented (or not) in the media environment, but also because the difference between bad and worse representations of women is not socially and politically unimportant. Between a problematic concept of improving representations of women where, for example, professionally successful women are favoured to the detriment of many other sub-groups of women and a different concept in which two or three priests interpret women's god-given duty as giving birth, it seems to me that the former, the problematic one, opens more space for values of equality than the latter. Criticism of normative approaches is important because it points out the problems inherent there: generalisation narrows the space for specificity in special cases, whilst creating possible new exclusions of those who don't fit into a certain concept of change in representations of women. A possible way to reduce these problems is to insist on diversity in representation of women, men



and those identities that are a transgression in terms of male-female difference. This requires more media space, which is, of course, difficult to obtain.

Finally, the idea of *realistic* representations of women, even though problematic for the aforementioned reasons, is not to be entirely rejected. In the book about *Cagney and Lacey*, one of the first American police series where two women police officers were the central characters, Julie d'Acci (1994) finds a certain value for feminism in what the fans of the series praised as more a *realistic* representation of women in a torrent of letters protesting against ending the series. Thus one woman viewer writes:

(...) it was about time a programme appeared on television that represents two realistic and human women who are successful as police detectives. They may not be infallible and may not look like Susan Sommers, but many of us don't nor would ever wish to. That's why we prefer seeing a programme that has people like ourselves as central characters, who live probable and possible lives (page 178-179).

Julie d'Acci's interpretation of the meaning of *real* in representations of women in this case is interesting because it is affirmative even though within a post-structuralist framework, i.e. with a full awareness of the criticism of perceiving the media as a reflection of reality. D'Acci refers to Gledhill (1988) and her understanding of a textual figure of a woman as a space of negotiation between patriarchal meanings and those meanings that are taken from the lived social and historical experiences of certain groups of women today. According to d'Acci, a *realistic* portrayal of women that was so important to the viewers of this series is not just a matrix taken from the women's movement of the time, even though it is that as well. One of the meanings of *real* here consists in recognising one's own experiences, as women who are contemporaries of the series, in textual negotiations between old and new gender identities and possibilities that women have in society. Another meaning of *real* that D'Acci sees in this case is a reference point for those programmes that the audience recognises as different from conventional, stereotypical portrayals of women in the media. From the viewpoint of this analysis, many activist demands for *more realistic* portrayals of women may perhaps be seen as an expression of the need

and the right of women to have their own experiences recognised in the public space and to receive something other than usually offered representations of women as well.

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demilitarisation



# Challenges of Demilitarisation

Milan Colić Humljan

The idea of writing a text on the challenges of demilitarisation in Serbia (and the Balkans in general) has been growing within me for a long time now, and it has become synonymous with words such as challenge or venture. There are almost no works, texts, analyses or research projects in this political and geographic region that address this issue from the positions I consider to be important today, position of antimilitarism, opposing NATO, (at least in part) antiglobalism and work on building a lasting peace.

Even though the idea of demilitarisation is not novel or utopian within global frameworks of real politics, demilitarisation is neither considered nor researched in today's Serbia. There are many reasons for such a state of things, from the imposition of Atlantic integrations and the inherited power of military structures, to deeply rooted patriarchal traditional norms and customs.

This text is an attempt at a brief analysis of the current state of affairs, primarily in Serbia, but also in the region. It has no pretensions to assume a position among the (still non-existent) scientific and expert analyses for which I sincerely hope in the future, nor does it attempt to offer concrete and tried solutions and alternatives. Its purpose is to point out the importance, possibilities, and reasons for a gradual, complete demilitarisation of the Balkans in a way as structured as possible, and to mark some of the difficulties and challenges of this journey that can be glimpsed from this perspective. The hope of a public debate about the best ways for Serbia and the Balkans being opened sooner or later is my further motivation for writing about this. I am assured that demilitarisation is a realistically feasible option, attainable and needed by the Balkan countries of today.

The text is comprised of four sections. The first three sections are focused on recognising bases of militarism and militancy in general through analyses of social relations, tradition and collective heritage, the role of the army and its way towards the NATO nowadays. The fourth section will try to offer some of the non-militant alternatives based in thoughts, research but also concrete experiences from the region and Europe.

### **Marking militarism and support for militarism in society**

Some theories describe militarism as a system of beliefs, thoughts and practices founded in the assumption that human beings are aggressive and prone to violence and that social order must be preserved by force and violence against members of the society. Militarization is a process of transferring military values and military organisation to all spheres of life.

Even though the omnipresence of militarism, both in the public life and awareness of citizens of Serbia, is fairly obvious, the attempts at marking some indicators through usual relations and everyday examples can be of great use in terms of research of priority points of action in the process of demilitarisation, but also as an applicable contribution to discovering militarist trends in society in their early stages.

The following social-political indicators of militarism are presented in the World Encyclopaedia of Peace, according to the theory of Marek Ti:

- nationalism, chauvinism, ethnocentrism, xenophobia
- expansionism, aggression, martialism
- glorifying the power of the army and military establishment
- attributing significance to hierarchy, discipline, military organisation and distribution of power
- ideological dogmatism – of political, religious or tribal-traditional character

Systemic characteristics of militarism:

- army position in the state and government: a governing force, influence on decision making, equal participation in civil authority or having great authority within the civil organisation of power



- straying off the path of democratic rule: dictator regime, authoritarian government, abolishing democratic liberties, taking repressive measures

Political orientation and activities:

- high military expenditure and assigning a privileged position to armed forces
- hoarding military force and implementation of military power as a tool of politics and diplomacy
- belonging to military alliances
- imperialist and neo-colonial attitudes
- attributing special attention to police force and army participation in operations regarding security on the internal plane
- military involvement in creating social-economic goals and doctrines
- wilful, self-centred decision making.

Militarism and militarization cannot, of course, be viewed as static social occurrences, but rather as very dynamic ones, depending on the given circumstances.

Militarism, according to the same theory, includes (at least) three components:

- a system of beliefs and values that sees organised violence and use of force as a necessary means of maintaining order and peace, social order and international supremacy
- a system of governing that structurally relies on a more or less institutionalised alliance or coalition with military establishment, state bureaucracy and dominant economic interest groups
- a system whose executive function on the internal plane consists of repressive use of force in the interest of preserving existing social order and governing elite, and on the international plan on the use of force as means of implementing nationalist and expansionist politics and diplomacy.

Going through these three premises, it is difficult not to perceive many coincidences with the system and social set-up in which we live and which a great number of people believe in. The author of the theory cited above goes on to state: 'the presence of just some of these indicators can give enough reasons for concern'.

For me, almost each of the points is more or less perceivable at many social levels, to a lesser or greater degree. My conclusion with regard to the militarism of my society is self-evident today. I live in a society that fits the definition of a militant one. Awareness of individuals is militant, relationships between them are militant, domestic relationships too, constitution and relations of social groups are militant, political system, values, the media, and attitudes on peace are militant... Many symbols, beliefs, and values are a part of a militant system of values. It would take an enormous analysis to classify it all into groups and sub-groups, to find their causes and view their consequences. I will not go into that, but will try to point out the conspicuous points and symbols linked to my memories, experience and thoughts in which I recognise the pillars of preserving this system. My experience from work in the field of peacebuilding so far has helped me understand that viewing militarism is almost impossible without viewing the relations founded in patriarchy. These two fields are very much entwined, often with an unbreakable bond between them, they mutually provoke and support each other and in many cases it is difficult to draw a clear border line between them. Thus, for example, militarism can in no way be considered outside of the issue of socially constructed gender roles (both men's and women's).

I will try to describe and explain some of the points that I have located during my attempts at marking militarism in the country/region in which I live.

**Symbol of the uniform.** Uniform and uniformity are notions linked to army and military relations. Even though uniform is the term also used in other contexts (e.g. work uniform, pilot's or fire-fighter's uniform), saying the word without additional explanations means, as a rule, that it is about military and police uniform. The power of the symbol of military uniform as something important, beautiful, something that reflects power and masculinity, is recognisable to the extent of respect being paid to everyone wearing the uniform, along with the respect for the beloved uniform of a son-husband-father-soldier, particularly to soldiers during their compulsory military service. Uniform also provokes awe (in case of police uniform) due to the power it carries with it, and also largely due to the uncontrollable and repressive role of the police in communist and the post-communist system of governing.

Additional meanings are often attributed to the uniform: wearing a uniform makes you more handsome, slimmer, more shapely in the eyes of the beholders (uniform is, as a rule, a man's thing); uniform is mentioned in songs as a symbol that helps you draw the looks of all women to you ('When I wear a uniform, every woman eyes me, I can't help it, brother, it fits me like a glove, when they see me – their eyes widen, women love officers...'); uniform of special units (63<sup>rd</sup> Parachuters' Unit) makes us invulnerable and inexorable.

**Soldiers' upbringing.** The time of pseudo-communism rule in the territory of the former SFRY was, through various social roles we assumed growing up (or that were imposed on us), marked by a military upbringing. A form of 'Spartanism' that was nurtured here is nicely illustrated by the motto of: 'We prepare as if the war is going to start tomorrow, and we work as if peace will rule for a hundred years!' – was very frequently said in the period following the World War Two. The first militant role that we encountered in an organised fashion was the role of Tito's pioneers. A uniform-like outfit, the 'Tito – hat' with the five pointed star, reminiscent of hats of JNA soldiers, red scarf, a pin and an 'oath' to '... guard brotherhood and unity...' were important events in the school life of every pupil and their parents and an important first trial of readiness to accept the determined social roles. You will seldom find a person who grew up in SFRY who is not familiar with the verses 'Little pioneers, we are a true army, growing up every day like the green grass does' and isn't fond of them in a specifically nostalgic way. Nurturing collectivism and uniformity, accepting the set and clearly defined duties and values of camaraderie of Tito's pioneers and the obligation of immaculateness of someone putting on that uniform were very memorable guidelines of upbringing back in the day and an important step in accepting the uniform and the army as a prerequisite of growing up and maturity.

**The Scouts' Association** is yet another link in the soldier-like upbringing. Affiliation with the scouts in the Communist era (scouts still exist today but the structure and size of the movement decreased through diminished funding by the state) represented an important identity of a part of young people, particularly those living in smaller towns. Under the slogans of ecology, humanity and social

solidarity, helping the elderly and making do outdoors (following the model of scouts' movements) many things that supported militarism and a soldier's spirit were promoted and taught. A green uniform and a hat reminiscent of the soldiers', a system of ranks, decorations and hierarchy, forming units and companies reminiscent of partisans', raising the flag, standing in line and lining up – these are but a few militant elements of the movement. We can observe the additional problem of the scouts' movement in the fact that its members (both male and female, women were equal in the scouts' hierarchy) are included in the system voluntarily and on the volunteer bases, unlike the army where there is a duty prescribed by the state, and that was next to impossible to avoid. In the town I grew up in, the Scouts' Association occasionally organised actions entitled 'An Underground Resistance Movement Member in Town' in which we were divided into two groups, 'the blue and the red', of which 'the blue' were the attackers and 'the red' defenders. The defenders' assignment was to guard and defend important objects in the town (hospital, municipality building, school, bus station...) that 'the blue' attacked with the intention of conquering them.

**'You become a man in the army!'** Learning discipline, obedience, non-questioning, non-criticising, and harassing the weaker and repressing emotions are some of the things learned in the army in order for one to 'become a man'. In many parts of Serbia, people who were not accepted into the army (or avoided the service in one way or another) are still considered to be incapable of living a normal life. The community marks such people and denies their identity as people able to work, start a family and take responsibility. Young people who attempt to resist serving in the military system for various reasons (ethical, religious, family, political) often meet a very strong pressure from the entire community, courts, the police and often their own families.

Almost every middle aged man will nostalgically tell you about the army and a **'friendship that will last until the grave'** with people they were in the army with. More often than not, they will also remember many 'interesting' situations from the army, in which they managed to do something for themselves, go out to town, trick the commanding officers and get drunk. Whilst listening to that, one can get the impression of the army as something funny, a guys' thing, friendly

and cheerful. You seldom hear about the hardship of staying away from home for twelve months, being placed in an extremely masculine space, with violations of human rights, harassment, and demonstration of power and hierarchy. An example that Boban Stojanović describes in his book 'Drugi' (Others) illustrates this male sympathy and solidarity through militarism very well:

Namely, I travelled on a bus in which the majority of passengers were soldiers who were going back to their base barracks from shooting practice. Firstly they started to monopolise the space: they spoke loudly, walked around the bus freely, lifted their feet onto the seats. Later, the bus got packed, a certain number of people got on the bus at one station and some people had to remain standing. The soldiers continued talking loudly about their experiences from the army; they soon won over the older men standing in the bus. Not long afterwards, these older men started to tell their own experiences and memories of being in the army. All the while, they were cheered on by a young boy, not older than ten or twelve, who encouraged them, begged them to repeat a story, admired their experiences and their wit. I was astounded by the amount of bonding between men of different ages and (probably) education structure. For them (with or without the experience of the army), the *military* was the link of bonding and communication.

**Glorification of special military units.** Mentioning someone's participation in special units or paramilitary formations represents a powerful symbol in society. Names such as 63<sup>rd</sup> Parachuters', Cobras, Tigers and White Eagles are widely known and even respected. The mere statement of: I was in the 63<sup>rd</sup> (Parachuters' Unit) commands admiration and awe. Regardless of some of these units frequently being mentioned in the context of crimes committed during the war, their credibility and symbolism do not wane. As a rule, they are brave, physically and psychologically fit for anything, almost immortal. They are seen as someone who does 'good things, in a good way, keeping their hands clean'.

In economically poorer parts, many young people see enrolling in **military or police schools and academies** as their sole chance of getting an education and escaping the hard conditions of living. This choice offers free schooling

(accommodation, food, textbooks...), a safe job, an apartment and salary. A poor boy becomes a successful man through joining the army, he becomes recognised and respected. For this very reason, and on the basis of percentages of those who opt for those occupations, it could be claimed that being in the military is more pronounced in these parts. Add to that a stronger patriarchal structure as a consequence of poor economic development and a lack of openness of such communities, a fertile soil is created for accepting the military system of values. Patriarchy is intertwined with militarism at many levels. Duties a man faces: protecting his family, defending the state, national duty, the duty of a carrier of state's and family honour, as opposed to a woman's duty to give birth to warriors and to heal the wounds of heroes, fit into the concept of a military society perfectly.

**History** is full of those who gave their lives for Serbhood and the state, obedient warriors who died honourably, who did not refuse orders which required them to march into certain death, and who have become the model of patriotism and love. Streets and squares are named after them, and we know the mountains and the rivers by the battles and enemy offensives that took place in them.

**War heroes.** Mostly under the influence of the previous wars, and perhaps not so much under the influence of the wars of the 1990s, wartime heroes are synonymous with altruism and solidarity. Thereby war is often recognised as a space in which such humane processes take place. Courage is a feature that is linked to patriotism through societal relationships with the war, as well as altruism, national pride, responsibility to the forefathers. It is more socially acceptable to get killed or injured in the war than to refuse to shoot and 'thus prove yourself to be a coward', let alone by escaping and thus 'bringing shame on yourself, your family and your ancestors'.

**Going to the war.** The person going to the war puts themselves in the group of the 'holy offspring of their ancestors', and where the forefathers had stopped (with warfare), he will continue, and assume his role.

The idealisation of the Serbian warrior is largely carried by the media. The warrior is mostly portrayed as a young or a middle aged man, leaving something behind him: girlfriend, wife, children, parents, home and work, he puts on the uniform (that, almost as a rule, suits him perfectly),

and leaves for the wasteland and uncertainty of the war. There he guards Serbian homes, Serbian children, women... At schools, as a particularly important visitor, children make performances for him, elderly women in mourning embrace him when he steps in their front yard. A living warrior represents a substitute for fear, a killed son, husband, father, brother... he represents Deliverance and Freedom. He is God's protégé – with the Church's blessing he went to war. A Serbian warrior, just like warriors of any other nationality, does not kill, does not loot and rob, does not cut throats, does not rape, does not burn houses down, does not torture. This is not a feature of Serbs just as it is not a feature of any nation. This is not a feature of the orthodox, just as it is not a feature of any religion. Still, there are victims on all sides. Who caused them? (Boban Stojanović, *Others, Women in Black and Queeria*, Belgrade, 2006)

**Volunteers.** A frequent image that comes to mind when it comes to people who took part in the wars, is the image of volunteers – those who voluntarily apply and go to war. Even though this information is difficult to obtain, it is clear that a lot more people were conscripted or taken from their regular military service than those who went to the war voluntarily. Regardless of this, the numerousness of 'volunteers' was constantly underscored in the media and officials' statements.

This image of volunteers going to war also has a lot of influence at other levels: many of those who go to the war of their own free will are proof of its justification and of how just it is, for its defensive purpose and imperilment of the people that have to be protected; the great number of volunteers inevitably reminds us of this action being an obligation, but also the honour of every true Serb; even though there is an image of war as a thing abounding in danger, an image of challenges for manhood and courage, of an exciting adventure in which our forefathers have taken part, an adventure our grandfathers told us about with pride.

'**Family honour**' – a value that is more often than not perceived as something to be defended by participation in a war. The readiness to sacrifice

one's life for the state, and honour that is defended in front of their immediate and extended family, surrounding, state.

A phrase '**granddad's soldier**' meant, in my grandfather's affectionate talk, (while my sister and I were sitting on his lap, a special affection for me as a boy) a future man whose masculinity and social significance is defined through the role of the soldier. He said it in a special voice, full of pride but also some sincere joy. As much as I can remember, I used to feel important and significant because of something that would come and give me the role of a glorified, courageous, armed soldier.

**War is where the state is created.** The 1990s have shown that the war in these regions was where states were made. The state was the parent (mother Croatia, mother Serbia, fatherland) who sends her children to war, where they lay down their lives for the mother (the state) that is worthy of it. War is the time when Serbhood is defended, nation, identity, tradition, culture. It is an old figure of speech that 'Serbs are winners in the war and losers in peace' (D. Ćosić).

**Church** – support for the courage and suffering in the war because the cross and the church are defended, for them the wars are fought and for them all the killing is done. Attacks on the orthodox monasteries in Kosovo were represented as an attack on the state, nation, Serbhood. Dying in the war for the church is justified, special and holy; it is a special kind of death, blessed, and is often represented as dying for the faith and for God. Warriors, Obilić, Sindelić, are holy Serbian warriors. Peacemaking cannot qualify you for the holiness verified by the church. The Serbian Orthodox Church is represented as the cradle of Orthodoxy and we always perceive it as an endangered mother targeted by those who wish to destroy her (by the Muslim, the Catholic, the Jew) and which is permanently in the role of a victim for the truth and justice it strives for. In the Serbian Orthodox Church there are prayers for soldiers, as well as prayers for a powerful army. In the brochure 'What Every Orthodox Boy Needs to Know', it is said that a boy should play with guns and arms, and that he has to master certain skills.

**The media in the service of militarism.** One of the features of the militarization of society is the imposition of a soldiers' language and symbols. Terms such as triumph, battle, defeat, and victory are often present in the media



space and are very common in everyday speech. There are programmes that directly promote the army, warfare and armament. Some of those are: 'Allow us to...', a programme dedicated to the army and defence system of Serbia, overflowing with reports on the capability and force of the army, interviews with young soldiers who tell us how nice it is to be in the army, pleasant but strict officers who practice quick action against the enemy; the programme 'MBS1' ('There Can Be Only One!') in which young people (men and women) compete under extreme conditions performing exhausting exercises in order to win and become members of elite special forces and thus prove their strength and power. There are magazines and TV programmes dealing with arms, means of battle and innovations in those fields. The fact that these programmes and magazines have survived for many years implies that their viewers and readers ratings are high. Not to forget the fact that the media, in search of sensationalism, often supports certain social occurrences such as war. This does not mean that the media should not report on crisis and war events, but it means that they take responsibility by expressing a greater interest in subjects dealing with war and territories than those that speak of peacebuilding and people's needs. For instance, the south of Serbia (Preševo-Bujanovac-Medveđa) only becomes interesting when some military actions begin to take place there and in the meantime there is no interest in covering the realisation and criticism of (a lack of) success and the (non)realisation of Government projects that should influence stabilisation.

**'Army=Chimney'**. In a programme on state television, a well known TV host speaks of how we often tend to forget the army when we don't need it. And he instructs us that we have to think of it continually, that the army is like a chimney on a house, we only use it in the winter, but a house cannot function without a chimney even though we do not need it in summer. This comparison of the army to an important part of a house, a home in which we feel safe and protected, is a very illustrative example of the perception of its importance in the context of feelings of security. A chimney helps us feel warm and cosy. The army is presented as a chimney of the state.

**Security** – the word for creating the army. When it is talked about, security is about strengthening the army and armaments, and the modernisation of the army. This term has the term of **national** added to it, so the derived term of *national security* carries even more weight. This is the security that guards the *nation* and it is all encompassing and the most important. Thence, militarization for the purpose of national security is an essential and indisputable fact.

**Negotiations**, non-military and nonviolent solutions are presented as a sign of weakness and lack of manhood. Showing understanding or empathy for the other side equals treason.

**Dichotomy ‘Us-Them’**, a very important link in the chain of nurturing militarism for centuries now is constantly present when it comes to any lack of understanding, conflict, difference... A very much present logic of assigning the side that you’re in conflict with, the role of ‘the other side’, someone ‘you should defeat’, a depersonalised enemy who threatens, is useful for the mechanism of dehumanisation of ‘THEM against whom nothing will be solved without war!’.

**Military hospital.** The best equipped medical institution in the country, both in terms of equipment and expertise, is the Military Medical Academy (VMA). This is a consequence of decades of compulsory state investment in the institution that was until recently accessible exclusively to persons subject to military conscription and their families. The privilege of being treated at this institution (financed from the state budget) also belonged to state officials and important public personalities (the president of Serbia, the patriarch, party presidents). So, if you want a good medical treatment, free of charge, you have to be a part of the military system...

It is clear that listing things further would take too long. I will only mention: children’s toys, games, computer games, poems/songs (epic, heroic, marches...), school reading, sports’ spirit, the curse of Prince Lazar, the phrase ‘A Serb will gladly be a soldier’ and much more. The list of pillars of militarism is also very long: principle of power, traditionalism, family values, ‘public morality’, intensifying fear of endangerment, fear of change, conformity, system of privileges, hierarchy, authority, justifying violence, the right of the ‘first’ to the land, fears, habits...

## The Army

The current military security system of Serbia greatly relies on the heritage of the military system of the former JNA, a strong army from the time of global division into blocks (which was fourth in the world in terms of numbers and equipment at the time). The role and structure of the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) was mostly founded in experiences from partisan wars and perceptions of threat in the shape of an outside invasion that would include engagement of either NATO or the Warsaw Pact.

Along with this, the JNA at the time had a very important role in conveying the symbols related to 'brotherhood and unity' and in a way also represented a 'guardian' of the principle.

Serbia is now in the stage of transforming the army into a professional one, conforming to NATO standards. The armed forces of Serbia (as well as the armies of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Croatia) adopted three military missions following the model of NATO in their recent development strategies: defending the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the country, assisting civilian structures in cases of natural disasters and participating in international peace missions.

One of the indicators of militarism is the percentage of public expenditure allocated to military purposes. In the case of Serbia, 795 million dollars were allocated for 2007, which sounds almost frightening considering that investing in the army directly takes funds away from social security, healthcare, education, culture, environmental protection... The projected costs of defence in Serbia are, in the period of 2004 through to 2008, in US dollars: 782, 774, 730, 795, 844 million.

Viewed from the outside, research also contributes to this impression; the army is highly respectable in the society. Even though this image has recently been shaken by frequent suicides, murders of soldiers in barracks and frequent incidents at military warehouses, thus discouraging some potentially proud parents of future soldiers, the respectability and respect for the army as an institution still remain. Some important notions are attached to the army: safety, security, organisation, hierarchy, discipline, growing up (becoming

a man), technology development, concentrated knowledge, clear division of roles. In the army, 'there is room for everyone and everyone has their task'. The strength of a state is often represented and reflected by the strength, organisation, and number of troops. The army is presented as a guarantor of democracy and constitutional order in the country.

And what happens in the army, behind the barracks' walls and inside the dormitories? The things that happen are daily violations of human rights, including harassment and molestation of the weaker ones or the ones lower in rank, absolutely no rights to difference or dissent, different needs and affinities, keeping people guarded and under surveillance, prohibition of everyday contact with the outside world, the 'seniors' bullying 'rookies' (the ones who have been in the army longer and the new arrivals, respectively), taking away the 'civilian documents', imposing patterns of functioning (when you eat, when you shower, when you change clothes, when you go to bed and when you get up...) and many, many other things. The army is a system in which even the lowest form of democracy doesn't exist.

With the introduction of the option of civil military service, a large number of young people have exercised their Right to conscientious objection. There are many causes for such a trend. On the one hand, the past wars and the weight they carried with them are still very recent. On the other hand, establishing at least some kind of a democratic system enabled people to be informed better, but also more courageous in demanding their rights. Earlier constitutional charters allowed for no options of refusing to go into the army, so that many young people were taken to the barracks against their will and forcedly, when they tried to escape, arrested and sentenced. Today's legal regulation allows for the possibility of choice (even though the army tends to make the civil service 'a punishment for those who do not want to serve their military duty carrying arms') and enables us to see how popular the army really is. Unfortunately, a great number of people who cite conscientious objection do not do it for ethical, moral, anti-war, religious or other 'conscientious' reasons, but out of their own interests, i.e. their wish to avoid the six months' (current duration of the military service is six months) stay away from home in difficult conditions in an

almost prison-like environment. Even though these reasons are also legitimate and absolutely acceptable, their superficiality on one hand undermines the authority of the army and diminishes its importance, but on the other hand does not negate militarization as a social need. Behind the standpoint of ‘I am not against the army, I just don’t want to go’ remains a lot of room for maintaining militarism. Military organisation sees in this very standpoint the support for explaining the necessity of their own transformation towards a professional voluntary army. So, many conscientious objectors do not deny the need for existence of the army as a mechanism of security.

Aleksandar Radić, one of military-political commentators, speaking of problems the army currently faces, said in a statement on a radio station with many listeners: ‘due to the poor response of recruits, and because of the fact that people who do come to the army are those of lesser abilities and lower education level, we currently have poor biological material at our barracks’<sup>1</sup>, leaving us the possibility to conclude ourselves how much conscientious objection weakens the army, and thereby the state. Treating people as biological material (that is, according to this explanation, worse in the case of ‘people of lower education level’) is not far from Nazi theories about the high quality Arian soldier; not to mention the amount of discrimination and potential for various types of violence a statement like this one has.

The still fresh case of Montenegro leaving the state union with Serbia has for years now raised in the broader public (from ordinary citizens’ chatting to important political debates) the issue of: How will the army be divided?! The fact that some other ministries, along with the Ministry of Defence, were joint institutions (the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights) wasn’t much of a dilemma or a problem for anyone. The only thing important was what was going to happen to the army. The epilogue is distressing: the army and foreign affairs were successfully transferred to the level of Serbia, but the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights ceased to exist. It turned into the Government Office for Human Rights.

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1 Source: B92, 9 June 2005.

## NATO

Serbia's journey towards NATO commenced not long after the changes of 5 October 2000; a number of international military experts came to the general headquarters to advise, propose, and direct. Serbia is now a part of the Partnership for Peace Programme, conceived in order to promote and strengthen intensive cooperation between NATO candidates and members on matters of defence and security, with the goal of strengthening stability in Europe. Within the Partnership for Peace, the so called Programme of compatibilisation, armament of candidates, or new members, with weapons compatible with NATO standards is being carried out. What's more, members must acquire new equipment, which actually enables emptying the storages from the Cold War period and opening space for new generations of weapons that are also less needed considering that there is no realistic danger any more, yet nevertheless maintains the military-industrial complex.

The road to NATO, it seems, is not at all easy and simple, and includes a series of steps towards transformation not only military, but also of the state, legal and political system. For this very reason, a question worth asking is why do so many states want to join the NATO, whereas some still do not? What are the advantages and shortcomings of membership in this Euro-Atlantic association? What is almost never questioned is the meaning of the term Euro-Atlantic Integration. This entails something good, European, cultured, rich, employed, safe. And is it really a symbol of welfare awaiting us? The term of Euro-Atlantic integration was coined by merging the words *European* (referring to creation of the EU as a unified region) and *Atlantic* (which refers to the Atlantic Pact, i.e. NATO).

To begin with, it should be known that joining, i.e. accession to NATO is not a prerequisite for membership to the European Union. In the EU there are countries that are not NATO members, such as Austria, Sweden, Finland and Ireland, and the new constitution of the EU which is being created does not link this membership to EU. Serbia (as well as other countries in the region) is one of the aspirants to EU membership. Even though the very assumption of impoverished countries such as ours joining the EU can very much be discussed,

especially in the context of economic globalisation, market competition that the smaller and the weaker cannot endure, cheap labour force and resource exploitation, priority in this text are non-truths and half-truths that are served as explanations for Serbia joining NATO.

We often hear that there is no alternative to NATO and that this is in 'our' national interest. The paradigm of national interests emerges as the main propaganda technique of the government and advocates of joining NATO. It is completely unclear who has the mandate to judge what national interest is, but it is clear that if you touch national interests, you touch the state and the people.

Let us, nevertheless, dare touch that 'holy cow'!

### **What is NATO and who needs it?**

NATO is a military alliance of the USA, Canada and twenty four European countries, founded in 1949 with the goal of protecting the capitalist West from the Soviet Union and its socialist model. The Eastern Block fell apart in 1989 and NATO lost the purpose for its further existence. However, instead of ceasing to exist, the alliance put new goals and tasks before itself.

For the objective lack of 'enemies' with whom the equilibrium would have to be maintained by manufacturing more up-to-date weapons, NATO, in order to justify the reasons for its existence (as well as the enormous budget it has at its disposal), turns towards the terrorism story. 'Defending the heritage of the developed West from ever growing terrorism' becomes one of the main arguments. It is interesting how the threat of terrorist attacks develops parallel to this new doctrine and the number of terrorist activities in NATO member countries increases. It is difficult not to notice that the number of such actions has multiplied in the few past years, i.e. from the beginning of NATO's orientation towards defending us from them. Someone might think that NATO needs terrorist attacks.

On second thought, what security guarantees can hundreds of 'hunter' planes provide, thousands of tanks, military ships and nuclear heads, if the danger is within an organised group of people (a dozen of them, say), ready to sacrifice their lives entering an underground or a railway station with bags loaded with

explosive? There don't seem to be many options of F117A plane diminishing that type of danger. Therefore, it can be said that NATO currently has no enemies.

NATO expansion is a very profitable business for its members – 80% of the global production of weapons is held by the wealthiest NATO members. Demands for 'meeting NATO standards' in terms of weapons and military equipment mean nothing else but providing the sales of weapons to new members.

The weapons trade serves to strengthen positions of military-industrial complex in countries that manufacture and export weapons on one hand, and on the other hand it serves to strengthen military influence in the countries that import weapons. The military industrial complex profits from wars and preparations for wars and is therefore oriented solely towards war.

Militarization on an internal level strives to encourage tension between different groups in the society, which leads to external intervention and intervention of countries that supply weapons. Global hierarchies of power and global military order thus maintain the dynamics of its existence.

Citizens of Serbia have no one and nowhere to turn for answers to what accession to this pact means for Serbia and themselves, i.e. tax payers. Thus, they do not know that:

- investment in the army directly takes away from social security, healthcare, education, culture, environment protection... NATO membership fees are very high, but this is not the only cost a country has to pay. There are the costs of army reorganisation, purchasing weapons and military equipment in order to meet 'NATO standards', costs of soldiers' participation in interventions outside the state, costs of adaptation of communication systems, roads, railroads, airports and harbours, according to NATO orders;
- dangerous weapons and various poisons are stored at army bases, including nuclear weapons, so that military bases are a constant threat to the environment and people's health.

Even though around 75 percent of the population has a negative attitude towards NATO, most of them are not aware of alternatives to joining the pact.



The notions of safety and security are analysed exclusively through military doctrines in which they are tightly linked to 'defence from the enemy'. Thus the army has exclusivity to talk about it. Even though a part of the military structures is not enthusiastic about joining NATO<sup>2</sup>, they see it as a possibility of further justification of their existence, along with an increase of budget and better equipment. Even though their military security analyses point to the fact that there will almost certainly be no more wars in these regions, the security offered by that structure is not questioned, and nor is the budget increase that should ensure the transformation of the army in line with NATO standards. The only place where these capacities and armaments will be engaged in the future are clearly American military interventions recognisable through the role of 'global policemen', behind which there are thinly veiled interests linked to economic and political domination. What, then, does the transformation of the army bring except for the fact that the amount of money that the taxpayers will have to allocate to supporting American 'interventions' and 'campaigns', that are reminiscent of the 'campaign' carried out in Serbia in 1999. America certainly likes it when someone shares its costs of ever more frequent bombings. For this reason, Serbia needs a 'small, but modern air force'. How is it to be explained that Serbia (if that information is correct) will keep a part of the navy on the Montenegro coastline, if not through preparations for participation in international 'peace' missions. What other geo-strategic role could a couple of ships in the territory of a neighbouring state have? It is hard to imagine them in a mission of 'defending the territorial sovereignty of Serbia'.

Among the promoters of joining NATO without much further thought, we can list the majority of non-governmental organisations that see in this step a road towards 'strengthening democracy and respecting human rights'. This attitude towards the future of Serbia and the region is almost called forward,

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- 2 For reasons nowhere near the above mentioned ones, but that rather rely on the idea of a strong Serbian army dominating the region, on the theory of the justice-loving Serbian people being endangered for centuries, on nationalist theories on one should never trust Croats, that Bosniaks are impressionable, Macedonians traitors, that Serbia will be conquered by Albanians if we are weak, that wars will never cease in the Balkans.

European, democratic, and it can quite often be seen as a side opposing the 'backward, nationally oriented' part of our reality. The fact that the majority of national-chauvinist groups, including the parties of the late Slobodan Milošević and Vojislav Šešelj are clearly oriented as anti-NATO certainly influences it. However, it is often overlooked that the reasons for opposing joining this type of a militarist alliance, except for the very militant ones advocated by these rightwing oriented options, can be founded in quite different values, such as antimilitarism, building a lasting peace, solidarity and a politics of nonviolence. Unfortunately, a lot of essential thinking, learning and research is lacking among those who are presented and recognised as 'progressive thinkers, and it seems that courage is also lacking at the time when most of those 'projects for democracy building' are financially supported by NATO members' governments.

### **Does NATO build peace?**

On several occasions now, NATO has, after military mediation, established an inappropriate political solution that gave legitimacy to further war and ethnic cleansing in those regions, and the political stability itself is still not attained. In the region of the former Yugoslavia, it was shown that NATO was unsuccessful in both preventing conflicts and the tasks of building and strengthening democracy that it so often cites.

'In spite of the presence of 40.000 heavily armed NATO soldiers, 120.000 Serbs and 30.000 Roma, as well as members of other minorities' were exiled from Kosovo in the period from June through December. The decimated minorities can still not move freely and are forced to live in ghettos, because they are otherwise victims of violence and even get killed'. (Andreas Zumach, *Die neue NATO. Vom Verteidigungsbündnis zur Interventionsmacht?* Hamburg, Europäische Verlagsanstalt/Rotbuch Verlag, 2000)

The United Nations' failure in conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina had been planned for in advance: in 1992, the UN Security Council (three of whose members, the USA, France and Great Britain are also members of NATO) sent militarily and politically underequipped units of UNPROFOR to Bosnia and Herzegovina. In 1993, the United Nations approved only 7000 'blue

helmets', instead of the required 38.000 soldiers, to establish the area under UN protection. 'NATO's presence in the former Yugoslavia, and the systematic discreditation of the UN, eventually led to the only possible solution for the conflict in Kosovo that occurred later seeming to be NATO intervention'. (Jürgen Gottschlich, *Die neue NATO*, 2000)

NATO forces also take part in so called 'peace missions' such as those in Afghanistan and countries of the former Yugoslavia, where soldiers maintain an 'artificial peace'.

NATO tolerates violations of human rights in its member states. At the time of the Cold War it admitted three non-democratic states among its ranks: Greece, Turkey and Portugal. Even though there are five principles that members would have to meet (democracy, successful market economy, civil control of the army, ordered relations with neighbours and technical conformity of the army with the armies of other members), Turkey has met none of these requirements to this day. NATO tolerates the persecution of Kurds, and the fact that Turkey has occupied the Eastern part of Cyprus. NATO has also tolerated many illegal moves of the USA, including helping military groups in Latin America between the 1950s and 1980s.

'In the NATO document of MC 327, adopted in late 1993, it is said that NATO would mediate when authorised by the UN Security Council only in those regions and conflicts where NATO members have their own interests. For lack of such interests in, say, Rwanda in 1994, they calmly watched the genocide over hundreds of thousands of people'. (Andreas Zumach, *Die neue NATO*, 2000)

Access to strategic raw materials, particularly fossil fuels, is of fundamental importance for NATO. Thus the intention is to expand towards Central Asia, with its enormous reserves of oil and natural gas. With the same intention, the USA have intensified military cooperation with some of the states in the region of Caspian Sea and Caucasus, all under the guise of the war against terror. Leading NATO members thus try to attain political and military control of the region, and privileged access to raw materials'. (Scheer, *Die neue NATO*, 2000)

The USA uses their current campaign against terrorism to fulfil their geopolitical interests. The War against Terrorism is primarily a useful excuse

for armed violence by the sole global superpower who can thus establish a monopoly over global natural resources, primarily fossil fuels, for its corporations, who brought George W. Bush into power, and intensify patriotism among the population of the USA, in a country where every criticism of the Bush administration equals national treason. (Dr Mišo Alkalaj, publicist, *Mladina*, 9 April 2002)

The legal definition of terrorism is unclear, whilst the political selection of enemies, marked as terrorists, is willful. The joint feature of all terrorist movements is opposing American interests; and in the incriminating American lists there are many liberation movements trying to oust US supervised dictators' regimes in their countries. (Dr Mišo Alkalaj, publicist, *Mladina*, 25 February 2002)

Terrorism and the fight against terrorism in the context of transition countries primarily imply expansion of the USA interest sphere. In the Caspian region, the reshaping of power relations and alliances is taking place, with the goal of free US access to oil. (*Delo*, 5 October 2001)

### **Demilitarisation – a realistic alternative**

**Demilitarise** (Lat. *de-*, *militaris*) mil. disarm; particularly: release (or: significantly decrease, not keep) army and tear down military objects in a city, region or state: introduce civil governance instead of military governance. (Milan Vujaklija, *Leksikon stranih reči i izraza* (Lexicon of Foreign Words and Expressions), Prosveta, Belgrade, 1970)

### **Where to?**

An analysis of the possibilities of demilitarisation entails a lot of things today. Militarism includes and entwines many segments of the society, so the process of advocating demilitarisation would have to include very different levels of operations at the same time. From deconstruction of militant patterns of social relations and demilitarisation of people's awareness, through demobilisation and gradual release of military capacities and transformation of usable capacities into civil, to offering and building clear non-militant alternatives.

An important segment is constituted by work on creating social support to the process and recognising its importance. One needs to take on various errors the society of today is founded in. The ideological justification and indoctrination that has been going on for centuries now, is rooted in many values and principles that directly confront the idea of demilitarisation. Work on deconstructing these values would have to be the axis of society transformation. There is a socially accepted thesis that the use of violence is a historical law. Violence is considered a primary force rooted in human nature, and its use is considered a main means in the struggle for human rights and interests. The fact that states themselves originated in wars, i.e. armed violence, supports the idea of the justification of violence for the purpose of security of a national state. Principles of patriarchy and masculinity reach every pore of both private and social lives. The deconstruction of patriarchal relations and gender (male-female) roles in society is important for understanding many principles and ideologies from which militarism draws its force.

Understanding tradition as something bright and eternal, social conformism and viewing war as an inevitable social occurrence, make an enormous contribution to the role of military system in society. Awe for authorities and justifying hierarchy as the only realistic option, non-refusal of privileges and abuses of power, theses on national imperilment and that of the national state, are but a small part of the problems that we need to face on our way towards demilitarisation.

Parallel to this process of deconstruction, work has to be done on developing a 'peace' paradigm that, according to Gal Kirn, has to be articulated within 'civil society', or to be more precise, through social networks of politically acting autonomous individuals and various groups. Through small actions and their self-reflection, a possibility of collective action is opened and thus the process of gradually building 'peacemaking' awareness through social norms takes place.

'Both in theory and in practice, there is a certain 'shortage' of peace paradigm in the world today. People usually perceive it as Utopian, particularly those who fall for political non-imagination of global and political elites who see everything through lens of real-politics. We will be building the social world

ourselves. It is up to us to decide what values will prevail in that world: whether the values of war, violence, social injustice, material and spiritual poverty, or enlightening ideals of social justice, 'eternal peace', redistribution of wealth and humane and active coexistence of peoples and people.' (Gal Kirn)

### **What about the army?**

The process of demobilisation and abolishing the army should take place gradually, during a period of several years. It should not entail leaving a huge number of people working at the military structures jobless, but on the contrary, the funds saved by the gradual abolishing of the army should be invested into the re-training of people, who are now in active military service, and in the long run in the processes of education and revitalisation of the economy. Many military capacities can be transformed into civil ones, or privatised. A large portion of military property could be used for other, profitable purposes. The program of re-training of military personnel for civilian jobs is already carried out through the 'PRISMA' project. Part of the capacities owned by the army (e.g. halls, production machines etc) can be ceded to the redundant employees for starting their own businesses through various projects, or to existing companies under the condition of employing and re-training military personnel that remained jobless.

Much research done in Europe has analysed the best and the least painful ways in which this process could move. With some readiness, money and ideas, such studies could also be done for the region we live in.

### **And what would be the paths and tasks of politics of Serbia and the region?**

The sense of peace, security and safety among citizens cannot be attained through purchasing and storing new and modern weapons. Acquisition of better military aircrafts, for example, does not create a sense of safety but rather produces the same need in other countries, particularly the neighbouring ones. The sense of safety is not created when you have better and more powerful weapons than your neighbour, but when you know that the neighbour doesn't

want to attack or kill you when the thought of doing the same to your neighbour has not occurred to you either.

Our own state politics largely determines the degree of the safety of its citizens and the entire community. Politics relying on dialogue, a culture of peace, communication and cooperation, primarily with closest neighbours, makes for the best possible, and the only realistic way of creating peace and sense of security. The issues of building a lasting peace, demilitarisation and security cannot be viewed or treated locally. This is a process that has to take place continually in the entire region and on a broader scale too, within the international framework. The fact that the neighbouring countries are taking the route that is offered, even imposed on them, does not mean that there is no alternative.

Serbia could make an invaluable contribution to peace in the region through its own example of choosing the path of demilitarisation and building communication and trust with neighbouring countries. It is quite certain that the EU would not oppose such politics, nor could it defend opposing such politics in front of Serbia's own public.

On a broader political level, Serbia would have to support the strengthening of the role of the United Nations, a democratic organisation that draws its legality and legitimacy from all states of the world, not the handful of the wealthiest. One of the features of the so called new world order is the weakening of legal mechanisms of international order and replacing them with military mechanisms.

NATO strives to discredit the UN and OSCE whose roles are to secure peace in the world. The Security Council serves to provide legitimacy to NATO military interventions. As a consequence of such a relationship and with the abuse of power of today's role, the UN and OSCE are increasingly and frequently reduced to concerns of mitigating the consequences of wars led by NATO, from assisting the recovery of wartime damage to organising democratic elections.

Serbia would be a more recognised and respectable state in terms of international relations if it supported the peace and development programmes of the United Nations in a more resolute manner. By joining NATO, Serbia

would help the collapse of international law and establish NATO as a biased judge to the detriment of United Nations.

Professor Žarko Puhovski speaks in one of his interviews about the fact that today, now that the block division of the world no longer exists, NATO has become irrelevant, and a radical reform of UN could be discussed, and that it would then have to become a truly democratic organisation, a kind of a global parliament, and even a global government, and thereby a guarantor of global security. Fulfilling this, according to him, is conditioned by the demilitarisation of national states, which, as he says, cannot be avoided in the long run, and is an unimaginable thing to even say in the short run. He backs this statement up with the fact that the modern state was created in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by the legitimate monopoly of physical force becoming a feature of government, and the condition for this was the disarmament of citizens. According to the same pattern, demilitarisation of national states should commence, in order for the principle of collective security to be possible to introduce.

By joining NATO, Serbia would not be noted, and its international respectability and notability would grow if it opted for the opposite. Serbia's decision to be organised as a state according to the principle of peacefulness would have a great influence and response that would promote Serbia in the international community. Serbia and the countries of the Balkans could establish the so called system of active neutrality, in which they would represent themselves by a strong and deft diplomacy that supports peaceful cohabitation of various peoples within international communities. Through this, they would take responsibility for peace in the world as active states. Instead, current politics imposes military organisation that would act as a contingent of international forces for mediation that will not be just peaceful but aggressive, sooner or later. The notion that neutrality is not possible, current or is too expensive is promoted and supported primarily by the military-industrial complex, because it is the interest of its survival. It is possible to take responsibility for global peace in ways other than in military systems: within a system of early detection and prevention of armed forces, and primarily through peacebuilding and support for civil peace solutions.



Instead of the military doctrine, capacities should be used for researching non-military mechanisms for achieving a lasting peace and support for peace. One of the realistic goals could also be founding non-military systems of conflict transformation. Those should be convincing and applicable concepts that demonstrate efficiency, and yet founded in international experiences that should be gathered and structured. Some of the states (such as Germany) have been working on researching these possibilities for quite some time now. This is the road we should join. Peace teams would in the cases of armed violence have the option of reacting through mediation and visiting each other. Some states and their representatives can be perceived as friends (on the bases of good inter-state relations) on both sides and this credibility can be used very well in establishing dialogue.

Existence of such systems does not limit states to acting through them alone. Individual active neutrality is also possible, i.e. self-initiated and responsible assuming of peace negotiating functions of demilitarised states working on researching possibilities of building a lasting peace.

Building a different internal model in the Balkans as opposed to the armament race and maintaining 'enemy images' that has been happening so far is one of the priorities. The condition for that is abandoning the military logic and dynamics of armament and setting political priorities such as building trust, politics of cooperation, transparency, economic development, equality and solidarity between people and inclusion of people in making significant political decisions.

Building trust with neighbours calls for a lot of time, courage, and patience. It requires getting to know our neighbours well, seeing what's important to them, what they fear of, what makes them feel secure. It is also necessary to let them know the same about oneself. This process takes a lot of work, conversations about painful issues, dealing with the past, talking about the future, but also takes a lot of time and money. It is a difficult journey, but the question is whether we have a choice at all, if we wish to feel good and safe where we live in the future.

An important link in this process is the media. One of the quality ideas is investing in regional independent media and building their credibility. Such a media could play a crucial role in building trust, mutual understanding, solidarity and empathy.

The principle of transparency in the region (and beyond) is a very important segment of these attempts. Establishing secret agreements and political manipulation is very damaging in building conditions for a lasting peace; and transparency could be one of the so called 'national interests' of today's Balkans.

Creating the European Defence Alliance is currently underway, and that should be a counterpart to other military alliances, including NATO. Countries of the Balkans could, through clearly articulating non-militarist future of the region, refuse this type of membership, and instead offer their capacities for work on agreements, negotiations, mediation in the future crises in the world; to cite the recent wartime experiences that can, in certain situations, and bearing in mind choosing the path of demilitarisation, carry a strong anti-war message. It would hardly, after such a militant past of the region, be understood as a 'bad intention' and European countries would hardly oppose such politics from this region.

One of the ways the army resorts to, in justifying the reasons for its existence is assigning civil roles to military structures, so that one of the three aforementioned main missions of contemporary army (assisting civilian structures in case of natural disasters) clearly strives towards entwining military and civilian tasks. The army is thus given the role of someone who helps. The argument denying such claims is the possibility of forming civil systems of protection and forces for reacting to such situations. Such services would be cheaper beyond comparison and qualified (technically and in terms of expertise) to react fast in cases of natural disasters.

## **To end with**

Journalist Antonio Prlenda writes in his text 'The possibilities of demilitarisation in the region': 'Whilst the economic aspect is fairly clear, the political aspects of considering the possibilities of demilitarisation are a lot

more confused. Of course, it depends on who is citing it and to what end. Not going into the attitudes of certain non-governmental organisations, it is clear to all that demilitarisation in Bosnia and Herzegovina is very unlikely, unless the demilitarisation includes neighbouring countries: the Republic of Croatia and Serbia and Montenegro. For the unfortunate historical reasons and also the afore mentioned Agreement on sub-regional armament control, this fact makes the possibility of demilitarisation difficult, because it requires that all three countries display sincere will for this idea at the same time. Meaning, to have in power those political forces whose ideas on demilitarisation would match, at the same time. (...) We live in the times when the power of a country is not measured by the number of guns it has, but the number of allies and friends. But that stems from political and, perhaps most of all, economic power’.

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about the authors



# About the Authors

**Amela Puljek-Shank** graduated at the Eastern Mennonite University Programme of The Centre for Justice and Peacebuilding in 2004. She is the co-author of the chapter 'Put iscjeljenja' in: *Pozitivni pristupi izgradnji mira: Resurs za inovatore* ('Journey of Healing': *Positive Approaches to Peacebuilding: A Resource for Innovators*). She worked as a facilitator in the programme Seeds of Peace in Greece, the USA and the Balkans. She gave lessons on trauma healing and recovery at Summer School on Peacebuilding of the Eastern Mennonite University. She works with the Mennonite Central Committee as a co-representative for Southeast Europe Programme and leads seminars and workshops on trauma healing in the region.

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field of interest in nonviolence: nonviolence in intercultural context with a particular emphasis on ecumenical and inter-religious lives. In this context, she coordinates the project of the Regional Conference of Believers for Peace. She was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006, as a part of the initiative of 1000 Women. She lives in Sesvete/Republic of Croatia. She is a mother of three.

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**Danica Minić** (Belgrade, 1975), used to lead workshops on women's representation in the media, and now she mostly does research and writing in the field of feminist media studies. She is currently working on her doctoral thesis at the Central European University, Gender Studies Department. The working title of her thesis is: Gender and Media Diversity: Television in Serbia and Croatia after 2000.

**Darija Žilić**, holds BA in comparative literature and history. She has published literary reviews, essays and theoretical texts in the journals *Književna republika*, *Tema*, *Vijenac*, *Polja*, *Balkanis*, *Zarez*, *Nova Istra*, *Filozofska istraživanja*, *Treca*, *Kruh i ruže*, *ProFemina*, *Rijeci*, *Koraci*, and in the collection *Philosophy and Gender*. She is an ongoing associate of the Third Programme on Croatian radio, and she was a long-standing leader of theoretical and activist panel discussions at the Multimedia Institute in Zagreb. She has published a volume of poetry *Breasts and Strawberries* (2005), and her story was published in a collection of queer stories (2004). She also likes to sing jazz.



**Goran Božičević**, is the leader of the Miramida Centre in Grožnjan, Istria. He lives and works between Grožnjan and Skopje, where his wife is from and where his children were born. He has been involved in peace work since 1993 and has participated in the Volunteer Project Pakrac, The Anti-war Campaign in Croatia and The Centre for Peace Studies. From 2002 until 2006 he worked with the Quaker Peace & Social Witness, and at the moment he is working on developing a Regional Peace Studies Programme.

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**Ivana Franović** (1974) is a peace activist, feminist, and antimilitarist from Belgrade. She has been a part of the Centre for Nonviolent Action since 1998. She often takes the role of trainer in peace education programmes (basic, advanced and trainings for trainers), although is reluctant to call herself a trainer. She is the co-editor of the book *I Can't Do Well if My Neighbour Does Poorly*. When she is not primarily an activist, she is an amateur designer, makes jewellery and likes maths (she is a would-be mathematician) and makes radicals and homophobes crazy. She is currently a postgraduate student of peace studies in Coventry, UK.

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**Milan Colić Humljan** (Babušnica, 1978), is a peace activist, who has lived and worked in Babušnica, Niš, Sarajevo; in Belgrade, from 2001. Since 1997, he has been engaged in programmes of peacebuilding and building a more just society through CNRS (Centre for Nonviolent Conflict Transformation, Niš), Protecta (Centre for Development of Civil Society, Nis), Otpor and CeSID. From 2000 to 2006 he has worked with the CNA in Sarajevo and Belgrade, and took part in developing regional programmes for Dealing with the Past, as well as Basic and Advanced peacebuilding trainings, and programmes for networking peace activists. He was a part of trainers' team of around thirty nonviolent conflict transformation and peacebuilding trainings. He is one of the founders of campaigns REACT! and NE(u)NATO.org.

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international non-governmental organisations. A manager, coordinator, eternal networker who links people she has met in her life and work. In constant search of new challenges, new discoveries, places, people, nice things....

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