

Ivana Franović

Dealing with the Past in the Context of Ethnonationalism

The Case of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia

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Preface

More than fifteen years ago the state of Yugoslavia broke apart and a cycle of organised violence, expulsions and atrocities started. Although different areas were affected by different degrees of destruction – Bosnia-Herzegovina 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 violence and human rights violations. Due to the presence of international organisations, engagement of civil society organisations and local initiatives the region has not suffered a relapse into war. But to say that a lasting peace has been achieved would be a euphemism. Societies in the region of former Yugoslavia still have to cope with numerous traumas. They have to follow through on the prosecution of war crimes, enhance social healing processes, and establish functioning mechanisms that guarantee the rights of minorities, co-existence, and participation of all citizens in democratic institutions.

In all countries of former Yugoslavia, civil society organisations have set up initiatives for fact-finding, awareness raising for the past, reconciliation and peace education. The *Centre for Nonviolent Action (CNA)* has been actively involved in transnational peace work since 1997. CNA started out as a training organisation in Sarajevo. Since 2001, it has established a second office in Belgrade. It has contributed to creating an impressive cross-border network of experts from the education sector, the media and the NGO community from Bosnia, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo.

CNA has helped to transfer the concept of nonviolence (“nenasilje”) into the regional context and spread it widely throughout the Balkans. In addition, the team has increasingly focused on activities that encourage people to actively face the past. The team has organised workshops and public discussion forums in which war veterans from different sides spoke about their personal experiences during the war. Beyond the public forums, all of CNA’s educational materials – from books on reconciliation to recently published film documentaries – aim to motivate people to reflect critically on their role and their personal responsibility before, during and after the wars.

CNA’s regional crossborder approach is quite unique. So is its capacity and willingness to constantly revise and question their own work by undergoing individual and collective processes of self-reflection. One result of such a process is Ivana Franovic’s text on “Peacebuilding and Dealing with the Past in the Context of Ethnonationalism”. Ivana, who joined the team in 1999, lives and works with CNA in Belgrade. This text is based on a thesis that was presented at the Department of Peace Studies at Coventry University, where she received her Master’s degree in 2007. The

thesis presents a range of efforts being undertaken by civil society groups in the region, highlighting the absence of initiatives on the part of the government(s) and the wider public sphere(s). It concludes with an appeal to form broader alliances, and to also seek partners beyond those groups already working in this field. This implies, however, that two frequently observed tendencies among NGOs – both the mutual suspicion with which they regard each other, and the widespread prejudice that all politicians are incurable ethnonationalists – must first be overcome. Another problem that all civil society initiatives face is that their activities – carried out with a high level of engagement – are not in the spotlight of the media.

We have decided to publish the study as it gives a comprehensive overview of dilemmas faced by practitioners in peacebuilding after violent conflict. Moreover, it raises questions which overlap with an issue area (the relevance of “dealing with the past” for conflict transformation) that the Berghof Research Center has recently established and intends to broaden by action research projects in the near future.

Berlin, October 2008

Martina Fischer

1 Introduction¹

There are many theories and narratives about the reasons for the break-up of Yugoslavia, the war that accompanied it and the guilt and responsibility for the slaughter that happened. As Sabrina P. Ramet states, we all “know” why the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) disintegrated and why the war(s) (1991-1995) broke out:

It was all because of Milosevic/ Tudjman/ "the Slovenes"/ communists/ organized crime/ Western states/ the Vatican-Comintern conspiracy, who planned it all by himself/ themselves in order to advance his own personal/ Serbian/ Slovenian/ American/ Vatican interests—your choice. Or again—it all happened because of local bad traditions/ economic problems/ structural issues/ system illegitimacy/ legitimate grievances/ illegitimate grievances/ the long shadow of the past. Or again—it really started in 1389/ 1463/ 1878/ 1918/ 1941/ 1986/ 1987/ 1989/ 1990/ 1991—your pick. Of course, we all know that both the break-up and the war were completely avoidable/ inevitable, don't we? And best of all, we all know that the real villain(s) in this drama can only be Milosevic/ Tudjman/ "the Serbs"/ "the Slovenes"/ "the Croats"/ "the Muslims"/ Germany/ Balkan peoples generally/ the Great Powers, who must be held (exclusively/ jointly) responsible for most of the killing, though some of us also know that all parties were equally guilty. Well, maybe we all know what caused the Yugoslav troubles, but it seems that we "know" different things.²

This is an authentic summary of how different the things we “know” are. Narratives vary throughout the region. Some people might argue that we do not suffer from a lack of truth, but from the existence of too many ‘truths’ and a lack of consistent efforts to debate them openly, to face and integrate them.³ There is almost no shared truth, and for many people it is still hard to accept that different people perceive different things as truths due to different experiences. Only *our* ‘truth’ is accepted as *the* truth, while the

¹ The first version of this paper was my dissertation for the degree of M.A. in Peace and Reconciliation Studies at Coventry University, Coventry, UK. I am thankful to Dr Andrew Rigby, my supervisor, for his questions and comments. I am also thankful to Dr Martina Fischer and Beatrix Schmelzle from the Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management for crucial feedback, for encouragement to revise the paper and deepen it, and for all their effort and support. Special thanks go to my colleagues and friends from the Centre for Nonviolent Action (CNA) for all these years of immense support and learning from each other. This present paper is mainly based on peace activist experiences that I gained during the last decade with my CNA team.

² Sabrina P. Ramet, “Explaining the Yugoslav meltdown, 1. ‘for a charm of pow'rful trouble, like a hell-broth boil and bubble’: theories about the roots of the Yugoslav troubles,” in *Nationalities Papers* 32 (2004): 731.

³ Edin Hodžić, “Komisija za istinu i pomirenje: Forum protiv mitova” [Truth and Reconciliation Commission: The Forum Against the Myths], *Puls demokratije*, September 1, 2006, available at www.pulsdemokratije.net (accessed September 3, 2008).

‘truths’ of others are perceived as manipulation and propaganda. And in many cases, ‘our truth’ is that we are *the* victims, while the others are perpetrators.

The countries of former Yugoslavia still suffer from the legacy of the 1990s war(s). This legacy seriously affects the present and endangers the future of societies in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia and Croatia. In 2007, on the twelfth anniversary of the genocide in Srebrenica, the radical nationalist magazine *Pravda* [Justice] in Serbia published an article by a notorious nationalist where he stated: “It is exactly twelve years since in Srebrenica nothing has happened.” He then continued to claim that it was “warmongers” who turned “Srebrenica’s nothing” into “something huge and horrible”.⁴

If a paper in Germany published a text where Auschwitz was denied, those responsible for such an act would feel the consequences. But in Serbia so far, past war crimes and atrocities can still be denied, which is often justified by recourse to a so-called ‘freedom of speech’. At the same time, peace and human rights groups who speak out about responsibility for crimes cannot make use of such ‘freedom’. For example, just a few days after the above mentioned newspaper article was published, a peace and human rights activist in Serbia, Maja Stojanović, was sentenced to ten days in prison for displaying posters in an “unauthorised place.”⁵ The posters contained an appeal to Serbian authorities to arrest the fugitive war criminal Ratko Mladić and transfer him to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.⁶ He was the Chief of Staff of the Army of Republika Srpska, and is, besides other misdeeds, connected with the massacre of more than 8,000 Muslim men and boys in Srebrenica in July 1995. Stojanović stated to journalists that the judge told her that his house in Kosovo had been burnt by those same Muslims, and that they deserved everything that happened to them. Attacks on and defamation of human rights activists and journalists are frequent occurrences in Serbia. The situation is not different in Republika Srpska, where it is almost impossible to hear different voices, and those who are trying to raise them are under strong pressure.

A narrative that can frequently be heard in Sarajevo says that it is a multicultural city, as Bosniaks are the most tolerant, although they are the main victims of the war. But

⁴ Miroslav Toholj, *Pravda*, 17 July 2007.

⁵ Maja Stojanović displayed the posters in an unauthorised place, indeed, although she put them over posters that were already displayed there by others, also without authorisation, but no one was sentenced because of them. Maja refused to pay a fine imposed on her, thus she was sentenced to prison. After a number of appeals sent to Serbian authorities, the President of Serbia expressed his support and she was not imprisoned. But the fine had to be paid, so NGO activists collected the amount needed (see *B92*, July 23, 2007). Further information available at www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2007&mm=07&dd=23&nav_id=256478&nav_category=11 (accessed August 25, 2008).

⁶ The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) was established in 1993 in The Hague. Ratko Mladić is indicted on charges of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity by ICTY. Further information available at www.un.org/icty/cases-e/index-e.htm (accessed August 25, 2008).

reality often turns out to be different. One of the events that run counter to this narrative is what happened at the “Kids’ Festival”. It has been organised every year in Sarajevo since 2004, and gathers children from Bosnia-Herzegovina from different ‘ethnic communities’. During the festival, they are engaged in different programmes. The idea is a good one, as those kids usually do not have a chance to meet each other. At the opening of one of the programmes this year, the master of ceremonies was recounting the towns where the kids came from, and each name was accompanied by applause from the audience. When it was the turn of the towns in Republika Srpska, kids in the audience were shouting “boo”. Obviously, kids from those places were very scared.⁷ It is worrying how the childhoods of all those kids are afflicted with a post-war atmosphere.

The situation in Croatia is no more rosy. Croatia keeps on celebrating anniversaries of the military action “Oluja” [Storm] carried out in 1995, still denying the war crimes that accompanied it. At that time between 150,000 and 200,000 ethnic Serbs fled from Croatia, but the mainstream narrative says that it was their choice to do so.

All this is a legacy of war. And something needs to be done about it. This text will explore what can and should be done in the former Yugoslav region, so that these societies develop constructive ways to deal with the past and take a path towards lasting peace. I will argue that constructive dealing with the past is an indispensable prerequisite for accompanying peacebuilding processes.

My interest in this topic is not purely academic. It is also driven by very personal experiences and the need to reflect on them. The disintegration of former Yugoslavia, which was accompanied by bloody wars, meant that my home country fell apart. The fact that one federal state disintegrated is not even such a big deal – what is horrifying is how it was done, what we were able to do to each other, how we treated and still treat each other. In contrast to many of my friends, relatives and millions of other people, I had that kind of luck to live in Belgrade where I was born. So I was a few hundreds kilometres away from any of the front-lines, and I did not experience the war directly.⁸ However, since the war was not happening “only at the front, but everywhere and to us all,”⁹ I did experience it on many levels: through friends, relatives and other people close to me throughout the region; through war propaganda and horrifying news; through lost and destroyed lives; through the fact that war was going on and the helpless feeling that we cannot do anything to stop it; through the poverty that a war brings along as it is terribly costly and ordinary citizens have to pay for it; through scary drunk men in camouflaged uniforms who came to spend a weekend away from the front-line (despite the narrative

⁷ *Dani*, 15 June 2007.

⁸ With the exception of NATO's ‘humanitarian bombs’ in 1999.

⁹ Slavenka Drakulić, *The Balkan Express. Fragments from the Other Side of War* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1993), 3.

that Serbia was not at war); through hiding close friends from mobilization; through raids where policemen, like dog-catchers, were hunting young men, refugees from Croatia or Bosnia, to send them back to the front-lines; through sending food parcels to relatives in crisis areas, even if we did not have enough for ourselves. And last but not least, I have experienced war through the very fact that I am from Belgrade, where most of the war-creators were safely situated – a marker that goes with me wherever I go.

This paper will focus on the potentials and obstacles for peacebuilding processes in the triangle Serbia – Bosnia-Herzegovina – Croatia. People face very different situations in these three countries. But at the same time, these situations are related, affecting each other. And to avoid any misunderstanding, when the paper refers to ‘us’, it refers to people in the region of the former Yugoslavia, no matter what their ethnic prefix is. First, the paper will give a brief overview of the issue that needs to be faced foremost: the suffering that human beings endured during the war (chapter 2). This second chapter will address the role of ethnonationalism in our tragedy. I will argue that for analysing the causes of war we should not look at ‘ancient hatreds’ between the tribes or at ethnic differences. We should look at the essence of patriarchy (not forgetting that ethnonationalism is one of the incarnations of patriarchy): namely power over others, no matter who they are and which group they belong to. I remain convinced that as long as we are dedicated to ethnonationalism, our chances for building lasting peace are low.¹⁰ The third chapter focuses on reconciliation and peacebuilding. It explores what reconciliation could mean in our context, and it looks at concepts for “dealing with the past” in a constructive way. The fourth chapter gives an overview of mechanisms for transitional justice and dealing with the past applied in the region of former Yugoslavia and outlines what should be done in addition to these, in order to establish lasting peace. The fifth and final chapter identifies actors whose duty is and/or should be to take an active role in peacebuilding processes.

¹⁰ Due to the scope and thematic focus of this paper, I will not be able to discuss or even give a short overview of the overwhelming research work done by feminist and gender-oriented scholars and activists in the region of former Yugoslavia who during the last two decades have been disclosing the relation between patriarchal hegemony and (ethno)nationalism. The critique of patriarchy that underlies my thesis will not be the subject of theoretical examination. It rather reflects my personal convictions, and marks the position I take in a still male-dominated society. Regarding subject-related references see Marina Blagojević, ed., *Mapiranje mizoginije u Srbiji : diskursi i prakse I [Mapping misogyny in Serbia: discourses and practice I]*, (Beograd: AŽIN, 2000); Marina Blagojević, ed. *Mapiranje mizoginije u Srbiji : diskursi i prakse II [Mapping misogyny in Serbia: discourses and practice II]*, (Beograd: AŽIN, 2005); Darija Žilić, “Gender essentialisms, politicalisation and peace activism in the region of former Yugoslavia” in Helena Rill et al., eds., *Twenty Pieces of Encouragement for Awakening and Change. Peacebuilding in the Region of Former Yugoslavia* (Belgrade: Centre for Nonviolent Action, 2007): 267-281. Biljana Kašić, ed., *Women and the Politics of Peace. Contributions to a Women’s Culture of Resistance* (Zagreb: Centar za ženske studije, 1996); Ružica Rosandić and Vesna Pešić, ed., *Warfare, patriotism, patriarchy. The analysis of elementary school textbooks* (Belgrade: Centre for Antiwar Action, 1994); Nirman Moranjak-Bamburač, *Vodič kroz studij roda, ideologije, kulture, [Introduction into Gender Studies, ideology and culture]*, (Sarajevo: Centar za interdisciplinarnе studije Univerziteta u Sarajevu, 2006); Staša Zajović, ed., *Women for Peace* (Belgrade: Women in Black, 2003); Rada Iveković, “Women, nationalism and war: ‘Make love, not war’,” in *Hypata* 8/4 (1993): 113-126, et al.

2 The wars of the early 1990s and their consequences

2.1 War against civilians: the legacy of human suffering

The “first round” of wars in former Yugoslavia (in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina) took place from 1991 to 1995.¹¹ There were numerous international efforts to reach a cease-fire and peace agreement from the very beginning, without much success. Finally, the war ended with the Dayton Agreement, signed on 14 December 1995.

We still, 13 years after the ceasefire, do not know the exact number of casualties, as all “the sides” manipulate the figures. Most frequently cited estimates say that between 200,000 and 250,000 persons were killed, and a similar number held in detention camps, that 2.5 to 3 million had to leave their homes,¹² and that a few hundred thousand people were part of military and paramilitary formations (although, according to some estimations, this figure goes to more than a million).

One of the serious attempts to establish the facts about the casualties is being made by the Sarajevo-based Research and Documentation Centre. According to their ongoing research, the number of dead in the war in Bosnia is 97,207.¹³ The level of knowledge concerning these kind of facts is worst in Serbia, where no concrete figures are known. The reason is most probably that Serbia officially was not at war – thus, officially, there could be no casualties.

The war was a horrifying slaughter and marked by extraordinary human rights violations such as ethnic cleansing, torture, rape and humiliating people in detention camps. Soldiers suffered a lot, but the main targets of this war were civilians. In Bosnia, 40.82 percent of those killed and missing are civilians.¹⁴ Very often, the “battlefields” were streets and houses, so for many people the war was not happening somewhere on

¹¹ The war in Croatia started in 1991, and the war in Bosnia in 1992. Due to the limited space, in this paper I will not deal with the war in Kosovo (1998-1999), the NATO ‘humanitarian’ intervention (1999), the war in Macedonia (2001), or the war in Slovenia (1991).

¹² UNHCR figures from December 1995: 1,493,000 refugees, 1,300,000 internally displaced persons. For details, see Appendix, Figure 1.

¹³ See Research and Documentation Centre. www.idc.org.ba/project/populationlosses.html#thetime (accessed August 25, 2008). Their estimate is that the figure may rise to up to 110,000 by the completion of the research. The date of the completion depends on the availability of financial support.

¹⁴ Research and Documentation Centre, *Human Losses in Bosnia and Herzegovina 91-95*, www.idc.org.ba/presentation/Bosnia%20and%20Herzegovina.zip, slide 6 (accessed September 2008).

the front-line, but it “came under their window”.¹⁵ Some realised in time what was going to happen and fled to a more secure place, but many did not realise it, or did not want to believe.

One of the characteristics of the war was *ethnic cleansing*, defined as “rendering an area ethnically homogenous by using force or intimidation to remove from a given area persons from another ethnic or religious group.”¹⁶ According to the *Bassiouni Report*, all sides were engaged in ethnic cleansing (against the other two); in most reported cases it was committed by Serb forces, Croat forces did it “on a more restricted scale” and Bosniak forces “in some limited areas” and did not have it as a policy. The means applied were “mass killing of civilians, rape and sexual assault, torture, the bombardment of cities, the destruction of mosques and churches, the confiscation of private property, unlawful detention of civilians in harsh and sometimes inhuman conditions, and other unlawful practices...”¹⁷

The invention of this crime cannot be ascribed to torturers from this part of the Balkans, they were just able to implement a “well-working” recipe.¹⁸ Many of them have exercised it throughout our history, as Jackson Preece argues, with the goal of an “ethnically homogeneous or pure (cleansed of minority ethnic groups) nation-state.”¹⁹ She rightly observes that although “ethnic cleansing affects people, what is really at stake is territory.”²⁰

Those *acts of torture* and the *suffering of the tortured* are unspeakable and unbelievable. Those who experienced the disaster of being detained in a detention camp were exposed to brutal mistreatment, humiliation and torture: food and water deprivation; ice-cold water showers; subjection to extreme temperatures; being forced to remain in one position for several hours; being forced to watch the torture or killing of

¹⁵ Adnan Hasanbegović, “Four views; How I found myself in war ?; How to reach sustainable peace?”, English translation of the supplement in *Vreme*, no. 600, July 4, 2002. Available also at www.nenasilje.org/publikacije/pdf/4pogleda/4views-02-sr-vreme.pdf, p. 6 (accessed October 10, 2008).

¹⁶ *Final Report of the United Nations Commission of Experts Established Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 780 (1992), S/1994/674*, Annex IV: The policy of ethnic cleansing, prepared by M. Cherif Bassiouni, www.ess.uwe.ac.uk/comexpert/report_toc.htm (accessed August 25, 2008).

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ See, for example, Andrew Bell-Fialkoff, “A Brief History of Ethnic Cleansing,” in *Foreign Affairs* 72/3 (1993): 110-121; Jennifer Jackson Preece, “Ethnic Cleansing as an Instrument of Nation-State Creation: Changing State Practices and Evolving Legal Norms,” in *Human Rights Quarterly* 20 (1998): 817-842; Samantha Power, *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

¹⁹ Jennifer Jackson Preece, *Ethnic Cleansing*, 821. The author of the article refers to 1.5 million Greeks banished from Turkey; 400,000 Turks and around 100,000 Bulgarians banished from Greece; 35,000 Greeks, 67,000 Turks and 110,000 Romanians banished from Bulgaria; 62,000 Bulgarians banished from Romania. Skipping out the figures from World War II, after that 45,000 Turkish Cypriots were banished from Greek Cyprus; 160,000 Greek Cypriots were banished from the Turkish part; more than 300,000 Turks were banished from Bulgaria. See Jackson Preece, *ibid.*, 817-818. And all these misdeeds were done in the 20th century only (excluding WW II).

²⁰ Ibid.

others; beatings with a rifle-butt, whip, belt, stick, etc; choking and suffocating; beatings on the soles of the feet; being forced to bark, dance, sing, repeat certain sentences over and over again, or behave in other humiliating ways; staying naked; forced hard labour; mock execution; presence of family or friends during a person's torture; being forced to participate in torturing or killing of others; being forced to watch or listen to sexual abuse of others; being forced to rape another person; being forced to watch or listen to sexual abuse of family members; castration and mutilation of sex organs; being forced to decide who would be killed or tortured; mutilation and breaking the person's bones; being thrown from high altitude; burns inflicted by cigarettes; electrical shocks; forcible extraction of teeth; hanging by toes, hands or feet; pulling out of nails; sticking of needles under the nails; being used for mine-field clearing...²¹

These acts were not committed by a few madmen. Camps were established and organised as a part of a conscious policy. The *Bassiouni Report*, written in May 1994 (more than a year before the end of the war), mentions 956 reported places of detention in Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia (although officially Serbia "was not at war").

[C]amps were maintained and operated by a mix of military personnel, former army officers and soldiers, various paramilitaries, local volunteers, members of civilian police forces, or politicians. There were also many reports of situations where there was movement in and out of camps by visitors, including local civilians, paramilitary forces, and the army, who perpetrated abuses upon the prison population.²²

Detainees were mostly members of the other two ethnic groups, civilians rather than prisoners of war, but also political opponents and deserters (young and old; men and women). Even some refugees became detainees. In 1994 and 1995 police in Serbia arrested and conscripted male refugees from Bosnia and Croatia, and also those who were born in one of those places but were residents of Serbia. Those people were handed over to Serb military authorities in Croatia or Bosnia and they were incorporated into the armies there.²³

²¹ See Vladimir Jović and Goran Opačić, "Vrste mučenja" [Types of Torture], in IAN, *Tortura u ratu, posledice i rehabilitacija: Jugoslovensko iskustvo* [Torture in War: Consequences and Rehabilitation of Victims. Yugoslav Experience], (Belgrade: International Aid Network, 2003). See also the *Bassiouni Report*, Annex VIII: Prison camps, 27 May 1994.

²² *Final Report of the United Nations Commission of Experts Established Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 780 (1992)*, S/1994/674/Add. 2(Vol. IV), Annex VIII: Prison camps, under the direction of M. Cherif Bassiouni. According to this report, 466 camps were operated by Bosnian Serbs or forces of FRY; 121 by Bosnian Croats or the Government of Croatia and the Croatian Army; 84 by the Government and Army of BiH or Bosnian Muslims; 32 jointly by Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats; 9 as private prisons by individuals or groups; and 244 (25.4 per cent) by unidentified forces.

²³ A number of them were first sent to the "training" camp Erdut in Eastern Slavonia (Croatia), held by the notorious paramilitary group of pre-war criminal Željko Ražnatović Arkan. As the Humanitarian Law Center (Belgrade) has reported: "On arrival, they had to run a gauntlet of Arkan's "Tigers" and were beaten for not staying in Croatia to defend the Serb Krajina. Their heads were shaved and they were made to carry a

During the war, *organised rape* was another widespread atrocity committed. There were even special camps for women, or detention camps had special buildings for women for ‘special treatment’. Most of those women endured horrible torture and sexual abuse, and were often raped by a group of men. Rapes of men are not so well known, since victims and witnesses in this patriarchal world are not very willing to speak about that.²⁴ Women were not only raped in detention camps, it could happen anywhere. It seems that it was a practice after the “cleaning” of a village or a town to look for women and ‘have some fun’. It was not perceived as a crime, but rather as a reward. Estimates say that tens of thousands of women were raped, which indicates that rape was systematically applied in this war by a large number of men.²⁵

The list of examples of human suffering and agony in these wars does not have an end. There are millions of people who endured the lengthy siege and shelling of their towns and living spaces, who survived (or did not) the razing of their town to the ground, who lost their dear ones, who still do not know where the remains of their family members are, who died of hunger, who became permanently disabled and those whose fate is not known. Everybody who has been directly exposed to war has their own wounds. Even those of us who were not exposed directly have them, although the experiences are incomparable. Many people in the region still ask themselves: how is it possible that we did all of this to each other? How is it possible that we split, following ethnic paths, and started to behave like monsters?

rock weighing between 25 and 30 kilograms on which the word “Discipline” was inscribed around the camp. One man, whose rifle slipped off his shoulder, was stripped to the waist and tied by the paramilitaries to a tree for 24 hours. Another, who complained that his hearing was impaired, was tied half-naked to a tree on the mosquito-infested bank of the Danube River for two days.” Humanitarian Law Centre (HLC), *Refugees vs. Serbia trial continues before first municipal court in Belgrade*, November 30, 2000, www.hlc-rdc.org (accessed April 2007; no longer available online in August 2008). The HLC filed law suits against the state on behalf of 686 refugees. For personal testimonies, see Drinka Gojković et al., eds., *Ljudi u ratu – Ratovanja I [People in War – Warfares I]*, (Beograd: Dokumentacioni centar Ratovi 1991-99, 2003).

²⁴ See Dubravka Zarkov, “The Body of the Other Man. Sexual Violence and the Construction of Masculinity, Sexuality and Ethnicity in Croatian Media,” in *Victims, Perpetrators or Actors? Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence*, eds. Caroline O. N. Moser and Fiona C. Clark (London: Zed Books, 2001), 69-82.

²⁵ See, for example, Vesna Kesić, Vesna Janković and Biljana Bijelić, eds., *Žene obnavljaju sjećanje: Centar za žene žrtve rata deset godina poslije [Women recollecting memories: Center for Women War Victims Ten Years Later]*, (Zagreb: Centar za žene žrtve rata, 2003); *Ženska strana rata [The women’s way to the war]*, (Beograd: Žene u crnom, 2008); Jasna Bakšić-Muftić, “Zločin silovanja u Bosni i Hercegovini – lokalna i međunarodna dimenzija” [*Crimes of rape in Bosnia-Herzegovina – the local and international dimension*], in *Izazovi feminizma*, eds. Jasminka Babić-Avdispahić et al. (Sarajevo: Forum Bosna, 2004): 49-54; Patricia Weitsman, *Women, War, and Identity: Policies of Mass Rape in Bosnia and Rwanda*, paper presented at the Annual meeting of the International Studies Association, Town & Country Resort and Convention Center, San Diego, California, USA, 22 March 2006), available at www.allacademic.com/meta/p98059_index.html (accessed October 10, 2008); Lisa Sharlach, “Rape as Genocide: Bangladesh, the Former Yugoslavia and Rwanda,” in *New Political Science*, 22/1 (2000): 89-102; Alexandra Stiglmayer, ed., *Mass Rape: The War Against Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, trans. Marion Faber, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992).

2.2 War and ethnonationalism: the significance of myths

Michael Lapsley, a priest who supported the struggle against the apartheid regime in South Africa, once made a remarkable observation :

I was born in New Zealand and came to South Africa as an adult. When I reflect back on my arrival here I think that was when I stopped being a human being and became a white man. Whiteness became like leprosy, something that would not wash off.²⁶

One of the consequences of the war in the region of former Yugoslavia is that we stopped being human beings and started to be recognised instead only as ‘Serbs’, ‘Croats’, ‘Bosniaks’, ‘Albanians’, ‘Macedonians’. It was of no importance whether we felt this way or whether we actually *had* those kinds of identities. Others *knew* better than ourselves *who we were* - and Serbness, Croatness, Bosniakness started to be something that would not wash off. At the same time, some of us have been bearing that *marker* with awkwardness and even shame due to the crimes and misdeeds of some members of the group that we (are supposed to) belong to. The awkwardness and the shame seem even harder to wash off. Some, however, willingly embraced only one single of our numerous identities, the one of belonging to a tribe. During the war that identity became a marker for whether one was going to live or die, to be spared or tortured. Because of that, many people started to feel it as being the most important of all of their identities. Thus, what we have now in the region is a lack of ‘human beings’, and a flood of ‘Serbs’, ‘Croats’ and ‘Bosniaks’.

Another legacy of the wars are the *ethnocracies* established after the disintegration of SFRY – new states and borders that were organised along ethnopolitical lines. Bosnia today is a quasi-state.²⁷ It is split into the Republika Srpska (RS, 49% of the territory) and the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina (FBiH, 51%).²⁸ This creation is fixed within the Dayton Agreement. The Federation should stand for a federation between ‘Croats’ and ‘Bosniaks’, while Republika Srpska (RS) is ‘Serb’. The RS was “the cleanest” in the neighbourhood, with some 3% of ethnic minorities.²⁹ Since Bosnia is a protectorate still under strong international pressure, the RS was, however, forced to accept the return of

²⁶ In Alex Boraine, Janet Levy and Ronel Scheffer, eds., *Dealing with the Past. Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa*, 2nd ed. (Cape Town: IDASA, 1997), 26.

²⁷ Boris Buden has remarked that Bosnia is neither a state, nor a nation: "it is a crime scene". Boris Buden, *Kaptolski kolodvor. Politički eseji [The Capitol's Station. Political Essays]*, (Beograd: Centar za savremenu umetnost, 2002), xi.

²⁸ Overall, there exists an ultra-complicated state structure with some 14 governments, including the international Office of the High Representative on top. See Figure 2 in the appendix for the map of division of Bosnia.

²⁹ Before the war, more than 40% of the people living there belonged to ethnic groups other than Serb.

those who had been banished. Croatia “successfully cleansed” ethnic Serbs down to 4.54 percent of its population.³⁰

In those places where no ‘agreement’ was achieved, we see the phenomenon of divided cities. Authorities, but also citizens, make their best effort not to confuse a passer-by - it is easy to recognise *who* the territory supposedly belongs to by various symbols all around. This kind of marking is one of the outcomes of the war. While Bosnia is clearly divided by the “ethnic key”, whose legal document is the Dayton Agreement, Croatia defines itself as “the national state of the Croatian nation and the state of the members of autochthonous national minorities”³¹ (while naming them), and Serbia recently defined itself as “a state of Serbian people and all citizens who live in it.”³² However, in all cases we can talk about *ethnocracies*.

As political psychologists have outlined, ethnonationalism is not driven by mental illness.³³ Psychologist Ervin Staub states, for example, that belonging to groups is of profound significance for human beings. It fulfils deep needs by providing satisfaction inherent in connections and provides a feeling of security: “[T]he self gains values and significance through identification with groups and the connection to others that membership provides.”³⁴ Michael Ignatieff also observes: “Where you belong is where you are safe, and where you are safe is where you belong.”³⁵

Yet, would we need so desperately to feel safe if we did not have enemies that we had constructed in the first place? Of course, many ethnonationalists would not agree that either enemies or our *ethnies* are our constructions, they are inherited, as the ethnicity is. According to ethnonationalistic reasoning, ethnicity is a biological question, it is in our blood: we are all connected by those blood ties and, together with the land where we live, we make one organism.

But I will argue that those communities *are* constructed. Smith rightly points out that “[e]thnicity is not about blood or genes as such, but about myths and beliefs in

³⁰ Republic of Croatia – Central Bureau of Statistics, www.dzs.hr (accessed August 25, 2007). According to the pre-war census in 1991, there were 580,762 ethnic Serbs, while the 2001 census records 201,631.

³¹ *The Constitution of the Republic of Croatia*, updated 2001, www.constitution.org/cons/croatia.htm (accessed August 17, 2008).

³² *The Constitution of the Republic of Serbia*, 2006, www.parlament.sr.gov.yu (accessed August 17, 2008). It is not clear in this definition what Serbia is: are “Serbian people” also citizens; and also if someone prefers to be a citizen, does it mean that she/he does not belong to the Serbian people?

³³ See, for example, Dušan Kecmanović, *Etnička vremena [Times of ethnicity]*, (Beograd: Biblioteka XX vek, 2001).

³⁴ Ervin Staub, *The Roots of Evil. The Origins of Genocide and Other Group Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

³⁵ Michael Ignatieff, *Blood and Belonging. Journeys into the New Nationalism* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994), 10.

common origins.”³⁶ Moreover, that land is neither my leg nor my arm. One can even *choose* if he/she is going to belong to such a group or not. Nevertheless, as Hobsbawm noted, using Anderson’s phrase: “an imagined community” is “not the less real for being imagined.”³⁷ In my opinion, it would not be a problem if *ethnie* would stay within its cultural frame. But the *politicisation* of ethnic identity, grounded on nationalism as its guiding ideology, creates a time bomb. Smith puts it well:

By invoking the idea of ‘the nation’, nationalists are able to mobilize, unify, and legitimate the goals of different sub-elites in their quest for power. [...] Politics is about capturing and holding power in the state – and nationalism is an argument for doing so. Nationalism is therefore a political movement, not a question of culture and identity.³⁸

Some western politicians and analysts have argued that the reasons for the wars in former Yugoslavia lay in ancient hatreds between the tribes. It is one of the most widespread theories, supported by many local but also international actors who were dealing with this region, that the hatred between Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats has generated conflicts for centuries.³⁹ But this observation is not an appropriate approach to the reality in our region, and it reflects another myth.

There are, in fact, two myths. One is that we always hated each other (to be precise, it actually goes this way: “*they* always hated *us*”) and that ethnic division always existed. The other one is about interethnic harmony, and the ‘brotherhood and unity’ that we lived in, when war suddenly broke out. In fact, in former Yugoslavia we did live together (although cities were more ‘mixed’ than villages), we shared jobs, schools, hobbies, cafés, even families. At the same time, ethnonationalists always existed. Ethnonationalists were frequently warning us that we should not marry each other, because it is not natural, that we should never forget how many members of our family *they* threw in a pit (in the past), that it is all right if we are friendly with *them*, but we should be careful, as *they* should not be trusted, and so on. Under the ‘communist fist’, they were not so loud, but when the fist started to slacken they started to occupy and poison the public space with stories about atrocities that *they* committed against *us* in the past.

³⁶ Anthony D. Smith, “The Ethnic Sources of Nationalism,” in *Survival* 35/1 (1993): 50.

³⁷ Eric Hobsbawm, “Identity Politics and the Left,” in *New Left Review* 1/217 (May-June 1996): 45.

³⁸ Anthony D. Smith, “Culture, Community and Territory: the Politics of Ethnicity and Nationalism,” in *International Affairs* 72/3 (1996): 448.

³⁹ For an overview of international actors (politicians, media, academic circles) who supported this theory see David Campbell, *Nacionalna dekonstrukcija: Nasilje, identitet i pravda u Bosni* [*National Deconstruction: Violence, Identity, and Justice in Bosnia*], trans. Dražen Pešar, (Sarajevo: Međunarodni Forum Bosna, 2003), 63-95.

But war did not start because *all* ‘Serbs’ hated *all* ‘Bosniaks’ and ‘Croats’ and vice versa. I do not deny that there were people who were filled with hatred. But hatred itself does not lead to large-scale violence, and a war never suddenly breaks out like a natural catastrophe. It is planned and prepared much in advance. As King notes, reasons why people hate each other ought to concern psychologists and marriage counsellors, but why they kill *en mass* has to do with statesmen.⁴⁰ King rightly raises the question of “whether a thing called ‘ethnic war’ even exists.”⁴¹ He argues that myths and fears “might be a good recipe for a pogrom, but they rarely lead to large-scale, sustained violence. For that, you need the same kinds of forces that sustain any war, whether ‘ethnic’ or otherwise: entrepreneurs who benefit from the violence, arms supplied, by foreign powers, charismatic leadership, and plenty of bored young men.”⁴²

Smith, in his criticism of “group aggression” theory, which is a parallel to “ancient hatred as the cause of war theory”, points out that “most wars can be attributed to other factors like mass migrations, religious or other movements, natural disasters, colonisation and, above all, state formation.”⁴³

And our wars were about creating pure ethnic states, because ethnonationalists could maintain their power perfectly and easily in such constructions. It can be said, then, that ethnonationalists do not act according to their sentiments but according to rational choice. Ethnonationalism is not primarily a phenomenon created by psychological conditions but a tool for securing power.

⁴⁰ Charles King, “The Myth of Ethnic Warfare,” in *Foreign Affairs* 80/6 (2001): 168.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 169-170.

⁴³ Anthony D. Smith, “War and ethnicity: the role of warfare in the formation, self-images and cohesion of the ethnic communities,” in *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 4/4 (1981): 376.

2.3 Summary: prerequisites for lasting peace

The war of the early 1990s was a slaughter whose targets were mainly civilians. Most of those who were in detention camps were civilians. Women tortured and raped were civilians. Towns that were bombed and razed to the ground were inhabited by civilians. Most of these did not torture or slaughter anyone (there are some who did, but their number is limited). The vast majority of combatants was conscripted. Some joined the army to defend something. But the vast majority of soldiers did not commit such terrible crimes. Nevertheless, many people in the region are used to shifting the responsibility onto entire ethnic groups: if thousands of Serbs/Croats/Bosniaks committed those horrors - that means that all Serbs/Croats/Bosniaks did it. But the fact is that in the Balkans millions of people did suffer, no matter what their ethnic identity is or was. When we acknowledge that fact, we will make a big step towards a lasting peace. This is certainly not to say that all sides have to be blamed equally. But it is to say that all suffering has to be acknowledged, no matter whose responsibility it was.

The current reality, though, is that all three groups blame each other for the war and suffering, while not accepting that others also suffered. In Croatia and FBiH the war is mainly seen as aggression by Serbia with a goal of establishing 'Great Serbia', while among 'Serbs' it is perceived as a civil war whose roots are in an ancient hatred between the ethnic groups. Many refugees have still not returned to their homes, and many of those who did have actually sold their property and moved to a place where 'their group' is in the majority. Those who returned, if not feeling threatened, usually do feel insecure - they cannot find jobs and provide for their families, because ethnic minorities are not accepted by many employers. Many families still do not know the fate of their loved ones.⁴⁴ War criminals are celebrated as heroes and protectors by the mainstream of the group that they belong to, and it is largely denied that they committed any crime, even if undeniable facts exist. This is why the levels of mistrust and even fear of each other are so high.

Today, nearly thirteen years after the Dayton agreement, the situation in the former Yugoslav region cannot be defined as peace. It is not war, we have stopped shooting at each other, but neither is it peace. One of the reasons for this is a lack of peacebuilding efforts. Lederach claims that "peace is both ending something that is destructive, painful, and inhumane and building something that is dynamic, feeding people and their

⁴⁴ According to the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP), 24,088 people were reported as missing during these wars, and around 7,000 people have still not been found. See ICMP, www.ic-mp.org (accessed August 17, 2008).

relationships.”⁴⁵ And we have not yet stopped with the destructive, painful and inhumane behaviour. Signing a ceasefire agreement was important to stop the war, shooting and killing. But there is still a long road ahead in order to achieve lasting peace in the region.

3 Peacebuilding and Reconciliation

Based on years of peace activism in the region, it is my impression that most people want to live in peace. Nevertheless, warmongering can be heard from some political groups whenever they need to gain political votes. Thus, *peacebuilding* in general is an accepted term in our region. At the same time, *reconciliation* is not such a popular term. Some are at best reluctant to use it. Different voices can be heard throughout the region, from those absolutely in favour of reconciliation; via those saying that they personally do not need it because they did not quarrel with anyone; and those saying that truth and justice is more important; to those who do not want to reconcile with “those who slaughtered us” because they should be punished. Very different understandings of the notion certainly exist. Even peace activists rarely use the term to describe their work. Thus it is necessary to clarify the term reconciliation, and to explore how useful it is for peacebuilding.

3.1 Reconciliation as a multidimensional process

Reconciliation is not a very new concept, since it has existed for centuries and in almost all religions. Thus, it would seem logical for it to be quite well developed and widespread, so that it is relatively clear what it is and how it is done, at least half as clear as what war is and how to start one. But partly due to the fact that religious institutions have not been very helpful in developing this concept⁴⁶, as maintaining the militant

⁴⁵ John Paul Lederach, “Civil Society and Reconciliation,” in *Turbulent Peace: The Challenges of Managing International Conflict*, eds. C. A. Crocker et al. (Washington D.C.: USIP, 2001), 853.

⁴⁶ Taking a very critical stance towards religious communities, their representatives and their problematic role in public does not imply that I diminish all the positive and peace-oriented initiatives within the religious communities or started by interreligious and ecumenical groups. My critique is mainly based on public acts and speeches given by religious representatives. Concerning the role of religious institutions in “heating up the atmosphere”, see Vjekoslav Perica, *Balkan Idols: Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslav States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Milorad Tomanić, *Srpska crkva u ratu i ratovi u njoj [The Serb Church at war and the wars within it]*, (Beograd: Medijska knjižara Krug, 2001); Mitja Velikonja et al., “The Role of Religions and Religious Communities in the Wars in ex-Yugoslavia 1991-1999,” trans. R. Obradović-Đurđević et al., in *Religion in Eastern Europe XXI/4* (August 2003): 1-42; Vjekoslav Perica, “Uloga crkava u

patriarchal concept of the ‘other’ and the role of sole victim seemed more important to them⁴⁷ (at least in this region), there is considerable confusion about what reconciliation is supposed to be.

Reconciliation as a secular notion is much newer, and there is still no consensus in academic and peacebuilding circles on how to define it. It is mostly considered as an important multi-dimensional concept without one easy recipe to follow.⁴⁸ In Galtung’s words: “Reconciliation is a theme with deep psychological, sociological, theological, philosophical, and profoundly human roots – and nobody really knows how to successfully achieve it.”⁴⁹

Most scholars agree that reconciliation is a process aiming to improve relations between human beings or groups: to restore broken relationships,⁵⁰ to change and redefine⁵¹ or redesign⁵² them, to prepare the parties for “relations with justice and

konstrukciji državotvornih mitova Hrvatske i Srbije,” in *Historijski mitovi na Balkanu* (Sarajevo: Institut za Istoriju, 2003).

⁴⁷ Editors’ note: For a feminist and gender-oriented critique on a militant patriarchal discourse based on religious fundamentalism, see *Šta svaka građanka i građanin treba da znanju o SPC [What all citizens should know about the Serb Orthodox Church]*, (Beograd: Koalicija za sekularnu državu, 2007); Nada Ler-Sofronić, “Fašizam danas: žene između vjerskog i tržišnog fundamentalizma” [*Fascism today: women between religious and trade fundamentalism*], in *Zeničke sveske – Časopis za društvenu fenomenologiju i kulturnu dijalogiku* 7 (2008): 135-150. Jasminka Avdispahić-Babić, “Feminizam i diskurs o pravima”, in *Forum Bosna: Religija i javni život* 19 (2002): 286-297; Ženska mreža Hrvatske, “Katolička crkva štetno utječe na položaj žena u Hrvatskoj” [The damaging influence of the Catholic Church onto the position of women in Croatia], www.zamirzine.net/spip.php?article3461 (accessed October 10, 2008). For a more moderate, yet critical and profound analysis of the relation between religion, civil society and gender see Zilka Spahić-Šiljak, *Žene, religija i politika: analiza utjecaja interpretativnog religijskog naslijeđa judaizma kršćanstva i islama na angažman žene u javnom životu i politici u BiH [Women, religion and politics: an analysis of the influence of the interpretative religious heritage of Judaism, Christianity and Islam in public and political life in BiH]* (Sarajevo: IMIC, 2007).

⁴⁸ For models on reconciliation and truth proposed and discussed in the region of former Yugoslavia, see Vesna Nikolić-Ristanović, “Specifičnost društveno-istorijskog konteksta i viktimizacija u Srbiji i njihov značaj za koncipiranje modela istine i pomirenja” [The specificity of the social-historical context and victimisation in Serbia and their meaning for conceptualising a model of Truth and Reconciliation], in *Temida* 4 (2002): 55-66. English version available at www.vds.org.yu/File/VesnaNikolic-Ristanovic1.doc (accessed August 28, 2008); Vesna Nikolić-Ristanović, “Truth and reconciliation experience in Serbia: the process so far,” paper presented at the XI International Symposium of the World Society of Victimology *New horizons in victimology*, Stellenbosch (South Africa), 13-18 July 2003; Jelena Tošić, “Koji model istine i pomirenja odgovara bivšoj Jugoslaviji? Razmišljanja na osnovu završne panel diskusije” [Which model of Truth and Reconciliation suits former Yugoslavia? Reflections based on the final panel discussion], paper presented at the Austrian Academy of Science for the the Commission for Social Anthropology Research Fund – Wittgenstein 2000; Dejan Đokić, “Unutarnje pomirenje i nacionalna homogenizacija: diskurs o pomirenju u Srbiji i Hrvatskoj” [Intraethnic reconciliation and national homogenisation: discourse on Reconciliation in Serbia and Croatia], in *Reč* 7/16 (2003): 109-127; Vjeran Katunarić, “Oblici mira u multietničkim sredinama” [Forms of peace in multiethnic communities], in *Migracijske i etničke teme* 4 (2007): 391-408; Goran Milas, Ivan Rimac and Nenad Karajić, “Spremnost na oprost i pomirenje nakon domovinskog rata u Hrvatskoj” [The willingness to forgive and reconcile after the homeland war in Croatia], in *Društvena istraživanja – Časopis za opća društvena pitanja* 6 (2007): 1151-1173; et al.

⁴⁹ Johan Galtung, “After Violence, Reconstruction, Reconciliation, and Resolution. Coping with Visible and Invisible Effects of War and Violence,” in *Reconciliation, Justice and Coexistence. Theory and Practice*, ed. Mohammed Abu-Nimer (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2001), 4.

⁵⁰ Andrew Rigby, “Twenty Observations on ‘Post-settlement’ Reconciliation,” paper presented at the *Reconciliation Expert Network* seminar, Stockholm, 15-17 March 2006), 1.

⁵¹ Lederach, *Civil Society*, 847.

peace,”⁵³ to build and heal “the torn fabric of interpersonal and community lives and relationships.”⁵⁴ Thus, it is the concerned parties who should create and/or recreate relationships that suit them both; they should put effort into making a first step and starting to change. Reconciliation refers to the *future* and, as Rigby says, “requires the active participation of those who were divided by enmity. At the core of any reconciliation process is the preparedness of people to anticipate a shared future.”⁵⁵

Yet although the process of reconciliation focuses on the future, it does not imply that atrocities and human rights abuses from the past should be forgotten and neglected, but serves “precisely to ensure that the past does not return.”⁵⁶ Thus, the process of reconciliation also has to deal with the past, or as Lederach puts it:

Its primary goal and key contribution is to seek innovative ways to create a time and place, within various levels of the affected population, to address, integrate, and embrace the painful past and the necessary shared future as a means of dealing with the present.⁵⁷

Scholars often define reconciliation as a multidimensional process that encompasses a number of elements. For Lederach, these are truth, mercy, justice and peace.⁵⁸ Bloomfield, considering reconciliation as an “umbrella term”, defines four main instruments: a justice process, truth-seeking and truth-telling, a process of healing, and a process of reparation.⁵⁹ According to Rigby, there are five necessary conditions for constructive dealing with the past and thus reconciliation: truth, security (personal and collective), justice, time and culture.⁶⁰

In this region people usually discuss the notion of reconciliation in connection with truth, justice and forgiveness. Some perceive these concepts as being in collision, others see them as complementary or even as synonyms. It therefore seems necessary here to clarify what connections there are, and what importance truth, justice and forgiveness have for the processes of reconciliation and peacebuilding.

⁵² David Bloomfield, “Reconciliation: An Introduction,” in *Reconciliation After Violent Conflict: A Handbook*, eds. Bloomfield et al. (Stockholm: IDEA, 2003), 12.

⁵³ Galtung, *After Violence*, 3.

⁵⁴ Lederach, *Civil Society*, 842.

⁵⁵ Rigby, Andrew, *Justice and Reconciliation after the Violence* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001), 12.

⁵⁶ Bloomfield, *Reconciliation*, 15.

⁵⁷ John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, 2nd ed. (Washington: United States Institute for Peace, 1998), 35.

⁵⁸ Lederach, *Civil Society*, 849.

⁵⁹ David Bloomfield, *On Good Terms: Clarifying Reconciliation*. Berghof Report No. 14 (Berlin: Berghof Forschungszentrum für konstruktives Konfliktmanagement, October 2006), 12.

⁶⁰ Rigby, *Twenty Observations*, 8.

Truth

The most permanent request by those who have endured violence, families of victims and those who struggle for political and social change is the *request for truth* about past misdeeds to be known and publicly acknowledged. Some voices say that too much truth can be counterproductive, and that it is better to try to let bygones be bygones. But those who suffered cannot forget, and if society does not recognise and acknowledge that terrible things were done to them, they will not have trust and will not feel safe in such a society, they will not feel a part of it. One can argue that not to acknowledge what has happened, to deny it, to close one's eyes to it amount to not taking care and supporting wrongdoing.⁶¹ It also implies that there is no guarantee that the past will not return, and that our societies accept atrocities as a 'normal phenomenon'. In such an atmosphere reconciliation is not possible. As Bleeker emphasized, "truth is the centrepiece of successful conflict transformation and of a future lasting peace."⁶²

Truth is important with respect to three dimensions: "what happened?", "what made it possible?" and "who did it?". Many voices express many truths, but there is only one truth about human suffering: the facts about what people endured, an answer to *what has happened*. And this truth has priority in being acknowledged, no matter which identity group those who suffered belong to. This dimension of truth must not be an object of disputes.

Of course there is a variety of interpretations about causes and roots of violence due to competing narratives and myths (and myths are "strangely impervious to facts").⁶³ This is the hardest task, as it raises questions about responsibility, and all parties, of course, see themselves as righteous ones. Instead of asking why, one should ask *what made it possible?* Mapping the *ideology* that lies behind the conflict is a crucial task (at least in the region of former Yugoslavia).⁶⁴ Only when we become absolutely

⁶¹ Stanley Cohen, *Stanje poricanja: Znati za zlodela i patnje* [original title: *States of Denial. Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering*], trans. S. Glišić, (Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2003), 413.

⁶² Mò Bleeker Massard, "Introduction and Recommendations," in *Dealing with the Past: Critical Issues, Lessons Learned and Challenges for Future Swiss Policy*, eds. Mò Bleeker and Jonathan Sisson, Swisspeace Working Paper 2, KOFF Series, 2004, available at www.swisspeace.ch/typo3/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/KOFF/KOFF_DealingWithThePast.pdf, p. 5 (accessed August 17, 2008).

⁶³ Ignatieff, "Articles of Faith," in *Index on Censorship* 5 (1996), 116.

⁶⁴ Ignatieff claims that truth cannot not lie somewhere "in between". It cannot result from a compromise between two competing versions of events: "either the siege of Sarajevo was a deliberate attempt to terrorize and subvert the elected government of an internationally recognized state or it was a legitimate preemptive defence of the Serbs' homeland from Muslim attack. It cannot be both" (Ignatieff, *ibid.*, 114). Yet, sometimes a truth can consist of a number of individual truths. For a militaristic mind a siege of a city is legitimate preemptive defence. So we should not focus on the question of which truth is a true one, but on the *ideology*, in this case militaristic ethnonationalism, that lies behind it.

aware of what led us to large-scale violence, then we can know what we have to change. And building peace is about making change.

The third dimension of truth is about *who* committed a crime. The main reason why this is important is to give a name to a perpetrator, so that the perpetrator is not ‘them’, the other group, but a number of individuals.

Justice

It can be often heard, especially from those who have endured misdeeds, that there is no peace and reconciliation without *justice*. For many people justice means first and foremost punishing wrongdoers. Vjera, whose young daughter was killed, most probably because she was born in a ‘mixed’ marriage, points out that there will be no reconciliation,

[u]ntil [the] justice system brings justice to all, regardless of their nationality, for all war victims[...] Until I find out who has killed my daughter and why. How can someone walk freely after murdering 100 people? How? I know that Serbs slaughtered, but by God, the Croats did also, very much so.⁶⁵

But there is a dilemma about justice, according to Judge Goldstone, former chief prosecutor at the ICTY. He argues that “in a perfect society victims are entitled to full justice, namely trial of the perpetrator and, if found guilty, adequate punishment. That ideal is not possible in the aftermath of massive violence. There are simply too many victims and too many perpetrators. Even the most sophisticated criminal justice system would be completely overwhelmed.”⁶⁶ As Rigby says, “[a]t the heart of most common-sense notions of justice is the idea of ‘making things right’.”⁶⁷ But even if we could punish all the perpetrators, we would not complete the process of “making things right”. That would not bring us to a lasting peace, because changing the unjust system and giving up a militant ideology is what is crucial if lasting peace is the goal.

A minimum that could be done is the acknowledgment of crimes committed, public condemnation of those acts, and a demonstration that such crimes are unacceptable. Instead of treating war criminals as heroes, especially those who do not show any regret and remorse, their own ‘communities’ should shame them. And turn their heads away from them as Edin says, whose father, brother and a number of relatives disappeared after being detained in a concentration camp.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Vjera Solar, interview in Nenad Vukosavljević, *Svi bi rado bacili kamen [All wish to cast a stone]*, (Belgrade-Sarajevo: CNA, 2007), DVD.

⁶⁶ Richard J. Goldstone, “Foreword,” in Minow, *Between Vengeance*, ix-xx.

⁶⁷ Andrew Rigby, “Three Contrasting Approaches for ‘Dealing with the Past’: Collective Amnesia, Retributive Justice and Prioritising Truth,” in *CCTS Newsletter* 18 (Autumn 2002).

⁶⁸ Edin Ramulić, interview in Aldin Arnautović and Refik Hodžić, *Slijepa pravda [Justice Unseen]*, (Sarajevo: XY Films Produkcija, 2004), DVD.

Forgiveness

The reason why many people feel reluctant towards the concept of reconciliation in this region is that in many discussions it is directly linked to forgiveness. Many people, especially those who experienced violence themselves or saw it done to their close ones, feel resistance towards the concept of forgiveness, since it is mainly understood as a “moral issue”: that it is a duty to forgive for the sake of peace. Due to this understanding, people may feel under pressure to forgive, that there is the expectation for them to make the first step and thus make a compromise that would not lead them to their so badly desired justice. As Minow observes: “To expect survivors to forgive is to heap yet another burden on them. To forgive without a good reason is to accept the violation and devaluation of the self.”⁶⁹

Forgiveness is a very personal process and an act that cannot be demanded. It is a choice of the individual who has endured a misdeed – only she/he has the power to decide. Anyone who has suffered should keep that power and right, disregarding moralistic sermonising. If people are able to forgive, that does not mean that they are going to forget, or to annul or accept the misdeed done to them. If they do not want to or cannot forgive, it is not decisive in the process of peacebuilding.

3.2 Reconciliation by and with whom?

Rigby defines two dimensions of the reconciliation process: 1) *reconciliation to* the pain and loss, and 2) *reconciliation with* former enemies for the sake of future coexistence. The first dimension, in transcending the desire to avenge the loss, is important for “richer” forms of coexistence between those divided by enmity.⁷⁰ As much as this is also important for the society, it is important for individuals so that they become capable of moving on with their lives.

The dimension *reconciliation with* raises the difficult question: who should reconcile with whom?⁷¹ A victim of a crime might reconcile with the perpetrator (in some circumstances), but this is not decisive in the process of peacebuilding in the society. They may never reconcile and forgive, many acts are not forgivable at all, but if they overcome the need for revenge, there is still a real chance to build lasting peace. Here we are talking about reconciliation on the level of individuals.

⁶⁹ Minow, *Between Vengeance*, 17.

⁷⁰ Rigby, *Twenty Observations*, 5. For the three forms of coexistence that Rigby defined, see Table 1 in the Appendix.

⁷¹ I am thankful to my friend and colleague Tamara Šmidling for insisting on this question.

It is of much greater importance for lasting peace in a society to address what happens in public discourse at a group level. And it is there that the question “who should reconcile with whom” becomes a tricky one. Scholars usually refer to “former enemies”, “groups that were once adversaries”, those “divided by enmity”, “parties to the conflict”, “sides”, etc. In my own work, the question then arises who the former enemies are in the context of former Yugoslavia. Are these enemies actually Serbs and Croats (or other combinations)? As I have outlined in the previous chapter, the war of the early 1990s was not an “ethnic war” that suddenly exploded due to so-called “ethnic hatred”. The enmity of the ethnic groups is a constructed myth that was exploited for waging war, and it perfectly covered up the real underlying reasons.

If the only meaning of “ethnic conflict” is that all sides are ethnically distinct, “then all we have is a superficial description, not a useful concept”, as Gilley argues.⁷² From the peace activist’s perspective, I can say that the concept may even be a dangerous one, feeding and strengthening ethnonationalist ideology. But it may also lead those concerned with the peacebuilding onto a wrong path. As Gilley says, “Once we decide to devote ourselves to the concerns of ethnicity, we may ignore the gross deprivations faced by the wretched peasant who either has no minority neighbours or who (as is mostly the case) lives peaceably with them.”⁷³ Esma, a woman who endured three years under siege in Sarajevo and frequent grenading, clearly stated: “It’s them over there who should reconcile, those politicians, those, excuse my language, pieces of shit! Who am I to reconcile with, I never argued with anyone to begin with.”⁷⁴

Thus, peace activists should not fall into the trap of looking at ethnicity as the element that divides people. Otherwise they may not recognise the root causes of conflict in our region. Peace activists should not focus primarily on ethnicity, but on structures, cultures and ideologies that are the basis for violent conflict. They should offer people space for taking a rest from the overwhelming and pressing ethnic label, and they should offer them other ways to perceive reality and to act.

In our region it seems that an approach with the goal of reconciling large groups or peoples is not a useful one. It is individuals who can reconcile *to* and *with*. Rigby rightly notes that for the “richest” level of coexistence - where the level of reconciliation is deep – the key actors are everyday people at the grassroots level.⁷⁵ This is not to say that nothing can be done with ethnonationalist public discourse. If many individuals were to

⁷² Bruce Gilley, “Against the Concept of Ethnic Conflict” in *Third World Quarterly* 25/6 (2004): 1158.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 1163.

⁷⁴ Esma, interview in Helena Rill and Ivana Franović, “*Ne može meni bit dobro ako je mom susjedu loše*” [“I cannot feel well if my neighbour does not“], (Belgrade: Centre for Nonviolent Action, 2005). 42. See also www.nenasilje.org (accessed August 18, 2008). The English version of the book is forthcoming in early 2009.

⁷⁵ Rigby, *Twenty Observations*, 13. See Table 1 in the Appendix.

change their attitudes and behaviour towards members of other group(s), it would influence change in the main public discourse. That would be a “bottom-up” approach. Again, though, it starts with reconciliation on personal level.

But a bottom-up approach alone is not enough, thus it is important to develop a more political view on reconciliation and its significance for conflict transformation. Bloomfield suggests that reconciliation is “an essential (and essentially political) ingredient in peacebuilding, just as central and just as necessary as economic reconstruction, legal reform, and all other post-violence reconstructive and preventive measures.”⁷⁶ He argues that in the political practice of rebuilding post-war structures, “peacebuilding and democracy-building will benefit significantly in their efficacy from paying more overt attention to the nature of the *relations* that are built during these processes. In developing [...] a ‘fair’ society after violence, political institutions must be designed so that not only do they further fairness, representation, accountability, inclusiveness, etc., and the ability to manage difference without recourse to violence, but that they also pay conscious and ongoing attention to the relations contained and developed by and within them.”⁷⁷

Following this understanding of reconciliation, however, there remains the same open question: *who should reconcile with whom?* And this question should be seriously considered by those who are devoted to peacebuilding and reconciliation work. Nevertheless, even if there is reluctance about the concept of reconciliation (and peace activists in the region rarely use that term to describe their work), I do find it useful for peacebuilding in our region. It is important that individuals *reconcile to* pain and loss and overcome the desire for revenge, and thus prevent a new cycle of violence. People might be able to *reconcile with* direct perpetrators, but that is not decisive in peacebuilding (overcoming the desire for revenge is crucial). In this case it is more important that the rest of the society does not support or deny the acts of perpetrators. This is about reconciliation on a personal level. “Political reconciliation” could be all those processes and acts on the level of society that contribute to and encourage reconciliation on an individual level to happen, that encourage broken relationships to be (re)established, that promote peaceful and respectful relations. Political reconciliation means processes that contribute to peacebuilding and lower the chances for peace degrading. Sustainable peace in our region cannot be reached without serious effort being put into political reconciliation. But neither political reconciliation nor lasting peace is possible without facing our violent past in a constructive way.

⁷⁶ Bloomfield, *On Good Terms*, 9.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 30.

3.3 Facing the Past as a precondition for sustainable peace

The past is a heavy burden for the present and future if inappropriately dealt with. It is the past that we remember, not so much historical facts, but rather strong emotions, pain, loss, victimisation, injustice, myths and narratives that developed around it. Because there is so much pain associated with it, it is quite difficult to deal with it in a constructive manner, and that is why peacebuilding and reconciliation are not easy processes at all. If it is a distant past, we can even have the case of “chosen trauma” – trauma not as a consequence of something upsetting that we experienced, but something that previous generations endured.⁷⁸ Almost every large group has this kind of past, and if many group members are not *reconciled to* it, if the desire to avenge is not relinquished, this past may be easily mobilized and abused for different political purposes. As Giordano describes, in most cases, “intellectual and political elites manage the past and produce both the histories and the memories of a society, and consequently also the antagonistic truths. The latter are a specific social construction of reality that results from an accurate re-elaboration, reinterpretation, manipulation, or even reinvention of the past in the present.”⁷⁹

For Neier there are two crucial reasons for dealing with the past. The first one is recognition of “the worth and dignity of those victimised”, because if we fail to do that we “perpetuate, even compound, their victimisation.” The second reason is establishment of the rule of law. The question of deterring future abuses is not credible enough for him, “because it involves predictions.”⁸⁰ Maybe it does involve predictions, but a violent past is a time-bomb if inappropriately dealt with. It can always be used as an ideal excuse to massacre other people.

A victim of violence, or a group that maintains a chosen trauma due to the victimisation of its ancestors, can become a perpetrator. And a new cycle of violence is opened. *Reconciliation to loss* might prevent the reopening of that cycle, bury it forever, and contribute to the start of a life in the present and for the future. Rigby argues that finding a way of dealing with the pain of the past is necessary for people “to reinterpret that past, looking backwards through time with a different lens that enables them to reconstruct their memories in such a manner that eases the intensity of feelings of hatred,

⁷⁸ See Vamik Volkan, “Transgenerational Transmissions and Chosen Traumas: An Aspect of Large-Group Identity,” in *Group Analysis* 34/1, 79-97.

⁷⁹ Christian Giordano, “Dealing with the Past, Dealing with History,” in *Dealing with the Past*, eds. Bleeker and Sisson, 56.

⁸⁰ Aryeh Neier in Boraine *et al.*, eds., *Dealing with the Past. Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa*, 2nd ed. (Cape Town: IDASA, 1997), 3.

bitterness and loss.”⁸¹ He also argues that constructive dealing with the past is comparable to forgiveness, if this process is not understood as a moral obligation, but as a process of “the formation of new memory (personal and collective) that liberates people from the over-determining negative influence of the past.”⁸² This should not mean forgetting the pain, loss and numerous abuses, this should mean perceiving the past and present in a new light, since “history and background are not the only way of seeing ourselves and groups to which we belong.”⁸³ An indispensable step in this process is to make a decision whether we are going to live for the past or in the present, whether we are going to live at all, or to maintain and perpetuate into eternity the cycle of violence. But for all this to happen, a public acknowledgment of the past abuses is necessary. Mutual denial is a perfect strategy for keeping people locked in the past, and leads to the prevention of any meaningful peacebuilding.

According to my experience as a peace activist in the region of former Yugoslavia, dealing with the past is a crucial issue in peacebuilding and reconciliation, since it is the view of the past that divides and drives people. Thus, we have to find ways for opening and “cleaning” it (as Father Lapsley would say), so that wounds can be healed.⁸⁴ In this sense, constructive dealing with the past is a process that, first and foremost, reconstructs collective memory in such a way that it is not possible anymore to reinterpret it and manipulate it as a tool for waging violence against ‘the other’. It is a process that must therefore go hand in hand with the peacebuilding process.

⁸¹ Andrew Rigby, “Dealing with the Past: Forgiveness and the Reconstruction of Memory in Divided Societies,” in *International Journal of Politics and Ethics* 3/1 (2003), 95.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 96.

⁸³ Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence. The Illusion of Destiny* (London: Allen Lane, 2006), 19.

⁸⁴ Michael Lapsley, interview by Hannes Siebert in *Track Two* 6/3-4 (1997), www.ccr.uct.ac.za (accessed August 19, 2008).

4 Dealing with the Past: applied mechanisms and current necessities

Prijedor is a small town in Bosnia, where horrible atrocities happened during the war. A number of detention camps operated in its surroundings; the most infamous among them are Omarska, Keraterm and Trnopolje, where those who were not (recognised as) 'Serbs' were forcibly interned. Today, it is a town covered in silence. Most of the places where people were tortured are not marked at all. But there is a huge monument at the spot where the detention camp Trnopolje operated with the inscription: "To the soldiers who built their lives into the foundation of the Republic of Srpska."⁸⁵ One of the survivors of the Omarska camp expressed how she feels about it:

I don't know what to call this, sarcasm, irony, insult to victims. [...] I am truly hurt and cannot understand it. I can understand when somebody doesn't want to talk about the crimes that happened, I think, maybe some more time should pass. But to celebrate crimes with monuments? It is simply ludicrous.⁸⁶

Many soldiers really lost their lives in the war, and erecting a monument for them can be an understandable desire. But erecting such a monument at the place where people from other groups were tortured is an indicative message. In this region there is a widespread pattern of dealing with the past as either denying past misdeeds or glorifying those responsible for them. Psychologists claim that a positive self-concept, as well as a positive view of the group they see themselves as belonging to, is important for human beings. Thus, most probably we are not talking in this case but also in general about conscious glorification, but about denial.

Cohen, in his study of denial, argues that the most widespread form of it is incapability and refusal to continuously face awkward truths or to live with them.⁸⁷ As one man said to the director of a TV station in Serbia that broadcast a documentary about the massacre in Srebrenica: "If it really was like that, then the only thing left for me is to take a gun and kill myself."⁸⁸ According to Cohen, denial is to claim that something did not happen, that it did not or does not exist, that it is not true or that we do not know anything about it.⁸⁹ A group censors itself, and learns how to keep silent about certain

⁸⁵ It was built some years ago, I presume it was in 2003 at the latest.

⁸⁶ Nusreta Sivic (survivor of Omarska camp), in Arnautović and Hodžić, 2004.

⁸⁷ Cohen, *Stanje poricanja*, 46.

⁸⁸ Quoted in Veran Matić, "Odbacivanje istine" [Rejecting the Truth], in *Reč* 62/8 (June 2001): 75.

⁸⁹ Cohen, *Stanje poricanja*, 26.

crimes or human rights violations, because open discussion about them would threaten the group's (and group members') self-image.⁹⁰ And one denial is easily linked to another: if *they* deny that they tortured *us*, *we* are going to deny that we tortured *them*.⁹¹ It might not be of importance whether the first torture happened recently or ages ago.

According to Ignatieff, in the former Yugoslavia “the past continues to torment because it is not past”. He argues that we “are not living in a serial order of time but in a simultaneous one, in which the past and present are a continuous, agglutinated mass of fantasies, distortions, myths, and lies.” He also states that reporters in the Balkan wars often experienced that “when they were told atrocity stories they were occasionally uncertain whether these stories had occurred yesterday or in 1941, or 1841, or 1441. For the tellers of the tale, yesterday and today were the same.”⁹²

Many would argue that dealing with the past is an exit from this vicious cycle. There are many different approaches to dealing with the past around the globe. One of them is *not* dealing with it, or “collective amnesia”⁹³, as was the case in Spain after Franco's death (the recipe: forget about human rights violations, repressions and other violence, and move on with life).⁹⁴ What we are doing in the region of former Yugoslavia is quite different. We *are* dealing with it. But in my opinion we are not doing it in constructive ways.

So, what would constitute constructive dealing with the past? What does this mean in the context of former Yugoslavia? There have been diverse efforts by international actors and also by local/regional activists in the field of transitional justice. The question is whether these approaches are appropriate and sufficient? In this chapter I will, first, briefly examine some applied approaches, and second, I will try to define what needs to be done if the goal is lasting peace in the region.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 35.

⁹¹ For links between Serbian and Croatian denial see Henry R. Huttenbach, “The Psychology and Politics of Genocide Denial: a Comparison of Four Case Studies,” in Levon Chorbajian and George Shirinian, eds., *Studies of Comparative Genocide* (New York: Palgrave, 1999), 216-229.

⁹² Ignatieff, *Articles of Faith*, 120-121.

⁹³ Rigby, *Justice and Reconciliation*, 2.

⁹⁴ But since the suffering cannot be forgotten, there are voices asking for the truth to be unveiled.

4.1 Initiatives for transitional justice and Dealing with the Past in the region of former Yugoslavia

4.1.1 “The Hague Tribunal” and trials

If the term “dealing with the past” is recognised at all in the region of former Yugoslavia it is immediately connected with the Hague Tribunal, which means with retributive justice.⁹⁵ Vast literature is focused on the effects of the Tribunal, being for or against it, most of its writers offering interesting arguments. What cannot be denied is that the development of the Tribunal represents a kind of revolution in international law, thus many are excited about it.

However, many politicians and some ordinary people in the region are not happy about it. It is perceived either as being biased, ‘victor’s justice’ and unfair or ineffective, slow, paying no attention to victims, applying too short sentences, or equating the guilt of those who attacked and those who ‘only’ defended themselves.⁹⁶ Moreover, it is perceived as a foreign body, somewhere over there, kept in western hands where they do what they think should be done. It can be observed that many people see trials, although very rarely followed in detail, almost like a football match: did ‘ours’ score a goal or was it ‘them’? And the Tribunal bears its part of responsibility for these perceptions. Although since the very beginning it has presented itself as “a tool for promoting reconciliation and restoring true peace”⁹⁷, it actually has not been present in the region (until recently, when the Outreach Programme was developed)⁹⁸, and did not pay attention to how some of its acts might influence those that it is presumably ostensibly concerned about. It was not until 2000 that it published its first press release in the Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian language, thus it was left to local journalists and politicians to interpret what was going on over there.⁹⁹ And those interpretations led us to the existing perceptions that could

⁹⁵ “The Hague Tribunal”, as it is commonly referred to in the region, is the International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia (ICTY).

⁹⁶ For a realistic article about these perceptions, see: Dan Saxon, “Exporting Justice: Perceptions of the ICTY Among the Serbian, Croatian and Muslim Communities in the Former Yugoslavia,” in *Journal of Human Rights* 4 (2005): 559-572. See also Maryanne Yerkes, “Facing the Violent Past: Discussions with Serbia’s Youth,” in *Nationalities Papers* 32/4 (2004): 921-938.

⁹⁷ *Annual Report of the International Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of the former Yugoslavia since 1991*, A/49/342 - S/1994/1007, 29 August 1994.

⁹⁸ It began its work in late 1999, six years after the ICTY was established.

⁹⁹ Some local TV stations broadcast the trials, but few followed them in detail due to the fact that an “ordinary person”, who is not a lawyer by profession, finds the legal proceedings too complicated and hard to follow.

hardly be changed so many years later. The Tribunal collected extremely valuable testimonies and facts, and it was able to greatly influence the process of shedding light on at least one part of the truth. But due to the ‘satanisation’ of the Tribunal (in Serbia and Croatia it is often seen as an instrument against the very nation: it is the nation that is prosecuted, and not individual criminals), that truth is often not believed.

Minow proposes that responding “to mass atrocity with legal prosecutions is to embrace the rule of law.”¹⁰⁰ Unfortunately, it seems that the ICTY has not even contributed much to the promotion of the rule of law and justice in the region. Croatia and especially Serbia unwillingly cooperate with the Tribunal.¹⁰¹ The only reason why they sometimes do cooperate comes down to pure national interests, not the rule of law. Both states are interested in international investments and in joining the European Union (though not because of the values and rules that it brings along), so when the international community wants them to be cooperative, it has some leverage for applying pressure. It is interesting to note in this context what kind of language Serbian authorities use when pressed to arrest and transfer those indicted for war crimes to the Tribunal. War crimes are never mentioned, instead they use constructions like: “obligation towards The Hague”, “international obligation”, “the last obstacle on our path to the EU”.

Many would argue that it would be much better if those indicted were put on domestic trial, with local prosecutors and judges, here in the region. But from the few cases processed by local courts, and from the great political pressure under which the courts work, one can get the impression that they will never be able to prosecute anyone who held a high position in the atrocity hierarchy, but only the small pawns.

Still, one has to admit that the Tribunal has certain accomplishments. I see two direct benefits that these societies get from the ICTY. First, it is the only well organised system that struggles against impunity, so survivors and others concerned have a feeling that there is at least one body that is dealing with the injustice done to them. And that is a step forward, even if those very sentences do not contribute to an anti-impunity climate when those indicted and sentenced are treated as heroes by the mainstream. Also, while the ICTY database may at this moment not be perceived as a collection of certain truths, I believe that at least the next generation will benefit from it, when the political atmosphere changes.

The second direct benefit does not have anything to do with the ICTY’s goals, it is more a consequence of its functioning: putting away those ones who could still be in positions of power in these states. Concerning “promoting reconciliation and restoring

¹⁰⁰ Minow, *Between Vengeance*, 25.

¹⁰¹ In Bosnia there are different attitudes, but as the state runs under international control, it is clear who has the final word.

true peace” I can say – it has done next to nothing. Uncovering certain truths and punishing a few of those responsible is not enough.¹⁰²

4.1.2 Apologies

In the past few years there have been several apologies by officials. It is interesting that all of those who apologised are either moderate or non-nationalists. The hard-core have never apologised, and the ethnonationalist mainstream voices attacked those who did – “They should apologise to us”, “We apologised to them three times, while they did it only once”, “Who is he to apologise in our name?”, comments like these were frequently heard. These apologies hardly brought a visible change, but it is important that they happened.

The other type of apologies are made by people prosecuted for war crimes in front of the ICTY court. Those apologies were even less acclaimed. By whichever group the prosecuted belonged to they were largely ignored, while by other groups they were not taken as real, many considered them to be a result of bargaining.

For example, Predrag Banović, who was a guard in Keraterm camp, sentenced to eight years for killings, beatings and abuse of detainees, pleaded guilty and stated in front of the court:

My guilty plea was an expression of sincere remorse concerning the events in Prijedor, and especially the Keraterm camp. [...] I deplore the period of war and hatred, and I regret that I did not find a way to avoid mobilisation and my role in the camp. I feel sorry for all the victims, and I curse my own hands for having inflicted pain in any way on innocent people. I wish my sincere words to be understood as a balm for those wounds and as a contribution to the reconciliation of all people in Prijedor and the restoration of the situation that existed before the war.¹⁰³

¹⁰² By July 2007 the ICTY had indicted 161 persons, while estimates say that crimes were committed by a few thousand persons. At the end of 2004, the Tribunal had completed all investigations and indictments and it is expected to complete all cases by 2010. For further information see, ICTY, www.un.org/icty (accessed August 19, 2008). For concerns about this completion strategy, see Amnesty International, *Amnesty International's concerns on the implementation of the "completion strategy" of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia*, AI Index: EUR 05/001/2005, June 2005.

¹⁰³ ICTY, *Case information sheet. Predrag Banović*, www.un.org/icty/cases-e/index-e.htm (accessed August 19, 2008).

Edin, whose father, brother and relatives were detained in that camp, and have been missing persons ever since, comments on these sentences as follows:

What he said in that courtroom does not mean anything to me, or to any of my relatives. The only positive effect would be if Serbs from Prijedor were to turn their heads away from Banović, to hide their children from him.¹⁰⁴

Edin clearly felt that the main addressee for this apology was the court and not the people affected. Moreover, he knows that it is very likely, when Banović gets back to his hometown in a few years, that he will be treated as a hero or martyr.

4.1.3 Truth commissions

Tribunals, trials and apologies, then, have very limited impact on peace and reconciliation processes in the region. Unfortunately other mechanisms of transitional justice, like truth commissions, have not been successful or have largely been neglected. One truth commission was established in Serbia (actually in the former union between Serbia and Montenegro), but it literally died (when the union fell apart), without any results. It was established by successors of the Milošević regime, but since they did not clearly dissociate themselves from their predecessors, the commission served its purpose to gather political points. In Bosnia, too, there have been initiatives for establishing a truth commission, but there is still none. At the very beginning the ICTY opposed the idea, since there was a fear that a commission would overlap with its own mandate. In Bosnian society there is still an ongoing discussion whether a commission is needed or not; and there is no political will for such a step.¹⁰⁵

However, it seems obvious that a truth commission could bring some improvement. But it can only succeed if it is formed jointly by people from Croatia, Bosnia and Serbia. It is not possible to separate the consequences of war in these three countries, and therefore it is not possible to separate the peacebuilding processes. Nevertheless, due to the present political circumstances such a joint endeavour is still not a real policy option.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Edin Ramulić, interview in Arnautović and Hodžić, *Slijepa pravda*.

¹⁰⁵ See, for example, articles on “Komisija za istinu i pomirenje” [‘Truth and reconciliation commission’], by Tokača, Suljagić and Hodžić, *Puls demokratije*, www.pulsdemokratije.net/index.php?a=tag&t=istorija+i+odgovornost&l=bs (accessed August 19, 2008).

¹⁰⁶ It should be noted that there is a valuable initiative for establishing a regional body (in the region of former Yugoslavia) for truth seeking. The initiative came from the Humanitarian Law Centre from Belgrade (www.hlc-rdc.org), the Research and Documentation Centre from Sarajevo (www.idc.org.ba) and Documenta from Zagreb (www.documenta.hr). A number of consultations throughout the region with different social groups were held. At the moment (September 2008) it is in the process of forming a coalition of organisations and individuals for establishing a regional commission. More information is available on the initiators’ web sites. The idea is to have the regional commission established by the governments in the

4.2 What else needs to be done?

Any peacebuilding process in the region needs to acknowledge the suffering of human beings without ethnic prefixes, followed by recognition that it was ethnonationalist ideology that made war possible. Peacebuilders, as I have argued, should also avoid putting people into ethnopolitical ‘pigeonholes’, that very “miniaturization of human beings”¹⁰⁷, which ethnonationalists use, and should offer other perspectives. As Sen points out in his brilliant book on identity and violence, our freedom “to assert our personal identities can sometimes be very limited in the eyes of others, no matter how we see ourselves.”¹⁰⁸ Peace activists should advocate and make space for this freedom.

Peacebuilding and constructive dealing with the past are twin processes that strengthen and give legitimacy to each other. Dealing with the past, as a quite difficult and painful process, has a deeper sense only if its goal is sustainable peace. But peacebuilding is not possible without facing the past; otherwise we can just reach fake or fragile ‘peace’. In order to proceed on this road in the region we have to take the following steps: 1) acknowledgment, 2) deconstructing the myth of ‘ethnic war’, and 3) reconstructing identities and de-victimisation.

4.2.1 Public Acknowledgement

Although crucial for peacebuilding, public acknowledgment of misdeeds is very hard to achieve. The maximum of acknowledgment that has been admitted by the public discourse is the idea that “*the others did it also*”, which is actually an excuse and not a real recognition. Another excuse is “it was a war, and in war terrible things happen.”

During these ten years of peace activism, I have come to realise how hard it is for many people to accept and admit that *members of their own group* committed terrible acts. In our region’s dominant frame of mind, if I point to a crime committed by a member of one group it is experienced as an attack on the person that belongs to that group, an attack on his/her identity. And at the root of this phenomenon is an ethnonationalist ideology, which claims that all of us (tied to a piece of land) are one organism.

One of the main obstacles to acknowledging that people did suffer on all “sides” is a widespread belief that experiences and pains of others are a “denial of our own

region. Bearing in mind the political circumstances, it is quite an ambitious idea. Thus, we can only hope that it is going to be a successful one. The time will show.

¹⁰⁷ Sen, *Identity and Violence*, 185.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

experience”¹⁰⁹ and pain. It has to do with the conviction that there is a group who is a perpetrator and another group who is the victim. And these groups, in many people’s minds, have clear ethnic markers. This, however, was not the reality in the given context; all groups were split at least into two factions: one promoting violence against ‘the other’, and the other struggling against that violence. When we recognise that on all ‘sides’ there were people struggling against the policy of violence, and against the ideology that led us to slaughter, then we will be able to make much more space for *acknowledgment* to happen.

It is important that those who did not experience the whole tragedy of war get to know, first and foremost, what other people endured. And it is important to find a way to raise awareness that acknowledgment of the atrocities leads to liberation from the past, it allows life in the present and gives hope for a better future. Living in fear, among accusations, feeling threatened and not safe - this is not a life.

Although a crucial task of the dealing with the past process is recognising “the worth and dignity of those victimised”¹¹⁰ the entire society will benefit from this. Thus, the process should be shaped in a way that it is not only carried out for the sake of victims, but for the sake of a peaceful society whose main value is social justice. If we deny what has happened, we approve violence and thus establish it as a norm. If we acknowledge and condemn it, we have a chance to establish nonviolence as a norm, and the most important social value.

4.2.2 Deconstructing the myth of “ethnic war”

The next crucial step is deconstructing the myth of “ethnic war”. It is important to raise awareness of the root causes of war, which did not consist in ethnic differences or so-called ancient hatreds. This myth has to be deconstructed as it is the source of fear and mistrust between people of different identities. If people go on believing that ethnic differences are the cause of war, then they can never feel secure because those differences (although minor) will always exist, thus no one can guarantee that it is not going to happen again. Ethnonationalist ideology and ethnonationalists give their best to maintain the idea that having *our (ethnically clean)* state is the only guarantee for feeling safe. And since the project of ‘clean’ states did not fully succeed, many people still do not feel safe. Ethnonationalism is like a perpetual motion machine – constantly reinforcing itself. It creates a climate of fear and a so called “security dilemma”. Ethnona-

¹⁰⁹ Svjetlana Nedimović, “Suočavanja s prošlošću: Lično iskustvo kao samica” [Dealing with the Past: Personal Experience as Solitary Confinement], *Puls demokratije*, 3 May 2007, www.pulsdemokratije.net/index.php?a=detail&l=bs&id=114 (accessed August 19, 2008).

¹¹⁰ Neier in Boraine et. al., eds., *Dealing with the Past*, 3.

tionalist leaders make people suffer, then they boast that they were right when they were telling us that we cannot feel safe with *others*, and people still support them, because they are the ones who talk about 'our' interests, they address 'our' fears (that they created), and at the end they turn out to be 'our' guardians. This seems to be the reason why ethnonationalists still go on winning so many elections in the region.

Scholars recognise security as one of the main conditions for the process of reconciliation to start. As Rigby notes: "To begin to have hopes for the future, a necessary dimension of any constructive reinterpretation of the past, people must experience a degree of personal and collective security sufficient to reassure them about actions of former wrong-doers."¹¹¹ Thus, the sources of fear must be understood, deconstructed and neutralised.

Moreover, the answer to the question of who is a wrongdoer should be reframed. The wrongdoer is not that neighbour from the other ethnic group, since he/she is in a very similar situation to the one we are in. Wrongdoers are those; for example, who maintain ethnonationalist ideology for personal profit, and convicted war criminals. It also should be noted that only when we *reconcile with* the neighbour might we consider *reconciling with* the wrongdoer, otherwise we will never be able to *reconcile with* the neighbour.¹¹²

4.2.3 Reconstructing identities and de-victimisation

In the literature on peacebuilding it has been argued that "the transformation of identity is necessary for reconciliation."¹¹³ It has been outlined that the very existence of ethnic (or other) identities could be cultural heritage, something that enriches people's lives. A problem may arise from certain definitions. In the Balkans, we have allowed ethnonationalist extremists to impose their perception of what *ethnie* is about, while all other perceptions are marginalised. And their main understanding of *self* is defined *ex negativo*, i.e. by exclusion of the others; or as Keen observes: "All we despise in ourselves we attribute to them."¹¹⁴ Thus, having an enemy is at the core of their version of identity.

¹¹¹ Rigby, *Dealing with the Past*, 97.

¹¹² One can often hear calls by ethnonationalists in Serbia for "national reconciliation" which are actually calls for ethnic/national unification. Dimitrijević made an interesting observation (as a reaction to these calls) in his article on the prospects for the determination of truth and reaching reconciliation in Serbia: "If Serbs reconcile with each other, there reconciliation with others will be hindered." Vojin Dimitrijević, "Izgledi za utvrđivanje istine i postizanje pomirenja u Srbiji", in *Reč* 62/8 (2001), 74.

¹¹³ Lisa Schirch, "Ritual Reconciliation. Transforming Identity/Reframing Conflict," in *Reconciliation*, ed. Abu-Nimer, 152.

¹¹⁴ Sam Keen, *Faces of the Enemy: Reflections of the Hostile Imagination* (Cambridge: Harper & Row, 1986), 21.

If ethnic identity is important, what does it then mean to be a Serb, Croat, Bosniak, Albanian, Macedonian...? What kind of values do these identities entail? What is the cultural heritage that lies behind them? If the only thing we know is that *we* are not *them*, then we actually do not know who we are and there are no values behind us. Anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, writers, artists, politicians, and also ‘ordinary people’ could contribute to changing this picture, so that a construction of identities would be based on real humanistic values and cultures.

On the other hand, all of us have numerous identities, not only (if at all) ethnic and national ones. And we should be free to choose them and express them if we want.

In our region, all ethnopolitical groups are deeply immersed in the role of victim. And there are multiple and understandable reasons for that. What is worrying is that *victimisation* is built into the very identity. As Buruma observes: “Identity more and more rests on the pseudoreligion of victimhood.”¹¹⁵ It goes so far that all these *ethnies* were identifying themselves with Jews.¹¹⁶ In this situation of *victimisation* it is almost impossible to reflect on one’s own responsibility, or the responsibility of one’s own society. The role of victim turns out to be a comfortable one: if I am a victim I cannot be responsible for anything, and no one can argue with me because it would be showing a lack of respect for a victim. It is actually a powerful position. Thus, in addition to psychological reasons and deep trauma, de-victimisation is additionally complicated because of the comfort that role might offer. This lack of responsibility is reflected on the level of society. Citizens do not feel responsible for what is going on in society, since they have given that up to ‘politicians’. Moreover, we live in monolithic societies where, as Staub says, strong authority and totalitarian rule enforces uniformity: “The authorities have great power to define reality and shape the people’s perception of the victims.”¹¹⁷

It is absolutely necessary to empower people to abandon this role, because it is them who can make a change. If we constantly give up our power to ethnocratic authorities, we will never make a change. Without our power they would be powerless.

In this chapter I have defined a few steps that should be taken in order to reach fundamental change in our societies. And even if there are only a few steps, they need quite a lot of work and effort. The open question remains whose job it is to take those steps, which is the focus of the following chapter.

¹¹⁵ Ian Buruma, “The Joys and Perils of Victimhood,” in *The New York Review* 46/6 (1999), 6.

¹¹⁶ The historian Paul B. Miller wrote a brilliant text on this topic: Paul B. Miller, “Svi ste vi Jevreji” [All of you are Jews], *Dani*, 18 May 2007.

¹¹⁷ Staub, *The Roots of Evil*, 19.

5 Whose job is Peacebuilding and Dealing with the Past?

Scholars mostly agree that reconciliation and peacebuilding are processes in which all layers of a society need to be included. Lederach explicitly says that “peacebuilding must be undertaken simultaneously at numerous levels of society”.¹¹⁸ At the same time, Bar-On remarks that “top-down and bottom-up processes are difficult to synchronize because of the lack of a common language and social perspective”.¹¹⁹ Actually, in the region of former Yugoslavia, so far peacebuilding processes have not been initiated by the top level of decision makers in governments and parliaments. Others have tried to fill that gap. In this last chapter, I focus on actors that do have or should play a role in peacebuilding and dealing with the past processes, including steps suggested in the previous chapter. I also focus on obstacles that I am aware of which some of these actors face.

5.1 Governments, parliaments and political parties

Political institutions in our countries are still very weak and many of them are dominated by ethnonationalists. Peacebuilding is not their priority, since maintaining enemy images and ethno-political borders is very useful to them as a tool for securing their power. When representatives of governments, parliaments and political parties in this region talk about reconciliation they usually mean “national reconciliation”, seeking ethnic unification and promoting the concept “we-represent-one-body” which excludes others. Dealing constructively with the past and interethnic reconciliation is a threat for them, which endangers their identity. Those who we consider as “civic parties” also often use ethnonationalist rhetoric to gain more votes in elections, even if they do not believe in it themselves. And even if they do not flirt with ethnonationalism, they do not see peacebuilding as a priority either. Even politicians who belong to the political factions that peace activists set most hopes on have argued that ‘reconciliation’ is important, but it should be done by NGOs, and not by the state or state actors. According to them, the state’s job is focused on arresting and prosecuting war criminals.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Lederach, *Civil Society*, 843.

¹¹⁹ Dan Bar-On, “Empirical criteria for reconciliation in practice,” in *Intervention* 3/3 (2005), 180.

¹²⁰ Gordana Čomić, lecture held on «The role of a state in dealing with the past» as a part of the seminar on dealing with the past at the Centre for Nonviolent Action, 18-22 November, 2007.

The priority concern of most politicians in our region is the economy (which is understandable since so many people live on the edge of deprivation), assuming that a better life standard will set all things right. But the development of our economy alone will not lead us to more truth, justice, and peace. Moreover, when they are going to arrest some more war criminals, some of them will get their sentences, but that still will not “make things right”.

Unless we go through the steps listed in the previous chapter, we will not reach fundamental changes in our societies. People on the top and at the middle level of the societies could do a lot in order to achieve these steps and make crucial changes, if only there was enough will, knowledge, but also courage. I believe that a number of them would start taking these steps if they knew how, and if they got support by citizens.

Given the fact that the ‘top’ level is still so far from any interest in peacebuilding, this kind of work is left exclusively to civil society actors. Thus there is a big task for civil society actors to learn how to motivate and involve authorities in their activities, to get supported by them and also to give them support.

5.2 NGOs

The emerging sector of NGOs has often been confused with “civil society” as such. In recent years, after being perceived as the ‘key’ actors in post-war situations by many international and also some local actors, there is a growing criticism of the phenomenon of NGOs.¹²¹ Although it is mostly well grounded, it has to be admitted that many of these groups feel the gap and are, after all, struggling to do the job that state actors, representatives of governments, administrations or parliaments are incapable of doing or unwilling to do (due to the lack of political will). On a global level, one of the most constructive critiques of NGO work can be found in Fisher and Zimina’s open letter to peacebuilders.¹²² There, they observe two contrasting approaches in the peacebuilding field: *transformative*, which aims at fundamental political and social change, and *technical*, which aims to make a practical difference in a specific domain, while not “necessarily challenging the deeper context.”¹²³

¹²¹ See, for example, Rastko Močnik, “NVO, sluge neoliberalne države” [NGOs, servants of neoliberal states], in *Buka*, 20.06.2006; Vlasta Jalušić, “Ideologija i realnost civilnih društava” [Ideology and the reality of civil societies], in *H-Alter*, 13.11.2006; Paul Stubbs, “Civil Society or Ubleha?”, in *20 Pieces of Encouragement for Awakening and Change. Peacebuilding in the Region of the Former Yugoslavia*, eds. Helena Rill et al. (Belgrade, Sarajevo: CNA, 2007), 215-228.

¹²² Simon Fisher and Lada Zimina, *Just Wasting Our Time? Open Letter to Peacebuilders*, March 2008. [Editors’ note: an edited version is forthcoming as part of Berghof Handbook Dialogue No. 7 in late 2008.]

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 20.

5.2.1 Local / regional peace and human rights organisations

In our microcosms, there is a lot of “technical”, and also “transformative” work being done by local NGOs. These groups have a remarkable potential due to the fact that they have gained a lot of knowledge during the last decade. They have much more experience than most of the candidates for positions in governments, parliaments and political parties. But there are obstacles that prevent this potential from being fully used. First of all, personal animosities and competition prevent effective networking in the field. Beyond this, there are also some more complex barriers that prevent effective action and might reduce the NGOs’ impact.

Peace groups in our region are usually so deeply opposed to nationalism that they lack any understanding and empathy for the reasons that make many ‘ordinary people’ maintain ethnonationalist feelings and attitudes. This distances NGO activists fundamentally from a large percentage of the population. Thus they find themselves in strong opposition or confrontation to those who they would like to address or invite to be their allies. Moreover, space for constructive action is constricted. In Serbia, for instance, peace activists who decided to work with war veterans, were strongly criticised by some others for working with so-called “ethnonazis” and “killers”. The problem is that such rigid behaviour by peace NGOs pushes away many ‘ordinary’ people who could be allies and might have a strong potential to contribute to sustainable peace. Shifting that “self-righteous style” a bit would, I believe, open many doors.

Another limitation that narrows the NGOs’ impact on peacebuilding is an unspoken and unwritten rule between NGOs that forbids dealing explicitly with the “crimes of others”. There seems to be a consensus that if I am an ethnic Serb, I am expected to criticize only acts of Serb forces and politicians, and should not deal with those of Croats or Bosniaks since this should be left to the others, “they should clean their own house”. This approach reproduces the experience that public debates shy away from reflecting on the own responsibility, and ends up tending to overemphasise the responsibility of the own group and establishing a new taboo with respect to the crimes committed by other stakeholders of the wars. I might feel more shame and discomfort with misdeeds done by those who belong to my ‘tribe’ or society, but I am equally responsible for what is done by any of the sides, since I am or was part of that society and, whether I like it or not, part of that problem. And none of the criminals are ‘mine’ anyway. If I were to accept that some criminals are mine, and some others not, I would contribute to the existing ethnocentric world view, instead of bridging it. So even if it is not intended, the above mentioned unwritten rule risks actually reinforcing ethnocentric narratives. However, as has been explored on the previous pages and in the literature, the main problems and causes of the violent conflicts in the region were not and are not about ethnic differences.

Although I am aware of many obstacles that peace and human rights groups face, I am also aware of much valuable and brave work done by them: collecting testimonies and oral histories, bringing facts about crimes committed during the war into the public discourse, providing space for lacking public debates, building bridges, motivating the wider public to react, providing legal and medical support to the victims of human rights abuse, dealing with trauma, sowing seeds of humanistic social values that almost got forgotten... Isn't that something?

A lot of things rest on the shoulders of peace and human rights activists. But they are not going to change the situation fundamentally if they do not find modes of cooperation, and if they do not forge alliances with other actors: people from the media, artists, education, religious institutions, political parties, state institutions, local authorities, and business...

It should also be noted that these groups that work on social change lack support. Many of them feel like they are left alone, since their work is usually not publicly valued and sometimes not even recognised. Activists get tired and burn out. But, for the beginning, they could be the best support to each other.

5.2.2 International NGOs

International NGOs and external donors can play an important role and have certain impacts on peacebuilding in the region, given the experience they have gathered throughout the world. A precondition is that they are aware of their own role, potential and also limits.¹²⁴ Work on peacebuilding is much more sensitive than development or humanitarian aid, at least when it comes to the issue of dealing with the past. The first question that international NGOs have to answer is what is their own motivation to support this kind of work in post conflict areas? Second, they have to make explicit what they have done in their countries of origin on dealing with the past that gives them credibility to be a part of that process elsewhere. And these questions should get answers if the base of any cooperation is to be established: namely, trust.

Exploring what kind of role international NGOs can play in the peacebuilding process in the region would be a topic for another article. But it should be noted that in many cases international NGOs do give valuable support to local actors, sometimes they are even the main source of moral support.

¹²⁴ See Fisher and Zimina, *Just Wasting Our Time?*

5.3 Media, arts and culture

Beyond NGOs, media, arts and culture can also contribute substantially to peacebuilding.

In May 2008, a Eurovision song contest was held in Belgrade that was accompanied by absolute excitement. During these days, listening to the Belgrade Radio B92 one could quite frequently hear a commercial for a newly released album by the Bosnian singer Laka, who was representing Bosnia in the contest. The main message in the short commercial was: “Let’s prepare for action! Support the neighbour!” Given the context we live in, this should be considered as a great campaign that contributes to peacebuilding much more than many ‘projects’ which proclaim this goal, although the initiators most probably did not think about this kind of effect at all. This is just an example that arts and entertainment – at least implicitly – can make important contributions to changing political cultures or at least to bridging ethnopolitical gaps.

5.4 Survivors and victims’ groups

Peace activists working locally and regionally have to explore more clearly where our own potentials are and who else can contribute and could be our alliance partners. We should include the individuals and groups that are considered as those mostly affected by the wars: victims and survivors, and their families, who I will focus on in this section, and also ex-combatants, who I will focus on in the next and last section.

There is a number of associations of families of victims, of ex-detainees in concentration camps, and refugees across the region. Their goals are mainly to find the remains of their dear ones, to uncover the truth about their destinies, to have that truth acknowledged, and also to have the perpetrators held responsible for their misdeeds. The difficulty is that many of these groups are organised according to the ‘ethnic key’, and one can easily notice that to a large extent they maintain competing narratives, there is a lack of constructive communication and cooperation between them,¹²⁵ and sometimes they perceive the other association (whose members belong to a different ethnic group) as an enemy itself. It happens that someone who committed war crimes is perceived as a perpetrator by one association and as a hero by some other. There is also a lack of acknowledgment of the suffering of the members of the other associations, having a competition about who is the greater victim. Some victims’ groups are highly politicised

¹²⁵ There are attempts to develop cooperation between these groups, like projects of the International Commission on Missing Persons.

and they are easily abused by ethnonationalists who gain points on account of their misery.

One can frequently hear representatives of victims' groups saying: "May these tragedies never happen anymore to anyone"¹²⁶, but the difficulties I have listed above usually contradict this wish and prevent these groups from reaching their goals. Victims' groups from different sides have similar goals (with respect to acknowledgement, justice and compensation for those who suffered from war crimes and human rights violations). They have huge credibility and they are also quite respected in their societies. If they were to act in cooperation, and not in opposition, exchanging more information and exerting joint pressure on authorities, they could be much more effective and the whole society would benefit from the results of their work. It is difficult for all these groups in the countries of former Yugoslavia to make this move, but at the same time there are indicators that individuals exist in many groups who do not feed into ethnocentric divisions and could be relevant actors for peacebuilding.

5.5 Ex-combatants and war veterans' organisations

It seems that international organisations have also recently developed some interest in two specific groups: victims and perpetrators, followed by a kind of consensus that both groups should be worked with. As many would say, it is easier to identify who is a victim, but there are difficulties in identifying the perpetrators. When discussion about perpetrators starts, then the only group that is often talked about are war veterans, although many of them did not commit any crime and many of them were forced to join the war. Unfortunately, the perception and conceptualisation of dealing with war veterans in international reconstruction and reintegration programs is usually rather superficial, or to use more diplomatic term, borrowed from Fisher and Zimina, *technical*.¹²⁷

In our experience, among war veterans many people can be found who raise brave voices and go against the stream, despite having strongly expressed their national identity. NGO activists should be open to approaching those individuals that have huge acceptance and credibility in society and can take on important functions as multipliers and ambassadors for peace.

Ex-combatants are often perceived as 'spoilers'. Observing a number of associations of war veterans throughout the region, it is easy to label them as 'spoilers', due to

¹²⁶ See, for example, Svetlana Broz, "Facing the Crime – Vengeance, Justice and Understanding," in *Balkan Yearbook of Human Rights 2005. Confronting the Past, Consequences for the Future*, eds. Dino Abazović and Branko Todorović (Sarajevo: Balkan Human Rights Network, 2005).

¹²⁷ Fisher and Zimina, *Just Wasting Our Time?*

the fact that they are, like victims, very much affected by the war and quite politicised. They usually maintain ethnocentric narratives and enemy images, and in addition many of them share identities marked by militarised masculinity. But, as is the case with other groups and institutions, they consist of individuals, and many individuals do not fit this general picture. Most of them did not want those wars, and they certainly cannot be blamed for starting them; they were either drafted, or the war “came under their window”.¹²⁸ That experience changed their lives, and based on that, many of them have a powerful anti-war and peacebuilding potential. Many peace activists can easily be discredited by ethnonationalists as ‘non-patriots’. However, this is not so easy with respect to war veterans who have huge social credibility and acceptance. People listen to them. Thus they are important multipliers and can be messengers for peace. This could be observed during the public forums that the Centre for Nonviolent Action (CNA) organised, where some of the speakers were war veterans.¹²⁹ The audience, which had never had the opportunity to hear a story of a combatant from ‘the other side’, was listening to every word – carefully and with respect.

CNA’s work with war veterans has shown that these individuals usually have great motivation to meet people from the other side they fought against. Galtung points out one reason for this: to get to know, as all professionals would like to do, whether they did a good job, since “few would know this better than the other side”.¹³⁰ This might be true, but to a large degree they were not professionals, rather they were ordinary people who became soldiers due to the circumstances. And a number of them discovered that after getting to know those “others” and having honest discussions with them, they could sleep properly for the first time since the war. Thus, it is more likely that their motivation to meet former ‘enemies’ is due to the traumatic experience they endured.

There is a growing number of brave veterans who are joining informal networks that contribute to peacebuilding, trying to rebuild broken bridges and find answers to the questions that distress them (“why?”). Doing this, they mostly swim against the tide and they risk being criticised. So it is not easy for them, and to sustain their engagement, the support from other actors is crucial.

¹²⁸ Adnan Hasanbegović, *Four views*, 6.

¹²⁹ For more information, see publications on the “4 views” programme, www.nenasilje.org/publikacije/4_pogleda_e.html (accessed October 10, 2008).

¹³⁰ Johan Galtung, “Twelve creative ways to foster reconciliation after violence,” in *Intervention* 3/3 (2005), 229.

6 Outlook: the necessity of building alliances for Peacebuilding in the region

The above mentioned groups that are concerned about dealing with the past and/or peacebuilding and reconciliation are still a minority in the societies of the former Yugoslavia. How could the wider society/societies be included in peace processes? Journalists and activists from the media have often reported that people are tired of stories about dealing with the past and about victims. This is understandable, on the one hand since facing the past is hard and an emotionally tense process, especially if not dealt with in a constructive way, and many of us really lack happiness and optimistic perspectives in our lives. On the other hand, this “tiredness of dealing with the past” is also worrying. Apathy is quite a dangerous phenomenon in any society, because it is accompanied by a lack of taking responsibility. And if we as citizens do not feel responsible for our society, then authorities will not fulfil their responsibility either, because there will be no critical mass to control their work.

While both local and international NGOs can make important contributions to peacebuilding, one should not expect that NGOs on their own and as the only actors could be effective in establishing long lasting peace. Peace groups in the region of former Yugoslavia, although doing valuable work, are small in number and not supported by our governments, neither morally nor financially (or if some of them are, this support is almost invisible). The financial means for peace activities come from abroad, mainly from western governments. The very moment when that support stops we will be lucky if we stay on with a few enthusiasts – with no perspective, of course.

We are not going to reach sustainable peace if peacebuilding remains the concern of activists, academics and artists alone. Our only chance, if sustainable peace is our goal, is to make it become institutionalised, spreading across professional fields and all layers of society, providing a critical mass and a good base for a better future for all of us. Luckily, there are individuals in all these spheres who do act and react, swimming against the tide, and the least we can do is to give them support or join their actions.

In the end, any small step that any citizen can take would be a contribution to lasting peace. It *is* especially hard in a situation where political systems and public debates are dominated by ethno-political and ethnonationalist actors. But for the citizens in our region it is important to stop complaining about politics and instead become aware that it is each member of society who can contribute to change, by no longer voting for ethnonationalists and refusing to give any power to them. In our region, we have to continue to build peace from the bottom-up, because we cannot expect the authorities to start that job. But work on the grass-root level alone will not help, it has to

‘get sealed’ approval at the tops level, in a way that would prevent decision-makers from obstructing peace processes, and beyond. It is our responsibility to encourage authorities to support this process.

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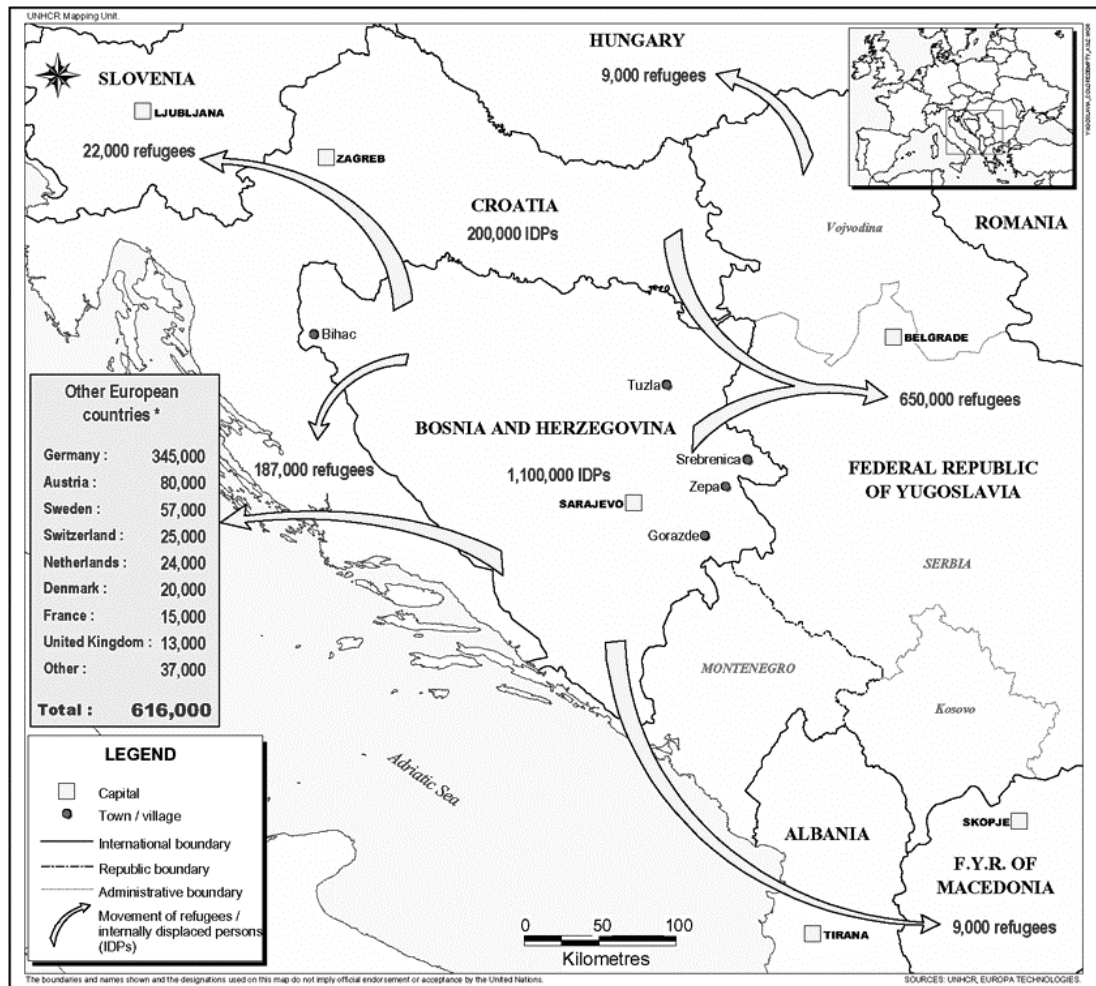
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Appendix

Figure 1: Main displaced populations from the former Yugoslavia, December 1995



Source: UNHCR Maps, *Map of Main Displaced Populations from the Former Yugoslavia, December 1995*, 1 June 2000 (www.unhcr.org/publ/PUBL/3ae6bb00.pdf).

Figure 2 : The 1995 Dayton Agreement for Bosnia and Herzegovina



Source: UNHCR Maps, *Map of the 1995 Dayton Agreement for Bosnia and Herzegovina*, 1 June 2000 (www.unhcr.org/publ/PUBL/3ae6baea8.pdf).

Table 1: Levels of Reconciliation

Levels of reconciliation	Type of coexistence	Nature of cross-community interaction	Typical initiatives to deepen relationships	Key actors in initiatives
<i>Surface reconciliation of non-lethal coexistence</i>	Separate lives. Live apart. Kind of apartheid	Minimal social interaction – mainly by arrangement	Dialogue of words	Third parties. Top and middle level leaders
<i>Shallow reconciliation of civil association</i>	Live alongside each other as fellow citizens. Parallel lives. Benign apartheid.	Role-specific interaction	Dialogue of projects	Third parties. Middle- & grass-roots level opinion-leaders
<i>Deep reconciliation of community – ubuntu/ rainbow kingdom</i>	People from different communities live with and amongst each other	Rich and multi-textured	Dialogue of living	Grassroots everyday people

Source: Andrew Rigby. “Twenty Observations on ‘Post-settlement’ Reconciliation.” (Paper presented at the *Reconciliation Expert Network* seminar, Stockholm, 15-17 March 2006, 13).