

## Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication

### **Intergroup Communication and Reconciliation: Experiences from the Former Yugoslavia**

Vesna Nikolić-Ristanović

Subject: Intergroup Communication Online Publication Date: Aug 2017

DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.388

#### **[-] Summary and Keywords**

Intergroup communication is an important aspect of dealing with intergroup conflicts in post-conflict societies, including countries of the former Yugoslavia. Widespread monolithic and authoritarian communication is one of the main obstacles to constructive communication about the past in the former Yugoslavia, and the challenges involved in shifting the nature of communication, although rarely addressed and explored, seem to be a condition sine qua non of effective reconciliation efforts. This should include contact and communication issues as well as the very process through which the shift from authoritarian (one-way) communication, which perpetuates conflicts, to inclusive (two-way) communication, which has reconciliatory potential, can be achieved. Allport's intergroup contact hypothesis, its revisions and further elaborations in relation to the use of inclusive communication for overcoming divisions and reaching reconciliation in post-conflict societies, as well as restorative and transformative justice literature, including experiences of using yoga as part of restorative justice and reconciliation programs, can serve as good theoretical departures.

As we explore communication as a way toward reconciliation in post-conflict societies using as an illustration experiences from the former Yugoslavia, we need to be aware of intergroup communication on the macro, meso, and micro level and its impact on reconciliation after the armed conflicts of the 1990s. Conflicts on the macro level include conflicts between the states, or on the level of the society, while meso-level conflicts are intergroup conflicts; micro-level conflicts relate to interpersonal conflicts. Also we need to understand the scope and nature of interethnic and other intercultural conflicts, as well as their socio-historical context and impact on intergroup communication. Thus, addressing intergroup communication in a constructive and inclusive way while dealing with the past and implementing reconciliation initiatives is important. Intergroup communication initiatives that foster reconciliation in particular need to be identified and explored, as examples of the practice of establishing inclusive communication and binding people from different ethnic groups and those affected by armed conflicts in different ways together.

Keywords: conflicts, intergroup communication, optimal contact, reconciliation, civil society, the former Yugoslavia

---

## Intergroup Communication as an Obstacle and Resource for Reconciliation

Although widespread authoritarian<sup>1</sup> communication is one of the main obstacles to constructive communication about the past in many post-conflict societies, the challenges involved in shifting the nature of communication are rarely addressed and explored. This applies also to the studies that deal with contact and communication issues because they do not explore in detail the very process through which the shift from authoritarian (one-way) communication, which perpetuates conflicts, to inclusive (two-way) communication, which has reconciliatory potential, can be achieved (Nikolić-Ristanović, 2015).

The challenges of intergroup communication faced by post conflict societies and their relationship with reconciliation are explored, using as an illustration experiences from the parts of the former Yugoslavia<sup>2</sup> that were involved in armed conflicts in the 1990s and most severely affected by them (Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, and Kosovo). The impact of conflicts on intergroup communication in these societies was the strongest and had the most durable consequences, and at the same time posed the most demanding challenges connected to reconciliation. These challenges are connected to different aspects of changes linked to ethnic and religious identities of members of different ethnic groups, as well as to the replacement of a socialist socioeconomic and political system with neoliberal capitalism and quasi-democratic pluralism.

Intergroup contact and communication as important aspects of dealing with intergroup conflicts in post-conflict societies are explored both as an obstacle and a resource for reconciliation. Special attention is paid to reconciliation initiatives that tend to address intergroup communication challenges in a constructive way. Moreover, inclusive two-way communication is considered as a way toward reconciliation in general, as well as in the former Yugoslavia. Bearing that in mind, the model developed within the nongovernmental organization Victimology Society of Serbia is presented as a possible way forward.

## Contact and Reconciliation

Contact and constructive communication seem to have a vital role in overcoming divisions, hostilities, and conflicts between members of different groups in general, and particularly in post-conflict societies. Contact itself may contribute to members of different groups becoming closer to each other. But there are also situations where the contact was not productive and where participants' positions were unchanged or they became even more estranged. Usually one-way communication was established in which one side accused the other, and the story of the other was not even allowed to be heard.

Obviously, for the contact to overcome division and head toward reconciliation, it is necessary that some conditions are met. Thus, optimal contact, or contact that is expected to advance into constructive communication, is a necessary precondition for gradual change from authoritarian or exclusive to democratic or inclusive ways of communication and their further development and maintenance (Nikolić-Ristanović, 2015).

## **Intergroup Communication and Reconciliation: Experiences from the Former Yugoslavia**

---

According to literature about intergroup contact (Allport's intergroup contact hypothesis and its revisions and application in post-conflict society), the following conditions need to be met for the optimal contact to take place: balanced power relationships, safe place, common goals and interests, intergroup cooperation instead of competition, the support of authorities, law, or custom, as well as close connections between members of different groups through extensive and repeated contacts in different social contexts, and the proper amount of time (Allport, 1954; Amir, 1998; Pettigrew, 1998; Janoff-Bulman & Werther, 2008; Nikolić-Ristanović, 2015).

As Pettigrew suggests, Allport's hypothesis "says nothing about the processes by which contact changes attitudes and behavior. It predicts only when contact will lead to positive change, not how and why the change occurs" (Pettigrew, 1998, p. 70). Thus, the contribution of later studies was very important, particularly their findings about four interrelated processes that operate through contact and that mediate attitude change: learning about the out-group, changing behavior, generating affective ties, and in-group reappraisal. New information about the "other" may improve attitudes, while ignorance promotes prejudices.

However, behavior change often comes before attitude change (Pettigrew, 1998). As Pettigrew writes, because new situations require conforming to new expectations, "if these expectations include acceptance of out-group members, this behavior has the potential to produce attitude change" (Pettigrew, 1998, p. 71). Repetition of contacts is also beneficial for positive behavior change, given that repetition leads to liking (Zajonc, quoted by Pettigrew, 1998). Later reformulations of Allport's contact hypothesis explained the role of emotions in the process of behavior and attitude changes. Continued contact usually reduces anxiety. Positive emotions aroused from intergroup friendship and mutual empathy are particularly important (Amir, 1998; Pettigrew, 1998; Janoff-Bulman & Werther, 2008). In addition, time is an important factor for the contact to advance into constructive communication and changed behavior and attitudes toward "others." Obviously, optimal intergroup contact is able to affect intergroup communication positively and contribute toward reconciliation by providing a more nuanced view of one's own group and less biased view of other groups in general (Pettigrew, 1998).

Allport's contact hypothesis was also explored in highly divided post-conflict societies where prejudices are especially emphasized and where social context severely limits intergroup contact. This makes it especially difficult to meet Allport's equal status condition, leading to difficulty in involving people in intergroup discussion about divisive group concerns (Pettigrew, 1998). The prevailing stereotypes about "us" and "them," as well as the dominant authoritarian way of communication about the past, make it difficult to establish constructive contact between members of different groups. Contact may also easily lead to an increase, instead to a reduction, of conflicts. This is why in these societies it is particularly important that initial contact is well planned and kept under control. Initial contact should be the first and necessary step, and the precondition for development of communication. It is necessary that awareness exists about the need for contact establishment, that the effort is made in that direction, as well as that there is the will and readiness of interested parties to really establish contact (Nikolić-Ristanović, 2015).

### **Intergroup Communication and Reconciliation**

## Intergroup Communication and Reconciliation: Experiences from the Former Yugoslavia

---

Although existing literature suggests that optimal contact and constructive communication play a particularly important role in overcoming divisions and intergroup conflicts in societies striving to come to terms with a violent past, deeper exploration of the very process through which the shift can be achieved from widespread monolithic (one-way) communication, which perpetuates conflicts, to inclusive (two-way) communication, which has reconciliatory potential, is only sporadic. This process seems to be one of the most challenging aspects of reconciliation in post-conflict societies, where gradual and nonlinear changes from an ethnocentric discourse, through attacks, to addressing the different frames of reference and dialogical moments, are observed (Bar-On, 2005; Nikolić-Ristanović, 2006).

The rare research to explore the process of communication change (Nikolić-Ristanović, 2015) suggests that conditions need to be set for both optimal contact and the gradual change from authoritarian to democratic ways of communication, as well as for further development and maintenance of the democratic (inclusive) communication. These conditions include a controlled and low-risk process. This process needs to include a place that is perceived as secure in both a physical and psychological sense. Such a place is necessary for people to be able to open up and establish dialogue. Nongovernmental organizations might be the best organizations to create such safe environments for contact and dialogue (Lederach, 1997; Justad, 2006). Developing and maintaining a two-way communication between participants requires setting a communication framework that allows both sides to speak and be heard, to recognize similarities and respect differences, and, in this way, to get to mutual understanding and respect (Nikolić-Ristanović, 2015). Discovering similarities between the “self” and the “other” can be beneficial in understanding the “other,” as well as in reducing prejudices and increasing respect toward other groups (Rohne, Arsovska, & Aertsen, 2008). Research discovered that the main factors that contribute to establishing and maintaining constructive communication and dialogue include: optimal contact, readiness for communication, and the gradual setting of conditions for constructive (two-way) communication (Nikolić-Ristanović, 2015).

The two-way communication is very similar to nonviolent communication, described as “an approach to life which uses the language of feeling and needs to help us connect compassionately to others and ourselves,” which some authors refer to as “compassionate communication” or “language of the heart” (Sullivan, 2007, p. 131). This kind of communication is important because it enables both sides to get respect for their injuries and accept their own responsibility, and, as a consequence, to get to mutual understanding. Respect facilitates reconciliation because “it allows for the possibility that legitimacy may lie in more than one’s own perspective,” and over time people learn to hear the other perspective without overreacting or disparaging the other side (Janoff-Bulman & Werther, 2008, p. 159).

The dialogue is an important tool of constructive communication and, as such, it fosters cooperation and reaching common goals. Understood as an exchange and interaction between dissimilar voices, it is able to change relationships over time. This kind of dialogue is also called restorative dialogue because it is the essence of the “dialogical/restorative justice” (Foss, Hassan, Hyde, Seeberg, & Uhrig, 2012, p. 47). This dialogue includes two-way (subject-subject, or *I-Thou*) instead of one-way communication (subject-object or *I-It*) (Sidorkin, 1996; Kent & Taylor, 2002; Tschudi, 2008) and is characterized by active and respectful listening and mutual understanding. It promotes empathy and fosters relationship-building or its transformation (Berghof Foundation, 2012). Some authors call this kind of dialogue reconciliation dialogue, pointing out its inclusiveness of all opinions and constituencies to the conflict and non-judgemental nature, as well as the fact that it is voluntary and supportive of all at the

## **Intergroup Communication and Reconciliation: Experiences from the Former Yugoslavia**

---

psychological level (White, 2003). Inclusive communication that leads to reconciliation presupposes either consensus about the truth (facts and their meanings) or mutual acceptance that there are different truths and that each side has the right to have its own truth. Storytelling and dialogue help people to uncover the truth through active participation and communication (Chapman, Campbell, & Wilson, 2014). In addition, dialogue helps people to gain knowledge and understanding of the different truths and their validity, for example, that both groups have experienced loss (Justad, 2006).

Finally, it is worth mentioning the potential that yoga has for intergroup communication and reconciliation, given the healing and empowering effects of yoga on victims (Franklin, 2001; Nikolić-Ristanović, 2014), as well as the use of yoga as a conflict transformation, conflict prevention, and community-building tool, particularly in post-conflict societies (Srbova, 2015). Moreover, yoga is considered as having the potential for helping a mind shift from a dualistic toward a holistic worldview, and toward nonviolence and a constructive, positive, and problem-solving attitude in communication and conflict situations. Available research also suggests that yoga provides a skill set and attitude of nonviolence by transcending inner peace to relations with others (Srbova, 2015).

### **Conflicts and Intergroup Communication in the Former Yugoslavia**

As the basis for the analysis of intergroup communication-related challenges for reconciliation in the former Yugoslavia, the scope and nature of interethnic and other inter-cultural conflicts of the 1990s and their socio-historical context and impact on intergroup communication need to be understood.

### **The Scope and Characteristics of Conflicts**

Interethnic conflicts<sup>3</sup> from the 1990s include conflicts related to armed conflicts in the territories of what was once one country—Yugoslavia—that took place in Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina (between 1991 and 1995), and in the territory of Serbia, which refers to the conflict in Kosovo in 1998–1999, which was an autonomous province within Serbia at that time.

Although Serbia was not officially involved in the armed conflicts outside its territory, unofficially it has been involved in armed confrontations in the republics of the former Yugoslavia:<sup>4</sup> Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. These conflicts had the characteristics of interethnic (Serbs, Slovenians, Croats, and Bosniaks) and interreligious conflicts (Orthodox, Catholics, and Muslims). About 140,000 people were killed in the region during the armed conflicts and between 3.5 million and 4 million others were displaced (International Center for Transitional Justice, 2009).

In the armed conflict in Slovenia in 1991 the sides were the Yugoslav national army (JNA) (Serbian officers mostly led the army) and the Slovenian armed forces. In the armed conflicts in Croatia, which lasted from 1991 to 1995, the sides were Serbs and Croats, while in the armed conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992–1995) the parties were the Serbs, Croats, and

## **Intergroup Communication and Reconciliation: Experiences from the Former Yugoslavia**

---

Bosniaks. These conflicts were formally ended by the Dayton peace agreement, which was signed on December 14, 1995.

During these armed conflicts there were massive violations of human rights and customs of war, ethnic cleansing, war crimes, massacres, and genocide. Some of the events that are most frequently mentioned in public and in the literature are the crime in Srebrenica, the destruction of Vukovar, the siege of Sarajevo, and the military operations of the Croatian armed forces, known as the “Storm” and “Flesh.” All of these events, as well as countless others, have been accompanied by a large number of killings of civilians, mass executions, rape, torture in the camps, looting and destruction of property, deportation, expulsion, persecution, and destruction of cities and infrastructure.

The Kosovo conflict in 1998–1999 was characterized by a massive use of force in Kosovo by the Serbian police, army, and irregular forces, on one side, and the Kosovo Liberation Army on the other. In 2001, this conflict spilled over to southern Serbia or the so-called Presevo Valley, where the conflicting parties were the Serbian police and military forces on one side and the Albanian Liberation Army of Presevo, Medvedja, and Bujanovac on the other. The aftermath included: massacres of the civilian population, individual murders, rape, kidnappings, torture, mutilations, disappearances, massive exodus of the population, forced deportation, discrimination, imprisonment, and destruction of property, mostly houses and religious objects.<sup>5</sup> The conflict in Kosovo is an ongoing one, but nowadays the victims in the majority of cases are non-Albanians, their property, and historical heritage. Also there is still much tension in the region of southern Serbia, and strong Serb military forces in the area protect the fragile peace.

In addition to these conflicts, in 1999 international military forces (NATO) conducted a military campaign “Angel of Mercy” by bombing the capital, Belgrade, and other Serbian cities in order to protect the Albanian population in Kosovo, which had been subjected to violence by the Serbian army and police. This conflict ended with the formal signing of the Military Technical Agreement in Kumanovo (Kumanovo Agreement) on June 9, 1999.

Various aspects of interethnic conflicts at the macro and meso levels have had large repercussions on intergroup communication and relationships—during and after the ending of the armed conflicts. During the armed conflicts this included expulsion, harassment, and persecution of citizens of different ethnicities; mistrust between members of different ethnic groups; mobilization; domestic violence in mixed marriages; physical and sexual violence against refugees and refugee families; trafficking in women in exile, including violence; and the most serious crimes against refugees and increasing violence in general. In addition, conflicts on a micro level included domestic violence in the families of refugees and war veterans, clashes between neighbors, maltreatment of women refugees, and conflicts within the families who accepted refugees in their homes (Nikolić-Ristanović, 1998).

After the end of armed conflicts, many unresolved problems and conflicts continue to exist on both the level of the state and between individual citizens. This applies in particular to the conflicts between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo. Serbs from Kosovo continue to live either as internally displaced persons in Serbia or in complete uncertainty and exposed to hostility and violence in Kosovo. In addition, armed interethnic conflicts that took place outside Serbia had a serious impact on interethnic relations in Serbia itself (Domonji, 2008), and in particular in the parts where multi-ethnicity is the most emphasized (e.g., parts near the southern, western and northern borders).

## Socio-Historical Context of Conflicts and Dealing with These Conflicts

There is a connection between past and present conflicts and the way they are dealt with in the former Yugoslavia. Dealing with present-day conflicts is connected not only with intergroup conflicts that happened during 1990s, but also with conflicts that occurred in World War II and before. The entire region has a history of wars for national liberation, with people from different ethnic groups waging wars against each other without any attempt at reconciliation (Pavkovic, 2000). The consequence is a disturbance of communication that has made any potential effort at building trust between groups that were involved in armed conflicts very complex and challenging.

Thus, the region also has a history of denials and multiple and opposed truths (each ethnic group passing its own truth from generation to generation) as well as a history of exploitation of (their own people's) victimization to feed the cycle of violence (Nikolić-Ristanović, 2006). This process existed in parallel with the politics and discourse of "brotherhood and unity" that were officially maintained during the socialist time. One-sided, partial truths, which include victim/offender binarism (Butler, 2004), survived the socialist time and was, as "ghosts in the bottle," taken out and used for manipulation of national sentiments and provocation of wars in the 1990s (Nikolić-Ristanović, 2003). And, although "brotherhood and unity," together with Yugoslavian identity and Serbo-Croat language, was accepted by many, particularly by those from ethnically mixed families, it also was experienced as a threat to national identities and their free expression.

It is not unusual than that during the 1980s national identities were re-created, ethno-nationalistic movements were developed or strengthened, and the "others" (primarily other ethnic groups but also other opponents) were recognized as dangerous, (potential) opponents, and enemies, all of which generated armed conflicts that emerged in the 1990s in the countries of the former Yugoslavia (Blagojevic, 2000). The context of economic crisis and disorientation brought by the change of political system was a fertile soil for manipulation with nationalistic attitudes and sentiments (Blagojevic, 2000; Zdravkovic, 2005). A good example of this was the inflammatory nationalistic speech of Slobodan Milosevic<sup>6</sup> in 1989 in Kosovo on the occasion of the 600th anniversary of the Kosovo battle in which the Serbs were defeated by the Turks, who at that time occupied a large part of the region. He called Serbs to unite and to fight for the liberation and returning of the Serbian Holy Land (Pavkovic, 1999), manipulating nationalistic feelings based on the revival of old divisions and hostilities (Nikolic-Ristanovic, 2000, p. 11). This was considered to be one of the crucial generators of the conflicts that started two years later in Slovenia, spreading to Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and ending up in Kosovo at the end of the 1990s. Thus, since the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s ethnicity became an important agent of social differentiation throughout the former Yugoslavia (Blagojevic, 2000), while "nationalism was emerging as a synthesis of anti-communist fervour, on the one hand, and 'blame-the-victim' and 'scapegoat' ideologies, on the other" (Blagojevic, 2005, p. 164). Social differentiation also included replacement of the Serbo-Croatian language, as a common language for all ethnic groups, by individual languages with an overemphasis on their differences.<sup>7</sup> In such a context, conflicts in the countries of the former Yugoslavia were justified as defensive and as such they were treated as just and inevitable, strengthening national homogenization (Rakovic, 2005, p. 72).

## **Intergroup Communication and Reconciliation: Experiences from the Former Yugoslavia**

---

Among the population in the post-conflict context of the countries of the former Yugoslavia there are victims and perpetrators, witnesses and bystanders of interethnic crimes. There is also overlapping of victimization and offending. There is a high complexity of victimization with a strong impact on intergroup communication and relationships after armed conflicts.<sup>8</sup> For example, a large proportion of the male population participated in war as soldiers. Their national sentiments and families' traumatic experiences from earlier wars were abused and manipulated to convince them to fight. As a consequence they are also often victims in a more direct way. Many people were victimized by different perpetrators, who belong to different communities and ethnic groups (e.g., Serbian refugees from Croatia, who were first in refuge in Bosnia and then in Kosovo, or Croats from Bosnia and Herzegovina who were victimized by both Serbs and Bosniaks). Many people are multiple victims, some with memories of victimization in previous wars, or with war trauma passed down to them by their parents or other relatives (e.g., Bosniaks whose family members were killed by members of other ethnic groups during World War II, or those whose family members were killed during and that war by members of their own ethnic group who belonged to a different political or military group).<sup>9</sup> There are conflicts and divisions within ethnic groups themselves that are connected to belonging to different political and other social groups, differences in their war victimization, and other factors (for example, between communists and anti-communists, between supporters of nationalist leaders and their opponents, between Serbs from Serbia and Serbs from other parts of the former Yugoslavia, between refugees and the local population, war participants and those who did not participate in war, etc.) (Nikolić-Ristanović, 2003).

As post-conflict societies that are undergoing a painful transition from communism to neo-liberal capitalism, countries of the former Yugoslavia constitute an unstable environment. In particular, borders between countries are characterized by instability and eruptions of violence, which seriously jeopardize the security of citizens. Moreover, there is also an increase of lawlessness, corruption, and crime, and, at the same time a lack of mechanisms and institutions for upholding the rule of law and dealing with past abuses (Rohne, Arsovska, & Aertsen, 2008). On the other hand, however, the fact that all citizens of the former Yugoslavia are united by similar language and culture as well as many common values related to their earlier belonging to one country may be fertile soil for re-building their communication and trust.

### **Challenges of Intergroup Communication and Reconciliation**

Ethnic conflicts in the former Yugoslavia had a strong impact on the long-term worsening of interethnic relationships and more general intergroup communication in parts both directly and indirectly affected by armed conflicts. As a consequence, present-day relationships and conflicts between members of different ethnic groups are still very much under the influence of wars from the 1990s and their consequences. In addition, contemporary intergroup relationships are influenced by other factors, such as the status of the state in relation to armed conflict results (winner or defeated party), the current political and socioeconomic situation and institutional framework, mechanisms and policies for dealing with discrimination, the scope of human rights violations, crime and violence in general, rule of law level, etc. Interethnic relationships are also under the strong influence of the international community, in particular in Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the international community directly participates in governing the states. There is also the strong influence of the trials before the International Criminal Tribunal



## Intergroup Communication and Reconciliation: Experiences from the Former Yugoslavia

---

for the Former Yugoslavia, and the European Union (EU) integration processes, as well as an indirect influence through funding policy of both state and civil society projects about human rights and dealing with past.

There are differences between new states in relation to intergroup communication problems and the ways they are dealt with, but the main similarity is that in all countries affected by previous wars there are still strong stereotypes and prejudices about “us” and “them,” and intergroup communication is far from being inclusive and constructive (Simić, 2016; Subotić, 2016). Moreover, the very opening of the story about the past was not much help in solving existing conflicts. It even contributed to deepening conflicts and creating new ones. Thus, intergroup communication that is one-way, authoritarian, and exclusive tends to be maintained in the post-conflict period—on all levels of the society as well as within various projects of both state and civil society organizations that have been dealing with the past. This kind of communication seems to be a strong obstacle for reconciliation both in individual countries and in the region as a whole.

In Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, there are opposed or exclusive narratives about what happened during the 1990s (Subotić, 2016). While Croats consider Operation Storm as the pinnacle of the fight for independence and statehood of Croatia, for Serbs this is a crime—ethnic cleansing of Serbs from Croatia. So far, there has not been any inclusive communication that would allow a kind of alternative, conciliatory discourse on the macro level. Similarly, in Bosnia there are three exclusive versions of the Bosnian past that cement separation and obstruct intergroup communication. As Petrović-Ziemer (2015) points out, “typical of the divided cultures of memory in Sarajevo and throughout Bosnia is a tendency to not even mention the victims of other ethnic groups. Only the victims in one’s own ranks and the crimes of enemy troops are remembered. There are currently three official designations for referring to the war. The Croatian interpretation of the conflict refers to it as the Homeland War; the Bosniaks consistently speak of Serbian or Serbian-Montenegrin aggression and the defensive war of the Bosnian army; and Serbian historians refer to it either as a civil war or a patriotic war.”<sup>10</sup>

In Serbia, two polarized and opposing, extreme and exclusive approaches to dealing with the past prevailed within the society after the 1990s and kept producing new conflicts around the issue of the past atrocities. Changes in Serbia transformed the political scene from the conflict between the democratic opposition and Milosevic’s regime into the conflict between the nationalist, anti-Hague forces, on the one hand, and pro-Hague-oriented groups and individuals, on the other. On one side, was the extreme nationalistic discourse, which recognized only victimhood of Serbs and considered war criminals national heroes. On the other side, was the extreme anti-nationalistic discourse, which addressed exclusively non-Serbs as victims and Serbs as war criminals. Nevertheless, although opposing, these approaches are rather similar in their essence: they are both characterized by denial, accusation, exclusion, one-sided dealing with the past and accepting the existence of only one truth. Both approaches are oriented toward retributive justice and punishment of perpetrators, while dealing with victims is primarily linked to establishing criminal responsibility of perpetrators and not to assistance and support to victims, which often results in maintaining and increasing victims’ identity and anger. This may, however, contribute to development of feelings of vengeance and hatred rather than to reconciliation. These two extreme discourses regarding the past have prevailed in the media, in civil society, and in politics,<sup>11</sup> and had significant negative influence on reconciliation in Serbia (Nikolić-Ristanović, 2015).

## **Intergroup Communication and Reconciliation: Experiences from the Former Yugoslavia**

---

As a response to these two extreme and exclusive approaches, the Victimology Society of Serbia initiated a model called the “third way.” In an attempt to find a new approach that would help stop or alleviate existing and future conflicts, the “third way” developed an inclusive, restorative discourse. Some other nongovernmental organizations have also adopted this approach, but in others the discourse continues to be very exclusive, not allowing space for different views. Therefore, it is not unexpected that there is tension as well between the prevailing exclusive discourse, on the one hand, and inclusive, restorative discourse and activities used by some organizations, on the other. Moreover, inclusive discourse is largely considered as an inappropriate, or “soft” approach (Nikolić-Ristanović & Čopić, 2013, 2016).

### **Examples of Intergroup Communication that Fosters Reconciliation**

Although they are not dominant, there are also examples of intergroup communication initiatives that foster reconciliation. These are activities that take care about optimal contact or constructive communication and inclusive understanding of truth to be introduced at meetings and other interactions involving members of different groups. These should be identified and explored as examples of good practice of establishing constructive communication and binding people from different ethnic groups and those affected by armed conflicts in different ways together.

In the former Yugoslavia, examples of intergroup communication that fosters reconciliation can be found mostly in activities of nongovernmental organizations. These are in particular interethnic group activities and activities that include interethnic and intra-ethnic dialogue, within one or several countries of the former Yugoslavia. These activities take the form of public panels, seminars, workshops, small group discussions, billboards, exhibitions, publications, plays, films, street performances, etc.

Analysis of these activities clearly shows the potential of inclusive or restorative approaches to open difficult topics while preserving the safety of citizens. Doing them in an exclusive way (suggesting nondisputable, objective truth, and using accusatory language or pressure to face the past, etc.) leads to negative reactions and conflicts with those who felt provoked (Petrović-Ziemer, 2013; Nikolić-Ristanović & Čopić, 2016).

## Intergroup Communication about the Truth on Past Atrocities

A good illustration for different effects of different approaches is the exhibition of war photographs of the American photographer Ron Haviv. The exhibition presented atrocities done in the former Yugoslavia, and was organized during 2002 in Serbia. After several unsuccessful attempts to organize it in an exclusive way that produced conflicts and violent incidents, the nongovernmental organization Vojvodjanka, within the project called VIVISECT, organized the same exhibition using an inclusive approach. Different interpretations and views were allowed to be expressed, and the ground was set for a nonviolent communication between people belonging to different groups and having different conflict experiences. The exhibition was organized in Novi Sad, the capital of Vojvodina, a multiethnic autonomous province of Serbia. Having in mind the violent incidents that followed the previous exhibitions of the work of Haviv, CSO Vojvodjanka devised a new concept of both the exhibition and a supporting program whose goals were to encourage the public discussion of the wars in the former Yugoslavia and to present the truth about the wars as a mosaic composed of different elements, which, only when put together, can offer a relatively complete picture of the tragedy that a part of Yugoslavia went through. The new concept also intended to show the necessity of knowing the facts about war in every society and to provide the chance for everyone to deliver an opinion with respect for other people's views of the events from the recent past. In order to avoid incidents that took place in other towns, it was decided that the photographs would be exhibited for eight days without the name of the artist. The intention was to enable visitors to write their commentaries or give their own titles to photographs on the basis of what they have seen. Every photo had blank sheets and pencils beside it. *The book of impressions* and a special space within the exhibition, a 10-meter-long wall, were designed to offer alternatives for visitors who could there display their own photos or documents related to the 1991–1999 conflict. Within the program of the exhibition in Novi Sad, two panel discussions and four documentary films screenings took place. Through this concept the organizers enabled visitors to be not just passive observers but active participants in the process of confrontation with the truth about the wars in the former Yugoslavia. The exhibition was organized in cooperation with the institutions of the provincial and city administration and in cooperation with the regional and city representatives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Visitors to the exhibition and the follow-up programs belonged to all age, social, national, and religious groups who live in this city.

There were those who visited the exhibition several times, as well as people who visited the exhibition every day on a regular basis. Because the organizers of the exhibition offered visitors an opportunity to bring photos and documents that refer to the war period in the former Yugoslavia, the exhibition gained new elements every day. The written messages that people left beside the photos of Ron Haviv especially attracted attention and were read as "a novel in sequels." A special form of communication was established during the 10 days of the exhibition that managed to channel a wide range of emotions and impressions (from extremist and aggressive attitudes to a reasonable and objective attitude) when it comes to the question of facing the truth and the consequences of wars in the territory of the former Yugoslavia. No violent incidents occurred. The exhibition was seen by 5,000 people, and the material that was collected during the exhibition was transformed into a short documentary entitled *VIVISECT*; the commentaries that the visitors left beside the photographs of Haviv were published in a book of documents (based on the description in Nikolić-Ristanović, 2006).

### Communication and Cooperation between War Veterans from Different Ethnic Groups

Another activity that may be an example of good practice of contact and intergroup communication that fosters reconciliation is done by the nongovernmental organization *Centre for Nonviolent Action* (CNA), which itself is the result of cooperation between activists from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia, and has its offices in Serbia and Bosnia. CNA initiated and organized war veterans' visits to atrocity sites in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as advocacy for their marking. This activity is closely linked with the training CNA organizes regularly, so that war veterans groups mostly consist of previous training participants.<sup>12</sup> War veterans from all armies that participated in the 1990s war in Bosnia and Herzegovina joined together to visit war crime sites and established good cooperation with local authorities representing all three ethnic groups. One of the joint visits of war veterans to sites of atrocities in Bosnia and Herzegovina was on November 27–29, 2010. CNA organized joint veteran visits to the towns of Derventa and Brod and nearby villages, where they had meetings with the local veteran organizations and within which they visited atrocity sites and monuments from the wars of the 1990s. The initiative for these visits was launched at the training for war veterans that took place during June and July 2010.

A group of 25 who took part in this visit consisted of veterans from Bosnia and Herzegovina (Tuzla, GornjiVakuf, Brcko, Odzaci, Prnjavor, and Zavidovici), Croatia (Zupanja, Vinkovci), and Serbia (Novi Sad, Belgrade, Vlasotince). These veterans were members of the following military formations (during the war): Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatian Defence Council, Croatian Army, Army of RepublikaSrpska, Republic of Serbian Krajina Army, and the Yugoslav Army. Thus, the participants were members of all armies involved in the wars of the 1990s in the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia.

Among the most important was the visit to Sijekovac as a place of important symbolic significance for interethnic reconciliation. Organizers considered the fact that Bosnian and Croatian veterans visited this place and paid respect to the victims very important, because for many people it is the symbol of Serb suffering in the war. An important moment during the course of this visit was when veterans were joined by an older woman who was a direct witness to the events and whose family was killed in Sijekovac. The veterans had the opportunity to hear her immediate testimony, which made a very emotional impression on them.

At the places visited, veterans paid respect to the victims with prayerful silence, and in Sijekovac and Cardak veterans from Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina laid the wreaths together with the hosts. The participants kept stressing that the visit to the memorial room in Brod was very emotional because in it they could see hundreds of photographs of people killed, a sight that is impossible not to cause nausea and disgust over the war tragedy.

The encounter with the local authorities was particularly significant. The local authorities supported this visit and had an open conversation with the war veterans. In addition, the representatives of the local authorities are representatives of all three constitutive peoples, which was important given that conversation was initiated about the return of Croats to Derventa (which was a predominantly Croat municipality prior to the war and now has only a small number of Croats) (based on description in Centre for Nonviolent Action, 2011, pp. 78–79).

## **Intergroup Communication and Reconciliation: Experiences from the Former Yugoslavia**

---

Meetings of war veterans from all three once-warring sides gave rise to the idea to document monuments erected in the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina following the war. One of the missions of this project, which works toward constructive dialogue by promoting a culture of nonviolence with a view to building lasting peace, is moving away from a focus on the enemy and honoring all victims irrespective of which side they were on. The result is the exhibition of photographs titled *War of Memories*, with the aim of creating space for common remembrance. The exhibition was held in Brčko (Bosnia and Herzegovina) at the beginning of 2017 and was accompanied by a monograph with the same title.<sup>13</sup>

The approach used by CNA and war veterans groups seems to be a good example of an approach that has a high potential for building trust and increasing feelings of safety among people from ethnic groups that were in war earlier.

### **Communication and Cooperation between Victims from Different Ethnic Groups**

Examples of successful individual contacts and communication between associations of family members of missing persons are also known. As an umbrella association for the families of missing persons in the area of the former Yugoslavia, International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) has established cooperation with an extensive regional network of more than hundreds of national associations of missing persons. ICMP also works with other war victims and survivors groups. ICMP launched a pilot initiative and organized the “Paths to Reconciliation” conference in 2003, which aimed to create space for discussion, truth seeking, justice, and reconciliation through a series of round tables. Moreover, as part of the project “Victims as Survivors: Dealing with the Past and Present,” family associations from all war-affected countries of the former Yugoslavia participated in the meetings to discuss very sensitive issues, such as atrocities and disappearance of their loved ones.

Topics such as identity, prejudice, conflict, communication, and dialogue are addressed with a high level of sensitivity through a series of workshops. First, groups of the same ethnicity were organized, and later ethnically mixed groups followed in order to help people understand that all have common goals and problems.<sup>14</sup> Workshops were also aimed at encouraging participants to exchange their experiences in searching for the truth and building trust (Nikolić-Ristanović, 2008).

In addition, project grants have been made to family associations, as well as training and technical assistance. One of the priorities has been to encourage networking, specifically to engage family associations in effective regional multinational mechanisms that address the specific rights and needs of family members with missing relatives. Since 2005, a 15-member Regional Co-Ordination Board, representing networks of family associations from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Croatia, and Serbia has existed.

### **Intergroup Dialogue about Ethnic Conflicts and Ways of Dealing with Them**

## Intergroup Communication and Reconciliation: Experiences from the Former Yugoslavia

---

Among particularly important activities from the point of view of intergroup communication are activities that include interethnic and intra-ethnic dialogue about ethnic conflicts. These activities mostly consist of attempts either to open difficult topics about the past or to work toward creating suitable models of discovering truth or repairing broken relationships and achieving trust and reconciliation within the community. Activities of this kind have been quite widespread, but they vary regarding the scope and structure of participants as well as the discourse and methodology used (Petrović-Ziemer, 2013; Nikolić-Ristanović & Čopić, 2013).

A considerable part of these activities are public events such as large conferences, public panels, and public victim hearings that include large number of participants, devoted to discussion about the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and the importance of cooperation with it as well as about other issues dealing with the past. Victims often take part in these activities, and they are put in front of large audiences to speak about their painful experiences. For example, consultation meetings—part of a very important initiative for the establishment of the regional commission for the identification and public disclosure of facts about the war crimes (RECOM)—and public hearings of victims organized within it in all countries of the former Yugoslavia affected by war have been criticized by participants as non-democratic, non-participatory, non-transparent, and not open to different views. Particularly critical were war veterans, who showed high levels of mistrust and fear of their statements being misused for initiating criminal charges against them. Many criticisms relate to the treatment of victims, cited as leading to their passivity, re-traumatization, and isolation (Petrovic-Ziemer, 2013).

On the other side, there are various small group meetings and discussions, with and without the presence of the public, that seem to be more suitable for opening up traumatic issues from the past.

Some of the dialogue activities include members of one group in terms of war experience, type of activity, or other feature, such as war veterans, members of families of missing persons, or representatives of civil society or state institutions, young people etc., who belong to one or different ethnic groups. These activities involve participants either from one or more war-affected countries from the former Yugoslavia.

Good examples of inclusive communication that foster reconciliation are found in dialogue activities with war veterans implemented by the Centre for Nonviolent Action (CNA) as part of their forums named Four Views. War veterans from four countries involved in war (Croatia, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Serbia, and Montenegro) took part in each forum. The forums were held in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the period 2002–2004.

Forums aimed to affirm the wish and recognized need of CNA to contribute to the opening of space in order to start conversations about the past and the events that followed. The title of the forums was “FOUR VIEWS—from the past: WHAT WAS I DOING IN WAR? Towards future: HOW TO ACHIEVE PERMANENT PEACE?” Four former war participants from the former Yugoslavia spoke at each of forums. The participants were not representatives who spoke in the name of their nations or states, but individuals with all the identities they carry and deem important (religious, national, political, or any other).

Thus, participants were former soldiers from different armies involved in war in the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s, who rarely had an opportunity to speak publicly about their war experiences, motivations, and views regarding the future of their states and societies, as well as

## **Intergroup Communication and Reconciliation: Experiences from the Former Yugoslavia**

---

about the obstacles in the way to permanent peace in the region. It is a very numerous group in society, which is often stereotypically seen as one that is expected to speak about the war, but not about peace. CNA's intention was precisely to step out of that stereotypical image and to create an activity to enable former warriors to recognize their own capacities for peace, to reconsider their personal responsibility, but also to call for a serious and comprehensive deliberation of societal and collective responsibility for the past and the future.

The goal of CNA was not to search for the culprits or crimes in this process. This is left to the courts. They did not want to present some "great truths," because they think that the truth is a very subjective category. CNA assumes that "sincere stories of these men are the truth for itself (it can be completely different from another man's story) and represents a piece of a great mosaic which could be finished only if we could all tell our 'truths,' views and experiences. A story imagined in this manner has the aim to create a small shift: in the understanding that these questions are intended only for a certain few intellectuals; in the understanding that every conversation on the subject of recent wars necessarily determines one side (one nation) as the exclusive culprit which implies that there is an exclusive victim; in the understanding that it is best to forget everything that has happened."<sup>15</sup>

In terms of inclusive intergroup communication of special importance are also small group discussions where people from various backgrounds and views, often including victims, join together to discuss difficult topics and speak about personal experiences in a space that they perceive as secure, and without being exposed to an outside public. Good examples of this kind can be found in activities of the Victimology Society of Serbia. As already mentioned, as a response to two extreme and exclusive approaches to past atrocities, the Victimology Society of Serbia initiated the approach called the "third way," which was further developed within the informal initiative Joint Action for Truth and Reconciliation (also known as ZAIP).

The activities included small group discussions, workshops, and seminars with various stakeholders, as well as a large distribution of leaflets with a questionnaire addressed to the general public and the release of a public call to citizens, who are asked to suggest ways of dealing with the past that will lead to resolution of existing conflicts and not provoke new ones. The call for proposals was open to every citizen of Serbia regardless of his or her ethnic, religious, political, or any other orientation.

The main characteristics of the "third way," as they were defined by members of ZAIP, include nonviolent, two-way communication about the past of people with different war experiences; mutual recognition, support, and non-accusation as well as recognition of the existence of various truths; inclusiveness in dealing with the past; empowerment and reintegration of all persons affected by the conflict; using a wide range of restorative methods for establishing truth and reconciliation; giving priority to small group discussions about the past and victimization; and a proactive approach in dealing with the past (Nikolić-Ristanović, 2015).

The major part of the Victimology Society project "From remembering the past towards a positive future/What type of truth and trust/reconciliation is the most suitable for Serbia?" was a series of small group discussions organized during 2003 and 2004 in 12 towns in Serbia. The total number of participants was 149. The participants were: members of NGOs and humanitarian organizations; representatives of the associations of prisoners of war, refugees, displaced people from Kosovo, and the associations of kidnapped and disappeared persons; the

## Intergroup Communication and Reconciliation: Experiences from the Former Yugoslavia

---

combatants; journalists; members of political parties; representatives of local authorities; individuals of different professional background; students; and unemployed individuals.

The panels usually started with introductory speeches of experts, with a showing of a VIVISECT film, and then the discussion among participants would take place. The discussion was moderated so as to enable the presentation of positive and negative personal experiences and reflections on the topic of truth, remembrance of the past, ability to establish trust, model of reconciliation, problems that go with the reconciliation, etc. The format of small group discussion provided a relaxed atmosphere, with emotions being put in the background. Participants were encouraged to listen to each other, bring out their personal experiences, and be constructive in discussions. Moderators pointed at similarities of experiences and the richness and importance of the ideas that were put forward and summarized at the end of every panel discussion (based on description in Nikolić-Ristanović, 2006).

During 2005, development of the association Joint Action for Truth and Reconciliation was initiated, as an original project inspired by the experiences worldwide. Members of Joint Action are individuals and organizations who accept and promote a “third way” in dealing with the past. Males and females of various ages, direct victims of conflicts, war veterans, NGOs activists, researchers, journalists, psychotherapists, and others communicate actively and equally, exchange experiences and information, as well as cooperate and implement joint activities. According to their socio-demographic characteristics, war experience, and regions where they come from, they tend to adequately represent the population of Serbia.

The initiative had the character of a participatory action research, and, besides the usual features of this kind of research, such as self-research, reflection on own experiences, experiential learning, and documenting personal and collective changes, it had an additional orientation: the commitment of the group as a whole to develop a new approach to dealing with past and present conflicts, with the idea that the impact of the action would exceed the interests of the group involved in the research itself. The main methodological approach was setting the laboratory or experiment conditions for optimal contact and communication between members of different groups, which would allow for testing of the “third way” approach in practice. This approach was intended to spread around Serbia through activities set up by the participants. Moreover, it was intended to apply it to other societies in the former Yugoslavia that needed to come to terms with cycles of violent conflicts (Nikolić-Ristanović, 2015).

The aim of workshops organized within seminars in three Serbian towns (in south, north, and central Serbia) was capacity building for dealing with truth and reconciliation issues as well as joint development of both the association and the idea of the “third way.” For this purpose, the best ways for communication and binding people in one heterogeneous group were tested. Using experiential learning methods, participants set out to find out whether approaches used can in reality bring change and become resources and not obstacles to reconciliation. Victims, as well as other participants, are supposed to take an active role, and the overall process is meant to be supportive and have an empowering effect on all those who need support and recovery from traumatic experiences (based on description in Nikolić-Ristanović & Srna, 2008; Nikolić-Ristanović, 2015).

The “third way” model of communication was tested in 2014 in three multi-ethnic communities in Serbia that were more directly affected by the wars in the former Yugoslavia. This was again through the action research conducted within the broader “Fostering Victim-Oriented Dialogue



## Intergroup Communication and Reconciliation: Experiences from the Former Yugoslavia

---

in the Multi-Ethnic Society” program, which was implemented by the Victimology Society of Serbia within the EU-funded FP7 research project ALTERNATIVE.<sup>16</sup>

The two-way communication was tested in the form of participatory seminars entitled “From the Conflict toward the Peaceful Life in the Community,” which presented a process of bringing together representatives of different groups into the democratic intercultural dialogue.<sup>17</sup> Participants were representatives of civil society organizations in general, and victims’ and war veterans’ organizations in particular, local governance, state agencies, and institutions at the local level (police, social welfare service, schools, pre-school institutions) and religious organizations. These were persons who have their own social networks and who could contribute toward dissemination of knowledge, ideas, and the new models of dealing with conflicts based on restorative justice and to (re)build the web of relationships in the wider society. In addition, participants were from different ethnic groups and of different ages and genders, which enabled introduction of different perspectives into discussion and work, and “re-categorization” when necessary.<sup>18</sup>

Similar to the process of developing the “third way” model of communication, the main methodological approach of the participatory seminars was setting the laboratory or experimental conditions for optimal contact and inclusive, two-way communication between seminar participants who were members of different groups. However, this time this was done in a more systematized way, and some new elements that were supposed to be beneficial for intergroup communication were added. This meant that most of the conditions for optimal contact were met, a communication framework was set as part of the ground rules, with elements of mindfulness included, and different relaxation and empowering techniques, including yoga breathing techniques and meditation, were used throughout seminars as the generator of inner peace and positive personal and intergroup change. Additionally, a restorative circle was tested.

The ground communication rules are conceptualized in the spirit of the “third way” and included listening and respecting each other, regardless of whether one agrees or not; mutual recognition and self-respect; allowing and accepting the existence of different understandings or experiences of the same events by different people; no accusation of others and self-blaming—empowering *I* talk instead of *YOU, THEY* talk; acceptance of responsibility for what one says; understanding ourselves and others through awareness about the connection between personal sense of grievance, exclusiveness and aggressiveness in communication; focus on the present moment and mindfulness;<sup>19</sup> full consciousness about oneself and others, about the place where one is and what is going on, about one’s own feelings and reasons for them as well as about reasons behind feelings and deeds of other people that often are not directly related to others; and proactive instead of reactive approach (proposing solutions instead of self-defense and attack of others). In this way the basis was established for testing the use of restorative dialogue and experiential learning in three groups of participants.

One of the main aims was to explore how seminar participants communicate or change their communication patterns about difficult topics, including their own conflicts and victimization and related needs, when conditions are controlled and they find themselves in a space where they feel safe and relaxed. Thus, through the seminars the idea was to demonstrate and give people in local communities a kind of tool, which could be used for dealing with or solving problems, tensions, and conflicts, as well as to prevent future conflicts and enhance both inter- and intra-ethnic relationships. In this way, the “third way” model of communication was re-examined and both theoretically and practically upgraded. Moreover, the model was presented

## Intergroup Communication and Reconciliation: Experiences from the Former Yugoslavia

---

and discussed on the regional level, with representatives from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Croatia present, who all showed strong interest in testing and using it in their own communities.

It was concluded that the upgraded “third way” model should rest upon the following element or /components: conditions for optimal contact, communication framework in the spirit of restorative justice, yoga and mindfulness, peacemaking/restorative circle model (a circle format), and a solution-focused approach. This may make this approach a unique and original model of conflict transformation in intercultural settings, not only in the region of the former Yugoslavia but also in a broader intercultural context (Vanfraechem & Aertsen, 2016).

### Future Directions

We can assume that existing knowledge suggests that optimal contact and two-way communication can significantly contribute toward improvement of intergroup relationships and reconciliation in post-conflict societies, as well as that experiences from the former Yugoslavia can be beneficial for that. In that regard, establishing the communication framework seems to be particularly beneficial, because providing people with it helps them to respect each other despite different opinions and experiences. This further contributes to making people closer to each other and preventing estranging, to easier opening by providing space to communicate about difficult issues in a more easy way as well as to get to know and understand each other better.

Several characteristics of intergroup communication that can contribute to reconciliation are: listening skills (mutual and active listening and checking understanding), mutual trust and respect, and tolerance and acceptance of different opinions and attitudes, as well as differences in general. In addition, the following also seem to be beneficial: non-accusatory or non-judgemental discourse, messages, or communication; inner peace and balance and application of calming techniques; using open-ended questions; importance of appropriate voice and body posture (nonverbal communication); positive attitudes; evidence-based discussion; empathy; apology; creativity in solving problems; and readiness for cooperation and mediation by trusted people.

Because the change of state policy toward dealing with conflicts is usually a long-term task, working on (re)building relationships, trust, and mutual understanding, and developing restorative approaches on the local community level (bottom-up approach) seem relevant, realistic, and effective. However, further research is needed in order to find the way to introduce two-way communication as a model on the macro level as well as how to disseminate it more effectively on the micro level, that is, as a communication pattern among ordinary citizens.

### Further Reading

Adam, H. (2009). Divided memories: How emerging democracies deal with the crimes of previous regimes. In S. Karstedt (Ed.), *Legal institutions and collective memories* (pp. 79–99). Oxford: Hart Publishing.

# Intergroup Communication and Reconciliation: Experiences from the Former Yugoslavia

---

- Austin, B., & Fischer, M. (Eds.). (2016). *Transforming war-related identities*. Berghof Handbook Dialogue Series 11. Berlin: Berghof Foundation.
- Bloomfield, D., Barnes, T., & Huyse, L. (2003). *Reconciliation after violent conflict: A handbook* (pp. 10–18). Stockholm: International IDEA.
- Cohen, S. (2001). *States of denial*. Cambridge, U.K.: Polity.
- Fischer, M., & Petrović-Ziemer, L. (Eds.). (2013). *Dealing with the past in the Western Balkans: Initiatives for peacebuilding and transitional justice in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia and Croatia*. Berghof Report 18. Berlin: Berghof Foundation.
- Fischer, M., & Simić, O. (Eds.). (2016). *Transitional justice and reconciliation—Lessons from the Balkans*. Abingdon, U.K.: Routledge.
- Forbes, H. D. (2004). Ethnic conflict and the contact hypothesis. In T. Y. Lee, C. McCauley, F. Moghaddam, & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The psychology of ethnic and cultural conflict* (pp. 69–88). Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Lederach, J. P. (2005). *The moral imagination: The art and soul of building peace*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Minow, M. (1998). *Between vengeance and forgiveness: Facing history after genocide and mass violence*. Boston: Beacon Press.

## References

- Aertsen, I., Arsovska, J., Rohne, H. C., Valiñas, M., & Vanspauwen, K. (Eds.). (2008). *Restoring justice after large-scale violent conflicts: Kosovo, DR Congo and the Israeli-Palestinian case*. Cullompton, U.K.: Willan.
- Allport, G. (1954). *The nature of prejudice*. Cambridge, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Amir, Y. (1998). Contact hypothesis in ethnic relations. In E. Weiner (Ed.), *The handbook of interethnic coexistence* (pp. 162–181). New York: Continuum.
- Bar-On, D. (2005). Empirical criteria for reconciliation in practice. *Intervention*, 3, 180–191.
- Berghof Foundation. (2012). *Berghof glossary on conflict transformation—20 notions for theory and practice*. Berlin: Berghof Foundation.
- Blagojevic, M. (2000). Prebrojavanje mrtvih tela: viktimizacija kao samoostvarujuće prorocanstvo. *Temida*, 2, 5–10.
- Blagojevic, M. (2005). War on Kosovo: A victory for the media? In F. Bieber, & Z. Daskalovski (Eds.), *Serbia after the Kosovo War: The defeat of nationalism and change of regime: Understanding the war in Kosovo* (pp. 163–180). London: Frank Cass.
- Butler, J. (2004) *Precarious life: The powers of mourning and violence*. London: Verso.
- Centre for Nonviolent Action. (2010). **Annual report 2010**. Belgrade, Serbia.

## Intergroup Communication and Reconciliation: Experiences from the Former Yugoslavia

---

Centre for Nonviolent Action. (2011). *Annual report 2011*. Belgrade, Serbia.

Chapman, T., Campbell, H., & Wilson, D. (2014). **Appropriate restorative justice interventions tailored to each site designed in the form of a practical manual**. Deliverable 7.5. of FP7 project ALTERNATIVE—Developing alternative understandings of security and justice through restorative justice approaches in intercultural settings within democratic societies.

Council of Europe. (2008). *Living together as equals in dignity*. White Paper. Strasbourg, France: Council of Europe.

Djokic, D. (2002). The Second World War II: Discourses of reconciliation in Serbia and Croatia in the late 1980s and early 1990s. *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, 4(2), 127-140.

Domonji, P. (Ed.). (2008). *Vojvodina's multiethnic identity: Challenges in 2007-08*. Helsinki Files 27. Belgrade, Serbia: Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia.

Foss, E., Hassan, S., Hydle, I., Seeberg, M. L., & Uhrig, B. (2012). **Report on conflicts in intercultural settings**. Deliverable 2.1 of FP7 project ALTERNATIVE—Developing alternative understandings of security and justice through restorative justice approaches in intercultural settings within democratic societies.

Franklin, C. (2001). Physiotherapy with torture survivors. *Physiotherapy*, 87(7), 374-377.

Gaertner, S. L., Mann, J. A., Murrell, A. J., & Dovidio, J. F. (1989). Reducing intergroup bias: The benefits of recategorization. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57, 239-249.

International Center for Transitional Justice. (2009). **Transitional justice in the Former Yugoslavia**. New York.

Janoff-Bulman, R., & Werther, A. (2008). The social psychology of respect: Implications for delegitimization and reconciliation. In A. Nadler, T. Malloy, & J. Fisher (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup reconciliation* (pp. 145-170). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Justad, L. O. (2006). **Post-conflict peacebuilding: Social reconstruction and reconciliation through dialogue**. (Master's thesis). Oslo University.

Kent, M., & Taylor, M. (2002). Toward a dialogic theory of public relations. *Public Relations Review*, 28, 21-37.

Lederach, J. P. (1997). *Building peace: Sustainable reconciliation in divided societies*. Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace.

Nikolić-Ristanović, V. (1998). War and crime in the former Yugoslavia. In V. Ruggiero, N. South, & I. Taylor (Eds.), *New European criminology* (pp. 462-480). London: Routledge.

Nikolic-Ristanovic, V. (2000). Zrtve ratova u bivsoj Jugoslaviji: obim, struktura i obrasci viktimizacije. *Temida*, 2, 11-21.

Nikolić-Ristanović, V. (2003). Possibilities for restorative justice in Serbia. In L. Woldgrave (Ed.), *Positioning restorative justice* (pp. 239-255). Cullompton, U.K.: Willan.

## Intergroup Communication and Reconciliation: Experiences from the Former Yugoslavia

---

- Nikolić-Ristanović, V. (2006). Truth and reconciliation in Serbia. In D. Sullivan & L. Tifft (Eds.), *Handbook of restorative justice* (pp. 369–387). London: Routledge.
- Nikolic-Ristanovic, V. (2008). Potential for the use of informal mechanisms and responses to the Kosovo conflict—Serbian perspective. In I. Aertsen, J. Arsovska, H. C. Rohne, M. Valiñas, & K. Vanspauwen (Eds.), *Restoring justice after large-scale violent conflicts: Kosovo, DR Congo and the Israeli-Palestinian case* (pp. 157–183). Cullompton, U.K.: Willan.
- Nikolić-Ristanović, V. (2014). Joga i žrtve. *Temida*, 1, 47–64.
- Nikolić-Ristanović, V. (2015). Communication about the past and reconciliation: Lessons from the Western Balkan. *Restorative Justice*, 3(2), 188–211.
- Nikolić-Ristanović, V., & Čopić, S., (2013). ***Dealing with interethnic conflicts in Serbia and the place of restorative justice and victims***. Belgrade, Serbia: Victimology Society of Serbia.
- Nikolić-Ristanović, V., & Čopić, S. (2016). Dealing with the past in Serbia: Achievements in the past 20 years. In M. Fischer & O. Simić (Eds.), *Transitional justice and reconciliation—Lessons from the Balkans* (pp. 141–168). Abingdon, U.K.: Routledge.
- Nikolić-Ristanović, V., & Srna, J. (Eds.). (2008). *Mogući put kapomirenju u Srbiji: Zajedničkaakcijazaistinu i pomirenje*. Belgrade, Serbia: The Victimology Society of Serbia and Prometej.
- Pavkovic, A. (1999). Kosovo: a Land of Conflicting Myths. In K. Drezov, B. Gokay, & D. Kostovicova (Eds.), *Kosovo- myths, conflict and war* (pp. 4–12). Keele: Keele European Research Centre.
- Pavkovic, A. (2000). A reconciliation model for the Former Yugoslavia. *Peace Review*, 1, 103–109.
- Petrovic-Ziemer, L. (2013). Analyses of interviews with civil society actors: Peace and human rights activists, journalists, war veterans' unions, and victims' organisations. In M. Fisher, & L. Petrovic-Ziemer (Eds.), *Dealing with the past on the Western Balkans: Initiatives for peace building and transitional justice in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia and Croatia* (pp. 46–70). Berghof Report 18. Berlin: Berghof Foundation.
- Petrovic-Ziemer, L. (2015, September 15). **Cultures of remembrance in Sarajevo, or the protracted search for multiperspectivity and integration**. Cultures of History Forum.
- Pettigrew, T. (1998). Intergroup contact theory. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 49, 65–88.
- Rakovic, S. (2005). We are not like them: Denial of the other in Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. In M. Pajnik & T. Kuzmanic (Eds.), *Nation-states and xenophobia: In the ruins of ex-Yugoslavia* (pp. 63–74). Ljubljana, Slovenia: Peace Institute.
- Rohne, H., Arsovska, J., & Aertsen, I. (2008). Challenging restorative justice: State based conflict, mass victimisation and the changing nature of warfare. In I. Aertsen, J. Arsovska, H. C. Rohne, M. Valinas, & K. Vanspauwen. (Eds.), *Restoring justice after large-scale violent conflicts: Kosovo, DR Congo and the Israeli-Palestinian case* (pp. 3–46). Cullompton, U.K.: Willan.
- Sidorkin, A. (1996). ***An ontological understanding of dialogue in education*** (Doctoral dissertation). University of Washington.

## Intergroup Communication and Reconciliation: Experiences from the Former Yugoslavia

- 
- Simić, O. (2016). Dealing with painful memories. In B. Austin & M. Fischer (Eds.), *Transforming war-related identities* (pp. 24–31). Berghof Handbook Dialogue Series 11. Berlin: Berghof Foundation.
- Srbova, K. (2015). *Yoga for peace*. (Master's thesis). Brussels School of International Studies of the Department of Politics and International Relations in the Faculty of Social Science.
- Subotić, J. (2016). Political memory as an obstacle to justice in Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. In M. Fischer & O. Simić (Eds.), *Transitional justice and reconciliation—Lessons from the Balkans* (pp. 121–138) Abingdon, U.K.: Routledge
- Sullivan, D. (2007). Nonviolence begins with speech: An Interview with Emely Gaarder on the practice of nonviolent communication. *Contemporary Justice Review*, 1, 131–142.
- Tschudi, F. (2008). Dealing with violent conflicts and mass victimization: A human dignity approach. In I. Aertsen, J. Arsovska, H. C. Rohne, M. Valiñas, & K. Vanspauwen (Eds.), *Restoring justice after large-scale violent conflicts: Kosovo, DR Congo and the Israeli-Palestinian case* (pp. 46–69). Cullompton, U.K.: Willan.
- Vanfraechem, I., & Aertsen, I (2016). *Justice and security through restorative justice approaches to conflicts in intercultural settings*.
- White, I. (2003). Victim-combatant dialogue in Northern Ireland. In D. Bloomfield, T. Barnes, & L. Huyse (Eds.), *Reconciliation after violent conflict: A handbook* (pp. 89–96). Stockholm: International IDEA.
- Zdravkovic, H. (2005). *Politika zrtve na Kosovu: Identitet zrtve kao primarni diskurzivni cilj Srba i Albanaca u upornom sukobu na Kosovu*. Belgrade, Serbia: Srpski genealoski centar.

### Notes:

(1.) Authoritarian communication is understood as a rigid sticking to one's own truth or understanding of the situation, not accepting differences and different understandings. It is the opposite of flexible, pluralistic communication. In order to emphasize this difference and its relevance for reconciliation, authoritarian communication is also called exclusive one-way communication, while two-way communication is also called inclusive or democratic communication.

(2.) The term *former Yugoslavia* refers to the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), which existed from 1943 until 1992. It comprised the socialist republics Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Macedonia, while Vojvodina and Kosovo were two autonomous provinces within Serbia. After the breakup of the SFRY in 1992, followed by armed conflicts, former socialist republics became separate states. Exceptions were Serbia (with both Vojvodina and Kosovo) and Montenegro, which established a federation called the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which was reconstituted into the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro in 2003. Finally, in 2006 both Serbia and Montenegro proclaimed their independence, and since that time the official name of Serbia has been the Republic of Serbia. Under Resolution 1244 of the United Nations (UN) Security Council, Kosovo was put under the protectorate of the UN in 1999. The UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) was

## Intergroup Communication and Reconciliation: Experiences from the Former Yugoslavia

---

officially mandated in Kosovo. In 2008 the Assembly of Kosovo unilaterally proclaimed the independence of Kosovo, which has been recognized by some 100 states, but is not recognized by the Serbian state.

(3.) Based on the description in Nikolić-Ristanović and Čopić (2013).

(4.) Officially, Serbs from Croatia and Serbs from Bosnia and Herzegovina were included in the conflicts in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Yugoslav national army (JNA) was involved in the armed conflict in Slovenia.

(5.) Religious objects were destroyed outside Kosovo as well. After the expulsion of Serbs in Kosovo in 2004 and the destruction of their homes and churches, there was retaliation in Serbia focused on the mosques in Belgrade and Nis.

(6.) President of Serbia (1989–1997) and Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1997–2000). Following a wave of popular unrest he lost power in October 2000. After considerable international political and economic pressure, the new government arrested Milosevic in 2001, and he was handed over to the International Tribunal for War Crimes in the former Yugoslavia in The Hague. On March 11, 2006, Milosevic was found dead in his cell at the United Nations detention center in The Hague.

(7.) Most of the languages used in different parts of the former Yugoslavia are similar and understandable to all. On the other hand, it is not always so easy to identify a person's ethnicity through language because the language spoken in some parts is connected more to the region than to ethnicity (e.g., the language spoken by both Serbs and Croats from Croatia, or Serbs, Bosniaks, and Croats from Bosnia.).

(8.) For more detailed analyses see Nikolić-Ristanović (2003, 2006).

(9.) Two opposed interethnic sides from World War II in Serbia (partisans and cetniks) never were reconciled. As well noticed by Djokić, although nationalist, Milosevic never called for national reconciliation so that this division became even more striking during his regime (Djokić, 2002).

(10.) L. Petrović-Ziemer, *Cultures of Remembrance in Sarajevo, or the Protracted Search for Multiperspectivity and Integration*, Cultures of History Forum, September 15, 2015.

(11.) This is basically the continuation of the opposition between the nationalistic discourse that prevailed earlier ("first" way) and the other one that has been developed as a reaction to it ("second" way).

(12.) Training topics include: "establishment of dialogue between former combatants from different warring sides; sensitization for different views and opinions about events from the wartime past; development of empathy; trust building; and building of a 'platform' for future joint activities" (Centre for Nonviolent Action, 2010, p. 12).

(13.) All photographs taken for the project can be viewed at [www.kulturasjecanja.org](http://www.kulturasjecanja.org).

(14.) See <https://www.insightonconflict.org/how-to-choose-a-local-partner/lidja-skaro-on-bosnia-herzegovina/>.

(15.) More information can be found online <https://nenasilje.org/en/2004/four-views/>.

## **Intergroup Communication and Reconciliation: Experiences from the Former Yugoslavia**

(16.) For more information as well as audio and video materials see ALTERNATIVE project <http://www.alternativeproject.eu/>.

(17.) According to the Council of Europe, “intercultural dialogue is understood as a process that comprises an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage, on the basis of mutual understanding and respect. It requires the freedom and ability to express oneself, as well as the willingness and capacity to listen to the views of others. [. . .] It fosters equality, human dignity and a sense of common purpose. It aims to develop a deeper understanding of diverse world views and practices, to increase co-operation and participation (or the freedom to make choices), to allow personal growth and transformation, and to promote tolerance and respect for the other” (Council of Europe, 2008, p. 17).

(18.) Re-categorization is useful for the perception of power balance, because it gives the participants a chance to perceive each other as sharing common goals, hopes, and fears (Justad, 2006). Two previously distinct groups may re-categorize themselves into one group with an inclusive common identity (Gaertner, Mann, Murrell, & Dovidio, 1989), such as “citizens who want to make a better future” (Justad, 2006, p. 41).

(19.) A mental state achieved by focusing one’s awareness on the present moment, while calmly acknowledging and accepting one’s feelings, thoughts and bodily sensations. It is used as part of meditation as well as a therapeutic technique.

**Vesna Nikolić-Ristanović**

Faculty of Special Education and Rehabilitation, University of Belgrade

