



Joys and Challenges: Peacebuilding in Southeast Europe

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Introduction

by Randy Puljek-Shank

Building peace is hard. This simple and perhaps obvious statement is reflected in this issue of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) *Peace Office Newsletter*. MCC’s partners across Southeast Europe have been working at building peace in the former Yugoslavia¹ over the 10–14 years since active fighting stopped.

- Building peace is hard amidst slow economic recovery, high unemployment, and continued divisions by nationalist ideologies.
- Building peace is hard because it is lonely work and it seems to be embraced and carried out by only a few people.
- Building peace is hard because it is often unclear how to go about changing groups, institutions, and societies even though there are ample stories of individual transformation. Indeed, one of the challenges that local organizations face is how to describe in plan documents (that MCC or other agencies may require) the ways that their work with a relatively small number of individuals contributes to wider peace in their societies.
- Building peace is hard because it often requires a very long-term commitment while seeing little visible or measurable results.

How does MCC pick projects in Southeast Europe to support? Many of the projects focus on individuals who might be characterized as mid-level leaders. They are selected despite their fairly modest influence on the wider society, for example clergy, social workers, or veterans. Projects often develop by beginning with a few known

individuals, and expand as the organization and its new ways of working become more familiar and trusted. Often the organizations with which MCC partners do not want to work with or do not have access to work with middle or upper-level leaders. Such leaders may be seen as being compromised or unable to bring significant change because of the institutions they are part of. MCC is currently encouraging its partners to explore the possible benefits of linking projects that work at the individual level with those involving “key people” and wider “sociopolitical levels.”

This *Peace Office Newsletter* offers perspectives from six individuals in Southeast Europe and Central Balkans who live peacebuilding on a day-to-day basis. Their reflections offer deep insights. The work that Ana Raffai and Amra Pandžo write about connects with believers where religious faith was seen to be supporting division and war. In contrast, these authors believe that religious faith can be a significant motivation for peace. Miloš Antić and Tamara Šmidling discuss their organizations’ work with war veterans. The veterans know first-hand about the reality of war, and to work with them to build peace brings both challenges and potential. Goran Božičević brings his experience of many years of concrete peace actions, but also a broad regional commitment to support peacebuilders. Finally, Nexhat Ismajli represents one of the few organizations that are working to bridge Serb and Albanian communities.

It is clear from these essays that MCC’s continuing commitment to work in Southeast Europe is an important source of support

for these partners. It is equally clear from an MCC perspective that it is important to be in Southeast Europe amidst ongoing conflict and human need. As we work together for peace with like-minded people and organizations we strive to be faithful to Christ's call to love others, to build interfaith bridges, to be peace-makers where ethnicity and religion divide.

Notes

1. The countries that make up the "former Yugoslavia" are Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia.

Anderson, Mary B., Lara Olson, Kristin Doughty. *Confronting War: Critical Lessons for Peace Practitioners*. (Reflecting on Peace Project). Available online at http://www.cdainc.com/cdawww/pdf/book/confrontingwar_Pdf1.pdf

Randy Puljek-Shank has been the Mennonite Central Committee co-representative for Southeast Europe since 2002 and lives in Sarajevo. He is a co-founder of the Post-Yugoslav Peace Academy and the Believers for Peace interfaith network, and a member of the Executive Committee of the NGO Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

“When I’m Somebody”—Why it is Worth Investing in Peace

by Ana Raffai

RAND’s trainers started to work with mixed inter-religious groups in 2001. That was the first time that they had encountered a group of Muslims. Today those trainers work primarily in inter-religious peace work. The trainings were organized in cooperation with a local organization in order to link the educated group to the organization and thereby strengthen it. RAND advocated nonviolent action as central to the training of peacebuilding trainers. RAND’s mission was to introduce nonviolence, and the inter-religious component and understanding would come with the participants.

And so it was. Thanks to the participants, discussions about handshakes between men and women, about listening to music or not, about missionaries, Muslim understandings of different synoptic reports of the same historical events, and literal understanding of the Quran by Christians all became part of the program. The trainers were in charge of opening the dialogue and leading participants toward a nonviolent way of communication. But the topics were surprising for the trainers and organizers too. Changes were reflected by the participants. Later we learned that one of them, an eager Muslim convert and a taxi driver, applied his learning by eagerly encouraging clients toward tolerance. Another participant is now very active in work with military veterans on dealing with the past. I changed as well, and began to love persons from an until-then-unknown world. I think that RAND’s significant contribution to inter-religious dialogue and peacebuilding is the introduction of the idea and practice of nonviolent communication and action when working with religious believers.

RAND is a non-governmental organization which promotes nonviolence as a position and way of working. Its headquarters is in Sesvete, in the Republic of Croatia, and it is active in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Macedonia. RAND is regionally known for its education of future peace activists. RAND sees itself as an organization that connects education with social change. Therefore, it is also engaged in social actions which urge changes in the society in a nonviolent manner (such as the Croatian initiative for the Referendum about Croatia’s accession to NATO, or the student movement against the commercialization of education). When working with people during trainings, we are privileged to witness the richness of their abilities. Trainings are educational programs lasting from four to six days. The strength of the training lies in the interactive way of learning. Exercises support the participant’s activities that are connected to their life experience.

Fifteen years of experience in conducting trainings has convinced me that participants do indeed change. Notable in these experiences is that “the finger pointing changes its direction.” While participants usually arrive at the training angry, particularly holding politicians responsible for all the harm they are suffering, they eventually recognize their own responsibility and “the finger points to themselves.” They then ask themselves “What is it that I can do.”

In the villages of East Slavonia (Croatia) people lived before the war in communities in which cooperation and separation coexisted: villagers agreed together and helped each other in the construction of pipelines,

The finger pointing changes its direction.

but they knew where “everyone goes to their side.” This is obvious in the case of the cemetery: each villager is buried in his/her Orthodox or Catholic grave. Even spouses are buried in different cemeteries.

Our religions, Christianity and Islam, are truly a part of social issues in the southeastern European region. These issues did not vanish after the armed conflicts and there is no solution in sight in the near future. Our religious communities lack the awareness of their own responsibility towards peace and nonviolence and that dealing with these issues they systematically can change public opinion. But as believers we are aware that “we are somebody,” we recognize our own responsibility as members of those communities. We do not have “the power over” cooperation, but we do have the “power of cooperation.” We are able to undertake something to introduce, use, and develop capacities of our religions for peace and reconciliation. We can search for contents, theological reasons, traditional affirmations for reconciliation between war-torn nations, for coexistence of communities of different religions, for resistance against hatred and hate speech in argumentation which is based on religion. It is very important to meet each other as individuals who praise God in different ways. We are trying to offer a chance to meet and get to know others despite religious differences.

We are working so that everybody can be somebody. Our experience is that it is necessary to constantly create opportunities for strengthening self-esteem and self-appreciation. A person who becomes aware that she/he is important and has the ability and power to act no longer has a reason to be destructive to her/himself or others. It is a skill to repeatedly resist the ritual of wailing and invest in the courage of speech and behavior which proves that each of us is somebody. Proclaiming that you are somebody right here and now, that we live, that we appreciate life right here and now, and that we are able to become more satisfied—that is peacebuilding.

Today RAND in cooperation with a number of organizations from the region is developing the network “believers for peace.” In our context this means motivating Christians of various confessions and Muslims for peace activism. Faith plays an important part for peace in the lives of believers and is also important for inter-religious reconciliation. We promote the values of peace and of a nonviolent culture.

Our organizational board of believers for peace provides an opportunity to see a miraculous fostering of our interconnec-

tions. We are a group of eleven persons from five different religious traditions: Baptists, Catholics, Mennonites, Muslims, and Orthodox Christians. The group formed through contacts throughout the region when we raised the idea with the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) office in Sarajevo. The organizers grew into a group that conceptually reflects inter-religious coexistence in our region. It became a treasury of knowledge and experience.

It seems to me that the relationships within the organizational team could be defined as miracles. Our relationships are spiritual and filled with mutual honesty and respect, and arise from the religious faiths that we each profess. We have created a safe space in which each can talk about him/herself without any pressure to represent her/his religious community. In this way, we all learn about each other, without having the feeling of being “converted.”

I recognize that it is our obligation as believers to witness to our communities about our experiences within our own communities and also to witness to our communities about the experiences of others with whom we now share the steps toward reconciliation. It is my obligation to tell what I saw, what enriches my life, and what kindness I experienced from “others” who members of “my” community feared to meet. To profess the belief in one good God overlaps with this testimony.

Perhaps the fact that “encounter” and “happiness” come from the same root reinforces the deep truth that participants in our trainings learn as they encounter others and themselves in transforming ways. In the words of a song, “If I were somebody,” by the Sarajevo group Indexi:

How good it would be . . .
If I were somebody.

In this interaction lies our hope that we can help Indexi’s lyrics become true as we recognize that we, each and all, *are* somebody.

Ana Raffai is a peace activist and Catholic theologian who lives in Sesvete, Croatia. She has been actively involved in the peacebuilding field in Southeast Europe. She works for RAND—Regional Address for Nonviolent Action—in education for nonviolent action, mentoring grassroots peace groups and networking believers who are active in peacebuilding. She works to stimulate and support ecumenical and inter-religious coexistence. She was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006 as part of a group of one thousand women.

A person who becomes aware that she/he is important no longer has a reason to be self-destructive.

It is my obligation to tell what kindness I experienced from others.

Time line of Former Yugoslavia (Also called Southeast Europe and Western Balkans).

1918—After World War I, the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes was formed. Croatia, Slovenia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina had been part of the fallen Austro-Hungarian empire; Serbia (including Macedonia) and Montenegro existed as an independent state. In 1929 the monarchy's name was changed to Yugoslavia

1945—After World War II, the monarchy became a communist republic under Prime Minister Tito called the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, composed of six republics (Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Slovenia, and Montenegro) and two provinces (Kosovo and Vojvodina).

1980—Tito's tight rein on Yugoslavia kept ethnic tensions in check until his death in 1980. Without his pan-Slavic influence, ethnic and nationalist differences began to flare.

1991—Slovenia and Croatia each declared independence. Slovenia was able to break away with only a brief period of fighting since 90 percent of its population was ethnic Slovenians; it declared independence in June 1991 and was recognized in 1992. In Croatia where 12 percent of the population was Serb, rump Yugoslavia fought hard against its secession for the next four years. As Croatia moved towards independence, its Serb population lost jobs and felt threatened. Serbs in the Krajina area took up arms with substantive support from Yugoslavia. Croatia declared its independence in October 1991 and was recognized by the European Union and UN in January 1992.

1992—Macedonia's independence was recognized in April 1993, but due to a name dispute with Greece, it was admitted to the UN under the provisional reference of the *Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia* (sometimes *FYROM*).

- Bosnia and Herzegovina declared independence in March 1992, and it was recognized in April 1992. Bosnia was the most ethnically

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On the path to peace

by Amra Pandžo

I spent four years in Sarajevo during the war, when some Bosnian Serbs decided to climb on the mountains around Sarajevo and shoot and bomb every day and night into our houses, streets and parks. During that time I gave much time to thinking that *peace* is the right of everyone. Everyone—black, white, small, old, woman, man, rich, poor—deserves peace.

During and after the war I was active in different NGOs trying to achieve inner peace—to be helpful and active in supporting reconstruction and reconciliation. I supported the idea of democracy and participation by individual citizens. So I favored the change from a “socialist” mindset held by many Bosnian citizens to one of citizenship based on taking responsibility. Under socialism, the state was responsible for all social initiatives. Bosnian citizens today often have difficulty accepting that they can take care of cleaning their yard, or take initiative concerning environmental issues in their town or the state system in their country. But I saw too much violence in the capitalism which was loudly arriving in my country—there was no workers’ union and a small elite was privatizing the huge socialist companies, sometimes buying them for “one dollar.” Ecology, equality, and taking care of other’s needs are not highly valued in post-war Bosnia. I was searching for something through which I could be social and active, but also spiritual and honest.

In the autumn of 2006 I met the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Co-Representatives for Southeast Europe at a regional peace-building conference in Croatia. There I was introduced to the idea of faith-based peacebuilding, the Mennonite interpretation of Christianity and the efforts towards peace by MCC and Mennonite churches. Immediately I felt that my religious identity—I am Muslim—is shaped in the same way. I felt that we share the values of inclusive and non-violent spirituality which seeks to create a world without discrimination and misuse of religion for wars and conflicts. At the end we are aware that only God has the full awareness, knowledge, and truth.

I learned more and became very enthusiastic about peace within Islam. Three Arabic letters, *s*, *l*, *m* make up the word Islam which basically means *peace*. As a verb, *Islam* means *peacebuilding*, the greeting *selam*

means *peace be with you*. I understand that my faith calls me to love and accept others. Many times in the Quran God speaks for both men and women to hear. For me it is easy to then conclude that we Muslims should stand up for equality—including gender equality. To be a Muslim means to be a peacebuilder—to bring peace instead of conflicts and war. Here are several verses from the Quran which inspire me:

“Those who believe (in the Qur’an), and those who follow the Jewish (scriptures), and the Christians and the Sabians,—any who believe in Allah and the Last Day, and work righteousness, shall have their reward with their Lord; on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.” (Quran, Al-Baqara, 62)

“Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error: whoever rejects evil and believes in Allah hath grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold, that never breaks. And Allah heareth and knoweth all things.” (Quran, Al-Baqara, 256)

“Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious.” (Quran, An-Nahl, 125)

After consultation with MCC, in 2007 I started a new Non-Government Organization (NGO), *Small Steps*, to promote the idea of peacebuilding within Islam. Since we founders mostly worked in education, we decided to work with Islamic religious teachers—to transmit the basics of non-violence and peacebuilding to them. It was wonderful to learn that there were many of the same ideas in the study of contemporary peacebuilding and in classic Islam.

Supported by MCC we published the first textbook for Islamic religious education that focuses on peacebuilding. We included situations when Muslims acted for peace in Bosnian society. In 1942 during the Second World War, the Bosnian Islamic Community published a document that said that the torturing of Jews, Serbs, and Roma people was against the basic principles of Islam. This happened even though the government in Bosnia was a Nazi puppet creation. By highlighting cases like this, we are trying to show how religion can be used to support peacebuilding activities.

In three years, 800 Islamic religious teachers passed through our basic peacebuilding educa-

tion workshops, and all of them have received the textbook. We are doing our best to sensitize teachers to transmit a message of love and tolerance towards non-Muslims. In this way, we directly influence the future of our country, Bosnia and Herzegovina. A peacebuilding interpretation of the sacred text of Islam at an early age will result in healthy individuals who understand religious faith as a bridge to others. An evaluation showed that teachers are using the new techniques. Some schools began to have the students sit in a circle while they learn. A number of teachers accepted the tenet from non-violent communication training that there are no right and wrong answers. This is very important, for Bosnian culture often treats people immediately as “stupid” and “wrong” if they have a different perception. Teachers also accepted that they as well as the children are often full of prejudice. They also started to invite non-Muslims as guests to their courses. Many religious teachers have continued their peacebuilding education. In the next three years we will work with the remaining religious teachers across the country.

We also organized interfaith seminars where Islamic religious teachers could be in dialogue with non-Muslims. The issue for us is how to relate to non-Muslims. It is not always an easy job. It is important for us to discover similarities between nonviolence as a philosophy and recommendations concerning nonviolence for Muslims from the Quran and the Prophet Muhammad. For example, a circle, as a way of sitting during the learning process is an important principle of non-violent communication. The Prophet Muhammad promoted sitting in a circle and it became Islamic tradition. It is a symbol of equality between people who share responsibility for community issues.

I believe that the spiritual peace teachings of the Quran offer everyone in my country a tool for reconciliation. Bosnian Muslims should use it to cure their traumas, to forgive, to reconcile. Bosnian Christians, Jews, and others can learn about Islam, so as not to be manipulated by ethno/nationalist leaders who are telling them that Muslims are enemies. That is how we use faith in the reconciliation process, to help restore confidence.

Unfortunately the stereotypical picture of Islam in the Western world is quite different than the reality that many Muslims live. The Muslims I live with cannot imagine having anything to do with terrorism. After the 1992–1996 war in Bosnia where many Muslims were victims, there were no examples of revenge. There have never been any suicide attacks or any terrorist attacks in my country. I strongly believe that the Bosnian interpretation of Islam is peaceful and tolerant. Everyone in my country should use it. That is why we are active internationally in promoting the idea of peacebuilding in Islam.

“O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other).” (Quran, Al-Hujurat, 13)

I believe that the faith-based peacebuilding model offers the possibility that believers from many religious traditions can retain their own identity and still live with others with respect, love and unity. That is the model that I am trying to live.

Amra Pandžo manages the NGO Association for Dialogue in Family and Society SMALL STEPS. Her training is in social work and religion, and she edited the first Textbook for Islamic Religious Teachers on Peacebuilding in Islam.

Balkan War Veterans As Peacebuilders

by Miloš Antić

In the summer of 1999 the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was in the last stages of falling apart in the midst of the fourth in a series of Yugoslav Wars (War in Slovenia 1991; War in Croatia 1991–1995; War in Bosnia and Herzegovina 1992–1995; Kosovo War 1998–1999). The former Republic is now six independent countries (seven including Kosovo).

During those wars, hundreds of thousands of people were killed and millions made home-

less. People were tired of all the horrors and accumulated trauma. Civilians were looking for psychological support, but hospitals, focused on providing medical care to soldiers, were available to civilians only in emergencies. Mental health was not a priority.

In that summer of 1999—the middle of the NATO bombing campaign—a group of psychiatrists and psychologists serving in a military hospital in Novo Sad were provid-

Time line of Former Yugoslavia (continued)

diverse of the Yugoslav republics, being 43 percent Muslim, 31 percent Serb, and 17 percent Croat. Ethnic tensions strained to the breaking point, and Bosnia erupted into war in 1992. By the time a tenuous peace was achieved in 1995, the country was partitioned into three areas. Each enclave was governed by one of the three ethnic groups and its population was roughly 90 percent from that group.

- Serbia and Montenegro formed the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, with Slobodan Milosevic as its leader. This new government was not recognized by the United States as the successor state to the former Yugoslavia.

1995—Bosnia, Serbia, and Croatia signed the Dayton Peace Accord to end the war in Bosnia.

1996—In the southern Yugoslavian province of Kosovo, the militant Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) attacked Serbian policeman and war started.

1999—After peace talks failed, NATO launched air strikes against Serbian targets.

2000—The war in Kosovo ended with the withdrawal of Serbian government representatives and the arrival of NATO troops and civil administration by the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK).

2003—A new state, called Serbia and Montenegro, replaced Yugoslavia.

2006—In May, Montenegro held a referendum on independence, which narrowly passed.

2008—Kosovo declared its independence in February; but the world community continued to be divided on the issue of its international recognition. At present, 66 UN member states have recognized an independent Kosovo. Most former Yugoslavian states—Croatia, Macedonia, and Montenegro—recognized it, although Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina did not.

See <http://www.infoplease.com/spot/yugotimeline1.html>

**All of them have
“wounded souls.”**

ing care to soldiers in this fourth war. Every day they witnessed overwhelming civilian needs, but hospital regulations prohibited them from acting on their own within the military hospital. In response, this group of therapists organized a volunteer psychological counseling center in the Red Cross premises in August. This is how the War Trauma Center (WTC) started—as a grassroots civic initiative to support people searching for tranquility and peace.

After the first three years of providing psychological support to all citizens of Novi Sad, the WTC focused primarily on support of war veterans and their families. The government was increasingly providing support to other social groups, but was avoiding war veterans. The veterans were reminders of the recent past, which is a period that the Serbian government would prefer to forget. Formal acknowledgment of the fact that the Republic of Serbia (the legal successor to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) was involved in wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina during the 1990s might open the door for possible international legal prosecutions. But more important, tens of thousands of citizen war veterans might claim their rights, which would require a lot of money to finance systems of social care in the country.

In 2002 WTC activists educated other therapists in the treatment of the consequences of war traumas and started counseling centers in South Serbia, a region with recent experiences from the 1999–2001 Kosovo war. Fifteen therapists provided support in ethnically-mixed communities with Albanian, Serbian and Roma populations. Although the narratives and interpretation of recent history were different, war veterans from all sides—former enemies—respected each other’s war experience and were asking for the chance to meet and talk to each other. In 2003, WTC began to provide psychological support and a “secure space for dialogue” between veterans from different ethnic groups. A group of Serbian and Albanian war veterans from Kosovo met jointly for ten days in Bulgaria during March 2004. While the veterans were meeting and discussing their war experiences and how they were coping with trauma in their everyday lives, violent unrest in Kosovo resulted in injuries to several hundred persons. That day, all the veterans who were participating in the seminar—from all sides of earlier wars—issued a joint media statement that condemned the violence.

Today the post-Yugoslav governments are trying to minimize the direct involvement of war veterans’ points of view in post-war

development. Although the more than 2 million direct participants in the wars in ex-Yugoslavia make up at least 10 percent of the population of the region, war veterans are sometimes perceived as an obstacle to the sought-after development, a “living burden” after the period of war. War veterans can be given a medal (or be forgotten), punished for crimes (or protected from prosecution), but whatever variation there may be in their treatment, no one is ready to listen to their stories.

All of them have “wounded souls.” While some are managing to cope with that wound better than others, all are, in fact, a resource for our societies rebuilding from war. Veterans can explain how easily one can enter the circle of war and violence, and how difficult is to live with the consequences. WTC believes that veterans could bring priceless experiences to our societies as they build a future understanding of peace and war. Those that best know the price of war should be included in post-war peacebuilding.

That is why WTC developed the philosophy of Constructive Utilization of Veterans Experience which includes “step by step” programs. The intent is to provide psycho-social support to war veterans and their families, to train and support war veterans to help other war veterans, to train and support war veterans to become active peacebuilders in dialogue with other societal groups.

Today, the War Trauma Center is an organization with four full time employees, 15 associates, and 60 to 70 constantly-engaged volunteers who work jointly with more than 500 direct beneficiaries in three mayor programs:

- **Psychological Counseling Center**—This is the biggest volunteer program, and is located in Novi Sad. At present, 24 volunteer-therapists are providing an average of 160 sessions monthly. Psychological counseling is primarily provided for war veterans and family members, but is also available for other citizens. The Counseling Center is also a practical learning center for masters-degree students from the Department of Psychology in the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad.
- **Support groups for people with experience of war**—Training and support is provided to peer groups of war veterans and their families. WTC trained 30 group leaders in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (Republika Srpska). At the moment WTC aids 20 support groups of which three are for women, as well as one workshop for children.

- **Constructive Utilization of Veterans experience**—This provides opportunity for war veterans to dialogue with other societal groups to prevent violence, to deconstruct prejudices and to deconstruct war as an “interesting experience” or “the only way to deal with conflict.” During the last two years we encouraged dialogues between veterans and 15-to-18 year olds in schools, civic organizations and social welfare centers for young people.

During its almost-eleven years of existence, WTC has been constantly changing. It started from a group of volunteer-therapists, and has developed into a peace-building organization. As an organization, the biggest challenge is to deal with the prejudices in civil society and to overcome the “wall of silence” built by governments on all levels. Support from a few organizations like Ohne Rustung Leben from Germany, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) from the United States and Canada and Kontakt der Kon-

tingenten from the Netherlands was crucial in the moments when we were feeling that there were no ways forward. Since 2006, the MCC office in Sarajevo has provided us with education for activists, a service worker and financial support. But it has also provided the assurance that somebody is willing to support us when we encounter a dilemma by showing the possibilities rather than merely providing prescriptions.

As its network of activists, partners, friends, and volunteers widens, WTC will continue to work to create bridges within the families of veterans, bridges between veterans from ex-enemy sides, bridges between war veterans and politicians War veterans can be peacebuilders if we give them a chance.

Miloš Antić has been active in different civil society organizations in Montenegro and Serbia since 1995. In 2007 he began as Executive Director of WTC, and is a consultant for organizational development in non-governmental organizations.

Building (Peace) Builders

by Tamara Šmidling

This article is a personal reflection—about the context and the challenges of peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina 15 years after the 1992–1995 war. I write after nine years of peace work experience in the former Yugoslavia on activities implemented by my organization, Center for Nonviolent Action (CNA), and other friends and colleagues from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Croatia.¹ Among the organizations and people with whom we have had longest-lasting and highest-quality cooperation is the Southeast Europe Office of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), whose support and friendship has inspired us to continue our work. We are connected with MCC by our mutual efforts to create a different and more just society where peace and nonviolence are woven into the fabric of society. During our cooperation and friendship of nearly eight years we have experienced many challenges and disappointments, but also the joys that peacebuilding work brings. We have continued to be supportive of each other so as to “live what we do.”

The lack of interest in peacebuilding is one of the main challenges for CNA. Even after the past twenty years of living through several wars and armed conflicts, we are still unable to say with certainty that a “peace-

building community” exists in my country and region. Indeed, peacebuilding is not widely recognized and highly valued as a profession, but is viewed as something dealt with by only a handful of people. In the few cases where activities are described explicitly as peace activities, the work on their implementation is considered more of a *profession* for a few persons than a *calling* to be responded to by large numbers of people. The main challenge for peacebuilders in our region is how to expand their circle and make *additional different people* feel free to join this abstract “peace community” and act as responsible and active citizens, conscious of their potential and worth.

The Center for Nonviolent Action started its work in 1997 by opening an office in Sarajevo, and then one in Belgrade in 2001. The organization intended to empower and motivate local people to work on the processes of peacebuilding and reconciliation in the war-torn region of the former Yugoslavia. Through our activities—trainings, documentary film production and promotion, publishing—we strive to promote peacebuilding as one of the top priorities in our societies. CNA currently employs nine persons of different national, religious, regional,

The lack of interest in peacebuilding is one of the main challenges.

Further Resources

BOOKS AND ARTICLES

General Overviews

Glenny, Misha. *The Balkans: Nationalism, War & the Great Powers, 1804–1999*. 2001.

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(continued on page 9)

and professional identities. Our activities are grouped around three focal points: peace education, dealing with the past, and peacebuilding promotion. We organize basic and advanced peace-building trainings for groups of approximately twenty participants from the region, and also trainings specially designed for ethnically-mixed groups of war veterans. We have made five documentary films, and are dedicated to work on the sensitive issue of the prejudice we harbor for one another as collective groups. The publications we have produced since 2000 vary from activity manuals for trainings in nonviolent conflict resolution to collections of interviews and oral histories of persons from the area.²

In our work we affirm the understanding that a lasting peace in our area is not possible until we work hard for it ourselves. This cannot be accomplished by a handful of non-governmental organizations. The process during which a society becomes conscious of its own peacebuilding capacities is never quick or easy. Work and leadership in this field is sometimes monopolized by those who regard themselves as the "most powerful, moral, and educated." We in CNA strive to expand the circle of peace builders, create a larger "peace community," and act as responsible and active citizens. We constantly seek to widen the spectrum of groups with whom we work—peace activists, human rights activists, employees in institutions, teachers in schools, members of political parties, persons from war victims' associations, and war veterans.

We have often encountered dilemmas. How should we communicate and live with that majority of people whose values seem to differ from our "peace" values? Do we have the right to determine who should be actively engaged in peacebuilding?

When we started work in 2002 to include war veterans, we wanted to motivate a "dialogue of the unlike-minded" so as to open peacebuilding space to a group perceived as those who tear down rather than build peace. We immediately opted to work with ethnically-mixed groups of veterans who fought on different sides in the wars in the former Yugoslavia. We organized public forums, devised special peacebuilding training for war veterans, and developed a program of joint visitations to war sites of civilian and soldier casualties. What was most surprising was how strongly this work was resisted by different civil groups. Many believed that to include war veterans would create space for "purging" biographies, that

attention was devoted to perpetrators of wrongdoings instead of victims, that "facts" as to who were victims and who the perpetrators would become less clear. We were constantly asked to explain our approach. Today, in 2010, the indispensability of peace work with veterans is mostly not in question.

However, in Bosnia and Herzegovina today the space for dialogue between ethnic groups and between political and religious leaders is narrowing. The entire society is torn between accepting democratic values and continuing to produce antagonized and victimized collective identities; at present the latter is winning.

The situation in the country is becoming more and more serious. The distrust between national groups is close to boiling point, state institutions are weak and non-functional, and ordinary people of any nationality find it difficult to discern any hopeful future prospects in this society. The strengthened nationalist narratives still dominate, and fears of a new armed conflict fuel manipulation of impoverished and traumatized people. At the same time, the peacebuilding community cannot seem to take a stronger and more visible step forward in society, so it often appears weak and vague.

It is hard for me to see "bright examples and hope and joys in this line of work," but I do believe there is hope; for otherwise I would not do what I do. I remind myself that I am privileged to be able to devote myself to a calling I love, to be able to earn a living from it, to have the chance to travel and meet people and talk with them, and that I am not alone in what I do. When I remember these privileges and realize that I have an opportunity to make my voice heard with a message of peace and reconciliation, I am grateful for these opportunities which many people here do not have.

We as peace activists must have a calling to immerse ourselves in our society in order to build up other peacebuilders from within it. When that happens it will be a joy worth writing about!

Tamara Šmidling was born in Belgrade (Serbia). Since 2001 she has lived in Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and worked as a member of the Center for Nonviolent Action team in the former Yugoslavia. She is particularly interested in dealing with the past, reconciliation and collective memory, and to unite theory and activism.

Notes

1. States formed by the break-up of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia
2. You can find more information on the activities of CNA at www.nenasilje.org

MIRamiDA—Regional Peacebuilding Exchange

by Goran Božičević

The word Miramida was invented in 1995 when I was working in Pakrac, a town about a two-hour drive from the capital, Zagreb, in western Croatia. MIRamiDA is a “made-up” word—MIR means peace, AMI is friend, and DA is yes. AMID also means to be between two separated “enemy” sides. Miramida is very similar to Piramida—Pyramid. My colleagues have a theory which explains that the symbolism of a pyramid is very important to peacebuilding, and John Paul Lederach describes a pyramid of peacebuilding actors. It is also true that some people hear Miramida as “Mira mi daj”—Give me peace. My inspiration for the name came from playing with words. And I would stress that “playing” is an important part of transformative peacebuilding—to be open to play, to feel joy, to enter into what is unknown, unpredictable and new.

“Creative, innovative, transformative, value-based peacebuilding” is a description coined by my friends Marina Škrabalo and Paul Stubbs to describe what we do. “We” are a growing number of Croatian (and post-Yugoslav) peace activists in a movement that started in the early 1990s. That was “cease-fire time” between heavy fighting in late 1991 and the last battles in 1995. One-third of the country was not under Croatian Government control but was the self-declared Republic of Serb Krajina aided by the Milosevic regime from Belgrade. In 1993 the first group of 14 international volunteers arrived in Pakrac after two days of training in Zagreb to start the largest project undertaken by the Antiwar Campaign Croatia. Pakrac was the second-most-destroyed town in Croatia. Three quarters of the city was destroyed and it was divided by a ceasefire line between “Croatian” and “Serb.”

Volunteer Project Pakrac was one of the first cooperative efforts between the big UN system and small local peace and human rights groups after UN General Secretary Boutros Boutros Ghali introduced the term “peacebuilding” in 1992. The Croatian Volunteer Project Pakrac worked on both sides of a divided town in cooperation with the Serbian peace group “MOST” from Belgrade.

The first five-day Miramida training was organized in October 1995 in Pakrac, and some 130 Miramida trainings have followed in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Macedonia. Miramida Centar was

founded in August 2000 and registered as a Non-Government Organization (NGO) two years later. Miramida Centar is primarily a residential center for people involved with or interested in peacebuilding. Several hundreds of people have been hosted there in the last ten years, mostly from post-Yugoslav countries. Since 2004 the program at the Centar has been operated in cooperation with Quaker Peace and Social Witness.

During 2004–2008, five week-long retreats for groups of over 20 regional peace activists were held. Those included “Theatre of the Oppressed” by Julian Boal and “Out of the Box—Reflection” seminars linking theory and practice. But these Retreats did not immediately catch the fancy of peace activists. Often the activists felt that the value of their work was indicated by the degree to which they over-worked themselves. But their pace of hard work also made them worn out and “burned out” and less effective. These retreats were fighting against those dangerous, almost suicidal, attitudes.

The Miramida Centar is also known for its work with war veterans. The first Miramidani (Miramidays—Peacebuilding days) began in 2008 and was intended primarily to bring persons who are promoting peacebuilding together to meet, to reflect and discuss, and to empower each other. The topic of that First Miramidani was “The role of war veterans in peacebuilding.” It was probably the first public meeting in Croatia which was attended by Serbian war veterans. This was quite a step. Croatia and Serbia had been at war for some 15 years, and many wounds are still not healed. Although normalization between the two countries is well advanced, prejudices are strong, memories of violence from 1990–1998 are still fresh, and the majority of the population of both countries is still hesitant to visit the other.

To cross barriers, overcome obstacles, and do what other people and groups cannot do is a challenge and a joy. But we are often reminded that these are hard things to do. *Collusion and Disobedience* is the title of a book we are publishing, and is the name of an approach that peacebuilders in Croatia and the region practice. This means *collusion* with our communities—which are often nationalistic, closed, conservative, xenophobic, homophobic, patriarchal—but *disobedience* to those values that we do not share. It

Further Resources (continued)

DISINTEGRATION AND WAR

20 Pieces of Encouragement for Awakening and Change. Peacebuilding in the Region of the Former Yugoslavia, http://www.nenasilje.org/publikacije/20poticaja/publ-20pieces_eng.html

Beara, Vladan and Predrag Miljanović. *Oh, where have you been, my blue-eyed son?* Authored by WTC founders, it describes the almost-identical explanations given by war veterans from different sides of their motives to go to war, the concept of righteousness, the sense of injustice in war, the fear and pain, the difficulty of facing reality and the sometimes unbearable life after war. Available for download at www.wartrauma.org.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Fantasy, documentary, 44 min, Aldin Arnautović, XY films, 2007. Watch the movie at: <http://www.xyfilms.net/content/view/13/42/lang,english/>

Justice Unseen, documentary, 58 min, Aldin Arnautović and Refik Hodžić, XY films, 2004. Watch the movie at: <http://www.xyfilms.net/content/view/19/42/lang,english/>

Intermittent Line, documentary, 39 min, Nenad Vukosavljević, CNA, 2009. Watch the movie at: http://www.nenasilje.org/film/isprekidana_crt_a_e.html

All Wish to Cast a Stone, 45 min, Nenad Vukosavljević, CNA, 2006. Watch the movie at: http://www.nenasilje.org/film/svi_bi_rado_e.html.

For more documentaries produced by Center for Nonviolent Action (CNA), please visit: <http://youtube.com/nenasilje>

The Death of Yugoslavia, documentary series, Norma Percy, BBC, 1995. This documentary can be found on www.youtube.com

In addition to the map on page 12, a map of Southeast Europe can be found at <http://www.southeast-europe.eu/map.html>

We peace activists and war veterans still have very different views on many things.

To stand amid peace activists and war veterans means not being fully accepted by any side.

is difficult. One of the biggest achievements of the Miramida Centar is to bring Croatian war veterans into peacebuilding. But it is not easy. We—activists and war veterans—agree on many things but we still have very different views on many things, such as the importance of nonviolence and armed struggle.

But to work closely with war veterans whose “veteran self-identity” is quite strong requires patience, understanding, listening, and calm nerves. I often ask myself how much patience and calm nerves I still possess. Many of us who have worked with peace organizations in the region have a kind of secondary trauma that lasts a long time. To stand amid peace activists and war veterans perhaps is a privileged position. But it also means not being fully accepted by any side. The same is true for war veterans who are involved in peacebuilding. They are sometimes seen as “traitors” and not everyone can cope with that pressure.

Working at the level of “transformation” and “values” is hard work, particularly when it often feels like there is a shortage of accessible knowledge, experience, psycho-social support and finances. My wife, Ana, and I often

ask ourselves whether we should do something else with less stress. I guess we could. But there are not many of us working here in the space—amid different social groups—attempting to encourage links between them. We want to witness more people coming into that space rather than leaving it.

Often new inspiration and energy come with friends and colleagues who visit us in Groznan, and remind us of the basic values that we care about and of the wider context. We draw support from our relationship with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and the network of MCC partners. This regional network provides important space for reflection, support and mutual empowerment. That network functions as a lighthouse and also a reminder—wars perhaps are over but peace is not yet alive here.

Goran Božičević has been a teacher and peace activist since 1993 in Antiwar Campaign Croatia, and is co-founder of Volunteer Project Pakrac and Centre for Peace Studies in Zagreb. He is editor of Collusion and Disobedience—Positive Practices of Peacebuilding in Croatia in 1990s and Later, April 2010.

Kosova/Kosovo¹: A Difficult Environment for Peacebuilding

by Nexhat Ismajli

Although all major armed conflicts in the former Yugoslavia ended 11 years ago, the consequences and causes of the conflicts are still present. Post-conflict societies in the Balkans have proven unable to deal with conflicts, but have entered into violent spirals that required repeated interventions with force by external actors.

The Kosova/Kosovo population is a mix of ethnic groups, and ethnic Albanians are the majority. During the Yugoslav era, Kosova/Kosovo enjoyed considerable autonomy. However, when Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic came to power in 1989 he brought Kosova/Kosovo under the government in Serbia’s capital, Belgrade. This led to the disintegration of government institutions in Kosova/Kosovo and caused massive restructuring of the economic sector. State-owned industries were reorganized and workers in them were required to sign loyalty pledges. Most Albanian workers did not sign these pro-Serbian pledges.² Albanian cultural autonomy was also reduced. Albanian newspaper, TV, and radio media were cut off

and Serbian replaced Albanian as the official language. Most professors and Albanian students were fired or expelled from the High Schools and University of Prishtina. After Serbian occupation troops moved into the region, unemployment and the subsequent poverty reached high levels. Young Albanian males fled the country in search of work.

Kosovo Albanians were angry and frustrated with the oppressive situation and some joined groups that used violent force as a means to rid the country of Serbian military and paramilitary forces. The creation of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) in 1997 was one example. Consequently, the Serbian forces implemented a policy to ethnically cleanse the land of the Albanian population by scaring them off to neighboring countries. Open conflict occurred in 1998 and 1999 between Serbian and Kosovar Albanian forces, and led to the deaths of over 12,000 people, including more than 9,000 Kosovar Albanians. More than a million people—mostly ethnic Albanians—fled Kosova/Kosovo.

A peace agreement between delegations from the ethnic-Albanian majority population and the Serbian government was sought in February 1999. When agreement was not reached, NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) forces began a bombing campaign against targets in Serbia. The Serbian government eventually acquiesced to NATO demands for a cease-fire plan, allowing Kosovars—both Albanian and Serb—to return to their land with the protection of NATO-Russian peacekeeping forces.³

But ethnic hatred and intolerance remained high. Violence, fear, security threats, and discrimination between the Albanian, Serb, Turk, Boshnjak, Roma and Croat communities persisted and prevented the emergence of an effective civil society. The lack of trust in ones' neighbors, in the political elite, and in the economic development in Kosova/Kosovo, greatly affected the growing population of youth who were born during the conflict and grew up in its aftermath.

The period immediately after the war in Kosova/Kosovo was marked by the arrival of numbers of international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Although the number of local civil society organizations grew to nearly 5,000, the vast majority of them depended on the short-term financial support of international donors and only a handful have survived long-term. The activities of the international organizations were not well coordinated and often resulted in project duplication. Relative to the funds received, the accomplishments from these projects are few in number.

Non-governmental organizations working in the field of peacebuilding are small in number and their voices often do not reach decision makers or the majority of the population. But peacebuilding and reconciliation activities are essential. Both the Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo Albanians enjoy freedom of movement within their majority areas, but limited freedom of movement elsewhere. Young people from both groups have very little opportunity for interaction since education and other services are divided along ethnic lines. For example, the Kosovar Serb youth only learn Serbian, Kosovar Albanian youth learn only Albanian, the Turks learn Turkish and Albanian, and the Roma learn Serbian.

Action for Non-violence and Peacebuilding (ANP)

Action for Non-violence and Peacebuilding (ANP) is a non-governmental, non-profit, multiethnic, peace organization that promotes the values of acceptance and respect

of diversity. It is based in Gjilan/Gnjilane⁴ municipality in the south-eastern region of Kosova/Kosovo which borders Serbia and Macedonia.⁵ Of 130,000 residents, approximately 90 percent are ethnically Kosovar Albanian, nine percent are Kosovar Serb, with several hundred Kosovar Turks and Roma. The interaction of these communities is limited, and young persons from the different ethnic communities have grown increasingly alienated from each other.

ANP seeks to reduce the tensions and to initiate peacebuilding and reconciliation activities by increasing the opportunities for interaction between the young people. ANP promotes creation of a model of active citizenship for peacebuilding, the initiation of inter-ethnic dialogue, and the engagement of all in the nonviolent transformation of conflicts. ANP conducts trainings on many topics in pursuit of these goals. ANP-Gjilan/Gnjilane also operates through a network of partners.

ANP's main focus is to build youth groups to act as generators for change and to serve as positive examples in their communities. ANP has developed a model of active citizenship to combat discrimination and to protect human rights. Interactive methods cultivate responsibility among youth and provide them with techniques for nonviolent communication and action. Public exhibits and performances are organized to publicize messages of peace, and youth groups have produced short movies to encourage a culture of nonviolence and tolerance.

The transformative power of these trainings is illustrated by a Serbian participant who was very radical and nationalistic. After the trainings he gradually transformed his thinking and became attuned to the peace-making processes. He voluntarily offered hospitality in his home and an interview with his family for a documentary film discussing inter-ethnic issues.

There was also an Albanian participant who followed up the friendships made with Serbian participants after the trainings. Together they organized a youth winter camp. They campaigned to raise awareness about taking care of the environment, about AIDS, violence in the schools, and human trafficking. In 2008 they established the first multi-ethnic team registered with the Football Federation of Kosova/Kosovo.

ANP contributes to the work of the Kosova/Kosovo Network "ProPeace" Platform. The Platform lobbies the central governmental institutions in order to develop democratic processes and peacebuilding across Kosova/Kosovo.

Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo Albanians enjoy freedom of movement within their areas, but young people from both groups have very little opportunity for interaction.

ANP's main focus is to build youth groups to act as generators for change and to serve as positive examples in their communities.

Long-standing partners have supported ANP to increase its capacities and to build stable partnerships. Those include the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Southeast Europe program office in Sarajevo and the Center for Non-violent Action (CAN) Belgrade/Sarajevo. With their assistance ANP has had exchanges with other organizations and is part of many regional networks. Peacebuilding is a difficult and challenging process, and it is a comfort to know that ANP is not alone in its pursuit.

Kosova/Kosovo is a young state and is undergoing political, economic, cultural and social transition. The worldwide recognition of it as an independent state is under review at the UN Security Council. The tension concerning its status contributes to daily tensions between the Kosovar Albanian and Kosovar Serb communities, and makes it nearly impossible to address the mythical and historical conflicts. Serbia's refusal to recognize Kosova/Kosovo as a sovereign state underlines the concerns and problems of Kosovar Serbs. The high unemployment rate in Kosova/Kosovo creates daily

social discontent and protests. Preservation of the recently-established fragile democracy requires urgent action. Undertaking human rights and peace-building education and trainings may be key to strengthening regional dialogues and relationships based on inclusive and participatory principles.

Nexhat Ismajli, a trainer and facilitator for non-violent transformation of conflicts, is one of the founders and managers of Action for Violence and Peacebuilding (ANP). He is also a founder of ProPeace Platform a network of 13 peace organizations from Kosova/Kosovo.

Notes

1. Kosova is the name by which Albanians refer to their country, and Kosovo is the internationally-accepted form.
2. Ideas paraphrased from: <http://www.nato.int/kosovo/history.htm>
3. Ideas paraphrased from: http://www.flashpoints.info/countries-conflicts/Kosovo-Serbia-web/Kosovo-Serbia_briefing.html
4. The Albanian and Serbian names, respectively.
5. Formally known as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia or FYROM

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