

Peace Education as an Initiator of Social Change

Ivana Franović

I would not by any means name the conditions in the region of the former Yugoslavia peace. True, the conditions of the overall global scene is far from a lasting peace, but it should by no means *pacify* us, but rather worry us, make us wonder, move us. I state the former because of my firm belief that peace does not denote the absence of war and direct violence, an opinion that all peace activists¹ I know share, as well as workers, promoters, theoreticians, researchers... Some theoreticians and researchers of peace call this absence itself a *negative peace*, which I would sooner name a *negative definition* of peace because it speaks of what peace is not, but doesn't provide information on what it is.

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

*

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

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

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

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

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

*

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

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

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

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

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

CNA peacebuilding training

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

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

Necessary segments of peace education

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

Sensitizing for violence

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

*

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

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

*

7 See footnote 6, page 68.

8 See footnotes 2 and 3, page 64.

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

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

Conflict as an opportunity for change

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

Responsibility – a model of active responsible citizens in democracy

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

*

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

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

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

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

Peace activism

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

*

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

Power of the people – power with and power for

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

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

Deconstruction of images of enemies

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

*

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

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

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

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

*

14 See documentation from one of the CNA trainings.

afflicted with this syndrome is a great step. Others are very well aware of the existence of such images, and do not deny them, and by creating an image of *multiculturalism* and *tolerance* and our openness for diversity¹⁵, we really create a space for confidence and build it. This is one of the most effective steps towards the deconstruction of those images. The next step is certainly mutual empowerment to deconstruct these images on a *daily basis*, to react when people close to us calls Albanians ‘Shiptars’, or Serbs ‘Shkiya’, to warn them that if something they have said/done offends or humiliates someone, to paint over graffiti on our or our neighbour’s building that contains hate speech, to write to the editorial staff of the paper that published an article full of hate speech and to complain, call for responsibility... and we can do many other things, just not close our eyes and not keep silent. It is of equal importance to no longer allow the projection of those images on ourselves and others.

Dealing with the past

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

*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Limitations

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

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

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

*

16 External evaluations of the CNA Programmes of Peace Education are available at www.nenasilje.org

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

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

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

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

'The future is not certain, but is possible'¹⁷

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

*

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

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

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

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

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

*

18 *Ibid.*