

Identifying factors promoting or obstructing healing and reconciliation: Observations from an exploratory research field in ex-Yugoslavia.

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Abstract

Neighbor-on-neighbor killing causes lasting harm to individuals, communities and societies. Even though the territory has been divided, a geographical proximity that has particular consequences remains along ethnic lines. In such context, when antagonist parties must live as proximate neighbors, post-conflict trauma must be addressed for reconciliation to occur. In ex-Yugoslavia, years of various peacebuilding measures and efforts have been giving priority to physical and tangible consequences while neglecting psychological sufferings. In this article, I argue that while instrumental reconciliation may have occurred to a certain level in former Yugoslavia – allowing cooperation for tourism, and the like – such reconciliation remains insufficient to sustain peace since it does not address post-conflict emotional reactions which, unaddressed will fester and grow – becoming potential tools of future political manipulation and/ or potentially sparking violence.

Introduction

Having to cope with the consequences of *neighbor-on-neighbor killing* is a situation in which the countries and peoples of ex-Yugoslavia have found themselves in since the conflicts of the 1990s. Despite years of various regional and internationally-sponsored peacebuilding measures and efforts, reconciliation remains as fragile as ever. In ex-Yugoslavia, reconciliation has so far been mostly instrumental and has not addressed socio-emotional needs. In this article, I argue that instrumental reconciliation is insufficient to sustain peace and, moreover, can foster emotions and cognitions that might exacerbate tensions and spark violent reactions. The article is based upon a thorough literature research and critical overview informed by preliminary field research in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia during the months of April, May, June and July 2011. This field research confirms much of the literature that emphasises post-conflict psychological conditions as a necessary basis upon which a sustainable peace can be built. In ex-Yugoslavia, (ex-)antagonist parties live in proximity, but peacebuilding practices and nationalistic party politics have greatly contributed to producing divisions where these (ex-)antagonist parties do not share the same society anymore. Instrumental reconciliation is insufficient and can even undermine the sustainability of the peace if a socio-emotional reconciliation is not promoted.

This article begins with a critical discussion of the reconciliation concept, noting the crucial distinction made between instrumental reconciliation and socio-emotional reconciliation. According to Nadler and Schnabel (2008), the appropriateness of instrumental reconciliation or socio-emotional reconciliation depends on the ultimate goal of reconciliation; whether the objective of reconciliation is a separate coexistence or an integration of the (former) antagonist parties in the

same society. However, the matter ought to be elaborated further in the context where antagonist parties shared the same society before the conflict and must live as proximate neighbors after *neighbor-on-neighbor killing*. Even though the territory has been divided, sometimes along ethnic lines, there remains a geographical proximity that has particular consequences. This article emphasizes the importance of post-conflict psychological reactions and their potential impact on the (re)construction of the relationships between (former) antagonist parties. I argue that reconciliation is intertwined with forms of psychological healing as some kind of emotional healing must occur before long term reconciliation becomes possible and sustainable peace built.

Instrumental reconciliation and socio-emotional reconciliation

“Relationships improved after the war but they stopped improving at some point. We share economic interests, we share entertainment interests but that’s pretty much it. We avoid each other as much as we can.” (Interview with survivor in Croatia, May 2011).

Reconciliation: Differentiating between instrumental and socio-emotional reconciliation

Reconciliation is conceived by scholars as a process that improves relations between antagonist groups via some kind of healing of post-conflict psychological reactions to violence (Nadler and Schnabel, 2008; Kriesberg, 2000; Lederach, 2000; Staub, 1998). The reconciliation process involves an essential psychological dimension that aims at “a changed psychological orientation toward the other” (Staub, 2006: 868). Without a change at the psychological level, the nature of relations between the antagonist parties will likely not change and the peace process will not progress (Bar-Siman-Tov, 2004). As I argued elsewhere, the (former) adversaries must conquer perceptions, interpretations and feelings of enmity which are based upon shocking and horrifying experience and / or upon demonizing representations of the “other” (Parent, 2011). To be more precise, each party must first acknowledge the other and the other’s sufferings before moving onto constructive attitudes and behaviors; thus, (re)building individual and collective relationships of trust. According to Kramer and Carnevale (2001), intergroup trust implies interdependence and comprises the belief that the “other” is open-minded, is willing to engage in honest and collaborative problem-solving and will cooperate.

Nadler and Schnabel (2008) distinguish between instrumental reconciliation and socio-emotional reconciliation. They define reconciliation as a process that seeks to change the relations between adversarial parties into positive ones: making possible a “co-existence”. The authors explain that the process lays the ground for a progressing development of positive perceptions of the “other” and trust, while decreasing negative perceptions and enmity. This “gradual learning” where adversarial parties increasingly accept and trust each other takes place in social contacts and in the repetition of cooperative efforts aiming instrumental goals which are important to both

parties. Socio-emotional reconciliation is understood as a process mending the lingering emotions and threats to identity created during the conflict. Nadler and Schnabel (2008) highlight two underlying processes where the perpetrator (who can also be an individual representing the group from which the harmful actions were perpetrated) acknowledges and apologizes for the harmful deeds committed. As for the goals of reconciliation *per se*, – “the creation of a conflict-free environment”- Nadler and Schnabel (2008: 44) make a distinction between “separation” and “integration” of the two (former) adversaries. Where the two (former) antagonist parties “coexist separately”, instrumental reconciliation can constitute a viable option. In the event the goal of reconciliation is the integration of the two parties “within the same society”, socio-emotional reconciliation represents a better option. Indeed, addressing the individual’, group’ and society’s representations of the traumatic war events, positive transformation of shared perceptions, interpretations and emotions linked to these and the following events and their meanings become possible.

Drawing on Nadler, Malloy and Fisher’s work (2008) and Nadler and Schnabel’s work (2008), socio-emotional reconciliation has various implications for the victim and the perpetrator. Coming to terms with sufferings inflicted by the perpetrator represents a critical one. Such reconciliation allows the victim’s pain to be acknowledged by the perpetrator and for the latter to apologize. Though, one should not expect the perpetrator to show sincere remorse or admit what he or she has done nor the victim to forgive and forget. Some mechanisms seem more in tune with socio-emotional reconciliation than others. There is much debate on whether trials or truth commissions facilitate acknowledgement and remorse (retributive justice versus restorative justice). A large body of literature supports the argument that restorative measures lay the ground for each side to tell his or her story and acknowledge each other’s narrative (without having to agree fully with it), the perpetrator to express remorse, accept responsibility and offer redress for the harm done. Both parties come to agree on the victim’s restoration. In a similar way, socio-emotional reconciliation lays the ground to reduce the distance between the victim and the perpetrator as it favors constructive cooperation and attenuates negative emotion (toward the self and the other), for instance. As mentioned by Jeong (2005: 156), “apology has symbolic meanings for not only victims but also perpetrators”. Socio-emotional reconciliation allows the victim’s sense of power and equity to be restored and the perpetrator’s sense of moral inferiority to ameliorate (Nadler and Schnabel, 2008). In the context of intergroup relations, feelings of collective victimization or collective guilt affect the group members’ cognitions and behaviors (Nadler and Leviathan, 2004). Nonetheless, as noted by Jeong (2005: 165):

“Legal punishment of rights violators represents a powerful means of affirming the dignity of victims... Restoring justice by punishing perpetrators is often vital for enabling victims of human rights abuses to attain closure and restore healthy relations with others and themselves. One of the difficult questions in defining legal justice is whom it should be applied to... It may not be realistic or feasible to uncover every detail and prosecute all of the soldiers and civilians connected to the violence.”

Public apologies (notably from top leaders) and memorials represent other mechanisms of acknowledgement, but as mentioned by a few interviewees, they have been much criticized in ex-Yugoslavia essentially because of the “moral equivalence of the victims”. The literature regarding healing and the contact hypothesis not only contributes to our understanding of the circumstances in which such transformations can occur but it also clarifies how instrumental reconciliation is not sufficient after *neighbor-to-neighbor killing* for sustainable and long term peace.

Healing of post-conflict reactions to improve intergroup relations...

For Hamber (2009: 20), it “is not only the traumatic event that requires attention. It is essentially the way in which the individual (or community) interprets the event that is important when considering a strategy for healing”. For Herman, the survivor’s interpretations of traumatic events and their meanings are essential for a reconnection with the “other” to be possible (for more details on the three stages of the healing process which is representative of the larger literature on healing, see Judith Herman, 1997). Herman’s second stage of healing corresponds to telling the traumatic memory until it is integrated into one’s daily life. A better understanding of events—or a full reconstruction of events—implies a number of interpretations linking the individual experience to the larger context. This also excludes, notably, the perception of superiority of in-group members toward the out-group members where the “good-ones” are considered as exceptions (ethnocentrism). Otherwise, the polarisation between “us” and “them” obstructs or impedes the transformation of the representations associated to these events - an important opportunity possible in remembering, mourning, and memory. The reconstruction of events allows an understanding that brings forward or underlines factors of contingency and ambiguity - insinuating possibilities of transformation and peace – and discards determinate factors such as the nature of the “enemy” that imply the impossibility of reconciliation and peace.

Hewstone, Tausch, Voci, Kenworthy, Hugues and Cairns (2008) contend that where conflict has occurred, more superficial contacts are found. They specify that simple coexistence – sharing the same environment or neighborhood – does not build meaningful contact across ethnic lines. Stephan and Stephan (2001) argue that the experience of shared humanity, the pursuit of common interests or goals and the development of close relationships with individual out-group members improve intergroup relationships. Other authors such as Vonofakou, Hewstone, Voci, Paolini, Turner, Tausch, Tam, Harwood, Cairns (2008) and Levin, van Laar and Sidanius (2003) have also researched the contribution of cross-group friendships on improvement of intergroup relations. Turner, Hewstone and Voci (2007) found that cross-group friendships reduce negative effects (such as intergroup anxiety) and promote positive effects such as self-disclosure and empathy. Pettigrew (1998) suggested the following condition before a “friendship potential” can occur: a contact situation which offers opportunities for individuals to develop friendship. The idea of aiming for a “friendship” type of contact to improve intergroup relations is not new. For instance, Cook (1962: 76) also pointed out the importance of favoring intimate

contact that he referred to as “acquaintance potential”. He argued that a condition of friendship potential implies repeated close contacts in different social contexts that would increasingly build friendships through a number of positive processes such as self-disclosure; requiring more than a contact aimed at an instrumental goal.

Pettigrew (1997) observed that personalized contact with individual members of religious, cultural or national out-groups generalizes to attitudes and feelings toward the specific ethnic group as a whole. An increased positive affect toward other ethnic and national out-groups was also found even in the absence of direct contact experience (see also Bar-Tal and Sharvit, 2008 and Brewer and Pierce, 2005). As explained by Roccas and Brewer (2002) and Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe and Ropp (1997), each individual can be members of a number of groups (ethnic, profession, and so forth): one can be an out-group member on one dimension and can also be a member of another one’s in-group on another dimension (for further details, see Roccas and Brewer, 2002). Crisp and Hewstone (2006) indicate that “cross-categorization” – when individuals are part of more than one in-group across different spheres of social life – enhances social stability and tolerance; thus, leading to more positive intergroup relations. Here, without knowing personally these individual members, sharing in-group memberships with some out-group members can allow generalization of a positive affect to whole out-groups which are linked to one’s in-group members (Brewer and Pierce, 2005; Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe and Ropp, 1997). In the same vein, Pettigrew (1997) found that out-group friendship predicted an enhancement in the support of pro-out-group policies (see also Bar-Tal and Sharvit, 2008). Hewstone, Tausch, Voci, Kenworthy, Hugues and Cairns (2008) note that meaningful cross-group interaction / cross-ethnic neighborhood contact engender a number of benefits and the reduction of the possibility of *neighboring killing* is one of them.

In short, concurrent with the work of Noor, Brown and Prentice (2008: 99), reconciliation is a process which “opens up a set of opportunities” to 1) address essential issues pertaining to victimization / post conflict consequences (perceived and factual); and 2) explore different options pertaining to how relationship(s) can be (re)constructed. Such an opportunity can only take place through a transformative understanding of the events and their consequences and an alleviation of negative trauma-related emotions that both lay the ground for, among other things, increasingly less threatening perceptions of the other and positive behaviors toward one another.

In the next section, I argue that the focus on instrumental reconciliation notably in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in Croatia, did and still do address lingering post-conflict psychological consequences constitute potential sources of future violence.

Factors impeding healing and reconciliation in ex-Yugoslavia

“The Muslim-Croat war for Mostar erupted one night in the early summer of 1993, climaxing months of rapidly escalating tensions. (...) That night, according to his account, Croat militiamen holed up in the gymnasium building just across the Boulevard from his position brought a 17 year-old Bosniac schoolgirl abducted from West Mostar to the school. They then apparently gang-raped her before throwing her

out of a top-floor window. Several years later the former Bosniac fighter recalled to me his most vivid memory of that night: the absolute stillness and silence for a few minutes after the girl's screaming ended. Then heavy firing broke out from both sides of the Boulevard" (Bose, 2002: 103-104).

*Lingering psychological consequences at individual and collective levels:
perpetuating trauma*

Armed conflicts and wars cause lasting harm to individuals, communities and societies. A ripple effect on the functioning of each individual, community and society is then created and leads to further stressors which interact among themselves at multiple levels (psychological, physical, economical, social). Ways of life and the establishment of social relations are destroyed by extreme traumatisation (Summerfield, 1996). Priority tends to be given to physical and tangible consequences while psychological reactions and needs are the least addressed (Olweean, 2003) or the most neglected (Mollica, Cui, McInnes and Massagli, 2002). Although, as Olweean (2003: 271) notes: "psychological and emotional injuries may be the most enduring effects of war". Charbonneau and Parent (2011: 12) noted that "the violence of conflict has profound and lasting emotional and psychological effects of trauma that are intertwined with practical consequences of social disruption, but such links seems often to be forgotten, taken for granted, and/or assumed to be solved through internationally sponsored peace processes, development initiatives, and mechanisms of political reconciliation". Moreover, Volkan (2008: 95) and other authors maintain that when "the impact of such trauma is denied or repressed, it will still manifest itself in various ways in new generations" (see also Staub, 2011; Green, 2009; Hamber, 2009; Staub, Pearlman and Bilali, 2008; Minow, 1998).

A frequent explanation of the longevity of psychological sufferings is that armed conflicts and wars involve intentional human violence: differentiating them from natural disasters and man-made accidents, and underlying the specificity of post-conflict trauma (Volkan, 2008, 2006, 1999). More specifically, individuals and societies traumatized by armed conflict and war must cope with "enemies" who purposely have inflicted suffering, misery and torment on other human beings versus accepting the event as "human negligence", "God's will" or "fate" (Volkan, 1999). According to Volkan (2006: 45), "a mental representation of it, common to all members, begins to take shape. This mental representation is the consolidated collection of the shared feelings, perceptions, fantasies and interpretations of the events, as well as the images of relevant characters, such as a fallen leader". Volkan (2006; 1999) explains that traumatized individuals and societies experience psychosocial changes going through, for instance, victimization, rage, a loss of trust and so forth. These responses then take a life of their own and re-emerge in societal, cultural and political processes. As specified by Volkan (2006), large groups of people experience and share responses to trauma that reflect aspects of individual responses (such as helplessness, distrust and so forth); generating a particular group identity process that constitutes a defensive identification against the ones who inflicted pain. This identification reinforces a "we-ness" or "togetherness" (Staub, 2011; Volkan,

2006). Then, groups and societies rally around the memories of these events – the “chosen traumas” – which become key components of ethnic groups’ identity or societies’ identity (Volkan, 2006; see also Pynoos, Steinberg, Dyb, Goenjian, Chen and Bryner, 2004). A number of authors have indicated that trauma generates a breakdown of the connection and trust, a collective erosion of social ties and social polarization between individuals, communities and groups (Staub, 2006; Hamber, 2006; Beneduce, Jourdan, Raeymaekers and Vlassenroot, 2006; Martín-Baró, 1996).

There is much evidence that shared narratives and memories of shared traumas significantly influence the understanding (notably the perceptions and interpretations) of current events and information (Bar-Tal and Sharvit, 2008; Bar-Tal, 2007; Staub and Bar-Tal, 2003; Volkan, 1997). Sveass and Castillo (2000) indicate that the perception of events and the meanings (personal and cultural) given to the traumatic events are closely related to their after effects and to coping. Staub (2011: 277) maintains that the focus on the traumatic event is the result of “carrying unhealed wounds, a society interprets new events from the perspective of the difficult past, thus maintaining vulnerability, the experience of danger, the need to defend oneself, or the desire for revenge”.

Ex-Yugoslavia

Common salient factors – obstructing or impeding healing and reconciliation – were drawn from interviews conducted within the context of our preliminary field research in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia during the months of April, May, June and July 2011. The respondents were between 18 - 45 years old (approx.) and were all able to communicate in English as the researcher was unable to converse in the local language at that time. Snowball sampling was used for recruitment. A semi-directive to non-directive structure and an open-ended active listening approach was used in order to allow open reflection and dialogue regarding one’s post-conflict experience. Sometimes, generous translators assisted the interviewees who had more difficulties expressing their thoughts in English during the interview. The older generation suffered the most from severe trauma but did not seem to be less supportive toward strategies promoting reconciliation than the younger generation. Healing seemed to be a daily struggle and an ongoing process for all interviewees. A general lack of consensus was found regarding what reconciliation means and entails.

The factors identified are not only obstructive to the healing and the reconciliation processes, they are also potentially conducive to violence ignition. Two lingering post-conflict psychological consequences were highlighted from the interviews: distrust and fear. It is important to note that these two are not exclusive and other remaining post-conflict consequences could be brought up as our research progresses. Distrust increases the challenge of the reconciliation process because the socio-emotional reconciliation process cannot proceed without a basic level of trust that can be fostered by instrumental reconciliation (see Nadler and Liviatan, 2004). Fear – focusing and enhancing negative cognitions and emotions – is not only a lingering post-conflict psychological reaction, it has become a potential significant fuel of future violence. An important contextual factor mentioned by our interviewees

emphasises a dominant nationalistic power (for instance, on resource attainment and on the perspective of the “other”) that appears to significantly contribute to the lack of opportunity for positive intergroup contacts to develop; thus, reinforcing and consolidating ethnic identities instead of dissipating them. Worse, the influence of this factor seems to be amplified by the proximity of the implicated parties.

As I argued elsewhere, proximity – an opportunity of contact with the other – can also breed opposition, enmity and aggression (Parent, 2011). Indeed, as neglect of healing undermines if not hinders reconciliation, healing of post-conflict cognitive and affective processes becomes a key component to consider in the reconciliation process (see discussion in Parent, 2011). Hewstone, Tausch, Voci, Kenworthy, Hughes and Cairns (2008) point out that neighboring groups are often “groups in conflict”. Indeed, groups in proximity can threaten, among other things, one’s identity, one’s local power, one’s inferiority in terms of number of members within one group (compared to another) and in terms of the groups existence. More precisely, Glick (2008) notes that neighboring groups can constitute threatening competitors for scarce resources (e.g. land) or can become targets of “convenient confiscation” for their possessions and their wealth. Hewstone, Tausch, Voci, Kenworthy, Hughes and Cairns (2008) indicate that even in seemingly clear ethnic clashes, competition for resources and power could be as influential as ethnic differences (as examples, the authors refer to the cases of Rwanda and Burundi). Biro, Ajdukovic, Corkalo, Djipa, Milin, and Weinstein (2004) report that the manipulation of the precarious economic situation of ex-Yougoslavia by the politicians was an important factor in the ignition of the conflicts in the early 1990s.

Malloy (2008) puts forward a model which facilitates our understanding between affect, cognition and behavior; known as the Intergroup Relations Model (IRM). Within this model, affect constitutes an essential variable between intergroup cognition and behavior. More precisely, in the “cognition-affect-behavior mediational model”, the closest “determinate” of intergroup behavior is affect (such as fear) which, in turn, is determined by cognition (ethnocentrism and stereotypes) (Malloy, 2008: 350). The IRM model takes into account that relations between groups are competitive. As mentioned by Malloy (2008), the Intergroup Relations Model: 1) brings forward the primary influence of cognitions on emotions which, in turn, affect behavior; 2) brings to light the regulatory role of the perceived equality / inequality of material resource attainment (such as food, employment, medicine) and social resources (such as positive social identity and collective respect) on IRM processes between cognition, emotion and behavior. The author specifies that the members of each group respond to one another i.e. their relations are reciprocal. Malloy (2008) explains that when members perceive an unequal opportunity for resource attainment (whether it is objective or not) - compared to other groups and in a context where each group has given equivalent efforts, negative intergroup relations is likely to result from negative cognitive and affective reciprocity that, in turn, lead to adversarial behavior. Worse, as noted by Bar-Tal (2003), members of each group can increasingly come to negatively perceive each other as competition for scarce and valued resources intensifies. Nadler and Saguy (2003) made a similar observation. Bar-Tal (2003) adds that, among other results, each group could come to see itself as morally superior, label the “other” as an enemy and, under certain conditions, even “dehumanize” the

other.

In brief, lingering post-conflict psychological consequences in a context where antagonist parties live in proximity facilitates – notably - perceptions of negative or threatening stimulus, cognitive processes (such as negative expectations from intergroup interactions) and foster and deepen negative emotions (such as anger) which affect post-conflict intergroup interactions. Furthermore, a post-conflict context where insecurity and hardship reign impacts and worsens one's perceptions, thoughts and emotions, and the consequent behaviors (according to a number of authors, the psychological conditions are part of the transitional context, along with other conditions - such as physical and political conditions – which affect citizens and society in its entirety. For instance, see also Bar-Tal and Sharvit (2008)).

Distrust

Trauma generates a breakdown of trust and social ties, and social polarization between individuals, communities and groups as those belonging to out-groups become the negative “other”. Schwartz (1996) and Agger (2001) contend that the loss of trust in humankind following the betrayal of one's neighbour or one's family member (member of the “other” group) constitutes the most traumatic and pervasive experience for war survivors to cope with. According to Nadler and Liviantan (2004), a successful socio-emotional reconciliation process is possible only if there is trust between the antagonistic groups; suggesting that instrumental reconciliation can lay the ground to socio-emotional reconciliation, the former fostering a basic level of trust. Drawing from our preliminary findings, a basic trust cultivated by instrumental reconciliation and necessary for socio-emotional reconciliation to ensue does not seem to have been reached nor addressed in ex-Yugoslavia:

“There is no genuine communication with the “other”. We think: *Oh! He or she is pretending because he or she has to!* That there is no genuine intention... Each one is there for its own interests, its own job, its own money.” (Interview, Victim of Sarajevo's siege, June 2011).

Moreover, this persistent betrayal constitutes a powerful tool for nationalistic appeals to convince their political supporters to trust only *their own* as the answer to a safer and more predictable future.

“You cannot trust the “other”. You never know what the “other” will take... you see the “other” establish a Church or a religious establishment here and there... and get a hold of the territory around it.” (Interview, Victim of Sarajevo's siege, June 2011).

Fear

Negative intergroup relations are often dominated by perceptions of the other

group as threatening. These threats can be tangible and linked to conflicting interests or they could be intangible or symbolic and linked to differences of values or beliefs. A number of authors such as Stephan, Renfro and Davis (2008), Jarymowicz and Bar-Tal (2006), Gray (1987) and Rachman (1989) indicate that threat perception triggers the emotion of fear. Fear of certain groups can become chronic and become even well-integrated into the in-group's history; and thus, laying the ground for an ethnic conflict to become intractable, as seen in ex-Yugoslavia. Fear was found as a common denominator to ethnic conflict by a few authors such as Jarymowicz and Bar-Tal (2006). Drawing from our interviews, the consequences of threats may be, notably, psychological or behavioral (e.g. aggression, avoidance). The psychological consequences comprise cognitive (e.g. stereotypes, perceived homogeneity) and emotional reactions (e.g. fear, anger, helplessness, resentment). An important consequence of fear which affects intergroup relations was also drawn from our interviews: the fact that fear focuses on threatening stimulus and controls information processing where danger is enhanced and information (or events) are perceived and interpreted as negative or threatening. In short, negative events and information will attract more attention, will be better memorized and will affect more intensely perceptions, interpretations and following behaviors of the other group. Then, the fear has to be justified; it is (justified) by an enhanced danger posed by the out-group.

Fear also affects intergroup dynamics by increasing the groups' cohesiveness, their acceptance of a centralized leadership, and their exclusiveness of non conforming / deviant members. High fear associated with enhanced group cohesiveness, breeds hostility toward the out-group. Avoidance of the out-group constitutes another possible consequence of fear. Moreover, the combination of fear with the enhancement of negative characteristics of the out-group encourages avoidance of intergroup contact. Among other reasons of this avoidance, we find the expectation that the interaction will go poorly or that negative outcomes will be experienced during intergroup interaction. Among examples of possible negative outcomes during intergroup interaction we find; condemnation from out-group and / or in-group, being exploited and being harmed (psychologically and/or physically). Under some circumstances, fear influences the perceptions of threat from a hostile out-group, laying the ground for defensive aggression.

Unaddressed post-conflict emotions not only fester and grow but, as mentioned above, become potential tools for political manipulation (also, see for instance Blitz, 2006). It did in ex-Yugoslavia and political authorities also contributed to fostering and feeding chosen traumas. The latter lay the ground for each ethnic group to focus further on both suffering and the events that formed them. It has already been contended that the perception of traumatic events and their meanings are closely related to coping and after effects. Thus, because negative events and information attract more attention, are better memorized and impact more acutely perceptions, interpretations, emotions and consequent behaviors, heed should be paid to how individuals and their respective ethnic group interpret their sufferings and conflict-related events.

Unhealed post-conflict psychological reactions and economic insecurity – among other post-conflict consequences - constitute possible conditions from which politicians can manipulate masses in order to maintain and / or increase their power.

All our interviewees mentioned that one cannot afford to be “in bad term” with the party in power in a context where economic insecurity reigns. Under these circumstances, fear enhances and focuses on perceptions of threat of future aggression from an out-group:

“I am too afraid to discuss politics with the “other”... we are afraid to spark trouble... We avoid talking about the war, politics, ...” (Interview, Victim of war in Croatia, May 2011).

“There is the fear of the “other” which was fostered by the war. We avoid going in the territories controlled by the Serb” (Interview, Victim of Sarajevo’s siege, April 2011).

All interviewees from Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina deplored the necessity of establishing important contacts with the majority party in order to increase one’s chance to live a functioning life. The importance of this necessity becomes prominent with the acuteness of the losses and the sufferings inflicted on the war-affected individuals, as well as the lingering economic insecurity. Croatia entered a devastating war in 1991 which led to, among other long term consequences, several thousands who died and hundreds of thousands who left their homes because of the conflict. Bosnia-Herzegovina entered a destructive war between 1992-1995 (although, all interviewees from Bosnia-Herzegovina indicated that the war did not stop instantly in 1995, where more violent events occurred afterwards, mostly in 1996) where, among other devastating consequences (e.g. rapes, arbitrary imprisonments and concentrations camps), more than 100,000 were killed (Tabeau, and Bijak, 2005) and approximately 2,000,000 left their homes (Wilmer, 2002). Colic-Peisker (2009) notes that the wars in Croatia and Bosnia, respectively, were at their most vicious in rural areas (although, as also noted by Colic-Peiske, exceptions such as Vukovar and Sarajevo, for instance, have been brought up in the literature).

Peacebuilding initiatives not only did not address psychological reactions adequately – by impeding healing- but institutionalized ethnic identities. Healing and reconciliation imply that ethnic identities should be understood as dynamic identities where their importance and meaning adapt to the changing current post-conflict context. In Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia, the polarization between ethnic groups not only worsened before and during the conflict but these divisions seemed to have become fixed through peace agreements which allowed the institution of ethnicity in post-conflict politics. As mentioned by Chivvis (2010: 47-49), in Bosnia for instance, “The Western Powers intervened in Bosnia to stop a war, not build a nation” and “Dayton created a complex, fragmented system, comprising three armies, two customs services, five presidents, 12 prime ministers, 13 police forces, and hence, no effective self-government”. The dominant (armed) identities were accepted as permanent identities at the end of the conflict. The representative government of each ethnic groups and the government of the majority, respectively, communicate nationalist discourses through their narratives which are essential to their power and their legitimacy but revive negative post-conflict emotions and feed chosen traumas:

“The old government is still there and still revives nationalism. It complicates decision making and worsen problems” (Interview, Victim of Sarajevo’s siege, April 2011).

“Politicians play with fear” (Interview, Victim of Sarajevo’s siege, June 2011).

Drawing from our preliminary interview, in times of difficulty, conforming to the dominant discourse of nationalism may provide a (false) sense of (psychological) *comfort* by providing straightforward answers and solutions to ambiguously defined problems. The increased salience of fixed-ethnicities – promoting the monolithic nature of the other’s ethno-national community - erase the complexities of the “other” and the dynamic transformative nature of the “other’s” ethnicity, and exclude non armed identities (for instance Jewish).

In Croatia, the HDZ (Hrvatska Demokratske Zajednica led by Tudjman between 1990-1990) party (Ramet, 2010), led by Sanader won the elections in 2003 and still reigns (Ramet, 2010; Blitz, 2006). Sanader resigned in 2009 but the party remained under Jadranka Kosor’s leadership (Tanner, 2010). The next elections occurred the 4th of December 2011 (OSCE/ODIHR, 2011). Drawing from our preliminary interviews, there was no hope for change. The center-left opposition won the elections (see, for instance Ilic and Radosavljevic, 2011) and the impact of this victory – in terms of healing and reconciliation - remains to be seen. The unemployment rate was 14.9 % in 2009 and 17.6% in 2010 (CIA, 2011). Moreover, concurrent with the literature previously discussed, there is evidence that post-conflict difficult economic conditions contribute to the obstruction or the impediment of the healing process. For instance, Kosic et Byrne’s study in Vukovar indicates that: “Respondents perceived that unemployment and other economic factors contribute largely to the pathology in individuals and in the community” (Kosic and Byrne, 2009: 70). Pertaining to Bosnia-Herzegovina, as mentioned by Aitken (2007: 254), the conflict was conceptualized as an ethnic civil war where the need to “respond to the ethnonationalist aspirations of the armed parties” – including “the Bosnian Government and Bosnian Serb and Bosnian Croat nationalist leaderships” and “the governments of Serbia and Croatia” - was found. The author (2007: 255) indicates that the following peace processes – compelling the implication and “participation of ethnonationalist armed parties”- legitimized and “institutionalized ethnicity as the basis of political representation”. The parties forming the government – each representing their own interests- remain ethnically divided: making the convergence of similar policies difficult between the parties (Bieber, 2011). Furthermore, Markowitz (2010), Gormley-Heenan and Mac Guinty (2008) and Pejanović (2007) noted that hardline parties – the strongest ethnic defenders - are likely to receive the most support in conditions of acute social problems, of prompt transformation and uncertainty. One of the many signs of the economic insecurity the survivors face: the unemployment rate in Bosnia-Herzegovina was estimated at 44. 2 % in 2009 and 43.1% in 2010 (CIA, 2011).

“We need good political connections to go forward. You want something, good job or other, you need the right paper, the right contact

and only the majority party can provide that to you and only if you have good connections” (Interview, Victim of war in Croatia, May 2011).

“There are quotas for jobs and you need to be part of the majority party or have a strong link with it in order to obtain something” (Interview, Victim of Sarajevo’s siege, June 2011).

Jobs are scarce and one does not wish to risk his or her job by having diverging views from that of the ruling nationalist party: laying the ground for one’s silence, compliance and increasing distance with members of the out-group. Getting a job or other benefits, usually implies the necessity to be on good terms with the ruling ethnonationalistic party whose power was based on the vote of “their own” ethnic group. At the same time, those in power need the enemy images of the other ethnic groups to boost support for their own party and interests: isolating further each ethnic group within its own borders (physical and psychological). For the more tolerant ones, fear impeded them to hold and / or to manifest different views from their own.

Such context worsens further the post-conflict psychological consequences as positive interpersonal contact is not encouraged. Significant literature indicates that inter-ethnic contact has not been widely promoted by the current governments whose self-interests have created isolated systems rather than integrated systems: each pursuing its own agenda and its own goals (see for instance Markowitz, 2010; Gormley-Heenan, and MacGinty, 2008; Pejanović, 2007; Conces, 2005). As noted by the interviewees, when one ought to choose a side and the out-group represents a threat to your interests, the divisions and the social distances between the groups and the isolation of each ethnic groups eroding the social fabric can only be deepened.

The “other” ethnic group remains homogeneous, fixed and permanent: each group is not “psychologically orientated” toward the “other” for the construction of a transformative relationship construction allowing improvement for intergroup cognitions, emotions and behaviors to occur and to develop. Indeed, unless there is a transformation of thoughts, emotions and behaviors through intergroup interaction where reciprocal listening and understanding occur, not only healing is obstructed or impeded but also long term reconciliation.

Little to no change of intergroup interactions occur where each think, feel, and behave differently because the “us” versus “them” has not become a “we”. Without acknowledgement of each other’s experience, the views and the perceptions of a common ground between the groups –laying the ground for intergroup cohesion- little to no change can be brought to conflictual intergroup relationships. The consequences of these divisions – in-group and out-group - are invaluable and affect all spheres of society. Among the repercussions brought about by in-group divisions (refugees / newcomers replacing ethnic groups who fled the war, mixed families, ...), we find bias, othering and resentment. Out-group divisions can lead to affronts, insults, discrimination, violations of rights and violence, for instance. Through these divisions, negative emotions are further fed such as mistrust, insecurity and fear (of being discriminated, victimized and so forth), and affect various aspects of life such as education (separate schools for each ethnic group), separate social lives (cafes, clubs, shops, ...) and travelling between entities (avoiding the travel through the other entity).

These divisions have an impact not only on the frequency of contact one has with another, but also on the type of contact. Negative contacts lay the ground for negative cognitions, negative emotions and negative behaviors toward the other. These divisions slow down or impede the healing process. There seems to be no clear rules or formula for healing (Green, 2009) but Judith Herman's (1997) three stages of healing are representative of the wider literature: 1) the guarantee of one's safety; 2) remembrance and mourning; and 3) reconnection with 'ordinary' life. Intragroup and intergroup divisions delay and / or obstruct all healing stages and have a negative impact on the prospects of reconciliation.

Moreover, as noted by Bladojevik (2007), a lack of direct contact and relationship with the other can further deepen dehumanization and fear of the other. To make matters worse, as previously mentioned in this article, proximity facilitates perceptions of negative stimulus, negative cognitions and negative emotions; thereby, negative intergroup behaviors:

“There is no opportunity to go to the other frontier and meet the “other” and see that he or she is not so bad and that nothing will happen to us. We go to the other side only when we have to and if we can avoid it, we do...” (Interview, Victim of Sarajevo's siege, July 2011).

People in former Yugoslavia have been exposed to a number of initiatives aimed at reconciliation from international organizations, NGOs and local grassroots activists. Although, these projects were conceived and implemented within a specific community (majority Bosnian, Croatian or Serbian...) in a particular state (such as Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia or Serbia), and the few attempts to bring these initiatives to the national level has not been successful, even less at the regional level. Among these programs we find music concerts, media dialogue programs on dealing with the past (such as Belgrade Radio B92) (Franović, 2008), community gardening projects, youth camps, peace education, inter-cultural exchange programs, various dialogue programs (Dimitrijevi and Kovacs, 2004), individual and group therapy for posttraumatic stress disorder (Zulpan, 2009). However, as noted by Franović (2008: 125), such initiatives not only lack support – moral and financial - from the governments, but they also tend to be “organised according to the ‘ethnic key’ and ‘maintain competing narratives’”. Few attempts were made toward activities which have a potential to heal and to reconcile - activities which could be relevant to socio-emotional reconciliation - such as story-telling and that involve different communities and survivor groups. Moreover, these efforts also suffered from many limitations such as ethnic divisions (inter and intra), lack of resources and political manipulation.

Some have observed the worsening of interpersonal relations between the groups:

“I have seen serious deterioration (of the relations between the groups) in the last two years or so. For instance, just in the way we greet... there is a difference in terms of respect. Just this, it has become a daily reminder

that we are on different sides” (Interview, Victim of Sarajevo’s siege, June 2011).

On the other hand, positive contacts could improve intergroup relations:

“I used to be too afraid to get out of my borders. I didn’t know what they (Serbs) would do to me. Now it is better, I went in the Serb’s territories a few times for business and nothing happened” (Interview, Victim of war in Croatia, May 2011).

Conclusion

In a context of *neighbor-on-neighbor killing*, when antagonist parties must live in proximity, socio-emotional reconciliation is important because it pushes further the necessary marriage between healing and reconciliation at individual and collective levels. An unknown amount of healing must occur where each party first acknowledges the other and the other’s sufferings before considering a connection with the “other” and where constructive attitudes and behaviors (re)build individual and collective relationships of trust. This healing prioritizes a flexible and transformative understanding of events (and their consequences) and of the “other” – linked to a larger context than one suffering- over determinate factors related to events and individuals (fixed identities). In a context of close proximity where *neighbor-on-neighbor killing* occurred, a limited repetition of social contacts aimed at instrumental goals appear to be insufficient as negative cognitions and trauma related-emotions such as fear and distrust need deeper processes to be addressed. Such processes are allowed in socio-emotional reconciliation which encourages self-disclosure and empathy. As each party would benefit (economically, socially and so forth) from the “other”, aiming for a reconciliation that does not prioritize the psychological dimension appear to be short term and vulnerable to rapid changes and disruption.

Peacebuilding measures and initiatives have prioritized political stability and order while neglecting the widespread trauma affecting individuals and societies. The psychological constitutes a vital component of the peace puzzle as ignoring or denying individual and collective traumatization and sufferings will not make them disappear. Although, as we have seen, the way in which the individual (or community) interprets and the meanings he or she gives to information, events and so forth are important, not only because they affect intergroup relationships but they also impact our choices of post-conflict interventions, peacebuilding initiatives and measures.

More heed should be paid to the complexity of the development of post-conflict trauma that is amplified when the survivors – as an individual and as a collective – face post-conflict stressors such as peacebuilding initiatives which injure them further or worsen their situation. The peace process implies the past, the present and the future. The past has to be dealt with before one can use the present to its utmost capacity and (re)build a peaceful future. When one’s suffering increases -being re-victimised with “old” and “new” stressors- one is left with little to deal with his or her daily battles and to (re)construct and transform one’s environment and one’s society,

i.e., structures and relationships that were destroyed during armed conflict and wars.

Given the proximity of the (former) antagonistic groups, post-conflict interventions, peacebuilding initiatives and measures ought to aim not only instrumental reconciliation between the parties, but also socio-emotional reconciliation and the inter-relationship between the two of them. Both scholars and policymakers must pay more heed to what fosters a “good enough” healing after armed conflicts or wars in a context of *neighbor-on-neighbor killing*, when antagonist parties must live in proximity. While internal armed conflicts and wars have multiplied since the end of the Cold War and conflict resolution strategies have developed, new partnerships among disciplines and levels of society (leaders, communities, individuals) have become a necessity, not only in theory but more importantly in practice. Integrating the study of the psychological dimension in the peacebuilding realm will allow a better understanding of the complex interlinked issues involved in long term peace and an adjusting of the related actions adopted accordingly.

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