

NEBOJŠA ŠAVIJA – VALHA  
ELVIR ŠAHIĆ

## **BUILDING TRANS-ETHNIC SPACE**





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Interethnic Dialogue, Social and Political Action in Local  
Communities of Bosnia and Herzegovina  
Socio-Anthropological Perspective

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*They say that history repeat itself. But history is only **his**-story. You haven't heard **my**-story yet! My-story is different from his-story. My story is not part of history. Because, history repeats itself. But my story is in this: it never repeats itself. Why should it? Nature never repeats itself. Why should I repeat myself?*

*Sun Ra – A Joyful Noise*



## Introduction

While waiting for a workshop on constitutional issues taking place in Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H), an international consultant politely asked a representative of Nansen Dialogue Centre (NDC) from Sarajevo: “So, how is the situation at NDC? “Pretty good!” he answered casually. Visibly taken by surprise, after a couple of silent seconds, the consultant continued: “It is nice to hear that! Not often people talk like that around here! Everybody complain! How come?”

The intention of this book is to offer perspectives that will help to answer precisely that question. It is a presentation of NDC’s experience from engagement in local communities of Srebrenica, Bratunac, Jajce and Zvornik. It resulted from the action research designed primarily for internal evaluation of the program and its achievements. Furthermore, it explores, in more general terms, the role of an outside party in the improvement of interethnic relations in the local communities.

In times when public discourse in and about B&H was overwhelmed by general resentment and constant complaining, because of the everlasting transition developments, we wanted to go beyond producing a fundamental evaluation report, and instead, present to the public a comprehensive study about NDCs work. The aim of the book is to outline and interpret practices and results in light of a localized “ruptures” in a “fabric” of that overall situation. It also indicates possible, exemplary and by no means naïve “lines of flight” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004 p.10). In other words, it stipulates possible ways out from the overwhelmingly negative yet very stable condition.

Furthermore, it reflect the results of active engagement of persons involved in the processes implemented by NDC Sarajevo, and it demonstrates not only a shift in perception of the overall situation, but the shift in attitudes towards a possibility of changing it accordingly.

The primary idea of the publication is to share and reflect on

NDC's experience in making, maintaining and widening the "ruptures" in peculiar regions within its field of engagement – peacebuilding through interethnic dialogue. This experience includes the understanding of a context, developing an action framework, implementing action and achieving results in iterative processes that have been ongoing since 2006. To a certain degree, this is also an epistemological study, since it not only describes the processes and their elements but reflects on possibilities of understanding the processes that are described.

The book is divided into chapters, each of them covering a cluster of topics. The first chapter elaborates on the methodology of the research. It is of particular importance to account for the methodological approaches since we cover long period and many interdependent actors and processes. The second chapter deals with the general context in which the engagement takes place. It briefly discusses the field of peacebuilding in global terms and its implementation in B&H. A brief history of Nansen Dialogue Network and Nansen Dialogue Centre Sarajevo is described in the third chapter. The fourth chapter offers an elaborate description of geopolitics, history and society of B&H. We consider this as fundamental to understanding behaviour of the actors and the context in which any social/cultural/political/economic action take place, including peacebuilding. The fifth, sixth and seventh are core chapters of the book. In the fifth chapter, there is a reflection on the Nansen-dialogue approach by dissecting and conceptualizing it through the, what we believes represents plausible theoretical frameworks. The sixth chapter elaborates NDC Sarajevo "intervention" or methodology of engagement in four local communities of B&H: Srebrenica, Bratunac, Zvornik and Jajce. The seventh and last chapter is a brief elaboration of achievements.

The book has a multi-faceted goal. It enables its readers to either read it as a whole or take only parts of it. Whatever way they chose, it will provide them with ample of analysed material and insights about specific topics such as methodology, presentation of B&H history and society or the NDC Sarajevo intervention. A significant number of footnotes support the multi-purpose character of the study.

# 1. Research Methodology

## 1.1. Action research

The book is an exploratory study based on results from a qualitative action research, which was intended primarily for internal evaluation of the NDC Sarajevo engagement as well as exploring the role of “outside party”<sup>1</sup> in improving interethnic relations in the local communities. As such, it was built in the project design as a complementary activity for providing core activities with data and reflections necessary both for the implementation of the project and its permanent improvements.<sup>2</sup> Several important aspects of an action research are highly compatible with the NDC approach to the engagement in the field:<sup>3</sup> “It seeks to explain social situation while implementing change; It is problem-focused, context-specific and future-oriented; The whole group is actively involved in the change process; It aims to be educative and empowering” (Waterman et al. Barbour, 2008, p.173). It also follows the project implementation at every stage, from the identification of problems, through planning actions

<sup>1</sup> We use the term “outside party” as a denominator for “intervening agency” referring to Galtung’s (1996 p.104) remark that it is about the party which is “coming from the outside yet joining the conflict” and not about “third side” which is “highly unfortunate terminology as it ties the mind to a conflict of only two parties.”

<sup>2</sup> At the beginning this was a semi-structured research, since there has been no strictly developed and detailed research plan prior to its implementation. Only general framework was given within the plan of action for monitoring process which should result with evaluation in terms of the project – process variables and achievements (NDC, 2009). Only during implementation the action research has been inductively developed in more structured way. However, it is a feature of qualitative research which “involves an iterative process, whereby the research design, ‘tools’ and even the research question can evolve as the project unfolds” (Barbour, 2008 p.31). In this regard the question of the role of “outside party” in the monitored processes appeared and become a part of research (NDC 2012).

<sup>3</sup> The NDC approach will be elaborated in the chapter 6.

and to the evaluation. Armed with learned lessons and updated knowledge, the action research returns to the elaboration of problems from a new perspective and starts the new cycle. As Barbour points out “the essence of this ‘cycle’ involves an iterative process, which has no natural end-point – rather the capacity to start the cycle again – and, it is for this reason that Carr and Kemmis... have described the action research process as, perhaps more accurately, involving a “spiral of cycles” (2008, p.173). Beyond this “technical” compatibility to NDC’s engagement, there is also an epistemological congruence since “[a]ction research is a participatory democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview” (Reason and Bradbury according to Barbour, 2008 p.172). To be able to communicate and translate among some these conceptual and practical layers “the process of searching... should include a concern for the links between themes, a concern to pose these themes as problems, and a concern for their historical-cultural context” (Freire, 2005 p.108). It starts from a “situation” in which participants “find themselves rooted in temporal-spatial conditions which that mark them and which they also mark” (Ibid. p.109). They reflect their thinking, not by an imposed thought framework of “outside party”, which eventually challenge them “to act upon it” (Ibid.). To a great extent this is “dialogical research method... involving extensive preliminary fieldwork, with emergent hypotheses being explored through group discussions in order to identify barriers to change” (Barbour, 2008 p.171). In this regard, a role of researcher is not primarily to pursue her/his own research agenda, but rather to be a researcher-participant which “facilitate the production of knowledge by and for the subjects” (Padilla according to Barbour, 2008 p.171). Therefore, this approach is at the very core of what latter will be referred and elaborated as “Nansen-dialogue approach”.

However, the action research undertaken here, although oriented towards participants and achievements is not void of theoretical assumptions (and/or conclusions), which are engaged during each

stage.<sup>4</sup> They are used without prejudices, not to enframe and limit the course of research and action. Quite contrary, drawn from various theoretical models, they are used to increase the capacity of knowledge gained through mutual learning/action and thus increase the probability of potential solutions.<sup>5</sup>

Having in mind a global and local context in which NDC is engaged as well as complexity of issues it deals with, such as anomic, post-war and transitional condition, it seems necessary to use interdisciplinary approach to increasing a scope of understanding it. Although social anthropology is a central discipline of the research, insights from history and political science, also from sociology, psychoanalysis, and even philosophy are applied. This approach includes an in-depth analysis of contexts, its theoretical elaboration and interpretation. It considerably increases range of “delivered” knowledge, not limiting it only to technicalities necessary for the implementation of specific activities, but opens possibilities of wider use, be it research or an action.

## 1.2 Data Generating

In response to the complexity of examined phenomena, disciplines involved and necessity to study processes and context as “a route for explaining action and events” (Barbour, 2008 p.31),<sup>6</sup> we opted for use of qualitative research methods.

Due to an evaluation request to follow stages in the project

<sup>4</sup> In the domain of NGO activism and research, we are often witnesses of various “research reports” and particularly “policy papers” which miss either/or/both methodological and/or theoretical elaboration, containing mainly generalization and commonplaces derived from “grassroots”. Whether this is due to ignorance of authors, or due to glorifying “grassroots”, or due to “request” for simplicity or brevity, such reports/papers barely serves their purpose – informing certain social and/or political actors, let alone seriously improve practice. This also opens a number of ethical questions. *Cf.* Barbour, 2008 p.183.

<sup>5</sup> *Cf.* Barbour, 2008 p.183.

<sup>6</sup> And designing it!

implementation, several methods for generating data were used. Observation of the activities was the most used method. Due to the specific request of the action research and the role of a co-researcher as one of the NDC's core workforce, the observation stems from several perspectives. Depending on the activities, the co-researcher, was in the position of an observer-participant or rarely as an observer-facilitator. Another source of gathering data included formal and informal conversations with other NDC staff members and participants during various types of meetings.

One of the key methods for organizing training and dialogue workshops within the project implementation were focus groups, comprising selected candidates from the local communities, who worked for a significant period. Although the primary intention of working with focus groups was educational and practical, because of dialogical approach, they became a notable source of data and practical knowledge, which served as a base immediate actions as well as for analytical purposes.

In the midst of the research period, ten semi-structured interviews were carried out as a triangulation tool. The interviews targeted the most active participants from local Nansen Coordination Boards<sup>7</sup> from each community. As such they fulfill the Neuman's (1997 p.374) criteria for ideal informants.<sup>8</sup> The interviews were focused on three important issues: interethnic relations, role of NDC in local communities, and personal engagement of the respondents. The chosen topics frame NDC's field and methodology of engagement, and our assumption is that opinions of NDC's most active participants should reflect a level of achievements. As a control tool, we used and analyzed interviews with political and

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<sup>7</sup> Nansen Coordination Boards are informal groups of the most active participants from NDC activities, which are instrumental in developing work in the local communities. Their role and function will be explained in the chapter 6.

<sup>8</sup> The criteria are: the person is (1) fully familiar with the culture, witnessing significant events, involved in everyday routines, (2) lives in the environment, (3) available to researchers for a prolonged time, (4) a non-analytical member familiar with and use local folk theories or pragmatic common sense.. To these criteria we added ethnic background and gender of interviewees to reach both heterogeneity and they balances in the sample.

religious leaders from three communities in which NDC Sarajevo have not been engaged.<sup>9</sup>

### 1.3. Data Analysis

Having in mind that data was generated during the project implementation, most of them have been recorded and organized in formal project documentation such as reports and application forms. Besides, there are published and unpublished articles by NDC representatives about the project implementation, as well as personal notes of a co-researcher. The documents, including transcribed interviews, were electronically coded and analyzed by the *Atlas-Ti* qualitative software. The “constant comparative method” was used, which “lies at the root of all qualitative data analysis... relaying on constantly comparing and contrasting... [i]t is absolutely essential in producing rigorous analyses” (Barbour, 2008 p.217). The obtained data were compared at two levels. On one side, they were compared in terms of means-ends: how the analyzed situation corresponds to planned actions and achievements. On the other hand, the data were compared with certain theoretical assumptions to understand and interpret them in wider frameworks.

### 1.4. Role of co-researchers

The research was deployed and implemented by two co-researchers. One of them, who is one of the NDC’s core staff, was responsible for research and data generation. It is important to emphasize that not only this co-researcher did participate at every project event and made an observation, but other respective NDC staff did it also both in the position of observer-participant

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<sup>9</sup> These interviews have been taken for the purpose of another research project in which NDC Sarajevo took part. The research explored the dynamics between religion and politics in sensitive political contexts in the case of Bosnia And Herzegovina. Cf. Fetahagić 2014.

and observer-facilitator. Due to the dialogical character of the most of the activities, and substantial involvement of NDC's core staff in observation, these two positions often overlapped. Such a challenge could be assigned to all data gathering methods. However, as Cohen (2002 pp.43-67) argues, the ethnographer must be always aware of the two egos s/he operates permanently: the one of an analyst, and the other of a participant. As he suggests, there is a necessity to move permanently between the two egos, and it is that move that constructs data and facts.<sup>10</sup>

In order to respond to these challenges, another co-researcher is involved in the process. Prior to the research, he has been generally, but not in-depth, familiar with the work of NDC. He got involved in the analytical part of the research as a co-analyst and a co-writer. Not participating in daily data gathering, he was able to offer significant external, yet well-informed insights and perspectives. A dialogue between internal and external perspectives added value to the level of analysis and its results.

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<sup>10</sup> Moreover, he argues, the essence of anthropology is actually in these "translations" (Ibid. p.58).



## 2. On Peacebuilding

### 2.1. Global perspective

Twenty years after the Dayton Peace Agreement, peace in B&H can be defined only in negative terms as an absence of the massive organized violence.<sup>11</sup> Significant human, material and financial resources have been engaged resulting in wide spectrum benefits for various groups and individuals throughout the country. However, the community of peace entrepreneurs, although successful in putting the conflict under control, neither transformed a very structure and/or system of the conflict which led to the war, nor significantly democratized B&H society. Elsewhere, we offered more detailed analysis of some reasons for such condition (Šaviĳa-Valha, 2012). Here, we will just point out the main findings necessary to understand levels of the problem the peacebuilding community.

The war in Yugoslavia and B&H, coincided with a global paradigm shift in treating issues of peace in international relationships. It came as a consequence of the end of the cold war. Not limited by global powers and ideological division, UN became able to act more widely and politically in establishing and maintaining of peace in the world (Smith, 1997 p.13). “An Agenda for Peace, Preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peace-keeping” (the Agenda further in the text) (Boutros-Ghali, 1992) is a basic document of the new approach to the peace. It defines four areas of peace actions: preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding, all of them primarily discussed within the discourse of security and assuming the negative definition of peace as the absence of a war. Yet, the Agenda introduces a number of elements which suggest positive content of the peace: democracy, human rights, the rule of law, freedoms, economic and

<sup>11</sup> For negative definition of peace *cf* Galtung, 1996 p.9.

social development, global communication and trade, and good governance. Assuming “an obvious connection between democratic practices ... and the achievement of true peace and security in any new and stable political order”<sup>12</sup> (Ibid. p.16), the Agenda suggests that peace actions should include both preventing/resolving violent conflicts and political transition, which could be described as installing values and practices of “positive peace”, or liberal democracy,<sup>13</sup> as the important part of the political solutions (Ibid. p.16). Not limited to a use of military forces and/or humanitarian aid only, such understanding of peace enables also political, economic, social, and cultural interventions in the (post)conflict areas (Ibid. p15). The main intermediary in this process supposed to be coalitions of “responsive Governments” and various national, regional and international institutions and agencies all under the UN auspice.<sup>14</sup>

## 2.2. Peacebuilding in B&H

Coincidence of the new conceptualization of the world peace with a crisis and the war in B&H made them to be a convenient test case which has all elements for application of the new strategy in establishing peace: B&H was a newly established, post-socialist, if not a post-imperial<sup>15</sup> state, which transition was interrupted by multilayered war,<sup>16</sup> dominated by ethno-national perspective. Hence, all four Agenda’s areas of actions could be and were applied on the B&H case. Preventive diplomacy during 1991 and 1992 unfortunately failed, and after more than three and a half years the war was ended by a use of an external limited military

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<sup>12</sup> On problematic status of this assumption cf. Galtung, 1996 pp.49-59.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Richmond, 2006.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Boutros-Ghali, 1992 p.2.; Richmond, 2006 pp.297-298.

<sup>15</sup> The “post-imperial” is thought here in terms of its ideological dependence on a unilateral socialist/communist rule, not in terms of its territorial-administrative bond to Yugoslavia. Cf. Baskar 2007.

<sup>16</sup> Technically speaking, the war started as a consequence of Yugoslavia and B&H entering transition process.

intervention combined with intensive diplomatic activities and negotiations. These efforts resulted in an arrangement known as *The General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, or more colloquially Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA), which established the completely new state. Although based on previous, limited statehood and territorial integrity,<sup>17</sup> a new internal social, political and territorial “landscape” of B&H was essentially established. It could be argued that such arrangement is a result of understanding the B&H society almost exclusively in the register of *ethnicity* by all actors in and around the war (Campbell, 1998 p.80), and eventually considering it as a basic cause of the war. Based on what Campbell (Ibid.) coins as “ontological assumption”,<sup>18</sup> which could be understood as a sort of an “organic” link between ethnicity and soil ending the “most obviously” in antagonistic relations, DPA established internal territorial division of ethnicities in the organizational forms of entities and cantons,<sup>19</sup> which order is guaranteed by external control mechanism, the Office of the High Representative (OHR). OHR is meant to act as the ultimate “conflict manager” with the significant assistance of international military and police corps as well as a catalyst of peacebuilding processes.

With regards to the Agenda applied on the B&H case, due to focus on ethnicity, a peacebuilding task was/is two-folded – reconciliation and transition. In the other words, it is a process of reconciliation understood as re-definition – transformation of antagonistic ethnic relations at all levels into productive, democratic and political relationships.

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<sup>17</sup> Being a republic in the federal Yugoslavia, but also being a relatively stabile territorial unit within empires which previously dominated region. Cf. Donia and Fine, 1994 p 7.

<sup>18</sup> The term “ontology” is Derrida’s neologism for denominating a phantasm of a nation as an ontological bond of a being – *on* – and its territory – *topos*. Cf. Derrida 2006, pp.102-103. Drawing upon this term Campbell introduces the term “ontological assumption” which represents mythical “conjunction of territorial representation, population identification, and historical determination” (1998 p.80).

<sup>19</sup> It is based mostly on the war results.

Reducing all social and political variables to “zero”, behaving as if there was no past to connect with, the process of peacebuilding supposed simultaneously to build a political system of parliamentary democracy, system of market economy and civil society, while pacifying antagonistic ethnicities. It is a process we will refer as *reconciliation interventionism*, having in mind necessity of an outside parties’ intervention in two important areas: keeping externally established conditions and the system; and in developing state, its political and social institutions, including “skills” of local population.<sup>20</sup> The aim of that wide operation at all levels is to transfer skills and practices to local actors, which once applied would “guarantee” democratic development and ultimately create condition for local actors to completely take over the institutions and processes. A number of results of the operations are undisputable: technical aspects of democracy function quite fairly securing full legitimacy for political elite; public discourse has been overwhelmed with concepts and values of liberal democracy, followed by number of actions in the public space; last but not least, a social engineering elite of local experts and managers of non-governmental organizations (NGO) and development project has been created, fully equipped to work within the field of democratization.<sup>21</sup> However, regardless of building these capacities or success in technical transition, ethnic relations, if not won more, definitively did not lose their antagonistic political potential. Accordingly, there is barely any essential progress in the democratization of the society, i.e. adoption of democratic norms, values and practices at all level of society.

Such results indicate some pitfalls of the peace process that were implemented in B&H in accordance with the Agenda. Considering that the pitfalls were elaborated elsewhere (Šavija-Valha, 2012), in this book we will briefly mention some of them, following their categorization into the three groups of problems: technological,

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<sup>20</sup> This is usually referred by intervention agencies as a process of “capacity building” and it has been inexhaustibly running since DPA, with the unpredictable end from nowadays perspective.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Sampson, 2002.

epistemological and contextual.

The whole process of peacebuilding has been dominated by technological – managerial approach in which peace is understood as a *problem*<sup>22</sup> to be managed and solved, which includes highly professional managerial structure, vertical subordination, hegemony of principles, skills and knowledge, narrow action framework and quantifiable resources and results. Two reasons might explain this dominance. On the one side, acting under the completely new conceptual framework proposed by the Agenda, international community (IC), missed appropriate mechanisms for doing the new kind of intervention, so they adjusted technology developed for disaster management (Lederach, 1999 p.74). On the other side, contemporary politics is dominated by ideology of *governmentality*<sup>23</sup> as a form of power “formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics” (Foucault, 1991 p.102) which rationalize political realities making them manageable “through the design of programs, techniques and practices that seek to influence the conduct of individuals or groups and resolve problems” (Finlay, 2011 p.50). Reducing all political issues to the techniques of government (Foucault, 1991 p.103), *governmentality* also determines the technical approach to peacebuilding thus overshadowing its cultural, ideological and political background. Such technical approach (to peacebuilding) requires only a control over prescribed processes and resources in very limited time and tight accordance with the budget. It practically demonstrates *accountability* (to the donor, not to beneficiaries!) and thus the visible result of project actions could be only *good governance*.<sup>24</sup> Purposes and goals of these processes, although important elements of project design, are disregarded in implementation as uncertain. In return, to demonstrate good

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Finlay, 2011 p.50; Lederach, 1995 p.28.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Finlay, 2011 pp.50-60; Richmond, 2006 pp.299-300.

<sup>24</sup> The Agenda suggests “responsive Governments” rather than states as the actors in the peace building, and “good governance” as an important goal for sustainable peace. Cf. Boutros-Ghali, 1992 p.2; p.4: p.16. See also how these requests for accountability and good governance reflects in NGO sector (Barker, 2010).

governance, this approach forces any intervening agency to limit a range of activities to easy manageable, short-term and highly secure actions that deals with few easily controlled variables and promising no negative surprise and responsibility, so any considerable change is hardly possible.<sup>25</sup> One could suggest that all the projects under such conditions are “condemned to succeed”.

As one of the consequences of the technological approach, peacebuilding faces an epistemological problem. It relates exactly to the purposes and the goals of the intervention. And it is the many-folded problem. They are conceived in a realm of a project logic assuming certain “natural” logical link or transition between planned interventions and their purpose and goals.<sup>26</sup> However, these assumptions, sometimes referred as *theories of changes*,<sup>27</sup> open a new set of problems. The purpose and the objectives of these interventions, regardless of actual wording are no more and no less than liberal democracy. Furthermore, it is assumed that a set of well-thought and performed actions will, under certain circumstances, eventually transform non-democratic and non-liberal society into the liberal-democratic one. Despite this assumption might be true, this relation is highly problematic. As Geertz suggests “though we have at least a general idea of the nature of civility and the range of forms through which it is materialized in industrial states, very little is known about the processes by which the present patterns have come to be what they are” (2006 p.309).

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. Barker, 2010 p.12; Lederach, 1999 pp.130-131; Fisher and Zimina, 2009 pp. 20-24, Anderson and Olson, 2003.

<sup>26</sup> In linguistic theory this difference would be the one of “signifier” and “signified”. At best, according to De Saussure (1965 p.67), the link between the two would be arbitrary. However, deconstructivists on the other side deny any referential link between the two, considering the signified only as a metaphysical speculation, made actually of the chain of signifiers.

<sup>27</sup> “Theories of change” are an implicit or explicit part of any intervention, although the term was originally used for the purposes of evaluating programs to reveal “how practitioners believe individual, intergroup, and social/ systemic change happens and how, specifically, their actions will produce positive results” (Shapiro, 2005). Cf. Lederach, 1999 pp.133-134.

This brings us to the third, contextual problem. It seems that what we have at work here are certain current democratic practices functional in the Western societies, which are taken for granted, and which are thought and implanted through interventions to produce the same effects in the target country as in the countries of origin, regardless different geo-political, social and cultural context. It is not to say that the factors as such have not been considered in intervention planning. Quite contrary, there are thousands of books, articles, reports, etc., written on B&H. However, findings from these immense volumes mainly circulate within academia, and they are rarely taken as a base for actions. If they were taken, it was done superficially, mostly to fulfill formally requested application format. On the others side, if the context analysis as a prerequisite for actions has done by an intervening agency, it was usually very schematic and stereotypical, explaining immediate condition without any deeper analysis.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, it is rather oriented towards predefined terms of references from donors' agendas,<sup>29</sup> searching for appropriate findings in the field, then otherwise, which would be transferring the findings into meaningful action not prescribed by donors. So, regardless of available data and knowledge, most of the actions take place in certain *anthropological ignorance*.

In the end, this is probably not an exhaustive list of problems peacebuilding in B&H have been facing. But they create the basic condition, which restrain all potentials developed in the intervention to actualize purpose for which they were “built” – to transform the B&H state and society into democratic ones. On the other hand, one should not be intimidated by this “failure” or it hardly could be described as such. Rather it is a prolonged and a necessary period for learning and experimenting.<sup>30</sup> However, what

<sup>28</sup> This comes either due permanent lack of time imposed by fiscal circles of donors, or due to lack of agencies' capacity for deeper analysis.

<sup>29</sup> This is known as donor driven behavior, and it only reinforce technological approach.

<sup>30</sup> It seems that learning and experimenting are not high on a list of many donors involved in reconciliation interventionism, exactly due to overemphasized technological approach.

is at stake in transition in B&H is not just a small shift in habits of parts of population, or some groups, but the paradigmatic cultural shift, from one to another type of society and culture. To achieve that takes time, resources, patience and a lot of experimentings.

In this regard, practices of NDC Sarajevo and some other organization in B&H, exemplify this type of a non-mainstream “organic” engagement. It was being developed gradually in the permanent analysis of contexts, dialogue with global and local stakeholders, by experimenting with methods and practices. It is not burdened to “succeed”. It was rather slowly progressing to something that will hopefully be a common yet developing and competing story: isn’t the liberal democracy just about that?



## 3. On Nansen Dialogue Centre

### 3.1. Nansen Dialogue Network

Nansen Dialogue Centre (NDC) from Sarajevo is a citizens' association established in September 2000 in a framework of Nansen Dialogue Network (NDN), which today includes 7 centers with total of 10 offices in the region of Western Balkans.<sup>31</sup> Foundation of NDN goes back to 1995, when a democracy project started in Nansenskolen – Norwegian Humanistic Academy in Lillehammer. The project was aimed at potential leaders, activist, politicians, journalists, judges, lawyers, teachers and other socially significant target groups from the region. It started in cooperation of Nansenskolen, The International Peace Research Institute from Oslo (PRIO), Norwegian Church Aid (NCA), Norwegian Red Cross (NRC), and financially supported by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (NMFA) (Aarbakke, 2002 pp.1-8).

Like many other organizations and networks, NDN and NDC were established in time when intervention of the IC in the area of capacity building and reconciliation, with focus on (ethnic) conflict issues was at its peak. Having similar starting condition as described above, the early work has also suffered from a lack of deep contextual knowledge on a targeted region (Ibid. pp.5-8).

However, unlike many others, the program which started at Nansenskolen, as basically educational program, was neither conceived nor run within limitations of a technological matrix and its urge to deliver “quantifiably measurable results in a timely manner.” Rather, it was open-ended and not pretentious<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> The offices are located in: Osijek, Croatia; Belgrade and Bujanovac, Serbia; Mostar, Prijedor, Srebrenica and Sarajevo, B&H; Podgorica, Montenegro; Kosovska Mitrovica, Kosovo; Skopje, Macedonia.

<sup>32</sup> We are suggesting that this characteristic of the program might be sought in interaction of at least three factors: history and conceptual structure of the Nansen

both in terms of “material” success and in offering models to be implemented. Rather, it was open-ended and not pretentious both in terms of “material” success and in offering models to be implemented. Also, the program was implemented through a sequence of courses, which lasted between 3 and 12 weeks including a maximum of 16 participants each. Combining such a “non-invasive” yet extensive approach, with enough time to get deep insights on participants, their society and culture, the program developed significant capacity to learn and change according to the needs of its beneficiaries. From a focus on capacity building at the beginning, the program gradually transformed into a dialogue-led process.

As a result, the participants coming from different post-Yugoslav countries, with different ethnic backgrounds, developed strong interpersonal and professional connections, which enabled them to cooperate across ethnic divisions in their respective communities. However, the program did not end up just in a sequence of courses at Nansenskolen. The follow-up process in the local communities was developed, and soon it became one of the main characteristics of the program. The program’s staff has repeatedly visited the region and local communities, meeting previous participants, interviewing them and organizing their local and international gatherings, maintaining and strengthening their connections. By the 1999, more than hundred persons took part in the program at Nansenskolen and the follow-ups, which made up both quite significant Nansen alumni and local interethnic networks of program’s attendees.<sup>33</sup>

It could be suggested that this overall process created a “critical mass” of “initiated” persons throughout the region to move the program to the next phase, namely to develop local interethnic activities based on the experience from Nansenskolen, which eventually led to establishment of locally based Nansen Dialogue

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Academy, personalities of people involved in preparing and running the program and in the general Norwegian culture. However, any conclusions on these issues are far beyond the capacity and range of this text.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Aarbakke, 2002.

Centers throughout the region. This move not only exponentially extended potential reach and range of the program in terms of people and targeted groups, but also provided basic tools for a work in real social environments contributing to real social changes in a longer run.

### **3.2. Nansen Dialogue Centre from Sarajevo**

As in the other communities, Nansen Dialogue Centre in Sarajevo has been established by the participants of the Nansen Dialogue program at Lillehammer, who came from Sarajevo.

Early engagement of NDC Sarajevo in the period 2000-2002, although in the form of capacity building, could be best described as *sharing of interethnic experience* gained at Nansenskolen by its founding members, the Nansen alumni. It has been organized in a form of a set of three-days dialogue seminars for a number of groups of participants coming from a wide spectrum of middle positioned leaders, activist, professionals, from all ethnic groups and beyond, from the region of Sarajevo. By the beginning of 2002, NDC Sarajevo spread activities to reach wider regions of Northern and Eastern Bosnia and to start to organize seminars in local languages, recruiting participants from smaller towns and rural areas. The intention was to cover both wider territory and increase range of participants.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, NDC Sarajevo organized, alone or in cooperation with similar and complementary organizations<sup>35</sup>, a significant number of public events in domain of civic actions, humanities and culture, promoting interethnic and intercultural collaboration and democratic values.

A turning point for NDC Sarajevo work happened when the Regional Educational Department of the OSCE Mission to B&H

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<sup>34</sup> Until that moment, the participants came mainly from the major cities and all of them were English speaking persons, since the dialogue seminars have been led exclusively in English language.

<sup>35</sup> Ambrosia, Atelier for Philosophy, Social Sciences and Psychoanalysis and Album from Sarajevo and Transeuropeennes from Paris.

approached the organization at the end of 2002, asking for a dialogue training for teachers in ethnically divided schools in small towns and rural areas throughout B&H. The success of a pilot seminar “Upbringing and Education for Human Rights” brought this activity into NDC’s focus during 2003-2005.<sup>36</sup>

Besides impressive qualitative<sup>37</sup> and quantitative results,<sup>37</sup> the most important outcome of the training for teachers was insights and perspectives NDC staff got from an intensive field work throughout B&H, regarding functioning of the local communities, differences and similarities among them, complexity of interethnic relations, and depth of ethnic division. General conditions in the communities appeared to be far more complex and demanding than assumed during projects preparations.<sup>38</sup> It might be argued that

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<sup>36</sup> The training program was additionally funded by NMFA and European Union (EU). It is important to emphasize that all three NDCs from B&H, Banja Luka, Mostar and Sarajevo participated in this program with strong support of OSCE Mission to B&H.

<sup>37</sup> Until 2006 NDC covered 40 municipalities, 49 towns & villages and 54 schools in both Federation of BiH and RS. 266 teachers passed training (41% Bosniaks, 24% Serbs, 26% Croats, 9% Others). The total number of pupils that are indirect beneficiaries is approximately 41,121. The most important outcomes of these activities are that very teachers started to communicate across ethnic lines, they (re)established their relations both on professional and personal level; they started to use knowledge and skills they got in everyday work with the children, and started to be proactive in the educational process. In many schools the teachers started extracurricular activities with ethnically mixed students, which was not a case before NDCs activities (NDC, 2004; 2004a).

<sup>38</sup> Being exclusively locals, NDC staff relied upon their supposed “native point of view” and “intimacy” with the culture to understand the context as a base for actions. Such a view, however, has been ideologically framed rather by micro-cultural factors of life in major urban areas, from which NDC staff came. Faced with conditions in smaller towns and rural areas, NDC staff was nonetheless taken by surprise with power of ethnicity and ethnical elites to rule all aspects of life, developing high level of ethnic division, maintaining a lack of interethnic communication and making local communities highly dysfunctional. Hardly these factors can be compared with those in major urban areas. It is not because one can not find them there, but because these “uneasy” elements are arguably hidden deeper, due to higher complexity of life and relations among citizens, but also due to political reasons. And not the least, it is due to their predominantly mono-ethnic compositions in which the position of other ethnic groups became marginalized

major learning point from NDC's work with teachers from local communities throughout of B&H was a revelation of NDC's own "anthropological ignorance". To deal with this "veil of ignorance" (Rawls), to make actions meaningful and appropriate, it was necessary that NDC staff learn deeply in context and to incorporate this learning and obtained knowledge into action as it was case with the program run at Nasenskolen.

As learned from the teacher's training program, the particularly hard condition was encountered in the region of Eastern Bosnia. Therefore, NDC staff decided to focus on that area. They have organized roundtable discussions focusing interethnic issues in all bigger towns in the region throughout the year 2005. Participants were municipal officials, NGO activists, teachers, journalists, but also ordinary citizens, most of them returnees and internally displaced persons (IDP). On one side, the public discussions were the ice-breaking if not "cutting edge" activities in many of the communities. Unlike those previously organized, by other organizations, these discussions were openly focused on interethnic issues for the first time. Also, for most of the participants it was the first time after the war that they sat together ethnically mixed and discussed the issues. On the other side, as it was predicted, these public discussions provided NDC staff with deeper insight into the problems of the communities. These findings have been crucial in developing further directions of engagement.

To be able to deal with multilayered problems in the communities for creating favorable conditions for any change, NDC narrowed territorial focus and engaged all its (limited) resources in certain kind of holistic approach.<sup>39</sup> By doing so, it addressed as many problems as possible in the communities, within its field of engagement. For the reasons that will be elaborated later,<sup>40</sup> NDC

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and invisible. Since they do not represent threat for power relations, they are tolerated and look almost protected and even inseparable from the majority (Cf. Vlaisavljević, 2007a pp.25-29). Hence, general condition in terms of interethnic relations seems much better then it actually is.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Lederach, 1999 pp.118-123.

<sup>40</sup> Chapter 6.

staff focused on particularly challenging regions of Bratunac and Srebrenica, the areas it has played an active role active since 2006.

Furthermore, having marked the improvement of interethnic relations at the very core of its mission, NDC staff also had a need for deeper understanding of the phenomenon of ethnicity and ethnic relations in B&H. Thus, as another collateral engagement direction, a more substantial academic research has been undertaken.<sup>41</sup> The results from the research, beyond its academic achievements, as a general contextual and epistemological analysis, contributed significantly in informing and framing the actions in the field.

Such approach were meant to provide better efficiency of the activities on one side, and information to support them, on the other, by forming abovementioned “spiral of cycles” (Barbour 2008, p.173) in which action and learning/knowledge permanently reinforce each other. In the following chapters of the study, we will elaborate and present results gained throughout the whole engagement from the period 2006 – 2015.

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<sup>41</sup> The research resulted with MA thesis on ethnic identities in B&H including their genealogy, structural characteristics and dynamics (Cf. Šavija-Valha, 2008). In the later phase, this research was extended and it particularly addressed the issue of interethnic cooperative behavior in everyday life in B&H. The results have been published in a book. Cf. Šavija-Valha, 2013.

## 4. (Understanding) History and Society of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Situated at the western part of the Balkan Peninsula, geopolitically and historically, B&H society has always been characterized by heterogeneity. It has been compounded by numerous groups of various ethnic and cultural backgrounds, belonging to almost all (old) European, but also to many non-European peoples. In permanent fluxes, for various historical and political reasons, the groups, also individuals, have come and lived there, some of them left, some of them stayed, assimilating others or being assimilated,<sup>42</sup> forming certain inclusive “aggregate of migrants and nomads” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004 pp.419), rather than exclusive coherent society. Both shared and diversified culture(s) among groups have been developed<sup>43</sup> in permanent communication and negotiation of various symbolic universes.

Geopolitical position of B&H, however, is the one, if not the key factor affecting the society. B&H can be clearly defined as a *borderline territory*. It has always been situated between the East and the West, whatever cultural and political meaning this division brings. During the Roman Empire, B&H was a borderline territory between Romans and “barbarians,” then it became the territory/line along “Great Schism” of Christianity 1054 was drawn; to become later a stable property of Ottoman Empire at its peak, thus bordering between Christianity and Islam, which was then followed by being the eastern border of Austro-Hungarian Empire; to furthermore evolve, as a part of socialist Yugoslavia, into the borderline between Eastern socialism and Western democracy; eventually nowadays to be, the borderline territory between European EU and European NON-EU regions. Such position meant that B&H has always been surrounded by great major powers of the time, which needed and claimed its territory

<sup>42</sup> On these fluxes cf. Malcolm, 2002; Stavrianos, 2002 p.24; Velikonja, 1998.

<sup>43</sup> Which of them dominates, fully depends of historical circumstances.

for their worldly goals. Consequently, as almost regular practice, certain major ruling power conquered the territory and people, stayed long enough to leave their cultural markers, and finally left to be replaced by another ruling power. Thus, B&H has been under the sequence of external rulers from Romans to communist party of Yugoslavia.<sup>44</sup> Such historical processes situate B&H as being *both/neither the East and/nor the West* surviving what we might call *a paradox of borderline territory*.<sup>45</sup> In an attempt to explain the paradox, we might suggest that there is a tendency of every external ruler to conquer B&H permanently, territorialize it by establishing firm borderline towards the others. Moreover, due to the sequence of the rulers, this line fluctuates over the territory, “threatening” to “shrink” B&H territory into a stable line by which two or more rulers supposed to be divided, while B&H, reduced only to the line, would cease to exist as a geopolitical entity. Hence, the question asked by many stakeholders, local and international, regardless of their motifs, is whether certain self-destruction element is built the structure of B&H?

Historical evidence of its survival, however, suggests another practice of “handling” the paradox. Oversaturated by cultural markers, signifiers and various symbolic universes, which appeared as a consequence of these territorializing and diversifications, by this very complexity of symbolic significations or even their confusion, B&H structurally disables unambiguous uni- or even multilateral territorial confinement. Using the paradox for its own advantage, rather than a mere place, which is “the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationship of coexistence” (De Certeau, 2002 p.117). B&H is a space<sup>46</sup> for various cultures to permanently negotiate their

<sup>44</sup> Even today B&H is ultimately under IC rule.

<sup>45</sup> Basically, in linguistics terms “borderline territory” is oxymoron: territory requires at least two dimensions, while (border) line is defined strictly by a single dimension.

<sup>46</sup> In comparison to a “place” a “space exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables. Thus space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. Space occurs as the effect produced by the



identities and (re)establish boundaries. Rather than a territorialized unit it might be perceived as a “machine” for the production of boundaries and territories which forms somehow peculiar or idiosyncratic culture of B&H which simultaneously includes and excludes its intrinsic differences.

The sequence of external rules that have been coming with their culture and ideology could be seen as important if not crucial aspect of constitution of particular ethno-religious identities as seen today in B&H.<sup>47</sup> It could be argued that the process of *antagonistic acculturation* is at the core of that process.<sup>48</sup> Simplistically, groups and individuals living in B&H, engaged forcefully in a cultural contact with more powerful groups of conquerors, have pragmatically adopted over time a number of “enemies”’ cultural symbols and practices to preserve own collectives.<sup>49</sup> Again, due to the borderline position of B&H and sequence of conquests, none of these acculturations has been able to encompass all the population. Instead, the process ideologically – and particularly in the domain of religion – linked only certain parts of B&H population with certain major powers, preserving fundamental heterogeneity of B&H society, yet making relations among the groups more complex.<sup>50</sup>

The Ottoman millet system, introduced after the Ottoman conquest of B&H, “politicized” these links, since it has administratively recognized, organized and ruled subjected population according to religion they belong, with all social and political power exercised operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities” (De Certeau, 2002 p. 117).

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Vlaisavljević, 2007 p. 86.

<sup>48</sup> Devereux and Loeb define antagonistic acculturation as “the diffusion of the means segment of a covert-culture (or overt-culture) complex of traits” (1943 p. 139). Two types of it are particularly important for the processes in B&H, “the adoption of new means in order to support existing ends” and “dissociative negative acculturation, or the evolving of culture-complexes deliberately at variance with, or the opposite of the culture of the out-group” (Ibid.).

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Donia and Fine, 1994 p. 44; Malcolm, 2002 p.46; pp.65-66.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Redžić, 1990, p.153.

through clerical “chain of commands.”<sup>51</sup> Under such circumstances, religious groups appeared as fundamental collective units, which gradually become “ethnicized” and “nationalized” (Donia and Fine, 1994 p.84). Having in mind that centers of religious power have always been outside of B&H, ethnicities and nations evolving from the religious groups have been also ruled from outside. The outcome of that process was that B&H appears as a poly-eccentric society that perceived itself as a mere periphery of these external centers.

Being a kind of colonial society, the population of B&H was never able to fully articulate itself politically. However, local elites, established in cooperation with ruling powers, benefited from such a system. Circumstances of the “pluralistic” acculturation made that benefits got along with religious and later national nominations. Though the benefits were actually enjoyed by a small number of religious/ethnic/national elites it has always been manipulated as if the whole group had politically privileged position over the others in certain historical and political period, and hence dominated society (Redžić, 1990 p.154).<sup>52</sup> In this regard, the politic has always been reduced to pure power, and a complex inter-group “domination game”<sup>53</sup> has been developed and practiced. Thus, such condition made the society of B&H antagonistically divided at the political level.

In terms of ethnical and/or national names, these geopolitical and historical processes transformed the “aggregate of migrants and

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. Velikonja, 1998 pp.76-81; Malcolm, 2002 pp.48-49.

<sup>52</sup> In this regards, there is a widespread opinion that Muslims-Bosniaks dominated during Ottoman Empire, Catholics-Croats during Austrian-Hungarian Empire, and Orthodox-Serbs during Yugoslavia(s).

<sup>53</sup> The “nature” and ideology behind this game is given in Močnik (2002, pp.79-85). In simple words: a fundamental assumption of the game is that if one player opens a space the other will use it. So everybody keeps the space closed and consciously miss opportunities. Everybody chose solutions which are “*equally disadvantageous to all the players.*” In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina the elites, on behalf of the communities, in order not to be dominated by the other elites, excludes all possible improvements that might be used by the others. So they conserve *status quo* that is “*equally disadvantageous*” to all groups.

nomads” by the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century into three major, to a certain degree distinctive groups, called today as Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs.<sup>54</sup> Due to the strong genealogical link between religion and ethnicity, the groups virtually cannot be considered without reference to their complementary religious counterpart: Bosniaks-Muslims, Croat-Catholics, Serbs-Orthodox.<sup>55</sup>

However, until today, none of these ideological indoctrinations, which have run in synergy of external rulers and powerful surrounding aspirants acting in cooperation with domestic “cultural innovators” (Barth, 1969 p.33), have been completely successful in creating fully distinctive groups. Necessities of everyday life, permanent interethnic contact in a shared space, living in vicinity, but also isolation due to topographical characteristic of B&H,<sup>56</sup> are some of important factors which have developed common symbolic universe, set of social practices and rituals for maintaining permanent trans-group relations on several levels. These mechanisms were structured in a way that enables integration of society that transgress religious, ethnic, national, class, professional, but also any other differences that might appear in social relations, creating interpersonal links sometimes stronger than those among relatives. In compression or paradoxically to the political domain, such relations reflect a highly cooperative trait of B&H society. Strength and social power of this common social space are fully comparable and complementary to the one religiously and ethnically diversified.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> One must not neglect many other minority groups such as Roma, Jews, Albanians, Czech, Austrians, Slovenes, Macedonians, Polish, Ukrainians, etc, but also many individuals who consider themselves simply as Bosnians or Herzegovinians, or even ethnically undeclared. Nonetheless, the numbers and power are concentrated among the three major groups.

<sup>55</sup> Cf: Velikonja, 1998 p.76-81.

<sup>56</sup> Rich by mountains, canyons, woods, rock deserts and rivers, most of the time B&H has been hardly passable region. Even today topographical obstacles and culture raised as consequence of this relative isolation limit global communicational capabilities of B&H, making it to a certain degree conservative society.

<sup>57</sup> Cf: Šavija-Valha 2008; 2013.

It could be argued that geopolitical and historical forces and population's response to them resulted in two separated yet complementary realities of B&H – the antagonistic vs. cooperative. Politically connected with antagonistic greater powers, the local ethnic elites have imitated such relationship between themselves, making B&H politically antagonistic society, where the fight for political power of elites was represented as fight for group's existence. At the same time, living together in the similar or even the same living condition, for the sake of everyday survival population have developed a high level of trans-ethnic cooperation based on mutual help, exchange and friendship. This has made B&H highly cooperative at the societal level.

In this regard, the majority of Bosnians and Herzegovinians practice divided loyalty as a certain norm of living in B&H society.<sup>58</sup> On one side, one claims loyalty to *exclusive, ethno-religious us*, which also “belongs” to the universe of certain “great power”, and which is articulated by power, politics and antagonism; on the other side, the same person claim *inclusive us*, born in everyday experience of living together, which is characterized with socialization and cooperation across ethno-religious division.<sup>59</sup> If the first loyalty is a cultural expression of force (power) that provides the mere existence of a group,<sup>60</sup> the later expresses a width and symbolic richness of everyday life.

A major problem in the perception of B&H society is (ideological)

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<sup>58</sup> This puts Bosnians and Herzegovinians in a situation to permanently balance between the two loyalties which leads to development of “ironic subjectivity”. A deep analysis of Bosnians and Herzegovinians as “ironic subjects” has been provided in Šavija-Valha 2013.

<sup>59</sup> This cooperative “us” is usually referred by Bosnians and Herzegovinians of all groups as “komšiluk” (neighborhood) or *raja* (collective noun from Turkish: “common citizens” or “subjected people” – in comparison to those having power regardless of being “ours” or “theirs”). Cf. Šavija – Valha, 2013.

<sup>60</sup> Need for such loyalty has been ingeniously used in political marketing of HDZ (Croatian Democratic Union) for election campaign in 2001. Using black and white letters on opposite backgrounds, HDZ offered a slogan: “Commitment or Extermination” [opredjeljenje ili istrebljenje], hitting the essence of political in B&H.

reduction and emphasizing of one or the other loyalty of Bosnians and Herzegovinians. If power and politics are only to look at, most probably the “antagonistic nature” of the society will be claimed; if society and everyday life are concerned, one can easily get a picture of highly “cooperative nature” of the society.<sup>61</sup> Instead, one should regard complementary reality of B&H, since antagonism and cooperation exist simultaneously. In a broader analysis of ideological mechanisms at Balkans, Močnik, suggests that “antagonism is the specific mode in which co-operation is performed” (2002 p.84).<sup>62</sup> To be able to grasp the complexity of internal (and external) relations, it seems that exactly such relation of antagonisms and cooperation should be assumed in any consideration of society of B&H.<sup>63</sup> And this “double game” has been played both by elites and population. Ethnic elites develop full cooperation both with the ruling power and among themselves while simultaneously promote antagonism between the groups they represent. These mechanisms enable them to keep the positions and privileges. The population plays the similar game. In a domain of everyday life people fully cooperate transgressing if not ridiculing ethnic divisions. At the same time, in supporting their particular ethnic elites,<sup>64</sup> they put themselves into antagonistic position towards other ethnic groups. However, this game of pragmatic balancing between (op)positions provides population and individuals with maximum possible benefits in the given geopolitical and historical reality of B&H.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> As Campbell (1998, pp.44-78) suggests, this is also highly contentious political issue, for the sides in a recent war took one or the other premises as governing principle, and the international community has been inclining to the antagonistic one, which severely affected time and type of intervention.

<sup>62</sup> Vice-versa functions as well.

<sup>63</sup> Findings from the research on dynamics between religion and politics in B&H clearly indicate behaviour of the stakeholders in such mode. Cf. Fetahagić 2014.

<sup>64</sup> Exercised through pseudo-historical narratives on common origin and destiny of groups, political calls for homogenization to survive, and due to patriarchal structure of society which is perceived as extended family (Giordano, 2001, p.235), this support appears as a “natural” act of survival.

<sup>65</sup> Cf: Šavija-Valha, 2005 pp.115-132.

However, each of these games is possible since conflicts that appeared in lateral relations are transferred to vertical relations and vice versa. The conflict, guilt and responsibility are always excluded from immediate circumstances and transferred to some other instances. External ruling powers are seen as the ultimate instances of responsibility. Arguably, being fundamental sources of inter-group inequality and hence tensions, as ultimate rulers, the ruling powers nonetheless play a role of conflict managers in these relational games. It seems that these complex structure and mechanisms, which includes population, elites and external powers, keep B&H society relatively stable except in short historical periods of anomies.<sup>66</sup> Although they possibly prevented some inter-group conflicts that might happened during the history, a paid price for this “stability” is that the society was left without developed internal mechanisms for conflict management/transformation, particularly at the political level.

## **4.1. Post-war Divided Society of B&H**

The 90-ties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century severely challenged such structure and culture of B&H society. A whole set of intertwined factors, global and local geopolitical and historical events featured conditions in B&H during that period. These are the end of Cold War and disappearance of socialism as one of major political systems at global scene; and at local scene, a fall of Yugoslav Communist Party, transition from socialist political and economic system into (neo!?) liberal-democracy, rise of nationalism and finally dissolution of the Federal State of Yugoslavia and getting independence.<sup>67</sup> Combined with structural and cultural elements of

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<sup>66</sup> In a way, Yugoslav socialism perfectly fit such structure emphasizing cooperative socialization and fully depriving society of politics, taking the whole responsibility out of it.

<sup>67</sup> It is not a rare case that the role and influence of these factors is neglected in consideration of B&H reality in a favor of the war and its immediate consequences. Nonetheless, these factors significantly affect post-war reconstruction of B&H society.

B&H society these factors brought the country into the war in 1992.

Usually ideologically driven,<sup>68</sup> interpretations of the war's causes and consequences are highly contentious political, scientific, legal, ethical, cultural and juridical issues within and outside B&H. Having no space in this book to get into analysis of these debates, but bearing in mind also dialogical perspective of NDC approach, which allows for contrasts and even contradictions to exist simultaneously, we operate at this place only with a more pragmatic structural interpretation of the war, which is build on previously presented argumentation on a structure of B&H society.

In this regard, once the last external rulers disappeared – the Communist Party and Yugoslav Federation, which acted as unifying factor and conflict manager at the political level – internally incapable and ignorant of resolving its emerging political conflicts without external help, peripheral and poly-eccentric society with regards to the power, left at mercy of more powerful and homogeneous neighboring aspirators who acted in close cooperation with local ethno-political elites, B&H society fell in the multilayered war. Cooperative society under severe pressure of antagonistic political elites and violence could not resist and it dissolved along ethnic divisions.<sup>69</sup>

In the end, after almost four years and severe atrocities, it was an intervention of IC that stopped the war. Through DPA, IC invented the new semi-independent state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, also providing necessary tools for the minimal reintegration of the society. It could be argued, however, that the very conflict was not resolved, but put under political and more accurately international control. The consequences of such solutions have been affecting all aspects of B&H society ever since.

The society is almost completely divided along ethnic divisions, and it acts through antagonistic ethno-politics. On the national level disagreement among ethno-politicians is so high that the

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<sup>68</sup> This includes an already mentioned reduced view on the “nature” of B&H society as being either cooperative or antagonistic.

<sup>69</sup> Keith Doubt (2000 p.143) labeled the war as “sociocid”.

IC through OHR imposed almost all laws to make the minimal functioning of the state.

Field work in the local communities in a sphere of interethnic communication and cooperation<sup>70</sup> clearly indicates how this state-level relation reflects in the local communities. Contrary to the tradition, communication in everyday life is not frequent between persons coming from different ethnic groups. There is a high level of distrust, which certainly came as a consequence of the war. However, it is not only due to fear of “the dangerous other” or the “enemy”; distrust is also permanently reproduced by internal group pressure against interethnic communication and cooperation. They are promoted as particularly dangerous since “deny all accomplishments” in the homogenization of nations. Thus, some participants in interethnic activities, who achieved extraordinary professional and human relations outside of their ethnically homogeneous environments, once they back to their place of living, do not even say “hello” to each other while passing by in the streets. Or: when a parent of a young participant of an interethnic seminar learned what it is all about, he forbid his son further involvement by lecturing him: “*What did I fight for if you will hang around with them!*” Or, let’s look at a more extreme example: the group of police officers using an excuse of “reestablishing public law and order” beat a group of young activists from “their” ethnic group who publicly condemned war crimes done “on behalf” of them. After this incident, the personnel of a local ER were afraid to issue an official certificate on injuries to the beaten youngsters.

On the other side, it seems there is a kind systematic effort, open or hidden, formal or informal, conscious or unconscious, of all ethno-political elites to “motivate” ethno-territorial homogenization. It is particularly visible in areas with significant returnee’s rate, where returnees face a high level of both

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<sup>70</sup> We will use here findings from the field work of NDC Sarajevo. The work refers to projects of interethnic dialogue implemented mainly in the region of Central and Eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina (NDC, 2002 – 2006; Cf. World bank, 2002; UNDP, 2004).



formal and informal obstructions. For instance, with a status of returnee a person can get her/his property back, but access to infrastructure (electricity, roads, phone line, etc.) is obstructed through complicated bureaucratic procedures. One can hardly find a job, and that is usually “justified” by the global economic crisis. On the other hand, a proper education for children or access to the public institution (health care, cultural institutions, etc.) is limited. Additionally, although sporadic, ethnically motivated violent incidents and threatening increase pressure on returnees’ population.

Another characteristic of the divided local communities is that the local political actors are under control of political elites from the top of the parties at the national level, and they are just following the “global” politics of their parties rather than creating the local one. Decisions made in local councils are regularly driven by the “centers of power”. Consequently, local multiethnic communities are often used as “tokens” for pursuing political agendas and goals at higher political levels. The result of such a game is the reinforced ethnic division in the local communities.

Political elites of all sides keep the cooperation at pragmatic level, supporting each other for the sake of keeping the power, developed balances and allowed parallelism wherever it is possible, even doubling institutions, to the level of infrastructure like distribution of electric energy!<sup>71</sup> Last but not the least, there is a strong link between local politicians and local businesspeople which results with many semi-legal economic arrangements for their mutual benefit. All these maneuvers are highly beneficial for politicians since they enable them to stay and share the power for economic profit. Thus, maintaining status quo is a vital interest of ethno-politics.

Supplemented by continuous reproduction of ethno-national symbols in all media, such behavior keeps permanent ethnic division among the population. Being impoverished and

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<sup>71</sup> In certain areas, dependently of the street where you live you might have this or that “ethnic” electric energy, or phone line.

under constant pressure of the elites, population perceive the situation in a fatalist manner as something “normal”, as a given framework against “*one can do nothing*”, and even if someone says: “*one should do something*”, the other may answer: “*it is not our business, but there are people who should do it!*” In a predominantly rural society of Bosnia and Herzegovina, decision making and responsibility is allocated vertically and almost exclusively to the figure of a *pater familias*, the head of the family. Due to ontological assumption, an ethnic group is imagined as an extended family (Giordano, 2001, p.235) and the father of the family is represented by ethno-political leaders. In such narrative, “*he knows what and how to do, how to get maximum for us!*” Although it is not rare that there is a clear doubt in capabilities of “our representatives” who are “*corrupted*”, “*hypocritical*”, “*working only for themselves*”, when one assuming the “organic relationship” between “us” and “our leaders”, in which “*my representative naturally helps me rather than the other*”, “our” leaders appear to be not just the best but the only possible choice for majority of the population, the very existential choice.<sup>72</sup> Under such circumstances homogenization and acting within one’s group is perceived as the most reasonable action: that is the only way to provide oneself with means for life. In this regards, preserving status quo is also seen as beneficial for the local population.

The following example illustrates such an attitude developed to its ultimate rationality. A roundtable discussion in a town in Eastern Bosnia, focused on youth issues, gathered a significant number of participants, representatives of the targeted population, representatives of NGOs and local government. It is a region immensely devastated by the war, now in the Republic of Srpska, with Serb majority and with a considerable number of returnees – Bosniaks. In such constellation, the Mayor of the town is a Serb, and the President of Municipal Council is a Bosniak. The latter was

<sup>72</sup> Vlaisavljević suggests that this choice is made “mainly from a mere necessity, not from determination which meaning would be truly political. One votes for them [ethnic politicians] in order not to votes for the others, in order to prevent the others to win ... due to a danger that those who threaten our existence might come to power” (2007a p.254). Translated by NŠV.

at the roundtable discussion. Different aspects of youth problems were discussed, and communication was good, the dialogue was developed to a great extent. The President was very active, answering the numerous question and offering his visions and practical solutions. Close to the end of the session a floor was given to the young man, a Serb, and he addressed directly the President. We paraphrase his words:

“I was listening what you were telling. I could sign every sentence you said. I think you would be probably the better Mayor than ours. And I think that you could probably do much more for our region. But be sure that I will never vote for you. I have no job, and I think I will not have it whoever is in the power, current mayor or you. I know that the economic situation is simply bad. However, when my mayor [a Serb] rules I simply do not consider the possibility that I don’t have a job only because I am a Serb. If you would be in the position, however, I would be burden exactly with thoughts that I don’t have a job only because I am a Serb, no matter how it is unlikely.”<sup>73</sup>

To a certain extent this rationale is revealing since it clearly indicates that it is not all about usually lamented “centuries-long hatred”. It is not about stereotypes and prejudices that a person might have about the others. Exactly here the rationale becomes frightening. Since, one can hopefully cope with stereotypes and prejudices – many of the organized interethnic encounters in the “safe” environment successfully “cure” it. But the problem appeared in the argumentation of the young man is much deeper. It opens questions within issues of reintegration, reconciliation and political communication in Bosnia and Herzegovina that are usually not addressed by any intervening agency. They are unknown or forgotten in focusing on a content of the conflict.<sup>74</sup>

Thus, in this story, the young man has no problems with personal

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<sup>73</sup> Cf. NDC, 2002-2006.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Vlaisavljević, 2009 p. 82.

and professional relations with a concrete person of the President, regardless his/her ethnicity. However, he has a problem with the person that he represents – the Bosniak politician. For the young man that person symbolizes a set of above mentioned factors which are built in social and political structure, including colonial history, ethnically divided society, non-democratic “pre-political” regimes, prevailing traditional rural society, and of course recent events: the war and post-war reconstruction which both have been deployed in the period of political and economic transition. The complexity and interdependence of these factors pose serious cultural, social, political, institutional, security, legal, economic, and not the least methodological challenges. Hence, to deal with certain problem in the local community, one should bear in mind the whole complexity that the problem invokes. For example, to unite the two mono-ethnic into one multiethnic school in certain town, in order to increase chances of success of a project, one should deal at least with:<sup>75</sup> fear and passivity of parents, agendas and interference of political actors from the field and from the political centers, teachers and school administrators who will lose a job once the school is united, possible war criminal suspects that are still living in the community who might be parents or even teachers, ordinary criminals who benefits from the ethnic division, and most likely with a donor who has its own agendas and ideas how to deal with the situation. Certainly, the one should be prepared for a long-term exhausting engagement.

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<sup>75</sup> Technically speaking! But such engagement assumes also proper needs assessment and deep ethical and political consideration whether such an action is appropriate.

## 5. Nansen-Dialogue Approach

The essence of the NDC's engagement is what we experienced and accepted ... it is creating of the ambient for life in this area, namely, interethnic reconciliation, mutual reliability and spreading these positive relations throughout the society.<sup>76</sup>

The necessity to address as many as possible challenges resulting from the situation described in the previous chapter lies in the core of the NDC approach to peacebuilding, which is developed and used to obtain meaningful results for inducing social/political change in the local communities throughout B&H. In this chapter, we will elaborate the main elements of that approach.

It is labelled as the *Nansen-dialogue Approach* (NDA) with reference to two points: primarily it is the approach developed and used within Nansen Dialogue Network; secondly it indicates certain specificity of the approach that might differ from other dialogue-type approaches and techniques in a variety of communication led activities. Though the approach has been developed within the NDN, in interaction among the NDCs, including (the democracy project in the) Nansenskolen,<sup>77</sup> hardly can it be considered as an identical practice used by all the members of the network. It varies mainly due to contextual differences among the areas where it has been deployed, with different issues, means-ends and techniques that have been differently prioritized to match needs of the local context. In this regard, the approach described here relates more strictly to the ways NDC Sarajevo has been working in the local communities. In principle, elaborated concepts, strategies and doctrines are applicable (or partially applied) within the network in such or similar form.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Member of NCB from Zvornik.

<sup>77</sup> And PRIO in the earlier stages of NDN engagement.

<sup>78</sup> Not least due to fact that the NDC Sarajevo specific approach has been evolved in permanent communication with other NDC's, most notably NDC Serbia/

A term “dialogue”, as it is used today in B&H, entered in political discourse during the everlasting transition period in a “package” of liberal democracy vocabulary including other terms such as “democracy”, “rule of law”, “Human Rights”, “civil society”, “good governance”, etc. However, most of these terms are used rhetorically as buzzwords, to demonstrate speaker’s formal dedication to liberal democracy for obtaining (personal) political (or other type) goals which are not necessarily in accordance with very practices the terms describes.<sup>79</sup>

Following a complex political, social and economic condition which is burden with a myriad of unresolved and newly appearing issues, the term “dialogue” is frequently used as a kind of a word with magic power – *mana* – which suppose to resolve opposing even contradictory attitudes and practices of actors involved in political, social and economic areas. Although dialogue as a communicational tool has potential for such outcomes, the actors who use that potential are rare. Usually, it is ironically expressed through a conditional form: “we should have a dialogue” or as: “we need a dialogue,” to “demonstrate” the locutor’s politically correct or pro-active attitudes and *would-be-if* solution. While, in practice, the actors usually strive to maintain a status quo. At its best, the actors use the term dialogue as a synonym for any political communication of opposing sides whether it is a negotiation, mediation, or even debate, neglecting essential differences among them both in communicational means and ends.<sup>80</sup>

Unlike such actors NDC (NDN) has been using the dialogue as a practical tool, as a communicational means, as *lexis* in ancient Greek terms, with an idea to empower people in conflict situations “to contribute to peaceful conflict transformation, and democratic development with promotion of human rights” (Bryn, 2007 p.9).

As it is the case with other intervening agencies previously

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Bujanovac.

<sup>79</sup> But this is to a great extant global phenomenon in which B&H is pushed in unfortunate way.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Bryn, 2007 pp.12-14; Vlasisavljević, 2007 pp.66-70.

mentioned, it is a two-folded task: reconciliation of antagonistic ethnic groups simultaneously with transforming the society and state into democratic ones. However, what differentiates NDA approach from most of the other approaches is its essential attitude on what is meaning of these two tasks and how they should be implemented.<sup>81</sup> The attitude has not been preconceived as a recipe and then as a set of practical tools implemented in the social reality. Quite contrary, it has been developed as a response to the actual situation in the field, developments, reflections, lesson learned and together with actual actors in the fields.

Extrapolating its structural elements throughout the whole field of engagement, NDC understands dialogue not only as an appropriate communicational tool or technique, but also as a concept, strategy and doctrine of engagement in (dysfunctional) heterogeneous or multi-ethnic social environments which are characterized by (severe) social and/or political antagonisms and divisions. Containing a complex set of elements, NDC sees dialogue as non-violent multi-dimensional means for transformation of antagonisms into functional political and social relations, equally beneficial for all the sides along and across the social/political division. In a vision of NDC, dialogue as such becomes a general approach to reality.

## 5.1. Dialogue Work

What does make dialogue being such appropriate means for non-violent dealing with highly antagonistic entities? The answer lays most likely in its structural elements. Being a communication technique, dialog might be perceived as an ideologically neutral means of communication. However, as it is the case with any technique and technology as such,<sup>82</sup> the dialogue is not a neutral communicational tool in its relation to social and political reality.

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<sup>81</sup> The point of NDA elaboration is not to prove its superiority or excellence but to describe a framework which produces viable results.

<sup>82</sup> Heidegger (1977) warns us on this in his seminal work on technology.

It requires a certain ideology to be able to function, and the most important elements of that ideology are *freedom* and *equality*. Since ancient Greek, yet in significantly different form and content, these two elements, have been fundamental principles of *democracy* as ideological and political system, to which B&H society strives.

A speech – *lexis* – and an action – *praxis* – were the two human activities practiced to maintain the reality of a Greek state – *polis*. They represent politics in its original meaning – speaking and acting of a free and equals for a common good.<sup>83</sup>

On the other side of *polis*, or on its foundation, there has been a household – *oikos*. It was a place of production – *poiesis* – of necessities for maintaining life. Unlike in the *polis*, there has been neither freedom nor equality within the household. A man, a husband, as a master – *despotes* – ruled as an autocrat (monarch) or even as tyrant subordinating wife, children and slaves.<sup>84</sup> However, he and other households' despots appeared as free<sup>85</sup> and equal in the political space – as *demos* in the space of *polis*.<sup>86</sup> However, although they were equal, having various interests they were not the same. It is the *freedom* that made them both *equal* – hence capable of understanding each other – and *different* – so in the necessity to understand each other.<sup>87</sup> In the other words, political space assumes heterogeneity.

It was a power of speech and action which permanently moderated these three elements and actualized political reality. However, both speech and action should be understood in a specific meaning: for neither the speech (primarily) conveys certain information, nor the action produces a certain object. The speech on the one side,

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<sup>83</sup> As Aristotle suggests, this common good is the ultimate good for human being as *political animals* – *politikon zoon* – which is actualized through *polis*. Cf. Aristotle 1988, 1252a-1253b pp.1-6.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Arendt, 1998 pp.27-31.

<sup>85</sup> Basically they were free from the necessities of life!

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Posavec, 1988 p.XVI; Aristotle, 1988, 1328a 35 p.231.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Aristotle, 1988, 1261a 22 p.30; Arendt, 1998 pp.175-176.



understood as *lexis* enables humans “to express what is useful for us, and what is hurtful, and of course what is just and what is unjust” (Aristotle, 1988, 1253a 15 p.5).<sup>88</sup> The action as *praxis*, on the other side, does not produce certain objects but establishes and maintains relation among people (Pejović, 1988 p.VIII), particularly these which contribute to the good life in general (Aristotle, 1988, 1276b 30 p.79). So, both of them are relation oriented: “they are the modes in which human beings appear to each other, not indeed as physical objects, but qua men” (Arendt, 1998 p.176). Thus, while in the household the despot ruled by force and command,<sup>89</sup> which is from the communicational point of view a situation of a *mono-logue* in which the ruling person talks in a form of ordering and others listen in the form of obeying, a *polis* is a situation of a *dia-logue – con-versation*, exchange of speeches, where *demos* were speaking, listening, “talking back and measuring up to whatever happened or was done. To be political, to live in a polis, meant that everything was decided through words and persuasion and not through force and violence”, because “[o]nly sheer violence is mute” (Arendt, 1998 p.26). Therefore, the speech as dialogue, as conversation of equal, and the action, as “doing” human relations among equals actualize a *political space* in its original meaning, which is the space of relating people to each other beyond violence.<sup>90</sup>

Besides understanding the ancient Greek political model<sup>91</sup> as an epistemological foundation of modern democracy and politics, we use it as a fair analogy and as a very useful heuristic tool for our understanding of the Nansen-dialogue approach in many ways. A particularly important element is the relational aspect of the

<sup>88</sup> Translated from the Greek by William Ellis, A. M.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. Posavec, 1988 p.XVI; XVIII; Aristotle, 1988, 1278b 30-1279a 20 pp.86-87.

<sup>90</sup> Arendt shows that for ancient Greeks “speech and action were considered to be coeval and coequal, of the same rank and the same kind; and this originally meant not only that most political action, in so far as it remains outside the sphere of violence, is indeed transacted in words, but more fundamentally that finding the right words at the right moment, quite apart from the information or communication they may convey, is action” (1998 p.26).

<sup>91</sup> Or it is better to say Aristotle’s interpretation of a Greek ethos.

speech (dialogue) and the action. As Arendt argues, through them “men distinguish themselves instead of being merely distinct” (1998 p.176). These are deliberate acts of disclosures (Ibid. p.178) by which “men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world... This disclosure of ‘who’ in contradistinction to ‘what’ somebody is – his qualities, gifts, talents, and shortcomings, which he may display or hide – is implicit in everything somebody says and does” (Ibid. p.179).<sup>92</sup> In encountering others<sup>93</sup> in political space, through dialogue or conversation, by the disclosure of her/himself, a person does him/herself visible to the others. This mutual *doing-visible* re-valuates, re-articulates and eventually re-establishes relations among those involved<sup>94</sup>. As Buber claims: “Relation is mutual. My *Thou* affects me, as I affect it” (1984 p.15).<sup>95</sup> These newly established relations are almost by definition the relations that transgress boundaries among involved people. As Arendt points out, “[a]ction, moreover, no matter what its specific content, always establishes relationships and therefore has an inherent tendency to force open all limitations and cut across all boundaries” (1998 p.190). In this regard it is an act of creating a new reality of relations, new networks which connects across boundaries of persons’ identities (Ibid. p.177; 184), and it is a political action par excellence or politics in its fundamental sense.

In other words, referring to the Sun Ra’s motto taken from the beginning of the study, it is dialogical situation (of being free and equal yet different) which enables a person to tell *my-story* – by which s/he becomes visible – *versus your-story* – by which another *presented* person doing him/herself visible. These mutual *becoming-visible* are deployed in relation to *history* understood as a set of rather arbitrarily chosen facts, semi-facts or even fabrications

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<sup>92</sup> Martin Buber’s insights are also valuable in understanding the situation of dialogue. He suggests that “[t]he person becomes conscious of himself as sharing in being, as co-existing, and thus as being” (1984 p.63).

<sup>93</sup> Buber also claims that “a]ll real living is meeting” (1984 p.11).

<sup>94</sup> Cf. Bryn, 2015 pp.371-373.

<sup>95</sup> Emphasis by MB.

from the past, which have been reified, established and petrified into the official if not normative story as if representing the very truth of the past. As White argues, history always comes in a plural form – as histories: “Unless at least two versions of the same set of events can be imagined, there is no reason for historian to take upon himself the authority of giving the true account what really happened” (1987 p.20). B&H is the obvious case of the existence of multiple histories. Additionally, history is always and as Sun Ra suggests “*only his-story*” – the story of certain powerful agency that claims and exercise monopoly over the reality, and as such it strives to determine every relation and action. Referring to the ancient Greek household, it is a despot who rules in described way, and who is always “he” – a male – a head of the family, *pater familias*. The form of a monologue is the form of *his-story* and the history.<sup>96</sup>

Isolated, both *my-story* and *your-story* are ideologically determined by different histories. However, each of them contains an excess of personal experience and meaning which are to certain degree incongruent with their particular histories. In the dialogue, in interfacing *my- vs. your-story* in a *present*, the excess evolves into *our-story* which necessarily differs from the histories. Since appeared in the *present*, being something *new*, not previously existent, *our-story* can neither be history nor *his-story*. By the same “nature” of being new, it redefines previously existing relations into new forms that reflect the new state of matter. This process of interfacing *my-story vs. your-story* is fairly illustrated in one of the interviews:

There was a Muslim – Bosniak girl [at the seminar in Sarajevo], I think she is from Jajce. We were sitting together and generally talking about the war, how it affects people. And I literary started to cry.  
I told that my father got killed during the war. And

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<sup>96</sup> To avoid potential misunderstanding – history as represented here is not a genre of humanities, with its scientific researching methodologies and tools. The history referred here is an ideological tool for social and political manipulation, which might use and usually uses and misuses findings from the history as scientific discipline.

she also started to cry, telling me that she had the same lost. That was somehow a great moment for me. I was touched – every side is a loser in this story at the end. We are all hurt somewhere; we are all losers. When you look only from your perspective, you think you are the only victim. However, when you see the other side, hear the other story; you get the bigger picture only by that dialogue.<sup>97</sup>

It is important to emphasize that *our-story* as a result of the dialogue is not a new meta-story, which over-determines the reality from now on. It is by no means an ideology. *Our-story* exists only in *permanent* dialogue and its complementary action. It expresses and re-describes interest of those involved as “something *interest*, which lies between people and therefore can relate and bind them together” (Arendt, 1998 p.182),<sup>98</sup> whether it is matter of relations between people or some “objective reality” (Ibid.). By these permanent re-descriptions, dialogue delivers new meanings, and thus it invokes common action by which *interests* might be actualized. In this regard, the dialogue goes beyond truth of histories and *his-stories*. The truth is not given to the participants in the dialogue. It has been permanently and repeatedly re-established and re-articulated in the dialogue as a *truth in-between*, which is neither a kind of “eternal truth” nor “real truth”,<sup>99</sup> but the truth of new relations which can be a base for new actions: it is the political truth in its fundamental meaning.

However, “establishing” the truth of dialogue as political truth does not necessarily means negating particular truths of participants in the dialogue. Quite contrary, as previously argued, co-existence of these particular truths is a permanent challenging factor, one of fundamental “fuels” that requires and runs dialogue. As Mouffe argues, “democracy does not require a theory of truth and notions

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<sup>97</sup> The member of NCB from Jajce region.

<sup>98</sup> Emphasized by HA.

<sup>99</sup> It could be argued that these kinds of “eternal” or “real” truths have always been established in a form of ideological monologue, be it theological, metaphysical, or promoted as “political” or even “scientific”.

like unconditionality and universal validity, but a manifold of practices and pragmatic moves aiming at persuading people to broaden the range of their commitments to others, to build a more inclusive community” (2009 pp.65-66).

This inclusive capacity of dialogue, regardless of differences or even antagonisms with which it operates, is based on its inherent feature to reveal participants as each others “fellow sufferers”, as the story from the interview indicates. At the most extreme point, such as situation of post-violent conflict, through interfacing *my vs. your-story*, dialogue does not “focus on who is right or most guilty” (Bryn, 2007 p.10), but it is a forum that almost necessarily increases as Rorty suggests “our sensitivity to the particular details of the pain and humiliation of other, unfamiliar sorts of people. Such increased sensitivity makes it more difficult to marginalize people different from ourselves” (Rorty, 1995 p.16). Based on such an almost tangible morality, mutual responsibility of the “fellow sufferers” forms certain solidarity, which invokes actions of their mutual de-marginalization or emancipation. It is this morality that also determines a justice which is promoted by dialogue: the justice which goes beyond any kind of retribution, although not necessarily negating it, and which is primarily sensible for human suffering and hence in capability of shaping actions which avoids it.

Another important feature of dialogue is that it cannot be understood as a time-constrained set of activities that delivers predictable end-products.<sup>100</sup> It is almost a permanent process of interfacing and relating, re-describing and de-constructing whatever and whoever is in the forum. It is not a shortcut to any re-solution; quite contrary, it is a long joint roundabout journey of envisioning, elaborating, probing, experimenting on and with boundaries, crossing them forth and back with high level of uncertainty for any gain. Exactly due to this openness, unpretentiousness and duration, the probability of sustainable long-term success is significantly higher. Although it comes slowly

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<sup>100</sup> Cf. Arendt, 1998 p.183; 191.

and almost invisibly, one can argue that, among the others, these factors significantly contribute to gradual mitigation of particularly antagonistic differences, allow for affirmation of newly created relations and their articulation into actions, which at the end brings social change at larger scale. Thus, it is about political process par excellence.<sup>101</sup>

In the end, it could be argued that a complex set of these structural elements which creates a situation of dialogue, with possibility to transcend *his-stories* with *our-story* by means of words and deeds, not by violence, makes dialogue and its counterpart action very viable means for dealing with antagonistic entities, by bridging or even transgressing their pre-defined entrenched positions into the new set of inter-positions – which is almost by definition a win-win situation – from which reality can be or the most probably is re-valuated, re-described and eventually changed.

## 5.2. Interethnic Dialogue

Due to described structural features, NDC sees dialogue as the most appropriate means for dealing with a complex situation of an ethnically divided society of B&H. However, at a glance, it might look that there is an epistemological problem involved in implementing dialogue in such condition. For, hardly can democracy and dialogue be thought independently. They always come together, invoke each other, enable each other, or serve as privileged signifiers to each other.

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<sup>101</sup> For getting into relations is always “risky business”, because, one never knows to whom s/he discloses, and what might be a result of it (Arendt, 1998 p.180). Although certain courage is necessary to get out from private realm into domain of dialogue and action, it is not “necessarily... related to a willingness to suffer the consequences” (Ibid. p.186). Having in mind the antagonistic positions we are dealing with in B&H, the consequences – be them real or imagined – could be severe if not life threatening. However, over the time, through dialogue and actions the positions have been re-written with new content which additionally encourage involved person for more disclosure and more actions. Gradually, mutual visibility in dialogue process becomes visibility in wider public realm, which produces a strong political statement.

In dealing with B&H, we are in a social and a political space, which could be only constitutionally or legally labeled as democracy, and which technically functions as such,<sup>102</sup> while the most important ideological and practical aspects of it, freedom and equalities<sup>103</sup> and the very agents of them are severely limited by numerous factors. As argued before,<sup>104</sup> all these factors originate from the issue of ethnicity that is given central position in all narratives, political, legal, economic, social, or cultural. In the other words, ethnicity over-determinates all the reality of B&H. It is a consequence of historical contingencies and geopolitical situation, which were and still are far beyond the reach and control of the very population of B&H, including its elites. Society and culture developed in B&H is a pragmatic response to such a situation and it resulted in maintaining subtle balance between domains of politics, which deals with *antagonistic poly-eccentric ethnicities*, and domains society, which deals with *cooperative, inclusive heterogeneous communities*.

The balance was severely challenged by the political transition and consequently by the recent war in the nineties. The symbolic (a real) position of external ruler (as “conflict manager”) disappeared after the Communist Party dissolved,<sup>105</sup> and trans-ethnic cooperative society was almost completely erased for the benefit of ethnic homogenization and re-distribution of power, which by “nature” of B&H culture function in the form of antagonisms.

In the post-war period, through reconciliation interventionism, by processes of institutional and capacity building, IC has been establishing a playground for democratic development. However, for the reasons elaborated before,<sup>106</sup> beyond declarative acceptance, these processes have not been successful in “persuading” beneficiaries, namely, local agents, to adopt democratic values,

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<sup>102</sup> Particularly with regards to election mechanisms!

<sup>103</sup> It is about equalities of differences – or pluralism in political terms!

<sup>104</sup> Chapter 2.

<sup>105</sup> Although, IC and particularly OHR is temporarily fulfilling this role!

<sup>106</sup> Chapter 2.

norms and procedures as the rules of the “game”. The outcome is even paradoxical: the local agents adopted them – not to establish democracy and democratic state in their full capacities, but only to preserve a post-war gain in power and hence a status quo.<sup>107</sup> As a result, a form of *pretended or enacted* democratic practices and hence dialogue exists among elected ethno-politicians. They can establish a form of political space, but, due to “domination game”<sup>108</sup> political actions take places only at the boundaries of that space. For only such position does not undermine *power sharing that makes the state very stable*, yet completely closed for any development. Thus, the democracy in B&H, function basically as an elective poly-ethnic oligarchy.<sup>109</sup>

On the other side, unlike during periods of relative stability in the past, in the current condition of *anomia*, everyday life is not a complementary/opposed reality to the domain of politics anymore. Quite contrary, it reflects and reproduces ethnic cleavages promoted by ethno-political elites in the antagonistic mode, and even serves as “electoral fuel” for maintaining power sharing at the top-level. The society suppressed all authentic mechanisms for communicating across ethnic division that have been developed during the history.<sup>110</sup> Cooperative trans-ethnic networks, which have been a fabric of social life in previous periods, have been torn apart for the benefit of antagonistic mono-ethnic networks that now dominate almost the whole political and social reality. Places of everyday interethnic encounters that previously reproduced cooperative social relationships<sup>111</sup> have been replaced by “no man’s land” between frozen trenches, in which no one enters.

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<sup>107</sup> This maneuver could be recognized as a clear case of already mentioned antagonistic acculturation, in which subordinated group – in this case B&H ruling elites – adopting means of superior group – in this case IC – to preserve their own practices and ends.

<sup>108</sup> Chapter 3.

<sup>109</sup> One should notice that it increasingly becomes global phenomenon.

<sup>110</sup> Based on permanent symbolic exchange which could be considered as mechanism Mauss (1966 p.10) labeled as system of “total prestation”.

<sup>111</sup> Through rituals of everyday life.



Therefore, the crucial question for all actors, local and international, is how to break through this point of stagnation and immobility, which combined with prolonged global economic and political crisis, gradually deteriorates overall conditions in B&H. Although regression towards violent forms of relationships is unlikely, it is exactly that possibility – which spun from time to time from various political and media centers of power – that fuels maintenance of the status quo.

As already pointed out, NDC sees exactly *interethnic dialogue* as important means in overcoming such situation, not only in terms of breaking the motionless point and/or opening interethnic processes, but as permanent practice of challenging divided realities of B&H and establishing points and processes of mutual *inter-est* and hence contributing to overall development of the society and the state.

However, on one hand, having in mind that originally dialogue is a form of horizontal communication of *demos*, of free and equals, namely of political people, while in BiH we are dealing with *ethnos* – which might be considered as “pre-political” people,<sup>112</sup> which are ruled by vertical hierarchical relations and by monologue, it might look that dialogue as the interethnic one is an oxymoron and thus impossible practice. On the other hand, a solution of that paradox lies in a transformative capacity of dialogue as a communicational tool. As argued before in this chapter, once at the place, dialogue, in a necessary way, changes preexisting relations into the new ones and hence transform the setting in which it is deployed. In this regard, doing dialogue among antagonistic sides is also establishing democracy and the basic condition for dialogue. In other words: doing dialogue is fundamentally doing democracy.

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<sup>112</sup> Although labeling conditions and actors as “pre-political” is highly problematic – for all these elements are fairly modern if not post-modern, hence they might be pre-political only in ancient Greek terms, and it is used in this text rather as metaphor.

### 5.3. Places of interethnic encounters

The practical question remains: how to set dialogue in motion in B&H society?

The first step in opening dialogue process should be entering in the “no man’s land” and (re)creating the places of interethnic encounters (PIE). If PIE should offer channels to bridge divisions through processes of multiple affirmations and relation building, it must be structured as the dialogical place: the place primarily defined by freedom and equality, speech and action, and by no means with violence. It must be the neutral and symmetrical place in which participants have equal opportunity to claim, freely and openly, their group, individual, inter-group, and inter-individual identities and interests, and in which they will be safe while doing that. As Massey suggests, “[t]here can be no assumption of pre-given coherence, or of community or collective identity” (2008 p.141). Consequently, in physical terms, PIE must be both displaced and de-territorialized: no ethnicity-in-questions should claim it. It exists as a virtual reality that enables the interethnic symbolic exchange, which is forbidden by the reality of the lasting conflict.<sup>113</sup>

However “construction” of PIE is a task that entrenched ethnic entities are politically or even structurally prevented to fulfill.<sup>114</sup> However, it is the task that should be the (most) proper one<sup>115</sup> for an outside and neutral party.<sup>116</sup> Initially, it can act both as a catalyst of the process and as a substitute for missing democratic structure which guards the rules of dialogue until the transformative power of dialogue produces their democratic structure and subjects.

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<sup>113</sup> In the action, this displacement in initial phase is done by organizing encounters in places other than the places of living, most preferably in other countries.

<sup>114</sup> Yet in a quite long term perspective this task could be initiated by the entrenched entities.

<sup>115</sup> Both in technical and ethical terms!

<sup>116</sup> Intervening agency!

One critical question remains: considering severely entrenched positions, when (or) should (at all) the outside party intervene in creating PIE?<sup>117</sup> By drawing upon the essential principles of neutrality and symmetry of dialogical space, the intervention seems appropriate only when and where there is already expressed will for the movement from the tracheas by all opposing sides. The following question is then, why are the sides willing to get into dialogue? There are multiple motives which drive individuals to get into the process: “opening new perspectives and hopes”, “common history”, “curiosity”, “promoting the truth”, “convincing the enemy”, “having fun”, etc.<sup>118</sup> On an analytical level, each of these motives includes relational element: namely, interest in the perspectives of the other sides. Paradoxically, an overall political motionless *stalemate situation* of antagonistically entrenched ethnicities, which is established according principle of “*equal disadvantage for everybody*” (Močnik, 2002 p.84), and which due to ethnic homogenization deprives people both of individual action and interethnic contact, *defines a point of departure*. Looking for the exits, answers and perspectives<sup>119</sup> individuals get into the dialogical process. In the other words, it is the lack of democracy – or the lack of equality and freedom – that requires movement to the place of encounter.

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<sup>117</sup> The “outside party” intervention in any conflict is highly contested ethical and technical issue, which can not be elaborated here. However, a brief critic of technical part of reconciliation intervention is given the chapter 2.

<sup>118</sup> These are some of answers given by potential participants during recruitment process as reported by the project staff.

<sup>119</sup> Cf. Bryn, 2015 pp.371-373.

## 5.4. Process of Transformation in Interethnic Dialogue

Importance of PIE for interethnic relations lies in two factors. In the one hand, PIEs in B&H everyday life were traditional omnipresent situations of re-creating and maintaining cooperative society beyond and/or against antagonistic politics. In this regard, such spaces bear certain positive charge in collective memory.<sup>120</sup> On the other hand, in more general terms they are practically boundaries areas, or situations that are instrumental in constructing ethnic identities. According to interactionists' theories of ethnicity,<sup>121</sup> an ethnic group "is not defined per se, but as an entity which appears from cultural differentiation of groups that affect each other in a given context of interethnic relations" (Poutignat and Streiff-Fenart, 1997 p.90-91.<sup>122</sup> Contacts between groups or their permanent encounters are crucial for constitution of ethnic group, which is constructed through production and maintain boundaries between members and outsiders, namely through differentiation between "us" and "them" (Barth, 1969 pp.13-16).

It is such a situation that is framed by (re)creating PIE: bringing representatives of the different ethnic group together (again!?) and giving them an opportunity to become mutually (re)visible. It could

<sup>120</sup> One can also argue that places of encounters could also invoke negative emotions with regards to war. Although a word *encounter* originate from Latin *in contra* which means *against*, hardly can frontline be labeled as the place of encounter. It is true that sides in war are positioned one *against* each other, but the very frontline is a death zone in which any contact, any encounter means annihilation of one of the sides. So basically there is no one to get in touch with, because s/he is at the moment of touch non-existent. Unlike the place of encounter, the front line is not relational, regardless of a nature of the relations, but relation-killing.

<sup>121</sup> Interaction approach in understanding construction of ethnicity is theoretical background used in this research. The approach has been developed from a seminal work of Fredrik Barth (1969) *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*. Having in mind heterogeneous "nature" of BiH society in which groups are "forced" to interact at various levels, this theoretical background seems the most plausible heuristic tool to understand dynamic of ethnicities and their construction in BiH.

<sup>122</sup> Translated by NŠV.

be argued that due to this confirmative nature in terms of ethnic identities, these situations possess certain seductive power. They neither negate someone's ethnic identity nor necessarily mitigate antagonism.<sup>123</sup> However, bringing representatives of antagonistic sides in the same place is by no means creating a situation in which representatives of antagonistic ethnicities "use" each other only to reaffirm their identity and attitudes.<sup>124</sup> That place, besides confirming "*US-COUNTER-THEM*", simultaneously (re)creates a situation of *being together*, unlike the situations in their current life. It (re)establishes a relationship of "*US-AND-THEM*".<sup>125</sup> Being a situation of "throwntogetherness" and "demanding negotiation" (Massey, 2008 p.141), PIE functions as a complex "social machine" that deconstructs identities and relations by re-describing them in multiple registers. It is now the condition in which the dialogue work as described above might be deployed. In Victor Turner's (1974; 1987) terms, the process that takes place in PIE could be described as a kind of "rites of passage" or certain localized "social drama" of interfacing entrenched ethnicities in phase of "liminality":

During the intervening 'liminal' period, the characteristics of the ritual subject (the 'passenger') are ambiguous; he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state...

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<sup>123</sup> Quite contrary, by making the identities visible these situations (might) actually reaffirm the conflict. Although getting in the area of "risky business" here, this possibility might be instrumental in overcoming resistance produced by the same borderline situations, which, by requesting reaffirmation, actually challenge someone's ethnicity as if the one is not so firm. Thus, it seems that certain "paradoxical intention" (Frankl, 2000 p.126-131) is involved in providing PIE.

<sup>124</sup> And ultimately avoiding situation of being assimilated!

<sup>125</sup> This is multiple constructing. It constructs "us" as different from "them"; or it constructs "us" through differentiation from "them"; as well as constructing "them" through differentiation from "us". It is identification through negation. But, the process of identification through negation also constructs conjunction, necessary co-existence of "us" AND "them", or "primary" multiplicity of ethnic existence, for there is no "us" without "them". As Poutignat and Streiff-Fenart suggest "The context in which ethnicity appears is simultaneously defined as multiethnic" (1997 p.90-91). Translated by NŠV.

We are presented, in such rites, with a “moment in and out of time” ... which reveals, however fleetingly, some recognition ... of a generalized social bond that has ceased to be and has simultaneously yet to be fragmented into a multiplicity of structural ties... It is as though there are here two major ‘models’ for human interrelatedness, juxtaposed and alternating. The first is of society as a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions ... The second, which emerges recognizably in the liminal period, is of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community. (Turner, 1987 pp. 94-96)<sup>126</sup>

In “liminality” of interethnic dialogue, there is an active process of “conscientization”,<sup>127</sup> the process of mutual learning which challenges dominant ethno-political narratives of the division. As a result, a form of what Turner calls “*communitas*” has been established. As he suggests: “the bonds of *communitas* are anti-structural in that they are undifferentiated, equalitarian, direct, nonrational (though not *irrational*), I-Thou or Essential We relationships, in Martin Buber’s sense” (1974 pp.46-47).<sup>128</sup> And “when a ritual does work, for whatever reason, the exchange of qualities between the semantic poles seems, to my observation, to achieve genuinely cathartic effects, causing in some cases real transformations of character and of social relationships” (Ibid. p.56). In other words, participants enter PIE as representatives of their “structured, differentiated, and ... hierarchical” (Turner, 1987 p.96) ethnic groups and their particular histories – *his-stories*. Through the ‘ritual’ of interethnic dialogue in the safe and guarded environment, through interfacing *my- vs your-story* in the form

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<sup>126</sup> Emphasized by VT. Turner “prefer[s] the Latin term ‘*communitas*’ to ‘community,’ to distinguish this modality of social relationship from an ‘area of common living’” (1987 p.96).

<sup>127</sup> The term “conscientization” is an English translation of a Portuguese term “*conscientização*” coined by Paulo Freire (2005). It “refers to learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality... [Translator’s note]” (Freire, 2005 p.35).

<sup>128</sup> Cf. Turner 1987 p.131-132; Buber 1984.

of “conscientization”, they re-describe themselves in mutually recognizable way, restructure their interconnections and establish interethnic networks as “*communitas*” based on “undifferentiated, equalitarian, direct... Essential We relationships” (Turner, 1974 pp.46-47). As a consequence, developing of mutual *our-story* is beginning of a final phase of this “social drama”, which according to Turner is a process of “aggregation” and “*reintegration of disturbed social group*” (Ibid. p.41).<sup>129</sup>

*Our-story*, however, is not made to be a simple reflection or an outcome of the newly established set of self-sufficient interethnic networks in the virtual reality of artificial PIE provided and guarded by the outside party. It is a base for an interethnic actions in the reality of the actual community, which simultaneously make *our-story* visible to ‘non-initiated’ members of the community, test its viability, confirm or re-describe it, and eventually reinforce it for the new action. This is a reiterative process of mutual reinforcement between *our-story* and action. However, it is not a closed system. With each *coming out* from the safety of artificially created PIE into the community, both *our-story* and action get added value in quality and quantity of the interethnic networks, strengthening of *our-story* and efficiency of the actions. Besides, the reiterative structure of the “*our-story* – action” forms a process which expands or transcends the virtual “territory” of the artificial PIE into the domain of community: by telling *our-story* through public action it gradually “conquers” actual territory of the community. In this process, the PIE becomes re-territorialized and it “comes back” from virtuality of its displacement to the actual space in the community. It becomes increasingly open and available for more people both interested and in the necessity for social change.<sup>130</sup> This system that is made of PIE, *our-story* and

<sup>129</sup> Cf. Turner, 1987 p.94.

<sup>130</sup> Exchange between the realities of the ‘*communitas*’ and the community is necessary for it provides “thermodynamic” sustainability of the interethnic dialogue process. In a lack of the exchange, the very process would become self-sufficient, it would stagnate, entropy would increase and eventually it would cease to move as a “thermodynamically” dead system. It seems, unfortunately, that many peacebuilding processes have been (deliberately or not) facing this ‘fate’!

action, could be understood in terms of the Lederach's "process-structure".<sup>131</sup> Taking into consideration the infrastructure of peacebuilding, he suggests that

a process-structure for peacebuilding transforms a *war-system* characterized by deeply divided, hostile, and violent relationships into a *peace-system* characterized by just and interdependent relationships with the capacity to find nonviolent mechanisms for expressing and handling conflict. The goal is not stasis, but rather the generation of continuous, dynamic, self-regenerating processes that maintain form over time and can adapt to environmental changes. Such an infrastructure is made up of a web of people, their relationships and activities, and the social mechanisms necessary to sustain the change sought. This takes place at all levels of the society.

An infrastructure for peacebuilding is oriented toward supporting processes of social change generated by the need to move from stagnant cycles of violence toward a desired and shared vision of increased interdependence. Such an infrastructure must be rooted in the conflict setting. It must emerge creatively from the culture and context, but not be a slave of either. The purpose of the process-structure is a reconciliation that centers on the redefinition and restoration of broken relationships. The integrated framework suggests that we are not merely interested in 'ending' something that is not desired. We are oriented toward the building of relationships that in their totality form new patterns, processes, and structures. (1999 pp.84-85)

Consequently, the purpose of process-structure in interethnic dialogue, which is an integral part of overall peacebuilding efforts, is reconciliation understood not as a process of reaching local or universal harmony among people; rather it is the permanent and live process of deliberation on opposing if not contradicting

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<sup>131</sup> He suggests that "an infrastructure for peacebuilding should be understood as a *process-structure*, in the way that quantum theory has proposed. A process-structure is made up of systems that maintain form over time yet have no hard rigidity of structure" (1999 p.84).



identities, past and future, their re-description in new terms, which, now as transformed, are deployed in the action.<sup>132</sup>

Additionally, the power of interethnic dialogue as a transformational tool enables us to redefine the concept of *trans-ethnicity* in political terms.<sup>133</sup> Transformed as such, it does not merely signify a traditional social space of inter-ethnic cooperation based on reciprocity which aims to balance antagonistic ethnicities by hiding/suppressing conflicts;<sup>134</sup> quite contrary, *trans-ethnicity* became the space that not only discloses conflicts but employs them for deconstruction of antagonistic ethnicities, by which they are not abolished, but transformed into *demos* capable of democratic political practice.<sup>135</sup> In this transformation, *communitas* of the virtual PIE becomes a pluralistic political community in the real *trans-ethnic space*. By replacing “no man’s land” with trans-ethnic space structured by pluralistic and democratic principles and by practicing dialogue, the process-structure becomes self-sustainable and the role of outside party, as initiator, catalyst and guardian of dialogical place becomes redundant. Consequently, at long run, interethnic dialogue, as the process-structure, has a capacity to transform ethnocracy into democracy by introducing genuine political space and political behaviour among wider population through general conscientization “by means of which the people, through a true praxis, leave behind the status of *objects* to assume the status of historical *Subjects*” (Freire, 2005 p.160).<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Cf. Lederach, 1999 pp.23-35.

<sup>133</sup> This is in accordance with “double task” of peacebuilding in BiH, which is reconciliation and transition.

<sup>134</sup> Cf. Šavija-Valha 2013; Fetahagić, 2014

<sup>135</sup> A theory of *transdifferentiation* could be also used to account the processes in trans-ethnic space. It describe situation of cultural contact which neither negate its inherent asymmetry in power, hence possibility of domination/subordination, nor integrate differences, providing some universal unity. It puts focus both on the processes of differentiation which establish binary oppositions *us vs. them* in the contact and transgression of these oppositions, by which both collective and individual identities are (re)configured in mutual inter- and trans-actions. Cf. Blažević 2010; Breinig and Lösch, 2002.

<sup>136</sup> Emphasized by PF.

## 6. Nansen-Dialogue Work at Work: Intervention by NDC Sarajevo

### 6.1. Intervention

Theoretical elaboration of processes described in the previous chapter was not a deductive effort of creating *a priori* tools that were supposed to be applied by NDC Sarajevo in its peacebuilding work. It is the practice of NDC Sarajevo from the period 2006-2015 that provided a base for reflection and adopting some epistemological elements for understanding the processes and using it as a feedback for improving the practice. In this regard, NDA could be considered as a kind of anthropological approach in social/political activism. Similarly to anthropologists, NDC staff stay in the communities for longer periods, observe, participate in a certain social events/rituals, learn about all aspects of the community's life, but also reflect, triangulate and interpret it,<sup>137</sup> and finally inform the actions. Experience and learning points that have been gained in the period 2000 – 2005,<sup>138</sup> required serious reconsideration of the NDC Sarajevo approach to obtaining the sufficient level of expertise and reflection. Scattered actions implemented during that period with various target groups on a wide territorial range, which nonetheless produced useful quantitative and qualitative results, barely had capacities to indicate direction to which the organization should move moves

<sup>137</sup> They basically do what Geertz (2006, pp.3-30) calls “thick descriptions”. This approach should not be misunderstood in terms of favoring or even glorifying “native point of view” in action. However, the approach requires deeper understanding of cultural/social context, structures, functions and meanings, to avoid possible universalist pre-assumptions and proscriptive “colonial” behavior, which might result with negative or with irrelevant outcomes at best. Cf. Lederach, 1999 p.137; Lederach, 1995.

<sup>138</sup> Chapter 3.

in contributing to social change.<sup>139</sup> To address the issues, NDC strategically opted for more focused engagement in terms of target groups, area and general methodology.

Simplistically, there are two main types of approach to articulate and implement social changes: top-down and bottom-up.<sup>140</sup> Each of them might or might not involve outside parties. The first one is focused on leaders who conceive changes and then, using established hierarchical channels, formal or informal, implement, or more usually impose these changes on the society. As Lederach suggests (1999 pp.37-55), dependently on strata in a hierarchical structure which articulate change, this could be top-, middle- and grassroots-level leadership approach. The second type of approach assumes that it is general population, so-called grassroots, who envision changes and claim them through formal or informal channels towards their leaders. Solely, none of the approaches is likely to make a significant social change, for each of them have their advantages and shortcomings. Combined, however, as “double track diplomacy (elite-track and people track, with track interaction)” (Galtung, 1996 p.89), these approaches increase chances of making the change.

Such approach was a starting point for NDA. Moreover, NDA is not specified as any vector-type approach in advance: namely, neither top-down nor bottom-up. Rather, in its base it is the horizontal, stratum based and scalar approach in which participants themselves decides the direction of their action – towards the top, bottom or horizontally.<sup>141</sup> Consequently, NDC Sarajevo is

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<sup>139</sup> By no means have we underestimated transformative potential of a great number of various activities with whole set of target groups in peacebuilding. Quite contrary, more activities and more actors significantly contribute to “sum game” of peacebuilding. However, no single actor, regardless of capacities, can cover the whole range of activities and target groups (Cf. USAID, 2011 p.7). Yet it must not be mere quantitative effort in a simple hope of realization of Hegel’s law of the transformation of quantity into quality and vice versa. Cf. Šavija-Valha, 2012 p.259.

<sup>140</sup> Cf. Lederach, 1999 pp.37-55; Galtung, 1996 pp.89-90; pp.103-113.

<sup>141</sup> Usually, as a result of heterogeneity of the local Nansen networks, participants work multi-directionally.

concerned more with the strata in which it is to be engaged than about the directions.

NDC Sarajevo assumes that top-down institutional building, empowerment and legislative interventions from outside parties have been necessary for a given geopolitical and historical conditions to form a framework of the transitional process, particularly in the post-war period. However, one could argue that a range of such intervention is limited in inducing the real social changes. Since, such intervention did not affect the culture of the local actors in a significant way to enable them to act as the agents of change. Quite contrary relied upon imposed system and international agencies,<sup>142</sup> the local agents maintain the passive attitude, playing only the game of balancing the power. Moreover, from their point of view any action that might evaluate this balance is suspicious and hence obstructed by multiple channels provided by the institutional systems themselves.<sup>143</sup>

If the top-level political intervention in establishing formal political space is necessary to define general “rules of the game”, it is likely that intervention in the domain of everyday life might redefine cultural condition for taking part in the “game”. Because, it is a social space *par excellence*, where the society has been (re) produced. Indeed, any social/political process could be initiated, even imposed from various strata and by various agents; however it is always reflected and responded from the domain of everyday life, whether being accepted or rejected, whether being short or long-term.

In all these regards, but also from very pragmatic perspective, which includes estimation of its own capacity, resources, potential influence, number issues to deal with,<sup>144</sup> NDC Sarajevo found its

<sup>142</sup> Sometimes even perceived as patronizing!

<sup>143</sup> This is particularly case for the top level ethno-political leaders. And traditionally, as we pointed out before, this domain as the political one has been seen as antagonistic in itself. With regards to ability of political elites to resolve a conflict Galtung warns that it is “the most naive view one can possibly have of a conflict...” (1996 p.89).

<sup>144</sup> Not least, the reason for a work in this domain is a fact that firstly, it has been

niche of engagement in a domain of everyday life.<sup>145</sup>

## 6.2. Selection of Target Area

Everyday life is a very complex set social elements and variables both in terms of quantity and quality.<sup>146</sup> Various actors, individuals, networks and institutions, from inside and/or from outside, independently and/or interconnected, influence social conditions and chains of events that permanently (re)produce community of everyday life. Thus, the important question is: who are the actors to work with to be able to influence significantly conditions in which the desired changes could be possible? It is completely unrealistic, even physically impossible, to target and work with all of these factors. However, having enough resources and capacities, an engagement which would focus on strategically chosen specific regions and which would include strategically chosen actors, institutions and fields of engagement, and which would be equipped with proper methodology is a quite realistic enterprise.

The first issue the organization faced was choosing the specific region of the Country to work with, which was not an easy task. As an immediate consequence of the war and post-war ethno-political strategies, significant parts of B&H territory became ethnically homogenized to the level that cannot be found in the past (Vrcan, 2003 p.58). These areas function more-less as normal (in the given circumstances) social and political local communities, dealing mostly with communal issues that are not burdened by interethnic divisions. One can hardly call these communities democratic ones, for they are run by ethno-political elites in rather a vertical way. On the other side, there are still communities that are multiethnic,

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traditionally an arena of ethnic cooperation; secondly, political power positions are more flexible and pragmatic at that level.

<sup>145</sup> Additionally, in reference to previous theoretical consideration, it could be suggested that everyday life is the closest image of ancient Greek *polis* (in terms of size) in which *dialogue* has immediate consequences of the life of population.

<sup>146</sup> One could probably argue that it is far more complex domain then higher levels of social organizations.

which are, however, dominated by permanently reproduced antagonistic ethnic division, and incapable of providing a normal life for the majority of their citizens. Moreover, in a wider B&H pictures, although they might not bring majority of votes, being a fuel that permanently recall ethnic conflict and antagonisms, they are (mis)used as “neuralgic points”, as tokens in political positioning of ethno-political elites at the top level.

Although there are reasons for working with both types of communities, due to limited resources and capacities, in the necessity to prioritize between them, NDC opted to work the later. Having in mind that actual ethnic conflict, which persists there, affects both daily lives of the people and general political situation in B&H,<sup>147</sup> it seems reasonable that the process that aims to transform the ethnic conflict and antagonisms into political pluralism and democratic relations begins here. Assumptions which were with caution built-in in this decision<sup>148</sup> is that by mitigating the conflict through NDA – besides an immediate effect on improving daily lives of the people – the divided communities are more likely to lose their “conflict-maintaining significance” in general B&H situation in a long-term perspective. This might affect the behavior of the top elites and contribute in loosening firmness of the status quo. On the other side, if one is not able to “normalize” (stabilize) multiethnic communities, which are traditionally prone to interethnic cooperation, it will be completely unrealistic to resolve antagonisms on the higher political level that are traditionally ethnically antagonistic. These considerations and decisions are also a product of NDC Sarajevo previous experience; lesson learned and information gained through activities implemented throughout whole B&H in the period 2000-2005. They informed the organization of two more strategic decisions: the actual regions and field of engagements.

Resulting from the work with teachers in a project “Upbringing and Education for Human Rights” and particularly from public

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<sup>147</sup> Through manipulation of the ethno-political elites!

<sup>148</sup> As certain “theory of change”, see Chapter 2.

discussion in all major towns in Eastern Bosnia,<sup>149</sup> based on a number of criteria including multiethnic composition, number of returnees and depth of ethnic division, NDC Sarajevo selected the communities of *Srebrenica* and *Bratunac* as the region for its engagement. Although, the chosen communities are far more complex than the others concerning war consequences,<sup>150</sup> and presumably harder to deal with, NDC staff also relied on demonstrated interest of local people to be engaged in improvement of interethnic relations.

### **6.3. Selection of Fields of Engagement and Partners**

Also, as the result of the two abovementioned activities, three, among many critical issues affecting interethnic relations in this region, have been singled out: education, perspectives of youth and position of returnees.

As a consequence of overall ethnic division education in B&H is also ethnically divided. It even supports – reproduces the very system of the ethnic division to the level of segregation among pupils/students. It is the most visible in school curricula, which are not harmonized with needs of students of different ethnic background, and they are a source of segregation and discrimination. As a consequence, the students are educated and raised in exclusive ethnic setting, and they lack any knowledge about the other ethnic groups. Current political relations, negative media presentation of the other groups, as well as general influence of the environment (parents, neighbours, friends) – all of that leads them to discriminative and negative attitudes towards other ethnicities. Regardless of the fact that some students attend

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<sup>149</sup> Focus on Eastern and Central Bosnia was a consequence of a division of areas of responsibility between NDCs in B&H: NDC Banja Luka has covered Western Bosnia; NDC Mostar has covered Herzegovina, and NDC Sarajevo has been working in Eastern and Central Bosnia.

<sup>150</sup> Including severe war crimes characterize as genocide by ICTY.

ethnically mixed classes they have negative prejudices among themselves, they do not communicate across ethnic divisions, some of them feel rejected from the others, and some even do not hesitate to express open hatred towards their inmates from the other ethnic group. On the other side, the school and teachers do not have the capacity or in some cases even will work for changing this situation either through formal and/or informal channels. The role of parents in these processes is significant: their passive attitudes also implicate the lack of interest for overcoming such a situation. Moreover, in some cases the parents are supporters of ethnic divisions in schools. The reason behind such behavior is a blend of war experience, poor economic and security situation, sensitivity to daily political issues, usually low level of their education, lack of proper information, media manipulation and certain isolation of the regions at stake. As described, education is a part of the process that reproduces ethnic division that is very harmful to everyday life of the communities, and it could be a possible source for future escalation of the ethnically based conflict.<sup>151</sup>

Similarly to pupils/students, youth also experiences consequences of ethnic division in the region. There is almost no interethnic communication among them; youth organizations were organized according to ethnic background or geographic origin,<sup>152</sup> the level of ethnic tolerance is low a huge level ethnic prejudices dominates their behavior. Economic perspectives of the communities and communicational isolations are an additional burden to the position of youth.<sup>153</sup> Such condition makes youth to be likely aggravators

<sup>151</sup> It could be argued that the education is the first and the last line or generally the main frontline in political fight for maintaining status quo in ethnic division of B&H. It seems that no other issue is so politically charged for its crucial role in indoctrination of future generation for sustaining and even reinforcing ethnic division. It seems that there is a tacit consensual agreement between main ethno-political parties in B&H to taboo any action which might change actual condition of the education. Interestingly, the main religious communities also “conspire” in maintaining such situation. *Cf.* Fetahagić, 2014.

<sup>152</sup> For example: there are youth organizations in that regions which gather only domicile Serb and those which gather only Serb IDPs!

<sup>153</sup> This communicational isolation is consequence of a peripheral position of such communities. There are no enough links to the “outside world”, both nationally



in ethnically motivated conflicts and to contribute to the ethnic division.

Finally, the selected regions are largely the returnees' and to a certain degree IDPs' communities. Although the returnee's rate is high, their position was influenced by "structural" ethnic division of the communities. It is particularly visible in communication between municipality structures and returnees. Lack of capacities, professional qualifications, equipment, financial resources, motivation, unequal ethnic representation and employment, poor and biased information distribution, no available legal advices, non-transparent work, obstructions are part of problems which returnees face in communication with municipality while trying to resolve their statuses and problems. Such a situation creates distrust to this institution and further deepens ethnic division.

Thus, as the critical fields requiring close attention and change, the education, youth and returnees became focal points of NDC Sarajevo's strategic plan as the field of engagement and a base for defining target groups. NDC Sarajevo staff decided to address the very "places of production" of the problems, so they chose to work with a number of elementary and secondary schools, a number of youth organizations and with both local governments – municipalities. In each of these institutions, important stakeholders have been defined as target groups. In schools, NDC Sarajevo planned to work with administrative staff, teachers, students/pupils and parents. Regarding youth organizations, the leaders and the most active members of youth organizations were targeted. Finally, both administrative staff and municipal councilors were target groups in a work with the local governments.

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and internationally. Thus, the opportunities for capacity building regarding new social and professional skills are scarce in order to be in the touch with the "world". Such situation brings the youth from the communities into highly disadvantageous positions.

## 6.4. Holistic Approach

The heterogeneity of target groups in terms of status, experience, age, education, etc., corresponds to NDC's *holistic* understanding of the issues and approach to solutions.<sup>154</sup> According to findings from the previous work, NDC staff identified a strong interconnection among the issues and their protagonists. For example: on one side, municipal councilors are representatives of local government and political parties. On the other side, in such small communities they are also important stakeholders in other areas: many of them are heads of various public institutions, successful business owners, and other socially appreciated professionals such as medical doctors, teachers, etc. Similarly, parents who are engaged in parents' councils in the schools usually come from the same background. The work in a single field and with a single target group could produce results beneficial for the individuals from the specified group. Most likely, however, it could not induce wider impact even in the single field, because too many other variables and factors affecting it were not dealt with. In contrast, the holistic approach, which works multilaterally, horizontally and vertically, treating the issues and the stakeholders both separately and as interdependent, having highly developed "sense" for local context, space and timing, should maximize capacities of the work and hence its effectiveness.

In a wide spectrum of individuals from the target groups, NDC staff aimed in the first phase to select those who were most active in their field, skilful, powerful and interested for interethnic work regardless of their political attitudes, but considering equal ethnic and gender balance among them. They could be labeled as "key people" since they are "deemed critical to the continuation or resolution of conflict because of their leverage or their roles" (CDA, 2004 p.7) in the given context. In the first phase, they were approached both as individuals and as representatives of institutions to be part of the interethnic dialogue process. The assumption built in this strategic choice is that eventual changes in

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<sup>154</sup> Cf. Lederach, 1999 pp.118-120.

“the attitudes, values, perceptions or circumstances”, experienced at the “*individual/personal level*” (Ibid. p.8), could primarily affect the condition of the institutions from which they come and also include new key people in the process. Secondly, having in mind position and potential influence of the targeted institutions for the local community, the consequent change in “institutions’ behavior” should affect in a later phase “more people” and “the *socio-political level*” (Ibid.).<sup>155</sup>

By using the holistic approach with efficiently and clearly defined fields of engagement (institutions) and partners (key people), dealing with changes in such extremely complex social system<sup>156</sup> seems manageable even for significantly smaller and less powerful actor such as NDC Sarajevo. The “price” of the holistic approach is a long-term engagement that requires patience, passion and deep commitment. Indeed, it is also a relatively expensive process. However, a potential gain of a sustainable social change<sup>157</sup> in society such as B&H today is far more valuable.

## 6.5. Role of NDC Sarajevo as the “Outside Party”

Before elaborating on NDC actual engagement, it is important to consider its position in these processes. The term *outside party* could be cautiously applied to describe the role to a certain degree. Partially it corresponds to Galtung’s suggestion to use a term for parties “coming from outside yet joining the conflict” (1996 p.104). However the position of NDC as “outsider” is highly ambiguous. On the one side NDC, coming from Sarajevo, is an actual *outsider* for the local communities in which the organization is engaged, in

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<sup>155</sup> All emphasized by CDA.

<sup>156</sup> The elements of social systems and their interconnections are not necessarily transparent or even known, and the system is in a permanent oscillation between internal inertia resisting the change and the very change that comes as reaction with the environment. To influence such complexity for achieving envisioned ends, one should be able to think and commit itself in generational terms even at the level of a local community. Cf. Lederach 1999 p.73-85.

<sup>157</sup> Which is not established and maintained by pure force!

terms of not being fully familiar with “micro-culture” and “micro-conflict”.<sup>158</sup> On the other side, NDC, as B&H founded organization is an *insider* in terms of “macro-culture” and “macro-conflict”.<sup>159</sup>

Additionally, in communication with local partners it is partially in the asymmetric position, because NDC is the provider of a place and space for the “parties” to meet each other; it is also the provider – guardian of the “rules of the game” and the “epistemological” provider of certain knowledge and skills; as an “empathetic ear” it serves also as “the social and communicative glue” (Galtung, 1996 p.104). However, being the organization that uses dialogue as overarching “tool” NDC is partially in the symmetric position, since not only it provides space for dialogue, but participates in it as an equal party. As Galtung suggests, the relation of dialogue “is profoundly horizontal, with communication among all actors” (1996 p. 107). Thus, it is crucial for NDC to understand its “polyvalent” position and permanently balance among the roles in the most convenient way, since each of them could be either advantageous or disadvantageous, with regards to actual circumstances of an action. In all these processes, however, NDC *must* maintain the *neutral* position. Nonetheless, it is also the ambiguous position – because, NDC *must* demonstrate *neutrality* towards “parties”, yet remain *not neutral* but inexorable *in pursuing the processes* toward long-term vision of political, democratic and pluralistic society. It is a metaphor of the *catalyst* which the most appropriately symbolize the role of NDC Sarajevo in these processes – the agency that is a part of the process, enabling it or accelerate toward it outcomes, yet remains unchanged itself.<sup>160</sup>

The practice showed that such a complex position was not easy to communicate to the “parties” in the field at the beginning. Many issues were opened, and it took lot efforts to answer them and to earn the trust of the communities. NDC had to deal with

<sup>158</sup> By “micro” we refer local specificity of the culture and conflict.

<sup>159</sup> Similarly “macro” refers “national” level of the culture and conflict.

<sup>160</sup> In the case of NDC unchanged should be understood in terms of the vision that it pursue.

a potential “meta-conflict”.<sup>161</sup> In a general negative perception of NGOs, particularly among politicians,<sup>162</sup> not least due to reasons described in the chapter 2, NDC had to demonstrate by its actions and behavior that it is not one of such NGOs which is running for projects, grants, self-preservation and quantity of indicators, or implementing some specific local or international policy, but an organization genuinely interested and equipped for helping the process of improvement of interethnic relations for the benefit of the local community and all ethnic groups. Several factors contributed to establishing and maintaining such an image. “Anthropological approach” briefly elaborated above, enabled stakeholders to become deeply familiar if not intimate with the organization and the staff, both on professional and personal level. Also, such approach enabled the organization to avoid traps of the overly bureaucratic attitude of many agencies and focus on (social and political) processes rather than just implementing single activity-project. Transparency of NDC’s vision, goals and actions contributed to building trust toward the organization, particularly combined with the involvement of the local stakeholders in all phases of designing and implementing the activities from the very beginning. The principle of inclusion also indicated clear ethical consideration of NDC “intervention”: prioritizing local partners and their needs prevented “colonial” and patronizing attitude of NDC and contribute to “mobilizing domestic [local] political will” (ICISS, 2001 p.70) to act as the real agent of change.

In this regard, although the processes were initiated by NDC Sarajevo, they were deployed in a multilateral cooperation from the beginning. However, multilateralism goes beyond the relationship between NDC and local stakeholders. One can argue that this is a critical aspect of the whole enterprise and achievements gained for the local communities. Other international and national stakeholders have been deeply involved in a process. In the first place, there is deep involvement of Nansenskolen – Norsk

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<sup>161</sup> Galtung warns on this issue, where the parties have conflict with outside parties “over conflict intervention” (1996 p.111).

<sup>162</sup> Cf. Fetahagić 2014.

Humanistisk Akademi, from Lillehammer, Norway, which was not only initiator of whole Nansen-dialogue enterprise, but also fundamentally involved in the process, through providing safe, exterritorial space both for dialogue and reflection as well as area experts.<sup>163</sup> The International Peace Research Institute from Oslo has supported Nansenskolen during the first couple of years of the process. Nansen Dialogue Network, gathering up to eleven offices from Yugoslav region increased the image of the range of the engagement and provided an invaluable resource of knowledge and skills. Additionally, a pool of local and international experts that have participated in various phases of the process enriched this multilateralism and gave specific tinge to overall engagement. Last but not least, for NDC to be able to operate from all these premises there should be a complementary strategy and responsibility of a donor who support such type of engagement. In these regards, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (NMFA), including Norwegian Embassy in B&H, from the beginning supported the work of NDC, not only financially but substantially in all these aspect.<sup>164</sup>

Multilateralism that stretches from NMFA, through Nansenskolen (NCPD), PRIO, NDN, external experts and NDC to local stakeholders provides bigger picture of the range of the whole enterprise, in which local actions took place.<sup>165</sup> Thus, it reassures

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<sup>163</sup> These roles are nowadays taken over by the Nansen Centre for Peace and Dialogue (NCPD), which is also situated in Nansenskolen, thus keeps the symbolic involvement of Nasenskolen alive.

<sup>164</sup> It could be argued that not many major donors act in this way. The cooperation basically begins and end with formal requirements and has barely if any substantial involvement in terms of process, strategies, let alone decisions and help in concrete problems in the field. International commission on intervention and state sovereignty suggested: "Contextual factors like size and power, geography, and the nature of the political institutions and culture of the country concerned are all important in this respect. Some countries are just more instinctively internationalist, and more reflexively inclined to respond to pleas for multilateral cooperation, than others: really major powers tend never to be as interested in multilateralism as middle powers and small powers, because they don't think they have to be" (ICISS, 2001 p.70).

<sup>165</sup> Besides these major actors in NDA, NDC Sarajevo's activities have been

local stakeholders that it is not just another NGO in a run for short-lived projects, but serious engagement with serious resources and potentials for social impact. As Bryn suggested the multilateralism acts as “leverage”, becoming “backbone in the strategy of reconciliation, [where] [e]ach component is essential to secure the outcome.” (2015 p.368). As such it can deal with extremely complicated conditions of ethnically divided communities and to induce significant positive changes. If the role of NDC in locally run activities is the one of *catalyst*, the critical role in this multilateralism is *facilitation* of all the resources and stakeholders.

## 6.6. Three (Four) Phases of Engagement

Strategically, engagement of NDC Sarajevo in the selected local communities, due to previously elaborated factors, was conceived as an open-ended gradual process which begins with institutional and personal mappings within targeted groups, goes through creating and capacitating compatible yet heterogeneous focus/action groups and continues with their engagement in the community. Such approach corresponds to a progressive set of objectives, which starts with the modest establishment of interethnic dialogue, advances through the establishment of multi-ethnic networks and continues to induce changes in institutional behavior. In the following, we will elaborate this process through four phases. Although, these are highly interconnected sets of actions, we will consider them as separate due to heuristic reasons.

*The first phase is the recruitment process.* Once the communities, fields and target groups were selected, NDC staff did thorough mapping of the institutions (schools, municipality structures and local NGOs) and persons (stakeholders and potential partners from the institutions). The process includes a desk research, formal and informal conversation with many people, following

supported by USAID, EU, Balkan Thrust for Democracy, Open Society Fund, Pro Helvetia, Mennonite Central Committee – SEE Mission, The Office of Public Affairs of The US Embassy in B&H, British Embassy, Swiss Embassy and many other organizations, universities, and individuals.

local media and events, triangulating data among NDC staff, making a broad list of potential candidates from all the groups and the institution, doing in-depth interviews with them, and finally selecting institutions<sup>166</sup> and persons to work with in a form of focus groups.<sup>167</sup> Many factors have been considered as criteria for composing each focus group – from the position, status, personal characteristics, through a will to participate, a record of social engagement, to ethnic background and gender. The objective was to compose as heterogeneous as possible groups, yet compatible in terms of equal potentials for personal contribution. In the other words, the group should demonstrate enough differences to fuel discussion,<sup>168</sup> yet individuals in them should be able to discuss the differences on an equal basis. It is important to emphasize, that during the selection process NDC did not discriminate so-called “hard-core” nationalist, with whom many NGO refused to work assuming their obstructionist behaviour: quite contrary, many of thus perceived persons took part in NDC’s focus groups. NDC’s experience shows, that such persons, once they took on the process often become its most passionate protagonist.

In the second phase, which could be called *capacity building*, the focus groups have been gathered in series of facilitated seminars, which possess a number of functions: they serve as educational platform for adopting skills or more precise rules of dialogue; they are forums for dialogue or exchanging *my-story vs. your-story*; and they are places of casual socializing.<sup>169</sup> By offering multitude of relationship building opportunities, the seminars increase the

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<sup>166</sup> By selecting institutions at this place we mean selecting particular schools to work with; the other institutions, municipalities have been singled out during selection of the regions of engagement.

<sup>167</sup> It is important to emphasize that in the first round of recruitment, pupils/students were not selected. They are selected in the second round of recruitment process, together with teachers who have been capacitated though NDC’s activities.

<sup>168</sup> Chantal Mouffe (2009) warns that level of *agonism* must ne preserved to maintain delicate balance between democracy and liberalism.

<sup>169</sup> In all these function they are very close to what ancient Greeks called *symposion*.



trust among participants which in return increases the level of communication and dialogue. With the aim to provide a neutral ground for the discussion, as elaborated earlier in the previous chapter, the seminars are organized out of the participants' places of living, *i.e.* "exterritoriality". In this phase, the most active and promising participants get advanced training in various areas enabling them to work actively both in promoting interethnic communication and generally in democratization processes. An important part of advanced training takes part in Nansenskolen, in Lillehammer. A group of ten most active promising participants from each target group (except students) spend a week in Nansenskolen, getting additional training and visiting Norwegian local and national institutions. Arguably these visits and activities in Norway are breakthrough points, "quantum leaps", after which engagement of those "initiated" gets different dimension both in quantitative and qualitative terms.

This experience and change of behavior opens new, *the third phase* in the process: *interethnic networking*. This phase goes along with the two previous phases; however, it is the "post-Norway" period that accelerates multiplication of cross-ethnic connections to the level of establishment of relatively stable multi-ethnic groups. Established in a form of dialogue-action groups, they are capacitated and ready both to discuss the issues and to act publically in improving interethnic relations in their communities. The four dialogue-actions groups were established in each community: *Nansen Coordination Boards* (NCB) consist of important stakeholders from the local communities, such as municipal councillors, municipal administrators, heads of public institutions and teachers; *Nansen Forums of Young Peacebuilders* (NFYP) consist of the students active in interethnic sections that have been running in the targeted schools through NDC's extracurricular programs; *Teachers alumni* (TA) consists of teachers from the targeted schools who continue to capacitate students for interethnic communication and cooperation and who support work of NFYPs; *Parents alumni* (PA) consist of the student's parents who actively support work of NFYPs. An

important aspect of all these groups is that they are to the great extent ethnically and gender balanced. Moreover, NCBs' members, many of them being also members of political parties, represent almost the whole political spectrum of B&H.

The establishment of the dialogue-action groups introduces *the fourth phase* in the process: multi-ethnic cultural/social/political actions in the local communities. Developed and implemented by the dialogue-action groups, ranging from public discussions, through sport or cultural event, education, to various civic engagements, these actions open the groups to wider population, promote the common values of dialogue, generally contribute to the improvement of interethnic relations in the local communities, and in return strengthen the very dialogue-action groups.

With the fourth phase the initial 3-year long cycle (2006-2008) was “closed”. The established dialogue-action groups and their engagement in the communities was actualization of the localized “process-structure”,<sup>170</sup> which is able, yet with “outside” multilateral support, to reiterate process in a progressive spiral – from recruiting new people to involving them in the groups and actions, in order to increase the overall impact of the process. As a proof of an outstanding dedication and ownership developed during implementation of these activities, an initiative of the dialogue-action groups to establish a dialogue centre for Srebrenica and Bratunac (DCSB) as independent NGO emerged. The centre was established in 2009, with local members and board and has been active since, working in close cooperation and synergy with NDC Sarajevo.<sup>171</sup>

After the first cycle of engagement in Srebrenica and Bratunac, and by transferring part of responsibilities to local groups and DCSB, NDC Sarajevo reallocated its released resources and started the new cycle of engagement in the communities of Zvornik and Jajce (2009-2011). The communities were selected after thorough

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<sup>170</sup> Lederach, see chapter 5.

<sup>171</sup> USAID mission to B&H recognized this potential and financially supported establishment of the office of DCSB and a number of their activities.

analysis of the conditions and using the same criteria as in the case of selection of Srebrenica and Bratunac. The same four-phase model – although adjusted to local contexts – has been applied and it delivered similar if not the same outcomes – four dialogue-action groups ready both to discuss the issues and to act publically in improving interethnic relations in their communities.<sup>172</sup>

Having tested and proved the Nansen-dialogue approach as functional, NDC staff and partners from the four local communities decided to increase the range of the whole process. Beside continuation of the regular spiral-progressive four-phase engagement in each community, a new dimension of regional, namely cross-communal and cross-entity cooperation was introduced in the fourth phase. This created opportunity for development of larger forums in which dialogue groups could exchange experience and improve impact both in their communities and regionally. In a longer run, these regional forums might become instrumental in elaborating regional issues and addressing them to a higher level of governments. The regional component has been tested during the third cycle of the process (2012-2015). Gathered at the strategy planning meeting in December 2014, after evaluating results gained in exchanging information and opening new area for potential cooperation among the communities, all four NCBs, recognized this component as highly valuable and suggested it to become the inseparable part of the process.

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<sup>172</sup> In the similar development as in the case of the work in Srebrenica and Jajce, the group of NCB members from Jajce has established still informal yet functional Dialogue Centre in the neighboring municipality of Jezero (which belongs to Republic of Srpska unlike Jajce which is in Federation of B&H). Additionally, a member of NCB from Jajce established Nansen Youth Section within the Red Cross from Jajce.

## 7. Achievements

In this chapter, we will elaborate achievements of NDA in the local communities. Rather than presenting them as a clustered sum of “verifiably measurable indicators”,<sup>173</sup> we will focus on the interpretation of their potentials for social/political impact/change. This not only follows the general approach of NDC toward achievements but corresponds with perspectives of the partners in the process. As one of them in interview suggests:

There were a lot of organizations which have appeared in these areas surrounding Bratunac and Srebrenica. They were mainly focused on [delivering] material goods and they had short-term character, without a vision for future... and which benefited a number of individuals. In comparison, NDC Sarajevo with Srebrenica office [DCSB], works with completely different agenda, [including] a vision, and the future that matters everybody. Thus, the effects are greater in creating better relations among people... in normalization of these relations, which will reflect in the better material status of people in the areas at the end. I think that in the coordination of NDC, people from local communities and coordination boards [NCBs] a lot of things might be achieved, as it has already been proven by results from the previous activities. These results might not be materially measurable, but the effects they produce are wider than material benefits. We have been working primarily on the development of circumstances for the improvement of interethnic dialogue in the community, but also for improvement of [general] material condition ... we bring experts and teams from Norway interested in the development of both municipalities... and with certain projects we will produce greater effects for the [whole] communities than those short-term material ones.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> The study, however, heavily rely upon them as we suggested in the chapter on methodology. Yet, in analysis and interpretation deployed in this text, we pay attention far more on qualitative than quantitative indicators.

<sup>174</sup> Member of NCB from Bratunac.

As indicated in the previous chapter, by the gradual four-phase approach, once the process reached the specific stage by achieving the specific objective(s), it advanced to the next phase/stage. To avoid possible misunderstanding, an important remark on the meaning of the term “achievement” used in this text should be given. Having in mind that we are dealing with perpetual processes, or with the “process-structure”, the concepts used to signify the achievements – be them objectives, aims or goals – should be understood in dynamic terms. They are not the states, but the processes themselves. Considering conflict transformation as “*never-ending process*”<sup>175</sup>, Galtung (1996 p.90) invokes Gandhi’s words: “The Way is the Goal,” and suggests the following dynamic definition: “the process is the goal.” It is exactly such definition that we use in understanding both stages and achievements in the processes that NDC Sarajevo and partners have been running in the local communities. Additionally, the dynamic characteristic of achievements enables not only easier understanding of their progression from one to the other stage but also their interdependence.

To grasp the whole of multilateral engagement facilitated by NDC Sarajevo in the four communities and the range of achievements as defined above, we suggest a heuristic progressive four-level scale of achievements. Establishment of a *process of reconciliation*, creating *multiethnic networks* (as dialogue-action groups) and implementation of *social/political actions* in the communities belongs to the first level. They are immediate outcomes<sup>176</sup> appeared as direct results of the activities implemented through the four-

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<sup>175</sup> Emphasized in the original text.

<sup>176</sup> In this presentation of achievements, we will not strictly follow highly formalized terminology of logical framework approach (LFA) with regards to upper part of the framework that defines the various level objectives. There are several reasons for that: partially, as explained in the previous paragraph, since we do not operate with static definitions of the objectives; partially, because there are various terminologies used in the various forms, by various proponents and with variable meaning; last but not the least due to authors’ critical attitude towards of applicability of the framework beyond planning and monitoring process. Cf. Šavija-Valha 2012.

phase of engagement. The second level of achievements was built on the effects of the first level and represents both its consequence and reinforcement. The achievements reached at this level are *building trans-ethnic social fabric, pluralistic political integration* and *institutional change* in the local communities. The third level of achievements is a collateral effect of the first two levels and represents added value of the overall engagement with the potential for positive impact on *the local* and even *regional development* of the communities. Finally, the fourth level of achievements describes human capacities developed through the whole process. These are the development of bridging “*social capital*” in the local communities and between the communities and transformation of the local partners from active beneficiaries into the real *agents of change* in the local communities. In the following, we will elaborate the achievements both in their causal link and interdependence.

The result of the first and particularly of the second phase of the engagement is the establishment of the *process of reconciliation*. As elaborated in the chapter 6, by this practice NDC understands process of permanent (re)establishment, re-description and transformation of interethnic relations between “parties” from those conflict-torn and exclusive into the interest-based and inclusive ones. Although, specifically targeted during the second phase, through seminars and educational activities, reconciliation, understood in these terms, reverberates throughout the whole engagement as its core open-ended “activity”: everything that was done positively in domain of interethnic cooperation it was possible only because it was preceded by the process of reconciliation; in return, everything that was done contributes to the very process of reconciliation, both for the people involved in the original processes, and for the wider community. In the other words *our-story vs. his-stories* has been gradually building and spreading.

Once, the process of reconciliation started to re-describe relations among the participants, mono-ethnic networks have been gradually enriched by a number of cross-ethnic connections, which have

resulted in establishing *multi-ethnic networks*. Within these networks, the multiethnic and gender balanced dialogue-action groups were formed for each target group: NCBs, NFYPs, TA and PA. Although the establishment of these heterogeneous, multi-ethnic, and to the great extent stable and durable groups<sup>177</sup> was the achievement in itself, it is their dialogical and action-prone character which adds value and enables them to bring the process to the next, fourth phase.

*Actions of these groups in the public spaces* are simultaneously *activities and achievements*. Designed and implemented by the members of the groups according to their needs and the needs of the communities, the actions have tremendous symbolic value. Both for the groups and individuals, the actions are primarily courageous *coming out* in a public space and promoting the idea and practice that interethnic communication and cooperation are still possible even in severely divided communities. They are highly subversive; transgression acts toward the system of ethnic division<sup>178</sup> and the first steps towards conquering political/social space of no men's land between ethnic trenches. Through the actions, the virtual *trans-ethnic space* of communication and cooperation from the "seminar reality" is transferred and established in the reality of the community. In this regard, the content of action is not important at all: be it public discussion, theatre show, exhibition, ecological action, peer mediation, football game, intercultural education, study visit, etc. What is important is that each of them is designed and implemented by the multiethnic group and benefiting the whole community.<sup>179</sup> As such, each activity is an occasion for (re)

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<sup>177</sup> In terms of membership.

<sup>178</sup> Hence toward the predominant conflict system!

<sup>179</sup> Such disregarding of the action content is often met with criticism from NGO community, governmental organizations, donors, and even among common people. Many would like to see it as the actual, materialized help to real persons and institutions. However this criticism disregards symbolic component of interethnic relations and complexity of social and political life. It usually derives from oversimplified point of view, where the role of economic factors, such as wealth, property, etc., is overemphasized, put in a front of all other human needs, and considered as panacea for all social/political issues.

establishing common “semiotic universe” and (re)building *trans-ethnic social fabric* of the community not only in the (traditional) domain of everyday life, but, as previously argued,<sup>180</sup> in *political* terms, which is a *novum* in the area of social relations in B&H.

In this regards, with the public actions, the groups enters into the domain of *political*. Appearing in the public space as multi-ethnic groups which cooperate for the common good, they “transcend” differences and act as *trans-ethnic groups*. The transition from *inter-* to *trans-*ethnicity demonstrates undergoing a process of *integration*, which must not be confused with assimilation. It is meant in terms of common actions and goals, not of identities. The integration in these aspects has political meaning *in nuce*: it assumes persistence of (inter-) differences yet possibility to mobilize them through a dialogue-action for common good (trans-difference).<sup>181</sup> In this process (ethno-religious) heterogeneity, which is the “given” (“pre-political”) condition,<sup>182</sup> gradually get contours of *pluralism* as an active, thus political, and the affirmative relation to differences.

The other level of political transformation which the actions induce is *institutional change*. For strategic reasons explained previously,<sup>183</sup> all the groups and individuals have an institutional link, be it school or local governance. Acting in the formal environments as informal yet compact and enduring groups of deeply dedicated individuals, sharing common vision, they positively affect *institutional behavior* both in terms of improved inclusion (ethnic and social) and increased professional standards. Good examples of such behavior are “minority”<sup>184</sup> teachers who got job in a number of schools which are part of process; or forming

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<sup>180</sup> Chapter 5.

<sup>181</sup> See footnote 135, Chapter 5.

<sup>182</sup> Constructed by geopolitical and historical contingencies, as suggested in chapter 4.

<sup>183</sup> Chapter 6.

<sup>184</sup> “Minority” refers to “constitutional minority” – the people who belong to one of the three “constitutive people” in B&H Bosniaks, Serbs or Croats, yet in the place of living they are outnumbered by the other “constitutive group”, and proportionally deprived of power, so they are factually in position of “classical” minority.



“Nansen Classrooms” in each of the schools as the formal place for interethnic encounter and activities of students/pupils; or financial support of municipalities for a number of interethnic activities of dialogue-actions groups.

These changes arguably pave the way not only to the general improvement of interethnic relations but to *democratic* (or even economic) *development* of the communities. By increasing the number of the areas in which NDC Sarajevo is engaged the *regional component* of the process was introduced. Institutionally supported by the municipalities and schools, it added value to the processes by increasing the range of potential benefits for the communities from political, social and economic cooperation.

The “sum” of the described processes, existence and synergy of the groups and their inter-actions, indicate development of what could be broadly explained by the term of (bridging) “*social capital*” in the local communities.<sup>185</sup> As defined by Putnam “[s]ocial capital ... refers to features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions” (1993 p.167). Krishna confirms that “[p]ossessing a high level of social capital enables members of any community to act collectively for achieving diverse common goals” (2002 p.9). However, he argues that

[a]gency is required, however, to help them select goals that are feasible and likely to be achieved, given the constraints and opportunities available within their institutional environment. Agents who have regular contact with state officials and market operators and who are familiar with their procedures and practices can help villagers organize themselves in ways that are more likely to succeed. Collective action can occur even in the absence of informed and effective agents, but it is not likely to be as productive or as sustainable. (Ibid.)

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<sup>185</sup> By introducing the term we only try to summarize broadly the content that it usually denominates as suggested by Putnam, not getting into discussion of its applicability and range as analytical tool. Thus, we use the term rather as metaphor, although not negating possibility of analyzing the processes through the “social capital” paradigm.

The process catalyzed and facilitated by NDC Sarajevo as the multilateral enterprise, so far did not only result with creating the “social capital” but also with creating the agency – informal dialogue-action groups, which have been capacitated through the process and which have significant formal institutional ties to be able to act as agents of change in the local communities and regionally. The existence of these trans-ethnic pro-active networks, their public action and the positive response of the institutions are early indicators of the sustainability of the process which gradually conquers more ethnically entrenched areas and builds the trans-ethnic space for even more social and political actions. Therefore, it is the work for the improvement of interethnic relations in short- and mid-term; and it is the work for sustainable social change towards pluralistic and democratic society in a longer run.

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## Conclusion

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The experience, practices and achievements presented in this book should be neither overestimated nor underestimated. It is the irrefutable fact that NDC's engagement created a functional "machine" or the "process-structure" in domain of peacebuilding in local communities which has proven its capacities to induce certain sustainable social and political changes.

In short- and mid-term their actual reach is localized, even with regards to local communities in question. However, on the one side, strategically chosen institutions and persons to work with, namely local governments and schools, due to their "nature" as being formal communicational and social hubs, open serious possibilities for reaching wider population of the communities. On the other side, existing regional interlinking between the engaged local governments and schools, and potential vertical and horizontal multiplication of the processes throughout B&H pave the way for even wider outreach in the long run.

Yet, the important question remains, asked by NDC, local partners and probably donors: although combination of well-designed methodology, human capacities, personal dedication, financial resources,<sup>186</sup> and results achieved over long period of engagement could reach huge number of people, change their attitudes and behaviour, is it enough to challenge highly petrified social and political institutions that has been reproducing post-war and transitional status quo? In the other words, does the described "process-structure", alone or in combination with the other similar

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<sup>186</sup> One can not avoid being cynical on the issue of finance for this type of engagement, which is usually labeled as "too expensive." Is it? In comparison to the "other side" of peacebuilding, probably the price of a single fully equipped fourth generation fighter airplane would be sufficient to reach majority of B&H population with some sort of peacebuilding activity, let alone what could be done with the price for the squadron. It is particularly ironic, since these apparatus are not particularly efficient (in financial terms) killing machines.

“process-structures”, possess such “transformative capacity”<sup>187</sup> to “translate” indisputable localized achievements into state-level achievements, transforming B&H from what is now into pluralistic democracy? Or even more important question should be asked before this one – is there any vision according to which B&H should be transformed, beyond image created by common places of “liberal-democracy” rhetoric? How pluralistic (liberal!?) democracy should look like and function in B&H?

Any process that invokes transformation of that level should answer these questions. And there is no single or simple answer. Once again, dialogue and its counterpart action “offer” themselves as (the most!?) appropriate means for dealing with the vision(s). Logically (!?), it is the fifth phase of engagement which should be introduced: after leaving the ethnic tranches and establishing *trans-ethnic space*, the new cycle of dialogue-action should start developing “*social capacity to dream*” (Lederach, 1999 p.117), and to dream big! Because: the ultimate question is not how to make present bearable, but how to make future.<sup>188</sup> Thus, the answer to the above questions is opening the space for serious dialogical dreaming of common vision, which might bear ideas of how to “transform” what is now into what the people agreed to be. Until then the possibility of the transformation of whatever achievements is pure speculation.

At the end, one has to be clear: considering the overall situation and actors, local and global, regardless of the time and resources which the process needs to evolve in order to be able to induce changes at such level, not so many democratic alternatives to dialogue approach are conceivable let alone viable.

P. S: The good news is that it seems that NDA has this “futuristic” element already built-in! To remind the reader, in the previously quoted part of the interview a member of NCB suggested: “... NDC Sarajevo with Srebrenica office [DCSB], works with

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<sup>187</sup> Cf Lederach, 1999 p.144; Galtung, 1996 p.90.

<sup>188</sup> Different from unbearable present, but also, with regards to global perspectives, how to make future at all?

diverse agenda, [including] a vision, and the future that matters everybody.”

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