ALTERNATIVE

Developing alternative understandings of security and justice through restorative justice approaches in intercultural settings within democratic societies

Final Research Report on Conflict and RJ

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Executive summary

The overall objective of this report is to provide an analytical basis for the variations in roles of gender and age in conflict transformation processes, i.e. in conflict perception and conflict handling. There is little emphasis in the restorative practice literature till now on the role of gender and age in conflict resolution approaches. We have therefore suggested how to conceptualise and include gender and age in empirical studies within the restorative justice fields.

As part of this and as a comparative addition we use empirical evidence from the Norwegian Red Cross Street Mediation, Gatemegling, involving young people, 13 – 25 years, in a new communication methodology. Youth at risk are taught restorative justice, incorporating the principles of Non Violent Communication and the Giraffe language teaching, which serves as a symbol of a big heart and a long distance between the heart and the brain, thus one takes one´s time to digest acute feelings and think before one speaks, and finally the three-steps model in teaching and workshops. The youth then brings this competence into their localities and mediate in conflicts in their own environment.

The question of age and gender is handled in an intersectional approach, developing the issues of generation, time, timescapes and memoryscapes. Time is social. People's images of right and wrong and of handling past-present conflicts vary according to their perceptions of time frame, tempo, temporality, (a)synchronization, sequence, emerging pauses/gaps and simultaneity, all of which we define as timescape.

The socio-history of peoples and places will be dependent upon time as well as memory. Thus, not only timescapes but also the issue of memoryscapes might be of relevance as background variable when analysing conflict transformation. Memoryscapes are seen as the relationship between local memory practices, an often violent past, and landscapes in which material and immaterial traces of that past may be encountered, a synthesis of diverse influences. Palimpsest memoryscapes, i.e. traces of something that was, but not is, in the place of things, people and happenings, can be more or less hidden in local myths, cosmologies, histories, songs... thus —hidden in thought patterns of new generations to come.

In order to make comparison between the different empirical experiences in conflict transformation in the different intercultural contexts possible, the issue of both timescape and memoryscape may be useful. Little has been said about memory- and timescapes and the issue of generation in the restorative justice literature. Thus it remains to be learned whether these approaches may enhance our understanding of what goes on during restorative processes.

Perhaps the most important lesson from this elaboration of gender and age is that researchers within the social scientific fields have to consider and carefully examine the complexity of peoples' identities related to gender, age and generation (in addition to ethnicity, nationality and religion) in whatever issue they are doing research on. And that they themselves also have timescapes and memoryscapes that influence their analysis and interpretation of their data. Restorative justice practices challenge these variations and complexities utterly because the aim is to reach an agreement – somehow.

The report also handles an alternative focus on conflicts and peace building from the point of view that even violent conflicts may be resources for peace and security when used within a paradigm of restorative

justice and restorative practices, such as street mediation. Young peoples' contributions to such peace building are overlooked but must be essential in building peace as they represent the future.

Our third point in this investigation into methodologies in security research, is that qualitative security research can improve by the use of visual means, such as filming, and in particular in a practical and interactive way, by participatory filmmaking. Although our empirical findings from street mediation show many similarities, we have had different research and field approaches. The relevance for the comparative challenges of ALTERNATIVE seems obvious.

However, there are also important critiques and concerns emerging. Do these restorative justice practice approaches contribute to a decentralised, but increased surveillance and control of civil society at large by civil society actors themselves? What about those who protest, deny or mismanage? Will this result in an even increased exclusion of the "unwanted"? Thus, a vicious circle of the routinised policy of unease. This remains as an overall empirical question for the near and far future of Europe.

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