

Interview: Zamir.net interviews Arlene Audergon, in response to the Croatian translation of her book, *The War Hotel: Psychological Dynamics in Violent Conflict* www.zamir.net

First I wanted to applaud you for this truly revealing and inspiring book. I found it a precious asset in my studies of the topics discussed therein, especially due to my own personal experiences regarding some of them.

A: Thank you, I'm glad and I would be interested to learn more about your personal experiences. One of the ideas behind the book is that it might support reflection and dialogue, and that readers might add their own experiences.

How do you, in relation to Jung's concept of 'individuation' perceive the process of individual growth or transformation?

A: You could say 'individuation' is a process of getting to live more consciously the person you are – there is an innate creativity within our human nature, striving to come out. If you bring awareness along on this journey, with all its difficulties, obstacles and surprises, you feel more active and engaged in your personal life experience, and in your contribution and relationship to your community and world.

You are beginning by asking about individual growth and it's exciting to consider how getting to know yourself can free you from falling into repeating intergenerational patterns, and repeating rounds of conflict whether inside your own mind, or in relationship and community.

Getting to know yourself also means getting to know those parts that you tend to think are 'not me', that you project on others and react against. It does not mean giving up your strong opinions and you may feel more engaged than ever, but you can facilitate the interaction rather than just feel polarized.

It's also exciting that consciousness can develop not only in individuals, but collectively. The large scale polarizations of violent conflict happen when we are individually and collectively unaware of how easily our emotions are activated and manipulated. Time and again in our forums in Croatia, people from all sides of the war were able to enter, interact and transform the most difficult conflicts together.

We use the term 'hot spot' to refer to points in an interaction that people tend to want to avoid and where conflicts escalate and repeat. It is where we lose awareness. But if you go carefully to these spots, they can be doorways to a potential deepening of understanding, awareness and transformation. No matter how terrible we are as human beings, there is also this urge in us to become conscious and to take responsibility, to recognise how we are a part – and to get that we really do each make a difference.

What is your understanding and utilization of dreams and dreaming in facilitating? How do you see Mindell's concept of 'dreambody'?

Amy Mindell was originally a physicist and Jungian. Jung looked to dreams to see the pattern or direction of growth in the personality. During the 1970's while working with terminally ill clients Mindell discovered that the subjective experience of body symptoms was mirrored in the night time dream. An early example involved a man with a stomach tumour. He said it felt as if it would explode, while recalling his dream of fireworks. Mindell then helped this man, who always had been reserved to 'explode' with his feelings and passion.

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Mindell used the term 'dreambody' in those days to describe this 'dreaming' dimension that manifests simultaneously in the visual night time dream, and in the somatic experience. He also observed how the dreaming appears in unintended communication signals. With colleagues, he went on to study system dynamics in relationships and communities, including working with conflict, historic oppression and conflict resolution.

When we facilitate, we are interested in the content, and the 'dreaming' or 'mythic' dimension expressed in polarizations of emotions and roles, as well as a deepest underlying source of creativity or sense of connection to one another. Even in the most dire situations, if there is an opportunity to carefully facilitate the interactions –there's an uncanny sense of direction and possibility that arises, just the moment it all seems so impossible. The facilitator does not bring the change - it comes from within the individual and community.

You obviously draw inspiration from Eastern religions. Could you describe the importance of spirituality in a therapeutic process, as well as in the process of individual growth?

Bringing awareness along into the flow and interaction of processes allows us to not just be taken unconsciously by our reactions and interactions. You identify with one point of view, and at the same time, you may experience being part of the larger stream of life. Eastern religions and philosophies tend to focus on this experience of awakening, being present in one's part while aware of the interconnectedness of all things.

If you are interested in your personal development, and in making a difference in your community, you may find you are in the role of the 'elder'. It's not necessarily associated with age, but with your feeling of contact to a sense of meaning, and an interest and love for the whole community. At a certain point, one is no longer only interested in one's own part, but is interested in the well-being of everyone in community. This may include taking a strong stand - but it does not mean remaining one-sided or dominating the other. Rather you can in turn support the other side and the whole interaction to take place, with a concern for all. It is a liberating experience to be connected to the whole, while not caught in it.

Throughout the history we have had various religious institutions as kinds of 'centres of spirituality' that often played key roles in inspiring, initiating, promoting and vindicating war campaigns. How do you propose we preserve the spirituality of individuals against such unambiguous manipulation of their most intimate feelings

One of the underlying ideas I wrote about in my book is that our deepest nature and emotions, when unconscious, are used as fuel for violent conflict. This includes some of our most treasured human traits, such as our feelings of loyalty, our urge for justice, and our deepest values and spiritual experiences that are more important than life itself- that we are willing to die and kill for,

The good news is that awareness of these dynamics makes the difference. With awareness these same qualities can give us the capacity to care for the life of our community, beyond even our own lives.

As you said, religious institutions have contributed actively to making war throughout history. And you make an important distinction - Spirituality and religious feelings do not create war. It is the identification with power that supports one side to dominate or oppress, and even support genocide, in the name of 'god'. People kill each other out of a belief that we must do so for the

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safety of our children or future, or as a matter of loyalty, or to redeem the historic wounds and trauma of our ancestors. The passion, fervor, and devotion that accompanies religious experience is potent and when unconsciously intertwined with righteousness and power, is easily exploited.

So, one answer to your question is that we all need lots more support to get to know our greatest ideals, values, what gives us a sense of meaning, our spiritual experiences, what moves us, what we feel passionate about - so that rather than going to war for such causes, we can actually begin to behave according to those values, and become the leaders we want to see in this world.

If I got it right, you claim that, in order to establish a process of accountability towards a sustainable reconciliation within a society, it is important not to consider any attitude or experience to be illegitimate and that such views must not be seen as only reactionary and extremist, but as actual and legitimate perspectives of some citizens of the country. However, when it comes to public debate on some issues, we, as journalists, intellectuals or mere citizens, often feel that some opinions should immediately be disqualified as unacceptable, and sometimes even that a debate on some issues should not be allowed, that there must be a minimal consensus on inadmissibility of certain views. For example, I would not even go into a debate on the issue of admissibility of torture evidence, or I would be quick to judge an extremist's concert on the central square in Zagreb. My question is: how can 'deep democracy' function in the public discourse?

The topic of justice and accountability brings with it trauma, pain and volatility. To include all points of view is not about tolerating inflammatory or violent behavior that repeats the violence. We need to differentiate violent actions from the underlying feelings driving those actions. For a sustainable process of reconciliation, we need to make space for those feelings to also be expressed, heard, responded to.

How to develop a process of accountability and move forward is a huge topic here in the Balkans, but also just about everywhere. How do we face the traumas of history, our deepest need for justice and our desire to put history behind us? Without some process of accountability, we can predict that violence will re-cycle. One of the motors of violence is that unprocessed issues of accountability sit like a vein of fuel, ready to be set on fire in the next cycle of revenge.

In addition to Tribunals that deal with criminal accountability, or Truth commissions to tell the story, I think it's vital and possible for a process of accountability to include a community level of interactions, a culture of talking about our greatest difficulties together. And with this, a level of inner work, or inner grappling with discovering our part.

By going into the very issues that are usually avoided, people are able to transform the most difficult situations and find creative ways forward. In our forums, we saw profound shifts in outlook, as these groups were able to grapple with their history and future together.

Arny Mindell used the term 'deep democracy', to mean welcoming and including all points of view, emotions, and dimensions of our interactions- that the wisdom or way forward comes out of this inclusion and interaction.

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If you rule out someone's view as too 'extreme' to be included in the dialogue, then it will find its way in, one way or the other - possibly in the form of violence. For sustainable change, it is very important to try to include all views into an interaction. In fact, when a position is implied but not represented directly, the facilitator can go ahead and represent it.

In a recent forum, some people spoke about hostilities in their community, from both Serbs and Croats, trying to block any attempts at reconciliation. So, we created a role to represent the position who did not want to reconcile, and who accused them of betraying loyalty to their own communities. We expressed this 'role', and soon a participant asked the group to go deeper into the role, to really understand what it is like. This brought up a sense of compassion in the group for that part in everyone who had suffered and could not so easily move on, after what happened. This brought a sense of direction and cohesion for the work in their communities.

I also sense in your thoughts about what is admissible, an important point about knowing your 'bottom line'. My personal bottom line is that I am interested in processing the conflict, not just repeating it. So, when we go back into a conflict, it cannot be for the purpose of dragging ourselves through it one more time, but rather to bring awareness and facilitation along, and the potential for transformation.

A few months ago I met a girl of 20 from Hiroshima visiting Zagreb as a part of her journey through Europe. She confided to me that she was astonished by perpetuating inquiries about 'some' atomic bomb. The thing is, she knows about the bomb as a historic fact, but believes, as apparently many of her peers do, that Hiroshima is world-famous mainly for its oysters! When compared to Slobodan Milosevic's use of amplified 'emotional memories' of the Battle of Kosovo during the Kosovo War, I wonder if it is the same mechanism at work, but functioning in the opposite way? Is it at all 'healthy' that the youth of Hiroshima does not feel that Hiroshima's tragedy is an essential part of their identity?

I'm so glad you tell this story. It is not just the 20 year old from Hiroshima who can't identify or feel or react to the horror and devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. There is a bigger story here about what happens where there has been a collective shock, tragedy and trauma that is really too great for any of us to fathom.

It takes many years before people can even begin to talk about such collective trauma and find some way to even approach the tragedy, pain and problems of justice. The young woman from Hiroshima represents the need in us to move on, which is healthy and necessary, and she also draws our attention to the dire need we have in our societies for eldership, for guidance, to find a way to face and grapple with our history and its meaning.

If you want to understand the dynamics of collective trauma, it can be useful to first think a moment about your own, or your friends' individual experiences of trauma. Just after the traumatic experience, usually a part of you goes ahead, in order to survive. Whether it was after an accident, a violent assault, or in the midst of war, you had to continue, go on. There was no time to react to the intensity of the situation – you might not have even realized how strongly you were affected, because it was part of the times and you had to just continue. Even so, another part of the personality was not able to just go on. One part remains with the shock of the event, or caught in the traumatic story, which repeats again and again, in the form of

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nightmares or flashbacks, or visceral memories. It is as if the story is being told again and again, looking for a witness, a part of you, and a part of the world who can hear it, feel it, respond.

The same thing happens around collective trauma. In one way the traumatic events do recede into history as time marches on. In another way the traumatic event never recedes. History remains present. The trauma remains, often replaying in those who suffered, and also replaying in attitudes and polarizations that get passed on without reflection and which can be turned into renewed rounds of conflict. While everyone wants to move on, the tragedy remains frozen in time.

Then what happens is some tell the story, usually those who have suffered and are identified with the traumatic experience, and another part of society – those privileged and somewhat unconcerned say “isn’t that so long ago...isn’t that history? –why are they still talking about the slave ships? Why are they still talking about genocide? Usually it is those with the privilege to forget, or those who were a part of the perpetrating group who are quick to say ‘this is history, let’s forget it now’. Or, in some cases it is written right out of history.

Where the collective trauma has not been really reckoned with in society, it remains something like a mythic and repeating story, ready to be tapped into as a vein of fuel. When the story can be told, and grappled with by the larger society, it can no longer be used to inflame conflict. The pain may never go away, but the terrible reality is somehow included as a vital part of our story, so that we can go forward whole.

How to resist, or better, what approach to take when it comes to reshaping history, manipulating 'emotional memories' (or 'sites of memory' or '*Lieux de mémoire*', as Pierre Nora calls them) and creating myths in one's own community? There is a Bosnian band *Dubioza kolektiv* which, on their first concert in post-war Serbia (Exit 2005), broadcasted the speech of Nataša Kandić, a Serbian human rights activist, addressing the tragedy of Srebrenica genocide. This broadcast caused a real uproar in the audience and a part of the young people who were, up to that moment, having harmless fun started throwing bottles and threaten the band (note that the band is well-known for their political engagement). After a while, the band standing still during all of this, the singer said something like: 'come on guys, this was not your war'. I found it very meaningful: in a sense, it was an offer of absolution ('we are not here to condemn you, nor do we demand reparations of any kind'), but only through a mutual consensus on condemnation of the tragedy ('that is not and does not have to be a part of your identity'). What do you think about that?

It’s an important story. This band made use of its public role out of interest in trying to create a different future. They do this not only by renouncing the atrocities and asking others to join them in this - They also do this by bringing expression to a topic that is full of controversy and volatile. Also by using the words of an important human rights activist who is controversial in Serbia, they touch straight on a very important ‘hot spot’.

The violent reaction of those young people demonstrates how a ready polarisation can be set off – even among people in the next generation –who’s war it supposedly is not. The volatility here also reminds us we need much more dialogue and facilitation around controversial issues so that emotional reactions and polarisations can become processed in ways other than violence, and so the violence does not have to be passed onto the next generation.

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So, it is a complex statement, when the band pleases 'come on guys this was not your war'. The problem is, it is still their war, as long as there has not yet been a process of accountability, and one which cares for everyone who suffered as individuals. As you say, it was also an invitation or gesture to the audience to realise they don't have to identify unconsciously with repeating the war, and replaying the cycle of conflict – and that renouncing atrocity is needed, and does not mean entering another cycle of guilt, accusation and revenge. Rather what is being invited is a condemnation for what has occurred, and determination to not repeat it. Reckoning with what has happened, including our personal experience of that, and grappling with our different versions of history can help to reduce disinformation and the revision of history, and later manipulations.

Evading confession is immanently connected to the fear of demands of reparations. How to overcome that problem? Do you expect it is actually possible in the Balkans? How 'useful' do you find Croatia's and Bosnia and Herzegovina's lawsuit for genocide against Serbia, regarding the process of reconciliation in former Yugoslavia? Along similar lines, what are the long-term consequences of communities that participated in conflicts negating their guilt (both for the individuals and for the collective)? Is that as well a form of purposeful manipulation by war creators with the goal of 'nurturing' their human resources for future wars (community identifying with innocence, thus subtly feeding its latently violent nature)?

It is a huge issue the way people tend to evade confession for fear of having to make reparations. I think of the United States, where there has never been any real acknowledgement of the genocide of Native Americans, partly due to fear of having to make reparations, to give land back. It's interesting because even among social activists, who were active with civil rights, women's issues, etc – the issue of our history in relation to Native Americans is largely ignored.

This also relates to the question of fearing if you acknowledge your actions you will have criminal consequences. This was the special value of the Truth and Reconciliation commission in South Africa, where society could grapple collectively with what happened, and with issues of accountability. If someone was able to tell the full story of what happened, how they were involved, stand accountable and show remorse, they could be given amnesty.

A process of interacting with the complexities of community wide trauma and issues of personal and collective responsibility is terribly needed throughout the Balkans. It is needed at different levels. At the level of criminal accountability; at the level of trying to seek the truth of what has happened or to find missing graves; and at the level of social dialogue through journalism, media, and also in the kinds of forums I've mentioned – where people active in NGOs and government organisations can interact together.

We've seen time and again, the huge difference it makes when in such interactions, at a certain moment, someone is able to speak out about the tragedies in their communities and how they are terribly upset about the behaviour of their group towards the other. If a leader in an organisation or community can do this, it holds a symbolic meaning that can go far. I think of the story of Willie Brandt, then Chancellor of Germany, when he knelt at the Warsaw memorial for the holocaust.

One of the features of courts and Tribunals is setting a bottom line that leaders or war lords cannot just get away with impunity, because they have power. Trying to establish criminal

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accountability (in the international courts and Tribunal) is an important process - even in so far as it brings the issues out into public discourse and onto kitchen tables. The whole subject is complex but it brings out the question of how to differentiate criminal accountability from a collective grappling with our part and responsibility in myriad ways. Where there is no process of accountability, what is left is a cloud of generalized hopelessness, blame and guilt that makes it near impossible to come to terms with neighbours, or even our own hearts. A process of criminal accountability or Truth commissions can support some level of closure, and at the same time free society to begin to consider other forms of personal and collective responsibility –a wider and deeper dialogue that involves all of us in our relationships to ourselves and one another –how was I involved? And more important, how can I make a difference now?

What type of motivation do you lean on, or even create, when you work on these sensitive issues with the people you work with? I mean, which role in the conflict is more susceptible for a successful 'awakening'? I suppose it is those that perceive themselves as victims, but how do you motivate those that are marked as perpetrators?

You describe how difficult it can be to become aware when we are part of a group that perpetrated violence on others. I agree - it's difficult. Almost all of us see ourselves more easily where we have been a victim, than where we may have been a part of hurting others – or how in our silence, we often feel unable to make a difference.

My motivation comes from having seen many times the remarkable capacity for transformation within individuals and large groups when supported to go carefully into the conflicts and the history they suffer from, with facilitation, slowing it down, bringing awareness along. My motivation also comes from people who have seen the worst of human nature, yet seem to be in touch with something bigger that can hold even this – and so model, believe in and work towards a different future.

There, that is all. Now that I look back it seems like quite a handful. I hope it is not too much trouble, but as I said, I found your book quite inspiring.

Thank you – You have asked really good questions, which all need so much more – but I hope this adds a little something into the ongoing dialogue.