Making Peace: Kosovo/a and Serbia

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Abstract

This essay explores the futures of Kosovo/a and Serbia. It uses methods from scenarios and peace theory to articulate a different possible future for the region. The current trajectory promises hardship for all parties especially in the medium and long term.

Introduction

When there is conflict between two ethnic groups, be it over territory, resources or values, there is also always a one-sided take on the past and present. The separate one-sided perspectives Kosovars and Serbs have been using for decades, if not centuries, evokes the ancient tale of blind men attempting to describe an elephant solely by touching different parts of its body. "The elephant is like a pot!" asserts the one touching the head. "No, like a winnowing basket!" says the one who touching the ear. "Ploughshare!" says another, touching the tusk. And so they went, describing the elephant as a plough (trunk), granary (body), pillar (foot), mortar (back), pestle (tail), or brush (tip of the tail). In a similar vain, Serbs exclaim: "Kosovo[1] is ours! This is where our nation was born, where our ancestral bones are buried and where our churches were built". "No, Kosova is ours!" exclaim Albanian Kosovars. "We've lived here even longer and are now a vast majority." "Oh well, they are all irrational barbarians, Balkan cavemen," exclaim the 'civilised'. "If it was not in Europe, no one would care," exclaim the postcolonial theorists. "It is a result of a militaristic warrior culture," so assert peace theorists. "No, of patriarchy," say the feminists. "Unfinished nation state building process," is the discourse of the nationalists. "One must respect international laws of national sovereignty," say the legalists. "But the laws change when reality on the ground changes," say the realists. "Change is the only constant," remind social change theorists.

The examples in the previous paragraph suggest that it is possible to theorise conflicts within and around Kosovo/a and Serbia in many different ways and by using different discourses. Yet only some of the discourses are seen as legitimate and dominate. Both locally and internationally, it is

Thus the question, 'to whom does Kosova/o righteously and historically belong' cannot possibly be answered using this type of discourse. For a solution that is fair to all sides involved, for an outcome that is acceptable and sustainable, a range of futures rather than history-oriented discourses needs to be applied. So instead of only asking 'who was there first', 'who is the rightfull owner' and 'what are the legal issues and implications', the questions themselves need to be reframed. But before doing so, let us look at some possible scenarios.

Conflict Resolution Scenarios

In this section I employ four main approaches: power based methods, rights based methods, randomness/chance based methods and interest-based methods.
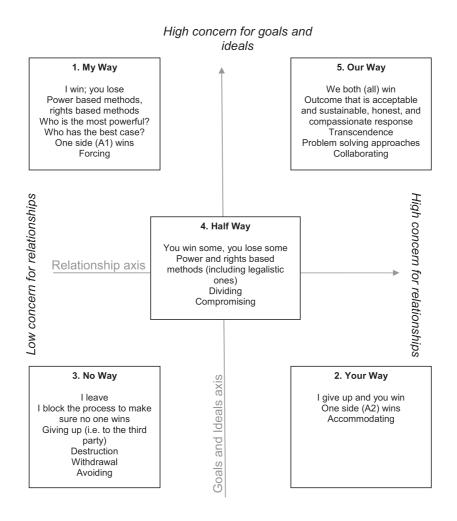
1. *Power based methods* ask the question, "who is the most powerful?" They use the rule of man, that is 'fight it out, might is right', overt violence (war, terrorism, individual and group attacks), and non-physical sanctions alternative systems of governing, ultimatums, sanctions, psychological abuse, boycott and so on).

2. *Rights based methods* ask the question, "who has the best case?" They rely on the rule of law, religious code or community norms. The resolution ultimately is through authority's order, course of law or arbitration.

3. *Randomness/chance based methods* ask the question, "who is 'the luckiest'?" These methods rely on the rule of chance, are random and ad hoc.

4. *Interest-based methods* ask the question, "what are the needs and concerns?" Such methods thus focus on problem solving approaches, on 'our way' (collaboration) instead of 'my way' (forcing), 'your way' (accommodating), 'no way' (avoiding) or 'half way' (compromising).

Many of these conflict resolution methods have already been tried–in particular, power and rights based methods–by all sides involved, and also by the international community. This part of the world has had its share of wars, sanctions and group directed abuses, that is, its share of direct, structural and psychological violence. In 1999, power based methods were taken to a new high, with the Milošević government's implementation of the 'ultimate solution' of 'not giving Kosovo away'. So the world witnessed the expulsion of ethnic Albanians from their homes by Serbian military and para-military forces. Since in power based methods the game is not over 'until the fat lady sings' *["I nad popom ima pop"]*, the next stage involved NATO bombing of both Serbia and Kosovo/a, effectively changing the Serbian 'my way' to the 'my way' of ethnic Albanians. While this is difficult for Serbian nationalists to hear, since 1999 Kosova/o has effectively and *de facto* not been part of Serbian territory. And yet, no long term, sustainable and acceptable solutions for all parties involved has been created either. While Kosovars (ethnic Albanians) have been successful in becoming inpendent, this independence is not accepted by the minority of Serbs still living in Kosovo or by the Serbian state. Most likely, if power based politics prevails, Serbs will eventually be forced to *de facto* accept a one-sided, one way solution that favours ethnic Albanians even if Russia and China continue to support the Serbian perspective. But the negative consequences of this enforced solution may be too numerous,

including the potential for the nationalist, pro-militaristic and conservative Radical Party to eventually seize power in Serbia, even though they were unsuccessful in the recent election. The party's current leader, Tomislav Nikolić explicitly stated that military intervention in Kosovo–if he was to have his way–would be a desired outcome should Kosovars proclaim full independence. While this has not occurred, it is too soon to judge how history will play out, given the last decades of war. As stated by one Serb in a blog debating the independence of Kosovo: "Serbs waited for 500 years to free Kosovo and Metohija from Turks, we can wait again". As well, even without military intervention and new war in the region, the negative consequences to both Serbian and Kosovar society will be many–from further focus on 'ethnic cleansing' to the creation of closed, conservative, xenophobic and totalitarian societies.

Another potential solution that qualitatively differs from the 'my way'/'your way' approach is that of a compromise or a 'half way' approach. This involves some sort of division and is currently (and after secession) the preferred option of Serbians living in the northern part of Kosovo. This too is possible, althought at this stage very unlikely. As well, this outcome would fall short of the most desirable solution that focuses on the needs and concerns of all involved, that is future oriented and that has the potential to result in outcomes that are sustainable in the long term.

The following figure (Figure 1) summarises five possible scenarios: (1, 2) of one side prevailing (A1 or A2), gaining exclusive right to the territory through the rule of man, law or chance, or via being compensated for the loss (my way, your way); (3) of no-one winning (sides taking turns to block the positive outcome for the other, 'freezing of the issue' as occurred during the last decade or via various destructive violence based realities, kllings, war, non-violent sanctions, or any other 'no way'); (4) of a compromise (some sort of a division of a territory, 'half way') and (5) of a 'win-win' solution for all involved (collaborative, 'transcendence', 'our way' scenario).

High concern for goals and
ideals

1. My Way

I win; you lose
Power based methods,
rights based methods
Who is the most powerful?
Who has the best case?
One side (A1) wins
Forcing

5. Our Way

We both (all) win
Outcome that is acceptable
and sustainable, honest, and
compassionate response
Transcendence
Problem solving approaches
Collaborating

Low concern for relationships

High concern for relationships

Relationship axis

4. Half Way

You win some, you lose some
Power and rights based
methods (including legalistic
ones)
Dividing
Compromising

3. No Way

I leave
I block the process to make
sure no one wins
Giving up (i.e. to the third
party)
Destruction
Withdrawal
Avoiding

Goals and Ideals axis

2. Your Way

I give up and you win
One side (A2) wins
Accommodating

Low concern for goals and
ideals

Figure 1. Styles of conflict management
Note. Adapted from *Conflict Mediation Across Cultures: Pathways and Patterns*, by David W. Augsburger, 1992, London, Westminster John Knox Press. *Conflict Transformation by Peaceful Means,* by Johan Galtung, 2000, Genève,United Nations. *Mediation and Facilitation Training Manual*, by Ron Kraybill, 2000, Akron, PA, Mennonite Conciliation Service. *Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument*, by Kenneth W. Thomas, & Ralph H. Kilmann, 1974, Tuxedo NY, Xicom.

In terms of these five potential scenarios for conflict management, there is currently a formidable focus on 'my way' and power and rights based approaches. History in this context is not used as a 'teacher' but as an additional tool to state one's case.

Randomness/chance based methods, 'no way' and 'your way' approaches are, on the other hand, most commonly not seen as a solution and indeed, they are very unlikely to create one. This is because there is a high concern for goals ('my' Kosova/o) and ideals (it is 'ours') by both (all) sides involved. In addition to this *goals and ideals axis*, the *relationship axis* can also be used to provide some explanations, specifically to also help explain the overwhelming focus on 'my way' approaches. The sad reality is that neither the majority of ethnic Albanians living in Kosova and elsewhere, nor the majority of Serbs (living in Kosovo, Serbia and elsewhere) currently care much about establishing quality relationships with the other group. Rather, the full process of 'othering' has been going on for many years in its latest incarnation, as it has periodically throughout history. This means that 'the other' is portrayed as 'less', 'violent', 'wrong', 'evil', 'wild', even 'dirty' and 'disgusting'. And it doesn't matter which side is othering, either explicitly or implicitly when talking and thinking about the other, the outcome is always the same: "We really do not want to deal with the other and it is the unfortunate fact that they live in close proximity".

To summarise, these are the potential outcomes:

- Scenario 1 (My way, A1 wins): Kosovars proclaimed secession–a *fait accompli*. Most if not all states recognise independent Kosova. Russia 'trades in' its own recognition of Kosova for the international recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The UN Security Council eventually recognises Kosova as a new state. Serbia in the end accepts the defeat.

- Scenario 2 (Your way, A2 wins): Countries like Russia and China pressure UN Security Council to reject secession. International legal processes end up in ruling that independence was an illegal act. Kosovo officially becomes again a part of the Serbian state and the full national sovereignity of Serbia and its territories is confirmed. This is a highly unlikely but preferred scenario amongst many in Serbia as well as amongst those states having to deal with their own breakaway areas–Serbia may find allies there and apply diplomatic pressure when and where possible. Another crisis and/or violent conflict in the region may once again change the power dynamics and the currently established borders.

- Scenario 3 (No way, withdrawal): The issue is frozen for another several decades. Kosovo's full independence is stalled by international legal processes. Serbia uses its limited power to make life difficult for Kosovars, so that they too do not fully 'win'. China and Russia continue to veto attempts by others to grant Kosovo full international recognition.

- Scenario 4 (Half way, compromise): Kosovo is somehow divided, i.e. between North and South or between Serbian controlled enclaves–where a Serbian minority lives and where Serbian monasteries are situated–and the rest of Kosovo.

- Scenario 5 (Our way, transcendence): Kosova/o and Serbia join a larger political entity, i.e. the European Union, simultaneously. Whether certain territories are officially in Serbia or Kosovo becomes less important than good quality rela-

tions and a high standard of living. Municipalities are also allowed self-determi-nation rights. This is thus simultaneously a globalising/unifying and localising/self-detemination based scenario. Both Kosovo/a and Serbia agree that the treatment of minorities must be of the highest standard and allow for the free movement of people, goods and services between these two territories, again based on EU standards. Kosova/o becomes 'an independent' region within a broader association, a Truth and Reconciliation type process begins, refuges are brought back, local groups engage in various peace building processes, peace education initiatives are applied, psychological trauma counselling work-shops take place, ecumenical peace work gets intensified and a sense of a com-mon future based on positive neighbourly relationships starts to develop.

The most preferred scenario for Kosova Albanians is maintained by this side involved in conflict to be Scenario 1. The most preferred scenario for the Serbian (identity, state) side overall is maintainted by this side in the conflict to be Scenario 2. For Serbs (now) left as a minority in independent Kosova, the scenario that is current-ly vocalised as the most preferred is Scenario 4. The most likely scenario at this stage, however, is Scenario 3, or some version of it. This would mean that Serbia and some other contries continue do not recognise an independent Kosova and to freeze relation-ships (through, for example, boycotts, sanctions, legal initiatives). This likely scenario may be very costly in the end as the potential ground for further conflict(s) develops. These may include further and potentially violent conflicts between two political options in Serbia, between the Serbian minority and the Albanian majority in inde-pendent Kosova, between Kosova and Serbia and between other seccessionst move-ments within states across Europe. As well, further conflicts and divisions between members of the UN Security Council may also occur. The most beneficial scenario for the long term (and positive, constructive) futures of both Kosovars and Serbs (in Kosovo and Serbia) is Scenario 5. This scenario is also the most difficult to achieve and, at this stage, not very likely. As well, it would be possible to devise different spe-cific strategies and solutions within this 'our way' approach to conflict to the ones described above. In fact, the more creative and innovative strategies and solutions are proposed within this context the less likely is the violent outcome (Galtung, 2000 and www.transcend.com).

Futures

The purpose of designing futures scenarios is to enable us to make more informed choices in the present. Futures thinking is ultimately about inquiry into probable, pos-sible and preferable futures, which we are creating today. For example, had various former Yugoslav ethnic, religious and ideological communities–as well as politicians, journalists and other professionals–gone through a process of envisioning different scenarios and their many intended and unintended consequences, would they still have made the same decisions they did back in the 1980s and 1990s? Had the international community anticipated how much the war in the former Yugoslavia was to eventually cost them not to mention the economic, human and environmental cost to the region itself) could things have been different? Most pre- and post-conflict nations do not

engage in this process and thus behave reactively rather than proactively and constructively. We can see similar occurences at the global level–thus the short-sightedness, destructivenes and even plain stupidity of all sides involved in the so-called "war against terror". And yet this short-sightedness and reactivity have nothing to do with 'human nature' or the inevitability of action–reaction–reaction ... or trauma–further trauma–further trauma... mechanisms. This is because even though most societies do not currently engage in long term thinking–non-action at the global level in regard to climate change is but one example–some have done and continue to do so. History teaches us that it could be otherwise and that different choices with very different future outcomes could be made. While most former Yugoslav ethnic groups have not learned alternative lessons from history (such as that 'violence breeds violence', or 'unjust solutions do not last'), South Africans it seems did learn. Thus the former Yugoslavia collapsed and in the process created hundreds of thousands of dead, millions of exiles, damaged the psychological makeup of those that remained and militarily polluted the environment, to name but a few negative outcomes. South Africans who used the scenario planning process, on the other hand, created a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This is but one example. There would be many others, beyond the scope of this paper. The literature on peaceful societies, social movements and communication practices (i.e. research by Ackerman & DuVall, 2000; Barash, 2000; Bonta, 1996; Boulding, 2000; Galtung, 2000; Glasser, 1998; Jones, Haenfler & Johnson 2001; Kemp & Fry, 2004; Paige, 2001; Rosenberg, 1999) gives a multitude of concrete examples of how historical and contemporary *peaceful societies, groups and individuals* have dealt/deal with conflict in a positive and constructive manner. The whole field of peace and conflict studies does the same, as do other individuals and groups engaged in nonviolent social and political efforts.

Crucial in these efforts at dealing with conflict in a constructive manner is to move away from 'the problem' (detrimental historical stories, unmet expectations, violence that happened in the past) and envision/propose future alternatives that are positive, imaginative, creative and doable. This does not mean a denial that atrocities took place in the past; on the contrary. But it means not letting past atrocities continue in the present and the future, *especially* preventing the commission of atrocities by *one's own* ethnic, religious or ideological group. This again does not mean standing passively by while 'the other' is engaged in hostile behaviours, allowing the creation of 'victims'. Rather, it means taking responsibility for enhancing peace building and taking initiatives in one's own community, and thus hopefully through such processes, connecting with peace makers and builders in communities beyond.

The main questions for all involved–and in contrast to legalist, nationalist and historical approaches–should be: how should we respond to the crisis/conflict in a way that is honest (acknowledges what is going on for all involved, beyond delusions and misconceptions) and compassionate (cares about all involved, about relationships with the other and about 'our way', 'win-win' solutions)? (For this approach see: www.transcend.com.) What are some of the basic *needs* of all involved? What do Kosovars need? What do Serbs? What does the international community? How many future based solutions accomodating to those needs (rather than 'wants' and 'shoulds') can be created? Out of the multitude of these creative, positive and doable alternatives, which

are the most preferable for all involved? Who are the actors that are to be involved in this planning and visioning process? How many stakeholders beyond government officials, politicians and bureaucrats can be found? Who are the most marginalised groups; can they provide out-of-the-box thinking and solutions? Can representatives of various still marginalised discourses, including those that are peace oriented, feminist, futurist and representative of other ethinc groups, also be included? Why leave it only to nationalists, lawyers and governments? Why not engage in truly democratic practice wherein the voices of all involved are to be heard and given space?

In order to engage with some of these questions, extensive community collaborative processes of envisioning desired, preferrable futures are needed. Given the financial difficulties of both Serbia and Kosova, financial support from the international community is also needed. Even though such processes would be by far the least costly when compared with any other alternative, there needs to be a will to start, plus the means to achieve them. And while all that seems like hard work, it is necessary if future generations in this area are to live harmoniously, fruitfully and optimistically. Even after Kosova's secession, ethnic Albanians, Serbs and others still need to continue living there, next to each other. Put simply, the neighbours are not going to go away, miraculously disappear or somehow be completely silenced. So it is the best bet for all involved to learn how to live together without hate, resentment and 'othering'. Those living today do have a responsibility at the very least to leave to their children and grandchildren a world somewhat better than the one they inherited.

So why not encourage both sides to inquire into:

1. The positive aspects of the other group. Is there something, anything, positive about the other? As there must be, no matter how small, let's build on that. How do we do so?

2. What do I (we) really want? What are our needs here? How do we distinguish those needs from what we were told our needs have to be or from the "unrealistic, wishful thinking"?

3. Can my trauma be heard by others? Can they recognise it without going into blaming and shaming?

4. What are some of the commonalities in our futures visions? Living in peace, harmony and abundance, perhaps? How can this best be achieved? Is the conflict between us helping our vision or hindering it?

5. What are some best strategies that we can implement here and now to bring forward preferable futures for all involved?

6. Could media be utilised to promote these, rather than to focus on divisive processes? How about school curricula? Do they allow for learning about multiple perspectives or are they serving the short-term political needs of nation building, wherein a one-sided perspective on issues is all that is available to students? If the latter, can a curricula that distinguishes facts from ideological interpretations (while also recognising the multiplicity of diverse interpretations) be developed?

Without such inquiry it is doubtful that not only the long-term but also immediate future are going to be better than the past and present. For futures that do not replicate violent pasts, different strategies, different thoughts, different discourses and different

futures visions need to be chosen. For, as the saying goes, if one usually does what one has usually done, one is going to get what one has usually got so far. It would be nice if, for a change, things did change and positive, safe, healthy, inclusive, purposeful, imaginative, fun and abundant presents and futures were created. Like the vast majority of people in different post-conflict areas, and indeed like the vast majority of people in general, these kinds of presents and futures are, after all, also what the vast majority of Kosovars and Serbs want. At this stage mainstreaming existing marginal and sporadic/ad hoc work on developing 'our-way'/'transcend' processes and strategies does not seem very likely in the case of Serbia and Kosovo/a (and beyond). Still, it is crucial to keep on insisting that such alternative futures too are possible.

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Notes

1. For Serbians, the region is known as Kosovo or Kosovo i Metohija; for Albanians, Kosova.

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