

DEALING WITH THE PAST OF WAR OF 2001 IN REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

A brief presentation of the Peace
Action's work started in 2008



PEACE ACTION

Brief presentation of the Peace Action's work on "Dealing with the past of war of 2001 in Macedonia" (fall 2008, spring 2009)

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“One can not speak about 2001 without being hurt”

*“If I speak with my fellowmen/woman, hey, we will tell all about
it. With strangers it is not so easy”*

Both sentences are statements of participants of the training for life story collectors, organized by Peace Action at the beginning of the project.

In the fall 2009 Peace Action began with the realization of the project “Dealing with the past of war in 2001 in Macedonia”, as a part of the program Dealing with the past. This program is realized on three lines: Establishment of a Documentation Centre about the war of 2001, publishing books about life stories for the 2001 period and regional linking of the work related to the dealing with the past. At the end of 2008, Peace Action organized training for life story collectors. In the months that followed, the group of life story collectors have been working on field as to find people and to perform interviews. This book presents a part of their work. The overall collection of life stories (currently with a number of 30 stories) is available on request at Peace Action premises. This program is envisioned as multi-year action and the collection of life stories and other documents from the 2001 war will continue.

Dealing with the past of the war of 2001



There is one very simple reason about our interest to work on themes linked to the war in Macedonia in 2001, and that is: “In order not to have a war again”. It is of essential meaning to talk about, to explore, and to collect stories, to debate about the war in 2001. Some say, it was not a war – it was a conflict. Fair enough. Hence - we wish for a debate. The worst option is if the Macedonian society enters a phase of a collective amnesia about 2001 – “*what it happened, it happened, one should look forward to the future*”. Here lies the key mistake of the conspirators of the collective amnesia. We must not allow - all of us, to have a war again. In order not to have war again, one needs to work on the causes that brought up the war in 2001, to search for them and at the end to see what are the lessons learned and what are the steps to be taken in order not have the same situation again. Not always in the made interviews, including the ones in this book, there is a positive feeling for living together and bright mutual future. Mostly the pessimism and bitterness from “the other side” is dominant with the narrators. Still this aspect is also very important to be taken into account as to assess the real situation in Macedonia, particularly among the



youth in the areas stroked with the war in 2001. This should be an indicator to all of us, about the reality we are living in, a sort of analyses of the position we are presently in.

Life stories themselves are not history, but for sure are important historical source. We have decided that in this first phase, we will publish stores from young people. Man and woman who at the time of the war were teenagers or young adolescents. We thought it is important to explore their stories and perceptions about that time, the present and how the war past has affected their personal development. What kind of narratives have the war created and how were those accepted? In future we intend to continue with thematic publishing of stories.

The stories appearing in this edition are result of made conversation, i.e. interviews with people from different places. The biggest number of the interviewed people are coming from regions



that were most affected by war, even though smaller number of interviews were made with people coming from the other parts of the country. The methods used while collecting the stories are the usual ones in many places of the world when working with oral history: the collectors of life stories have

a basic set of questions or themes that should give the major direction of the conversation. Further on, the collectors of life stories should develop each interview separately, based on the individuality of the person being interviewed and the flow of the conversation. The basic element of the final shaping of the themes for the interview is the preliminary conversation that the collector of life stories has made with the narrator, even before collecting the life story.



The preliminary conversation plays another important role. It serves the purpose, not only to gain more detailed information for the collector of life stories, but also to enhance the story teller to open up on personal level and to speak about his/her perceptions and experiences. Through the short practice that we have so far, this has proven to be a real challenge. The people speak easily about the past through a set of phrases that are “generally accepted” and often repeated in the public. Still the challenge remains: to enhance the people to speak about the deep personal perceptions and their personal past, present and the future.

The trust is another key element in the process of life story collection. The collectors of life stories are people from different parts of the country with different ethnic and





education profile. All interviews were made on the native language of the narrator. The collectors of life stories were enhanced to choose people from their living environment not only because of the good perception of the local context, but mostly because of the trust that needs to be

developed between the collectors and the givers of the stories. The situation in Macedonia related to the experiencing the past from 2001 is such that is far from the situation in which one could have a relatively equalize level of capability to bare the happenings in the past, a situation which would allow a bigger freedom in making choice for the collectors of life stories and their successful work in different places all over the country. This is why it is important that the collectors of life stories work on collection of stories from their micro environment. Building trust is a process and we hope that this book is contributing towards this.

In the work of collecting life stories, Peace Action is trying not to look



for “sensational” happenings. On contrary, we are much more interested in stories of the people from most different profiles who had the misfortune to go through a series of unpleasant experiences. Accordingly, we look for stories that can

be recognized as “ordinary”. Most interesting to us are the moments in the story that reflect the parts revealing how the experiences of the past are reflecting on the shaping of the today perception of the reality and the future, the narrator wishes for.



Every man/woman has some story. It is within. There is not a single story that should be ignored, every story deserves attention. The narratives, the stories are part of our past, present and the future and have been always a way to communicate the events from generation to generation. Still, the stories of the people are the ones that make the complete picture about the happenings. This is particularly important for the year 2001 and the happenings in Macedonia, where even today the academic circles are debating whether it was a war or a conflict and in general the public actors are more interested about the legal or political interpretation of the happenings. We are interested in people.

THE PROCESS:

1. Forming the team

In fall 2008, Peace Action approached individually to 12 people we have already worked with on other peace-related issues in the past and proposed them to take part in the project as story collectors. 7 Of them accepted to work as story collectors. Pranvera Kasami,



Hristina Vasilevska, Nadica Kostova, Lidija Gjokic, Laura Lauberga, Xhaferi Shyqeri and Divna Jankova, together with Goran Taleski and Boro Kitanoski from Peace Action formed the team of collectors of life stories.

2. Training

In November 2008, Peace Action organized training for selected collectors of life stories. The goal of the training was to give to the future collectors of life stories needed contextual, theoretical and practical input about the process of collecting life stories. It was consisted of 3 main parts:

- a. Communication and active listening;
- b. Oral history – how do we treat the past; theoretical and practical input about collecting life stories; making an interview; practical tips;
- c. Work on the skeleton of the interview, simulation of interviews;

3. Collecting the stories

In the coming period of few months after the training, the group of collectors of life stories worked in their local communities on approaching people for possible interviews. Finally, until the end of April, 30 life stories were collected and archived.



4. Publishing the book and public promotions

In May 2009, Peace action selected 10 life stories and published them in a book named “Growing up during war”. On the same month, 4 public promotions of the book were organized in towns of Tetovo, Kumanovo, Skopje and Prilep. Speakers on the promotion were always people from the local town where promotion was held, contributors of life stories from the same area as well as editors of the book. The reactions of people that attended the promotions was generally positive. In all places we experienced that there is truly a need to speak about the war of 2001. In Skopje, for example, the debate after the promotion lasted for almost 2 hours. Many people spoke in Tetovo as well. When speaking about



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it, we noticed that people were very much careful about others feelings, and generally feeling the debate as a safe place to speak about the issue which is usually being discussed in close circles among friends. Media reports were very much positive as well. We feel encouraged from this

development, but are aware that it is just a start of a long process which will probably not always be in this manner.

FUTURE OF THE PROJECT

When speaking about the future of this project... Peace action sees this program as a long years intervention. We will continue collecting life stories, we will continue building the data base of documentation center about the war of 2001 and we will continue to publish life stories or other material connected with the issue. But, we will also actively seek other forms of activities in which people will start feeling safe to speak about the past of 2001, and mainly, to start sharing their narratives with “the other” side. Talking and listening.

With this program, we are arguing with the selective public silence about the war of 2001. In today's Macedonia, we are aware that the past of the war (like many other issues) is being discussed only within one ethnic community. And almost always, when a story bridges out to “the other group” it is usually a matter of a case which have bigger political (mis)use. And usually, when the war is being discussed within the community it is almost always being treated from a perspective of a collective victim. At the same time, contacts between Albanians and Macedonians are being stigmatized and rarely ever happen on such sensitive issues, which stops us to even hear “the other truth”. With this course, willingly or not, the process of reconciliation in post-war Macedonia is being blocked.

The work that we do within the program of the Dealing With the Past of 2001 is trying to overcome the ethnic/religious borders, and to encourage people to accept other people's memories, pain,... to legitimize their own narratives as equally relevant as personal ones, without at the same time neglecting our own memories and pain. Both are equally important in order to understand each other. Nobody holds the final truth. Each of us has just a little piece of it.



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