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Peace Communication for Social Change
Dealing with Violent Conflict

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When societies are affected by huge inequalities in gaining access to resources, power, and decision making concerning social coordination, the changing processes required to facilitate an integral, participatory, and inclusive development can be met with some resistance. Depending on how societies deal with it, this can develop into violent conflicts. While the number of interstate wars has decreased progressively since the end of World War II, increasingly, since 1989, the amount of armed confrontations and civil wars within states has skyrocketed (Kaldor 1999; Themnér and Wallensteen 2011).

Intrastate and internationalized intrastate conflicts have been the predominant type of war for the past six decades. As Kalevi Holsti explains, they are "not about foreign policy, security, honor, or status; they are about statehood, governance, and the role and status of nations and communities within states" (1996: 21). The world map of armed violence overlaps with the atlas of poverty and inequality. In 2010, 53% of the major 15 active armed conflicts (SIPRI 2011) took place in African and Asian countries with human development levels amongst the lowest in the world. A further 20% of them occurred in medium–low[1] development countries. The war phenomenon has accompanied the processes of independence, national construction and development of the majority of the states born during the decolonization period after World War II, as examined by Monty Marshall (1999), who refers to these types of conflicts as "Third World War."

Intrastate wars have reached higher levels of violence than interstate wars since the 1960s and show a worrying tendency to re-emerge (Hewitt 2010). Nearly 80% of active conflicts during the first decade of the twenty-first century were recurring conflicts, that is to say that they occurred in societies considered to be in a transitional post-conflict situation, and where no episodes of armed violence had

been registered for a minimum of one year. "Slow economic growth, badly timed international aid, and lack of attention to social reforms, are key factors that lead to recurrence" (Hewitt, Wilkenfeld, and Gurr 2010: 2). Several studies have shown the existence of strong correlations between the onset of political instability or armed conflict and poor performance on key factors such as governance and development (Marshall and Cole 2011). There cannot be development without peace, nor can it be sustainable peace without development. If that is the case, communication for development and social change must be also a communication for peace and conflict transformation.

It is surprising though, that the field of communication for development and social change has barely paid any attention to conflict, armed violence and peace-building, despite its more than six decades of existence (Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte 2008).[2] The same way that, in spite of the centrality of communication in the structuring and transformation of human relationships, conflict resolution and peace studies have evolved with their backs to the field of communication for development and social change since they emerged in the 1950s, as Clemencia Rodríguez (2000) already observed more than a decade ago. The proliferation of intrastates' violent conflicts in societies with the lowest development indicators urges us to overcome that distance and to examine the phenomena of development, social change, conflict, and communication from an integral approach, with a view to build a common body of knowledge and strategies.

Work on armed violence and peace-building of scholars and practitioners like Kenneth Boulding, Johan Galtung, Adam Curle, Edward Azar, John Burton, and John Paul Lederach on one side, and some citizens' experiences of communication for social change that emerged in armed conflict and post-conflict contexts from the 1990s, like in Colombia (Rodríguez 2008) or in the African Great Lakes region (Search for Common Ground 2009, 2010), on the other hand, reveal the existence of unexplored meeting points between both disciplinary fields. Nevertheless, the dialogue between their theories, concepts and premises progresses slowly, possibly because interdisciplinary work is complex. It requires transcending the boundaries of our fields of knowledge and experience to penetrate into unknown disciplinary territories, as well as learning to grapple with new conceptual and analytical practices and tools.

This chapter aims to develop an exploratory analysis of the intersections between the processes of communication, social change, development, conflict and peace, through the combined use of the lenses and the premises of two theoretical perspectives: peace and conflict resolution studies, on the one side, and communication for social change, on the other side. We will highlight areas of complementarity or overlap, as well as spaces of contradiction, with the aim of broadening the understanding of the role of both communication and conflict in the processes of social change, development and sustainable peace-building.

Communication and Change at the Heart of Conflict Analysis and Conflict Resolution

Conflict is an intrinsic element of human relations and for many authors it represents a stimulus and an opportunity for social change. It takes its origins in a sense of grievance resulting from economic inequality, political organization and the cultural system. The formation of conflict parties, which believe to have mutually incompatible goals, turns the conflict into an open and visible one. Depending on the capacity and the mechanisms a society relies on to manage conflicts, they can develop into constructive or destructive processes (Deutsch 1973). Thus, sociopolitical conflicts reveal the existence of problems of social coexistence and urge us to face them and resolve them.

Even though the intellectual history of reflection on war, peace and conflict dates back to the origins of philosophy and thinking on politics, the development of conflict resolution as a specific academic field had to wait until after World War II. It began in the United States, as a reaction of a group of academics who shared pacifist convictions to the limited ontology and objectives of war studies traditionally made by International Relations – which understood the war phenomenon, in accordance with the famous aphorism by Clausewitz, as "the continuation of politics by other means."

The interest in studying human conflict as a general phenomenon gave rise to the establishment of several research groups in the 1950s. Kenneth Boulding and his colleagues at the University of Michigan launched in 1957 the first specialized Academic Journal, *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* (JCR), which gave the name to this new discipline. Two years later they set up the Center for Research on Conflict Resolution (CRCR). Their initial premise was that conflicts are *settled* but not *resolved* by coercion.

They held that the collection of a data set – as indicators of human behavior and conflict – and their further processing with quantitative techniques, would allow us to anticipate the potential outbreak of violent conflicts and, therefore, to prevent them. At this first stage of conflict resolution studies, communication was equated with the generation and transmission of information. The present technological development has revitalized the idea of articulating "early-warning and response systems" to detect and stop violence before it happens (Bock 2012).

Europe set a new research agenda in this field in the 1960s, which included the topics of peace and social change. Up to the middle of the twentieth century, the studies on war had traditionally focused their attention on the use of coercive power and military force. From this perspective, peace was defined as the state of "no war", in other words, the absence of direct, systematic, and organized violence. Consequently, conflict resolution studies initially aspired to contribute to reduce the incidence and the duration of war, in particular, by improving diplomatic efforts.

Johan Galtung, founder of the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), rejected this limited and *negative* definition of peace and violence. He carefully studied the complexity of both phenomena and ventured to describe their multidimensional nature. According to Galtung, conflicts can be seen as a triangle, whose three vertexes are: an underlying structural contradiction, the attitude and perceptions of the parties, and their behavior. These three components keep changing and influencing themselves, making the conflict a dynamic process. As far as violence is concerned, it would have also three dimensions: direct violence, manifested through human behavior; structural or indirect violence, exerted through the social, economic, political, military, and cultural structures which prevent the fulfillment of human needs (Galtung 1969); and cultural violence, constituted by ideas, beliefs, and values that legitimize and justify both direct and structural violence (Galtung 1990). Galtung warns that the different forms of violence feed on each other, forming a vicious circle.

From this point of view, *positive* peace would be the absence of the three kinds of violence and "the context for conflicts to unfold non-violently and creatively" (Galtung 2003: 31). This requires fair and supportive social relationships, social justice and respect for human rights. The mass media, as cultural producers and transmitters, play a significant role in Galtung's model of peace-building, because they can either reinforce or challenge not only the cultural violence, but also the structural one – for example, cultural imperialism (Galtung 1971). He insists on the importance to overcome the structural contradiction at the root of the conflict formation, in order to prevent its recurrence.

At the structural level, peace manifests itself as symmetric, symbiotic and equitable social relationships, which lead to acts of cooperation, friendship and solidarity. This is why communication – the way in which human beings interact and socialize among themselves – is a central element to this peace-building approach (Galtung 2003). The scholar and mediator Adam Curle developed this idea in depth. He differentiated between symmetric and asymmetric conflicts, depending on whether the existing power relations amongst parties are balanced or unbalanced (Curle 1978). Curle argued that conflicts of interests among relatively similar parties (symmetrical conflicts) have a better chance to be resolved in a negotiated, creative and satisfactory way for the parties involved.

When the conflict arises between dissimilar parties (asymmetrical conflicts), such as a majority and a minority or an established government and a social sector who denies its legitimacy, its source stems not from particular issues or interests that may divide the parties, but from the very relational structure that determines their power positions and the nature of the interactions between them. These types of relationships, characterized by domination and imposition, causes suffering and hardship and hinders development (Curle 1978). As long as members of the weak party are not conscious of the injustices they are subjected to and their causes, the conflict remains latent. If this is the case, building a lasting peace

requires restructuring social relationships, so that they become balanced, peaceful and collaborative. Curle forewarns that this may need to awaken consciences and to adopt confrontational tactics, as necessary steps to reach a position from which to negotiate.

Curle also underlined the importance of the values and attitudes of societies and individuals for a non-violent conflict resolution. He was a firm advocate of peace education and a pioneer in the use of techniques such as extra-official conciliation and mediation. Mediation, in his opinion, should begin by establishing and improving communication among the parties in conflict, to provide them with information that would enable them to counteract their prejudices and mistaken ideas.

Another important distinction about the causes of conflicts was drawn between human interests and needs by the scholar and former diplomat John Burton. Interests are primarily about material goods (land, natural resources, and suchlike), which are susceptible to trade, bargaining, and negotiating. Needs, on the other hand, are intangible things (such as security, recognition, and identity) that cannot be traded or fulfilled by power bargaining. However, non-material human needs are not scarce resources, therefore conflicts based on unsatisfied needs can be resolved with an understanding around a peaceful change which meets the needs of both parties in conflict (win–win outcome). The key lies in translating the conflict into the human needs that prompted it.

Burton also associated the emergence and the evolution of conflicts with communication. He believed that armed conflict occurs as a result of inefficient communication between the parties, with the understanding that communication comprises messages and interactions. Therefore, just as Curle, he viewed the external intervention in the communication flows and system where parties are inserted as a strategic resource to unblock intractable conflicts: "Communication is a tool of conflict as much as it is a tool of peaceful relationships" (Burton 1969: 49).

According to Burton, conflicts have a decisive subjective dimension, linked to factors like the parties' assumptions, perceptions, selection of goals and means of attaining them, and assessment of costs of conflict. Experience and knowledge can alter these elements, hence the importance of communication. At the same time, this implies that the resolution of a violent conflict is a process that can only come from the decision making of the parties, and not from an external imposition. He therefore proposes the technique "controlled communication," which consists, essentially, in gathering a small group of representatives of the parties in conflict to analyze and counteract together the perceptions, interpretations and misunderstandings, which prevent them from even considering the possibility to negotiate. This technique would also allow identifying the problem and the causes underlying the conflict and considering resolution options that had not been regarded. The aim is to develop a base for mutual understanding and trust.

The importance he granted to communication, perceptions, assumptions, values, and stereotypes was ahead of arguments regarding the role of culture and the *media* in violent conflicts, which other scholars developed later on – for example, to put forward a "peace journalism" (Galtung 1986; Varis 1986; Mitchell 1989; Gilboa 2002).

The Lebanese researcher Edward Azar was one of the first experts to apply systems theory to conflict analysis and resolution. He focused his work on the protracted social conflicts (PSC), apparently unsolvable, such as those in Lebanon, the Philippines, Israel, and South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s. Azar linked the violent conflict to underdevelopment, distributive injustice, and exclusion in all its forms; he associated national problems and the international system; he pointed out the multiplicity and dynamism of the factors causing conflicts, and he concluded that the most useful unit of analysis in PSC situations is the identity group, which is based on shared values (racial, religious, ethnic, cultural, among others), rather than the nation-state or the individual. According to Azar, the source of intractable conflicts is the denial of those essential elements required in the development of all people and societies, and whose pursuit is an ontological drive in all: "These are *security*, *distinctive identity*, *social recognition of identity*, and *effective participation* in the processes that determine conditions of security and identity, and other such developmental requirements" (Azar 1986: 29). What is of concern are the *societal needs* of the individual, which embrace both material and the psychological well-being.

PSCs are increasingly arising within States, because they have either lost, or never had, such is the case of many African States, the capacity to integrate the different groups that constitute them, to manage satisfactorily their demands and to inspire loyalty and civic culture. Quite the contrary, they have tended to impose institutions that reflect sectarian interests. Consequently, as far as multiethnic societies are concerned, PSCs don't improve with centralized power structures – which they are, in their own right, a source of conflict – because they reduce the opportunity for a sense of community among groups and tend to deny to groups the means to accomplish their needs. The way to unblock these conflicts is to establish open, participatory, and decentralized political structures, since these increase groups' feelings of identity, participation and security. War wouldn't represent the continuation of politics by other means, as Clausewitz declared, but the failure of politics.

To sum up, the analytical and practical approach of conflict resolution doesn't ignore the coercive power or "hard power," but rather considers that the most influential and important form of power is what Boulding called "integrative power": the power to weave relationships, to bring people together, and to create legitimacy (Boulding 1989: 30). Integrative power relies on a complex network of communication and unlimited learning, which is opened to expand the comprehension and the representation of both the present reality and the future. It is based on reciprocity, trust, respect, and cooperation.

Transforming Conflicts to Transform Societies

As an analytical framework and as a peace-building strategy, conflict transformation emerged at the beginning of the 1990s. It incorporates part of the premises regarding conflict resolution that we have examined above, although it goes beyond the resolution of particular problems and the reconstruction after the ceasefire. Peace-building is understood "as a comprehensive concept that encompasses, generates, and sustains the full array of processes, approaches, and stages needed to transform conflict toward more sustainable, peaceful relationships" (Lederach 1998: 48). And peace is seen as a dynamic social construct, an ongoing process of change from negative to positive relations, behavior, attitudes, and structures.

This approach emerged as an answer to the increase of both PSCs and the use of violence as a tool for change in societies profoundly divided and where political structures barely offer peaceful and effective mechanisms to channel the collective demands in favor of the fulfillment of basic human needs. These societies are characterized by long-standing and deeply rooted hostilities between social groups, which are reinforced by strict stereotypes, feelings of fear and hate, high levels of violence, and first-hand experiences of atrocities.

John Paul Lederach's proposal (1998) to transform the conflict is based around three main factors: the change actors, the depth in which transformation is dealt with, and its time framework. With regard to the change actors, the process of conflict transformation is the responsibility of the entire affected society. This involvement can be represented as a three-level pyramid of leadership and approaches to peace.

The top of the pyramid contains a reduced amount of people: the military and political leaders. Their search for peace is focused on the establishment and management of negotiations aimed at reaching a ceasefire and creating mechanisms for a subsequent political transition. This is a "top-down" peace-building approach, which assumes that there is a monolithic and hierarchical power structure operating in the conflict, and that therefore, the agreement between the elites will be immediately accepted and implemented by the other levels of society. It fails to recognize the de facto interdependence of the different social levels, and the existence of multiples tiers of leadership and participation in the process (Lederach 1998: 74).

At the bottom of the pyramid we find the ordinary citizens who form the base of a society. In settings of protracted and violent conflict, their lives are marked by fear, suffering and a daily struggle to survive, yet they are able to promote valuable practical efforts to achieve peace. These are initiatives led by influential members of local communities, who witness and deal with the everyday aspects of the crisis. Lederach reminds us that the transitions toward peace in El Salvador and Ethiopia in the 1990s were driven largely by the pressure for change coming from the grass-roots level. This "bottom-up" approach to peace-building is often based on the work of local peace commissions.

The medium-level is of strategic importance for the conflict transformation, because it is connected with both the top and the bottom levels and thus represents a potential bridge between them. It comprises people who hold leadership positions in the conflict scenario, but who are not controlled by the government structures or by the major opposition movements. They are known and respected leaders in fields like education, culture, religion, humanitarian organizations, indigenous movements, etc. Their status and influence derive not from their public visibility, but from their relationship networks, that cut across the lines of conflict. As they maintain respectful relationships with their peers from the other side of the conflict, they represent privileged communication channels amongst both parties. Medium-range leaders benefit from having more freedom to maneuver than do top-level leaders.

For Lederach (1998) that dense network of vertical and horizontal contacts, which is embedded in the physical and human cartography of the conflict, puts mid-level leaders in a strategic position to boost a "middle-out" process of peace-building. Their active involvement can be promoted through problem-solving workshops, conflict-resolution training and peace commissions. The Centre for Conflict Resolution in South Africa, for example, undertook an extensive program of this type in order to contribute to the post-apartheid reconciliation.

A second fundamental question from the conflict transformation perspective is the distinction between particular and immediate problems, on the one hand, and the underlying and wider aspects of conflict, peace-building, and social change, on the other hand (Kriesberg 2011). Máire Dugan's nested paradigm (1996) distinguishes four interrelated dimensions of conflict: the immediate micro-issues, the relational context in which conflict is embedded, the subsystem from which it arises and the systemic structures that create and perpetuate the conditions for its emergence. The subsystem, being a medium-level activity area, connects all dimensions and thus opens up possibilities for spreading change "middle-out" and "bottom-up."

The image of the nested paradigm model, as a group of concentric circles, is also useful to visualize the progression of the transformation process toward the desired change. Each circle symbolizes a time framework and a level where to think, plan, and act (Lederach 1998). The first circle represents the urgent response to the immediate crisis, for example, by delivering humanitarian aid to the affected population and by taking actions to stem the ongoing violence and to achieve a ceasefire. The second circle refers to the short-term intervention, which focuses on the conflict and crisis analysis and on preparing people to deal with conflicts nonviolently. Training is essential at this stage, which lasts between one and two years.

The long-term perspective, the desired horizon towards which to move forward, is located in the fourth and last circle. This stage involves envisioning and promoting a project of a commonly shared future, as well as establishing structural, systemic and relational objectives on which social coexistence will be founded. This transformation requires the time of at least one generation. Between the long- and short-term approaches we find, again, a medium-term perspective. Therefore, the

third circle represents the stage where both social change and the mechanisms that enable the sustainable transition toward it are designed. This process can take up to a decade and takes place parallel to the rebuilding of society's integrative power. Lederach (1998) underlines that the key to constructive conflict transformation lies in keeping the responses that address the issues at each stage with a long-term perspective of change.

Moreover, the transformation has to operate at four interdependent levels of change: personal, relational, structural and cultural. The first one includes the emotional, perceptual and spiritual aspects of human experience over the course of the conflict. The transformation strategy will aim to minimize the destructive effects of social conflict on people and promote their physical, emotional and spiritual progress. On the relational level, the goals are to change the negative patterns of communication and interaction underlying the conflict and to maximize mutual understanding, compromise and solidarity (Dukes 1996). The structural level encompasses the changes required to satisfy basic human needs and implement mechanisms that guarantee people's participation in decisions that affect them, as well as the non-violent resolution of conflicts. Finally, the cultural level of the transformation focuses, on one side, on countering the cultural patterns that contribute to the appearance of violence, and on the other side, on fostering the cultural resources and mechanisms available in the society to handle its conflicts constructively.

The integration of all the actors, dimensions, stages and levels of change that we have just described constitutes the infrastructure for the constructive conflict transformation. Lederach describes it as a *process-structure*: "A phenomenon that is simultaneously dynamic, adaptive, and changing, and yet has a form, purpose, and direction that gives it shape" (1998: 113). The transformation doesn't consist of a single operational solution, but it rather rests on multiple levels and types of change. It is also both a linear and a circular process, made up of a set of experiences and cycles of change that feed on each other. Sometimes, things move forward and progress; other times, they remain stagnant; and other times, they even seem to go backwards, due to resistances to change, but this step backwards may allow us to discover alternative ways to move towards the desired change.

Communication for Social Change in Fragile and Conflict Contexts

Despite the undeniable presence of communication in peace-building theories and practices, the field of conflict resolution and transformation lacks an integral approaching to communication, as a multidimensional phenomenon that goes beyond media and their messages. Beginning with the early studies on war propaganda during World War I, the impact of the conflict's media coverage on its

emergence, evolution, and resolution has been of interest and concern for peace-building researchers, actors, and activists (Barry 2004; Galtung 1986; Gilboa 2002; Hamelink 2011; Varis 1986).

This interest, increased by the awareness of the damaging role played by some media in the escalation of violence in Rwanda and former Yugoslavia during the 1990s (Article 19 1996; Thompson 1999), has favored the formulation of a series of recommendations for putting into practice a peace journalism (Galtung 1998; Manoff 1998; Wolfsfeld 2004; Lynch and McGoldrick 2005; Shaw, Lynch, and Hackett 2011). If we are to assume that media can worsen tensions, we can likewise think that they could play a positive role in the conflict by actively favoring its prevention and moderation, on one side, and fostering peace and tolerance, on the other side. However, in order to do this, it is necessary to change journalists' norms and routines for covering peace and conflict.

In the past decade, peace-building scholars and practitioners have started to realize that the peace-building potential of the media goes further than both news and mass media. It also embraces other genres, narrative languages, and formats, closer to community communication and entertainment (Tufte 2012), such as popular music, participatory theatre, radio series, soap operas, documentaries, public debates in local media, and community-produced programs (Howard *et al.* 2003; Melone, Terzis, and Beleli 2002).

A third and last approach to the use of media as a peace-building tool is peace advocacy. For Servaes (2011: 39), mass media can play two kinds of advocacy roles: disseminate messages that encourage the public to support peace-building and development projects, and provide the decision-makers with information and feedback needed to reach a decision for action. The starting point of this strategy lies within the citizens, who organize themselves into coalitions and social alliances to demand and propose to political decision makers solutions to conflict and violence. These advocacy platforms search for the mass media's complicity with their objectives.

Behind every peace-building initiative, there is at least one theory of change; in other words, a set of beliefs about how change happens. The three ways of incorporating media communication in peace-building strategies that we have just described respond to a model of change theory, which is focused, particularly, in the cultural dimension of change. The underlying assumption is that the desired change can happen if we succeed in getting a critical mass of people to adopt new attitudes, values, and objectives favorable to peace and cessation of violence, and that they put pressure on political elites to taking the necessary actions to resolve the armed conflict.

Communication, nevertheless, is a relational and symbolic process, which is not confined at all to the transmission of media content (Pasquali 1978). It is the substratum of social life and human relationships; a social process that affects the perception, knowledge, affectivity, and conduct of those who take part in it. For this reason, communication constitutes an element of paramount importance to

tackle not only the cultural dimensions of conflict transformation, but also the personal, relational and structural ones. The long-term change perspective requires analyzing and enhancing the communication processes, relationships and networks; this is still a pending issue for the theoretical reflection and the praxis of this approach to peace-building.

Such a comprehensive approach to communication as both *focus* and *locus* of change was proposed in the field of communication for development more than three decades ago, in a context of redefinition of the concept of development as structural change, and of characterization of emancipatory communication as horizontal, participatory and dialogical (Melkote 1991; Servaes 1989; Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte 2008). In practice, however, the initiatives of participatory and community communication for social change promoted in the 1980s were confined to projects of a limited geographical and sociopolitical reach. They concentrated excessively on the subjects and put aside concerns for articulating a macro-level view of society and its destiny: "the communicative proposal did not emphasize the significance of integrating into society: this perspective did rather arouse suspicions. In this way the idea of 'no contamination' was stressed; we had to be amongst people like ourselves or with similar ideas and groups" (Alfaro Moreno 2006: 121). Those experiences had an enormous value from the viewpoint of the conscientization of oppressed social groups, but it wasn't until the mid-1990s when a political vision of change started to forge itself, as a democratic project of peaceful, respectful and fair social coexistence.

The transformation of social, political, economic, and cultural structures in order to guarantee social and procedural justice. The latter refers to decision-making processes, the respect and dignity of human beings, and the survival of ecological systems of our planet requiring that we face up to the emergence of conflicts amongst unequal and deeply divided parties, which ultimately can evolve towards different forms of direct violence. On the other side, exclusion, poverty, and armed violence shape the landscape of the societies with the lowest levels of human development. In these contexts, the incorporation of communication in social change strategies must be sensitive to conflict; that is, understand as operational dynamics and the possibilities for its constructive transformation.

The Freirean and Habermasian dialogical models, which inspired the proposal of participatory communication for social change (White, Nair, and Ascroft 1994; Jacobson and Servaes 1999), presume the willingness of both individuals and groups to set aside their power imbalances, in order to engage in a dialogue aimed at reaching consensual decisions and agreements. However, this requirement can't be taken for granted when the social and power relations between those individuals and those groups are enormously unbalanced, as confirmed by the increase of protracted social conflicts and intrastate wars in the last decades.

Participatory communication entails the redistribution of power and communicative resources. Likewise, empowering people, communities and citizens, so they can claim and exercise their fundamental rights and therefore transform their daily

realities, involves disempowering those who are benefiting from their deprivation of rights and freedoms. In both cases, resistance, tensions and conflicts will arise. Even admitting that dialogue processes could be set up, they will not always be realms of straightforward rational deliberation or smooth spaces of unforced and peaceful agreement.

The academic field of communication for development and social change has tended to dodge the question of the conflictive nature of the change towards social and environmental justice, although it should be pointed out that in the last years some authors have highlighted the need for an analytical and operational framework that takes into account the problem of power and its structures (Wilkins 2000). Yet a conflict-sensitive approach to social change remains to be developed. It needs a theory of conflict and another one for its constructive transformation, as well as examining and analyzing the role played by the multiple dimensions of communication in empirical processes of social change in contexts of violent conflict.

In this regard, over the past two decades Clemencia Rodríguez has contributed suggestive keys to rethink links between communication, peace building, and social change. Her insights are grounded in her field research on local initiatives of citizens' communication that rebuild the social fabric in armed conflict contexts (Rodríguez 2008). With a long history of direct violence, Colombia provides numerous examples of social innovations that have emerged from the realm of communication as mechanisms of resistance to the relational and destructive logics of violence. One of the projects that has received national and international recognition is the *Colectivo de Comunicación de Montes de María Línea 21* (Communication Collective of Montes de Maria Linea 21), an initiative of participatory radio and television that embraces 17 municipalities located in Colombia's Caribbean region.

Since the 1990s, the arrival of the different conflict actors to this area, already afflicted by high levels of structural violence, has contributed to armed violence, destruction, massacres, and forced displacement of civil population. The Collective was born in 1994, as a vital response of a group of young intellectuals from the municipality of El Carmen de Bolívar to the prevailing climate of terror and violence. They began by establishing a school of community journalism for children and adolescents and with the first group of students they launched a 20 hour weekly production of local news for radio and television. The purpose was not media production per se, but the transformation of the collective imaginaries and the reparation of the damage caused by the violence on the local social fabric (Rodríguez 2008: 29).

Following Rodríguez (2008: 30–31), as a result of both a precarious state unable to guarantee civil rights and the strong presence of violence and armed groups, the inhabitants of Montes de María had increasingly become more individualistic, fearful, suspicious, and aggressive in their interactions. One of the Collective's initiatives that succeeded in breaking this spiral of isolation and mutual distrust

was the street film project. It consisted of open-air film projections in the main square of the village, as a pretext for people to gather together, share experiences again, and reappropriate the public space, defying the collective fear. Interaction patterns *normalized* by the war were slowly modified, not with persuasive messages on peaceful coexistence and peace culture, but rather through the experiencing of peace and solidarity in their daily lives. The same philosophy of building up democratic and peaceful relationships and transformative subjects characterizes the internal functioning of the Collective (Rodríguez 2008: 24).

Another Colombian experience worth mentioning is *Tejido de Comunicación* (Communication Tissue). It was created in 2005 by the Association of Indigenous Cabildos of Northern Cauca, as part of its strategy to defend the rights of indigenous peoples in this region: to live peacefully in their ancestral land, to preserve their identity, and to freely design and advance their "life plan." Northern Cauca has been for more than half a century an area of strategic importance for the conflict actors, who have turned the region into a war zone and indigenous people into their victims. The indigenous communities, however, declare themselves to be outside this armed conflict and thus they demand from the conflicting parties to stop attacking them and to demilitarize their territories. They confront the power of weapons with the power of the collectivity and the power of the word.

In this context of resistance to war, violence, the invasion of their lands and the militarization of their lives, the indigenous communities of Northern Cauca promote an active process of peace-building and change that adopts communication as one of its basic pillars. *Tejido de Comunicación* was born to gather, preserve, and encourage the traditional forms of communication of the indigenous people – the assembly, community meetings, the *minga* (collective community work), tales and legends, the cosmogonic communication, and so on – as essential elements in the growth of their life together and in the designing of their "life plans" (Otero 2008). This initiative, as explained on its website, does not place technology – which indigenous people know and appropriate – at its center, but the strength and richness of the cultural knowledge, the community senses, the rituals and the various events where the joy of living is expressed and from which the strength to defend their life's projects emerges.

The combined use of forms and means of communication allows them to work on information, reflection, debate, recovery of the memory, and activation of participatory decision-making processes, at the same time as they weave a web of communication inwards and outwards between their communities. Beyond forging solidarity links with other indigenous peoples and with social movements that denounce multiple forms of oppression and injustice, they also search for spaces of encounter and dialogue with political authorities and with the rest of society. They are fully aware of the importance of building coexistence on the basis of respect for difference and recognition of the other as a valid and necessary interlocutor.

Understanding differences; Acting on commonalities is Search for Common Ground's (SFCG) motto. This North American NGO has three decades of experience in

peace-building and conflict prevention in more than 30 countries around the world. An essential part of its intervention strategy consists of television, radio, and Internet programming to transform the way individuals and societies deal with conflict – away from adversarial approaches, toward cooperative solutions. It is not merely a question of diffusing useful information and edutainment contents, or even persuasive messages on peaceful coexistence, but rather of getting across that the content production process reflects the type of cooperation and entente that the programs themselves advocate and promote. Therefore, SFCG places a great importance on local ownership and management of media projects. For example, both the staff and the editorial board of one of its most emblematic projects, *Studio Ijambo*, a radio production studio set up in Burundi in 1995, at the height of the civil war, are balanced in terms of ethnicity (Hutu–Tutsi), religion (Catholic–Muslim), gender, and political backgrounds. These professionals work together in mixed teams and they produce a wide range of content (news, series, open debates, documentaries, and the like), which features and analyzes all aspects of the conflict, highlights commonalities, and promotes dialogue.

In the past few years, SFCG has worked on non-violent resolution of conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and in Rwanda (Search for Common Ground 2010) with a methodology inspired in Augusto Boal's "Theatre of the Oppressed," which SFCG has named "Participatory Theatre for Conflict Transformation" (Search for Common Ground 2009). On the basis of real problems that are portrayed in the plays, actors interact with the public to adapt, change or correct situations or behaviors that are developed during the show. This gives the audience the opportunity to dialogue about problems central to their communities, explore together different ways to solve them and engage creatively in the process of conflict transformation. Moreover, SFCG aims to repair social relationships in DRC also through joint activities using media, culture, sports, conflict transformation trainings, festivals, and communal projects. The search for common ground of coexistence promotes constructive change.

Final Considerations

As we have seen in this chapter, there is a general consensus within the field of conflict resolution about the idea that building positive peace involves essentially building trust and relationships within communities. Communication lies at the root of this process. A different relationship requires a different communication. That is why, beyond balancing the flows of information and cultural content in the public sphere, it is vital to open spaces and situations for people to meet, get to know each other again, assume their interdependence and forge peaceful and respectful bonds between them (Rodriguez 2004). The desired horizon is the establishment of a mindful communication (Hamelink 2011), which enables

creation of new collective meanings and to imagine and design a shared future by regarding the others as valid and necessary interlocutors.

One of the keys to the relational dimension of social change lies in the quality of those spaces and opportunities for encountering, dialoguing, and participating. According to Lederach,[3] it is crucial that they foster vertical and horizontal links among different identity groups and social levels. He warns that change does not come from spaces nor from relationships where people think alike, but from the confluence of *improbable* processes and people, where partiality is the starting point to work with the counterpart to understand the human needs underlying the emergence and violent expression of their conflicts. These are slow and multidirectional processes, which encompass numerous movements forward and backwards. Nevertheless they must be sustained and nourished by a long-term vision of the desired change.

Changing the interaction patterns *normalized* by armed conflicts, which are characterized by logics of individualism, egoism, aggressiveness, and violence, has a significant positive impact also on the personal level of change. Conflict and violence change the way people perceive themselves and others. It is hence important that they can *experience*, collectively and individually, alternative and constructive ways of interacting and coexisting (Rodríguez 2010).

The new spaces of interaction on a local–national–global scale afforded by new technologies, and the blossoming of citizens' media in countries with armed conflict have opened new possibilities and opportunities for civil society to actively participate and involve itself in the different phases of the conflict cycle. This fact is transforming the nature of the communication flows and dynamics that contribute to the systemic prevention of and response to conflicts (SFGG 2011): they become more horizontal, open and continuous. This forces the de facto decentralization of peace-building and development processes and makes it easier to put into practice the "bottom-up" and "middle-out" approaches to social and conflict transformation (Tongeren *et al.* 2005; Clark 2009) and the multitrack diplomacy initiatives (Notter and Diamond 1996; Rupesinghe 1998).

The transformation of violent conflicts requires, in short, a structural, relational, personal and cultural change, which goes beyond the satisfaction of the particular interests of the parties involved, whose number increases as the conflict evolves. Peace is development in the broadest sense of the meaning. It is not a fixed or a final estate, but an ongoing changing process, able to meet constructively new needs, interests, and conflicts in a changing environment. Lederach regards it as a "process-structure" of social change.

Communication for peace and social change therefore encompasses a set of multiple strategies, processes, and interactions aimed at addressing, where possible, existing communication flaws and failures between the multiplicity of actors who interact in the conflict and who influence its dynamic, while being in turn influenced by it. Ultimately, it intends to contribute to the establishment of peaceful, balanced, and constructive relationships between these actors. Such relationships

would enable the collective designing of processes of emancipatory social change. Although the roots of this approach to peace communication lie in the philosophy and the practice of communication for development and social change, elucidating the potential of the latter for preventing, resolving and constructively transforming conflicts requires analyzing and systematizing experiences from which to generate new knowledge.

Communication for development and social change scholars and researchers need, therefore, to observe and pay attention to changes when they happen, in order to understand and explain how change happens in a given context of violent conflict. It is not simply a case of analyzing how parties negotiate and dialogue or what agreements and initiatives result from these conversations, but rather paying attention to the framework where these processes take place and, most of all, to the patterns and networks of human relationships that hold them. The real support base for sustainable peace and social change is the very fabric of society. Yet multiple levels and types of change converge in conflict transformation, operating at different space-time scales and mutually affecting each other. Mid-level actors, subsystems, integrative power, networks, and relationship patterns are key elements of both immediate interventions and sustainable long-term change. We need to study not only "bottom-up" and "top-down" change processes, but also the "middle-out" ones, and, particularly, the processes of reconstruction of the social fabric.

Notes

1　According to information collated in the *SIPRI Yearbook* of 2011, these countries were: Afghanistan, Iraq, Myanmar, Rwanda, Occupied Palestine Territories, Somalia, Sudan, and Uganda. They ranked among 37 of the world's poorest countries according to the UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI) of 2010. A further 20% of the most violent conflicts registered in 2011 took place in medium–low HDI countries: the Philippines (97), India (119), and Pakistan (125).

2　There are, nevertheless, two important exceptions that must be mentioned due to the relevance and coherence of their contributions in this matter: the reflexion of Colombian academics and experts (Amparo Cadavid, Omar Rincón, Clemencia Rodríguez, Jair Vega, and the like) and the work of the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC), which, from the 1990s, has observed the interaction dynamics between development, conflict, and peace.

3　Interview with the author, Barcelona, April 25, 2012.

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