



Regional Network for Historical Dialogue and Dealing with the Past

2015 Istanbul Workshop

January 15-16 2015

Truth Telling and Encounters: Dynamics in Sites of Dialogue

This first thematic workshop of the Regional Network for Historical Dialogue and Dealing with the Past (RNHDP) in Istanbul will focus on three interrelated themes regarding the work and activities of civil societies working in the areas of peace-building, conflict resolution, transitional justice and reconciliation: truth telling and constructing the truth, encounters and the new media-scape. The aim of the workshop is to provide a platform for participating civil society representatives to discuss, with specific examples from their work, the ways that truth telling, encounters and the new media-scape contribute to peace building and conflict resolution efforts. The workshop also offers opportunities to identify where and how organizations fall short of their goals in these areas; it will explore ways to develop areas for knowledge sharing and joint work that address these shortcomings and, by means of collaboration, strengthen the work and resources of all the organizations involved.

Truth telling, covers a wide set of practices established within legal, research, documentation, memorialization, journalistic, educational and artistic practices. It includes efforts related to documenting state crimes, legal struggles for 'right to truth', transitional justice instruments like 'Truth Commissions' and numerous struggles for the recognition of mass human rights violations. Civil society organizations across the world have used these various practices to uncover the truth with the simple proposition that establishing the truth about what happened and who is responsible for serious crimes helps societies to understand the causes of past abuse, just as it helps end such violence and prevent these violations from occurring again. Additionally, establishing a clear record of human rights abuses can support reconciliation efforts, particularly since denial and silence often results in increased mistrust and social polarization of the communities in question.

Constructing truth, however, is an additional component to truth-telling in that it is a method that brings together truth-telling with encounters between perpetrator and victim communities, and their conflicting narratives about the past, through its emphasis on shared narratives. Thus by examining the impact of truth-telling through specific case studies, participants will explore the ways in which these practices and efforts contribute to a political and/or cultural transformation, and the ways in which such narratives open up new questions regarding issues of peace, justice and reconciliation. What are some examples where these propositions hold and where truth telling and struggles for 'right to truth' contribute to ending



the violence and impunity? What are the limitations of truth telling? Does truth telling in itself suffice for reconciliation and dialogue? Can truth be subjective and antagonistic? Do conflicting 'truths' damage opportunities for dialogue by ossifying varying sorts of nationalisms instead of creating a space for the recognition of state crimes? In what ways do practices and institutions engaged in 'truth telling' create new public debates and shape the existing ones? In which cases do projects or organizations have an effect on the policies of the political parties, governments, state policies? What makes some 'truth telling' practices more effective than others?

These questions invite the second theme into the discussions: **Encounters**. We take encounters in the widest sense possible within the fields of peace-building, historical dialogue, conflict resolution, and reconciliation. This theme thus includes encounters between participants (youth, historians, experts, etc.) during dialogue meetings organized for conflicting polities by NGOs or political bodies; it includes encounters between victims, victims' relatives and researchers; it includes encounters between audience members and the creators of museums, exhibitions, documentary installations/films and art pieces; it includes encounters between human rights activists, NGO staff, and political decision-makers. How do these various encounters shape / change the involved parties? What are the ways to spread the positive effects to a larger audience? What happens when the audience does not agree regarding that which it has encountered? What happens when the audience must acknowledge and face its own ignorance? What happens when the representation is not true to the violence that audience members themselves witnessed? What happens when people from conflicting polities who participate in dialogue activities feel that are only meeting with the 'liberal, lefty' types? What are the means of dealing with the feeling of being circumscribed with a likeminded people's circle? These are only some of the questions generated by encounters. During the workshop we will expand and discuss these questions, and explore possible answers to them.

And finally we believe that in today's world, it is not possible to discuss truth telling and encounters without referring to the **New Media-scape**. Transformations in the digital media and the uses of social media are opening new fields for discussion and innovation. Many debates on 'facts' and 'truth' take place on twitter, facebook, instagram, activist whatsapp groups etc... Infographics, short videos, citizen journalism, interactive maps-databases, blogs, mobile apps all create new discussion fields for issues related to truth telling and encounters. We are also aware of the fact that new media offers as many opportunities for and instances of hate speech and animosity as it does for dialogue and peace-building. What are the implications of this new medium for civil societies' efforts, programs, goals for peace, dialogue and reconciliation? What are some examples of the use of new mediascapes that work? How may the equilibrium between "freedom of expression" and "hate speech" be brought up to the speed of social media milieus? How does the irony and sarcasm that young people so often employ in utilizing new media forms problematize our ability to speak about the atrocities of the past, and to use new media to do so?



In the RNHDP workshop in Istanbul we seek participants from the Caucasus and the Middle East who are able to discuss their experiences in relation to these themes. We plan the workshop as a space for experience sharing and an opportunity to collaboratively face the challenges we share regarding these issues.

We also plan to invite experts as discussants and/or presenters from other parts of the world whose experience and knowledge in the above mentioned themes will be invaluable for the workshop.

We plan to structure the workshop around the presentation of case studies, each of which will be followed by round-table discussions. In order to have an engaged discussions we plan to limit the number of participants to 15-20.

We are looking forward to receiving your proposals for case studies you would like to present at the workshop related to the above mentioned themes. The proposal for the case study shall not exceed **500 words**. Please attach your **CV** and your **organization profile** to the proposal submission. The deadline for submission is **December 1st 2014**. The organizing committee will announce its selection of cases on **December 17th 2014**. Travel costs and accommodation expenses of the selected participants will be covered by the organizers of the workshop. Travel costs will include the return ticket and two way airport transfer costs in Istanbul.