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Human Development and Political Violence

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FIGURE 1.1. Caught between decay and future.

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Beyond the *Youth Gap* in Understanding Political Violence

Youth are never taken seriously, and we sometimes have ideas that would be good for all people.

Alex, Croatia

...Some things do depend on us; war, consequences of the war, poverty; the influence of the church interfering with the state affairs, which must not be so.

Ljubicia, Serbia

As we hear in these comments by two teenagers who have grown up in the shadow of political violence, their generation is aware of the past and its legacies. These brief quotes mention many details that young people in easier situations may not notice: “consequences

of the war,” “the influence of the church interfering with the state affairs,” youth responsibility for the future (“some things do depend on us”), and their capacity to contribute to the benefit of society (“we sometimes have ideas that would be good for all people”). These reflections echo the letter we read by Visnja in the Preface, pointing out, ironically, that youth perspectives are usually ignored: “Who would be open to listening to the ‘complaints of youth’ and take them seriously?” On the other hand, those in power are stymied about how to create a future: “The old guard politicians are still shaking their heads, and they tell us ‘it will be better’ . . . Yeah, right!” Scholars have contributed information about children and youth as the objects of study in situations of political violence, but the literature has offered little from the perspectives of young people themselves.

Previous research and practice have focused, in particular, on two types of responses by young people growing up during or after armed conflict: pathology and risk. After a brief review of these approaches, I discuss the need for inquiry into youth perspectives on political violence to fill the remaining gap in research and practice.

HOW DO YOUNG PEOPLE RESPOND TO POLITICAL VIOLENCE?

Research and practice on the human effects of political violence have increased in the past decade. Young people, especially in developing countries, are the major group affected by violence (www.unhcr.org), so assessing the costs to them is important. Children are, after all, vulnerable to and inheritors of situations created by others. Consistent with such reasoning, representations of *child* and *youth* in scholarly and practical discourse evoke images of victims, potential villains, or both. To examine the prevalence of those representations, I did a computer search of the phrases “child/youth armed conflict” and “child/youth political violence” in a social science database of articles from 1983 through 2008, and I noted how the young person was

described. The search indicated that 65 percent of the relevant citations portrayed the figure of the young person in terms of war-related damage and concerns about cycles of violence.

The Damage Response

The following e-mail message from a male teenager in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) suggests the overwhelming focus on psychopathology as a response to war. Once an esoteric medical diagnosis, post-traumatic stress disorder (commonly referred to as “ptsd”) is available for war-related humor.

*Dear Friends, I'm sorry for not coming to the meeting. can't get out of bed, that old ptsd acting up again!!!!!! Ha ha ha ha ha!!!!!!
From D.*

In this e-mail to his supervisor and peers at a community center, D. uses “ptsd acting up again” as an excuse for not being able to “get out of bed,” obviously playing, “!!!!, Ha ha ha ha ha,” with the overuse of what is sometimes a result of exposure to violence. Along with similar examples in my field notes, this message hints at the overuse of medical explanations for responses to war, in particular war-related damage to the young. Suggested by D.’s humorous approach, such terms have become commonplace in lay discourse.

More than 41 percent of the articles in the database of relevant scholarly literature on political violence represents children as victims. Terms like *ptsd*, *depression*, and *anxiety* are common, with or without scientific measures designed to assess those disorders. Medical language, including *suffering*, *vulnerability*, *helplessness*, *behavior problems*, and the need for *healing*, appears widely in research and program reports. Terms for antisocial personal traits, like *aggressiveness*, *victims*, *internalizers*, and *externalizers*, are also prevalent. Research has identified damage to functional systems, including moral deficits,

such as to child soldiers who have been forced to kill (Posada & Wainryb, 2008), and lack of perspective-taking abilities among those who may be repressing traumatic memories as perpetrators or victims. Because imagining, considering, and empathizing with the perspectives of others are major sociocognitive capacities (Damon, Lerner, & Eisenberg, 2006), assessments of these processes are relevant to development in situations of violence. This figure of the child as victim is, furthermore, consistent with the consideration of interpersonal effects such as *abuse, bullying, forced migration, sexual exploitation, abduction, and child labor*.

Researchers have explained that psychopathological responses like PTSD occur but are overdetermined (Bonanno, 2004). Although the medical definition of PTSD includes thoughts and behaviors that disrupt normal activity and social relations for up to 6 months, researchers and practitioners apply it across much longer time spans. Even when applying concepts like PTSD correctly, research indicates that the disorder occurs less than once reported (Bonanno, 2004; Inter-Agency Standing Committee [IASC], 2007; Summerfield, 1999), suggesting a need to study resilience (Barber, 2009; Boyden, 2003). Those citing the overattribution of psychosocial damage have urged researchers to broaden their inquiry beyond acute phases of violence to the devastating residual effects across time and space (Boyden & Mann, 2005; Daiute & Turniski, 2005; IASC, 2007).

Representations of vulnerability and psychopathology have practical implications. Knowledge about the nature and course of violence-related trauma and developmental deficits is useful to clinicians (Apfel & Simon, 1996). At the same time, explanations emphasizing vulnerability could promote passivity, in part because such responses garner financial and political support (McMahon, 2009). Scholars have also proposed that focusing on youth victimization and risk may be consistent with government efforts to negate political activism by children involved in violence, such as when they participate on the

frontlines of battle (Boyden, 2009) or when they protest against violence and injustice (Daiute, 2009a). Although contributing insights for therapy, focusing on damage to individuals reduces the analysis of political violence to the relatively narrow scope of *intrapersonal* processes. Political violence is, however, an activity that occurs over a broad range of actors, spaces, and time. Broadening inquiry to address this complex nature of violence can complement prior research.

Cycles of Violence

The other major representation of the young person in situations of armed conflict is one of potential villain, either directly or as a result of having been a victim. Twenty-four percent of the articles about effects of political violence on children and youth represent children and especially youth as potential villains (9%) or victims at risk for becoming villains (15%). Mentions of *risk, prevention, perpetrator, child soldier, rehabilitation, neo-Nazi, and ethnic hatred* express this view.

An implicit idea behind this view is that children internalize the beliefs, values, and practices of their societies, families, and like-minded peers. In situations of political violence, older people exhibit actions and subjectivities that socialize young people to their ways. Often referred to as *social reproduction*, this phenomenon is mentioned in sociological research, some anthropological research, and psychological research emphasizing the enculturation of a child into society via collective memories of violence and the practices of ethnic cultures.

At the same time that such deficits are imposed on children and youth, adults in their societies express the need to protect young people from the horrors of the past, which, in turn, results in reducing conversations about history. Explanations based on views about social reproduction focus on causes and effects of violence as inevitable

sequences of events, such as a history of animosity among people of different ethnic groups sharing the same spaces and resources. When we assume a broader political perspective, we realize, however, that such views reduce the analysis, such as to ethnic hatred in the former Yugoslavia. Most simply stated, even children growing up during the 1990s wars point out that if their parents and grandparents had lived with Serbs, Croats, Bosnians, Catholics, Muslims, and others peacefully for nearly a half century, why, all of a sudden, did they have to fight and kill one another? Resonant with that question, numerous detailed political analyses document the exploitation of ethnic differences and tensions by leaders who were economically motivated to fracture the loosely integrated republics of Yugoslavia (Gagnon, 2004; MacDonald, 2002; Silber & Little, 1995; Woodward, 1995).

An assumption related to concern about cycles of violence is that children grow by internalizing past history. Implying this view are comments by parents who are reluctant to answer their children's questions about the past for fear that stories about the war will harm the children and, perhaps, their own image as parents (Freedman & Abazovic, 2006). Also, despite arguments for reconciliation after intergroup conflict, there are fears that narrating violent events could easily ignite emotions, fueling ongoing cycles of violence. Such formulations imply that learning is a one-way process from adults to children rather than *inter-action* in everyday activities. Assumptions that young people internalize the views of the previous generation are consistent with an emphasis on the passing along of master narratives or dominant discourses (Salomon, 2004). In accordance with such logic, research and practice have explored interventions designed to overcome or prevent past animosities, for example, by promoting positive social-relational understandings and perspective taking.

The social-reproduction explanation, like the focus on damage, defines the problem within the individual. Analyses that focus on an

individual life course, for example, tend to consider a child's exposure to violence, protections from such exposure, antidotes to it, and a child's own inclination to become violent. Evidence for such cycles of violence exists, but researchers continue to debate the nature and extent of the explanation that violence begets violence in any predictable way (Boyden, 2003; Widom, 1989). Research has broadened from examining cause-and-effect cycles within families, neighborhoods (Earls & Carlson, 1999), and cultures (Ware, 2006). Within this latter line of research, the focus is on individual young people's behavior measured in outcomes like fighting, school delinquency, expulsions, criminal offenses, intergroup conflicts, group identity, self-esteem, and other factors related to living in low-income, ethnically diverse neighborhoods. Similar studies contribute information about ecologies of violence, but explanations could also focus on young people's reasoning about the circumstances of violence surrounding them or their goals. Cultures develop systems of meaning, which may include rationales for violence (Barber, 2009), so the dynamic nature of meaning systems warrants further inquiry in the increasingly volatile global situation. In political-economic revolutions, in particular, young people cannot simply follow in their elders' footsteps because so much has changed since parents, teachers, and older siblings interacted with former regimes in education, the media, and public life.

Political changes, such as holding fair elections and allowing media independence in former dictatorships, are imposed without precedents or role models, a situation that is especially acute in the postwar Western Balkan nations gradually entering the European Union (EU). Although EU economic standards for candidate nations present incentives and hope, political requirements, such as turning over war criminals, affect young people who are aware of being associated with violence in their country. Diverse pressures apply to youth interacting internationally (such as on the Internet) and during migration or other travel. For example, Serbians face prejudice

for the crimes of Slobodan Milosevic, Croatians face ties with the Third Reich in World War II, and refugees face double threats from Americans who resent their immigrant status and from Bosnians at home who may resent their having abandoned the homeland in crisis.

Along with important information about the damaging effects of war, postwar transitions, and related consequences, we need to know how young people make sense of circumstances like displacement, political-economic instability, and lack of infrastructure, especially as those circumstances impact adolescent transitions to adulthood. To learn about the developmental nature of growing up in environments defined by political violence, we can usefully shift the perspective away from assumptions about damage and fear to inquire with young people about how they perceive their situations. In other words, we can take young people "seriously" to learn about the legacies of war that matter in their lives, the factors that "depend on them," and their "ideas that could help all people."

THE NEED FOR YOUTH PERSPECTIVES

As suggested in the quotations at the beginning of this chapter, young people feel the need to express their knowledge about society and the need to be heard by those in power. This need is supported by other academic and practical sources.

Of the articles about the effects of armed conflict on the young, 19 percent point to a broadening away from the damage and reproduction models. Approximately 13 percent of the reports define children's roles in terms of broader sociopolitical issues, and 5.9 percent analyze conflict in terms of young people's understandings about effects. Survey research has, for example, offered information about young people's attitudes and activities (Kovac-Cerovic, Popadic, Knezevic, & Matkovic, 2006; Popadic, 2000; Srna, 2005), providing foundations for in-depth inquiry into the complexities of these views. This shift to

more active representations of young people is clearly worth exploration, but it requires new theory and methods.

Research on the useful employment of young people in contexts of armed conflict has begun to show, for example, that serving in the field as medics and cooks offers stable institutions, education, and opportunities for productive and, in some ways, protective activity to children who are bereft of their parents (Honwana & De Boeck, 2005; Sta. Maria, 2006). Although the powerful in society create and allow seeds of violence to grow, young people caught up in those situations become the focus of blame as members of *youth gangs* exacerbating violence. Ethnographic research in the oil-rich delta region of Nigeria shows, in contrast, that some of those same youth labeled *gang members* develop strategies for dealing in socially conscious ways with the competing motivations of local leaders to comply with multinational corporations and the need for local control over precious natural resources (Akinwumi, 2006; Ukeje, 2006). Such observations have led to interest in learning about how children and youth engage developmentally in conflict.

Shifting the focus from youth subject to subjectivity is imperative for creating analyses of violence that integrate individual and societal development. Young people's interpretations of their environments can provide a foundation for education, community development, and international relations, because those views not only provide a way for educators and leaders to connect with young people but also contribute insights about orientations and goals that could influence public sentiment in the future. Other rationales include young people's desire to speak, their awareness of self-determination rights, and their capacity to understand the challenges and opportunities in contemporary realities. Such youth perspectives are not completely separate from those of their elders or the goals of the state but are likely to be unique in how they link the past and the future from the perspective of present experiences.

Studying young people's perspectives requires a different paradigm for considering the effects of political violence. Both damage and social-reproduction models assume that political violence is an interruption in some natural course of events. Instead, as we see in the situation of the former Yugoslavia and other contemporary societal transformations, war changes society dramatically and, consequently, the circumstances of development with which the postwar generation interacts. In the former Yugoslavia, for example, adults and older youth once lived within a communist dictatorship now separated into distinct, emerging capitalist democracies. Even though the "old guard politicians" are still in power, as Visnja stated, many postwar institutions like education, civil society, and government are creating democratic practices, like voting, if not complete democratic philosophies. Young people have firsthand knowledge of the new practices and probably experience contemporary circumstances more openly than adults who speak for them based on knowledge and ideology from the previous system. Although it is clear that war can cause psychological as well as physical damage, the idea that individuals or states heal after a war may not be what actually happens with the passing of time. Similarly, fears about the passing along of hatreds that fueled the war and, for some, that justified committing atrocities, may be exaggerated because the prewar mentalities have changed.

Given political, economic, and social changes, the postwar generation is also likely to develop unique goals based, in part, on the fact that they cannot rely on realities of the communist past, such as guaranteed access to health care and, in part, on the fact that their future is tied to participation in Europe and the wider world. The transformed political system, rituals of daily life, and goals for the future across ex-Yugoslavia, as in other dramatically changing societies, warrant eliciting young people's perspectives about the state of the society and the effects of the war.

A major innovation for young people growing up at the beginning of the 21st century, especially in newly formed and developing

states, is children's rights. Although the design and implementation of children's-rights treaties are not perfect, there is growing consensus that young people's views must be sought and considered, at least in matters affecting them. The frustration expressed in the quotations about adults not taking young people seriously occurs in light of the stalled promise of Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and attests to the ongoing youth gap in scholars' understandings of political violence. Especially relevant to young people's critiques, the UNCRC was ratified at a time of major geopolitical reorganization related to the demise of the Soviet Union in 1989 and the rise of new forms of globalization. In addition to numerous other rights, including those protecting children from participation in war, the UNCRC underscores children's right to self-determination (albeit qualified) as one among 53 other rights declared in the UNCRC, as follows:

Article 12

1. *States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.*
2. *For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.* (UNCRC, 1989; www.un.org)

The UNCRC has led to some successful interventions in extreme cases of child abuse, such as programs to demobilize child soldiers (www.crin.org). The treaty has also spawned numerous initiatives for children's participation in community development programs (Hart, 1999). More research is required, however, to learn about the

issues, institutions, and individuals that young people perceive as limiting their right to self-expression and development. A poignant example of the wisdom of young people in war-affected areas is their resistance to certain impositions by the EU related to education reform in the newly formed Western Balkan states. Numerous comments by young people acknowledge that adults in charge of education reforms rely, for example, on outdated standards of the socialist education system, resulting in abstract applications of democracy rather than practical ones (Spajic-Vrkas, 2003a; & b). Many of these young people raised during the war have fresh ideas as witnesses to violence and as participants in international relief organizations and popular culture. Although they are not without skepticism about democracy, contemporary generations are well aware of the contrast between the old and the new in their rapidly transforming societies.

A DEVELOPMENTAL ANALYSIS TO FILL THE YOUTH GAP IN RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

An alternative view to the figure of child as victim or potential villain is a developmental view. A developing child is not only subject to surrounding forces but is also actively weighing various options. As suggested in the following quote by a scholar making sense of political change at the beginning of the 20th century, human development also involves persuasion.

Persuasive discourse – as opposed to one that is externally authoritarian – is, as it is affirmed through assimilation, tightly interwoven with “one’s own word.” In the everyday rounds of our consciousness, the internally persuasive word is half ours and half someone else’s. . . . It is not so much interpreted by us as it is further, that is, freely, developed, applied to new material. . . . (Bakhtin, 1935/1981, p. 345)

In this view, societal change depends on what is “persuasive” to people, including to young people. Rather than repeating past “authoritarian” discourse completely, young people “interweave” their perceptions and needs as they interact with others in the circumstances where they find themselves in their everyday realities, where they develop “new material” from unique perspectives in history. Such living history can complement responses like trauma and repetition of a violent past. Although not directly applied to explain development in political violence, this dynamic view of an individual in society is one that we can usefully apply to understand the normative realities for many young people at the beginning of the 21st century.

Filling the gap in scholarly knowledge requires redefining the problem in terms of social–relational complexity. Societies positioned differently around conflicts interact with one another in complex ways, as do individuals in those diverse contexts who must engage with the multiple diverse meanings circulating in times of change. Rather than reducing the analysis to cause and effect, we consider relations within and among groups and individuals relative to a broader political system, as suggested in cultural–historical activity theory (also referred to as sociohistorical theory and sociocultural theory). This developmental analysis asks, “How do youth growing up in environments experiencing political violence and transition interact with the circumstances where they find themselves? On what do they focus? What sense do they make of events? Toward what goals do young people direct their energies?” Addressing these questions requires defining youth perspectives as context-sensitive, that is, organized in terms of goals and obstacles. While more purely maturational theories explain children’s abilities as gradually turning toward society (Piaget, 1968), the theory guiding this inquiry assumes goal-based orientations from the earliest interactions, when human babies and their caregivers attend jointly to relevant animate and inanimate objects in the world (Nelson, 2003; Tomasello, 2005; Vygotsky, 1978). As children venture

out to the playground, school, and broader community, their involvement with sociopolitical issues increases. For this reason, educators and civil-society activists should involve young people with history, which rarely happens: "after widespread violent conflict, some societies suspend the teaching of history because they cannot achieve consensus on how and what to teach" (Cole & Barsalou, 2006, p. 1). Human development research likewise must inquire into young people's participation in the complex systems required to understand past, present, and future events.

WHAT IS DEVELOPMENTAL ABOUT POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND TRANSITION?

Organizations like the United Nations (UN), United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR), the World Health Organization (WHO), human rights groups, and others that monitor violence imply that violence is a system. This insight from the policy world is the analysis of issues related to armed conflict in terms of institutions like "countries" and "staff" rather than only in terms of individuals. The following posting by the UNHCR, for example, reports on displacement (a major effect of political violence) as a unit of analysis beyond the individual, country, and region: "Today, a staff of around 6,300 people in more than 110 countries continues to help 3.9 million persons" (www.unhcr.org/basics.html, February 9, 2009). Although it may seem obvious to policy makers and political scientists, analyzing conflict beyond the individual is new for many who focus on human development in conflict. The concept "political-violence system" is useful for considering conflict in relation to social change.

Building on this view, we define the effects of political conflict as distributed across relatively broad space-time relationships. That is, our definition of *psychosocial activity* locates the dynamics of knowing, feeling, and goal making as interactions among people, groups, and institutions in specific places. Drawing on cultural-historical

activity theory, this analysis integrates the orientation of political scientists, sociologists, and anthropologists who analyze political violence in relation to broad causes and effects among institutions and political elites (Honwana & De Boeck, 2005). The orientation could usefully become more typical of psychologists, educators, and community organizers who focus on children.

This cultural-historical analysis considers the development of youth in society as mutually persuasive discourses (Bakhtin, 1935/1981). Everyone works, to some extent, with authoritarian discourses promoted by the state and cultural mores as applied to everyday realities that individuals perceive as important. If an authoritarian discourse persuades a 40-year-old man to deliver a death threat to a neighbor of a different religion who was reluctant to leave town during the war, that man is likely to perceive with animosity the expelled neighbor's family returning to claim their house after the war. By contrast, the man's teenage daughter and son are persuaded by a postwar authoritarian discourse of social inclusion promoted at school and in the community center. From that perspective, children and teenagers are curious, if not enthusiastic, about new young neighbors, even those from a different ethnic group or religion. While for adults, the returning neighbor's family dredges up bad memories, perhaps guilt and other negative emotions, for the children there is a sense of excitement about an expanded social scene and signs of life to render less creepy a house that lay broken down and vacant for as long as they can remember.

Building on this idea that multiple, sometimes conflicting discourses interact in differing persuasive ways, we have the basis for a developmental analysis that is interactive rather than predetermined. Applying these ideas to a case study of a political-violence system involves a new analytic perspective to address new questions about human development during and after armed conflict. Complementing the prior focus on individual units of analysis based on the figure of victim, potential villain, or cycles of both, we broaden to sociopolitical

analyses that integrate old, new, authoritarian, and persuasive discourses across changing societies. An alternative approach to focusing on individuals' damage requires broadening to a political system.

CASE STUDY ACROSS A POLITICAL-VIOLENCE SYSTEM

For a century now, scholars building on the sociohistorical theories of Vygotsky, Leont'ev, and Luria have worked to explain how individuals' minds, personalities, and identities are social rather than self-contained and naturally unfolding. "Activity theory is an integrated approach to the human sciences that . . . takes the object-oriented, artifact mediated collective activity system as the unit of analysis, thus bridging the gulf between the individual subject and the societal structure" (Engestrom, Miettinen, & Punamaki, 1999). "If a collective activity system is taken as the unit, history may become less manageable, and yet it steps beyond the confines of individual biography" (Engestrom, 2009, p. 26). This means that when we study individuals, their lives, their understandings of their lives, and the connection of individual lives to one another, we must consider them in interaction. For this reason, we design research so we can examine how activities embody relationships.

In a situation of political violence, an activity system involves meaning-making about the causes, manifestations, and consequences of a crisis affecting the social and physical environmental system and individuals within it. Beginning with the premise that children interact with the environments where they grow up, a research design must account for people, events, and meanings that are persuasive in the contemporary situation. This means focusing on what matters to young people growing up in different positions across time (born before, during, or after a war), geopolitical location (different postwar countries), and goals (analyzing problems in society, expressing one's personal experience, and engaging in other purposeful activities).

The former Yugoslavia is fascinating as a developmental system because the youth generation was born in the country of Yugoslavia, experienced wars that broke it apart, and now lives across numerous countries, some oriented toward Western Europe, others eastward toward Mecca, and still others positioned between alliances to Russia and the EU. Unlike other political separations in the region, such as the Czech and Slovak Republics, violence characterized the breakup of Yugoslavia, which exacerbates developmental problems and possibilities for the transitional generation orienting toward adulthood. Tensions within this system organize people's everyday lives. By extending beyond individual sites, groups, and countries, we seek to identify the tensions not only in terms of individual subjectivities but also in terms of salient goals and opportunities in each context. Working with youth organizations across the system, we ask young people what is on their minds rather than assume that they are damaged, dangerous, or holding onto collective memories of the past. The government and other elite actors must create political systems for democracy and stability, but their work depends in large part on knowledge of the generation growing up with the new systems.

The political system of the former Yugoslavia is neither naturally occurring nor necessarily functioning as a political unit, in part because migration and displacement continue to occur across the region. Tensions defining distinctions across the system include, for example, that the 1990s wars occurred but that the origins, causes, stakes, and consequences differ depending on where one is currently standing. Disagreements about what happened, who was right, who is suffering most, and so forth are played out in local and national public spaces: in the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), in neighborhoods, in the media, in places of worship, and in private conversations among family and friends. In addition, societies and individuals across the former Yugoslavia have different material and psychosocial positions within their local contexts.

A detailed account of the wars is beyond the scope of this book, but the timeline in Figure 1.2 provides information related to inquiry about the effects of war as a developmental process. Events, places, and actors involved in the geopolitical project of Yugoslavia and the resulting states are integrated as a developmental system.

Figure 1.2 presents a timeline with dimensions of the political-violence system of the former Yugoslavia that are likely to affect young people growing up in this system. This figure depicts major settings and events across time and space. Those listed in the first four columns become meaningful, as discussed by 137 case-study participants during several years of activities across four countries of this system. After the rationale and description of the political-violence system presented in this chapter, subsequent chapters focus, first, on young people's participation to create living history from their perspectives during the second half of 2007 then on various psychosocial activities and orientations of youth across this system.

The 1990s breakup of the former Yugoslavia and the resulting political transitions create the context for human development at the beginning of the 21st century. A brief review of events acknowledged by many scholarly accounts serves to chart the territory, but I ask readers to keep in mind that it is the youth perspectives presented in subsequent chapters that are the histories of primary interest.

Tensions in Yugoslavia mounting since the death in 1980 of the longtime dictator, Josip Broz Tito, were exacerbated with the breakup of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. From 1945 to 1991, Yugoslavia existed as a socialist federation of six republics with inhabitants claiming a wide range of ethnicities and religious persuasions. Several moves for independence began a sequence of events that led to the catastrophe of geopolitical fragmentation (Silber & Little, 1995). As a result of political-economic shifts in the region, Slovenia and Croatia, the two Yugoslavian republics with potentially independent resources, such as proximity to Western Europe in the case of Slovenia and geographic position on the Adriatic coast in the

Phase in a political-violence system		Time	Space	Events	Case-study participants
Relatively Peaceful Dictatorship		1945–1980	Yugoslavia	Socialist dictatorship	Parents, teachers of our participants born, educated, grow
Tensions Build		1980–1989	Yugoslavia	Turbulence	Generation experiences war as children, born 1980–1988
Violence in Region		1989	Eurasian Region	Breakup of the Soviet Union	Generation born during or after war, 1989–1995
Provocations of Violence		1991	Slovenia and Croatia	Affects entire region, world	
Extreme Political Violence		1991–1999	former Yugoslavian region	Declare independence	
				Wars fracturing Yugoslavia into numerous countries; bombing; killing; raping; “ethnic cleansing” – massive displacements	Study participants interact in society
Major Violent Events		1996–1999	Europe and the world observe, get involved	Bosnian wars (1992–1995)	
			NATO	NATO bombing of Belgrade (1999)	
Ongoing Tensions				Assassination of President Dinjic	
Violent Events and Threats		post–2000	Serbia	Sovereign states formed, constitutions created	
Aftermath		2000–2008	former Yugoslavian region now Western Balkan states	Formal peace agreements continued	
Political Instability				Displacement, returning to prewar homes	
Related Confusion about Identity		2007		Migration because of economic difficulties	137 youth aged 12–27 share their views in a research workshop discussed in this book
Economic Instability, Unemployment				Tribunals; pressure to turn in/capture war criminals	
Uncertain Future				Provinces break from Serbia (Montenegro, Kosovo)	
Pressures Related to EU Membership			European region	Accession process creates tensions in name of progress, peace, stability	

FIGURE 1.2. Dimensions of a political-violence system for child and youth development across the former Yugoslavia.

case of Croatia, declared independence in 1991. These moves were followed by Serbia's aggressive response, such as declaring an independent Serbian state within Croatia. Violent conflicts followed in that area from 1992 to 1995, and the siege of Sarajevo heightened attacks on Bosnian territory in 1994, reportedly as an attempt to stave off independence movements in that area. Violence across the region led to hundreds of thousands of deaths and as many forced migrations from 1991 through 2000, with related events through each successive independence move.

Numerous accounts of these wars mention, in one way or another, the fact that people of different ethnic and religious origins had lived together peacefully as neighbors, families, and participants in public life during Yugoslav times. The rapid shift from "brotherhood and unity" to "ethnic cleansing" is characterized by a range of extreme psychosocial orientations like "ethnic hatreds," "protection," and "defense" that justified violent acts.

The resulting expulsions, ethnic cleansing, bombings, and physical violence left between two hundred fifty and four hundred thousand people dead across the area (depending on the source), hundreds of thousands physically and/or emotionally wounded, and approximately 3 million people displaced within the region or beyond, many emigrating several times, and many eventually returning to their prewar homes (www.unhcr). Violence that increasingly accompanied regional secessions included armed conflict, mass killings, rapes, seizures of property, and massive displacements across the region and to other continents. In addition to death, displacement, and injury, there was extensive destruction to the built environment, political-economic infrastructure, and civil society (Gagnon, 2004; Johnstone, 2002; MacDonald, 2002; Silber & Little, 1995; Tanner, 1997; Woodward, 1995). Such landscapes set the scene for the development of mistrust, bitterness, revenge, and retribution with which the children and youth of today interact.

As shown in Figure 1.2, violent events occurred at different times across the region. Violence was, for example, most acute in Croatia from 1991 through 1995, whereas in Bosnia it occurred from the mid- to late 1990s, and the bombing of Belgrade took place in 1999. Amnesty International reported that as recently as August 2005, two hundred thousand people remained displaced in the Western Balkans. Investigators continue to identify unmarked graves from that period. It may take years to determine the exact number of casualties that occurred in the now-separate countries and to forge definitive agreements about the perpetrators and the victims. There is, however, agreement that the generation growing up since the early 1990s is experiencing difficulties, including the loss of family members, either through death, disability, or displacement; scant resources; and exposure to gruesome evidence of past events continuing to emerge in neighborhoods, the media, and local stories. At the same time, an ongoing dilemma is the tension between the possibilities of a new political-economic system and troubles sustaining its growth.

This necessarily simplified history became associated with different broad narratives about causes and effects of the wars of the 1990s. To account for events and actors interacting with the war-affected generation, we consider development beginning with the birth of Yugoslavia, which was organized as a socialist dictatorship under Josep Broz Tito. Although many scholars point to contradictions involved in creating a national identity among the myriad ethnic, religious, and local groups across a region of some 47 million people, Yugoslavia was peaceful, prosperous, and relatively outside the Cold War tensions.

As a result of the 1990s wars, the postwar generation, whose parents grew up and were educated in Yugoslavia, now lives in different locations across the region (as shown in Figure 1.3) and the world, including the United States. Examining youth perceptions of these diverse circumstances offers insights about how age, cultural origin,

Former Yugoslavia

FIGURE 1.3. Map of the former Yugoslavia and resulting Western Balkan region.

and national affiliation may matter less than interaction with the circumstances of daily life (Daiute & Lucic, 2008). Given the violent breakup of Yugoslavia, the contentious nature of recent history depends on the persuasiveness of national and generational positions. Rather than the weight of history, which was shattered with the secessions and wars, factors determining persuasive discourses among youth in each nation could be quite dynamic. Despite agreement about some of the major events of the wars, current national

positions toward the past differ dramatically in how they narrate events, causes, consequences, perpetrators, and victims. Resulting political-economic circumstances also differ, as do opportunities for youth and societal development.

As outlined in Figure 1.2, conflict builds and resolves over long periods and is, therefore, a developmental process spanning generations rather than an aberration affecting only those directly involved. Although the acute phase of war may have ended, tensions continue over situations like Kosovo's recent declaration of independence from Serbia, tribunals, the status of refugees and returnees, as well as a range of effects including poverty, instability of legal institutions, lack of health and social services, opportunities for new ways of knowing, potential for involvement in societal reorganization, and critical thinking. As we will see in subsequent chapters of this book, these factors frustrate a postwar generation motivated to enjoy a positive future and distinguish itself from the generation that waged war.

INSIGHTS ABOUT YOUTH PERSPECTIVES IN CONTEXT

The 1990s was a turbulent decade defined by transitions from the Cold War that affected children and youth growing up in very different areas of the world. At the same time the wars were fragmenting Yugoslavia, public schools serving children from diverse ethnic backgrounds in the United States reported increased incidents of intergroup conflict (Elliot, Hamburg & Williams, 1998). A relatively protracted history of tensions over hard-won civil-rights legislation for African Americans in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, culminated in educational practices designed to address the tensions. Responding to an increasing number of violent events toward the end of the twentieth century, educators developed myriad violence prevention programs based in theories of social development and risk management, among other foundations (Elliot et al., 1998; Lelutiu-Weinberger, 2007; Selman, Watts, & Schultz, 1997). The line of research that sought children's understandings

of interethnic-group relations and conflict offers insights for our present concern of state violence internationally. Before illustrating how adolescents use social-relational activities in the context of political violence, I briefly review an “aha moment” when I observed how younger children expressed their understanding and action around ethnic-group conflicts in a violence-prevention program in U.S. public schools.

An “Aha” Example of Child–Society Interaction

To learn about the understandings and actions of seven- to ten-year-old children in the third and fifth grades in U.S. urban public schools, I designed a sequence of oral and written discourse activities within a violence-prevention curriculum focusing on conflict among children from different ethnic groups. Grounded in cultural-historical activity theory, the series of individual and collaborative assignments to write about personal experiences of conflict and to write endings to fictional children’s stories about ethnic conflict gave children a range of expressive contexts reflecting on conflict. These writing activities also provided the research team with data for considering theoretical questions about how children worked with principles from the violence-prevention curriculum to change their views about ethnic conflict over the course of one or more school years. We hoped that children would gradually adopt curriculum ideas like “use words, not fists, when you have a strong disagreement with someone,” but children’s uses of the narrative writing activities revealed a profound, even cunning, manifestation of the interdependence of social and individual psychosocial activity.

Analyses of the curriculum, classroom interactions, and hundreds of autobiographical and fictional narratives indicated that the seven- to ten-year-olds in the study increasingly shaped narratives about their personal experiences of conflict to conform to the values promoted in the curriculum, such as using words instead of fists to

resolve interpersonal problems. In a parallel series of narratives about conflicts involving fictional characters, the same children increasingly expressed counter-curriculum values, such as fighting and expressing intense emotions (Daiute, 2004; Daiute, Buteau, & Rawlins, 2001). Such flexibility indicated the social-relational nature of different narrating activities, in particular, mediating the narrator’s presentation of self in relation to the values of audiences. These children not only expressed and transformed understandings about conflict in their narrative writings over time but also used the activities to engage with the social context in sophisticated ways.

The following excerpt from a teacher-led classroom discussion about children’s autobiographical stories offers a glimpse into how values about the correct way to think about and manage conflicts are formed. As is common practice in U.S. classrooms (Graves, 2003), a fifth-grade teacher asked students to share stories about personal experiences, in this case, focusing on conflict issues like those in literature the class had read and analyzed. This interaction occurred after one child, John, shared his story about a conflict with people of an ethnic background differing from most in the class. The teacher launched a discussion about how conflicts escalate by connecting the student’s experience to the literary selection *Felita*, a book the class had read about discrimination against Puerto Rican immigrants in New York City during the 1960s:

- 1 TEACHER: . . . *Is there anybody else who is making a little connection between Felita when I tell you that kids in our class attacked the Lebanese kids down the block with water balloons?*
- 2 STUDENT: *What was the reason [for the conflict]?*
- 3 TEACHER: *It doesn’t sound like there was really a serious reason. We’re not getting on you guys. We’re not getting on you guys.*

After referring anonymously to “kids in our class attacked the Lebanese kids down the block with water balloons,” the teacher turned to several students who had been involved and said, “We’re not getting

on you guys,” apparently to reduce the sense of blame implicit in her selection of this real-life event to connect to an ethnic conflict in literature and, ultimately, to the role of racism in the conflict process. After John interjected the following explanation about his perception of the sequence of events, the teacher guided her students to consider the perspective of their adversaries:

4 JOHN: *Because they tried to lock us in the park because of the door, right. Whenever you close it real hard, it gets stuck and you have to try and...*

5 TEACHER: *And they were purposely trying to lock you in?*

6 JOHN: *Yeah, that's what happened.*

7 TEACHER: *... They started, but you continued. I hear constant escalation. Do you, Emily, or do you hear any de-escalation yet?*

Voicing what may have been the point of view of the Lebanese children, the teacher responded to John, “And they were purposely trying to lock you in? ... They started, but you continued.” In this excerpt as in many others among numerous instances of discussion, the teacher transformed this account of events near school into a lesson about “escalation,” asking another student, Emily, to make the connection for her classmates.

8 EMILY: *Escalation.*

9 TEACHER: *Escalating, all right. What's your connection to Felita here?*

10 EMILY: *When they beat Felita up.*

11 TEACHER: *When they beat Felita up.*

12 EMILY: *Because... she was a different color...*

13 TEACHER: *A different, a darker complexion, and the fact that she was Latin and that her mother was really dark. You know what, kids, I worry very, very often, the difference between black and white is extremely obvious, and sometimes we forget when the difference is not so obvious, that the things we're doing may be tinged with a little racism there. In the fact that we're treating children who are different than us in a way that we might not treat each other, just a point for you to think about a little. Just a point for you to think about a little bit.*

The teacher extended beyond the children's reported experiences further by comparing details about skin color and discrimination in the book *Felita* and “that the things we're doing may be tinged with a little racism there.” She then attempted to make the definition of racism real for her nine- and ten-year-old students by saying, “... we're treating children who are different than us in a way that we might not treat each other. Just a point for you to think about a little.”

Given this and many other such discussions, it is not surprising that children would learn to avoid narrating events in their lives that may appear to escalate conflicts, especially if they could be interpreted to be racist (Daiute, Stern, & Lelutiu-Weinberger, 2003). The effects of this conversation are visible across several stories by John, a ten-year-old boy identifying as African American, in response to the request, “Write about a time when you or someone you know had an argument or disagreement with someone your age.”

*My conflict is when me and my best friend Robert and I was fight because i didn't want to be on his team so and we solved it later that day nobody got herti and that is when we became best friends.**

As suggested in the curriculum to teach children effective strategies for dealing with interpersonal conflicts (Walker, 1998), John, like several hundred of his peers, ended the year by narrating personal experiences with strategies like explaining differences of opinion (“because i didn't want to be on his team”), trying to include an adversary's point of view (“we”), resolving conflicts without physical aggression (“we solved it later that day nobody got herti”), and maintaining friendships above all else (“we became best friends”).

During the course of the same school year, as John's autobiographical stories became more peaceful, his responses to an assignment to complete a fictional story, like other students' responses, became increasingly full of conflict details. The activity asked the

* Texts appear as written by the child.

seven- through ten-year-old participants to complete a story based on the following starter:

Jama and Max were best friends. Pat moved in next to Max, and they began to spend lots of time together. One day, Jama saw Pat and Max walking together and laughing. Write a story about what happened next. What happened? How did the people involved think and feel about the events? How did it all turn out?

Hundreds of children completed the story, most introducing some type of conflict, which the research team analyzed for the nature of the conflict and resolution. Most children used this fictional story in different ways than they used the autobiographical-narrative activity (Daiute, 2004, 2006). Children who identified with minority backgrounds like John, used the fictional context to express values very different from those promoted in the curriculum and in their own autobiographical narratives (Daiute, et al., 2003). In the following fictional narrative, for example, John includes descriptions of violence, such as references to punching, fighting, and laughing with a negative twist.

Jama saw Max and Pat and she said what are you laughing about. Max said about you pat stared to laughing. And then Jama punnch pat in the face and then Max stared to laughing. Then pat and Max, jama stared to fight. Then jama punched maxs and pat in the face Then jama got punch in the face when jama got home her mother said what then.

Various elements illustrate the less-than-friendly nature of this story. The first-person protagonist engages in forbidden fighting and veers into negative emotional terrain, with laughing as mocking rather than as joy. Also different from the autobiographical accounts at the end of the school year, this story has a suspended ending: "her mother said what then."

We learned from children's strategic uses of narrating in this study just how much social values become part of an individual's psychosocial orientation, as shared, for example, in a personal experience story. In that process, we learned how important an individual's motivations to be perceived positively in the social group shape autobiographical writing while the need to release tensions that would clearly be perceived less favorably emerges in fictional writing that is not necessarily true. In that study, we learned how even young school-aged children adjust their self-presentations to social messages. Building on that work, this study offers insights about how knowledge, identity, and orientation to the world are distributed across individuals and social groups in discourse and not only through it.

The previous study is particularly relevant to the theoretical issue of individual and societal interdependence from a period when discourse – histories, myths, and rationalizations – led to violence. The period of transition beyond violence is preoccupied with the appropriate narratives for positive futures. Prosocial class discussions and children's abilities to factor them into their narrations and their perceptions of life experiences are clearly important, if not profound. These findings suggested that in education and research, as in society more broadly, discourse is the mediation of social and individual consciousness rather than a window into individual minds and hearts.

Based on those findings, I extended the practice-based research design with a generation growing up during political violence and transition. The interaction of self and society exhibited dramatically on a smaller scale in U.S. urban classrooms could, I hypothesized, be operating in the sociopolitical realm of development toward the future among postwar youth across the former Yugoslavia.

A pilot study showed how children and adolescents engage with different narrative activities to express a range of knowledge, self-presentations, and goals. Adolescents in Croatia expressed diverse

knowledge about the past, present, and future when they had the opportunity to narrate conflict from diverse generational perspectives (Daiute & Turniski, 2005). Participants offered different knowledge about and interpretations of conflict in narratives with older protagonists (the generation directly involved in the 1990s wars) and younger protagonists (postwar peer generation). The finding about the distributed nature of narrating is consistent with results of the study of younger children's strategic use of narrating in the school-based violence-prevention program in a U.S. city (Daiute, 2006) discussed above.

As one cultural-historical theorist explained, personality "originally arises in society . . . and [one] becomes a personality only as a subject of social relations. . . . The method of . . . dialectics requires that we go further and investigate the development as a process of 'self-movement,' that is, investigate its internal moving relations, contradictions, and mutual transitions" (Leont'ev, 1978, p. 105).

This comment about the dialectic nature of personality motivates question, including: What are the dynamic relations at the forefront of life among a postwar generation? What are the relevant diversities in those contexts that set those "moving relations" meaningfully in place to create contradictions and mutual transition? How can we usefully characterize the political-violence system of the former Yugoslavia in terms of the moving relations, contradictions, and mutual transitions in play among the postwar generation across those societies? With such clear distinctions among the contemporary youth generation (up to their mid-20s) and their elders in terms of war experience, current environment, and future prospects, the nature of the psychosocial dynamic is intensely contested and in need of analysis to inform practice and theory. In addition to living with the consequences of war, the contemporary youth generation is participating in schools, community centers, media, and public institutions undergoing reform in varying degrees and speeding

toward capitalist democracies, most specifically with the influence of the EU. Thus, although the generation that experienced the war and grew up in the prewar socialist society shares knowledge and ways of knowing with their children, the postwar generation is living among diverse new influences and the attendant need to express the motivations, fears, and other subjectivities in material and symbolic circumstances of daily life. What, then, is persuasive to these young people?

From the challenges of a classroom serving children of diverse ethnic backgrounds in a large U.S. city, we consider this interaction of individual and societal story-telling as a dynamic developmental space in contexts of war and transition. Tensions between societal stories, such as the correct way to think about people who are different and to approach conflicts with others, may in the present be more subtle than they are in the immediate aftermath of war. The processes of creating one's autobiography in relation to societal imperatives and the corresponding changing societal narratives are worthy of examination across a range of contentious contexts. Although many designs for practice and research in crisis settings entail drawing or other art-related performances, it is in focused verbal interactions that meaning, dissention, and progress take the most dynamic shape. Certainly it is time for inquiry about the use of such cultural tools.

ADOLESCENCE AND POLITICAL TRANSITION

Positioned precariously between childhood and adulthood, adolescents may be especially qualified to use a range of expressive activities for sharing experiences from third- or first-person stances, in fictional or autobiographical contexts, and in relation to the expectations of diverse audiences, including those who maintain a "last-century mentality;" those who want to create new ways of organizing life; and

those from afar whose ill-informed, critical, pitying, or other perceptions are conveyed in stereotypical narratives readily available in the media. To examine mediational processes, I present a case study that analyzes various activities by young people living in four countries positioned differently in the aftermath of the war in the former Yugoslavia. Effects and causes of conflicts are also ideological and symbolic and thereby shared in the stories of individuals, groups, and nations. This developmental approach to studying conflict occurs in the context of activities including story-telling, social interaction, and community participation, which offer a test of practice-based research methods.

As part of a workshop with youth surviving the Yugoslavian conflict, one hundred and thirty-seven 12- to 27-year-olds in Bosnia & Herzegovina (BiH), Croatia, Serbia, and a refugee community in the United States reflected on social conflict (Daiute, 2007). Compared with scale-based measures designed to assess traumatic reactions like internalizing and externalizing symptoms, the discursive practices in this study invited participants to express a range of knowledge about and orientations to conflict. The study was designed to address questions of whether and how young people living across four countries during the 1990s, when half of our cohort were preadolescents and adolescents during the war (currently aged 19 and older) and half were children or babies (currently aged 18 and younger) are experiencing diverse effects of violence. Chapter 2 describes the workshop in terms of several principles of cultural-historical activity theory, which I propose as tools to increase our understanding of human development in the context of political violence.

Along with many other expressions, the drawing in Figure 1.1 at the beginning of this chapter suggests the need to fill the gap in our understanding about youth perspectives on political violence. It is those perspectives – knowledge, understanding, and goals in practical activities – that constitute history. Young people's perspectives, grounded in real time and space, comprise a living history of political

violence. Together, the various expressions that young people shared create a story, in terms eloquently defined by Jerome Bruner:

The fabula of story – its timeless underlying theme – seems to be unity that incorporates at least three constituents. It contains a plight into which characters have fallen. . . . And it requires the uneven distribution of underlying consciousness among characters with respect to the plight. . . . Whether it is sufficient to characterize this unified structure [of meaning] as steady state, breach, crisis, redress is difficult to know. It is certainly not necessary to do so, for what one seeks in story structure is precisely how plight, character, and consciousness are integrated (Bruner, 1986, p. 21).

Chapter 2 describes the context of story-telling for youth perspectives to complement the various other types of responses about political violence. Accounting for youth consciousness about the plights into which the characters of their nations have fallen will evolve as youth history.

The drawing in Figure 1.1 depicts a youth caught ambivalently between “decay” and “future.” A young man living in a country fractured by war and continuing to suffer the consequences poignantly rendered the dilemma of his generation: being caught between what is problematic (“decay”) and a future that is, at best, uncertain (“?”). By presenting a youth caught in an historical dilemma, the drawing expresses a critical perspective not yet offered in research or practice.

SUMMARY

The argument in this book is that a sociohistorical analysis of young people's engagement in conflict and its aftermath provides new insights about the effects of political violence and human development more generally. This argument is consistent with the idea that human development in war-affected environments is normative. Normative-developmental contexts are “good enough” (Winnicott,

1971), providing that at least some relationships are close, loving, friendly, supportive or stable, thereby allowing children to muster intellectual and emotional resources for exploring and, eventually, mastering their surrounding environment. Young people's uses of story-telling and other discursive activities can be such resources. The purpose is not to replace bad effects with good but to consider human development, in particular during the second decade of life, in ways that do not assume vulnerability or risk. When I argue that we consider the normative nature of growing up in crisis situations, I do not imply that political violence is optimal or acceptable as a developmental context but rather that we must understand the full range of interactions to design research, practice, and policy. These ideas raise several questions, including: What are the theoretical bases for a normative analysis of conflict? How do we explore those ideas? What results do we find from such systematic analysis?

FIGURE 2.1. Youth and society work together.

2

Youth and Society Work Together

This chapter presents a practical research design to learn about young people's experiences of political violence and transition. The *Dynamic Story-Telling by Youth* (DSTY) research workshop involves young people aged 12 to 27 across four countries resulting from the recent wars to learn about how they interact with the circumstances where they find themselves. Before discussing this theory-based research design, I present vignettes based on fieldnotes, project archives, and reports to offer insights about the workshop settings. These vignettes focus