



14/01/2020

## EX POST PAPER

RAN RVT and RAN EXIT meeting – Restorative Justice

3-4 December 2019

Dublin, Ireland

# The role of restorative justice in preventing and responding to violent extremism

On 3-4 December 2019, a unique event brought together two RAN Working Groups (RAN RVT and RAN EXIT) and the European Forum for Restorative Justice (EFRJ) for exploring the role of Restorative Justice (RJ) in cases of violent extremism. This initiative is part a longer journey initiated by RAN EXIT a few years ago, with the aim of expanding the exit work to other relevant fields, and by RAN RVT to give a voice to victims of terrorism and combine their expertise to better prevent and counter violent extremism (P/CVE). In 2019, both Working Groups gave more attention to the RJ philosophy and its practices, hence the idea of inviting the RJ community and the EFRJ to share their expertise in this field.

About 40 participants with experience in violent extremism, restorative justice, or combining both, gathered in order to increase understanding of the role of restorative justice in relation to cases of violent extremism, terrorism, and political armed conflicts. The group included victims of terrorism, former members of extremist groups, mediators, social workers, exit workers, and psychologists. In order to better prepare for the meeting, participants received in advance an ex-ante paper with the definition of restorative justice, its values and practices, its areas of application, as well as a short description of some restorative justice examples in cases of domestic violent extremism. During the actual meeting, a series of presentations provided more details on case studies and other experiences, and created a safe space for sharing concerns and questions.

This paper captures the outcomes of this meeting, including inspiring restorative justice initiatives and challenges in the field. It is divided into the following four sections: Setting the scene, Restorative justice realities, Other innovative restorative justice approaches, and key messages and recommendations.

# Setting the scene

## The basics of restorative justice

Restorative justice (RJ) brings together people affected by a crime and/or conflict with the aim to identify, understand and possibly transform a conflict and repair the harm that originated by such crime or conflict. The process includes both those who were harmed (victims) and those who perpetrated it (offenders), but may also include family members, neighbours and others who have been affected by the crime or conflict. Restorative justice is based on basic human values such as solidarity, responsibility, respect for human dignity, inclusion and truth.

*'If you ask others sitting in this room, especially the experienced restorative justice practitioners among you, the definition of restorative justice as well as its core values may slightly differ. However, we all share the main concern, to **focus on the harm and the suffering caused by such harm**; and this applies to both victims and perpetrators. We start from the general assumption that those who harm have themselves suffer(ed) and that the criminal justice system does not fully respond to the needs of all those affected by such harm.'* (Tim Chapman<sup>1</sup>)

Whereas the actual definition of RJ remains quite broad, at the core of its philosophy and practice lies the importance of giving the responsibility of resolving the conflict back to the people, as well as allowing them to rebuild the trust that builds and maintains the community. This is reflected in one of the early proponents of restorative justice, the Norwegian criminologist Nils Christie, who wrote in a 1977 article ("Conflicts as Property") of the idea that conflicts are hijacked and exploited by the state system instead of allowing citizens an opportunity for change and growth by taking responsibility and ownership of their own conflicts and stories.

The most common RJ practices are victim-offender mediation, discussion circles and conferencing. Within these three main models, there are many variations, depending on the needs of participants and who is involved: e.g. encounters can be direct or indirect; and dialogue can take place in oral or written forms of communication, or through images and stories. They also depend however on national institutional arrangements, legislation, history, and the culture in which restorative justice is applied. What's most crucial in RJ practices is the voluntary participation of the parties, the presence of a well-trained restorative facilitator, and the meticulous preparation of the actual encounter in a safe environment. Such basic principles ensure that if the meeting is well-planned and implemented, the encounter will follow a natural way. Restorative justice says that, once everything is safe and well prepared, you should bring people together and connect them. This works for both parties, victims and offenders.

In terms of areas of application, RJ began within the justice system, but it became relevant and increasingly popular in other sectors, such as security, education, family matters, neighbourhoods and urban settings.

### Inspiring projects beyond the justice system

- The four-year European project "ALTERNATIVE" aimed at developing an alternative understanding of justice and security through the use of RJ approaches in intercultural settings in democratic societies. Theoretical and action research was carried out in Austria, Hungary, Northern Ireland, and Serbia ([www.alternativeproject.eu](http://www.alternativeproject.eu)).
- Several municipalities across Europe are investing in innovative projects for creating and maintaining safer and more peaceful cities through the use of RJ approaches in urban settings conflicts. Areas of application include neighbourhoods, schools, and work environments ([www.euforumrj.org/about-the-forum/working-group-restorative-cities](http://www.euforumrj.org/about-the-forum/working-group-restorative-cities)).

Two major international instruments support restorative justice in Europe:

1. Most recently, the Council of Europe gave major visibility to RJ in criminal matters in its **Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)8**, which focuses on the harm suffered or perpetrated, and promotes a broader RJ culture to be established at different stages of the criminal justice system;

<sup>1</sup> Tim Chapman, probation specialist/lecturer at Ulster University, was one of the presenters during this meeting in Dublin; see eg <http://www.euforumrj.org/about-the-forum/board/>

- The **Victims’ Directive 2012/29/EU** also includes a section on RJ, although its focus is mostly on providing protective measures for victims of crime.

A common point in the definitions provided by each of the two documents above is the principle of parties voluntarily agreeing to meet (instead of being coerced) and the presence of a trained and impartial third party in the process as facilitator. These bare criteria provide enough room for individuals to decide for themselves whether to initiate an RJ process or not. As outlined during the EXIT-RVT meeting by one of the participants:

*‘It is important that **restorative justice practices do not have many rules**. If we ask the perpetrator to be fully responsible of what he/she did, we risk giving him/her too much power: some victims simply wish to tell their story and explain how they have been affected by what happened; some victims need to see the perpetrator still acting aggressively towards them to finally understand and move on; some seek an apology, while others simply want to ask “Where is the body?”; some gain a sense of control and self-confidence in finding the courage to meet the perpetrator face-to-face. What is relevant to someone may be irrelevant to another. Thus, if these two sides wish to meet, this must be organised safely, keeping in mind that it will be an encounter between two humans, beyond which there is no guarantee of outcome. **Restorative justice must be real, not idealistic.**’*

## Restorative lenses on violence

One of the models used to address violent behaviours (see matrix below, adapted form McCold and Wachtel’s Social Discipline Window<sup>2</sup>) refers to the actions and consequences that occur when low and high levels of accountability and support are in play. This model can be useful to visualise the difference between restorative justice and other approaches of justice.

<b>ACCOUNTABILITY</b>	High	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Do to</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Punish</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Exclude and stigmatise</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Do with</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Restore and Respect</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Include and engage in participation</p>
	Low	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Move away from</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Control</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Assess and manage risk</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Do for</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Rehabilitate</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Offer support and services</p>
		Low	High

**SUPPORT**

Looking at the violent behaviour through restorative lenses implies that a high level of accountability and support are needed to engage in a respectful dialogue about the problem and the causes of certain actions. Still, as visible in the matrix, the “Restore and Respect” box, which is inclusive and requires active participation, cannot stand by itself without the sustenance of the other boxes. In particular, when talking about serious violent crimes, the “Punish” box can be used to temporarily isolate the person and initiate a given programme, while the “Rehabilitate” box can be helpful to look at the personal background and social context that may have driven someone in a certain direction. Still, “Restore and Respect” implies including all parties involved to work “with them”, instead of working for or against them, and it opens up the possibility of giving victims an opportunity to play a role in addressing the violent behaviour which affected them. This is applicable to any type of serious crime (e.g. rape, homicide, traffic offence, extreme violence) and at any stage of the criminal justice process, as well as beyond.

*‘Victims have questions to be answered: “Why me? How did it happen?” come just after the crime. But even when the perpetrator is handed a prison sentence, there is an opportunity for restorative justice. A victim may ask to be reassured: “I hear you will come out of prison in few months: Are you still a danger to me?” (Tim Chapman)*

<sup>2</sup> Wachtel, T., & McCold, P. (2000). Restorative justice in everyday life. In Braithwaite, J., & Strang, H. (Eds.), *Restorative Justice in Civil Society*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Research<sup>3</sup> demonstrates that victims and offenders who engaged in an RJ process met many of their needs (e.g. recognition, empowerment, positive changes) and managed to move on with their lives. The encounters gave them the opportunity to tell their side of the story, to be heard, and to receive answers to their questions; in terms of reoffending, RJ contributes to prevent a relapse into crime. Restorative justice thus provides an added value generally encouraging fair relationships in safe societies, although it cannot be considered a unique solution.

*'The person is not the problem. The problem is the problem. And the problem is the harm caused and the suffering originating from it: in restorative justice, the focus is there' (Tim Chapman).*

## Restorative justice responses to violent extremism

So, what is the role of restorative justice as a response to or to prevent violent extremism? To start with, let's look at such experiences initiated as a response to the European-born terrorism in the Basque Country, Italy and Northern Ireland, which "incidentally were responsible for far more deaths than today's terrorism" (Tim Chapman), but are also different from today's terrorism, because they were not initiated by "the other". Without entering into the details of each conflict, the table below summarises and compares each of the three RJ initiatives, born out of the necessity of building relationships in the aftermath of the conflict (and not during the conflict itself).

<b>Basque Country 1959-2018</b>	<b>Italy 1969-1988</b>	<b>Northern Ireland 1968-1998</b>
2011, Prison of Nanclares de Oca	2005-2007, preparation 2007-2014, encounters	Since 2000, Belfast and Derry-Londonderry
20 prisoners – no penitentiary benefits	From 9 to 60 people, incl. facilitators, <i>witnesses</i> (victims, former combatants, family members), <i>guarantors</i> (or wise people), <i>first third parties</i> (youth)	More than 100 community members, prisoners, activists (Ulster University)
Institutional support (Spanish Minister of Interior; Basque Directorate of Victims' Support)	Private and secret	Institutional support Academics, activists and practitioners
14 victim-offender encounters; workshops of coexistence; Glenree reconciliation initiative; practices of commemoration	100 restorative encounters: RJ practices (mediations, circles), other restorative initiatives (collective visits to memorial places) and informal approaches (residential setting)	Few victim-offender encounters; many community projects to challenge culture of violence and train in restorative practices; victim awareness programmes with prisoners
2013, book "Los Ojos del Otro"	2015, book "Il libro dell'incontro"	Several academic publications

One of the key results of these RJ initiatives has been the unique role given to the stories of all individuals affected by these acts of terrorism and violence:

*In violent extremism, there is much interest in society, and the victim is often selected for his or her social and political impact alone. Restorative justice starts from the harm suffered or perpetrated and focuses on everyone who is involved: the injured party, the person responsible and the society. (More information: Balanced Model developed by Ulster University)<sup>4</sup>*

Also, these restorative justice initiatives attempted to reconnect people to human values such as solidarity, accountability, justice, respect, and truth:

*In violent extremism, the harm is not only personal but it has an impact on society. It creates a rupture in the value of **solidarity** on which the society is based: The crime isolates and shuts people up while solidarity opens towards 'the other' and creates obligations. Extremism tries to polarise society while solidarity aims at bringing people together, instead of separating them, even when they differ greatly among them. The aim is to restore **justice** (or undo injustice) by transforming both identities (of victims and perpetrators) and by focusing the sense of **responsibility** towards another human being (previously considered as a target, an enemy or as a monster), not towards the law or the state. This can only happen through a process of **truth**, finding out what really happened through dialogue. If the truth is not what parties wish to hear (if, for*

<sup>3</sup> European Forum for Restorative Justice (2017). Effectiveness of restorative justice practices. An overview of empirical research on restorative justice practices in Europe. Retrieval on <http://www.euforumrj.org/>.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.euforumrj.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/The-UU-Balanced-Model-of-RJ3.pdf>

*example, there is lack of remorse, or a persistent belief in the ideology), honesty should still prevail: Victims have the courage to live with such a truth, even when it is not nice to hear. The outcome must be a real experience of justice. (More information: Balanced Model developed by Ulster University)*

Inspired by transitional justice models, another commonality of these three country case studies is the importance given to personal stories and dialogue, the ambivalence between memory and history, and the different concepts of truth, such as the following:

1. **Forensic truth:** This is the factual truth, including measurable facts and details of the story, as presented in court (e.g. number of days in the hospital, loss of a loved one);
2. **Narrative truth:** This is the unique story of suffering of each person, which differs even when people experienced a similar situation, simply because each person experiences the event based on personal values, relationships and emotional background (e.g. the different relationship with the lost one (e.g. separate events may include similar harm but affect victims differently);
3. **Dialogical truth:** This is the "complete truth", the common narrative which arises when parties affected by the same acts meet to share true facts (history) and subjective experiences (memories) of what happened (e.g. when victims and perpetrators meet);
4. **Transformative truth:** This can be an effect of the dialogical truth (e.g. the victim's self-perception of being set in their belief system, can change after meeting the perpetrator).

*"Restorative justice takes the narrative truth really seriously, although this is not the complete truth: for that, you need another story to be told. From a victim's perspective, trying to understand the other side of the story may seem to legitimise the act, but that would be insensitive. Sometimes looking at the motives behind the crime can be healing too: human realities are complex." (Tim Chapman)*

### **Moment of inspiration: the power of stories**

Novelist and storyteller Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie presented "The Danger of a Single Story" in a TED conference in 2009. Through a journey into her personal life, she explains the overlapping identities and layers that create each individual character and each story, but she also warns about the power of stories, especially when only one is told or sanctioned about a country or person. Watch it here:

[www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_ngozi\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story?language=en](http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=en)

## Restorative justice realities

This section includes a series of RJ initiatives and other relevant projects that took place in the aftermath of violent conflicts and/or terrorist attacks. While some initiatives directly link victims and perpetrators affected by the same crime or conflict, others extend to the wider society affected, including among other issues which is the next “first party”, who suffered the violence and therefore may play a crucial role in promoting a culture of peace.

### The time and unique applications of justice (Italy)

Between the late 1960s and mid-1980s, Italy suffered a series of terrorist attacks that resulted in more than 400 deaths and 1000 wounded people. The criminal justice response was indispensable to guarantee a sense of security, preventing possible new attacks and publicly recognising what happened; but it was not enough, especially when the responses given to victims were improper or the final sentencing of perpetrators came too late. So, while the criminal justice system responded by following its own set of rules and regulations, the community assumed the responsibility of seeking another kind of justice, one that was not limited to looking back to what happened but also looking forward to the future.

*"The question of time is quite difficult. There is an individual time and a group time, thus there shouldn't be a time limit for applying restorative justice. In fact, restorative justice cannot provide quick solutions, it actually has to search for solutions!"<sup>5</sup>*

As a result of the work of 3 experienced mediators, almost 60 people engaged in a large RJ project including victims of terrorism, ex-combatants, young people and professionals with an important role in Italian public opinion. The group still meets, after more than 10 years, in residential settings, where RJ encounters take place in more formal methods (e.g. mediations, circles, dialogue sessions) and informal ones (e.g. walking, cooking, watching films together). A lot of the preparatory work focuses on the importance of listening because “while it is difficult to listen to people who are close to us, it is really difficult to suspend judgement towards those who do things differently from us”.

*'Victims demonstrated double courage in meeting 'the other' and accepting the possibility of a new co-existence, and in standing up to the criticism of people who could not understand this choice,' such as other victims' groups.'*<sup>6</sup>

What is crucial to recognise is the uniqueness of such experience: “Restorative justice offered A place, A method (not THE) for SOME people” (Diletta Stendardi<sup>7</sup>). Clearly, this is not something that would have worked for everyone, but still it has an immense value for those ones who took part in it.

#### To know more

- The book “*Il libro dell'incontro: Vittime e responsabili della lotta armata a confronto*” (Bertagna, Ceretti, & Mazzucato, 2015) will be soon translated in English: [www.ilsaggiatore.com/libro/il-libro-dellincontro/](http://www.ilsaggiatore.com/libro/il-libro-dellincontro/)
- A book review in English entitled “*Restorative Justice and Political Violence in Democratic Societies*” is retrievable on <https://marioragazzi.eu/?p=393>
- John Braithwaite writes about this experience in his blog piece “*Understanding terrorism through restorative justice*” retrievable on [www.johnbraithwaite.com](http://www.johnbraithwaite.com)
- Diletta Stendardi talks about this experience in a plenary speech on the use of restorative justice in cases of terrorism and political violence: [www.vimeo.com/373140615](https://www.vimeo.com/373140615)

### Restorative walks with youngsters (Basque Country)

An initiative, launched by Gemma Varona, lecturer in victimology at the University of the Basque Country, aims to bring together victims of terrorism and young students in a participatory “restorative walk”, to offer a space for alternative justice experiences and to question the present cultural tendencies to justify violence. Young people had the opportunity to reflect on the concepts of violence, war and terrorism, while walking in public spaces and discussing events of Spanish history. They were also however encouraged to also think about the future,

<sup>5</sup> Quote from a participant of the EXIT-RVT meeting in Dublin.

<sup>6</sup> Quote from a participant of the EXIT-RVT meeting in Dublin

<sup>7</sup> Diletta Stendardi was one of the presenters during the EXIT-RVT meeting in Dublin in 2019.



reconciliation and the experience of those affected by crime and conflict. Victims could share their experiences as witnesses of these events, actively participating in one of the walks' main objectives: ensuring that such violence will not occur again and history will not repeat itself.

*"I [...] speak as a victim of terrorism. [...] This happened 36 years ago and of course I will never forget, but I have learnt to live with the pain and enjoy life. [...] To me, being a high school teacher myself, the most important task is to make history part of the conscience of young people. [...] To me it is essential to explain the importance of memory as an essential heritage in understanding and appreciating the values of democracy and justice, which didn't just come out of the blue. [...] The historical memory makes us learn from the past, to understand and react in our present, and therewith form our future."<sup>8</sup>*

### The line game

In the film "Freedom Writers" (2007), based on a true story, the teacher proposes a game to her students: Setting a line on the floor with tape and asking each of them to step towards the line if they can respond positively to the question. Questions refer to their life experiences and feelings over certain situations of injustice, unsafety, discrimination and violence. The aim is to encourage empathy and understanding of each other's situation. Watch the clip of the film here: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=9axXKI3zBgU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9axXKI3zBgU)

This game and other exercises are used with high school students (15-22 years old) in Milan to share and reflect on direct experiences of injustice and to identify possibilities for dialogue and social restoration in their conflicts. Students, as well as other citizens, are also invited to meet detainees in prisons to further work on the concept of restorative justice.

## Restorative justice encounters beyond borders

A unique experience was organised in autumn 2019 in San Sebastian, in cooperation with the University of the Basque Country: Victims of terrorism and former combatants from Italy, Basque Country, Northern Ireland, Israel and Palestine came together to share their restorative justice experiences and talk openly about their life stories. Among others, victims had the opportunity to share their suffering while perpetrators could explain the reasons for which they had engaged in a criminal career of violent extremism. For some of them, this was the first time they met and listened to "the other side" of the story.

Such a unique experience created an opportunity for different truths to be heard, but also for acknowledging the universal values held in common by all these people: the need for recognition, for change, for non-repetition, for justice, for a better future. After such experience, a victim stated: "*Justice to me always has been strictly the law, whoever breaks the law has to be punished*" but she expressed that restorative justice "*could be a valid complementary instrument*" to the traditional criminal justice system "*to soothe the suffering of victims and help to reintegrate the offender*".

A similar international experience was already organised by the Fernando Buesa Blanco Foundation in 2013 during the XI Seminario Fernando Buesa, which brought together victims and former combatants from the Basque Country and Italy. A book has been published about it and videos are available online<sup>9</sup>. In 2018, on the occasion of the XVII Seminario Fernando Buesa, a roundtable was organised bringing together a victim, an offender and the director of the prison of Nanclares de Oca, where the RJ encounters took place<sup>10</sup>. (More information is available at [www.fundacionfernandobuesa.com](http://www.fundacionfernandobuesa.com)).

<sup>8</sup> Quote from a Spanish victim during the EXIT-RVT meeting in Dublin.

<sup>9</sup> Mateo, E. & Rivera, A. (eds.) (2017). *Políticas de memoria. Qué, cómo y para qué recordar*, Vitoria-Gasteiz, Fundación Fernando Buesa e Instituto de Historia Social Valentín de Foronda. Retrieval on [www.bideo.info/buesa/imagenes/Políticas%20de%20memoria%20-%20XI%20Seminario%20Fernando%20Buesa.pdf](http://www.bideo.info/buesa/imagenes/Políticas%20de%20memoria%20-%20XI%20Seminario%20Fernando%20Buesa.pdf). It includes the roundtable "Del terrorismo a la convivencia" (Adriana Faranda, p. 131; Manlio Milani, p. 139; also on YouTube: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ro5kcehTH0E](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ro5kcehTH0E)) and "Las víctimas y los victimarios en la construcción de la memoria" (Iñaki García Arrizabalaga, p. 151; Iñaki Rekarte Ibarra, p. 163; also on YouTube: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=zqIoKrh9E10](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zqIoKrh9E10)).

<sup>10</sup> The debates are included in this book: Rivera, A. & Mateo, E. (eds.) (2019): *Víctimas y política penitenciaria: Claves, experiencias y retos de futuro*, Los Libros de la Catarata. Retrieval on: [www.catarata.org/libro/victimas-y-politica-penitenciaria\\_93813/](http://www.catarata.org/libro/victimas-y-politica-penitenciaria_93813/). Chapters 12-14 refer to the restorative justice experiences in the prison of Nanclares de Oca. A video is also available on YouTube: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=g-0BvH7RsjE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g-0BvH7RsjE).

## ***Moment of reflection: the concept of forgiveness***

An interesting debate took place on the concept of forgiveness during the RAN meeting in Dublin, which has been an expressed need by some perpetrators, creating strong emotional responses among victims.

*"I am convinced that forgiveness is an absolutely personal choice, important only to me, and it does not have anything to do with the offender. After sitting next to him and listening to his story of why he joined the terrorist group, I accepted his desire to feel reintegrated in society, but honestly, in the bottom of my heart, I do not know if I care about his life. My contribution to 'restore' is so far the recognition of him being given a second chance, of sitting next to him, of listening to his story and of telling him mine. This is enough."*

Truth is a crucial element in restorative justice, which is expressed in the honest words of this victim as a response to a discussion on forgiveness. Also, the experience is left in the hands of people participating in the encounter, showing that there is no "best result" to be achieved but that the only lead depends on individual needs, capacities and expectations following the guarantee of a safe process. In this case, forgiveness should not be specifically sought as a possible outcome or achievement, but simply accepted as a possible part of the process' experience.

*"All the options [...] should be respected. Mind you, as long as they are in agreement with democratic and humane criminal law."*

*"Restorative justice practitioners do not talk about forgiveness. They are only there to ask 'What is going on here?'"*

Reflections were also shared on the religious connotations of the concept of forgiveness (as encouraged by Desmond Tutu), and the way language travels across cultures and borders (e.g. in Spanish, the term "perdón" can be translated as "forgiveness" or "sorry").

*"It is immoral to forgive. If I give up my right to revenge, that's already forgiving enough."*

*"Some victims cannot forget or forgive: We must create space for such feelings."*

*"Forgiveness is less important when you consider that the toughest judge is your inner struggle."*

## **Spontaneous victim-offender encounters**

In some cases, people affected by a crime decided to meet the other party spontaneously. While these initiatives cannot be called a "restorative justice practice", they show the importance of making RJ services more widely available for any type of crime and at any stage of the criminal proceedings. Although it is impossible to know in advance what individual people's needs are, it is possible to create services and training programmes for RJ applications. Spontaneous victim-offender encounters, self-organised and without facilitators, took place:

- In Poland, such as when a former far-right group member self-arranged an encounter with one of his victims to ask for forgiveness (a double interview has been published in Polish, available by subscription only: contact [www.fundacjaodex.pl](http://www.fundacjaodex.pl) for more);
- In Israel, Robi Damelin wrote a letter to the Palestinian man who killed her son ([www.theforgivenessproject.com/robi-damelin](http://www.theforgivenessproject.com/robi-damelin))

*"When I wrote the letter to the person who killed my son, I gave up being a victim, although it took him three years to respond. I met many angry parents that think that if you give up being a victim you forget the memory of your child."*

- In the Basque Country, some more encounters took place after the restorative walks programme was over.



These self-arranged spontaneous initiatives to meet the other are important testimonies of the shared victims' and offenders' needs for a dialogue or a personal encounter.

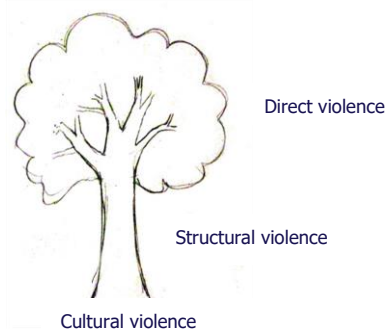
## Restorative approaches and polarisation (Hungary)

The work of the Hungarian NGO "Foresee Research Group" includes a series of restorative justice approaches (conferencing and circles) provided in different settings (schools, families, prisons). While the group does not specifically deal with violent extremism or politically motivated violent crimes, RJ issues appear in its work in several ways, as when dealing with hate crime and hate speech, when responding to political polarisation, and when looking at how media narratives and governmental propaganda exclude or stigmatise certain groups of people. These factors may all contribute to creating conflict and leading to crime. One of the key questions for this organisation is how to deal with polarisation fuelled by mainstream media and the government.

### Learn more

The Foresee Research Group consists of a young multidisciplinary team of researchers and practitioners from Hungary, committed to combatting social inequalities and injustices while promoting restorative justice and other innovative ways of dealing with conflict ([www.foresee.hu/en/](http://www.foresee.hu/en/)). In 2018, Foresee was awarded the European Restorative Justice Award because of its contribution to the RJ movement and its dedication to bringing people together to resolve conflict instead of allowing it to separate people. In 2012-2016, the Foresee Research Group was one of the partners in the European project "ALTERNATIVE" ([www.alternativeproject.eu](http://www.alternativeproject.eu)), leading the action research in a small village facing conflicts between Roma and non-Roma inhabitants. Other projects in which Foresee is involved deal with hate crime and RJ, as well as prevention of radicalisation in prisons.

The importance of RJ practices beyond the criminal justice system is also reflected in the work of a Finnish mediator working in neighbourhood and communities to prevent intercultural conflicts and hate crime and to discourage polarisation. The main goals are to equip professionals (in education, security, social work, etc.) to increase their practical expertise in depolarisation with the right tools, like communication strategies, and actual intervention programmes; and to teach ordinary citizens non-violent communication strategies and other tools to understand and respond to polarisation. The lack of training on depolarisation strategies for these audiences is seen as a mayor risk of revictimisation and re-offending behaviours. In brief, we must make sure that such skills become a capital of the people, empowering professionals and ordinary people in practicing skills based on human values such as respect, solidarity, honesty. In order to better understand violence, a distinction needs to be made between what is visible (direct and structural violence) and what is invisible (cultural violence), as explained by the Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung. Practical tools to further expand on the concept of polarisation are provided by the philosopher Bart Brandsma, who provides training across Europe under the organisation "Inside Polarisation" ([www.insidepolarisation.nl/en/](http://www.insidepolarisation.nl/en/))<sup>11</sup>.



*Typology of violence (Galtung)*

<sup>11</sup> A key tool, the RAN Polarisation Management Manual, is available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation\\_awareness\\_network/ran-papers/docs/ran\\_polarisation\\_management\\_manual\\_amsterdam\\_06072017\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/ran_polarisation_management_manual_amsterdam_06072017_en.pdf).

## Other innovative restorative approaches

This section includes a sample of innovative restorative approaches, including arts (theatre, music, storytelling) and other participatory projects (cooking workshops) aiming at sharing experiences on the violent conflict and creating together a more peaceful future.

### Restorative encounters in a theatre play

The Spanish theatre group Proyecto 43-2 has created a trilogy on violence and peace in the Basque Country. The trilogy is the result of a 10-year research project that includes interviews with victims, ETA combatants, restorative justice facilitators, academics and other professionals who could describe the experience of violence as well as the RJ initiatives that took place afterwards. In this case, theatre is used as a pedagogical and educational tool as well as an instrument for collective memory.

*"I think it is impossible to provide a fixed opinion on restorative memory, which perhaps is not even necessary or not even possible. [...] Restorative memory [is not just] an encounter between victims and offenders, but much more like a conversation trying to heal relationships, always remembering that the only justice of an irreparable fact is the remembering it."<sup>12</sup>*

In the play "La mirada de l'otro", Proyecto 43-2 focuses mostly on the meticulous and cautious preparatory work done by senior mediator Esther Pascual to organise the victim-offender encounters, after about 20 prisoners from the prison of Nanclares de Oca wrote letters to ask to meet their victims. What was important in her work, which is reflected also in the theatre play, is the fact that despite the fact the meeting was initiated by ex-combatants, the full process has been fully victim-oriented and depoliticised.

The theatre play as such has also created a space for encounters to happen. When "La mirada de l'otro" was played in the Basque Country for the first time, some of the people whose stories were included in the play were present. This had an impact on the audience on different levels: on one hand, their personal stories, or the stories of their loved ones, became publicly known; on the other, they found themselves sitting together in the same space, which became a space for encounters and new dialogues. Instead, outside the Basque Country, "La mirada de l'otro" has been important more at the prevention level, changing the dichotomy 'good-bad' to consider other options, thus contributing to opening a new public debate about what happened. The play has been performed in other European countries as well, including the French Ministry of Justice. Some videos from Proyecto 43-2 can be watched here: [www.youtube.com/user/Proy432](http://www.youtube.com/user/Proy432).

### Ex-combatants' peacebuilding initiatives (Lebanon)

'Fighters for Peace' is the only initiative bringing together former combatants – former enemies, that is – from different religious and political sides in Lebanon ([www.fightersforpeace.org](http://www.fightersforpeace.org)). This group is actively engaged in promoting a culture of peace and fighting against violence to prevent the repeat of history. Its members address young people, activists, victims of war and other ex-combatants who are interested in building social cohesion in local communities and in the reconciliation process, by conducting dialogue sessions, collecting testimonies, delivering training and connecting with former combatants in other countries. Among other initiatives, they rely on the potential of arts for storytelling and to create a collective memory by using "playback theatre" (in cooperation with another local organisation, expert in this method).

Playback theatre creates proximity and interaction with the audience, which consists of victims of the civil war, ex-combatants and young people who have not experienced the war. Someone from the audience narrates a story he/she wishes to share, and the story is then enacted by actors on stage. The performance is totally spontaneous, as it is impossible to know in advance what stories people will bring in, and what kind of public will attend, as the event is advertised widely on social media. Playback theatre has been proven to be a powerful and successful instrument for different reasons: 1) individual stories are shared with a wider public and made available for others to relate to them, creating group dynamics, and 2) stories are performed in a theatrical setting, and dramatized through a specific artistic angle.

*"As the storyteller, you can see your story performed, looking at what happened through a third-person view and seeing how others interpret it and see you. Victims found it really empowering to see their stories coming to life on stage, and ex-combatants were able to regain their humanity by seeing how they chose the wrong tools in their youth."*

---

<sup>12</sup> Quote from a participant of the EXIT-RVT meeting in Dublin

In some cases, playback theatre has led to more direct encounters between victims and ex-combatants. Rituals, supervision and the willingness to hear other perspectives are crucial in guaranteeing the success of this practice. Challenges the Fighters for Peace mention include, among others, access to prison, engaging young people at risk of radicalisation and time constraints. To get an idea of how a playback theatre performance is prepared and performed, watch here: [www.fightersforpeace.org/Home/WarStories](http://www.fightersforpeace.org/Home/WarStories).

## Bereaved parents' restorative encounters (Israel and Palestine)

The Parents Circle–Families Forum brings together more than 600 families from Israel and Palestine who have lost a close family member during the ongoing conflict ([www.theparentscircle.org/en/](http://www.theparentscircle.org/en/)).

*"I was invited by a religious father to join a weekend with other parents who lost their children. Looking in the eyes of Palestinian mothers I realised we shared the same pain."*

In common, these parents have a similar experience of suffering and isolation, but also a similar desire to fight for peace and reconciliation in their country. For this, they have been engaging in educational programmes with young people, or raising awareness in the media about their restorative experiences. What is unique about this initiative is their capacity to build relationships and promote a restorative culture in an ongoing conflict, transforming their personal suffering into an opportunity for change and peace.

*"Letters have a healing power. I am now writing a book with letters to my son, not only about the suffering but also about positive memories."*

### **"You cannot kill anybody in the name of my child"**

- Watch the TED talk "Can I reconcile with the man who killed my son?" by Robi Damelin: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=faDSK\\_vVg\\_A](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=faDSK_vVg_A)
- Watch the film "One Day After Peace": [www.onedayafterpeace.com](http://www.onedayafterpeace.com)
- Listen to the song "Look at me - Noa (Achinoam Nini)": [www.youtube.com/watch?v=9205P-o1Azc&feature=youtu.be](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9205P-o1Azc&feature=youtu.be)

## Human Libraries to share stories (Poland)

The Human Library ([www.humanlibrary.org](http://www.humanlibrary.org)) is a platform for volunteers (so-called human books) who are recruited to share their experiences to 'readers' who desire to listen to their stories. The final goal of this living library is to challenge the stereotypes held by readers and help them to better understand the other's experience. Nine national Human Libraries were organized in different European countries in 2014 to give a voice to witnesses and victims from the Second World War (project "Human Library: the rest is history").

Similarly, in Poland, a former far-right group member was invited to share his story in a Human Library, becoming "the most popular book of the event" (part of this story can be read here: [www.euronews.com/2018/02/21/a-one-way-ticket-to-violence-my-life-as-a-polish-skinhead](http://www.euronews.com/2018/02/21/a-one-way-ticket-to-violence-my-life-as-a-polish-skinhead)). To start with, participants could read a short biography of the person (as in a book cover) and then sit with him to hear the live storytelling of his experience. This is an interesting practice to encourage active listening and sharing.

## Reconciliation initiatives and memory labs (Basque Country)

Basque victims launched the Glenree reconciliation initiative in 2012, supported by the Basque government's Directorate for the Attention to Victims of Terrorism, just some years after the RJ encounters took place in the prison of Nanclares de Oca. The aim was to share their suffering and open up to the public with their stories. Victims had different backgrounds, being for example relatives of people tortured and killed by ETA or by the police. The initiative included educational activities in schools, public forums on violence, testimonies, film screenings and theatre plays.

Also in the Basque Country, two more initiatives are organised to keep the dialogue and memory of what happened alive: 1) the "MemorialLab", two-day events in residence and 2) the "Afaloste", participatory cooking workshops of conviviality. In both cases, people from different backgrounds, such as ordinary citizens, but also victims and ex-

combatants, are invited to share their experience of the violent conflict and engage in a dialogue assisted by a facilitator<sup>13</sup>.

## Memorials and museums

Other activities that can contribute to keeping the memory alive and preventing that history from repeating itself include memorialisation and museums that keep track of the history of the violence and conflict. These are important to break stereotypes, reflect on the consequences of exclusion and polarisation, and hopefully deglamourize violence for young people. Ideas include providing more visibility to what happened in the Second World War, and engaging young people and communities to reflect on the past.

*"Art is an excuse to get people interested and to make them listen,"*<sup>14</sup> so one proposal is to work more closely with historians, witnesses and survivors through lectures and storytelling events, with the aim to avoid trans-generational traumas and encourage dialogue. The Holocaust museums and memorials, as well as human rights centres could provide the right venues to show such initiatives. What is important though is to start from victims' stories; suggestions to improve such practices are: 1) planning a training on storytelling, 2) staying within an agreed timeframe, and 3) providing instruments for stimulating empathy. When working with historians, instead, it is important to invite more voices to be represented.

*'Be careful. Historians also write their own interpretation of the facts.'*<sup>15</sup>

Other initiatives have been collected, which aim at keeping a memory alive, telling stories, explaining the context of violence, searching for truth and focusing on past-present-future in our societies:

- On awareness raising: The video campaign "We don't want you here" was launched by the bereaved parents of the Israeli-Palestinian Parents Circle – Families Forum, accessible at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=rmeqg3WpyMM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rmeqg3WpyMM)
- On the search for truth: FactCheckNI, established to fight against misinformation, gives ideas on how to encourage critical thinking and overcome prejudices at [www.factcheckni.org](http://www.factcheckni.org)

---

<sup>13</sup> To learn more about "MemorialLab": [https://issuu.com/museodelapazdeqernika/docs/redqernika\\_memorialab\\_n18\\_cas](https://issuu.com/museodelapazdeqernika/docs/redqernika_memorialab_n18_cas). To learn more about "Afaloste": <https://foroderechoshumanos.org/afaloste-laboratorio-gastronomico-social/>.

<sup>14</sup> Quote by a participant during the RAN EXIT-RVT meeting in Dublin.

<sup>15</sup> Quote by a participant during the RAN EXIT-RVT meeting in Dublin.

## Key messages and recommendations

- The unique stories of restorative justice and violent extremism mentioned in this paper are quite exceptional and not necessarily representative of the general reality.
- Institutional support was not always provided, nor was it always accepted by the people who engaged in the restorative justice programme, because of the issue of neutrality of public institutions in these cases.
- In some cases, restorative justice encounters took place outside of the programme and without the presence of facilitators, initiated by specific individual needs in the aftermath of violent conflict or terrorist crime.
- Time issues are the biggest challenge in restorative justice: individuals, groups and the justice system have different stages of reaction and interest.
- It is important to hear the other side of the story, as when violence is justified by other goals such as the independence of the country, before moving forward with the history of conflict and in order to counter this narrative, especially with young people.
- There is a widespread lack of awareness about the potential of restorative justice approaches, but also about the power of personal stories.
- More attention should be given to post-traumatic growth and resilience of individuals and communities affected by a violent conflict, and divergence among people should be valued as opportunities for dialogue.
- Today's Europe may not provide the best setting to fight for causes like restorative justice and peacebuilding, because of the rise of populism, polarisation, and of extreme-right movements.
- 

## Reflections and recommendations on restorative justice

- The preparation phase is crucial in all type of RJ approaches: there is no standardised practice except free consent of the parties, good preparation and no time pressures.
- Facilitators must receive proper training and continue to develop and improve the practice. Care and supervision are needed to support facilitators in their work. The same applies for others working in this field such as activists and artists.
- Facilitators must assume a neutral position regarding the violent conflict or terrorist crime, but still have a sufficient cultural understanding of the context.
- Awareness-raising and promotion of actual RJ encounters is crucial in all countries.
- Special support should be foreseen for all those who make the courageous decision to engage in an RJ process (judgement and isolation from victims' organisations; rejection from members of the violent extremist group): any sort of secondary victimisation derived from this engagement must be prevented.
- The results of RJ are not easy to calculate in terms of statistics and numbers, but the personal stories of those ones who engaged in such a process have shown positive results and should be taken into account.
- Restorative justice may reach only a limited number of interested people, but it should be made widely available to anyone who wishes to have a voice and be heard in any type of crime, in any stage of the criminal proceedings and even outside the justice system.
- In the few known cases of restorative justice and violent extremism, senior practitioners and experienced academics collaborated to offer this opportunity to the parties affected by this violent crime. Good preparation includes training, experience and evidence-based research.

### ***"Restorative justice: A place, A (not THE) method for SOME people"***

The key message that resulted from this meeting is the fact that restorative justice does not provide immediate and straightforward responses to violent extremism, terrorism and armed conflicts. All the experiences mentioned above show that the needs of individuals who have been affected by extreme acts of violence differ and should be taken seriously, without focusing on creating *"the same place, the same method for all people"*. In addition, the concept of time, which differs among individuals, groups, and institutions, plays a crucial role in the way people perceive justice and security in the aftermath of a violent crime. For these reasons, the criminal justice response to violent extremism and terrorism is not enough but must be complemented with innovative approaches that value the uniqueness of individual human beings, focusing on the basic human rights values forming the foundation of our democracies. It would be unimaginable to standardise all these stories and experiences and reduce them to a one-size-fits-all toolkit, ready for use by any practitioner in Europe. The restorative justice approaches presented at this event have developed out of years of research and practice by experienced academics and facilitators, and have been tailor-made for the unique socio-cultural context, type of crime, timing and individual needs of the people involved.

*In general:*

- A platform working on understanding and preventing the current growing far-right movements in Europe is needed.
- Civil society organisations should be better involved in the peacebuilding process of a country in the aftermath of a violent conflict, also assisting with funding and institutional support.
- Young people should be engaged in understanding the past, keeping a memory alive and making sure that history does not repeat itself.
- More attention to intergenerational traumas is needed as well as more attention to our history of conflict: this is important, especially in terms of prevention to violent extremism.
- Tools embedded in democratic societies (i.e. basic human rights values) are better used for work building social cohesion and peace.
- Arts (e.g. theatre, music, photography) can be important tools for understanding and providing a space to hear all stories, engage in constructive dialogue and keep alive the memory of what happened