

A Reconciliation Project in the Caucasus : Undermining War by Seminars in Nonviolent Conflict Management. A Theoretical Model Put in Practice

by Pat Patfoort

The conflict between Ingushetia and N.Ossetia

In the South-West of the Russian Federation, between Black and Caspian Sea, is the region of the Caucasus, actually quite well known because of Chechnya. Contiguous to the W-border of Chechnya is the Republic of Ingushetia, where the Muslim Ingush population is living. And contiguous to the W-edge of Ingushetia is the republic of N.Ossetia, with the mixed Orthodox-Christian and Muslim Ossetian population. The Chechens and the Ingush don't have the feeling they are two separated population-groups, they feel as one group : the Vainach. But Moscow is considering them and dealing with them in a completely different way, because the Ingush are not repelling against Moscow as are the Chechens. There is war between Moscow and the Chechens, but not between Moscow and the Ingush.

Ingushetia is on the contrary in conflict with neighbor republic N.Ossetia, because of the disputed region of Prigorodni, which is situated between both republics and on which both are laying claim. To situate this, we need to consider some facts in history. In 1944, together with the Chechens and some other population groups, and on suspicion of collective collaboration with the Nazi, the Ingush people have been forced into exile to Kazakstan by Stalin. (In the 19th century the Chechens and the Ingush already had been once forced into exile to Turkey.)

In 1957 (so 23 years later), Kroutchov reinstated them and allowed them to return to their countries.

But the Ingush didn't get the region of Prigorodni back ($\pm 250 \text{ km}^2$). This had been added to N.Ossetia. So the Ossetians continued to live in Prigorodni, and the Ingush found that their houses and property had been taken over by Ossetians. Nevertheless some Ingush did return to live in the region. Some even did find their own empty houses back, and went to live in them again.

Soon tensions did arise in the region : N.Ossetians were not willing to allow the Ingush back to their homes, and the Ingush didn't want to renounce to return.

Claims and arguments, sometimes violent, led to conflict between the two peoples in 1992. Bloody events in Vladikavkaz (N.Ossetia) and Prigorodni caused about 1.000 people killed. The Ingush were deported from the region : about 65.000 refugees fled from their villages in the Prigorodny region and took up residence in railway carriages in Ingushetia where many still live. (Meanwhile there are also 125.000 more refugees who came from Chechnya in Ingushetia.)

After the events in 1992 some Ingush nevertheless returned to live in Prigorodni. But since then tension remained very high between Ingush and N.Ossetians. Violence continues : people are killed, houses are burned, hostages are taken. Before I got there the latest in a series of small-scale attacks which had taken place was when a grenade had been thrown into a railway-carriage where refugees were living, and two people (one a father of eight children) were killed and five wounded.

The Ingush-Ossetian relations

There is much hurt, anger, grief, resentment and mistrust on both sides. There is practically no

dialogue.

When we crossed the Prigorodni region, we only saw a striking few amount of people along the road, we saw some destroyed houses, some tanks here and there.

At the East side, the Ingush edge, there was a fortified check-point : the Ossetians come as far as there from the West, and then go back; the Ingush come as far as there from the East, and then back. Normally nobody dares to go farther, to cross. And at night normally nobody travels through the Prigorodni region. It is too dangerous.

What could happen if one would go into the territory of the others? Nobody really knows. But people imagine : they could yell at you, beat you, or kill you. People also don't try to know. They just don't go. And meanwhile everyone imagines the worse things from the others. And everyone is scared. And everyone imagines the others as bad, as inhuman, as enemies.

There is still a large community of refugees and displaced people in Ingushetia. Ossetians are not willing to allow the Ingush back to the Prigorodni region, and the Ingush are not willing to renounce their claims to their right to return.

There have been some attempts to bring both groups somehow closer to one another, to increase dialogue. These were organized by the Provisional Administration for Liquidation of the Consequences of the Ossetian/Ingush Conflict. So for instance some gatherings of journalists of both groups have been organized, or of Afghanistan veterans, or of students. But those meetings didn't last long, and until now nothing really came out of these gatherings. The Presidents have also met a few times. There have been some proposals like the Ossetians offering to hand over the uppermost tip of Prigorodni to the Ingush; or like dividing up the region between the Ingush and the Ossetians according to the majority group which lived there until the violence in 1992. But it seems that Ingush and Ossetians won't be able to live together for a long time to come. There are still too many difficult feelings of resentment, anger and mistrust.

Preparation of the project

Since 1991, Quackers from the UK have been maintaining contacts with NGO's, governmental representatives and individuals in Ingushetia and North Ossetia. They have organized seminars on conflict resolution and on nonviolence, and facilitated humanitarian aid from western aid organizations. They also maintain contacts with the Ministry of Nationalities in Moscow who are supportive of Quacker efforts in the North Caucasus.

By all these ways, Quackers have introduced the idea of nonviolence in the area and got some confidence from people from both sides. They took the initiative of a reconciliation project between both republics. And they also organized it.

Pat Patfoort is studying nonviolence since 25 years, and is facilitating seminars on nonviolence, in many countries in the world, since 15 years. Since several years she is working more and more with people from "hot spots" in the world. And she is also teaching in Civilian Peace-Keeping and Peace-Building Training Programs. She was asked to coordinate the project.

In 1994, the Quackers and Pat Patfoort did meet at a Conference in Russia (near Moscow), and had the experience of joint work in the field of nonviolence, before working together in this project.

The project got financed through the Democracy Program of the European Human Rights Foundation, and through the Coordinating Committee for Conflict Resolution Training in Europe (CCCRTE) in London.

The First Phase of the Project : Two Parallel Short Separated Seminars.

We first worked with a small group (12-20 people) of each party, N.Ossetians and Ingush separately, on their own territory. Both sessions lasted two days. They took place end of June-beginning of July 1995. We tried to compose both groups in a quite similar way, regarding age, gender, activity. We choosed to work with "young intellectuals", that means young men and women, finishing their university studies or having just finished them.

1) The N.Ossetian Group, in Vladikavkaz

The Director of the Faculty of Human Sciences of the Institute in Vladikavkaz was quite sympathetic towards the project. There had in fact been a demand from a member of the N.Ossetian government to psychologists of the Faculty : if from their angle they could do something to the conflict. One of the teachers in psychology was very motivated for our project and did put a lot of energy in bringing an interested and stable group together.

The Provisional Administration was much interested in our work too. And so was also the Ossetian TV which came for an extensive interview at the end of the seminar .

2) The Ingush Group, in Nazran

Our contact person in Ingushetia was the Chairperson of the Ingush Red Crescent, who attended the second United Nations of Youth Conference in the Netherlands in 1994. There she got in touch with theories and training workshops about nonviolent conflict management. So she discovered new perspectives, and wanted to bring those to her people, hoping this could help in some way to get rid of the conflict.

She was supposed to bring the people for our seminar together. But as communications are rather difficult in Nazran, the message had not got through. So here first there was no group expecting us. But she was willing to organize a group as fast as possible. She also brought us in contact with the director of the Organization for Young People in Ingushetia, who also agreed to look for people to assemble a group.

So finally we got a group we could work together with. This happened at the university of Sleptsovsk, where the Dean of Humanities did welcome us. Having had no warning some students were not able to attend for the whole time of the seminar. Some others did not know about it until the second day, others had to leave at different times to take an exam, or for consultation with a tutor. There was a certain amount of dislocation, but by the end of the second day there had been 40 students or so who had attended for part of the seminar.

There was a lot of interest for our presence in the university. So several members of the staff who were thrilled to make contact did visit us, not always at appropriate moments.

3) The Content of the Two Short Separated Seminars

The program was on the one hand theoretical, and on the other practical, using exercises. Both were the whole time linked with one another. At this stage there was no attempt to solve the problem of hostility in the area, not even to discuss it.

We first studied conflicts from a general point of view, not linking this study with "the" conflict. We examined what is violence, and how the alternative of nonviolence looks like.

Discussed items were : What is exactly violence? What are the roots of it, the causes, the

mechanisms? How do we every time get into it? Why is it so difficult to get out of it? How do we cope with differences among people and with their different values? What does bi-polar thinking right vs. wrong involve? How do we ourselves cope with being in a minor position? What are the consequences of imbalance and competition between people? Where do prejudice and stereotypes fit in? And what are the consequences of them? How do we usually deal with aggression, anger and power?

Then we considered which alternatives there are to go on with conflicts in another way, how they look like, what skills they require. How is it possible to make conflicts de-escalate instead of having them escalate? Is there an attitude, a vocabulary which would enable us to relate to people in a balanced way to avoid the Major/minor struggle? Is it possible to solve conflicts in a way that there is no need to have someone loosing and suffering so that the other one could be satisfied? What does justice exactly entail? What is the role of communication in it?

The theoretical frame we used and in which we also situated the practical exercises was based on the models and diagrams is extensively described in the book "Uprooting Violence. Building Nonviolence".⁽¹⁾ We shall give here a very brief presentation of it.

The Theoretical frame

There are many different ways to work on violence and nonviolence. One that is convenient to use for very concrete situations, is the one based on diagrams.

*Nonviolence -and violence- arise from a **start situation** that by itself doesn't show any problem : it is a situation where (at least) **two different points** are present. These points can be characteristics, behaviors or points of view of two people or two groups of people.*

*The customary or usual way to go on with those two different points is the one based on **the Major-minor model or M-m model**: each tries to present its own characteristic or behavior as better than the one of the other. Each tries to be right, to dominate, to win. Each tries to put oneself in the M-position, and the other person or group in the m-position.*

*The consequences of this are **the three mechanisms of violence**:*

- violence against oneself, or, internalizing the violence/the aggression;*
- violence against the person who first did put us in the m-position, or, the escalation of violence;*
- violence against a third party, or, the chain of violence.*

*So the M-m model is at the basis of violence. It is **the root of violence** (see fig.1).*

Behaving following the M-m model is so usual, seems so normal, that we usually have the impression that this is the only possible way. We most of the time even think that this fits with the natural impulses of the human being, with the human instincts.

*Now, what is inherent to the human being, is indeed at the basis of the transformation of the start situation (=the situation of two different points) to the M-m model. It is **the instinct of conservation** of the human being that brings us to want to get out of the m-position. The need to protect and to defend oneself, to want to survive is indeed inherent to human beings. But to do this following the M-m model is absolutely not "inherent to the human being". This way is only one of the possible ways to achieve this. It is the way*

¹ : "Uprooting Violence. Building Nonviolence" by Pat Patfoort, published by Coblesmith pub., 1995.

that on first sight seems to be the most easy one, and (probably therefore) also the one that in most human societies is taught from childhood on, and that afterwards continues to be built up and fed in all possible ways.

Another way to go on with the start situation of two different points, is **the Equivalence-model or E-model**. This is the model that is at **the basis of nonviolence** (see fig.2). This model responds also to the instinct of self conservation of the human being. The E-model indeed also permits us not to get into the m-position, to defend and to protect ourselves. The nonviolence, on basis of the E-model, gives us the possibility to defend ourselves, but not at another's expense, not against someone, not attacking, as is the case with the M-m model.

The E-model brings up solutions. The M-m model in the contrary doesn't offer out ways : every time we defend ourselves following this model we do this in an attacking way, by which another person is provoked to defend him or herself, again in an attacking way, again provoking another person. And so it goes on.

The tools to use to get into the M-m model and the E-model are very different.

To make this clear we use the situation where the two different points of the start situation are points of view. This is the situation where there are two different points of view. This is better known as "a conflict". This situation is the most superficial en clearest one, so the most technically workable. But al what is said here can be transferred to the deeper level, where the two different points are characteristics.

In the M-m model **arguments** are used. They **are put forward, expressed, to try to be right**.

The three most important kinds of expressed arguments are the following :

1) **the positive arguments** : one says positive aspects about the own point of view, to push up the own point of view (to the M-position);

2) **the negative arguments** : one says negative aspects about the point of view of the other person, to push down the point of view of the other person (to the m-position);

3) **the destroying arguments** : one says negative aspects about the other person, to push the other person down, together with his or her point of view (to the m-position).

In this third category are included **the racist and sexist remarks**. So a characteristic that is different in the other person (for example the other person has another color of skin than mine, or is younger than I am, or is of the other gender) is going to be presented as negative, and will be misused to try to push down the point of view of the other person (that most of the time doesn't have anything to do with the characteristic of the person which is misused).

Using arguments is a **superficial** feeding of the situation. Each throws on his or her point of view what one can find to make the own point of view stronger in front of the other point of view, to get the own point of view above the one of the other person.

In the E-model **foundations** must be used (see fig.3). As the word indicates, foundations are the underlying factors of both points of view. These are **the reasons** why both parties have their points of view : their motivations, their needs, their feelings, their interests, their objectives, their values. These are as well rational as emotional elements. These are the answers to questions like "Why do I have this point of view?", "Why does this other person have his or her point of view?" When we work with foundations we feed the situation **from depth**.

The exercises started with the own experiences and those of others. Out of these we got the themes, mostly from "small" everyday concrete situations, like when a man and a woman quarrel because one wants to paint the wall of the room and the other one wants to paper it; or like when two friends can't agree about where they will spend their holiday together. The themes were assimilated through different kinds of exercises. In these ways people did actualize their behaviors, observed and experienced the consequences of these behaviors. People could try out principles and check assumptions. During evaluations, insights about the own behaviors and reactions of other people to them were clarified on the basis of individual experiences and observations. Experiences and insights were brought back to and situated in the proposed theoretical frame.

The exercises gave the opportunity not only to understand intellectually the theory, but to experience and to feel it too what this theory actually means in concrete situations. In this kind of matter the intellectual understanding is absolutely insufficient to "get it".

4) The Learning and the Knowledge arising from these Short Seminars

The purpose of these short seminars was to make people more conscious of what exactly is violence, how larger and deeper it is than is usually thought, and of course also to open them up for alternatives. So for instance it became clear it is not enough not to have war to have peace. And it is not because violence is not physical that there is no violence. People discovered there indeed are alternatives to go on with situations where there are different points of view or where there are conflicts. People became aware that there is not only a competitive but also a cooperative way of going on with one another. And they learned about the instruments which are used in the usual competitive way, and the ones needed to develop the cooperative way. They also got to reconsider their views about concepts like aggression, power, defending oneself, revenge, weakness and strength. This all means these workshops did open their minds regarding the area of conflicts, in a way they never would have expected there was any possibility to open up. And this could happen because they not only got a theoretical new knowledge, but they also could try it out in practice.

In both groups the participants were very interested, even if it wasn't always easy to work with groups where some people are leaving or new ones are joining during the work (especially in the Ingush group, for reasons as I explained p.4).

The participants of both sides were very positive about what they had been learning. They said it was important for them to have been working on this issue. They said they did learn a lot, they didn't know beforehand there were other ways to handle conflicts, and how conflicts were built up. For almost all of them these were completely new ideas and concepts. They said they were happy they had learned how much deeper violence is than they had thought until now, and that there are other ways to handle conflicts than the ones they always saw and heard about. "We shouldn't only consider the visible violence, what's the most conspicuous; we shouldn't think this is the start of the process. It's much more than that."

For almost all participants this way of learning -on basis of expositions linked to practical exercises which in their turn are linked back to the theory- was also completely new. They thought this way was very interesting and enriching.

When I talked with people in N.Ossetia or Ingushetia (outside of the seminars) I heard a lot of similar sayings : "Look at what **they** did do to us, or do to us. Look at what kind of people **they** are! **They** started. **We** never should do something like this! **We** only did things like these. Look at the (good) things **we** all did, what **we** can do,..." The concrete filling in of the facts depended

of the side where I was then. But the heart of the matter is at both sides the same : everyone tries to present himself as the good one, and the other as the bad and the guilty one. **Everyone** is suffering, and feels in a minor-position. But **everyone** tries to get him/herself out of this minor-position, by hoisting him/herself up to the Major-position towards the other party.

The minor-positions of both parties can't be compared. But every side tries to present things in such a way that they look as put in a deeper minor-position than they did put the other party : "What **we** did do to **them** is far not as bad as what **they** did do to **us!**" In this way, each is pushing the other one again in a minor-position, by the way of a judgment of the other, being a step of an escalation (cf. note 1).

The participants of the seminars were talking in such a way too before we started. By having been working on this issue and in this way for a couple of days, people had got a broader perspective on conflicts and the ways people can go on with them. They were not saying those things as easily anymore. They were more thinking about them now.

When at the end of the seminar we talked about meeting the other group of the other side in the next stage, there still was first a reaction of a strange feeling : "It seems so queer to think about sitting together..." Also when we said to the N.Ossetians (where we first were) we afterwards were going to the Ingush, someone reacted : "Aren't you afraid to go there?..." But after this first reaction the whole Ossetian group and about 10 of the Ingush one expressed their openness to continue the process. Some even were very eager to do so.

The Second Phase of the Project : A Joined Longer Seminar.

We brought the two groups together for a residential seminar of five days, in Nalchik, the capital of neighbor republic Kabardino Balkaria, which is a neutral and thus a mutually acceptable place. There were 2 x 8 people. This took place end of August 1995.

We had prepared a program assuming first that all the people participating in this second phase had gone through the first phase, and secondly that both groups would arrive at the time they had announced. As these didn't happen, we had to adapt, e.g. by organizing some supplementary sessions whenever we could for people who joined the group without having gone through the short introductory seminar. We had scheduled a separated preparatory first session, for each group separately, before working all together with the two groups. But as people didn't arrive as announced, we were confronted with the situation where the two groups met for the first time at dining table, quite clearly showing their feelings of uneasiness and mistrust, and even fear and animosity towards one another. We dealt with this by putting as much as we could neutral people (facilitators, translators, organizers) where people of the two groups would have been sitting besides one another.

1) The Content of the Seminar

We kept the schedule of two separated sessions for the two groups separately, before starting the joined sessions. During these we summarized the theory we had seen and the results of the exercises we had done during the short separated seminars which happened two months earlier. Moreover we did one more strong and intensive exercise about handling contradictory opinions in a nonviolent way. This was to bring people as well as possible back to the understanding and the mentality we had reached at the end of the former seminar.

Then we started the joined sessions. We first had two days where we still didn't discuss, even didn't touch, "the" conflict : the problem of hostility in the area. We continued to work on everyday situations as we had done in the short separated seminars, but so now with the two groups together. We used lots of exercises, situating every time experiences, evaluation points and conclusions in the theoretical frame. Personal difficult and happy feelings were shared, experiences were confronted by which lots of similarities were discovered between the two groups, similar differences in opinions within both groups were compared, affinities crossing the border between both groups were made clear; several exercises about communication were done, as well about expressing as about receiving messages; we worked on positive affirmation, we experienced cooperation all together. We also had some deep theoretical and philosophical discussions. We also used times outside the sessions to work on the group, by organizing adapted dance sessions, games or excursions.

As we were working on all this, we observed a slow but progressive reduction of the tension between the people of the two groups, and even a progressive approach between some individuals.

The fourth day we started to undertake the problem of the hostility between the two groups. We again did this in a very progressive way, after having given an intensive preparatory theoretical introduction. We started by having people express their emotions in a strongly structured way. For several hours things went quite well. People could listen to one another's hurts. These were very touching and deep sessions. But then at some point the emotions became too strong to still be able to follow the rules. So we had to interrupt the process to come back to situations farther from those strong feelings. Using less emotive situations we continued deepening the process of nonviolent conflict management, e.g. how to make emerge or create nonviolent solutions.

The last day was used to confront as clearly as possible what had happened the former day with all the other experiences they had accumulated and with the theoretical background they had got. We had some moments of very deep exchanges, with lots of listening, understanding and even compassion. We did some more exercises to clarify what had happened, why and how. We had some exercises of cooperation all together, and also some about skills which still needed to be more developed to handle conflicts in a nonviolent way. We finished with an evaluation about what people learned, and if/how they were going to use in the future what they did learn during these seminars.

2) The result of the Seminar

Along the five days of the seminar we saw a continuous but clear evolution from an uneasy, tense and mistrusting atmosphere between the two groups to a more open and relaxed one. People dared more to look at one another, to look in one another's eyes, to sit besides one another, to talk with one another, to laugh with one another, to sing or to dance together. People became more able to listen to one another, even if they still needed very much to be listened to themselves. They became more able to listen to and to understand the other side, even to the pain their own people had given to them. People of both sides started to dialogue with one another, and even to set up common projects together.

At the end of the session the participants said they had learned a lot : before coming they didn't know how violence is built up and how themselves are collaborating in it; they didn't know there are other, nonviolent ways to go on with conflicts. But on the other hand they also were somehow cautious : they were wondering how they were going to continue with all this new

knowledge and after these experiences; they needed to check all this with "real" life.

But I think the best way to get an idea of the result of this seminar is to list some sayings of participants at the end of the seminar (²):

- "I'm capable to listen more attentively to the other group."

- "I understand a bit better."

- "I am more relaxed now."

- "I need still to restrain myself."

- "I need to accept other peoples messages."

- "The border was born on basis of stereotypes. We came with them. But here we forgot them."

- "I feel deep sympathy with those people. They are human beings."

- "I don't expect a lot of results from official meetings, because they are artificial, they don't touch deep and warm feelings. What we did here, in this seminar, is probably one of the best possible solutions."

- "Because of our conflict, we are not able to communicate anymore. Here we can do it again."

- "Politicians from both sides have to do efforts to talk with one another. But in fact, the public opinion has to change first, because the public opinion can put pressure on politics to make changes."

- "I didn't think that I could come here and that I was going to be able to talk with **them**. I had the feeling that I never was going to be able to communicate with them. But meanwhile I understood that at both sides there are people who are guilty, but that the big majority is innocent."

- "I come out of this as another person. I'll think in another way. I saw mothers who had lost their children, sisters who had lost their brothers. Therefore I felt anger and even hatred towards the others. When I thought deeply I was conscious that not all of them are guilty, but sometimes deep in my heart I didn't want to understand it. Because of this seminar I did think more about all this and understood in a deeper way. Now I am able to prove this to my friends with more strength and confidence. There were people lost at our side, but there were also at the other side. And the pain our mothers did suffer when they did loose one of their children, wasn't less than the pain the mothers of the others were suffering. We all are human beings."

Conclusion

The aims of this seminar were

- to increase the knowledge about conflict resolution and particularly about the existence of a nonviolent alternative;
- to go as far as possible in putting this knowledge in practice in the territorial conflict between the Ingush and the Ossetian group.

Even if a solution is always where a process of conflict resolution tends to work to, we didn't think concretely of getting to a solution of the conflict during this seminar of 5 days. We wanted to work on as many steps of the process as we would be able to.

We started with two groups having and clearly showing feelings of uneasiness, mistrust, fear, animosity and prejudices for one another. These people didn't have any contact anymore with one another, didn't want it. They didn't communicate with one another. They didn't know what feelings, particularly feelings of hurt, the other ones had. They were not able at all to work

² : I'll use here fore not only my notes, but also the ones of my son Malik Weyns, student himself, who was traveling with me in August 1995, and who made several interviews of those young people, at the end of the joined long seminar.

together.

At the end of the seminar we got them to begin to listen to one another, even to one another's feelings of hurt regarding the territorial conflict. They became aware of how much each of them wanted to be heard by the other one, but how badly each -also themselves- were listening and respecting the other one. **So they became aware that they themselves were doing to the other one, what they were reproaching them.** And they were conscious of how this was disturbing a nonviolent resolution of their conflict. **So they became conscious of what they themselves needed to develop to come closer to a solution. They got more open to work on it. And they had experienced they were able to do it.** They got a lot of more insight about what they and their people needed to develop to grow towards a solution.

So at the end of the seminar they started to plan to organize similar seminars for groups of their own people, to have more people going through a similar process of consciousness and growing. And they also planned mixed Ingush-Ossetian meetings for after those one-sided seminars. It was particularly beautiful and touching to see an Ingush and an Ossetian woman who had it most difficult with one another in the beginning of the seminar, talking together at the end about common seminars they wanted to organize together in the future.

We saw that the people of the seminar felt empowered quite a bit first to continue on the way they worked during the seminar, but also to try to get more of their own people to do this too. It surely would be interesting if more people could go through a similar basic seminar as these people have had, or if more known people like politicians or public personalities would participate in such a seminar.

It is clear that this group is a very small part of the population, and to really get the mentality to change that more people need to get in contact with this kind of knowledge and experience. It surely is important to have done this first experience and to make it known as much possible, so that this would show that **this kind of thing is possible.** To get people to come to the first experience is the most difficult thing I would think. Now we can go to other people and tell them it already happened, without fighting or other problems, and even with positive results. More public personalities probably wouldn't have dared to participate in such a first experience.

We can continue to work with the same people in such a way they would learn how to bring themselves such seminars to their people (a kind of training for trainers). We also can use this experience as a kind of example to get more influencing people to come to a second experience of this type.

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