

Imagine Coexistence:

Restoring Humanity After Violent Ethnic Conflict

REVIEWED BY JAMIE ROWEN

Imagine Coexistence tells the story of a new effort to foster peace in countries emerging from war. The book provides insight into the complex needs of people who have undergone traumatic experiences and shows the importance of building peace at all levels of society, from the individual to the government. Although the authors don't discuss non-violence by name, their comprehensive approach reflects theories of nonviolence, from *svadeshi* (local reliance) to constructive program (internal improvement).

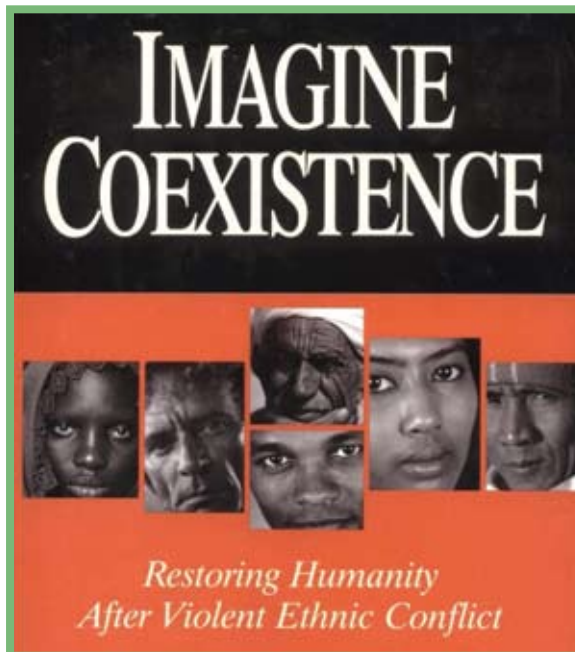
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Imagine Coexistence explores the theme of social repair in Bosnia and Rwanda, two countries that experienced and continue to experience significant social tension on account of ethnicity. Martha Minow and Antonia Chayes, both affiliates of The Negotiation Project at Harvard, edited this compilation of studies on the Imagine Coexistence project implemented by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The project involved the joint efforts of academics, policy makers and local organizations to apply ideas of community building to a real world situation.

The contributors highlight the specific projects in Bosnia and Rwanda that offered economic opportunity, conflict resolution, problem-solving skills training and other programs to promote interethnic cooperation. They show the importance of humanizing the "other," a common theme in the writings of Gandhi and other *satyagrahis* (activists who use the firm implementation of truth and love to promote social change). The project focused on changing individual perceptions, an important step towards realizing the goals of nonviolence.

The bulk of the book focuses on the obstacles faced by these projects, leaving the reader informed but overwhelmed by the challenges of social repair after violent conflict. Making peace is not an easy task and can't be solved by a war crimes court or a dialogue group. Bosnia and Rwanda need leadership, financial support and commitment from all levels of society. Peace is possible in Bosnia and Rwanda but it will require greater efforts by local communities.

This book shows a clear need for *svadeshi*, local community building, to help individuals feel interconnected. People need to be able to imagine peace, to know that peace is possible. From this first step, they will be able to make peace in their local communities and, hopefully, change their governments. Nonviolence offers great insights about how we are



— By Antonia Chayes, Martha L. Minow, Editors

all interconnected, how violence stems from dehumanization, how people must be the change they wish to see.

Hopefully, there will be more projects like *Imagine Coexistence* to bring individuals together and rehumanize former "enemies."

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