THEME SECTION

**Beyond reconciliation:
Social reconstruction after the Bosnian war**

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INTRODUCTION:

Reconciliation, reconstruction, and everyday life in war-torn societies

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Abstract: This special section of *Focaal* explores processes of social recovery and peacebuilding in the aftermath of radical violence and political upheaval. The articles draw on detailed ethnographic case studies from Bosnia and Herzegovina, a country that was shattered by war and ethnic cleansing in the 1990s, and raise issues of relevance to other post-conflict situations. Challenging “reconciliation” as a moral discourse with universalist claims, the articles highlight the dynamics of its localization in different contexts of intervention in post-war society. The four contributions explore different facets of this dynamic as it is played out in the key areas of justice, the return of refugees and internally displaced persons, and NGO peace-building activities. They illuminate what happens when the global paradigm of reconciliation encounters and filters through meanings and motivations of actors in local contexts. They also note that everyday interactions between former adversaries take place not as a moral engagement with reconciliation but as part of rebuilding a sense of normality. The findings point to the need to critically investigate the conditions under which such encounters may empower or prohibit the rebuilding of social relations and trust in post-war societies.

Keywords: Bosnia and Herzegovina, reconstruction, reconciliation, peacebuilding, justice, refugee return

Building peace: The interventionist paradigm

In the past decades, the question of how societies may recover from conflicts and massive violence has been a central concern in world politics, in response to events in places such as Cambodia, Rwanda, Afghanistan, and former Yugoslavia. In these and other post-conflict societies, *reconstruction* and *reconciliation* have

emerged as a pair forming the cornerstones of a paradigm of externally initiated peace-building interventions to promote stability, democracy, and good governance. These interventions are grounded in a longer tradition of Western powers seeking to build modern nation states based on the liberal model, but have intensified since the end of the Cold War when failed states and ethnic conflicts came to constitute a major challenge to the international community. The stated

aim is to transform the structures of the past, which led to violence and breakdown, and to lay the ground for a new beginning, based on liberal democracy, a market economy, and human rights. However, after 9/11, such interventions have increasingly become coercive operations, challenging established principles of territorial and political sovereignty. The ideological underpinnings of this engagement have been described by critics as “interventionism” in which Western powers rebuild state order and reconstruct war-torn societies for the sake of global stability and security (Duffield 2007). In a similar vein, the dramatic increase in the interest in rebuilding post-conflict societies has been referred to as a “global reconciliation industry” (Wilson 2003: 383). As Wilson notes, ordinary people are greatly affected not only by state collapse and massive violence, but also by the interventions of international organizations to rebuild and reconcile them with their former enemies.

Although both research and practice have often focused on state-building and institutional reconstruction, considerably less is known of the ways in which the intended beneficiaries make sense of and deal with the various external efforts at reconciliation and the outcomes of such encounters. In this special section of *Focaal*, the anthropological gaze is directed at the interaction between the international reconciliation discourse on key issues such as justice and the return of displaced persons, and the perceptions and priorities of local actors. The articles reflect on the meaning and relevance of external reconciliation initiatives for populations who, living in a post-war society, face a range of everyday challenges. The ethnographic cases of the contributions are all drawn from Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), a country that was shattered by war and ethnic cleansing in the 1990s, but the issues they raise also speak to other post-conflict societies. Peace-building in BiH has been the most comprehensive international project of its kind so far, in terms of external involvement and money spent, and, according to Chandler, “has become widely seen as a template for new experiments in international administration and

external assistance in state reconstruction and post-conflict reconciliation” (2006: 1). The concerns raised by the contributions engage critically with reconciliation as a discourse implemented without much attention to historical and cultural contexts of particular post-war societies, or to the profoundly changing socio-political reality in which people in many of these societies seek to rebuild their lives. In BiH, this entails a constant battle with “precariousness” (Jansen 2006: 183), a term used by ordinary Bosnians¹ to characterize everyday life following the war and the transition to a liberalized economy. The political realities in post-war BiH add to the complexity: a parallel system of government is made up of external agencies engaged in state-building—a semi-protectorate in which key decisions are being taken by the Office of the High Representative (OHR)—and internal nationalist elites with stakes in continued ethnic separation. Observers note that fifteen years after the end of the war and despite massive economic investments, there has been little progress in BiH in terms of reconciliation and rebuilding social trust (Fletcher and Weinstein 2002, 2004; Kostić 2007; Meernik 2005). The contributions illuminate some of the challenges involved in peace-building in a context of continuous division and profound social transformation, and inquire into the local meanings of reconciliation given the social realities and moral worlds in which ordinary people operate.

Reconciliation: Global discourse, post-war local realities

Reconciliation has emerged as a master narrative of our time, offering a promise to remedy the harm done and heal both society and individuals from the experiences of violence and conflict (Scheper-Hughes 1998). The academic literature has answered the question of how a society moves from a past of conflict and division to a shared future in very different ways. A distinction has been made between “thick” and “thin” notions of reconciliation (Crocker 2000;

Wilson 2001); the former looks more thoroughly at the quality of relationships to be restored and posits the mutual understanding and unity to be formed around a common past and a shared future. To this end, truth and justice, acknowledgement and forgiveness, are seen as vital components in social as well as individual healing (e.g., Amstutz 2005; Lederach 1997). The “thin” and less idealistic form of reconciliation refers to a more open-ended and fragmented process (rather than a linear movement toward a harmonious end). It is based on a “departure from violence” but one in which legal accountability or the “settling of accounts” is central (Borneman 2002). To others, a pragmatic stance of “peaceful co-existence”—that is, a certain level of social interaction and cooperation between former enemies—is, after a mass atrocity, the only realistic scenario, at least in the short term (e.g., Chayes and Minow 2003; Sampson 2003; Stefansson, this volume). In some societies emerging from war and violent conflict, this pragmatic view also reflects the emic understandings of post-war relations. In contemporary Rwanda, Eltringham notes, political discourse of the Rwandan government is replete with references to future “unity”—based on an inferred past unity, and to forgiveness and reconciliation. These “thick” official terms are shed by local actors in favor of their own “thin” understandings (Eltringham 2009: 6; Zorba 2009: 134). Similarly, as the articles in this special section show, the understanding of many Bosnians is a more pragmatic one: “peaceful coexistence” in the sense of restoring respectful relations and “life together” (*suživot*) reflects the politically unresolved division and general insecurity in Bosnian post-war society; it also resonates with historical experiences of accommodation after periods of communal strife.

Embedded in a global moral discourse of social healing, reconciliation is a framework that invokes the notion of a common humanity. At the same time, it is applied to a broad range of post-war settings. Writing on such interventions in Rwanda, where the global discourse of “reconciliation” has also been adopted as a cen-

tral part of government policy, Eltringham notes the salience of a virtual model of how reconciliation should proceed, and that it can only proceed within that visible, officially sanctioned model (2009: 5). In his observations, facilitation in reconciliation workshops by international organizations in Rwanda was based on a psycho-analytic idiom that made little sense to the Rwandans present (“this is not our culture”). As has often been pointed out in the academic debate, norms of justice, human rights, and peace are not neutral and may be dissonant with local understandings of how security and peaceful relations are restored (e.g., Jansen 2006; Wilson 2003). Perhaps it is expected that these populations will habituate to the norms and values introduced, while the targeted cultural milieu may be resistant to this kind of habituation or may only selectively incorporate these norms. Instead new influences may filter through and become digested into values and power patterns in ways that reinforce the very cleavages and inequalities they set out to eradicate (Kent 2009). Out of a similar concern but examining the comprehensive external involvement in democracy building in Cambodia, Öjendal and Lilja (2009) analyze the complex dynamic of social reconstruction and the clash of political cultures there. They argue that liberal democratic forms of governance have largely been reinterpreted and absorbed into traditional forms of power and patronage by the Cambodian government; legitimacy may be sought within the new “liberal democracy” and locally inflected interpretations of other global discourses, as well as by reference to old discourses of power and authority. However, both traditions are inevitably changed by the interaction, creating a kind of “hybrid democracy”.

As a highly normative formula with universalist claims, the reconciliation discourse tends to make context a blind spot. In eclipsing the specific characteristics of each post-conflict situation it leaves out the social conditions, uncertainties, and power asymmetries that mediate how its measures are interpreted and acted on by the various local actors involved. Instead, as

this Introduction argues, there is a dynamic interplay, or “friction”—to use Anna Tsing’s term (2005)—of the universalist reconciliation discourse and the particular local realities at the sites of intervention, which are mutually constitutive. Thus, the position taken here is to see reconciliation as a situated practice, played out in different contexts and with different outcomes—whether oppressive or empowering. The analytical focus of the articles is on a close examination, through ethnographic fieldwork in BiH, of the moral sensibilities and practical priorities of Bosnians in the different contexts of justice, return, and NGO peace-building activities. This examination illuminates under what circumstances they find it relevant to inscribe themselves into the reconciliation discourse. In such processes, as Helms’s article on Bosnian women’s NGOs illustrates, pre-war social institutions can be reinvented by the participants for new purposes in the post-war context, sometimes in ways that are at odds with the aims of donor organizations.

The articles in this special section inquire both into what reconciliation interventions do and what they do not do as they seek to engage members of the local population. Jansen’s contribution thus problematizes the emphasis on particular kinds of relations (in the case of BiH, inter-ethnic relations) that easily reproduces the categories it seeks to overcome, and neglects other relations of inequality such as class and gender. His article also throws light on the everyday forms, in which former adversaries interact and find common ground without necessarily being motivated by a moral concern with reconciliation. Both practitioners and researchers of reconstruction tend to overlook such interactions where no third party or intervening agency is involved. Nevertheless, they are useful reminders of the multifaceted nature of social identities in all societies, particularly those coming out of ethnic conflict, and of the fact that the salience of ethnicity is always contextual. They also suggest that sites with a particular potential to promote positive relationships along other lines and for other purposes need to be recognized.

Localizing reconciliation

Transitional justice has been a key strategy in coming to terms with a legacy of large-scale past abuses in international peacebuilding and ensuring accountability and stability.² The main argument of this paradigm is that the violent past has to be settled before a real transition to sustainable peace can be made; for this purpose the mechanisms of truth and justice are seen as pivotal and have been implemented in a wide range of post-conflict societies since the 1980s. Justice can be retributive, in which case criminal tribunals are set up to punish those responsible for gross human rights violations and to establish a factual record, as in the case of the ICTY (International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia) or its counterpart the ICTR (International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda). The main tenet of transitional justice is that the prosecution of perpetrators individualizes guilt and thereby puts an end to the demonizing of whole groups (e.g., Minow 1998: 40; Teitel 2000: 34). Restorative justice in the form of Truth Commissions, such as in the formerly authoritarian regimes of Latin America (e.g., Argentina, Chile) or the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, is based on exposing the truth and naming perpetrators, but lacks the judicial powers to prosecute. The focus is on the victims, rather than on the perpetrators, with an emphasis on acknowledging suffering and eliciting forgiveness and individual healing. The main argument, drawing on religious and therapeutic discourses, is that—through acknowledgement and forgiveness—societies and individuals can “heal” (e.g., Lambourne 2001; Lederach 1997; Minow 1998).

Whether transitional justice actually leads to reconciliation as envisaged has been disputed in recent scholarly debate (e.g., Gløppen 2005). Studies indicate that there is a gap between the aspirations of transitional justice and the experiences and needs of local communities (e.g., Shaw 2007; Stover and Weinstein 2004; Wilson 2000). In a comprehensive study of communities that had suffered mass atrocities and inter-ethnic conflict in former Yugoslavia and

Rwanda, Stover and Weinstein concluded that there is

“no direct link between criminal trials (international, national, local/traditional) and reconciliation, although it is possible that this may change over time. In fact we found criminal trials, especially of local perpetrators, often further divided small multi-ethnic communities by causing further suspicion and fear. Survivors rarely, if ever, connected retributive justice with reconciliation” (Stover and Weinstein 2004: 323).

Analyzing the failure of the ICTY to generate confidence among the population of BiH, Fletcher and Weinstein (2004) point to the gap between the high aspirations of the international community and actual practice. Justice as an instrument of reconciliation was conceived of by UN diplomats and promoted by the wider international community in response to the horrors of the mass atrocities in the early 1990s, in Yugoslavia and in Rwanda. The ICTY, however, defined its mandate in more narrow terms, that is prosecuting war criminals and restoring peace and security, terms that did not include any linkage to the broader project of rebuilding social relations. As a result, “international justice and national social reconstruction occupied separate spheres” (Fletcher and Weinstein 2004: 33) in which the latter task has been left to a range of other, mainly international actors, without much coordination between them. Also, these observers argue, placing the ICTY and the ICTR abroad, under international control—thus removing it geographically and legally from the populations concerned and from the national judiciary system—undermined a sense of local influence. This affected the ability of these courts to play a central role in post-war reconstruction. However, as the Rwandan case suggests, coordination between international and national justice systems is often made difficult by national political interests and a politicized national judiciary in a post-conflict society (Des Forges and Longman 2004).³

Thus, legitimacy of such international judicial procedures is also an outcome of how they

are represented in the local context by political stakeholders and understood by the public. In many post-conflict societies, political players directly or indirectly implicated in the mass atrocities have become part of the current national government or political elite, and undermine the credibility of such procedures by playing on continuing insecurities and a sense of victimization among the population. In Rwanda as well as in Cambodia, national governments have a strong hold over the national judiciary and over media flows (Öjendal and Lilja 2009; Reyntjens and Vandeginste 2005). A 2002 survey in Rwanda showed that the vast majority of the Rwandan population had little or no knowledge about the ICTR (Longman, Pham and Weinstein 2004). Even if the Rwandan government has made reconciliation and the elimination of ethnicity a central policy, its stated aim blatantly contradicts its nepotistic style of politics. The contradiction reinforces mistrust and division along ethnic lines, some observers note, and dampens expectations of reaching justice, whether trials are international or domestic (Apuuli 2009; McLean Hilker 2009).⁴ Cambodia represents an extremely elitistic case where only a handful of (possible) Khmer Rouge leaders are prosecuted by the tribunal of the Extraordinary Chambers of the Courts of Cambodia (ECCE) tribunal.⁵ The scant effort, for instance by NGOs, to make the trials more accessible to the public also reinforces the view that the trials really are for international consumption; internal dynamics, instead, become embedded in a less explicit process that relies on “gradual disappearance” and “time” (McGrew 2009; Öjendal, pers. comm.). The tribunal is currently the major focus of reconciliation efforts in Cambodia, yet for ordinary Cambodians, even if there is a widespread desire to know why they suffered and who was responsible, expectations of justice are low (McGrew 2006).⁶ Many contend that real, broad-based reconciliation rests on the re-establishment of trust and that Buddhism is probably the most appropriate vehicle for achieving this (Chea 2003).⁷ However, in present-day Cambodia religion is also vulnerable to cooptation by politicians and its future moral trajec-

tory remains uncertain. In former Yugoslavia, Subotic (2009) argues, the international efforts to establish accountability for war crimes have produced a similar, paradoxical result: being hijacked by local political elites for their own – and very different – goals, such efforts of transitional justice rather deepen political instability and division than resolve them.

Mannergren Selimovic's contribution illustrates the interplay among international aims, nationalist political interests, and local moral sensitivities in BiH. When representatives of the ICTY addressed audiences in Bosnian towns, they found themselves on trial, as their credibility, neutrality, and competence in meting out justice were severely questioned. In BiH, there is a long-standing skepticism of the ICTY and the stakes of European non-Bosnian actors, with the Hague tribunal perceived as an attempt by the outside world to counter criticism for not having stopped the war. More important, the ICTY discourse clashed with local ideas about justice. As underlined by the settings chosen (two communities that were sites of extreme violence in the war), the ICTY entered an already well-established discursive terrain of guilt and innocence in BiH, one in which Bosnian nationalist elites hold substantial political stakes. Transitional justice, based on attributing individual guilt, was then reinterpreted within and folded into these dominant ethno-political narratives about collective guilt and innocence. However, on the level of the individual participant, these collective narratives were often contested and strained by individuals' specific stories, positioning individuals much less firmly on one "side."

Truth and public testimony also figure prominently in the attempts of transitional justice to deal with the legacy of war and violence; the exposure of "truth" is usually seen as a necessary step on the road to reconciliation and "national healing." This conception was at the heart of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, emphasizing that through confession and forgiveness truth would lead to the healing of the wounds and closure, common currency in reconciliation work. However, truth-telling

is not a universal panacea to the moral problem of illegitimate social violence, either for society or for the individual. Truth-telling, like silence, are cultural categories and related in complex ways to power and agency; whether it makes sense to speak or to remain silent depends on what the social stakes are for a particularly positioned actor in a particular post-conflict context.

For individual victims, as Fiona Ross's (2002) study of women victims of violence in South Africa demonstrates, telling the truth does not necessarily heal, and many victims suffer after public testimony. There are aspects of pain and suffering that fall outside of inquiries and thus outside of accountability. As found among refugees from Bosnia, victims of sexual abuse may resort to silence as both a personal and a cultural strategy of maintaining family relationships and public respect (Eastmond 2005). The Truth Commission for Sierra Leone related truth to reconciliation in a way that made little sense to local participants (Shaw 2007). The anthropological literature on community-level reconciliation also provides examples of social silencing as part of a collective symbolic strategy toward closure of a painful and divisive past. Rural villages in Mozambique and Angola use healing rituals to restore peace and rebuild social relations after massive violence (Honwana 2005). Through these rituals, organized to undo the polluting effects of violence on individuals and the community, the troublesome and potentially harmful past is "left behind," allowing participants to attend to the concerns of the present and look toward the future (Honwana 2005: 96). Although Cambodian villagers said they would welcome the punishment of the Khmer Rouge leadership (Etcheson 2005), the reintegration of ex-Khmer Rouge soldiers into their former villages depended more on their attitude of regret than on the actual truth of their deeds being known and accounted for (Eastmond and Öjendal 1999). In a similar vein, the successful return and reintegration of former refugees into their villages in East Timor depended on their willingness to come together with their former adversaries and accept culpability, not on truth as a means to serve justice

(Babo-Soares 2004). The examples point to the need to take account of the particular world-views, such as the cosmological striving for social harmony and peace as in the cases of Cambodia and East Timor, from which local practices draw their meaning and moral force.

For those coping with co-existence after violent conflict, silence does not necessarily have to mean denial but can be a practical strategy in vulnerable relations to avoid embarrassment and conflict. Stefansson's research in Banja Luka suggests that, in face-to-face interactions across ethnic boundaries, eschewing subjects related to the war can be seen as a form of unarticulated empathy; such encounters are characterized by respect, awareness of difference, and care to maintain relations by emphasizing that which is shared rather than the potentially divisive. According to Stefansson, in BiH—with its history of violent conflicts followed by periods of peaceful coexistence—there is deep-seated cultural knowledge of living with difference and competence in managing potential conflict in interpersonal relations. At the societal level in Bosnia, however, as Mannergren Selimovic reminds us, “truth” about the war, its causes, responsibility and guilt, is plural and contested by different “sides,” framed by the nationalist non-conciliatory political rhetoric. However, as Jansen cautions, seen in the context of the present liberal transformation of BiH, the consensual silencing and polite avoidance may not hold much promise in terms of developing deeper social bonds or evoking a sense of building a common future.

The return of refugees and displaced persons to their former home communities is also a strong priority of international peace-building efforts in war-torn societies. This is evident from the sustained engagement by the UN, donor governments, and other international agencies, from the early 1990s on. Return has been linked to social reconstruction, sometimes depicted as the healing of the disrupted and dismembered social body by reinserting its missing parts. However, such internationally driven returns—as shown in the case of Cambodia and East Timor (McDowell and Eastmond 2000)—often fail to protect refugee rights and insure reinte-

gration and livelihood on returning “home.”⁸ The international repatriation discourse has often portrayed such movement within an essentialized conception of identities as rooted—as people returning to their “natural” homes (see Malkki 1995)—and predicated on an idealized notion of pre-war local life. The idea of rural villages as harmonious and close-knit units, as imagined by those planning the Cambodian repatriation in 1994 (Eastmond 2002), or of multi-ethnic communities of pre-war BiH as revealed in the approach of international aid personnel (Black 2001), appear more as romanticized visions than an accurate picture of pre-war realities. It does not mean that returnees cannot be drawn by a strong sense of attachment to their place of origin. But rather than assuming rootedness we need to—as anthropologists of place-making have been advocating—see belonging and attachment to place as contingent on wider social and historical processes through which people lay claim to a place and call it home (Gupta and Ferguson 2001; Malkki 1995). As studies on refugees have shown, rather than a “natural” reincorporation, those returning to their former homes often find them vastly transformed, physically and socially, and have to negotiate their re-entry in quite different contexts of power and inequality (Ranger 1994). Thus, as Jansen and Löfving (2007) argue, re-emplacement after violence and disruption must be understood in the context of economic and political transformation. Such large-scale transformations intersect with the changes in individual and social trajectories (Jansen and Löfving 2007).

International commitment linking refugee return to reconciliation has been particularly prominent in BiH, and was enshrined in the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA) in 1995. There, the driving force behind this policy was righting the wrong of a war perceived as one of/for ethnic cleansing. However, return was a more complex undertaking than envisioned in the DPA or by the external agencies involved. Although the peace agreement ended the war, it has also been charged with institutionalizing ethnic divisions created by it. BiH today is divided into two con-

stituent units, the Federation populated mainly by Bosniacs and Croats, and Republika Srpska with a predominantly Serb population. Special priority was given by the international agencies to the so-called minority returns. These refer to people who, in the post-war demography, have become members of the ethnic minority in their former home areas. However, the strong policy focus on return disregarded other issues vital for social reintegration, in particular livelihood and welfare prospects in new post-war circumstances (Black 2001). Even if substantial numbers of people have returned and their properties have been restituted, the impact in terms of ethnic remixing has been limited. The reality for those seeking to re-establish themselves has been complex, including obstructions by local nationalist leaders in many communities (Jansen 2006; Stefansson 2006). An evaluation in 2004 of support provided by SIDA (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency) to minority return in BiH found that although assistance was effective in improving material conditions, it entailed few future prospects and had little bearing on social trust between ethnic groups. It concluded that “since interaction is so rare, one could hardly speak of social reintegration and certainly not of reconciliation” (Çukur et al. 2005: 126). Against this backdrop, Tone Bringa’s positive account of return to a village in central BiH stands out as an exception (also because there are so few mixed communities in today’s BiH): before the war, she had done long-term fieldwork in this village, which had come under the control of Bosnian Croat forces during the war. She describes the return of displaced Bosniacs to their village, initially motivated by a strong desire for justice, and how return gradually allowed people to exchange experiences and to establish understanding and friendship based on common experiences that cut across ethnic identifications.⁹

Stefansson’s study (this volume) of return to Banja Luka is probably closer to the experience of most minority returnees, with many settling in ethnic enclaves that allow very limited interaction with the majority population. But Ste-

fansson also notes how Bosniac returnees and internally displaced Serbs, both being outsiders in the eyes of the majority (although in different ways), developed some degree of cooperation and a certain willingness to recognize the Other. For many other minority returnees, a common strategy—given the economic and political obstacles to social reintegration—has been to sell their property and move to an area where they form part of the majority, or engaging in translocal residence patterns that entail maximizing opportunities and keeping options open in different places (Eastmond 2006; Jansen 2007). Jansen thus points to the differential household and generational strategies employed in dealing with the transformed socio-political context, and highlights the ways in which certain conditions in post-war settings come to be seen as more feasible than others in the remaking of home. As Thiranagama argues (2007) in her analysis of home-making in the aftermath of violence in Sri Lanka, it is not merely ideas about the past but particularly ideas about the future that inform the possibility of being at home. These findings resonate with those of other anthropological studies of return in post-war societies, which note the desire of people to rebuild their lives in places that offer some prospects for a future. To achieve that, many circumvent policy directives where possible in search of better alternatives (Allen and Morsink 1994; Eastmond and Öjendal 1999).

Initiatives for return and inter-ethnic reconciliation in BiH have often been assumed by NGOs and encouraged by international institutions and donors who bring their own conceptions to bear on the projects to be realized. In the Balkans, assistance to such projects seems to have largely failed in addressing the complexity of inter-ethnic relations, tending to act as platforms that reinforce rather than transcend communal interests (Sörensen 2009). Helm’s article (this volume) illuminates the complex interplay at work in many such NGO initiatives. Although the organizations studied were underpinned by a view of women as natural peacebuilders, the women themselves invested their own meanings and purposes in the organization; in doing

so, they promoted conservative and nationalist understandings of gender and ethnic difference that were contrary to stated goals (see also Helms 2003). Although reconciliation in the deeper sense of forgiveness and restored trust was illusory, women's attempts to return and resume relations with former neighbors, were drawing on pre-war cultural notions of co-existence (*suživot*) and good neighborly relations (*komšiluk*) in order to negotiate their way back. In this process, they reinterpreted the general humanitarian aims popular with donors to suit issues of more practical relevance to their own problems and in ways that made sense in the context of their own social reality and moral world.

Beyond reconciliation: The struggle for "normal life"

From the perspective of everyday life, reconciliation with former enemies is not always the foremost preoccupation for people trying to make a new start after a devastating war. Although a number of accomplishments have been made in BiH after the war—with regard to physical reconstruction, the absence of major violence, several democratic elections, property restitution, and the return of refugees and displaced people—many insecurities about the future remain. For instance, a survey of attitudes among victims who had suffered major loss and violence—drawn from different ethnic groups in BiH—indicated that a majority believed that war would re-emerge (Kiza, Rathgeber, and Rohne 2006: 129). The economic reforms toward neoliberal marketization launched in BiH in 1995, which included the privatization of state-own industries, undermined economic and political reconstruction. In the institutional vacuum the reforms "strengthened the power of the very nationalist groups who were least interested in achieving interethnic reconciliation in Bosnia" (Paris 2006: 435; see also Chandler 2008).¹⁰ Job development has not been a priority of these economic reforms (Woodward 2000); employment opportunities remain scarce and

many Bosnians have to rely on the informal labor market for survival.¹¹

Reflecting these realities, a recurring notion in much ethnographic literature on post-war BiH is the desire for people to resume "normal life" (e.g., Jansen 2007; Stefansson 2004).¹² Jansen (this volume), during his fieldwork in villages in the north-eastern part of BiH, observed that informal social relations across the former frontline had become a regular occurrence after the war—not however, perceived as reconciliation but rather part of rebuilding a sense of normality. The notion of "normal life"¹³ can be linked to notions of family welfare that developed with modernization and urbanization in post-World War II Yugoslavia. It refers to the striving of families to build a materially and socially secure basis of welfare and status, part of the larger developmental vision of Yugoslavia (Eastmond 2006, 2007). It was embedded in sets of reciprocal social relations (Bringa 1995), but it was, above all, contingent on the State as a provider of welfare services and a main agent in social and economic development. The liberal economy introduced in the mid-1990s promotes a very different role for the State (e.g., Sørensen 2009).¹⁴ Before the war, work and work-related housing were not only key components in the promotion of family welfare and sociality but also provided a basis for inter-ethnic interaction.

Paula Pickering (2006) analyzes the role of mixed (urban) workplaces in the building of inter-ethnic social relations in today's BiH. She points to the importance of repeated horizontal interaction around particular tasks, in which other identities and capacities (such as profession or gender) become prominent.¹⁵ Obviously, workplaces—though often overlooked by donors and advocacy groups—offer opportunities for ordinary Bosnians to address their concrete and pressing needs (Pickering 2006). Mannergren Selimovic in a forthcoming study in Foča, also found that a mixed work place (the police force), in spite of initial misgivings, had recreated a sense of collegiality. Furthermore, men's recreational associations, which had existed before the war, provided opportunities for forging relations based on organized masculine activities,

such as rafting and hiking. Jansen's article (this volume) also highlights encounters between men that straddled former front lines in the course of everyday life; however, in so doing, this interaction marked or reinforced other divisions. In Jansen's example, men with different ethnic backgrounds displayed performative competence by using strong cultural motifs of a hegemonizing masculinity. Thus, although "ethnic" differences were at least partially overcome such encounters tended to reproduce hegemonizing gender patterns. Mannergren Selimovic, like Stefansson (this volume), also describes the circumstances in which practical assistance and economic cooperation between individuals, based on mutual need, opened the way for some degree of social interaction and recognition of the "other."

What these examples suggest is that reconciliation, with its narrow reference to particular kinds of relationships and activities, tends to eclipse the shifting bases of mutual recognition that are part of everyday social interaction in any complex society. They also suggest that external reconciliation initiatives seem to be curiously at odds with the primary concerns of many Bosnians, as they struggle to find their bearings in a profoundly changing socio-political reality. This experience, as demonstrated from other post-war settings, is not unique to the Bosnian case. As long as their lives were marked by poverty, unemployment, and lack of permanent housing, Stefansson's informants told him that reconciliation remained too abstract and of less priority to them to take a serious interest in. The recurring view was that improving the socio-economic situation would facilitate inter-ethnic relations, and for many individuals this way of rebuilding a "normal life" was a far greater motivating force than what can be referred to as "identity politics." This view echoes the realist scholarly position that emphasizes the rebuilding of functioning social relations in the daily life of ordinary people as a way to bridge differences and recreate trust.

The contributions to this special section, each in its own way, address the critical disjuncture between perspectives on reconciliation and

the implications for the rebuilding of lives and social relationships in Bosnian post-war society. Achieving a stable and peaceful society after massive and violent conflict is a formidable task and a long-term challenge in the complex and contentious reality of any post-conflict society; whatever policy approach taken it is apt to fail on a number of counts. This Introduction has drawn particular attention to the dynamics involved as normative and universalist discourses such as the reconciliation discourse are localized in post-war contexts. It means that, as situated practice, reconciliation interventions generate different outcomes in the variety of local contexts of implementation. As they filter through local experiences and moral sensibilities, such initiatives will be reinterpreted and invested with the meanings and strategies of local actors, at times at odds with the aims and ideologies of the external organizations and donors. Another key point made is that, given the everyday problems of people in post-war settings, reconciliation with former enemies may not be seen as a primary concern. The theme permeating post-war life in BiH was rather the striving for a sense of normality—not so much by consciously engaging in inter-ethnic reconciliation, as by invoking and practicing widely shared norms such as those of economic security and neighborhood sociality. Although a fraught process in the politically unresolved division in BiH, such practices evoke historical experiences and cultural competences of dealing with difference among erstwhile enemies. However, the future of such normalization on the ground, without the support of a larger vision and an institutional framework providing hope out of social insecurity and economic deprivation, appears highly uncertain.

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Notes

1. "Bosnians" refers to the population of the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, whereas "Bosniacs" are used to refer to Bosnian Muslims.
2. See Gloppen (2005) for an overview.
3. The plural understandings of justice, within courts and between courts and members of the population can also diminish legitimacy. South Africa's famous Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) is often heralded as one of the most successful exercises in national healing. However, in a study of local townships, Wilson (2000: 84) found "profound disdain for the TRC" and its "softer" form of restorative justice, where the interests of the locals instead centered primarily on revenge and retribution.
4. In Rwanda, the processes were established at different levels to deal with issues of justice and reconciliation after the 1994 genocide. These included the ICTR, established by the UN on behalf of the international community; and two domestic forms of trials—the National Genocide Trials carried out in the established national courts, and the Gacaca courts, modeled on traditional forms of popular litigation.
5. The Extraordinary Chambers of the Courts of Cambodia, a solution negotiated between the Cambodian government and members of the international community, finally began official operations in 2006. The 1991 peace accords did not include accountability, but a process to put the leaders of the Khmer Rouge on trial began in 1997.
6. Justice and forgiveness carry vastly different connotations in the Cambodian context than what is assumed in the globalized reconciliation discourse. For one, traditional conceptions of power and autocratic rule (Ovesen 2005) would rule out the idea that the powerful can be held accountable. Cosmologically justice, like moral redemption, is a more complex and long-term matter in the individual realm.
7. Revived Buddhism has been at the heart of a process of spiritual and moral recovery among ordinary Cambodians, providing a sense of security and moral order that promote social relations (Kent 2006).
8. In fact, the most successful are those who return unassisted, even when the home country is still at war, because of the ability to retain control and their intimate knowledge of the circumstances (Eastmond 2002).
9. The study was made into a film (see Bringa and Loizos 2001).
10. The neoliberal reform package of democratization and marketization that is part of most peace-building operations today tends to have adverse effects in societies with limited or non-existent governmental institutions (Paris 2006). In Chandler's (2006) view, viable institutions must be built from within, with respect for the domestic political process.
11. Although statistics from BiH are somewhat uncertain, the rate of unemployment in January, 2010 was over 40 percent (Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2010 www.bhas.ba).
12. Opinion surveys during the first two years after the war revealed overwhelming preferences for a job above anything else, followed by resolution of property issues (Woodward 2000: 163).

13. The idea of “normal life” was a recurring feature and a strong motivation in the settlement process of Bosnian refugees to Sweden and elsewhere (Eastmond 2005).
14. Vetta (2009: 86–87) argues that the rise of nationalism in Serbia after 2000 must be explained by the profound social transformation of the past twenty years. In the absence of an organized left, the nationalist Radical Party provides the most serious critique of global capitalist restructuring and promises a return to normality that strongly resonates with the material and symbolic needs of a wide range of the population.
15. In narratives of Bosnian refugees on pre-war social life, colleagues are frequent in most people’s social networks (especially women’s) and social interaction extended beyond the workplace (Eastmond 2007).

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