



AN AUTHOR MEETS HIS CRITICS

Around David Henig's *Remaking Muslim Lives: Everyday Islam in Postwar Bosnia and Herzegovina*

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■ **Comments by Catherine Wanner**

Although many anthropologists use ethnography as a research method to analyze social and cultural change, few muster the powers of observation that David Henig brings to bear in his recent ethnography on processes of reconstituting the self in relation to newly redefined collectivities in rural Southeast Europe. One of the singular most outstanding contributions of his recent book, *Remaking Muslim Lives: Everyday Islam in Postwar Bosnia and Herzegovina*, is the demonstration he provides of the path from deeply participating and keenly observing daily life in another society to illustrating what the life-world of those inhabiting that society might be like, how it forms, and what we can learn from it. Although there is little depiction of the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s *per se* in this book, his ethnographic analysis reveals much about processes of recovering from post-war destruction in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the changing trajectories of religious communities in Southeast Europe. This book has much to offer anthropologists on how the study of everyday life can be mined to better understand the dynamic processes that contribute to the formation of communal bonds and practices of sociality, and how ethnography can potentially be used by anthropologists to form concepts of social analysis that have the potential to offer insight beyond a particular field site.

It is tempting to posit the merits of the ethnographic method and daily life as its object of study as a premise. Few anthropologists make explicit what the perspective of studying the rhythms, sounds, smells, and vibes of everyday life offers and, by extension, the past and present life-worlds of individuals. This is a missed opportunity that sells the ethnographic enterprise short by minimizing the value of 'being there'. Few other disciplines engage the minutia of everyday life and, as Birgit Meyer (2020) has written, use the researcher as the research instrument to the extent that anthropologists do. This approach often results in the need to counter charges of anecdotalism and to explain the insight that such a perspective offers.

Henig lifts this burden. His focus on the feel of the everyday highlights the very habitualness, domesticity, and mundaneness in which bonds of social solidarity are embedded. For him, the everyday is a spatial, temporal, philosophical, and especially historical category. His depiction of the ordinary and yet multi-layered nature of everyday life in rural communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina is always haunted by the extraordinary—specifically, the extraordinary destruction of the same just a few years ago. The process of reconstituting social relationships and remaking Muslim lives in these rural farming communities occurs because they have



been shattered by war. Henig shows how seemingly insignificant habits, such as leaving doors unlocked (which many other researchers would have either missed or dismissed), feed forms of neighborliness and earlier forms of sociality. These everyday practices signal that a person is at home in this place and indeed root them there. Such openness expresses trust toward neighbors. Seen through Henig's eyes, leaving doors unlocked or locking them up is one of the many ways sociality, spirituality, and feelings of belonging are intertwined and used to remake individual lives and individual communities in Bosnia today.

Other everyday practices, such as first finding a neighbor and then building a house, reveal how being a good Muslim is equated with being a good neighbor in Bosnia. Given the region's recent history of war and displacement, a premium is placed on the morality inherent in neighborliness. Oft-repeated expressions belie deeply held cultural values. Reciprocating visits to neighbors to smoke, drink coffee, or share in farm work become moral acts that not only embed people in particular places and thereby constitute communities, but also have moralizing dimensions that individuals can interpret to see themselves as good Muslims because they are good neighbors. Henig offers us fine-grained ethnography of these micro-practices, which illustrate how such practices of sociality also make people feel attached to these communities and encourage a sense of belonging. Conversely, he shows how locked doors signify a guardedness toward strangers. Half-built houses advertise dashed hopes of becoming a neighbor and an inability to re-establish oneself in a community after tragedy.

From Henig's focus on the everyday, we learn how people eat, dress, and speak; how they interact, exchange, and barter among themselves; and how the past becomes present such that it animates symbolic geographies of place and feelings of belonging. We learn of the visual metaphors people have formed of themselves as 'badly parked cars' that make movement forward cumbersome and difficult. This analysis of everyday life allows Henig to move beyond the academic fixation on identity politics and nationalism that has so prominently framed anthropological and other studies of the former Yugoslavia. Rather, he opts to depict how people would like to live over demonstrating who they are in terms of identity politics. This aspirational focus reveals how people come to remake their lives, their communities, their relationships to those around them in the course of daily life, and how such actions coalesce to inform their life-worlds.

Religion comes more clearly into view when Henig documents how Bosnians live with history. Dual temporalities of the everyday and the sacred are enjoined to make the past present as the living and the dead comingle and contemporary actions face the past. Good Muslims make a hajj pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in a lifetime just as good Bosnians make a pilgrimage to Srebrenica, the site of some of the war's most gruesome atrocities. These pilgrimages enjoin individuals to interrelated communities and begin to remake who they are as religious subjects, national citizens, and moral people.

Religious practices oriented toward the soul, when enmeshed in national politics, often breed the status of martyr among some of the dead. The concept of the soul becomes a means to articulate and mediate the past in a locally intelligible medium expressed in moral practices. The souls of the dead appear to the living through mourning and prayer and thereby demonstrate their presence in the lives of the living as well as their agency and ability to shape current social practices. Bosnians cultivate their own souls by paying respect to the souls of the dead and caring for them through prayer and commemoration, empathically recognizing the suffering of those who died.

In these and many other ways, Henig's ethnography of everyday life in rural Bosnia and Herzegovina refreshingly casts off familiar analyses of identity politics that often draw on enduring tensions, grievances, and hostilities. Instead, he offers a theoretically informed and yet applied analysis of what everyday Islam, researched through ethnography, can tell us about processes of becoming a neighbor and becoming a Muslim, which finds a parallel in forming a

neighborhood and forming a community. These are steps in a greater process of reconstituting life-worlds. Ordinary acts, it seems, are shot through with the extraordinary as small farming communities in Bosnia, recovering from war, simultaneously remake themselves spiritually, ethically, and nationally.

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■ **REFERENCE**

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■ **Comments by Michael Lambek**

Remaking Muslim Lives is a quietly modest book. I do not use 'modest' here as a criticism but, on the contrary, as a form of praise. The book is about modest people living within a modest state and practicing a modest form of Islam, or one could say, practicing Islam modestly. And it is written in a direct, straightforward fashion, without the theoretical excess and exaggerated claims so fashionable today. I take modesty as a virtue.

Modesty is a particularly interesting response in the aftermath of extreme violence and in circumstances of economic precarity. The angle of this book on everyday historical consciousness rather than on historical trauma or resentment is therefore refreshing.

The book concerns Bosnians Muslims who live in a highland area. The depiction of this region as suffering from extreme unemployment reminded me of the western highlands of North Macedonia, another Muslim area of post-Yugoslavia. Anna Zadrozna (2021) writes about a long history of labor migration there, including the permanent migration of some Muslims to Turkey, at the encouragement of that nation. Among Macedonian Muslims, the identification with Turkey is positive, whereas in Bosnia contemporary Turks are distinguished from Ottoman predecessors and appear as arrogant colonialists.

Another comparison that came to mind is one you may find more surprising. That is with Appalachia. In contemplating David's opening metaphor of Bosnia as a 'badly parked car', I thought of Katie Stewart's (1996) *A Space on the Side of the Road*. It too suggests similar images for the awkwardness, the out-of-placeness, and yet the deep significance of place, as well as of movement, or stalled movement, between places. A central issue for rural Bosnians, as for Appalachians, is how to live with dignity despite being out of the way, in circumstances of poverty and unemployment, as well as subject to negative stereotypes. Things that come through in this book are the dignity of work and the dignity of continuous custodianship, of honoring and caring for the past and for places, and granting them acknowledgment.

David writes that living a Muslim life in rural Bosnia Herzegovina "is ordered by deep relations of obligation and care among the living, the dead, and the divine that are generations

deep” (p. 13). Rather than objectifying either Islam *qua* religion or Muslims *qua* ethno-national minority, David turns rather to the way Islam informs everyday life, social and material practice, and concerns with reproduction and fertility. In addressing the lives of people who have been European Muslims for generations, David turns neither to politicized Islam nor to religious authority or scripturalist Islam as depicted by Asad and his followers. This is not an Islam that loudly proclaims what it is for or what it is against, and it is not a mode of Islam overly concerned with liturgical or legal correctness. It is modest, unassuming. One could say that it is ordinary and non-secular in the sense that religion here does not stand over or above or outside daily life: it sits intrinsically within it, but somehow without overwhelming it.

Most profoundly, David says, the Bosnian “moral horizon is defined by the fundamental question of *how to live*, rather than the identitarian question of *who I am*” (p. 13). This is tremendously important, and it echoes other recent work on Muslims, such as that of Amira Mittermaier (2019) and Niloofar Haeri (2020), especially when David speaks of a Muslim life as “*a flow of vital exchange with God*” (p. 14). It is a particularly important message, not only with respect to the Balkans or global Islam, but also for North Americans—as we and our institutions and our students have become so obsessed with selfhood and with identity politics.

As David says, this rural Muslim life is deeply ethical, and it is an ethics that is immanent or ordinary rather than objectified and formalized. Hence, there is perhaps a question to ask why the word ‘remaking’ appears in the title. It is evidently a remaking after communism and after horrific violence, but David’s point is actually more one of continuity. Continuity with the past and continuity day to day, such that making and remaking cannot be distinguished from one another, much as the villagers make and remake their houses and gardens.

In the introduction to *A Companion to the Anthropology of Religion*, I wrote that it is one thing whether deity is conceived as immanent or transcendent, and another whether what we have called religion is immanent or transcendent to a particular social context (Lambek 2013). By immanent I mean here not objectified as a discrete institution in political life nor a reified abstraction in the realm of metaphysics, but a dimension of how people act and think and exercise their judgment. That is to say, again, that it is ordinary. David shows both ordinary practice and quiet resistance to attempts to dismantle, colonize, or objectify religious practice—whether by secular communists or Christian enemies, but more saliently by an ethno-nationalist Islamic administration, by scripturalist Muslims or Muslim clerics educated in Egypt or the Gulf, or by Turkish nationalists.

David’s book offers a series of illuminating illustrations of villagers’ ethical concerns with maintaining custodianship of houses, household objects, land, orchards, and their own food products; of maintaining good relations with neighbors and expressing generosity, albeit in the face of precarity. Generosity is subsumed with what Bosnians call *halal* giving and receipt—which adds a new level to the gift as a kind of tripartite relationship in which God is the third party. By saying something is given or received as *halal*, one is acknowledging that the bounty comes from God, thereby displacing human agency but also sanctifying it.

Being a good Muslim entails the exercise of judgment of being a good person more than it does the following of explicit rules. David writes that “villagers are not vehicles solely enacting an Islamic discursive tradition and religious duty in their practices of piety. Rather, the ways villagers articulate their relations to the divine are entwined with other moral commitments and punctuated by multiple rhythms and repertoires of time-reckoning in constituting villagers’ religious experience in the course of social life” (p. 108). He shows the way in which the agricultural cycle is Islamically informed with scheduled collective prayers for rain. There is a deep temporal dimension to this; put conversely, attending to the past is a significant element of ongoing ethical practice. A key point that sums up much of what I have said, and alludes to much more, is the villagers’ insistence on holding their prayers for rain *outdoors* at sacred spots

in the forest, rather than, as expected by external authorities, indoors in the new mosques built for them by outsiders.

Reading this fine ethnography with the care and perspicacity with which it was written offers significant reward.

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■ Comments by Basit Kareem Iqbal

Rather than asking *who one is*, David Henig's *Remaking Muslim Lives* turns to questions about *how to live*. In doing so, this book explicitly shifts away from the ethno-nationalist and identitarian frameworks that have dominated discussion of post-Yugoslav societies, and also away from the treatments of post-socialist religion reflected in Ernest Gellner's comment (cited in the introduction), that "nowadays, to be a Bosnian Muslim need not believe that there is no God but God and that Mohamad is his prophet, but you do need to have lost that faith." This quip, Henig writes, "reduces a vast array of experiences with the divine into discourses on the politics of identity and/or difference, and silences and dehistoricizes other ideas and practices" involved in "what it means to be Muslim and live a Muslim life" (p. 9). *How to live* is not a generic question that yields abstract categorical imperatives. Rather, it is a question held in common among one's proximate relations, emergent every day, participating in a specific history. At the Society for the Anthropology of Religion panel dedicated to his book, Henig disavowed strong claims to 'theory' writ large (echoing what others in this forum have called the book's 'modesty'). Even so, in these brief comments I want to note some of the book's conceptual work, whose acuity is all the more impressive for its light touch.

Remaking Muslim Lives moves between complex theoretical arguments without being agitated by them. One example of this aspect of its voice is how the book employs the concept of 'the

everyday', which in recent years has been contested among anthropologists in its relationship to a religious tradition. In these debates, the 'everyday' is sometimes valorized as a space of mediation and ambiguity, against 'tradition' figured as a space of pious normativity.¹ Henig does not ignore those debates but does not get drawn out by their polemic, instead emphasizing again how everyday practices are infused by an intertwining of religious experience and historical consciousness. Foregrounding the question *how to live* allows for a robust attention to the rhythms and intensities of ethical practice, to what Henig calls transvaluation and commensuration across otherwise divergent domains. Rather than taking piety as the cumulative (additive) result of performing certain prayers, for example, or of fasting or not fasting during Ramadan, Henig turns us toward how "pious conduct is more elastic and poetic, understood as an ethical practice that unfolds with different intensities and rhythms in the flow of life" (p. 105). One critical purchase of this approach to piety as an ethical practice is how it allows us to see competing moral imperatives within the same analytic frame (p. 106). Rather than devolving on a categorical opposition between religious (or pious) and secular (or national) temporalities, for instance, he leads us to see how the multiple temporal textures of everyday life are "interwoven" and "entangled"—again not in a generic sense, but as located within a "given historical-political nexus" (p. 93).

Henig's consistent emphasis on history does not stem from a historicist concern to locate the present within contextual frames of reference, that is, to *explain* present Bosnian Muslim practices by referring to experiences of the war and socialism. He is concerned to demonstrate not how the present is shaped by the past (from cause to effect) but rather the immanent presence of multiple pasts in the present (p. 123). The ethical practice of piety becomes one site for focalizing such presence and, hence, why prayer itself should be seen as a mode of historical experience (p. 112) in, among other things, disclosing the "conceptual vocabulary to act as historical subjects and articulate and come to terms with the new sociopolitical configuration of postsocialist, postwar Bosnian society" (p. 121). And the trajectory of historical causes and effects is not determined: "the practice of taking care of the souls of the dead," for example, is a way of encompassing "the temporality of the recent violent past and ruptures, rather than the other way around" (p. 128). An attention to religion can help us see how the therapeutics of ethical life work on present pasts.

The book refocuses anthropological attention on the delicate historical work of inhabiting *forms*—another way that it leaves behind a simple opposition between everyday ambiguity and pious norms. Across the book's six chapters, forms mentioned and explored by Henig include forms of exchange (halal, vital); of sociality (within proximity); of care (the possibility of generalized reciprocity); of debt and economic redistribution; of good deeds and kind words; of inalienable possession; of abiding deference (to the tradition); of envy; of misfortune; of remembering and mourning; of prayer, healing, and visitation; of moral striving; of structural violence and corruption; of guardianship; of farming/production; of relatedness and engagement; of expression and mediation; and more. These forms belong to different scales and registers of social life; read together, they recursively evidence the entwining of historical consciousness and religious experience. These forms are not simply given. We might here borrow Henig's double sense of the term 'fragile' from his account of the "fragile ethics of proximity," where fragility describes both an idiom of lived experience and a vulnerable analytic category (pp. 47–48). It thus underscores the question of fragility in relation to form, where social life takes fragile form even while these forms too are fragile.²

I first came across Henig's work on 'halal exchange' when trying to describe the humanitarian work of an Islamic charitable organization in Jordan. It was clear enough that charitable donors give expecting a divine counter-gift in the afterlife; volunteers and aid workers seek otherworldly

blessings through and in their relief work. But what kind of exchange is this (across life and death)? Do the acquisition of wealth and the gathering of good deeds share the same temporal logic (as argued by those who read contemporary Muslim charity as a 'pious neoliberalism')? And how then to understand the theological reversibility of blessing and tribulation, by which ultimate value is fundamentally withdrawn, at least until the day of judgment? Henig's argument helped me focalize the transvaluation between economic value and what he calls "halal metavalue" (p. 67). Given the right "performative acts in the moment of exchange" (ibid.), a vast range of activities (including but certainly not limited to charity and almsgiving) come to participate in the mediation of "divine abundance and grace" (p. 76). In *Remaking Muslim Lives*, "halal exchange" (the title of the final chapter of part 1) names not just religiously permitted exchange but a mode of moral action that satisfies God. More broadly, this point raises the question of the relationship between halal exchange and the "vital exchange" (the title of part 2) that Henig describes more generally as a "moral horizon of action," the "means by which villagers bring a perpetual flow of divine grace, abundance, and prosperity in their everyday lives" (p. 14). Halal exchange becomes one mode, perhaps, of that vital exchange with God that encompasses human action writ large.

The flow of vital exchange with God takes place between past and present, between living and dead (p. 129), making and remaking social forms, marking the "reproduction of life as an unfolding exchange with the divine" (p. 13). Although Henig does not theorize this remark explicitly, he does not make God simply another social actor. In defining "what it means to be Muslim and live a Muslim life" (p. 14), vital exchange poses the question *how to live* with reference to the divine term—reintroducing the ever-present problem of incommensurability into a scene of commensuration.

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■ **NOTES**

1. As an example, see the article by Nadia Fadil and Mayanthi Fernando, with responses by Samuli Schielke and Lara Deeb and counter-responses by Fadil and Fernando, in the 2015 issue of *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 5 (2): 59–100.
2. Although Henig himself does not take up this language, his close attention to form as congealing history and ethical practice together allows for theorizing form of life with Wittgenstein, Asad, and Agamben as a "dense articulation of crystallized temporalities" (Eldridge 2021: 21).

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■ Comments by Joel Robbins

This book is deceptively modest in presentation. David Henig focuses more on showing us what Muslim lives are like in the rural Zvijezda highlands of Bosnia than he does on telling us how we are supposed to theoretically approach these lives. This does not mean that the book is theoretically unsophisticated: Henig works with many of the most current theories of social rupture and repair, historical consciousness, place-making, exchange, and ethics. Yet the theory never outpaces the ethnography, which builds throughout the text until a book that starts in a small rural highlands village of 250 people in the present ends by having canvassed a temporal scale that stretches from the Ottoman past to the unknown future and a spatial one that opens out from that small village to reach Sarajevo, Srebrenica, Europe, contemporary Turkey, and the cosmos. The result is a text that is enormously stimulating on the full range of topics it treats, while also achieving that bit of the ethnographer's magic that takes the reader deeply into the lives of other people, in this case the rarely documented lives of rural European Muslims.

It is one of the great virtues of the book that it starts with social relations—the social relations of the village of Brdo (a pseudonym). Here we meet Bosnian Muslims attempting to practice an ethics of proximity and realize a project of social endurance in a world that has in the recent past and present been doubly ruptured, first by the passing of socialism and then by the war of 1992–1995. Thrown back to working with the land and domestic animals in the neoliberal present, people struggle to maintain their families, houses, and fields, and to engage in ongoing practices of exchange that bring neighborhoods and villages to life. It is the effort to reproduce these institutions and the practices of exchange and sociability they give rise to that constitutes the project of endurance that is central to rendering people's lives meaningful in Brdo. But this project is threatened on at least two fronts. On the one side, social standing in the village has become markedly unequal, with some now doing much better economically than others, often because of selfish actions taken during the war. The newly well-off are less apt than before to socialize as equals with others, while the less well-off resent both the wealth of some of their neighbors and the social distance it creates. How can you be a neighborhood or a village in the old way in the face of these new disparities? This is a pressing question for everyone in the village. On the other front, the project of endurance is threatened by the fact that those thrown wholly back on the land are vulnerable to increasing indebtedness that leads many of them to move to Sarajevo for wage work. Once there, they hold on to the dream of keeping up their village houses, fields, and relationships, but they find it harder to do so in reality.

It is against the background set by Henig's deft sketch of the tensions that mark social relations and the task of social reproduction in the Zvijezda highlands that Islam enters the ethnography. Its first sustained appearance is in a chapter titled "Halal Exchange." Understood as a key part of what Henig calls an 'economic theology', halal exchange is a complex local notion and practice. At least in part, it is a kind of generalized exchange in the Lévi-Straussian sense where one person gives to another and tells them the gift is forgiven—that is, it does not require reciprocation by the recipient, although it will be reciprocated with blessing by God. Practices of halal exchange at once localize Islamic charity, keeping some of it in village circuits rather than routing it through the national Islamic organization, and sometimes serve to allow those more well-off to give to those who have less without causing them shame. The chapter that takes all this up is a state-of-the-art discussion of a complex kind of exchange that deserves broad comparative attention.

Halal exchange is not, however, the only kind of give and take that Henig finds in play at the heart of rural Bosnian Islam. The frame around the second half of the book is a notion of 'vital exchange' that people engage in with God. This kind of exchange takes in, from the

human side, sacrifice, prayer, and good deeds, and, from the divine side, blessing, agricultural and economic success, health, and, in the ideal case, reproduction of the rural house and its associated land and kin group. There is not room here to summarize the evocative ethnography of everything—from prayers for rain to mosque attendance, from national commemorations of martyrs to yearly ram sacrifices—that Henig presents to flesh out this picture of an Islamic theological economy of vital exchange. Suffice it to say that it gives us a very rich understanding of how Islam takes its place in the lives of the Bosnian Muslims he has studied.

Along with vital exchange, another major theme of the book is temporality. This encompasses discussion both of how past, present, and future are understood, all of them in multiple ways, and of how post-socialist and post-war ruptures are worked into inhabitable lives. It is with the theme of temporality that I want to turn from primarily registering the book's achievements to posing some questions for Henig about directions in which it might be interesting to take his argument. I make this transition here because where I have carried out research, among the Urapmin of Papua New Guinea, in important respects exchange makes time. If you ask Urapmin people to narrate their life history to you, what they will respond with is a chronicle of exchanges in which they have been involved. Thus, for example and in this case from a male perspective, someone might tell you that "when my third sibling was born my uncle gave me my first piglet to look after, then I went to work on a plantation on the coast and one of the bosses gave me ripe bananas to eat, and when I was finished with my contract they gave me a box of goods to bring home, which I then gave to my uncle and other relatives, who later helped me gather shell money to give to my in-laws when I got married" and so forth. As Nancy Munn (1986) has influentially shown for the Gawa of Papua New Guinea, it is exchanges that make 'spacetime', ideally expanding it as they develop. With this background in mind, I want to ask if part of what Henig is showing us is that vital exchange might similarly make temporality (and perhaps spatiality as well) in the Zvijezda highlands. And if it does, I would also like to ask if there are interpretations of the recent ruptures that have marked these Bosnian lives that understand them in terms of vital exchanges gone wrong in some sense—a topic that is not really explored in the book. One of the great successes of Munn's book is that she can show how disvalued kinds of exchanges can shrink spacetime, leading to bad outcomes. Is there an equivalent kind of movement that is possible in this Muslim theological economy?

And while we are on vital economy, I would like to ask if this is an emic construct, or more of a theoretical one. It's clearly very useful either way, but it would help one to think with it to know the answer. I do not recall seeing a local language word for 'vital' or 'vital exchange', and this is what leads me to ask.

One of the most powerful moments in the book for me came near the end. Henig is talking about how he chose to focus on Islam's quality as a moral endeavor more than, as is common in the regional literature, an ethno-national one. As he puts it, "Of course, it would be futile to ignore the ethnonational arguments. But these preoccupations, focused solely on the identitarian questions of *who I am* (and *who I am not*), fail to address the fundamental question of *how to live* that dominates villagers' everyday concerns" (pp. 149–150). This comment shines a bright and theoretically important light back on the entirety of the book. For it has struck me for a while now that anthropologists who work in post-rupture situations often struggle with the question of when it is okay to put something other than the events that caused a jarring discontinuity at the heart of their ethnography. I would note, as well, that this kind of question holds not only when the ruptures that have taken place are ones that are locally seen as traumatic or tragic. In my own field of anthropological studies of Christianity, this issue comes up when one has to decide in some cases when it makes sense to stop treating people as converts and instead study them as Christians going about their lives. I think Henig's point about attending to

times when people shift from being most involved in figuring out who they are to instead focus most squarely on figuring out how they should live is a precious clue about when this kind of transition in anthropological practice makes sense.

A final point for discussion is one that is at a bit higher level of abstraction. The phrase ‘everyday Islam’ is there in the title of this book, and the word ‘everyday’ occurs as an adjective in many other collocations throughout the text, such as ‘everyday historical work’ and ‘everyday life’. My question is, what work is the notion of the ‘everyday’ doing in this text—and, by extension, in at least some of the many other anthropological texts in which it occurs today? In a work that takes in prayers said by people who feel themselves to be in great danger, and major collective rituals to bring rain or celebrate a complex past, what is the opposite of everyday Islam? And should it worry us that, as Charles Taylor (1989) tells us, a high valuation of the everyday is a decidedly modern trait, and one might add by looking to Taylor’s (2007) later work, a trait that might depend on a privileging of the secular as well. The term is rarely, although not never, theoretically weight-bearing in anthropological work, as I would suggest it is not all that often in this book. So we might want to ask if it is really necessary to qualify various things we study as ‘everyday’, or if it places some kind of drag on ethnographic and analytic precision when used without a lot of care and sense of its limits.

There are many other questions I could pose about this very stimulating book, one that makes a major contribution to our understanding of Muslim religious life, and of religious life more broadly.

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■ Response to Comments by David Henig

“Good conversations,” Stephen Gudeman and Alberto Rivera (1990: 1) unforgettably write, “have no ending, and often no beginning. They have participants and listeners but belong to no one, nor to history.” One never knows where a good conversation might take them. This forum brings together four reflections on *Remaking Muslim Lives: Everyday Islam in Postwar Bosnia and Herzegovina*. I feel immensely fortunate to have had a conversation with such engaged and thoughtful interlocutors as Catherine Wanner, Michael Lambek, Basit Kareem Iqbal, and Joel Robbins. It was gratifying to read their generous comments, which inspired me to reflect on the book in new ways. The questions they raise are challenging and important ones as they speak to much broader theoretical, analytical, and ethical concerns pertaining to contemporary anthropology. In the spirit of a friendly conversation, my response is organized around the interlocking themes of modesty, the everyday, and ethics.

First things first, so let me tackle the ‘M’ word head on. Three of the four responses explicitly characterize the book as being virtuously modest (Iqbal, Lambek, Robbins), while the fourth one (Wanner) is not far away from such a depiction either. Until our conversation, I must admit, I did not think of my book as being modest. Yet the notion of a ‘modest book’ is intriguing and generative. Upon reading it, my train of thought jumped the tracks. What is a modest monograph? What would be its opposite? And what would an im/modest anthropology look like? In order to be able to *correspond with* the world, as Tim Ingold (2017) puts it, doing and writing anthropology requires a good dose of modesty, attentiveness *to*, and care *for* the worlds that anthropologists open up in their writing. In a quick scan through book reviews recently published in several anthropological journals, I did not find any book that would be described as ‘modest’. Does it mean that virtuous modesty as a style of ethnographic writing has become obsolete? I am afraid this forum cannot answer this question. Be this as it may, the ‘M’ word pushed me to reflect on my choices.

As Basit Iqbal writes in his commentary, during the book roundtable I indeed explained that I had made a conscious choice to avoid strong claims to theory. This deserves some clarification since I do not discuss it explicitly in the book. The book’s “deceptively modest” (Robbins) style of quietly interweaving theory into ethnography and theorizing *through* and *with* ethnography was conceived of as an exercise in controlled theoretical exposition. This choice was not in any way an anti-theory stance. It rather grew from my discomfort with the increasingly prevailing modes of anthropological writing, which put emphasis on theoretical sophistication that tends to override ethnographic lucidity (for a similar point, see Carrithers 2018). In addition, the book is situated in a historical-political-geopolitical context of post-socialist and post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina. This is a context that has been dominated by a particular mode of theorizing that has had political consequences, namely, ethno-national identitarian theories and frameworks of inquiry. These frameworks have also hegemonized and straitjacketed the debates and research on religious lives in the region for decades (see my reference to Ernest Gellner in Iqbal’s commentary). Or to be perhaps more blunt, I have become convinced that they actually distort the analysis. In order to show the inadequacy of such identitarian frameworks that bear only partial resemblance to the concerns and life-worlds of my interlocutors and break away from them, I foregrounded my arguments in thick ethnographic situations. The modest tone and style of the book thus emerge from both my proclivity for an ethnographically led style of theoretical exposition and my ethical-political stance of refusing to reproduce these hegemonic identitarian frameworks of analysis.

Leaving aside these broader concerns about the styles of ethnographic writing and theorizing, all the commentaries helped me to see something that I was not able to clearly articulate in

the book. Namely, it is the realization that modesty can be a particular mode of ethnographic attunement, care, and ethics of writing about the aftermath and afterlives of violence. It allowed me to ask what it takes to remake one's life-world in the wake of dramatic and violent ruptures. It is probably telling that Michael Lambek made this point loudly and clearly. As he correctly writes, the angle of this book is on "everyday historical consciousness" rather than on historical trauma alone. Lambek's work on cultural accounts and responses to trauma and traumatic hi/stories, along with several other fine-grained (or shall I say modest?) accounts, have been an ongoing source of conversation and inspiration in my writing over the years (e.g., Antze and Lambek 1996; Bryant 2010; Kwon 2008; Lambek 2002). Indeed, the book's underlying concern is with the social and cultural dimensions, negotiations, and accommodations of dramatic and violent societal ruptures and the role that religion (Islam in this case) plays in navigating and mediating these. In my attempt at finding a way to elucidate how the brutal and enduring effects of violent events are folded into the milieu of a vast array of social relations and sensibilities, I turned my gaze to the ordinary and the everyday (Das 2007; Lambek 2010). But, as the responses here suggest, this analytical move deserves further clarification.

In recent years, 'the everyday' has emerged as a complementary (if not a counter-) perspective to the focus on piety and self-cultivation in the anthropological studies of Islam and Muslim lives (see Fadil and Fernando 2015; Iqbal, this section). In hindsight, I realized that the subtitle of the book, "Everyday Islam in Postwar Bosnia and Herzegovina," could be misleadingly confining the book to these debates. This was not my intention. While I give a nod to these debates, my concern lies elsewhere. But the question about putting so much analytical weight on the notion of the everyday remains. Isn't there a danger, as Joel Robbins suggests in his commentary, that the everyday could become "some kind of drag on ethnographic and analytic precision"?

The suspicion of the ordinary and the everyday, Veena Das (2007: 6–7) writes, seems "to be rooted in the fact that relationships require a repeated attention to the most ordinary of objects and events, but our theoretical impulse is often to think of agency in terms of escaping the ordinary rather than as a descent into it." As the second part of the book's subtitle indicates, my main focus is on the role of religion in mediating the enduring aftermath of violence in "the hard to name period after 'the postwar'" (Nelson 2015: 40). In the aftermath of critical events, such as war exacerbated by the brutal effects of neoliberal restructuring, as has been the case in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the everyday takes on the central preoccupation for those who have to live through such vicissitudinous times. My book traces these concerns. *Remaking* a sense of normalcy and the ordinary in the midst of ongoing upheavals becomes something rather extraordinary and an object of desire, a horizon of aspiration, and a temporal orientation—be it having a regular job, repairing or building a house, the ability to feed one's family, or watering fruit trees that were planted by one's ancestors. Indeed, as I discuss in the book, these acts and spaces such as gardens, houses, village paths, cemeteries, and neighborhoods are important sites for remaking life-worlds in the aftermath of violence, but also for what I call *vital exchanges* with God. Through the notion of 'vital exchanges', the book explores how living a Muslim life in Bosnia and Herzegovina is ordered by deep relations of obligation and care among the living, the dead, and the divine that are generations deep. These relations are governed by beliefs about exchange and reciprocity: "Villagers' conceptions of what it means to be Muslim and live a Muslim life are ultimately oriented toward the quest for salvation in the afterlife ... a pursuit that influences their actions in the world here and now" (p. 13). My 'modest' focus on 'the everyday' is thus concerned with the ways in which, in the aftermath of critical events, the human condition is being remade from fragile and intimate threads of actions, sentiments, and materials and in a vast array of relationships between the living, the dead, and God.

As developed in the book, the concept of vital exchange refers to my interlocutors' moral horizon of action and to the means by which they bring a perpetual flow of divine grace, abundance, and prosperity into their lives. Vital exchange can take place in the most ordinary as well as extraordinary moments and situations. Divine grace, as Barraud et al. (1994: 20) astutely point out, is "a gratuitous gift, bestowed inexplicably, not as a reward for exemplary acts of piety." I found this analytical perspective refreshing and generative for it opens new ethnographic avenues in the study of Islam and Muslim lives, while not forcing me to take a side in the everyday-piety debates. Instead, the focus on an ethnography of vital exchanges of divine grace moved my argument 'beyond the human horizon', as Amira Mittermaier (2021) puts it, and closer toward bringing God back to the anthropology of Islam (ibid.). Mittermaier is correct that this shift in focus poses challenges for both ethnographic research and writing strategies. Vital exchange is an analytical heuristic for such an anthropological endeavor.

Coming full circle, I want to reflect on the matter of ethics and how it is interwoven into the everyday. I introduced vital exchange as a moral horizon of action whereby Bosnian Muslims bring a perpetual flow of divine grace into their day-to-day lives. Viewed in this way, everyday life is where values are generated and religious experience is articulated. This historically unfolding, interactional relationship with God—as mediated through human actions and the cultivation of interpersonal relations and exchanges with fellow humans, and by caring for the souls of the dead—is deeply ethical (Lambek 2015). For my interlocutors, human activities and commitments in the world here and now are literally *vital* for whatever pathway to salvation may be forged. As I argue in the book, the focus on vital exchange as a moral horizon of action goes beyond reductive ethno-national identitarian arguments. It shows that the ethics of living a Muslim life in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina is defined by the fundamental ethical question of *how to live*, rather than simply the identitarian question of *who I am*. Pathways oriented toward the afterlife are multiple and uncertain, but they are all generated by human activities, which ultimately determine my interlocutors' relationship with God over time. Basit Iqbal's point about the incommensurability of God in the flow of vital exchanges is correct and helpful. It allows me to see a different kind of incommensurability at play—that of the grand identitarian concerns and the modest ethical acts, respectively, with which I started this response and conversation. Once again, I wish to thank my four fellow interlocutors for their generous and inspiring readings of my book and for the gift of a good and ongoing conversation.

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