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## Victimhood, Forgiveness and Reconciliation: in Stories of Bosnian War Survivors

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**Title:** Victimhood, Forgiveness and Reconciliation: in Stories of Bosnian War Survivors

**Abstract**

In this analysis of the retold experiences of 27 survivors of the war in northwestern Bosnia, the aim is to describe the informants' portrayal of "victimhood", "forgiveness" and "reconciliation" as a social phenomenon as well as analyzing the discursive patterns that contribute to constructing the category "victim" and "perpetrator". When, after the war, different categories claim a "victim" status, it sparks a competition for victimhood. All informants are eager to present themselves as victims while at the same time the other categories' victim status are downplayed. In this reproduction of competition for the victim role, all demarcations that were played out so successfully during the war live on. The stories of forgiveness and reconciliation are connected to the past; the interactive consequences of war-time violence are intimately linked to the narrator's war experiences. The interviewees distance themselves from some individuals or described situations. It is common that the portrayal of possible forgiveness and reconciliation is transformed into a depicted implacable attitude, thus the interviewees negotiate their stances: they articulate between reconciliation and implacability statements. In these stories, "the others" are presented as external actors in the context. Throughout their narrations, some individuals can make a confession or exert a certain self-esteem; others can take the chance to explain for themselves and the audience, to express regret over their actions and possibly restore their social status. Without this type of processing, war victims risk living an existence without confession, and the war perpetrators risk becoming permanently bound to their acts – clearly an unstable future foundation for a post-war society.

**Keywords:** war, victimhood, crime, forgiveness, victim, perpetrator, reconciliation

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**Biography**

Goran Basic is a postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Sociology, Lund University. His research concerns fieldwork in Bosnia and Herzegovina, he has written articles on the postwar society and carried out an evaluation of a project in the juvenile care. Basic's dissertation "When collaboration becomes a struggle. A sociological analysis of a project in the Swedish juvenile care" is based on ethnographic material. Basic is currently collecting empirical material for analyzing the collaboration between border police and coastguard in the countries of Baltic region.

## INTRODUCTION

The starting point of this article is the war that took place in northwestern Bosnia and Herzegovina and more specifically interpersonal interpretations of violence and the biographical impact of war-time violence. Serbian soldiers and police targeted their use of violent force directly against the civilian populations in northwestern Bosnia. In their quest to expel Bosniacs<sup>1</sup> and Croats from this area, Serbian soldiers and police used mass executions, forced flight, systematic rape, and concentration camps (Case No.: IT-95-8-S; Case No.: IT-97-24-T.; Case No.: IT-98-30/1-A; Case No.: IT-99-36-T; Case No.: IT-09-92-PT; Case No.: IT-95-5/18-PT).

Previous research on victimhood during the Bosnian war often has presented a one-sided picture of the “victim” and “perpetrator”. The picture of victims is often exemplified by killed or raped and displaced adults and children. The picture of perpetrators is exemplified by soldiers or policemen who have displaced, raped, and killed civilians. Some research on the post-war society in Bosnia, however, presents a more diverse picture of the “victim” and “perpetrator”. Victims are partly exemplified by individuals killed in the war and partly by individuals who survived the war but lost relatives or were displaced or raped during the war. The picture of the perpetrator is exemplified partly by former soldiers and policemen who had killed and raped as well as participated in the displacement, and partly by economic perpetrators who became rich during the war (Basic 2015, submitted 1, 2, 3, 4; Bougarel, Helms and Duijzings 2007; Delpla 2007; Helms 2007; Houge 2008; Maček 2009; Mannergren Selimovic 2010; Skjelsbæk 2007; Stefansson 2007; Steflja 2010; Stover and Shigekane 2004; Stover and Weinstein 2004). These two concepts of “victim” and “perpetrator” are objects of a general post-war discussion on a symbolic level. This social phenomenon becomes clear during trials at tribunals (Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2015; ICTY 2015a,b) where war crimes are dealt with or in other general inter-human and inter-institutional interaction, but as my research shows, the correlative discussion also appears in research interviews.

The Bosnian war can be seen as a particularly illustrative case of war sociology, based on the ethnic mix of the population prior to the war. War antagonists often knew each other from before the war. Post-war Bosnians do not portray their victimhood only in relation to the war as a whole but also in relation to the specific actions of themselves and others during and after the war (Basic 2015, submitted 1, 2, 3, 4). The article analyzes verbally depicted experiences of 27 survivors from the war in northwestern Bosnia and Herzegovina. One aim of the article is to describe how the actors portray the social phenomenon of “victimhood”, “forgiveness” and “reconciliation”, and the second is to analyze discursive patterns that interplay in the creation of the terms “victim” and “perpetrator”. My research question is, How do the interviewees describe victimhood, forgiveness and reconciliation after the war? With this study, I try to access the phenomena of victimhood, forgiveness and reconciliation by analyzing the interviewees’ stories, namely their own descriptions in relation to themselves and others (Riessman 1993; 2008).

In the following, I attempt to illustrate how victimization, forgiveness and reconciliation markers and the creation of the terms “victim” and “perpetrator” are exposed when interviewees talk about (a) war victimhood, (b) post-war victimhood, and (c) forgiveness and reconciliation.

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<sup>1</sup> Bosnian Muslims began to identify themselves as Bosniacs during the war. The term ‘Bosniac’ is actually an old word meaning ‘Bosnian,’ which is now used both in an official context and everyday language. Both “Bosniac” and “Muslim” are used in everyday speech.

## **VICTIMHOOD, FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION**

This article joins the narrative traditions within sociology that consider oral descriptions as both discursive and experience based (Riessman 1993, 2008). An interactionally inspired perspective on human interaction, through symbols and an ethno-methodological perspective on how people present their social reality (Blumer, 1986[1969]; Garfinkel, 1984[1967]), is a general starting point. As Gubrium and Holstein (1997) point out, ethno-methodology does not want to explain what a social world is but rather how it is created. The interviewees' stories as well as the analysis of them could, in light of this perspective, be seen as activities that create meaning (Blumer 1986[1969]; Garfinkel 1984[1967]). Narratives are interpretative because they attempt to explain the world, but they also need to be interpreted. This research joins those narrative traditions within sociology where spoken stories are considered as being based on experiences as well as being discursive (Riessman 1993, 2008). In this way, different social phenomena, such as conflict, competition, victimhood, forgiveness and reconciliation are created and re-created. In addition, I perceive the concept of "conflict", "competition", "victimhood", "forgiveness" and "reconciliation" as an especially relevant component in those specific stories that I analyzed.

Simmel (1955[1908]) understands social interaction as an interpersonal interaction – an interplay that can assume and display a variety of social forms. Conflict and competition, for example, are specific forms of interaction. Such forms of interaction often emerge in the post-war relations between the individuals and groups. Simmel (1955[1908]) argues that, in contrast to perfunctory understanding that implies that conflict disrupts the relations between parties, conflicts should rather be seen as an expression of the actors' powerful involvement in a situation, and conflicts fulfill an integrative function between involved parties.

Simmel (1955[1908]:61-108) argues that conflicts and competition may keep fighting parties concentrated on a point of interest. He argues that points of interest enable struggle between fighting actors. Simmel believes that focus on mutual points enables antagonism in the same way that absence of focus or the lack of conflict objects dampens tensions. Collins (2004:34, 79-109, 150-151, 183-222) offers similar thoughts, arguing that social life is shaped through a series of rituals in which individuals are interlinked when a common point of interest awakens their attention. When people move between different situations, earlier situations merge with the new ones. In consecutive interactions, involved individuals show respect and appreciation on behalf of objects seen as especially important.

When writing about conflicts, competition, and conflict points of interest in the following analysis, I am addressing the *verbal struggle* that occurs in analyzed sequences of the empirical material (Gubrium and Holstein 1997). From these sequences, different images of "victims" and "perpetrators" emerge.

This article contributes to a rich literature on war/genocide and victimhood. Some of this literature also addresses the "competition of victims." For example Bartov (2000), Moeller (1996), Olick (2005) and Olick and Demetriou (2006) discuss German claims to victimhood after the Second World War, claims that were often made by comparison to Jews. Furthermore, Holstein and Miller (1990) talk specifically about "victim contests". They argue that notions of victimhood reflect morality and claims about right/wrong, insiders/outsideers, etc.

Christie's (1972) study on concentration camp guards during World War II in Norway is imbued with a certain war interaction that includes the maintenance of normality in various relations, partly between those guards working for the Germans, killing and torturing in the Norwegian camps, and partly between Yugoslav war prisoners who had been placed in Norwegian concentration camps and the Norwegian general public after the war (Christie 1986). This relationship seems to be characterized by closeness and distance between actors where collective expectations of what is culturally desirable are defined (societal norms). Some guards portray the detainees as dirty and dangerous perpetrators – a threat against wartime's existing order. The general consciousness, after the war, portrays the guards as mad and evil perpetrators because in Norway, after the war, there was a need for a dehumanized picture of the enemy, a real and distant perpetrator. The result from Christie's study shows that the guards killing and torturing in the camps were ordinary Norwegians, and his point is that other Norwegians in wartime Norway would have done the same as those guards if they were the same age, had the same educational background, and had found themselves in the same situation (compare with Browning 1992).

Christie's (1972, 1986) studies show a connection between societal norms and the "victim" and "perpetrator" statuses. Collective expectations of that which is culturally desirable are sometimes informal and unspoken and thus difficult for an outsider to understand. These norms often become clear when someone violates them and the environment reacts. Through this reaction, an image of the "ideal victim" is created. With the term "ideal victim", Christie (1986) wants to describe that individual or individuals who, when subjects of crime, most easily will obtain the legitimate status of a victim: The individual should be "weak" and have a respectable purpose or honorable intentions when the attack occurs, and it should not be possible to blame the individual for being there. Furthermore, the ideal victim needs to have some influence to claim victim status. Ideal victims need and "create" ideal perpetrators. The perpetrator is expected to be large, mean, inhuman, and evil and without relation to the victim. The ideal perpetrator is a distant creature. He or she is a stranger who is not regarded as totally human (Christie 1986).

The "victim" category is not an objective category; it is in fact created during interaction between individuals, in the definition of the specific social situation. It could be seen as an abstraction or a social type (Bartov, 2000; Brewer and Hayes 2011, 2013; Christie 1986; Confino, 2005; Holstein and Miller 1990; Kidron, 2012, 2004; Maier, 1993; Moeller, 1996; Olick, 2005; Olick and Demetriou, 2006; Åkerström 2001). According to Holstein and Miller 1990 and Åkerström (2001), victimhood could also be seen as a product of moral creativity. It should not be possible to question the moral responsibility of an ideal victim. Brewer and Hayes (2011, 2013) argue that the portrayal of an ideal victim often has real consequences – that it does not exist only as a mental construction. For a specific category to achieve victim status, there must be some common interest that acts on behalf of the victims; in other words, there must be someone who has an interest in ensuring that the category achieves victim status. These activities sometimes take place on an institutional level and could be transferred to an individual level, as a conversation topic, for instance (Bartov, 2000; Brewer and Hayes 2011, 2013; Christie 1986; Confino, 2005; Holstein and Miller 1990; Kidron, 2012, 2004; Maier, 1993; Moeller, 1996; Olick, 2005; Olick and Demetriou, 2006; Åkerström 2001).

Simmel (1908[1955], 118) argues that peacefulness is a way to avoid struggle from the beginning and that reconciliation emerges only after the struggle has been carried out and finished. Forgiveness is the key element for reconciliation, and Simmel describes it as an exchange of emotions between people. He is saying that when reconciliation takes place, the feeling of hostility and conflict gives way to a feeling of peacefulness and consensus. Simmel (1908[1955], 121-22) sees both reconciliation and implacability as types of emotions that need external conditions to be actualized:

“... if one cannot forget, one cannot forgive and not fully reconcile oneself. If this were true, it would mean the most horrible irreconcilability /.../ image and after-effect of the conflict and of everything for which one had to reproach the other continue in consciousness and cannot be forgotten.”

Simmel continues arguing that those who cannot forget certain events are unable to forgive; in other words, they cannot reconcile fully. This situation is something that he interprets as “the most horrible irreconcilability” because every reason for reconciliation has disappeared from that person’s consciousness.

Forgiveness is possible only where there is someone who can be assumed or alleged guilty; in the words of Paul Ricœur (2004[2000], 460): “There can, in fact, be forgiveness only where we can accuse someone of something, presume him to be or declare him guilty.” Ricœur (2004[2000], 466) also draws attention to the question of unforgivable crimes. By ‘unforgivable crimes’, he primarily means crimes that are characterized by the victims’ great suffering; secondly, crimes that can be tied to named perpetrators; and thirdly, when there is a personal connection between victim and perpetrator.

Based on Simmel’s and Ricœur’s views on forgiveness, we can ask the following question: Can every crime be forgiven? Jacques Derrida (2004, 34-40, 56-7) reasons as Ricœur (2004[2000], 468), who writes: “Forgiveness is directed to the unforgivable or it does not exist. It is unconditional, it is without exception and without restriction.” Here a relationship between punishment and forgiveness is being raised. According to Ricœur (2004[2000], 470), when committing a crime, a perpetrator may be punished through a symbolic and actual marking of the injustice committed at the expense of somebody else – the victim (for instance, through law enforcement). Punishment creates a marginal space for forgiveness, because of unconditionality among other things, which is seen as an important condition according to Ricœur (2004[2000], 478). Derrida (2004, 45) also believes that unconditional forgiveness is virtually impossible:

“... pure and unconditional forgiveness, in order to have its own meaning, must have no ‘meaning’, no finality, even no intelligibility. It is a madness of the impossible. It would be necessary to follow, without letting up, the consequence of this paradox, or this aporia.”

Two questions are especially interesting in this context: (1) Should a victim forgive someone who does not admit his crime, and (2) Does the right to forgive belong only to the victim, or even to someone else without a direct connection to the atrocity (an institution, for example)?

Ricœur (2004[2000], 478-79) states normatively that the victim should forgive, trying to be considerate to the guilty party’s pride, and expect a latter recognition from him. Derrida (2004, 44)

writes the following apropos a woman whose husband was murdered: “If anyone has the right to forgive, it is only the victim, and not a tertiary institution.” It seems that reconciliation also has an institutional side. Occasionally, we see politicians and leaders of religious communities step forward to apologize for actions that they personally did not commit. The question is, Do these individuals have the right to apologize and, in that case, who has the right to forgive? Should a representative of another institution forgive or should it be the victim as the affected individual? Ricœur (2005[2000], 580-93) argues that true forgiveness should not be institutionalized. He believes that it is only the subjected victim who can forgive.

We see from Ricœur’s and Derrida’s writings that reconciliation ideologies are often generally and indistinctly formulated. They usually consist of two levels – the institutional and the individual. The institutional is often based on the current government’s or regime’s efforts, with economic and administrative circumstances playing a prominent role (for instance, tribunals and truth commissions). The individual level (or interpersonal level) concerns how victim and perpetrator, through inevitable interaction, discard their former roles – how the perpetrator asks for forgiveness and the victim struggles to forgive. Here there is often no institutional base, and individuals are highly dependent on their own ability to forgive past events and reconcile.

The competition over the victim role, forgiveness and reconciliation is a comprehensive and tension-filled theme in my analysis. The viewpoints of the above-mentioned theorists seem useful in serving my goal of understanding the interviewees’ stories about victimhood, both as an analytical starting point and as a subject for nuance.

## **FILD WORK AND QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS**

This study joins those narrative traditions within sociology where verbal stories are regarded as both discursive and based on experience (Riessman 1993, 2008). The general starting point of this study is based on interaction but is also inspired by how people portray their social reality (Blumer 1969/1986; Garfinkel 1967/1984). Stories are interpretative because they are used to try to explain the situation, but in turn, they need to be analyzed (Riessman 1993, 2008). Ethnomethodology does not explain what a social phenomenon is but how it is created (Garfinkel 1967/1984). From this perspective, one can regard both the interviewees’ stories and the analysis of them as meaning-making activities (Blumer 1969/1986; Garfinkel 1967/1984; Riessman 1993, 2008). In this study, narratives are analyzed as a separate piece of reality; I assume that the narrator is creating a reality within his story. During the analysis I ask: How is the actor creating his description? What is the actor doing with his story? For what purpose does the actor do precisely this?

The material for this study was collected through qualitatively oriented interviews with 27 survivors from the war in northwestern Bosnia and Herzegovina. I interviewed Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks – former camp prisoners, expelled from northwestern Bosnia during the war, perpetrators of violence and passive onlookers – about war violence, the role of victim, forgiveness and reconciliation after the war. The material was gathered during two phases. During phase one, March and November 2004, I carried out field work in Ljubija<sup>2</sup>, a community in northwestern Bosnia.

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<sup>2</sup> Ljubija is a part of the Prijedor municipality. Before the war, the residents of Ljubija lived in two administrative areas (Mjesne zajednice). Upper Ljubija was ethnically diverse, and the residents lived in flats for the most part. Lower

Just over ten years after I came to Sweden as a refugee from the northwestern Bosnia and Herzegovina (region of Ljubija and Prijedor), I travelled back, as a researcher in sociology. I wanted to try and carry out a non-judgemental study and interview survivors after war about war violence, the role of victim, forgiveness and reconciliation. Ljubija and Prijedor now administratively belong in the administrative entity Republika Srpska. Close by was the notorious Omarska, Keraterm, and Manjača<sup>3</sup> concentration camps, where several thousand Bosniak and Croat civilians were held during the Bosnian War. Hundreds died of starvation or were beaten to death. Mass graves are still being exhumed in the vicinity of the camp; one in Tomašica is suspected to hold up to 1000 missing persons (Case No.: IT-99-36-T; Case No.: IT-97-24-T; Case No.: IT-98-30/1-A; Case No.: IT-95-8-S).

In Ljubija, I interviewed 14 people who were living there at that time and performed observations at coffee shops, bus stops, and the local marketplace and on buses. I also collected and analyzed current local newspapers being sold in Ljubija during my stay. I interviewed two women and five men who had spent the entire war in Ljubija, together with three women and four men who had been expelled from the town during the war but had returned afterwards. Six of these fourteen interviewees were Serbian, three were Croats, and five were Bosniacs.

During the second phase, April through June 2006, nine former concentration camp detainees were interviewed. They were placed in the concentration camps Omarska, Keraterm, and Manjača by Serbian soldiers and police even though they were civilians during the war. These individuals who were interviewed, together with four relatives, all now live in Scandinavian countries, Sweden, Denmark, and Norway. Three women and ten men were interviewed. The majority of the interviewees come from the municipality of Prijedor (to which Ljubija belongs). Ten interviewees are Bosniacs and three are Croats. Parts of the material collected in 2004 and 2006 have been analyzed in other reports and articles. These analyses are based on the above-described material and with partly different research questions (Basic 2015, submitted 1, 2, 3, 4, 2007, 2005).

I personally experienced the beginning of the war as a member of one of those groups of people expelled from that area. Ljubija and Prijedor is a small communities. I personally know most of the interviewees from before the war, those interviewed during the field work in Ljubija, and those individuals mentioned by the interviewees in Ljubija. I am also familiar with some of the described situations that took place during and after the war in Ljubija and Prijedor. Thus, the fictitious names

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Ljubija was predominately inhabited by Bosniacs, and they mostly lived in single-family houses. The Ljubia region is known for its mineral wealth. There was plenty of iron ore, quartz, black coal, and clay for burning bricks as well as mineral-rich water. Most residents worked at the iron mine before the war. The war began in Ljubija in the beginning of the summer of 1992 when Serbian soldiers and police took over control of the local administrative government without armed resistance (Case No.: IT-97-24-T; Case No.: IT-99-36-T).

<sup>3</sup> Omarska is a village that belongs to the municipality of Prijedor in northwestern Bosnia. The population of Omarska is predominantly of Serbian origin, and the camp was located in the management buildings of the Ljubija Ironmine. Before the war, Keraterm was a brick-burning factory in Prijedor. Manjača is a mountain massif in the northwestern part of Bosnia, and prior to the war, the Yugoslav People's Army had several training facilities in different locations within the massif. When the war in Croatia began, some of the army compounds became concentration camps for captured Croatian soldiers and civilians. This continued when the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina began; Manjača was used as a concentration camp for civilian Bosnians and Croats (Case No.: IT-99-36-T; Case No.: IT-97-24-T; Case No.: IT-98-30/1-A; Case No.: IT-95-8-S).



that appear in the analysis (for example, Sanel, Radovan, Milanko, Dragan, Sveto, Milorad, Klan, Planić Mirzet, Savo Knezevic, Alma and Senada Husic, Bela, Laki, and Laic) are real people who are not unknown to me. This association, of course, affected the execution of the study. I was, on one hand, aware of the possible danger that my acquaintance with some informants and my knowledge about certain war events could affect the scientific nature of the text – and I worked intensely and continuously to be value-free in the analysis. On the other hand, my own experiences, from the war in Bosnia helped me more easily recognize, understand, and analyze social phenomena such as victimhood, forgiveness and reconciliation. The analytical work has continuously been presented at seminars and at national and international conferences<sup>4</sup>.

The interviews analyzed in this study have a strong emotional charge. They concern painful stories about neighbors who changed their behavior when the war began: One day, a neighbor is a civilian greeting you just as friendly as ever, and a week later, the same neighbor is in uniform; he still greets, but he also participates in massacres, rapes, robberies, and abduction of neighbors to place them in concentration camps. The narratives also tell us how the camps were organized and governed; they describe “pockets of resistance” and survival tactics, and they speak of rituals confirming the guards’ oppression and the inmates’ submission (Basic submitted 1, 2007). I also researched more specifically the competition for the victim role and phenomenon “Ideal victim” after the war as well as reconciliation and implacability of social life in the post-war society of present-day Bosnia, namely how people, in their everyday lives, try to cope with the fact that some events can never be forgiven, or at least leave very few opportunities for reconciliation (Basic 2015, submitted 2, 3, 4, 2007, 2005). The narratives contain several intersection points among war, violence, crime, ethnicity, nationalism, “total institutions” (extreme institutions that control the detainee’s whole existence), and power.

To understand the dynamics concerning the upholding of the victim and perpetrator, this study analyzes a limited context in northwestern Bosnia, more specifically the area around Ljubija and Prijedor. I seek to place my discussion in relation to other studies on Bosnia and the region so that the reader can understand the extremely polarized environment that exists partly because of collectively targeted crime during the war (including concentration camps, systematic rape, mass executions, etc.), and partly because of the competition for victimhood after the war.

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<sup>4</sup> The study’s analytical work has been presented at the following national and international conferences: (1) “International Conference on Community Empowerment, Coping, Resilience and Hope,” Brisbane Institute of Strengths Based Practice, Hyderabad, India; (2) “Victims’ protection: International law, national legislations and practice,” Victimology Society of Serbia, Beograd, Serbia; (3) “Criminal Justice and Security in Central and Eastern Europe, The Tenth Biennial International Conference, Understanding Professionalism, Trust, and Legitimacy,” University of Maribor, Ljubljana, Slovenia; (4) “The Balkans in the New Millennium: From Balkanization to EUtopia” (Keynote Speaker), Tetovo University (SEE) and Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, Tetovo and Skopje, Republic of Macedonia; (5) “Sigurnost urbanih sredina,” Sarajevo universitet, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina; (6) “Ett inkluderande samhälle? En inkluderande sociologi?,” Göteborgs universitet och Sveriges Sociologförbund, Göteborg, Sverige; (7) “Annual Conference of Urban Research and Development Society – Democracy, Citizenship and Urban Violence” (Keynote Speaker), Dhaka, Bangladesh; (8) “Annual International Conference on Forensic Science – Criminalistics Research (FSCR),” Singapore, Singapore; (9) “The 11th European Sociological Association Conference,” Turin, Italy; (10) “Place and Perspectives of Criminal Justice, Criminology and Security Studies in Contemporary Settings,” Sarajevo universitet, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Furthermore, I presented the analytical work at several seminars for the Social and Criminal Science Network, University of Lund, Sweden.

From the above, we see that informants belong to different ethnic groups, but the informants' ethnic background is not specified in the analysis that follows. I have not focused on ethnic background, hoping that this approach results instead in pointing the analytic focus towards social phenomena such as victimhood, forgiveness and reconciliation.

When preparing for the interviews, I used an interview guide designed after, among other influences, the above theoretical interests. During the interviews, I strived for a conversation-oriented style in which the interviewer takes the role of a sounding board and conversation partner rather than an interrogator; the interview is designed as a so-called "active interview" (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). The interviews lasted between one and four hours and were carried out in the Bosnian language. A voice recorder was used in all interviews, and all informants agreed to that. The interviewees were informed about the study's aim, and I pointed out that they could terminate their participation at any time.

The material was transcribed in the Bosnian language, usually the same day or the days just following the interview to ensure good documentation and to comment with details<sup>5</sup>. By commenting in the transcript, I produced a "categorization of data" (Silverman 2006[1993]). Empirical sequences presented in this study were categorized in the material as "war victim", "post-war victim", "forgiveness" and "reconciliation". My choice of empirical examples was guided by the study's purpose, i.e., to analyze how interviewees describe "victimhood", "forgiveness" and "reconciliation" as a social phenomenon as well as analyzing the discursive patterns that contribute to constructing the category "victim" and "perpetrator". Furthermore, the choice of empirical example was guided by the *analytical quality of the sequence*, i.e., to what extent the example clarified the analytical point I wanted to highlight. For this reason, some of the more eloquent informants are heard more often than others.

The material from the interviews is analyzed based on a tradition from the qualitative method (see Silverman 2006[1993] as an example). The above-mentioned theoretical interests – Simmel's view on conflict, competition, forgiveness and reconciliation, and Christie's view on victimhood – are not only applied here but also are challenged and modified with nuance.

## **STORIES OF WAR VICTIM AND PERPETRATOR**

The war made its entrance in northwestern Bosnia at the end of spring 1992 when Serb soldiers and police took over the local administration. Several villages in the Ljubija and Prijedor region (for example, Hambarine, Briševo, Kozarac and Biščani) were shelled by Serbian artillery while media spread propaganda about "Muslim and Croat war crimes against Serbs" to create panic. The residents of these villages were unarmed and sought shelter in the mountains and valleys surrounding Ljubija and Prijedor. A large number of refugees were caught by Serbian soldiers and police. Some were instantly executed in the woods, and some were transported to Ljubija and Prijedor where they first were battered in the Police headquarters and / or in the military facilities. Finally, many of them were executed in the concentration camps or at other locations in and around

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<sup>5</sup> Relevant parts of the transcribed material were translated by an interpreter (some parts I translated personally). The aid of an interpreter has been helpful to minimize loss of important nuances.

Ljubija and Prijedor (Case No.: IT-09-92-PT; Case No.: IT-95-5/18-PT; Case No.: IT-97-24-T; Case No.: IT-99-36-T).

Individuals who were executed or expelled from northwestern Bosnia during the war in the 1990s are, in legal terms, a recognized victim. They were subjects of crimes against humanity, and most were subjects of various types of violent crimes (Case No.: IT-95-8-S; Case No.: IT-97-24-T; Case No.: IT-98-30/1-A; Case No.: IT-99-36-T; Case No.: IT-09-92-PT; Case No.: IT-95-5/18-PT). Many perpetrators have been sentenced by the Hague Tribunal and the Bosnia and Herzegovina Tribunal on war crimes (Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2015; ICTY 2015a,b).

However, in order to establish guilt, agreement is first needed on who the perpetrator and the victim are. Legally, there is no doubt who were the victims in northwestern Bosnia. The Hague Tribunal has made that clear. However, the role of victim is interesting from a sociological perspective. An analysis based on Christie's (1986) view regarding the informants' stories about the expulsion from northwestern Bosnia could add nuance to the images of the "victim" and "perpetrator". Pre-war acquaintances between the antagonists could further complicate the definition of an "ideal victim". Serbian soldiers and policemen and Bosniac and Croatian civilians in northwestern Bosnia often knew each other well from before the war, which has probably affected descriptions after the war.

Here is an example of altered relations with neighbors and acquaintances in Milanko's story. Milanko was a child during the war, and he told me how he saw his neighbors being battered and executed. He stayed in northwestern Bosnia during and after the war. These are Milanko's words on the spread of excessive violence during the war:

I feel sick from it, they put on their uniforms and go out to the villages to rape and kill women. Not just Dragan but also Sveto and Milorad and a bunch of others. How do they sleep now, do they worry for their children? (...) They abducted Planic Mirzet before my eyes. Milorad and the son of Sava Knezevic were the guilty ones. It was Milorad in person who deported Alma and Senada Husic, together with many others, from Ljubija. (...) In 1992, 1993, it was Milorad, Sveto, Klan who ruled and decided, they were gods. They did as they pleased. I just don't understand why nobody arrests them now?

In Milanko's story, we see that the conflict is portrayed through personified terminology (it is "Mirzet", "Dragan", "Sveto", "Milorad", and others) and maybe because of this personification, it is done in rather accusatory terms. The perpetrators' actions are most clearly shaped through concrete drama and described in terms of "uniform", "rape and kill women", and "arrests".

In categorizing a person as a perpetrator, one also instructs others to identify the result of the acts by the perpetrator. Attributing to someone a perpetrator status implicitly points out the perpetrator's complementary contrast – the victims (Bartov, 2000; Brewer and Hayes 2011, 2013; Christie 1986; Confino, 2005; Holstein and Miller 1990; Kidron, 2012, 2004; Maier, 1993; Moeller, 1996; Olick, 2005; Olick and Demetriou, 2006; Åkerström 2001). The previous empirical example shows how "perpetrator" and "victim" are constituted at the same time: The acts of the perpetrator take evident form as concrete drama and an explicit designation.

In Milanko's description "Planic Mirzet", "Alma and Senada Husic", and "many others, from Ljubija" are portrayed as ideal victims according to Christie's conceptual apparatus. These individuals are portrayed as weak during the war, and their purpose and intent cannot be seen as dishonorable. The perpetrators "Dragan", "Sveto", "Milorad", and "a bunch of others" are depicted as big and evil. What problematizes the image of an "ideal victim" in Christie's term is that the perpetrators and victims are not strangers to one another. They know each other well from before, and there are relations between them.

Milanko also demands law enforcement action against those who clearly meet the definition of a perpetrator ("I just don't understand why nobody arrests them now?"). He seems, by emphasizing the others' victim status, to construct a distinction against the perpetrators.

Stories about the "victim" and "perpetrator" in my study produce and reproduce the image of disintegration of the social order that existed in the society before the war. Daily use of violence, during the war, is *organized* and *ritualized*, thus becoming a norm in society rather than an exception (Basic, submitted 3, 2007, 2005). The new war order normalized the existence of concentration camps in society (Case No.: IT-09-92-PT; Case No.: IT-95-5/18-PT; Case No.: IT-95-8-S; Case No.: IT-97-24-T; Case No.: IT-98-30/1-A; Case No.: IT-99-36-T).

In addition to the distinction between "victim" and "perpetrator", the descriptions also reveal a closeness between the antagonists. Nesim is a former concentration camp detainee now living in the Scandinavian countries. He was handed over to the soldiers during an attack on his village. Here is his description of the transport to the concentration camp:

Those sitting in the van started looting, they wore camouflage uniforms, Ray-Ban sunglasses, black gloves, we were shocked, the impossible had become possible. (...) When I saw how they beat those men which they picked up, and when I saw who guarded them by the railway, they were my workmates, this made the shock even bigger. One of them had worked with me for 14 years, and we had gone through good and bad times together, we shared everything with each other (...) I just froze.

Nesim places himself in a clear victim role, and he portrays the soldiers and policemen who expelled him and his neighbors as dangerous. Descriptions of objects such as "camouflage uniforms", "Ray-Ban sunglasses" and "black gloves" are used in an effort to depict the soldiers' actions as threatening. Nesim also uses dramaturgy when he talks about the shock he experienced ("the impossible had become possible"). When Nesim accentuates his victim role, he upholds and enhances the image of the perpetrators using dramaturgy and charged conflict points of interest.

Several interviewees who were displaced from northwestern Bosnia said that they saw their friends, neighbors, or workmates while they were being exiled. Continuing with Nesim's description of the situation when "old friends" came and battered two detainees in the concentration camp:

Nesim: One was frightened, everyone knew Crni, he was a maniac. I knew Crni from before when he worked as a waiter at the station and was normal. Now everyone was mad. I knew most of them, and it was hard finding a place to hide.

That which Nesim emphasizes in his story is fear, assault, and death in the camps. The reason for the difficulty in clearly defining “the ideal victim”, according to Christie’s (1986) perspective, is to be seen in Nesim’s depiction. My interviewees claim that those who suffered in the camps knew their tormentors. This familiarity can complicate a clear definition of the ideal victim according to Christie. Even Nesim’s portrayal of the perpetrators may give them some kind of victim role when they are described as mad (“he worked as a waiter at the station and was normal. Now everyone was mad”). Furthermore, what Nesim perceives as war crime others may perceive as deeds of heroism. Reality can be multifaceted, especially in a wartime situation, where something that is perceived as a righteous deed by one side could be seen as a hideous crime by the other. This is probably most clear in reports from the Hague Tribunal and the Bosnia and Herzegovina tribunal on war crime (Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2015; ICTY, 2015a,b). A large majority of those indicted by the Tribunal begin their statement with the words “nisam kriv” (“not guilty”).

Interviewees dramatizes the described situation, aiming at presenting the perpetrators’ actions as morally despicable and the victims position as a typical example of submission and weakness. The perpetrators are portrays as a coherent violence-exercising group. Interviewees story on war victim highlights the decay of social control which, according to their view, occurred at the beginning of the war. Such a display of violence could not be seen in northwestern Bosnia before the war. The social control of the pre-war society could not have accepted a situation in which a group of individuals is beaten, raped and / or killed in concentration camp. Nesim explains:

Behind your back, Goran (Nesim addressing the interviewer by name), just one meter behind you, they slaughtered and flayed people. There was screaming and commotion. It happened beneath the feet of those lying in the last row, I think I was lying in the fourth. I don’t know if you’ve ever heard a man’s shriek of agony, torment, and pain while being tortured. It is totally different from the cries you hear when someone is in emotional distress. I feel chills to this day when I hear someone crying. People were crying because of the torment, they begged to be killed to escape the pain. This makes your blood freeze.

Stories about war victims serve to support my argument that war violence in this war was more personalized/individualized—in many cases these are neighbors committing these crimes against people they know or “who are” (People) in their social networks. In many cases violence was of an individualized and personalized nature (people knew each other, (they) were neighbors) with this characterization of the perpetrators as sadistic, powerful and distant monsters.

Interviewees depicts the perpetrators as big, strong, evil, and non-human. The suffering created by the perpetrators is making them distant actors and a threat. The portrayal of the perpetrators produces and re-produces the picture of those submitted to this violence as weak and inferior. By categorizing the perpetrators as such, interviewees also instructs others to identify the results of the perpetrators’ actions. By pointing out the perpetrators’ position, interviewees implicitly points out the perpetrators’ complementary contrast— the victim. Note how perpetrator and victim, in the previous empirical example, are constituted simultaneously. The perpetrators’ actions are clearly shaped through a concrete dramatization and an explicit designation.

Implicitly, interviewees creates the correct morality when they rejects the actions of the perpetrators. In other words, interviewees rejection, which reveals itself during the conversation, contains a moral

meaning. What interviewees tell us could be seen as a verbal reaction to his unfulfilled expectations. These expectations—for example, helping a human in distress—are morally correct actions, which from interviewees' perspective are absent in the war situation they retell. Interviewees implicitly construct the morally correct action regarding the violent situation in contrast to that which they told us.

### **STORIES OF POST-WAR VICTIM AND PERPETRATOR**

In this study all interviewed paint themselves as a victim, even those who are perpetrators in a legal sense. One of the reasons is that they are much worse off economically than those who were forced to flee to other European countries. Their view is that they have been made a scapegoat for the actions of others and that they are now used as cheap labour by those who have returned and who are better off.

Examining interviews, observations, and articles in newspapers, I found that developments during and after the war in northwestern Bosnia led to individuals' being categorized in four ways. The "remainders" consist of individuals who lived in northwestern Bosnia prior to, during, and after the war. Dragan, Milanko, Sveto, Milorad, Klan, and Crni belong to this group. Then we have the "returnees", comprising those individuals who were expelled from northwestern Bosnia during the war and now have returned to their pre-war addresses (returnees). Individuals mentioned here who are in this group are Bela and Laki. The "refugees" are individuals who came as refugees to northwestern Bosnia from other parts of Bosnia and Croatia and now have settled in the new area (i.e., like Ljubo, who appears later on). Finally, we have the "diaspora", the individuals who were expelled from northwestern Bosnia during the war and stayed in their new countries. The "diaspora" is represented by Planic Mirzet and Nesim, who both live in Sweden, together with Alma and Senada Husic, who both live in the USA. Individuals belonging to the "diaspora" usually spend their vacations in Bosnia.

The individuals who appear in the material seem to be relatively melded together, and interaction between them exists. Members of the different groups talk to each other when they meet in the streets or cafés in Ljubija (field notes). Analyzed newspapers also exhibit an image that could be seen as a common denominator for all four categories – all are constructed as an antipode to former politicians who are portrayed as corrupt and criminal.

In the interview narratives, however, there are clear distinctions; categorizations are made on the basis of being victims of the war. Conflict competition produces jealousy. For example, the "remainders" and "refugees" see the "returnees" and "diaspora" in a negative way. On the one hand, "returnees" and "diaspora" have a better economic situation than the "remainders" and "refugees", which has created jealousy. On the other hand, the "refugees" do not want to assimilate and have in time become the majority in northwestern Bosnia, which in turn has forced the "remainders" to follow their norms and values.

When people began returning to northwestern Bosnia, relationships changed between the involved parties. The area was flooded with "refugees" who arrived during the war. They lived in the houses and flats of "returnees" and sabotaged their return. On one side, we have new perpetrators ("refugees") who, during the return, were assigned the role of distant threatening actors as strangers

in the community (Bartov 2000; Christie 1972, 1986; Holstein and Miller 1990; Simmel 1964[1950]:402-408; Moeller 1996; Olick 2005; Olick and Demetriou 2006). On the other side, we have victims who received help and recognition from the surrounding allies and the local police, which made the *ideal* in the very concept disappear. Members of the returnees and diaspora were no longer “weak”.

Christie (1986) argues that the ideal victim role requires an ideal perpetrator who is expected to be big, evil, and a stranger. During the war in northwestern Bosnia, the “returnees” and the “diaspora” confronted the “perpetrators”, as mentioned in the previous section, who appeared big, evil, and inhuman. However, they were obstructed from being *ideal* perpetrators because they were not unknown to their victims. They were neighbors, living in the same town, being workmates, which meant that there was a relationship between victim and perpetrators.

Markers of victimhood and the construction of the terms “victim” and “perpetrator” appear in the analysis of stories about returning after the war and refugees’ arriving during the war. The following quotations give us an example of returnee stories in which a wartime perpetrator appears. Bela and Laki describe their first visit to the community from which they were expelled during the war:

Bela: Ranka and Anka (both friends of the interviewee) became pale-white, I asked them what was wrong, and they answered, here comes Laic. He had raped them lots of times during the war. I asked him what he wanted, and he answered that he had come to pay a visit to his neighbors. I told the police, and they chased him away. Go to hell you fucking pig, whom did you come to visit? (Bela talks angrily and shows how she “aimed” at Laic.)

Laki: Personally, I was not afraid. I was not a pig like they (war-time perpetrators), not even during the war, they should be afraid and ashamed. They killed innocent people, women, and children, I did not.

In these interviews, Bela and Laki portray themselves as both wartime and post-war victims. They separate the “returnees” from the “remainders”. Conflict points of interest appearing in the description are “raped them lots of times”, “you fucking pig”, and “they killed innocent people, women, and children”. Bela and Laki point out that it was the “remainders” who raped women and killed, and abused during the war. Following Christie’s (1986) analysis of ideal victims, there is a reason the “returnees” are portrayed as victims. They described themselves as weak during the war and in some way even now when returning. They came to visit their home town from which they were expelled during the war and where they, using Christie’s words, had a respectable errand when the expulsion took place (during the war). No one can criticize them for having been in northwestern Bosnia in 1992 or for being there after the war.

The development of events in other parts of Bosnia and Croatia flooded northwestern Bosnia with “refugees”. These individuals could be seen as victims – the refugee status is often charged with victimhood. “Refugees” occupied the houses and flats of “returnees” and, according to informants belonging to the “remainders”, “returnees”, and “diaspora”, they actively sabotaged their efforts to return. These new perpetrators (“refugees”) were, after the war, given the role of distant actors, strangers in the society (Simmel 1964[1950]:402-408) as well as being viewed as dangerous and

threatening perpetrators (Christie 1972; Christie 1986). Laki describes the refugees' resistance to return, and Milorad and Sveto describe the decay in society that came with the "refugees":

Laki: On St. Peter's Day, they (refugees) gathered round the church, and the drunkards' stories were all the same: Let's go to the mountains and beat up the Turks (demeaning word for Bosniacs). They came and then there was trouble.

Milorad: At my first contact with them (refugees), I thought they cannot be normal but after spending every day, for five years, with them, they become normal to you. (...) You can see for yourself what Ljubija is like nowadays. It is wonderful for someone who has lived in the mountains without running water, electricity, and water closets. For someone like that, asphalt is the pinnacle, but all those who lived here before know what it was like then. The cinema, bowling alley, everything is ruined. The sports arena, Miner's House, everything is ruined.

Sveto: Someone who has lived near the asphalt does not chop wood in the staircase in the morning, it echoes. Firewood, mind you, for what does he use the woodshed anyway. Downstairs from me, you hear chickens, where Said (Sveto's acquaintance) used to live. People and chickens do not live together, they never had. I don't know where they used to live before. Let us go to the pub tonight and you will see. The way they behave and talk is outrageous. (...) We are a minority, we have no place there anymore. Before it was only five percent of those who visited the pub who had rubber boots and sheepskin vests, the rest had jeans or other normal clothes. Nowadays, the majority wear rubber boots and sheepskin vests.

Studies on the post-war relations in Bosnia and Herzegovina show that relations between the "victim" and "perpetrator" are characterized by a combination of rejection and closeness as well as competition between them (Basic 2015, submitted 1, 2, 3, 4; Bougarel, Helms and Duijzings 2007; Delpla 2007; Helms 2007; Houge 2008; Maček 2009; Mannergren Selimovic 2010; Skjelsbæk 2007; Stefansson 2007; Steflja 2010; Stover and Shigekane 2004; Stover and Weinstein 2004).

In the prior quotation, Laki, Milorad, and Sveto seem to agree that the criticism raised against the "refugees" is well founded. The conflict points of interest can be seen when they say: "everything is ruined", "we are a minority", and "beat up the Turks". "Refugees" are depicted as a threat, they destroy the environment ("everything is ruined"), and they are rowdy ("there was trouble"). Laki, Milorad, and Sveto portray their own victimhood in relation to the decay of society and newly arrived "refugees".

In this context, "refugees" are portrayed as a community hazard or as external actors or, using Simmel's terminology, as strangers. According to Simmel (1964[1950]:402-408), strangeness is characterized by a combination of nearness and remoteness, respectively nonchalance and commitment. The foreigner's position in the group depends on nearness versus remoteness throughout the relationship. When the issue of distance towards the foreigner is more dominant than nearness, we have a special relationship with the stranger – he is not a member of the actual group, but he is present.

In the Stefansson (2007) analysis, we can see that refugees who arrive at a community during the war can be perceived as a danger and a threat (as an "invasion" and "attack"). These individuals are



often presented as dirty, poor, and primitive. This perception could be interpreted as an articulated identity construction carried out by individuals who want to describe themselves as different, being clean, rich, and modern.

In the depiction that Laki, Milorad, and Sveto sketch, there is a similar relationship. These actors' rhetoric projects the image of "the refugees" as strangers and a danger to society. Those refugees who ended up in northwestern Bosnia are described as the worst thing a society might experience. They are singled out as guilty for the cultural decline and the destruction of infrastructure.

The language in these quotations conveys an image of great polarization between the categories. On one side, we have the "remainders" and "returnees" and on the other the "refugees". The informants declare themselves as distant from the "refugees", but still there are signs of nearness between them. The actors portray themselves as being part of two entities, one of which consists of "remainders" and "returnees" and the other of "refugees". A competition at a symbolic level emerges between the two entities. The quotations may be seen as an arena for different swings between "us" and "the others" in which the image of victimhood is upheld. The conflict points of interest reproduce a certain competition because they keep the demarcation between victim and perpetrator alive.

Victim attribution often becomes a subject for discussions and negotiations (Bartov, 2000; Brewer and Hayes 2011, 2013; Confino, 2005; Holstein and Miller 1990; Kidron, 2012, 2004; Maier, 1993; Moeller, 1996; Olick, 2005; Olick and Demetriou, 2006; Åkerström 2001). Changing circumstances in the context may motivate different descriptions while similar petitions of victims can emerge from seemingly different situations. In this study, we have seen that everybody portrays themselves as victims but that a big difference appears among the different victim categories. To be tortured, killed, or banished is a dissimilar type of victimhood from feeling discriminated against or feeling that the environment is destroyed by primitive refugees. The latter example is about how the environment acted on the divergence of the collective expectations about what is culturally desirable in the society. In this reaction, a picture of "danger" is partly portrayed: a "threat" against society and the picture of an "ideal perpetrator" (Christie 1972, 2001).

Markers for victimhood and the creation of the concepts "victim" and "perpetrator" are also made visible in stories about the riches of "returnees" and "diaspora". Ljubo is a "refugee" who prior to the war was an industrial worker in a town in northern Bosnia. During and after the war, he worked in an elementary school in northwestern Bosnia. He notes how "the rich get richer" after the war:

Do you know what I think is wrong here? Many people were expelled from here, that is a fact. Many have stayed also. Those who stayed do not have any money to buy their flats and those who live abroad can afford to buy out their flats and then sell them for 30,000 Marks<sup>6</sup>. They (diaspora) come on vacation here, and at the same time they earn money. Where's justice in that, I would confiscate everything (the returners' and diaspora's properties).

Ljubo does not describe himself as the ideal victim, according to Christie (1986). Ljubo, amongst other things, draws attention to the following points of interest: the lack of justice after the war. Ljubo's story reflects considerable jealousy. He displays envy and remoteness towards "returnees"

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<sup>6</sup> Approximately 15,000 U.S. dollars.

and “diaspora”. Ljubo is claiming the property of those abroad because this property makes the rich richer; in actuality, it means that those treated unjustly before are still treated unjustly. When we reach so far into the discussion, we could ask this question: Who is the victim in this situation? Earlier we have pointed out that “the ideal” disappeared when returning. Now, in addition to “returnees” and “diaspora”, we have “remainders” and “refugees” who could claim the victim status. They are poor, weak, and dependent on the financial resources possessed by returnees and the diaspora. “Remainders” and “refugees” are portrayed as *economic victims* while “returnees” and “diaspora” are portrayed as some kind of *profiteers* (or economic perpetrators). Radovan and Lana, who both stayed in northwestern Bosnia before, during, and after the war, explain this problem as follows:

Radovan: It is easy for these from Prijedor, they have returned with money and received donations in order to repair their houses. Gino (a mutual acquaintance who was expelled from northwestern Bosnia now living in Austria) should thank the Serbs because he would never have such a car if it wasn't for them.

Lana: Another problem is that the returnees have money, the refugees are at the bottom, and this creates a rift. Hate rises, but no one thinks about who deserves to be hated, the returnee or the politician who hasn't given me anything even though I fought.

Some points of interest charged with importance concern the economic success of the “diaspora” and “returnees” owing to their expulsion during the war and the surrounding world's recognition after the war (“received donations” and “would never have such a car”). Radovan's and Lana's description portrays “diaspora” and “returnees” as rich. Those with a bad economic situation are victims, too, according to their description.

The competition of victimhood after the war in Bosnia can be analyzed as a clear battle about meanings in victim status. The arguments of the interviewees depend on the different interpretations that imply the alternative enunciation about who the victim is. The actors apply different meanings to victim status when they ascribe themselves or the other position as victim and perpetrator, and motivations differ. It seems that the different ascriptions of a status as victim or perpetrator that are analyzed in this study are rhetorical productions that partly define “victim” and “perpetrator” and partly the argument that itself constructs the definition.

## **STORIES OF FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION**

Ricœur (2004[2000]) and Derrida (2004) present the image of reconciliation ideologies as often being general and unclearly formulated. They argue that on an institutional level, reconciliation can be ideologized, frequently based on the current government's or regime's efforts. An important point observed by Schaap (2006) and Janover (2005) is that activities on an institutional level often are transferred to the individual level. In my empirical material, the stories appear to be influenced by the regimes regarding the “war ideology destruction” (Christie 1986), which is taking place at the Hague Tribunal and the Bosnia and Herzegovina tribunal on war crimes (Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2015; ICTY 2015a; ICTY 2015b ).

We see examples of relations after the war, concerning trials and interpersonal and inter-institutional interaction in research reports from war-victim organizations. The majority of Bosniac and Croat organizations for war victims accept and appreciate the effort of the tribunals, in contrast to the Serbian organizations, which often renounce it. Serbian war victims see the tribunal as partisan (Delpla 2007: 228-229). The majority of indicted and convicted persons at the tribunal are Serbian politicians, soldiers, and police (Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2015; ICTY 2015a; ICTY 2015b). Regional discussions often stress the importance of justice being done after the war. What is not clearly stated in the discourse is that this justice enforcement also may entrench the antagonism and social identities that emerged during the war. Steflja (2010) argues that this administration of justice may cement the antagonism and social identities that were actualized during the war. Another important point made by researchers, in noting that these actions, on the institutional level, frequently get transmitted to the individual level (Bartov, 2000; Brewer and Hayes 2011, 2013; Christie 1986; Confino, 2005; Holstein and Miller 1990; Kidron, 2012, 2004; Maier, 1993; Moeller, 1996; Olick, 2005; Olick and Demetriou, 2006; Åkerström 2001). The stories in my empirical material seem to be influenced by (or comply with) the rhetoric of war-victim organizations and the tribunals.

Justice for war victims is one of the most important conditions for reconciliation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The interviewers in this study do think it is important for the perpetrators to admit their guilt, but that is not enough. For justice to be done, punishment is also necessary, in their view. Moreover, the perpetrators must express real remorse. These three criteria – justice, admission of guilt and real remorse – must be met, according to Basic (2015), if forgiveness and reconciliation are to be possible.

Many war criminals are detained by the Hague tribunal and the Bosnia and Herzegovina tribunal on war crimes; several have been convicted for crimes committed during the war, but many are still at large. Ricœur (2004[2000], 460) argues that forgiveness is possible only when one or several are singled out as guilty. Similar arguments emerge with most of the interviewees in this study. To achieve reconciliation in Bosnia, forgiveness is required and, from what I saw in the interviewees' stories, it is easier to forgive someone who is in prison for his crimes. During the war, Radovan was called into the Serbian militia, but he could not participate because of his illness. Nowadays, he is retired and living in northwestern Bosnia; he says indignantly that "the task must be done, if one wants to reconcile":

The first thing that needs to be done, if you want reconciliation, is to bring the war criminals to justice. Even if it was my own late father, I would have wanted him to take responsibility if he had murdered a civilian, in front of a firing squad or in jail. Who gives one the right to rape someone's sister and mother or to murder someone? The sentences passed in the Hague are a joke. A 10-year sentence is transformed into 6 years for good behavior. Without justice and by that I mean real justice /.../ there can be no reconciliation.

Radovan's recipe for reconciliation is based on justice for the victim and punishment for the perpetrator or the idea of a punishment visible for all, that must be displayed as a ceremony or a

spectacle (in this context, compare Collins 1992, 110; Durkheim 1964[1893], 80-96). At the same time, Christie (1986) believes that there will be a better reconciliation result if the victim and perpetrator meet in front of a mediator and an audience. This public process creates a situation in which the perpetrator is ashamed instead of being legally punished; thus, justice is done for the victim. Christie (1986) argues by referring to the hanging of the commander of the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp at the end of World War II. Christie finds it difficult to see the proportionality of the punishment in relation with the crime – one life in exchange for half a million who were gassed, tormented, and starved to death or killed in other frightful ways in that camp. Christie sees the hanging of the commander as yet another way of humiliating the victims. According to Christie's formulation, all of the survivors should have been enabled to speak about what happened there – they should have been enabled to give vent to their rage, their sorrow, their desire for revenge. The commander should also tell how he saw it and what he did and share his current thoughts on these events. All of this should occur in front of an audience.

I was influenced by Christie's perspective while gathering material and therefore asked during the interview of a former concentration camp detainee a question inspired by the South African truth commission. Sanel's health is damaged from repeated physical abuse, starvation, and anxiety in the concentration camp. He is retired and lives in Scandinavia. These are his words on the conditions for reconciliation:

Sanel: That all those, I don't want to say war criminals but all those who had something to do with this evil, to come forward in order to get judged. Everyone should confess to what they have done, physical abuse, rape, murder, etcetera, thus it would not be important where they were judged, they could be judged at their own court in Banja Luka<sup>7</sup>.

Goran: What about giving them pardon if they confessed on television?

Sanel: For the murders, too?

Goran: Yes.

Sanel: Well, regarding physical abuse and such, it would probably be OK but not murder. For murder, you have to spend time in jail according to the court's sentence. /.../ You cannot slaughter people with such pleasure and just say sorry, it is simply not possible. You can forgive someone for beating you up but not for killing your brother.

The individual's depictions of their war memories are often contradictory and ambivalent (Basic 2015). In some cases, the interviewees' narratives in this study are also contradictory and ambivalent. The narrators oscillate between different identities and perspectives, depending on the situations, relations, and questions they face. In one and the same sentence, or paragraph, they can express two completely different opinions.

Sanel, just like Radovan, delineates a sort of reconciliation recipe that seems to influence Bosnian people on an everyday basis: One of the most important conditions for reconciliation is justice for the victims of war. Earlier, I mentioned Ricœur (2004[2000], 460), who believes that forgiveness is possible only where there is someone who is presumed guilty. On the other hand, the point made by Ricœur and Derrida on forgiveness and punishment is that there is not much room for forgiveness,

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<sup>7</sup> Banja Luka is a town in northwestern Bosnia. Administratively belong, after war, to the administrative entity Republika Srpska.

partly because of the unconditionality, which is seen as an important postulate for forgiveness (Derrida 2004, 34-40, 56-7; Ricœur 2004[2000], 468). Sanel is putting up demands that must be met before he forgives and reconciles (“all those who had something to do with this evil, to come forward in order to get judged”); he will not forgive just like that. Obtaining amnesty by confessing on television could be interpreted as a lowering of Sanel’s conditions at the expense of the perpetrator’s undergoing disgrace.

Christie (1986) advocates a truth commission instead of punishing the guilty individuals. The idea of a truth commission is not to condemn a criminal but to give him an opportunity to express shame for his action and thereby be forgiven. The criminal shall be offered reentry into the community through his display. Even in the context of a truth commission, a perpetrator’s plea for forgiveness (for example, on television) could be understood as conditional: Participation in a truth commission lets the perpetrator avoid a judicial trial and potential punishment.

Simmel (1955[1908], 121-22) writes that someone who cannot forgive cannot fully reconcile. Forgiveness by punishment is ruled out because of unconditionality (Derrida 2004, 34-40, 56-7; Ricœur 2004[2000], 468). Conditionality is present in all stories on post-war reconciliation. Sanel’s question of forgiveness and reconciliation is conditioned by the crimes he suffered during the war. Through a public confession and apology on the television, Sanel may consider forgiving physical assault – but not murder. If we merge the perspectives of Simmel, Ricœur, and Derrida, we could say that Sanel’s reconciliation is not complete. We could also say that Sanel is criticizing the reconciliation manual advocated by Simmel and others.

Variation is a very interesting dynamic at the interpersonal level of reconciliation. Relatives of survivors often want to co-exist in peace with former enemies, with or without forgiveness and reconciliation. It seems that forgiveness and reconciliation are not mandatory after a war. Nor is it certain that reconciliation includes forgiveness (Arendt, 1998[1958]: 237-243; Borneman, 2003; Hagan & Levi, 2005; Sampson, 2003). In the previous quotations, a *resistance* against forgiveness emerges, in which Sanel obviously reacts strongly to the questions about whether he is ready to forgive. Sanel answers by mentioning examples of difficult personal experiences and more or less explicitly shows the *impossibility* of forgiveness in relation to these experiences. It seems that “conditioned reconciliation” could be interpreted as a resistance to or option of reconciliation based on forgiveness.

## CONCLUSION

This article analyzes the retold experiences of 27 survivors from the war in Bosnia. The primary goal was to describe how actors present the social phenomenon of “victimhood”, “forgiveness”, and “reconciliation” and the secondary aim was to analyze discursive patterns that contribute to constructing the terms “victim” and “perpetrator”. Previous studies have often presented a one-sided picture of the “victim” and “perpetrator” during and after the Bosnian war (Bougarel, Helms and Duijzings 2007; Delpla 2007; Helms 2007; Houge 2008; Maček 2009; Mannergren Selimovic 2010; Skjelsbæk 2007; Stefansson 2007; Steflja 2010; Stover and Shigekane 2004; Stover and Weinstein 2004). Researchers have emphasized the importance of narratives, but they have not focused on narratives about victimhood or analyzed post-war interviews as a competition for victimhood that can produce jealousy.

The narratives on the phenomenon “victimhood”, “forgiveness”, and “reconciliation” produce and reproduce the image of victim and perpetrator. The war victims are portrayed in a de-humanized fashion and branded as suitable to be exposed to it. In these stories, morally correct actions are constructed as a contrast to the narratives on war violence. In these descriptions, the perpetrator is depicted as a dangerous, evil, and ideal enemy. He is portrayed as a real and powerful yet alien criminal who is said to pose a clear threat to the social order existing before the war.

The disintegration of the existing, pre-war social order produces and reproduces a norm resolution that enables the ritualized war-time use of violence. This development allows the normalization of war violence in this time period even though the result means human suffering. This study presents this development in society ambivalently, as both allowed and normatively correct (during the war) and as prohibited and condemned (primarily in retrospect, in post-war narratives). It seems as if the categories “victim” and “perpetrator” means different things depending on whether it happened during war or not, whether it is retold or observed, and who is telling the story. For some persons, violence targeting civilians during the war is an act of heroism.

Development taking place during and after the war has led to populations’ being described based on four categories. One consists of “remainders”, namely those who before, during, and after the war have lived in northwestern Bosnia. Another is “refugees”, those who were expelled from other parts of Bosnia and Croatia into northwestern Bosnia. The third is made up of “returnees”, those who were expelled from northwestern Bosnia during the war but have returned afterwards. The fourth is the “diaspora”, individuals who were expelled from the area during the war and stayed in the new country.

Within the dynamics of upholding the victim and perpetrator, there has arisen a competition for the victim role after the war. The competition among the “remainders”, “refugees”, “returnees”, and “diaspora” seems to take place on a symbolic level, and the conflict points of interest are often found in the descriptions of the war-time and post-war periods. The remainders argue that the refugees, for instance, do not want to assimilate, that in time they have become the majority of the society’s population, which in turn pressures the remainders to follow the refugees’ norms and values. Furthermore, the returnees and the diaspora are criticized for having a better economy than remainders and refugees, making the latter jealous.

All interviewees portray themselves as victims, but it seems that they all are about to lose that status. Those who remained might do so because they are still under the shadow of war events; the refugees because they are portrayed as strangers and fit the role of ideal perpetrators; and finally, the returnees and diaspora because they have achieved recognition from the surroundings and have a better economic situation. This situation can produce and reproduce a certain competition for victimhood that re-creates and revitalizes those collective demarcations that were played out so clearly and in such a macabre fashion during the war.

What is required to make interviewee’s reconciliation and forgiveness? Is it that those who participated in the atrocities admit to emotions such as remorse and shame when they ask their victims for forgiveness? The interviewee stories are imbued with conditionality when they speak about reconciliation following the Bosnian war. Among other things, they highlight the importance

of emotional commitment from the perpetrator – the perpetrator’s display of remorse and shame (Basic 2015).

Emotions have different functions for forgiveness and reconciliation after the war. An individual can present a specific image of himself or herself through displayed emotions, create and re-create identities, or attack the identities of the others. Story’s of interviewees is emotional, and they recounts that *the others* are ashamed now or should be ashamed. In this way, they creates a collective and morally “correct” identity for them self. The shame that interviewees actualizes in their story’s seems to be able to generate reconciliation on a macro level; here a single perpetrator is sacrificed to achieve forgiveness and reconciliation between the groups.

The stories of forgiveness and reconciliation are connected to the past; the interactive consequences of war-time violence are intimately linked to the narrator’s war experiences. The interviewees distance themselves from some individuals or described situations. It is common that the portrayal of possible forgiveness and reconciliation is transformed into a depicted implacable attitude, thus the interviewees negotiate their stances: they articulate between reconciliation and implacability statements. In these stories, “the others” are presented as external actors in the context.

The stories of the actors after the war in Bosnia play an essential role in the tension-filled mosaic of everyday interaction where politics and legal actions in Bosnian society and individual identity formation and recreation combine when the individual grapples with issues such as: How shall I move on after the war? Should I forgive the perpetrators, and in that case, how? Thus, it is important to study the narratives of these actors. Throughout their narrations, some individuals can make a confession or exert a certain self-esteem; others can take the chance to explain for themselves and the audience, to express regret over their actions and possibly restore their social status. Without this type of processing, war victims risk living an existence without confession, and the war perpetrators risk becoming permanently bound to their acts – what Simmel (1955[1908]:121) calls “the most horrible irreconcilability” – clearly an unstable future foundation for a post-war society.

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