# Conditions for Reconciliation: Narratives of Survivors from the War in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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**Purpose:**

The aim of this article was to analyse the retold experiences of 27 survivors from the 1990s war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I have examined verbal markers of reconciliation and implacability and analysed the described terms for reconciliation that are being actualized in the narratives.

**Design/Methods/Approach:**

The material for the study was gathered through qualitative interviews with 27 individuals who survived the war in north-western Bosnia and Herzegovina. This study joins those narrative traditions within sociology where oral presentations are seen as both discursive- and experience-based. In addition, I perceive the concept of reconciliation as an especially relevant component in those specific stories that I analysed.

**Findings:**

Stories on implacability, reconciliation, and conditions for reconciliation are not shaped only in relation to the war as a whole but also in relation to an individual's wartime actions and those of others. In these stories, implacability is the predominant feature, but reconciliation is said to be possible if certain conditions are met. Examples of these conditions are justice for war victims, perpetrator recognition of crimes, and emotional commitment from the perpetrator (by showing remorse and shame, for example).

**Originality/Value:**

Previous research on post-war society emphasized structural violence with subsequent reconciliation processes. Researchers have focused on the importance of narratives, but they have neither analysed conditions for reconciliation in post-war interviews. This article tries to fill this gap by analysing the stories told by survivors of the Bosnian war during the 1990s.

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**Keywords**: reconciliation, narrative, forgiveness, implacability, conditions for reconciliation, justice

## Pogoji za spravo: pripoved preživelih iz vojne v Bosni in Hercegovini

**Namen prispevka:**

Namen prispevka je analizirati ponovno podane izkušnje 27-ih preživelih vojne v Bosni in Hercegovini v 90-ih letih prejšnjega stoletja. V pripovedih smo pregledali verbalne znake sprave in pomiritve ter analizirali opisane izraze za spravo.

**Metode:**

Gradivo za raziskavo je bilo zbrano s kvalitativnimi intervjuji 27-ih posameznikov, ki so preživeli vojno v severozahodni Bosni in Hercegovini. Raziskava se pridružuje pripovedni tradiciji znotraj sociologije, v kateri so pripovedi osnovane tako na diskurzu kot na izkušnji. Še posebej pomembna komponenta v analiziranih zgodbah je koncept sprave.

**Ugotovitve:**

Zgodb o pomiritvi, spravi in pogojih za le to ne oblikuje le vojna, temveč tudi dejanja, ki jih v času vojne izvede tako pripovedovalec kot drugi ljudje. V omenjenih zgodbah prevladuje element pomiritve, sprava pa naj bi bila mogoča ob doseženih nekaterih pogojih. Primeri le teh so: pravica za žrtve vojne, priznanje kaznivih dejanj s strani storilca in čustvena zaveza storilca (ki se, na primer, kesa in sramuje).

**Omejitve/uporabnost raziskave:**

Pretekle raziskave povojne družbe poudarjajo strukturno nasilje, kateremu sledijo procesi sprave. Raziskovalci se osredotočajo na pomen pripovedi, vendar v povojnih intervjujih ne analizirajo pogojev za spravo. Pričujoč članek poskuša zapolniti to vrzel z analizo pripovedi preživelih vojne v Bosni in Hercegovini v 90-ih letih preteklega stoletja.

## 1   INTRODUCTION

Previous research on post-war society emphasized the structural violence with subsequent reconciliation processes, for example in South Africa (Sampson, 2003), Rwanda (Applegate, 2012), and Bosnia and Herzegovina (Cehajic, Brown, & Castano, 2008). However, in reality there is usually overlap between actor and structure (Janover, 2005; Schaap, 2006; Simmel, 1955).

Previous research on post-war society emphasizes the importance of narratives (Broz, 2008; Broz, Kain, & Elias-Bursac, 2005; Delpla, 2007; Ericsson, 2011; Hagan & Levi, 2005; Hatzfeld, 2005a, 2005b, 2008; Jansen, 2007; Mannergren Selimovic, 2010; Mannergren Selimovic & Eastmond, 2012; Skjelsbæk, 2007; Stefansson, 2010; Steflja, 2010), but these authors have not focused on narratives

about conditions for reconciliation in post-war interviews. This article tries to fill this gap by analysing stories told by survivors of the Bosnian war during the 1990s. The research issue is with what normative orientations and from what social values do the assumptions behind the above questions draw upon for moral sense and social intelligibility, and how do these normative orientations and values then guide the actions of individuals as well as communities in post-war societies?

This article examines how survivors of the 1990s war in Bosnia and Herzegovina describe reconciliation with their former enemies. In the analysis, voices representing the three ethnic groups involved in the war emerge: Bosniacs[1], Serbs, and Croats. These individuals were living in northwestern Bosnia and Herzegovina during the war, and some of them still live there while others live in Scandinavian countries.

What were the circumstances in northwestern Bosnia during the 1990s war? In their quest to expel Bosniacs and Croats from the area, Serbian police and militia carried out mass executions, systematic rape, and forced flight and established concentration camps. The aim was to remove the Croat and Bosniac population from the region by making life there impossible. Warfare was aimed directly against civilians. War antagonists often knew each other from before the war. Expelling individuals was not enough; the goal was to create an atmosphere so that no one ever would dare return (Bassiouni & Manikas, 1994; Case No.: IT-97-24-T; Case No.: IT-99-36-T; Greve & Bergsmo, 1994).

This article analyses the retold experiences of 27 survivors of the war in northwestern Bosnia and Herzegovina. One partial aim is to analyse markers of reconciliation and implacability; the other is to describe the conditions for reconciliation being actualized in various descriptions. The overall research question asked is, how do the interviewees describe possibilities for post-war reconciliation and forgiveness? The research questions more precisely are actually deeper: Should a victim forgive someone who does not admit his crime? Does the right to forgiveness belong only to the victim and not, say, to an institution? And can a group ask for forgiveness on behalf of an individual when the individual does not?

In the following, I will try to illustrate how markers of reconciliation and implacability, together with described conditions for reconciliation, are highlighted when the interviewees draw attention to (a) war crimes, (b) perpetrators admitting crimes, and (c) perpetrator emotional commitment (for example, the display of remorse and shame). My analytical findings are presented in the following themes: (1) Implacability, (2) Reconciliation, (3) Condition for reconciliation, and (4) Negations – the past and the present.

## 2   ANALYTIC STARTING POINTS

This study joins those narrative traditions within sociology where oral presentations are seen as both discursive and experience based (Potter, 2007). An

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1   During the war, Bosnian Muslims began to identify themselves as Bosniacs. The term 'Bosniac' is actually the old word for 'Bosnian', and now it is used both in an official context and in everyday language.

interactionally inspired perspective on human interaction, through symbols and an ethno-methodological perspective on human stories (Blumer, 1986; Garfinkel, 1984), is a general starting point. In addition, I perceive the concept of reconciliation as an especially relevant component in those specific stories that I analysed.

Simmel (1955) looks at social interaction as an interplay between humans – a reciprocity that can take on and display different special social shapes (Bernard, 1950; Simpson, 1955). Conflicts and reconciliations, for example, are special shapes of interaction that become visible when analysing relations between individuals and groups after the fighting ends. Simmel (1955) argues that reconcilability is an emotional attitude aiming at ending a conflict. In contrast, a potential fighting spirit aims at upholding the conflict. Simmel (1955: 117) writes:

"This wholly elementary and irrational tendency to conciliation is probably at work in the innumerable cases in which conflict does not end as the most merciless consequence of power relations. It is something quite different from weakness, gullibility, social morality, or love for one's fellowman; it is not even identical with peacefulness. For, peacefulness avoids fighting from the start, or carries it on, once it is forced upon it, accompanied by the constant undercurrent of the need for peace."

Simmel (1955) 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 (ibid.) describes it as an exchange of emotions between people. He argues (Simmel, 1955: 118): "that the feeling of antagonism, hatred, separateness yield to another *feeling* – in this respect, a mere resolution seems to be as powerless as it is in respect to feelings generally." Simmel (1995) is saying that when reconciliation takes place, the feeling of hostility and conflict gives way to a feeling of peacefulness and consensus. Simmel (1955: 121–122) 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 (1955) 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 Ricœur (2004: 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: 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 (1955) and Ricœur's (2004) views on forgiveness, we can ask the following question: Can every crime be forgiven? Derrida (2004) reasons

as Ricœur (2004: 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), 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). 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) 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 (2004) 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 (2004) and Derrida's (2004) 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.

Christie (2004) discusses what importance truth commissions and international tribunals have for reconciliation (for instance, the Hague tribunal and Bosnia and Herzegovina tribunal on war crime[2]). Christie (2004) argues that

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2    *International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia [ICTY] (2015a, 2015b); Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2015).*

by punishing those guilty for war crimes, international tribunals are 'killing' the ideology behind the atrocities. He illuminates his reasoning with the Nuremberg trials in which German Nazi leaders faced accusations and the Nazi ideology was convicted and punished through the individual sentences against those involved in the atrocities. Christie's point is that a better result regarding reconciliation is achieved through a truth commission instead of legally punishing individuals singled out as war criminals (perpetrators described as monsters) – all this provided that the truth commission's operation is carried out without economic or political problems or disruptions preventing the commission's work.

Reconciliation is a comprehensive and exciting theme of my analysis. The perspectives of the mentioned theorists, although they sometimes are slightly abstract and normative as well as distant from people's complex and perhaps contradictory experiences, are useful for my ambition of trying to understand the interviewees' stories of forgiveness, reconciliation, irreconcilability, and conditions for reconciliation, both as an analytical starting point and a subject of nuances.

## 3   METHOD

The material for the study was gathered through qualitative interviews with 27 individuals who survived the war in northwestern Bosnia and Herzegovina. The material was gathered in two phases.

During the first phase, March through November 2004, I completed my fieldwork in Ljubija, a community in northwestern Bosnia[3]. I interviewed 14 individuals who were living in Ljubija at that time and conducted observations in coffee shops, at bus stops, in the marketplace, and on buses. Two women and five men who all stayed in Ljubija during and after the war were interviewed together with three women and four men from Ljubija who were expelled during the war but now have moved back. Six of the fourteen interviewees are of Serbian origin, three were Croat, and five were Bosniac.

In the second phase, from April through June 2006, I interviewed nine former concentration camp detainees who, despite being civilians during the war, were placed in the camps by Serbian soldiers and police. These individuals, together with four of their relatives who also were interviewed, now live in Sweden, Denmark, and Norway. Three of the interviewees were women and ten were men. The majority of the interviewees come from the municipality of Prijedor (of which Ljubija is a part). Ten are Bosniacs and three are Croats. Some of the collected

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3    *Ljubija is a community in northwestern Bosnia (belonging to the municipality of Prijedor). Before the war, the inhabitants of Ljubija lived in two local administrative entities (Mjesne zajednice). Gornja (upper) Ljubija was ethnically mixed, and most inhabitants lived in apartment buildings. In Donja (lower) Ljubija, most inhabitants were Bosniacs who predominately lived in private houses. The area where Ljubija is located is known for its mineral wealth, especially iron ore, black coal, quartz, clay for brick burning, and mineral-rich water. Most people worked at the Ljubija iron mine before the war. War struck Ljubija in the beginning of summer 1992 when Serbian soldiers took control of the local administration without armed resistance (Case No.: IT-97-24-T; Case No.: IT-99-36-T).*

material has been analysed in earlier reports and articles (Basic, 2005, 2007, 2013, 2014, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c).

Since 2004, I have repeatedly reused the empirical material. Understanding this repetitive analysis requires looking back at the research process. During the interviews, the narrators (interviewees) and I interacted as conversation partners (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Among other things, I was interested in how the individual was going to present herself or himself in different situations, how certain situations merged with other situations to create social rituals, how the individual defined certain situations, and how the individual's identity was created, preserved, and re-created. I also examined how social symbols such as language participate in the creation of cultural context. Blumer (1986) argues that symbols are social objects that are given a certain meaning. The meaning does not have to be precisely the same for all; individuals interpret symbols of others and in this way try to give them some significance. After transcription of the stories in the Bosnian language, another meaning was added, not to the narrator but to the empirical material. Thereafter, selected parts were translated into the Swedish language by an interpreter. It was both interesting and problematic that the meaning was different in Swedish compared to the Bosnian version, with certain nuances lost in translation. Now I have restarted the process by analysing the English language version. Åkerström, Jacobsson, and Wästerfors (2004) argue that empirical material from completed research sometimes, for different reasons, can linger in a researcher's mind. In some instances, this persistence is about fascination for a field of research or odd circumstances during the collection of the material, for example. These researchers argue that empirical material can be re-analysed again and again through the same or a different set of analytical goggles, and in this sense, the material can always add something new. When I conducted this new analysis of the previously collected material, I was surprised by the narrators' focus on different conditions for reconciliation during interviews, a tendency I partially overlooked in my previous analyses.

## 4 IMPLACABILITY

The Bosnian stories of reconciliation and implacability are not shaped only in relation to the war but also in relation to the narrators' own and other individuals' personal war actions. The interactive dynamics of war portrays reconciliation as something dependent on various charged symbols. These charges often paint a picture of implacability.

Stories of reconciliation and implacability from post-war Bosnia often start with the interviewee talking about revenge and hate. During the war, one man, named Sveto[4] in the study, participated in a Serbian militia group. Nowadays, he owns a business in northwestern Bosnia (field note). He described an execution that occurred after the war, which seemed to have originated from the war:

Sveto: *He walks in and asks him: 'Have you finished your beer?' 'Yes, I have'; when the answer was given, this fellow takes out a gun and shoots him in the head. He then*

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4    *Names have all been changed.*

*went outside and the pub-maid tried to escape, but he told her: 'You don't have to flee, call the police 'cause I have settled my business.' He sat down in front of the shop waiting for the police. When they arrived, they took his gun from him. It is said that this man raped his sister in Sanski Most[5] during the war. /.../ When this comes alive, when people free themselves from that pressure, they will remember who killed their father, brother, uncle. Lots of things will come forth in time. Bodies are still getting excavated, people are looking for them. One day, when it all is accounted for, you will see the perpetrator driving by in his car and your dead brothers' children will appear before your eyes.*

Sveto's story is imbued with an attitude of implacability. In his portrayal, we see how the post-war years are being charged with the importance of the war years – one will see someone 'driving by in his car' and identify this person with his previous atrocities. Stories of hate and revenge, as a direct result from the war, return in several interviews. One example is given by Milanko. He was a child during the war, and he told me that he witnessed his neighbors – Bosniacs and Croats – getting beaten and executed. Nowadays, he works in a factory in northwestern Bosnia. Milanko told the following about the widespread violence during the war and post-war vindictiveness:

Milanko: *In 1992, Rade was not here, he was in Germany. He and Dragan were friends. Dragan came to Rade's parents, he stole their money and abducted Rade's brother Zuti. First, he physically abused Zuti, then Zuti disappeared without a trace. Rade told me that Dragan won't live to get old.*

Goran: *Where is this Dragan nowadays?*

Milanko: *Somewhere outside, he is hiding in his village. He does not dare come to Prijedor now that many people, like Rade, come here completely unimpeded.*

Goran: *Is there any information about Zuti?*

Milanko: *It is known that he was in Keraterm[6] and that Dragan went there and brought him out again. Nothing is known of him since that. The lakes in which we swim, there by the mine, are full of corpses. They get drunk in the bars and start talking, thousands have been thrown in there. The lake is deep, more than 100 meters. Who could dive down there now to collect all of them (corpses)? It makes me sick, they put on the uniform and drive out to the villages to rape and kill women. Not just Dragan but also Sveto and Milorad and lots of others. How do they sleep now, do they worry about their children?*

Gangas (2004) argues that Simmel's views on conflicts and reconciliation partly actualize the involvement of the actors' morals, norms, and valuations. These post-war stories of violence and rejecting those actions could be seen as an expression of future morality (Jansen, 2002). In the previous stories, we see how Sveto's and Milanko's morals emerge as a rejection from the war morality in which rape, abduction, robbery, and murder were a part of everyday life (Bassiouni & Manikas, 1994; Case No.: IT-97-24-T; Case No.: IT-99-36-T; Greve & Bergsmo, 1994). This rejection is clearest through the dramatic shape it takes. In Milanko's narration, among other things, we see the conflict being described

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5    *Sanski Most is a community in northwestern Bosnia.*

6    *Keraterm is a concentration camp in northwestern Bosnia.*

through a personalized terminology ('Rade,' 'Zuti,' 'Dragan,' 'Sveto,' 'Milorad') and maybe because of these personalized illustrations through a rather implacable terminology.

Sveto and Milanko retell war crimes in which personal relationships among the deceased, surviving victims, and perpetrators are portrayed – they are not strangers. This proximity between perpetrator and victim seems to make Sveto and Milanko pessimistic about post-war reconciliation in Bosnia. Their reasoning is consistent with that of Simmel (1955: 121–122), who argues that someone who cannot forget different events cannot reconcile because reconciliation requires forgiveness. Sveto and Milanko appear to argue that people's consciousness cannot be erased after a trauma, and this, using Simmel's words, creates 'the most horrible irreconcilability'.

## 5  RECONCILIATION

Hatzfeld (2005a, 2005b, 2008) narrates the telling conversations with survivors of the 1990s war in Rwanda. The author mentions international tribunals and truth commissions through the analysis. These, of course, are institutions. One interesting question is why truth commissions were not established in Bosnia, following the models of South Africa or gacaca courts in Rwanda. Hatzfeld (2005a, 2005b, 2008) means that in Rwanda, the ideology responsible for the genocide was put on trial rather than the individuals. If we follow the Hatzfeld (2005a, 2005b, 2008) reasoning, in Bosnia, the war criminals as individuals are put on trial at the Hague Tribunal and the Bosnia and Herzegovina tribunal on war crimes (Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2015; ICTY, 2015a, 2015b) rather than the ideology that guided them. This analytical point is partly in contrast with Christie (2004), who argues that by punishing those guilty for war crimes, international tribunals are 'killing' the ideology behind the atrocities.

Schaap (2006) and Janover (2005), much like Ricœur (2004) 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, 2004), 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, 2015b).

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). The majority of indicted and convicted persons at the tribunal are Serbian politicians, soldiers, and police (Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2015; ICTY, 2015a, 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 (Hagan & Levi, 2005; Massey, Hodson, & Sekulić, 1999; Steflja, 2010).

Justice for war victims is one of the most important conditions for reconciliation in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Basic, 2015a; Ericsson, 2011; Hagan & Levi, 2005; Mannergren Selimovic, 2010; Mannergren Selimovic & Eastmond, 2012; Skjelsbæk, 2007; Stefansson, 2010). 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) 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 behaviour. 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; Durkheim, 1964). At the same time, Christie (2004) 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 (2004, 2005) argues by referring to the hanging of the commander of the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp at the end of World War II. Christie (ibid.) 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 (ibid.) sees the hanging of the commander as yet another way of humiliating the victims. According to Christie's (ibid.) 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 (ibid.) 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[7].*

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 (Jansen, 2007; Mannergren Selimovic, 2010; Mannergren Selimovic & Eastmond, 2012; Skjelsbæk, 2007; Stefansson, 2010). 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), who believes that forgiveness is possible only where there is someone who is presumed guilty. On the other hand, the point made by Ricœur (2004) and Derrida (2004) on forgiveness and punishment is that there is not much room for forgiveness, partly because of the unconditionality, which is seen as an important postulate for forgiveness. 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 (2004) 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) writes that someone who cannot forgive cannot fully reconcile. Forgiveness by punishment is ruled out because of unconditionality (Derrida, 2004; Ricœur, 2004). 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

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7    *Banja Luka is a town in northwestern Bosnia.*

television, Sanel may consider forgiving physical assault – but not murder. If we merge the perspectives of Simmel (1955), Ricœur (2004), and Derrida (2004), we could say that Sanel's reconciliation is not complete. We could also say that Sanel is criticizing the reconciliation manual advocated by Simmel (1955) 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; 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.

## 6    CONDITION FOR RECONCILIATION

What is required to make Sanel's reconciliation complete? 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. In addition, a collective responsibility for war actions is noted when conditions are imposed. An illustrative example is found from Ljubo, who worked in an elementary school in northwestern Bosnia during the war, as well as after. This is Ljubo's version of a possible reconciliation in Bosnia:

*But honestly, if one repents honestly and everyone is held accountable for their actions, I for mine, you for yours, and the third person for his, and we all apologize to one another, but it must come from the heart and with tears, this way there might lead to reconciliation. /.../ Remorse from all three sides, because one cannot be responsible for the war if the other did not participate. They must have quarrelled with each other because if there was no quarrel, they would not have made war.*

Ljubo's version emphasizes two central aspects for making reconciliation possible. One is the individual's emotional commitment ('it must come from the heart and with tears'), and the second is reciprocity in reconciliation ('remorse from all three sides'). He presents a kind of blueprint for reconciliation in which the individual and collective levels are interconnected. He presents and links the individual level to emotions that need to be shown, and he links the collective level to a universal war guilt ('all three sides'). Another empirical example, in which reconciliation is conditioned with the perpetrator's emotional commitment together with a collective responsibility, is found in the interview with Rifet. Rifet is a former concentration camp detainee, retired and living in Scandinavia, just like Sanel. Rifet says indignantly:

*I could never reconcile with those who harassed me but would not take revenge either. They are the ones being small now, now when I travel to Banja Luka, I meet with people with whom I have always been a good friend, but those who did wrong, they stay away from me. They did not have to help me during the war, but they should have left me in peace. It is hard for them not being able to sit at my table and have a drink with me like before. One of these came up to me and said hello, but I told him to go to hell. The Serbs sitting at my table did the same and this was the worst for him. You should have been a man when it was at its worst, they said. But I would never take revenge, God forbid. I think it is bad enough for him when people ignore him like that. /.../ The Serbs are ashamed now, this is normal if you have an ounce of honour. Even though you tell them that they, personally, did not do anything. There are rotten ones even among my people, but what does that have to do with me? Whoever imprisoned, raped, or killed someone is a disgrace to his people. I despise those because they are neither Bosniacs, Serbs, nor Croats, they are scum. /.../ My message is this: You have to put all of that behind you and move on. Without reconciliation, there will be no life for us nor for Bosnia. But everything will be all right in the end, it must be, for the economy and everything else. This bond between us is a bond of fate.*

Rifet's reasonably conciliatory attitude is still imbued with a 'we' and 'the others' division and a categorization of individuals based on their actions during the war. This can be seen as Rifet's way of making his own position stronger with the aid of special symbolic expressions that are common for members of the groups. Rifet generates his own abstract world in which the members can feel safe by creating symbols for each group ('Bosniacs,' 'Serbs,' 'Croats'). This symbol creation can be seen as an important condition for achieving reconciliation. Emotions are a permanent part of all interaction, and it seems that communication together with defining common symbolic expressions – with the display of correct emotions – enables cooperation even between enemies, and in some cases even reconciliation.

Rifet stresses the importance of the perpetrator's display of shame ('are ashamed now, this is normal if you have an ounce of honour'). Braithwaite (2006a) believes that the individual who committed the crime shows displeasure through shame, which in turn could evoke other emotions such as grief, guilt, remorse, and once again – shame. There are, according to Braithwaite (ibid.), two varieties of shame, namely *disintegrative shame* and *reintegrative shame*. Disintegrative shame works negatively through stigmatization and expulsion of criminals, thus generating a group of individuals who are excluded from the community. In other words, the individual is branded as a criminal and loses the right to be a part of the community (for example, through imprisonment and the subsequent stigmatization). Reintegrative shame has more of a positive effect – the individual is not condemned and branded even if the action is punished. The individual is enabled to atone for his crimes and 'be forgiven,' which can be seen as a way to show and offer the individual reentry into the community through stimuli and aid. Braithwaite's book is implicitly permeated with a view on disintegrative and reintegrative shame as an emotion, but it is not expressed explicitly. In a later publication, this viewpoint, stating that these varieties of shame are emotions, is clarified (compare Braithwaite, 2006b).

Rifet points out that the war criminals are shameful now, and he stipulates a kind of exclusion shame that works by stigmatization and expulsion of the

criminals. This means that Rifet, on one hand, condemns the individual's crimes, and on the other hand, strips him of his right to be a part of the group ('people ignore him').

Wohl, Hornsey, and Bennett (2012) have, like Hutchison and Bleiker (2008) and also Klain and Pavic (2002), studied different functions that emotions have for forgiveness and reconciliation. 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. Rifet's story is emotional, and he recounts that *the others* are ashamed now or should be ashamed. In this way, he creates a collective and morally 'correct' identity for himself and his friends and rejects his former friends ('those who harassed' him during the war). The shame that Rifet actualizes in his story 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 ('This bond between us is a bond of fate'). It is rather special that Rifet sees this Simmel-inspired bond. Broz et al. (2005) and Broz (2008) analysed their interviews with people who survived the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The conclusion of those studies was that the Yugoslav identity as cultural heritage is often represented in the Bosnian post-war stories (Broz, 2008; Broz et al., 2005). Rifet refers to a kind of Yugoslav connection – despite everything – but similar perspectives did not emerge from the other analysed narratives.

## 7    NEGATIONS – THE PAST AND THE PRESENT

The stories of forgiveness and reconciliation, much like the stories of implacability, 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, and the interviewees thus negotiate their stances: They articulate between reconciliation and implacability statements. In these stories, 'the others' are presented as external actors in the context (see the following: former friends who did not intervene and perpetrators who killed someone's father). Ivo exemplifies this in his story. He is a former concentration camp detainee who, during the interview, implied that he could 'forgive' Serbian friends and acquaintances who did not help him when he was captured.

*Those from Prijedor did not abuse me physically nor did they do me any other harm. In a way, they helped out but not really. That day they did not. Still, one has a soul, one can forgive them. I am better off without them, the less I have to do with them the better. /.../ Someone who had known me all my life could have tried to help me get away, but no one did. What actually happened, if people pointed us out or placed us on lists, I don't know. Anyway, I terminated everything concerning them, have no desire, don't want anything from them, I don't need them.*

The picture painted by Ivo expresses a powerful polarization between categories. On one hand, we have Ivo; on the other, we have his friends and acquaintances who did not help him although they could have. Ivo is portraying

a distance towards his pre-war friends, and no closeness between the categories is displayed. I asked the following question of another concentration camp detainee, called Safet here, whose 80-year-old father was tortured before being killed during the war in northwestern Bosnia: 'In which case would you be able to forgive or reconcile with what happened?' His answer:

Safet: *We have already reconciled because we travel to Bosnia every year; this shows that we love Bosnia and that we are trying to return to some kind of normal life, a normal way ahead. To forgive … this … I only had one father, and he was killed unjustly, without doing wrong, you can never forgive that.*

Goran: *So it is thus about what you suffered? It is probably easier to forgive a slap than ...?*

Safet: *Yes, that is easier. Maybe you have heard that they killed the teacher Krupic, from Hambarine, his former pupil asked him if he remembered giving him the lowest grade 10 years ago? I suppose there were many of those who lacked wits and got hold of weapons.*

According to Safet, this annual trip to Bosnia means conciliation, or maybe even reconciliation. This trip takes Safet to an area in which his former enemies now constitute the majority population. He meets them every day, perhaps even those who tortured and killed his father. Safet is keen to highlight that he could never forgive such an unjust crime as his father's murder. Simmel (1955) argues that someone who cannot forgive does not fully reconcile. By turning from a reconcilable conversation ('We have already reconciled') to an implacable tone ('I only had one father and he was killed unjustly /.../ you can never forgive that'), Safet creates a contrasting category, namely the category of 'those who lacked wits and got hold of weapons'.

Simmel (1955) describes conflict as an interplay of proximity and distance between actors. Applegate (2012), Cehajic et al. (2008), and Millar (2012), all of whom have studied reconciliation after the wars in Bosnia, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone, show that the relationship between victim and perpetrator is characterized by a combination of dissociation and closeness together with competition between the victim and perpetrator categories. In Ivo's and Safet's depictions, there is a similar relationship – the actors' stories describe 'them' as distant. The actors are portrayed as participants in two entities that compete on a symbolic level. The narratives on reconciliation seem to become an arena for different disconnects between *us/we* and *the others*. Turns from a reconcilable to an implacable attitude reproduce a certain competition because they keep alive those symbols of battle and demarcations that were so obviously played out during the war.

If we were to interlink different perspectives of theorists mentioned in this article, we could infer that the actors' narratives play an important role in a tense network of everyday interaction. In this interaction, communal legal actions and politics together with the moral perspectives of the individuals and their identity labour are combined as the individual struggles with the question: Shall I forgive and reconcile? Janover (2005) emphasizes the importance of studying the stories of both victims and perpetrators. By telling their stories, victims can restore their status and attain a certain level of self-esteem and recognition of their identities. The perpetrators, by telling their stories, can explain to themselves and an audience; they can show their emotions and open a possibility of re-entering

into the community. Without this type of process, the victims are at risk of living in an existence without peace and serenity, and the perpetrators are at risk of permanently being bound by their committed atrocities – which Simmel (1955: 121) calls 'the most horrible irreconcilability'. In my analysis, I found that the possibility for forgiveness usually dies when the atrocity occurs, when a father is killed or a sister is raped.

## 8    CONCLUSION

The aim of this article was to analyse the retold experiences of 27 survivors from the 1990s war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I have examined verbal markers of reconciliation and implacability and analysed the described terms for reconciliation that are being actualized in the narratives. Previous research on post-war society emphasized the structural violence with subsequent reconciliation processes, as in South Africa (Sampson, 2003), Rwanda (Applegate, 2012), and Bosnia and Herzegovina (Cehajic et al., 2008). Researchers have emphasized the importance of narratives (Broz, 2008; Broz et al., 2005; Delpla, 2007; Ericsson, 2011; Hagan & Levi, 2005; Hatzfeld, 2005a, 2005b, 2008; Jansen, 2007; Mannergren Selimovic, 2010; Mannergren Selimovic & Eastmond, 2012; Skjelsbæk, 2007; Stefansson, 2010; Steflja, 2010), but they have not focused on narratives about conditions for reconciliation in post-war interviews. This article tries to fill this gap by analysing stories told by survivors of the Bosnian war during the 1990s. The research issue is from which normative orientations and from what social values the assumptions draw for moral sense and social intelligibility, and how do these normative orientations and values then guide the actions of individuals as well as communities in post-war societies?

The war as a whole (its structure and its political character) and individuals' wartime actions are not independent of each other. Personal troubles are addressed in relation to social issues like reconciliation. Post-war reconciliation in Bosnia is closely connected to the war period. The reconciliation process seems to correlate with the war period's interactive dynamics, and events taking place during the war affect interpretations regarding a possible reconciliation.

This analysis used, among others, Simmel (1955), Ricoeur (2004), and Derrida (2004). Their use is not typical for scholarly discussions of interviews, and for this reason, I intend for the study to cast a fresh light on the existing literature.

The struggle has to end before reconciliation takes place, Simmel (1955) argues, and the difficulty of 'forgetting' war memories in many cases seems to generate an unforgiving attitude – especially when the stories are specific and emotionally strong with a concrete course of events and filled with names of individuals and places (for example, 'Rade,' 'Zuti,' 'Dragan,' 'Keraterm').

Atrocities during the war also raise the question of unforgivable crimes. Ricœur (2004) and Derrida (2004) believe that forgiveness either includes 'the unforgivable' or it does not exist. This study shows that some violent war crimes are described as particularly difficult to forgive. The analysis of the interactive consequences of violence shows that it is intimately associated with earlier personal experiences. Anger is sometimes expressed with charged emotional terms, with

very little space for reconciliation, and guilt sometimes gets transferred onto the whole category (not only the individual/individuals who committed atrocities).

The features of reconciliation seen in the interviewees' stories are imbued with conditionality. Forgiveness and reconciliation are depicted as possible to achieve but only if guilty war criminals are punished and also show remorse and shame for their atrocities.

It seems that one of the most important conditions leading to reconciliation in post-war Bosnia is justice for the war victims. Many war criminals have been arrested or convicted by the Hague tribunal and the Bosnia and Herzegovina war crime tribunal for crimes committed during the war, but many are still at large. Simmel (1955) argues that forgiveness is required to achieve reconciliation. The picture that emerges from the analysed narratives is that it is easier to forgive someone imprisoned for his atrocities.

Reconciliation through a truth committee to which the perpetrators confess their crimes as an alternative to judicial punishment is based on the idea of exposing a perpetrator's feeling of remorse and shame (Braithwaite, 2006a; Christie, 2004). The purpose of these feelings is not to condemn the criminal but to give him a possible way out by showing remorse and shame for his actions and thus 'being forgiven'. Even here, there is a visible condition, namely, through participation in a truth commission, the perpetrator avoids a judicial trial and potential punishment. The interviewees did not like the idea that participants in a truth commission avoided being punished, i.e., they were sceptical of this path leading to reconciliation.

In the stories on reconciliation, it is highlighted that the perpetrators now are shameful (or should be ashamed) and an expulsive shame is stipulated that aims at stigmatizing and excluding single perpetrators. In this way, one not only condemns the misdeeds but also points out the individual as a criminal who has lost the right to be a part of the collective. This kind of shame, when single perpetrators are 'sacrificed' to achieve reconciliation between groups, is presented as reconciliation on a macro-level.

An interesting question that could not be resolved in this article is what the limits are in models of international tribunals and truth commissions. In this sense, I mean that sociology can address the dysfunctionality of both processes. Another interesting aspect of the problem that could not be investigated in this study is how the various actors in the reconciliation fare in the future. What significance will be awarded to the reconciliation question in Bosnian society?

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