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Post-Conflict Peacebuilding in Bosnia-Herzegovina

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Post-Conflict Peacebuilding in Bosnia-Herzegovina

Abstract

During the summer of 2014, I lived in Sanski Most, Bosnia-Herzegovina, with funding from an International Research and Opportunities Program (IROP) grant from the Hamel Center for Undergraduate Research at the University of New Hampshire (UNH). Through a series of semi-structured interviews and participant observation, my research highlighted the roles of truth, memory, and justice in rebuilding a post-conflict society in Bosnia-Herzegovina—essentially, on peacebuilding since the war ended in 1995. The Bosnian War stands as the worst genocide since the Holocaust, with 350,000 casualties and over 100,000 dead—80% of whom were Muslim Bosniaks, targets of an ethnic cleansing campaign by neighboring Serbia. Of the interviews I conducted, the majority of respondents believe that truth is the most important part of rebuilding Bosnia-Herzegovina, which includes reconciliation and coming up with one common history of what happened during the war. I worked with my UNH mentor, Dr. Mary Malone (political science), and my foreign mentor, Vahidin Omanović (co-director of the Center for Peacebuilding in Sanski Most), to develop interview questions and use my research as the basis for my undergraduate honors thesis. I hope my work on peacebuilding in Bosnia-Herzegovina will be a useful addition to the field of studies in an area of the world that is often overlooked by Western media.

Keywords

peace building, Bosnia, BiH, conflict resolution, transitional justice, Balkans

Subject Categories

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**University of
New Hampshire**

***Post-Conflict Peacebuilding
in Bosnia-Herzegovina***

By Hannah Waller

Political Science and International Affairs

Honors Thesis

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I. Introduction

“This morning, I thought ‘send her home knowing nothing- what I know will destroy this girl. I don’t want to scare her.’”¹

This quote was one I heard from an interviewee while I was conducting funded research in Bosnia-Herzegovina from May to July 2014. She was referring to the first thoughts she had on the morning of our interview, and how she was afraid that I would be devastated by the horrors she had endured during the war from 1992-1995. This quote would set the tone of my research, which looked at post-conflict peacebuilding mechanisms in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH). My research was informed by the long, tumultuous history of BiH, which highlights the importance of understanding the past in order to fully understand the present. The war in BiH was one of a series of secessionist wars that tore apart the former Yugoslavia, and resulted in the declaration of independence by all six republics within the Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia. BiH declared independence from the Republic in 1992, and as a result, neighboring Serbia saw an opportunity to invade Bosnia and declare its territory part of a “Greater Serbia.”²

Before the war, BiH was a multiethnic state, composed of Muslim Bosniaks, Catholic Croats, and Orthodox Serbs. This made it all the more shocking when a central component of Serbia’s invasion was a bloody ethnic cleansing campaign against Muslim Bosniaks within BiH. The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia

¹ All names have been changed to protect identity of participants. All quotes are excerpts from interviews conducted by the author from May to July 2014 in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Respondent pseudonyms will be followed by gender, age, and occupation. This quote: Samra, female, 31, project assistant in tourist office.

² “Bosnian Genocide,” History Channel, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://www.history.com/topics/bosnian-genocide>.

(ICTY) estimates the total number of casualties to be over 100,000, making it the most violent event Europe had experienced since World War II.³ The war finally ended in November 1995 with the signing of the Dayton Accords, which managed to stop the immediate violence, but ultimately froze the ethno-religious divisions in BiH.

Today, Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks still remain divided both socially and politically. Dayton “was a formula to end the war, for conflict management rather than creating a self-sustaining form of peace,” as it divided BiH into the Bosniak-Croat federation, “which controls 51 per cent of the single geographical region of the state of Bosnia, and the Republika Srpska, which controls the other 49 per cent.”⁴ Rather than resolving tensions, Dayton ended up institutionalizing them – the treaty even put in place three presidents, one from each ethno-religious group, who take turns rotating presidential duties.

These ethno-religious groups are increasingly segregated and the fact that each group feels they “lost” the war in 1995 only increases the risk of future conflict. Although this does not necessarily mean an imminent civil war, it does increase tensions and set the stage for lower intensity conflicts that would still be damaging. Conflicting interpretations of what happened from 1992-1995 and why it happened continue to poison inter-ethnic relations between Bosnian communities. Successful and effective peacebuilding mechanisms are essential to creating a stable future for BiH and preventing its relapse into another conflict. If such a conflict were to erupt, the potential for a domino effect on other Eastern European countries would make an impact across the

³ Jan Zwierzchowski and Ewa Tabeau, “The 1992-95 War in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Census-Based Multiple System Estimation of Casualties’ Undercount” (Conference Paper for the International Research Workshop on “The Global Costs of Conflict,” Berlin, 2 February 2010), 2.

⁴ Oliver P. Richmond and Jason Franks, *Liberal Peace Transitions: Between Statebuilding and Peacebuilding* (Edinburgh, GBR: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 54.

globe - which is why it is infinitely better to work towards prevention now, rather than conflict resolution later.

For the purposes of this thesis, I will seek to answer a primary and secondary research question. The primary research question, addressed in the first chapter, focuses on the state level and asks: *How successful have peacebuilding strategies been in Bosnia-Herzegovina?* I will argue that peacebuilding mechanisms in BiH have been largely *unsuccessful*, as they have been unable to meet three key indicators for success - pursuit of rehabilitation, reconstruction, and reconciliation; creation of political and socio-economic mechanisms that build trust; and external intervention that helps create peace and stability. The secondary research question, addressed in the second chapter, focuses on the individual level and asks: *How have these peacebuilding strategies met the expectations and needs of the citizens in Bosnia-Herzegovina?* I will argue that as a result of peacebuilding mechanisms being unsuccessful, they also *have not met* the needs and expectations of the citizens of BiH.

II. Literature Review

The evolution of peacebuilding, which Paris calls “the global experiment in post-conflict peacebuilding” has been “underway since the end of the Cold War,” yet the concept itself continues to be an issue of modern debate.⁵ Peacebuilding, or “what happens when the guns fall silent,” as stated by Francis, is “still a markedly under-researched area of study. Despite the intensity, scale, and diversity of interventions to end bloody civil wars and rebuild the peace, there is still limited understanding of what

⁵ Roland Paris, “Saving Liberal Peacebuilding,” in *When War Ends: Building Peace Divided Communities*, ed. David J. Francis (Farnham, Surrey, GBR: Ashgate Publishing Group, 2012), 27.

actually happens when the shooting stops.”⁶ Due to this limited understanding, there is frequent debate among scholars over the different schools of thought in understanding peacebuilding and its practices. The pros and cons of different types of peacebuilding, as well as the intentions and interests behind the variety of actors, can be best shown through four different lenses – liberal, critical, transformatory, and realist. Each lens has different criteria for evaluating the “success” of peacebuilding mechanisms, which will be analyzed in the research design and methodology section.

The most dominant school of thought in the field is the concept of “liberal peacebuilding,” which is a corollary of the well-known democratic peace theory. The liberal peace hypothesis, as described by Newman, “is premised upon the idea that democracy and a free economy encourage people to resolve and express their differences peacefully and that this is the best foundation for development and acceptable governance.”⁷ Although debate over the pros and cons of liberal peacebuilding is rampant, most scholars agree that liberal peacebuilding has been used in nearly every intervention since Boutros Boutros-Ghali first defined peacebuilding in *An Agenda for Peace* in 1992.⁸ Francis notes, “It is important to stress that despite the diversity, large scope and range of peacebuilding activities and interventions, there is a predominant emphasis on neoliberal political and economic policies...hence the label ‘liberal peacebuilding.’”⁹

⁶ David J. Francis, *When War Ends: Building Peace in Divided Communities* (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2012), 1.

⁷ Edward Newman, “‘Liberal’ peacebuilding debates” in *New Perspectives on Liberal Peacebuilding*, ed. Edward Newman, Roland Paris, and Oliver P. Richmond (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2009), 39.

⁸ Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peacekeeping* (New York: Report of the Secretary General, UN Doc A/47/277-S/24111, 17 June 1992).

⁹ Francis, *When War Ends*, 5.

Paris seeks to explain the prevalence of liberal peacebuilding by linking it to globalization. Paris says the “the globalization of a particular model of domestic governance – liberal market democracy” is moving “from the ‘core’ to the ‘periphery’ of the international system.”¹⁰ This type of globalization is not cultural nor is it of specific goods or services, but is rather the globalization of a norm, “of the very idea of what a state *should* look like and how it *should* act.”¹¹ The most common criticism of liberal peacebuilding, as stated by Francis, is the fact that it often “inherently ignores the local context and ownership of the complex and long-term process of winning the peace and reconciling divided communities.”¹²

The “critical” school of thought regarding peacebuilding takes such criticisms to the furthest end of the spectrum. Newman defines the critical approach to peacebuilding as one that draws upon critical and international relations theory as it “raises questions about existing policy assumptions concerning, for example, the market, democracy, governance, capacity-building, and modernization.”¹³ As Mansfield and Snyder discern, “Pushing countries too soon into competitive electoral politics not only risks stoking war, sectarianism and terrorism, but it also makes the future consolidation of democracy more difficult” – meaning that imposing the liberal peacebuilding theory can often cause more harm than good.¹⁴

¹⁰ Roland Paris, “Echoes of the *Mission Civilisatrice*: Peacekeeping in the Post-Cold War Era” in *The United Nations and human security*, ed. Edward Newman and Oliver P. Richmond (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001), 100.

¹¹ Paris, “Echoes of the *Mission Civilisatrice*,” 101.

¹² Francis, *When War Ends*, 9.

¹³ Francis, *When War Ends*, 9.

¹⁴ Edward Mansfield and Jack Snyder, “Prone to Violence: The Paradox of the Democratic Peace,” *The National Interest* (Michigan: Gale Group, 2005), 39.

The idea that liberal peacebuilding has a reverse effect on war-shattered states – destabilizing societies, exacerbating tensions, and potentially *causing* future conflict - can be seen as the emerging “hyper-critical school” of scholars who believe liberal peacebuilding is “fundamentally destructive or illegitimate.” Hyper-critics can even go so far as to portray peacebuilding operations as “a form of Western or liberal imperialism that seeks to exploit or subjugate the societies hosting the missions.”¹⁵ David states, “The concept of peacebuilding holds much promise” but can “engender perverse effects to the point of jeopardizing the peace it assumes has been achieved.”¹⁶

The remaining lenses used to view peacebuilding can be classified as transformatory and realist. Transformatory peacebuilding “emphasizes the resolution of conflict, which may include addressing underlying sources of violence. This approach is premised upon the assumption that durable peace and stability rest upon the achievement of positive peace and giving free expression to local voices, desires and forms of politics.”¹⁷ Lederach describes this process as “conflict transformation,” which “views peace as centered and rooted in the quality of relationships.”¹⁸ Rather than a static process that has a beginning and an end, Lederach sees conflict transformation (and transformatory peacebuilding) as a “phenomenon that is simultaneously dynamic, adaptive, and changing.”¹⁹

¹⁵ Roland Paris, “Saving Liberal Peacebuilding,” 28.

¹⁶ C. David, “Does peacebuilding build peace? Liberal (mis) steps in the peace process,” *Security Dialogue* 30, No. 1 (1999), 26,29.

¹⁷ Newman, “‘Liberal’ peacebuilding debates,” 47.

¹⁸ John Paul Lederach, “Conflict Transformation,” in *Beyond Intractability*, ed. Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess (University of Colorado, Boulder: Conflict Information Consortium, October 2003), 3.

¹⁹ Lederach, “Conflict Transformation,” 4.

Realist peacebuilding, on the other hand, “entails containing or repressing conflict in the interests of international peace and stability in general or particular hegemonic interests. Although it may use the language of peace, this approach is primarily concerned with international systemic stability.”²⁰ This “Hobbesian” vision does not seek to address root causes, nor does it prioritize participatory government. Contemporary peacebuilding, Newman argues, “is characterized more by realist and liberal- of the hegemonic variety- rather than transformatory or Wilsonian liberal approaches.”²¹ Whether or not this was the case in terms of peacebuilding in Bosnia-Herzegovina will be analyzed later on in this thesis.

III. Research Questions

My primary research question, addressed in the first chapter, focuses on the state level and asks: *How successful have peacebuilding strategies been in Bosnia-Herzegovina?* My research will seek to complement other global studies on peacebuilding with an innovative study specific to BiH. The conflict is fairly recent, and is located in a part of the world often overlooked by the media. Conflicts and peacebuilding in the Middle East tend to receive the most media attention because of their location to strategic resources, and thus their international relevance. It is more difficult to find material about BiH or the Balkan region in Western media, and I am hoping to draw attention to an area where peacebuilding mechanisms may not have achieved the desired outcomes. Once the war and peacekeeping operation ceased, the

²⁰ Newman, “‘Liberal’ peacebuilding debates,” 48.

²¹ Newman, “‘Liberal’ peacebuilding debates,” 50.

relatively limited media attention on BiH dropped off entirely, and the subsequent failure of the peacebuilding operation was ignored.

My secondary research question, addressed in the second chapter, focuses on the individual level and asks: *How have these peacebuilding strategies met the expectations and needs of the citizens in Bosnia-Herzegovina?* To answer this follow-up question, I will analyze the interviews I conducted with local citizens during my time in BiH from May – July 2014. The local perspective helps to gauge the success of peacebuilding mechanisms at the individual level, and can show if mechanisms imposed at the government or international levels have filtered down to the citizens. The interview data will also show which expectations and needs the citizens prioritize, and whether or not the state institutions meet these priorities. The modern-day struggles of the citizens, as a result of their government failing to meet their needs, should be garnering media attention. However, people assume that the Dayton Accords (and Western intervention) ended the violence, so they believe that there is nothing more to be done in BiH. In reality, I argue that this assumption is not only unfounded but is dangerous to the future of BiH, which needs more effective peacebuilding mechanisms to create long-term stability.

The wider significance of this research is to contribute to the field of peacebuilding. As mentioned, there are significantly more peacebuilding studies that have been conducted on peacebuilding in Western countries (i.e., Northern Ireland) or areas of international importance (i.e., the Middle East), but comparatively less on BiH. While some academics have noted BiH was a “mixed success,” or used it as an example of what

not to do in a peacebuilding operation, few have looked at how to reverse these wrongs.²² I hope to use my research findings to not only draw lessons that can be applied to other conflicts worldwide, but also to help contribute to a new peacebuilding strategy in BiH. By incorporating my personal fieldwork and research, I hope to add a new perspective on peacebuilding in BiH to the broader literature of peace studies. I was able to fully immerse myself in the lifestyle and culture of BiH, and through participant observation and semi-structured interviews, was able to get a strong idea of how these two research questions should be addressed.

IV. Research Design and Methodology

Before seeking to address either of my research questions, there are a couple key terms that need to be defined and operationalized. To start, there are entire articles written on the problems that arise from defining “peacebuilding.” One of the primary issues is the confusion over the distinction between peacekeeping and peacebuilding. These terms are *not* to be used interchangeably, as they have different timelines, goals, and purposes in conflict societies. Peacekeepers serve to, quite literally, “keep the peace” in a post-conflict society *immediately* after a treaty or peace agreement has been signed. Peacebuilding occurs after peacekeeping ends, when the society is (relatively) stable, and peacebuilding mechanisms can be used to prevent a society from relapsing into future conflict. However, the term has “remained a largely amorphous concept without clear

²² Theodora-Ismene Gizelis and Kristen E. Kosek, “Why Humanitarian Interventions Succeed or Fail: The Role of Local Participation,” in *Cooperation and Conflict: Journal of the Nordic International Studies Association* 40, No. 4 (2005).

guidelines or goals” and the lack of agreement leads to a lack of coordination, as well as confusion over when and how peacebuilding should be conducted.²³

According to C. David, peacebuilding “is an elastic concept” that “may be broadly or narrowly defined,” but is generally regarded to have three central elements.²⁴

These elements include:

- “1. The rehabilitation, reconstruction and reconciliation of societies that have suffered the ravages of armed conflict;
2. The creation of the security-related, political and/or socio-economic mechanisms needed to build trust between the parties and prevent the resumption of violence;
3. An external (foreign) intervention (national, multilateral or UN) to help create conditions conducive to peace.”²⁵

These three conditions serve as the basis of my evaluation of the success of peacebuilding mechanisms in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The three categories all have elements that relate directly to methods used in BiH, and provide a coherent structure on which to base my evaluation of peacebuilding.

The next term that begs definition – success – is an issue faced by numerous researchers. Some define success as simply “the establishment of stability and a rule of law,” while others view it as a more complex and multi-layered concept.²⁶ The broader approach to peacebuilding typically requires a longer checklist of goals that need to be

²³ Jennifer M. Hazen, “Can Peacekeepers Be Peacebuilders?” in *International Peacebuilding* 13, No. 3 (2007), 324.

²⁴ David, “Does peacebuilding build peace?” 27.

²⁵ David, “Does peacebuilding build peace?” 27.

²⁶ Seth G. Jones, *Establishing Law and Order After Conflict* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2005): 2.

met before peacebuilding can be characterized as a “success.” Strictly quantitative approaches can “impose formulaic thinking and ‘universal blueprints’ which neglect local conditions and promote- or impose- external agendas.”²⁷ I chose to take a broader approach that is less tangible than the numerical approach, but is better able to incorporate the *social* aspects of peacebuilding, rather than solely the economic.

In terms of BiH, success is defined as meeting the three indicators described above – pursuit of rehabilitation, reconstruction, and reconciliation; creation of political and socio-economic mechanisms that build trust; and external intervention that helps create peace and stability. I argue that peacebuilding strategies in Bosnia-Herzegovina have been *unsuccessful*, as they have been unable to meet these three criteria that define and operationalize the success of peacebuilding. Data to support the failure of such mechanisms can be found in scholarly articles in the field that use BiH as a the looked-down-upon case study, based on the state of the economy, unemployment levels, general public opinion regarding institutions, and other socioeconomic indicators.

I also argue that the peacebuilding strategies used in Bosnia-Herzegovina *have not met* the expectations and needs of the citizens in BiH. This argument is in line with the previous one, because if peacebuilding mechanisms were unsuccessful, then they logically will have failed to meet the expectations and needs of the citizens. This is supported by the semi-structured interviews I conducted while living and researching in BiH from May – July 2014. This qualitative data is supplemented by participant observation and field research that I conducted as a result of being able to live and immerse myself in a post-conflict society such as BiH.

²⁷ Newman, “‘Liberal’ peacebuilding debates,” 29.

Whereas my first research question is answered by mostly scholarly literature (and therefore secondary sources), my second research question is answered with a combination of primary sources, including my interview data and government documents. The difficulty of directly accessing government documents was a barrier to my research, as I cannot speak the local language (Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian), and the current government in BiH is not known for its transparency. To replace these sources, I deferred to scholarly literature that had conducted government research in BiH but have produced research articles written in English.

In my semi-structured interviews, I had planned on conducting an evenly distributed sample among the three prominent ethno-religious groups – Christian Orthodox Serb, Roman Catholic Croat, and Muslim Bosniaks. However, this proved to be much more difficult than I anticipated, as the first two and a half weeks of my time in BiH were spent doing aid work in response to catastrophic flooding. Also, I lived in Sanski Most, which one interviewee described as “ethnically clean”- meaning that the vast majority of residents were the same ethnicity - which in this case, were Muslim Bosniaks.

Most towns in BiH have a dominant ethnic majority, but some larger cities (such as the capital, Sarajevo) have become more diverse over time. This proved to be a major limitation to my research, because instead of having a diverse research sample, all of my interviewees were Muslim Bosniaks – which most view as the victims’ side of the war. Although this differed from my original research plan, it was fascinating in its own right, as I was able to glimpse the emotional devastation of the conflict, which is so often lost in the simple comparison of numbers (of casualties, victims, etc.). I interviewed seventeen

people (eight women and nine men) between the ages of 18 and 52. I organized my questions into three themes – the roles of truth, memory, and justice in rebuilding post-conflict BiH. The structure of the second chapter will also be organized into these three themes, and will incorporate quotes from the interviews, while using pseudonyms to protect the identity of participants. The full list of my interview questions is included in Appendix I.

V. Chapter One: State-Level

How successful have peacebuilding strategies been in Bosnia-Herzegovina?

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, and for the purposes of this essay, success is defined as meeting the three indicators described above – pursuit of rehabilitation, reconstruction, and reconciliation; creation of political and socio-economic mechanisms that build trust; and external intervention that helps create peace and stability. I argue that peacebuilding strategies in Bosnia-Herzegovina have been *unsuccessful*, as they have been unable to meet these three criteria that define and operationalize the success of peacebuilding. However, other scholars have argued, “Bosnia can be characterized as a mixed success, in particular after August of 1995, when peacebuilding efforts have been more successful.”²⁸ This view uses the narrow approach to peacebuilding, as described above, which largely considers an end to fighting the single indicator of success.

The “mixed success” description refers to a couple other indicators, such as economy, unemployment, and corruption – all of which, in the eyes of some scholars, are showing “clear signs of a slow but steady progress” along with “normalization in

²⁸ Gizelis and Kosek, “Why Humanitarian Interventions Succeed or Fail,” 369.

relations between the local factions” in BiH.²⁹ The reasons for this “mixed success” are largely attributed to the Dayton Accords, in which American negotiator Richard Holbrooke “brought to the negotiation table the leaders of all [ethno-religious] parties who were active participants in the conflict” in order to “achieve a lasting agreement.”³⁰ According to an article based on the Failed States Index (FSI) data from 2014, Bosnia-Herzegovina is tied with India for most-improved country of the past decade, and has an “impressive trajectory” with its gain of 51 places in the FSI rankings from 2006 to 2014.³¹

As impressive as these statistics may seem at first glance, in reality, BiH is still in the “High Warning” category of FSI data, and BiH’s scores for Factionalized Elites, Human Rights, and Rule of Law have actually worsened in the past decade.³² Also, the data that supported BiH as a “mixed success” has a caveat at the end of the article, which says, “Although we do not have event data beyond the end of 1995, since 1996 Bosnia has been relatively stable with low levels of data.”³³ In my opinion, it is difficult to make this assumption when there is no relevant, modern data to support it. The lack of access to data is, in itself, an indicator of the lack of transparency by the government of BiH. Even though the blatant, all-out war and genocide has ended, the stability and future of BiH is still in question.

The primary obstacle to recovery is that “the state remains ethnically and democratically polarized,” and “being subject to separatist political agendas, the

²⁹ Gizelis and Kosek, “Why Humanitarian Interventions Succeed or Fail,” 378.

³⁰ Gizelis and Kosek, “Why Humanitarian Interventions Succeed or Fail,” 379.

³¹ Laura Brisard, “A Decade of Recovery: Bosnia and the Balkans Bounce Back,” *Fund for Peace* (June 2014), 1.

³² Brisard, “A Decade of Recovery,” 1.

³³ Gizelis, “Why Humanitarian Interventions Succeed or Fail,” 378.

government is constantly deadlocked and unable to move forward.”³⁴ The attempts at the first indicator of success – the pursuit of rehabilitation, reconstruction, and reconciliation – have largely failed as a result of such polarization. Peacebuilding mechanisms in BiH have so far focused only on surface-level tensions, and have ignored the root causes that began the conflict in the first place. The goal of peacebuilding should be to remove “the structural causes of conflict” and create “non-violent mechanisms for resolving social conflicts,” but in BiH, “national and international observers alike agree that the underlying causes of the war have been inadequately addressed in the post-war period and continue to pose a challenge to the peace process.”³⁵ As stated by Boutros Boutros-Ghali, former Secretary General of the United Nations, “the sources of conflict and war are pervasive and deep,” and it takes a sustained, focused effort to tackle the roots of conflict.³⁶

Rehabilitation, reconstruction, and reconciliation have also proved elusive in BiH as a result of the partition of the country by the Dayton Accords. BiH was divided into the Federation and Republika Srpska (RS) – that are defined by dominant ethno-religious identities (Bosniak Muslims in the Federation and Serbs in RS). This partition created political deadlock that has allowed RS “to move forward with its own separate – and probably separatist – agendas while Bosnia remains politically deadlocked.”³⁷ At the time of the Dayton Accords, partition seemed to be the only option that would ensure stability, but it was not meant to last for more than twenty years. The ethnically homogenous mini-states within BiH have made compromises difficult, as every policy “must be geared

³⁴ Richmond and Franks, *Liberal Peace Transitions*, 54.

³⁵ Hazen, “Can Peacekeepers Be Peacebuilders?” 326, 329.

³⁶ Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda for Peace*, 5.

³⁷ Richmond and Franks, *Liberal Peace Transitions*, 54.

towards both the Federation and the Bosnian Serb Republic” instead of for the good of the country as a whole.³⁸ The goal is to create a single state that encompasses the two entities and three ethno-religious groups, but for now, they remain divided.

These divisions are even more apparent in the political system of BiH, as the presidency is divided into thirds – one for each ethno-religious group – and citizens are likely to vote along nationalistic lines. The three-way division is “replicated from the national to municipal level and reflects the entrenched ethnic positions adopted during the war and persisting in the post-war environment.”³⁹ The Dayton Accords put in place this decentralized structure of government in order to bring all three sides of the conflict to the negotiating table, but it ultimately institutionalized the ethno-religious differences created by the civil war. This further contributes to political stagnation, as political leaders stoke ethno-religious divides in order to be elected, and once they are in office, refuse to pass laws that benefit groups outside of their own.

The political paralysis in the national government of BiH impacts all levels of society, as even education policies become politicized and divided by ethno-religious lines. Several of my interviewees described how each schools’ textbook differs based on the dominant ethno-religious identity in that town – so students who live in neighboring towns may read a Bosniak-biased book in the Federation, and a Serb-biased book in Republika Srpska. There is no single history of the war that is taught in BiH, so each student grows up already biased towards one group or another, further replicating the tensions that began the war in the first place. The education system is defined by “incompatible curricula, syllabi and textbooks for each of the constituent peoples, often

³⁸ Richmond and Franks, *Liberal Peace Transitions*, 54.

³⁹ Richmond and Franks, *Liberal Peace Transitions*, 55.

influenced by the political elites.”⁴⁰ In order to successfully pursue rehabilitation, reconstruction, and reconciliation, as stated in the definition of success in peacebuilding, there needs to be a common curriculum to provide “sustained education for peace, coexistence, and reconciliation” in “societies making the transition from protracted conflict to the consolidation of peace.”⁴¹

The second indicator of success in peacebuilding is whether security, political, or socioeconomic mechanisms exist to build trust between conflicting parties within a state. In BiH, this is another failed example, as “over a decade after the Dayton Accords, an ambivalent form of peace exists in BiH,” with a “semblance of security” but not much outside of that.⁴² The security mechanisms are in dire need of reform, specifically in terms of increasing “respect for the rule of law, commitment to democracy, and government legitimacy,” all of which are described as “critical pillars of the ultimate policy objective in Bosnia.”⁴³ As of now, security mechanisms are failing to build trust in BiH, scrutinized “in the eyes of a population that currently has more reason to fear its soldiers.”⁴⁴

Low public trust of political and socio-economic institutions creates barriers to “creating a climate of confidence in Bosnian society,” which is necessary for stability and success of peacebuilding.⁴⁵ There needs to be social support for non-violent conflict resolution mechanisms, but such support “flounders when these mechanisms do not function effectively,” often as a result of corruption, lack of transparency, and rampant

⁴⁰ Richmond and Franks, *Liberal Peace Transitions*, 61.

⁴¹ Zvi Bekerman and Claire McGlynn, *Addressing ethnic conflict through peace education international perspectives* (New York, N.Y.: Palgrave, 2006), 2.

⁴² Richmond and Franks, *Liberal Peace Transitions*, 76.

⁴³ Ritscher, “Democratization in Bosnia,” 115.

⁴⁴ Ritscher, “Democratization in Bosnia,” 127.

⁴⁵ Richmond and Franks, *Liberal Peace Transitions*, 68.

impunity- case in point in BiH.⁴⁶ The citizens have little reason to support such conflict resolution mechanisms, as many of them are merely channels for political elites to pocket funds and further embed corruption in government. It is this “lack of confidence in the ability of the government to provide a better future” that is “indicative of a lack of legitimacy in the government as a whole” in BiH.⁴⁷

The governments’ tripartite divide continues to prevent the establishment of security, political, or socio-economic mechanisms to build trust between ethno-religious groups. The lack of such mechanisms supports the notion that peacebuilding efforts have been unsuccessful, as “the nationalist rhetoric of the ethnic parties remains and indicates that a sense of a multi-ethnic community is a myth or utopian dream.”⁴⁸ The judicial system provides another example of dysfunction, as “the rule of law has failed primarily due to the division of the judicial system into three parallel systems presided over by the unaccountable internationals.”⁴⁹ Even the police forces are divided into Bosniak, Croat, and Serb divisions, each with its own jurisdiction and priorities. The justice system also has an enormous backlog of cases, and frequently fails to indict perpetrators due to the lack of evidence, disappearance of witnesses, or political pressure. This proves the point that “a post-conflict environment does not always offer the capacity to create effective accountability mechanisms in the state or territory.”⁵⁰

The third, and final, indicator of success in peacebuilding is the ability of external intervention to help create peace and stability in a post-conflict state. I argue that this

⁴⁶ Hazen, “Can Peacekeepers Be Peacebuilders,” 333.

⁴⁷ Ritscher, “Democratization in Bosnia,” 124.

⁴⁸ Richmond and Franks, *Liberal Peace Transitions*, 66.

⁴⁹ Richmond and Franks, *Liberal Peace Transitions*, 70.

⁵⁰ Eric de Brabandere, *Post-conflict administrations in international law international territorial administration, transitional authority and foreign occupation in theory and practice* (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2009), 116.

indicator could be characterized as a “mixed success,” as described by the counter arguments above, because external intervention did ultimately end the genocide and violence of the war. However, there are many criticisms of the Dayton Accords, primarily centered on the institutionalization of ethnic divisions in BiH. It was meant to be a temporary solution, but has remained for 20+ years, with little progress in terms of reform of the constitution or legitimization of the government. A second popular criticism refers back to the literature review, in that “the clear aim of the international community through the Dayton Accords...was to reconstruct Bosnia as a western liberal democratic state,” in pursuit of the liberal peace theory.⁵¹

Although many international actors may have had good intentions, “the attempts by the external actors to keep as neutral a position as possible during the first stages of the intervention in Bosnia failed, as severe problems of coordination between the civilian and the military component of the intervention plagued the peace-making efforts.”⁵² This lack of coordination, which occurred between foreign governments, non-profit organizations, and global institutions, meant that the immense amount of aid channeled to BiH had little impact on building sustainable peace. The United Nations had a particular battle in terms of having an ambiguous mandate and lack of organizational structure, which further contributed to local mistrust of the UN after the Srebrenica Genocide. The success of some external interventions (i.e., the NATO bombing campaign of Serb forces) and the failure of others (i.e., the Srebrenica genocide) contribute to the “mixed record” of peacebuilding in BiH.

⁵¹ Richmond and Franks, *Liberal Peace Transitions*, 55.

⁵² Gizelis and Kosek, “Why Humanitarian Interventions Succeed or Fail,” 376.

Overall, when defining peacebuilding success as meeting the three aforementioned indicators - pursuit of rehabilitation, reconstruction, and reconciliation; creation of political and socio-economic mechanisms that build trust; and external intervention that helps create peace and stability – peacebuilding strategies have clearly been *unsuccessful* in BiH. The first two conditions have plainly not been met, and while the third could be described as having a “mixed record,” for the purposes of peacebuilding (creating long-term stability), it has also been unsuccessful. These indicators, which support my argument that peacebuilding has been unsuccessful at the *state* level, also help support my argument that peacebuilding has been unsuccessful at the *individual* level in BiH, which will be further explored in chapter two.

VI. Chapter Two: Individual-Level

How have peacebuilding strategies met the expectations and needs of the citizens in Bosnia-Herzegovina?

The secondary research question –if the aforementioned peacebuilding strategies have met the expectations and needs of the citizens in Bosnia-Herzegovina – focuses on the individual level of society. My argument is that peacebuilding strategies used in Bosnia-Herzegovina *have not met* the expectations and long-term needs of the *citizens* in BiH. Since peacebuilding mechanisms have been unsuccessful at the state level, they have logically been unable to “trickle down” and have any success at the individual level. My analysis of this research question is based my field research in BiH from May - July 2014, in which I interviewed seventeen people between the ages of 18 and 52.

I interviewed eight women and nine men with the help of a local translator (Dijana Merdonović) who conducted the interview in Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian (the

official language of BiH). Immediately following the interviews, Dijana and I would listen to the taped recording and she would translate it into English as I transcribed the quotes on my laptop. My interview questions were organized into three themes, the roles of truth, memory, and justice in rebuilding post-conflict BiH. The full list of these questions can be found in appendix I. My goal was to analyze how post-conflict peacebuilding mechanisms have or have not worked to meet the expectations and needs of local citizens in BiH. I hoped to ascertain this goal by talking to a diverse variety of local citizens, but as mentioned earlier in the Research Design and Methodology section, this proved to be rather difficult due to the composition of the town of Sanski Most. The entire sample included only interviews with Muslim Bosniaks, who were the primary targets of the ethnic cleansing campaign during the war.

I lived in a small town in the northwestern corner of BiH called Sanski Most, and for all practical purposes, it was “ethnically clean” after the war, meaning that the vast majority of residents are from one ethno-religious group – in this case, Muslim Bosniaks. Before the war, the town was fairly evenly divided between Muslim Bosniaks, Catholic Croats, and Orthodox Serbs. During the war, Serb soldiers invaded Sanski Most and forced everyone to flee from their homes. In the nearby town of Prijedor, Serb forces murdered more than 3,000 civilians (predominately Muslim Bosniaks) in their campaign of ethnic cleansing. The fortunate Bosniaks were able to escape to nearby countries (Slovenia, Croatia, etc.) to live out the duration of the war.

My foreign mentor, Vahidin Omanović, was able to escape with his family and live as a refugee for several years. However, once he and his family returned to Sanski Most, they found their homes and livelihoods destroyed. The entire community had to

rebuild their lives from scratch, while many of the Serb soldiers ended up living in nearby Prijedor, claiming houses as their own and evading justice. My close friend in Sanski Most, Mevludin Rahmanović, said that he frequently sees his uncle's murderer walking free down the streets of Prijedor – but due to the aforementioned inefficiency of the BiH justice system, it is unlikely that he will ever face justice.

My semi-structured interview style allowed for questions to be answered in various ways. Respondents who were uncomfortable sharing information (or, in the beginning, did not trust me) could give one-word answers or short statements to convey their points. As the interviews progressed, however, respondents tended to get more comfortable and were more willing to share longer stories. The volunteer work I carried out during the floods helped me gain interviewees' trust, and turned out to be key in terms of gaining access in the community. Local citizens were much more open to interviews once they recognized me from the aid work I did during the floods. Many interviewees agreed to talk simply based on whom we knew in common (which was often either my mentor, Vahidin, or my translator, Dijana), and increasingly became family members or friends I had made through the Center for Peacebuilding.

Interviews were between one to two hours long, and the majority was conducted at Palazzo, a café on the Sana River in the center of Sanski Most. I offered to buy interviewees a cup of coffee (or two) in exchange for the time they spent with Dijana and I, and as I soon found out, coffee was the biggest key to getting people to feel comfortable. We would start the interview slowly, with Dijana and the interviewee discussing whom they knew in common (always essential for trust), and about the context of the interview (where I was from, why I was there, letter of consent, purpose of

research, etc.). Then we would discuss demographics (name, occupation, marital status, etc.), before diving into the list of questions organized into truth, memory, and justice. Prior to our first interview, Dijana and I had conducted several practice interviews, so that she knew the type of follow-up questions I would ask, as well as the core of what I hoped to address in my research.

In my initial grant proposal, I had planned to focus solely on post-conflict BiH, as in what happened *after* the war, but many respondents viewed the interviews as a form of “therapy” and a time to express the traumas they had faced *during* the war. This meant that every interview was unique, and covered vastly different topics – making a numerical comparison of questions (x answered “yes,” z answered “no,” for example) less interesting. I found it more powerful to identify key quotes that conveyed the feelings of respondents. The overall tone of my research turned out to be fairly negative, summed up by a 39-year old imam named Alen⁵³ who stated, “We [Bosnians] live in a constant atmosphere of fear. The war could start again tomorrow.”⁵⁴ This unstable future, a red flag that peacebuilding mechanisms have failed, meant that the present situation is plagued by a persistent underlying sadness, as most respondents have little hope for BiH.

TRUTH

In terms of truth, I asked questions about the respondent’s definition of truth about the war in BiH, the likelihood of finding the rest of the mass graves, the search for the “whole truth” about the war, and the potential for compensation for victims. In my analysis, it was evident that the majority of respondents viewed truth as the *most important* part of post-conflict reconstruction in BiH (see figure 1 below). The lack of the

⁵³ Alen, male, 39, imam.

⁵⁴ Alen, male, 39, imam.

“whole truth,” or one common narrative about what happened during the war, is a constant barrier to BiH being able to move forward. As stated by Damir, a 52-year-old male who was a soldier in the Bosnian military during the war, “We [Bosniaks] have our own truth and they [Serbs] have their own truth and those truths are completely different... When history doesn’t write who was the winner and who was the loser, when there are so many different versions of the truth... can you imagine how many lies there are?”⁵⁵

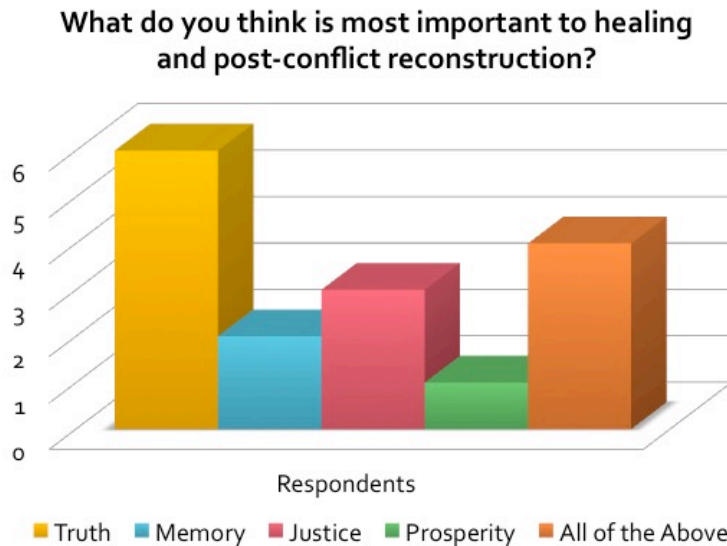


Figure 1

The obstacles created by this lack of “one truth” were mentioned earlier in the response to the primary research question, and were reiterated by Jasmin, a 18-year old student who said, “We [students] all have different history textbooks... whether you are Bosniak, Serb, or Croat... Whether you live in the Federation or in RS [Republika Srpska]. They all have different versions of the same event.”⁵⁶ Ada, a 50-year old woman who worked at a nursing home, said, “History classes need to educate our children in the

⁵⁵ Damir, male, 52, former soldier.

⁵⁶ Jasmin, male, 18, student.

same truth. One truth.”⁵⁷ Djeno, a 33-year old imam, said, “For reconciliation, we have to hear every single truth, or at least give everyone a chance to tell their own truth. We have to be aware. Sometimes we will like it, sometimes we won’t, but it’s the truth, and the ugly truth is better than a nice lie.”⁵⁸ These ugly truths are certain to come out eventually, and in order for society to move forward, a coherent narrative needs to be established that portrays the realities of the war without further increasing tensions between the three ethno-religious groups.

One “ugly truth” continues to resurface as mass graves are discovered throughout BiH. During one of the last weeks of my time in BiH, a funeral procession was held for 287 bodies that had been recently found in a nearby mass grave (Tomašica). Multiple semi-trucks full of coffins slowly drove through the town of Sanski Most, as hundreds of Bosniaks wept by the side of the road for the loved ones they had lost. Crying mothers wove roses in the ropes on the side of the trucks, and others wailed as they imagined the horrors that these 287 victims suffered before their murders. Even as an objective researcher, it is hard to support reconciliation with Serbs after witnessing the stark pain of Bosniaks who had lost so much during the war. The element of truth that interviewees seemed to cling to as the most necessary condition for recovery was for perpetrators to admit the location of mass graves, so that families could be able to properly grieve and bury their loved ones.

Edib, a 44-year old man who works for a Bosnian non-profit organization that works to find missing victims’ remains, said, “there are still 9,000 people missing from

⁵⁷ Ada, female, 50, manager of a soup kitchen.

⁵⁸ Djeno, male, 33, imam.

the war in all of Bosnia-Herzegovina.”⁵⁹ Aldin, a 20-year old student, said, “In Prijedor [a town 20 minutes from Sanski Most], they are still trying to find people- about 2,000 people remain missing. Seven hundred people were murdered in Sanski Most...about one hundred of these bodies still have not been found.”⁶⁰ According to the CIA World Factbook, the entirety of BiH is roughly the size of West Virginia- so one would think that finding missing victims should not have taken 20+ years.⁶¹ However, as Edib went on to describe, “Even excavating mass graves has become political...the government knows the location of more graves, but they wait to excavate until the next election cycle. They say they are waiting for ‘better times,’ but it is not about money, it is about politics.”⁶²

If more perpetrators were to come forward and reveal the location of mass graves to the media, victims could be found much sooner than the next “appropriate” political cycle. Damir, the soldier mentioned earlier, said, “I know firsthand how hard it is to kill someone and go to bed at night. It all comes back in your nightmares. Their conscience [Serbs’] has to be haunted. They will have to confess eventually.”⁶³ Many Bosniaks believe that perpetrators need to confess to the location of mass graves in order for the process of reconciliation to even begin. Elmina, a 33-year old ceramics teacher, said, “It is awful to know something...and to be silent for so many years. I don’t know how people can wake up in the morning and see themselves in the mirror and know such

⁵⁹ Edib, male, 44, NGO.

⁶⁰ Aldin, male, 20, student.

⁶¹ Central Intelligence Agency. “The World Factbook: Bosnia-Herzegovina.” [<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bk.html>].

⁶² Edib, male, 44, NGO.

⁶³ Damir, male, 52, former soldier.

crimes and still be silent.”⁶⁴ The confusion over *how* perpetrators were able to commit such atrocities was a recurring theme throughout my interviews, as respondents were shocked by both the start of the war and the ensuing violence.

Sabina, a 42-year old manager of a local soup kitchen and residential facility, conveyed her shock when she said, “Still after twenty years, I don’t understand how it happened overnight. All the Serbs and all the Croats knew...Bosniaks were blind, completely in the dark. We were lambs prepared for slaughter who had no idea.”⁶⁵

Samra, a 31-year old project assistant in the local tourism office, expressed a similar sentiment when she said, “They [Serbs] just snapped. There is no ideology that could make me kill someone...it is still a mystery to me why, and how, they could do this...It takes years and years and centuries of built-up hatred.”⁶⁶ She went onto describe the mentality of the perpetrators, with, “to Serbs, there was no difference if you were Catholic [Croat] or Muslim [Bosniak]...If you were not Serb, you had to die.”⁶⁷

Many Bosniaks argue that the meticulous planning and organization of the war (on the Serb side) are indicators of genocide. Edib describes it, as “Serb intellectuals became ideologists they seduced people and started the war People believed whatever they said.”⁶⁸ Damir believed that the war began “because of Serb aggression...they wanted to take our territory, they wanted to divide my country. This is why I joined [the military].” He firmly believes that this aggression still exists, as “Serbs and Croats still have aspirations for Bosnian territory. They still want it after all these years.”⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Elmina, female, 33, ceramics teacher.

⁶⁵ Sabina, female, 42, manager of a nursing home.

⁶⁶ Samra, female, 31, project assistant in tourist office.

⁶⁷ Samra, female, 31, project assistant in tourist office.

⁶⁸ Edib, male, 44, NGO.

⁶⁹ Damir, male, 52, former soldier.

Regardless of how the war began, the subsequent horrors should be hard to deny. Ada, a 50-year old woman who works in a nursing home, said, “Everyone knows what really happened [during the war]. Serbs are in denial...some kind of mass illusion. We can’t go forward because there is denial on their [Serbs’] side and rage on our [Bosniaks’] side because of their denial.”⁷⁰ Ada has particularly strong feelings on this because her husband was held in Omarska concentration camp – the site of many atrocities, and the location of the infamous Times magazine cover photo (see photo 1 below).

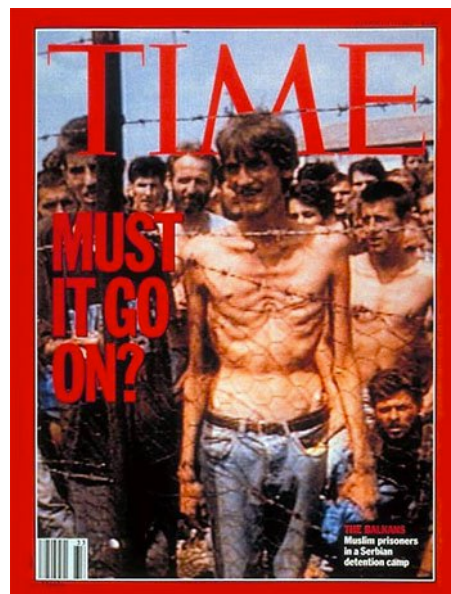


Photo 1

Without one common truth, and therefore one common history, future generations are going to continue to learn ethnically-biased versions of history that will further embed tensions between groups in BiH. Samra said, “It is very important that they [perpetrators] admit what they did was wrong... There are so many Serbs that believe they did nothing

⁷⁰ Ada, female, 50, manager of a soup kitchen.

⁷¹ Sense Tribunal. 2011. “The ‘Wailing Wall’ in Prijedor.” [http://www.sense-agency.com/icity/the-%E2%80%98wailing-wall%E2%80%99-in-prijedor.29.html?cat_id=1&news_id=13231].

wrong. For them, they were fighting for their country, for their nation. But you don't kill women and children, civilians, in a war over land."⁷² She went on to describe the war as genocide, because "It was so organized... When you carry out this scale of murder, you have to have political power, it has to come from a higher level."⁷³ Damir said, "Politicians know what the truth is, they can't keep pretending. The number of victims, the bodies... the majority of those killed were Bosniaks. It was genocide, the numbers speak for themselves."⁷⁴

These emotional responses to my interview questions about truth were more than enough to support the conclusion that defining one common history is crucial in order for BiH to be able to create a stable, sustainable peace (the goal of peacebuilding). Ahmet, a 31-year old doctor, said, "The truth still needs to be told, even if it is twenty years later. Politicians just keep talking and talking, but nothing about truth... We need to have a conversation on all sides and talk through what actually happened."⁷⁵ The role of memory has close ties to the role of truth in rebuilding post-conflict BiH, as it is difficult to memorialize a divided and disputed history.

MEMORY

In terms of memory, I asked questions about how respondents felt that BiH has dealt with the memories of genocide and war, how they personally have dealt with the memories of war, and the first thing that comes to their mind when I mentioned the war in Bosnia. Most respondents agreed that memory is crucial to recovery, because by sweeping war and tragedy under the rug, the root causes of conflict still remain. This is

⁷² Samra, female, 31, project assistant in tourist office.

⁷³ Samra, female, 31, project assistant in tourist office.

⁷⁴ Damir, male, 52, former soldier.

⁷⁵ Ahmet, male, 31, doctor.

certainly the case in BiH, and Djeno predicted, “We might have another genocide by tomorrow morning. This is not finished. All it takes is one crazy guy in power – and we have plenty.”⁷⁶ In this instance, Djeno was referring to the corrupt political elites that run the country, and how they misuse memory to gain re-election (i.e., by reminding voters of the hatred between groups). The conflicting memorials to memory are another source of tension between the three groups.

As Edib described, “Prijeedor [nearby town] is surrounded by mass graves [of Bosniak victims], but in the center of town there is a monument for Serb soldiers who died during the war. People are brainwashed.”⁷⁷ Monuments and memorials are frequently vandalized or destroyed depending on which territory they are in, which is a painful reminder of how far Bosnia has to go before it can reconcile its past. In January 2014, “Bosnian Serb municipal authorities, backed up by police, entered a Muslim cemetery in the town of Visegrad [BiH] to remove the word ‘genocide’ from a memorial to Bosniak war victims.”⁷⁸ The reasoning behind this destruction is that there as been no “official verdict” that this particular massacre was genocide.

Even without memorials being blatantly destroyed, “there are so many physical traces of war...crumbling buildings, things we [Bosnians] don’t have money to fix.”⁷⁹ This is particularly evident in the capital city of Sarajevo, which survived a four-year siege by Serb snipers in which some 400,000 inhabitants were “constantly shelled and sniped...people were cut off from food, medicine, water, and electricity. Thousands of

⁷⁶ Djeno, male, 33, imam.

⁷⁷ Edib, male, 44, NGO.

⁷⁸ Dzidic, Denis. 2014. “Bosnian Serbs Delete ‘Genocide’ From Visegrad Memorial.” Balkan Transitional Justice. [<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/visegrad-authorities-remove-genocide-from-monument>].

⁷⁹ Jasmin, male, 18, student.

civilians were killed and wounded.”⁸⁰ As one walks through the streets of Sarajevo over twenty years later, the craters left by bombshells seem to be on every street corner, and most buildings are still riddled with bullet holes. As Sabina described, “The country [BiH] has so few memorials to war. It is almost as if it never happened. We have been so occupied with trying to survive in the present, we can’t properly deal with the past.”⁸¹ The struggle in the present takes precedence over fixing facades or investing in memorials to the past.

Although it was not my intention when crafting the interview questions, one seemed to provoke the most painful responses. The question “What is the first thing that comes to your mind when I mention the war in Bosnia?” was met with a variety of disturbing and heart-wrenching responses. Lejla responded, “Basement. We hid in the basement of a three-floor house during the war.”⁸² Aldin responded, “Victims. People who lost family members... sons, daughters, fathers...that was the worst sacrifice.”⁸³ Mirela had several responses – “Raping, suffering, torturing. Tragedy. Hunger.”⁸⁴ Mirela survived off of corn flour during the war, because it was too dangerous to leave the house to find proper food. Damir responded, “Suffering. The worst part of the war [to me] was to see children suffering, to see civilians suffering. I can understand when soldiers fight each other...But not when they come and burn down a village and kill innocent people. When you are in the army, you have weapons to defend yourself...civilians do not.”⁸⁵ I

⁸⁰ The United Nations Refugee Agency. “Looking Back at the Siege of Sarajevo- 20 Years After.” 2012. [<http://www.unhcr.org/4f7acfb5c7.html>].

⁸¹ Sabina, female, 42, manager of a nursing home.

⁸² Lejla, female, 37, artist.

⁸³ Aldin, male, 20, student.

⁸⁴ Mirela, female, 35, teacher.

⁸⁵ Damir, male, 52, former soldier.

chose to display the responses to this question in a word cloud (see figure 2 below), as it had the most visual impact (as opposed to a list of responses).



Figure 2

Some respondents thought, “We [Bosnians] haven’t done enough to prevent the war from being forgotten,”⁸⁶ while others said they “think about it [the war] all the time” and “can’t escape it.”⁸⁷ Elmina said, “We can’t always focus on things that happened 50 years ago...or what our grandparents did to who...we can’t keep running around in circles.”⁸⁸ Lejla struggled with how “the memory of war is always floating nearby. Everything is a trigger [for memories of the war].”⁸⁹ Edib said, “In the government, there is no law that concerns memorials or anniversaries...we need a monument with a message that says ‘this should not happen again,’ something that tells a story, in all mediums.”⁹⁰ Edib devoted his life to finding the missing remains of victims because he was brokenhearted after seeing many people die before they found they bodies of their

⁸⁶ Aldin, male, 20, student.

⁸⁷ Mirela, female, 35, teacher.

⁸⁸ Elmina, female, 33, ceramics teacher.

⁸⁹ Lejla, female, 37, artist.

⁹⁰ Edib, male, 44, NGO.

loved ones. He describes memory as being “different from person to person and nation to nation. We [Bosnians] can’t agree about anything...we can’t move on when one side is always ignoring or denying what happened.”⁹¹

In addition to a monument that tells the real story of the war, many respondents advocated for one day that commemorates all victims. Alen said, “We have only three days when we are reminded of what happened [during the war] – May 31, July 11, and July 20. But the narrative on these days is to place blame, not to commemorate the victims...we need to learn how to acknowledge suffering on all sides.”⁹² Ahmet agreed, and said, “We can’t find the right way to cope with what happened [during the war]. There should be a day for remembering the whole war and all victims...not just one day for one genocide, or one day for Federation and another day for RS [Republika Srpska]. We should have one day when the whole nation remembers.”⁹³

As difficult as it was to hear victims’ stories of survival during the war, many of them said it was therapeutic. Samra described, “We don’t have anyone to talk to. I think it is important to have professional help (psychologists) for that. I deal with it the best way that I know, but it isn’t enough...for anyone. It is very hard to talk about the war. You almost can’t talk about it with someone who didn’t go through it. For me, I very rarely talk about it. So this [interview] is an exception.”⁹⁴ There is a stigma that your family will be shamed for generations if you go to a counselor, because “the opinion of people here [in BiH] is if you go to therapy, you must be crazy.”⁹⁵

⁹¹ Edib, male, 44, NGO.

⁹² Alen, male, 39, imam.

⁹³ Ahmet, male, 31, doctor.

⁹⁴ Samra, female, 31, project assistant in tourist office.

⁹⁵ Samra, female, 31, project assistant in tourist office.

The issue of memory is equally as relevant for soldiers as it is for civilians in BiH. Damir described how many of his fellow soldiers suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, “but not just because of their time in the military and the horrible crimes they saw, but because they now live in poverty and don’t have a job. They felt used. They were fighting and willing to give up their lives for a country that now doesn’t care about them.”⁹⁶ Damir was fortunate to be able to get a job at the local post office to support his family after the war, but many of his friends are struggling to survive off of the paltry military pension from the government. He said, “for the first three years after the war, I had trauma and nightmares...I was lucky to be able to come back to my old job- it was a distraction. I write books, which is a type of therapy for me. I can write down everything I have in my mind and everything that is bothering me in stories, songs, or poems.”⁹⁷ His fellow soldiers do not have such coping strategies, and have been battling for survival since 1996.

The role of memory in rebuilding post-conflict BiH is essential to recovery, in addition to finding one common truth, as described in the previous section. The final important theme to consider is justice, as perpetrators walk free and have never faced justice for the crimes they committed during the war. As Sabina insists, “It is not possible to live peacefully without resolving the past,”⁹⁸ which is the third condition for creating a stable, sustainable peace in BiH.

JUSTICE

I asked questions about respondents’ opinions on the international courts (the Hague, International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, International Criminal

⁹⁶ Damir, male, 52, former soldier.

⁹⁷ Damir, male, 52, former soldier.

⁹⁸ Sabina, female, 42, manager of a nursing home.

Court), national courts of BiH, and local courts (for most, this was courts in Sanski Most). Justice is paramount to protecting the future stability of BiH, because perpetrators who roam free are a daily reminder to victims of the failures of the government and judicial systems. Many respondents felt like there was no adequate punishment for the severity of the crimes that Serbs had committed during the war. Admir, a 33-year old man who is the director of a religious non-profit in BiH, commented on justice by saying, “when someone kills 100 people, you can’t kill him 100 times in punishment.”⁹⁹ Admir also noted how “being vengeful and angry traps many people” but he refuses to be one of them, and says that the only true justice for perpetrators will come from God.¹⁰⁰

Lejla, a 37-year old mother of six, said, “There is no adequate punishment or compensation for what they [Serbs] have done.”¹⁰¹ Mirela agrees, and said, “There is no justice for someone who killed so many people. You can’t count someone’s life in years spent in prison.”¹⁰² Samra thinks that you can’t compensate families for their lost loved ones, “but it will be some kind of relief if they [Serbs] call it the right name – ‘genocide’ – and admit it was wrong. It could be some kind of beginning.”¹⁰³ Samra’s comment brings us back to the issues of truth and memory, in which there is denial on all sides of the conflict preventing victims from moving forward. Alen expressed a similar feeling when he said, “For the moment, it would be enough if Serbs would admit it, and say ‘yes, this is what we did.’ After grieving, their denial is the most hurtful piece.”¹⁰⁴ The

⁹⁹ Admir, male, 33, religious non-profit director.

¹⁰⁰ Admir, male, 33, religious non-profit director.

¹⁰¹ Lejla, female, 37, artist.

¹⁰² Mirela, female, 35, teacher.

¹⁰³ Samra, female, 31, project assistant in tourist office.

¹⁰⁴ Alen, male, 39, imam.

rampant impunity of perpetrators is all but commonplace in BiH, as described by the next sequence of stories from interviewees.

Ada said, “When my husband visits Prijedor, he walks by the men who put him in a concentration camp [Omarska, described earlier]. They [perpetrators] are still free—nothing has happened to them. The courts aren’t doing their job.”¹⁰⁵ Djeno had a similar experience with the dysfunctional, corrupt justice system:

“My neighbor was sentenced to life in prison for killing my grandfather. After a couple years, his relatives were going around offering money and threatening witnesses. There was a retrial, and many witnesses pulled back their testimonies. Just like that, after only eight years, this guy was freed. I am sick of cases like this. We can’t protect our witnesses, so why would more come forward?”¹⁰⁶ Alen said, “The corruption is beyond imagination [in BiH],” not only in the justice system, but also in the medical and political fields as well. I witnessed a commonplace example of this corruption during my time in BiH, when my mentor had to bring a bag of coffee to the hospital just to get an appointment with a doctor to get a kidney stone removed. He said that this type of bribery is so ingrained into the system that it is expected.

In her description of the corrupt systems in BiH, Ada said, “We [Bosniaks] have an expression that our laws are ‘dead letters on paper.’ Even if a law gets broken, there is no force behind it, no punishment.”¹⁰⁷ She describes the international court as “nothing but a big theater,”¹⁰⁸ and Jasmin said, “If the local court didn’t exist, life would still be

¹⁰⁵ Ada, female, 50, manager of a soup kitchen.

¹⁰⁶ Djeno, male, 33, imam.

¹⁰⁷ Ada, female, 50, manager of a soup kitchen.

¹⁰⁸ Ada, female, 50, manager of a soup kitchen.

the same here...they don't do anything. Same with the police.”¹⁰⁹ Most of the time, when I got to the “justice” section of my interview and started asking about the respondent’s opinion on courts, they would simply laugh. Some would roll their eyes as if thinking, “this naïve American actually thinks we have a justice system!” I continued to ask questions about the courts and police to all of my interviewees, but it was nearly always the same, laughing response.

Once we had moved past the broken justice system of BiH, it led into multiple interesting conversations about interviewees’ perceptions of perpetrators. I would ask whether or not perpetrators could compensate victims and their families for their loss (always a resounding “no”), and then ask about the characteristics of the perpetrators themselves. Edib said, “Most of them were normal people before they were killers...they were intellectuals, high school teachers, who overnight became murderers. Only a few of them were criminals before the war. They suddenly killed their neighbors, and because no one prosecuted them, they are now back to their normal lives.”¹¹⁰ Djeno also commented on perpetrators going back to their normal lives when he said, “In Prijedor, 3,000 men, women, and children were killed during the war, but we have less than ten people in jail for it. That, for me, is not acceptable.”¹¹¹ He also said that his “biggest problem is that when Serbs committed war crimes, it was organized by the state, the regime, the government. When Bosniaks committed crimes [during the war], it was not organized, it was self-defense.”¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Jasmin, male, 18, student.

¹¹⁰ Edib, male, 44, NGO.

¹¹¹ Djeno, male, 33, imam.

¹¹² Djeno, male, 33, imam.

Samra reflected on how the perpetrators “became different people overnight...you can’t possibly imagine the transformation.”¹¹³ It was a neighbors-turning-on-neighbors situation, a parallel to Rwanda, in which the victims were shocked when friends and even family members turned on them in an instant. Sabina said, “It is impossible that someone could make me kill someone if I didn’t want to...It is unacceptable to kill someone, especially in those cruel and sick ways. It had to be some kind of mass hypnosis.”¹¹⁴ The fact that perpetrators continue to evade justice is a problem regardless of their motivations. A big part of this impunity is due to the corrupt political system that reinforces ethno-religious divisions between the three groups.

Mirela described such political tactics when she said, “Every time we [Bosniaks and Serbs] start to get along, politicians remind us how we are different...they come and say no, you must be careful of the others, they could attack again... Politicians are to blame for our separation.”¹¹⁵ Samra describes a similar scenario in which, “we have leaders who are encouraging these [ethno-religious] differences. In every election through the years it is the same...they just bring back bad memories and hatred. They bring up nationalism, they feed us rage...there is no future with that.”¹¹⁶ Sabina simply said, “Life would be easier if we didn’t have politicians,”¹¹⁷ and Ada said, “Politicians need to confess and admit to their crimes first. Then others will follow.”¹¹⁸

Djeno describes election season and the ensuing nationalism as a “trauma trigger that brings us back to 1992. Politicians used this to their advantage then [to start the war]

¹¹³ Samra, female, 31, project assistant in tourist office.

¹¹⁴ Sabina, female, 42, manager of a nursing home.

¹¹⁵ Mirela, female, 35, teacher,

¹¹⁶ Samra, female, 31, project assistant in tourist office.

¹¹⁷ Sabina, female, 42, manager of a nursing home.

¹¹⁸ Ada, female, 50, manager of a soup kitchen.

and they will use it again now.”¹¹⁹ Alen sums up elections by saying, “We don’t have a good political party to vote for – so we just vote for the less evil party. And this is always the one that protects our own ethnicity.”¹²⁰ By being forced to pick sides based on ethno-religious identity, the political system of BiH is further entrenching the divisions between the three groups. These divisions started the war in the first place, and there is a significant chance that they will start another one in the future.

The current widespread impunity for perpetrators, stemming from corrupt judicial and political systems, is a barrier to stability and reinforces the argument that peacebuilding has been unsuccessful in BiH, particularly at the individual level. Neighbors turned on neighbors during the war, and since there has been no accountability for perpetrators, these same neighbors are still walking by each other on the streets of BiH. This reminds perpetrators to stay silent and victims to stay angry, which does nothing to help the country move forward towards a stable, sustainable peace.

Overall, my interviews did not portray widespread optimism in the future of BiH. The way the system is now, political elites have no political will or desire to change the constitution, which they are benefitting from by being able to pocket government funds. My analysis, organized by questions looking at truth, memory, and justice in rebuilding post-conflict BiH, clearly supports the argument that post-conflict peacebuilding strategies used in BiH *have not met* the expectations and needs of the citizens in BiH. If their needs and expectations had been met, citizens would have been more positive and optimistic about the future of BiH. Instead, they are predicting the relapse into future conflict, which is exactly the opposite of what peacebuilding seeks to achieve.

¹¹⁹ Djeno, male, 33, imam.

¹²⁰ Alen, male, 39, imam.

VII. Conclusions and Implications

Throughout the entirety of this thesis, I have sought to answer two research questions. The primary research question, addressed in the first chapter, focuses on the state level and asks: *How successful have peacebuilding strategies been in Bosnia-Herzegovina?* I argued that peacebuilding mechanisms in BiH have been largely *unsuccessful*, as they have been unable to meet three key indicators for success - pursuit of rehabilitation, reconstruction, and reconciliation; creation of political and socio-economic mechanisms that build trust; and external intervention that helps create peace and stability. The secondary research question, addressed in the second chapter, focuses on the individual level and asks: *How have these peacebuilding strategies met the expectations and needs of the citizens in Bosnia-Herzegovina?* I argued that as a result of peacebuilding mechanisms being unsuccessful, they also *have not met* the needs and expectations of the citizens of BiH.

As has been stated, the response to both research questions are fairly similar in their findings that peacebuilding mechanisms in Bosnia-Herzegovina have been *unsuccessful* in achieving the goal of long-term stability and prevention of future conflict. Although the blatant violence and killings stopped with the signing of the Dayton Accords, the root causes of the conflict still remain, and have the potential to set the country up for failure in the future. A dominant theme in my interviews, the feelings of pessimism and apathy toward the future of BiH, indicate the potential for another conflict. Although I hope with everything in me that this is not the case, the data presented in this thesis seem to present a dark outlook for the future of BiH. In order to avoid future conflict, there needs to be significant reform of the constitution in BiH to

prevent political paralysis and help the country move forward both economically and socially.

If institutions were restructured not only in government, but in the judicial and police systems as well, this would increase public trust in institutions. By reforming security, political, and socio-economic mechanisms to build trust between ethno-religious groups, citizens could focus less on corruption and instead focus on rehabilitation, reconstruction, and reconciliation. These goals could be met with the help of external intervention, but actors need to be wary of imposing a top-down liberal peacebuilding approach, and should instead adapt methods to fit the local context of BiH. If these three criteria were met, then it could be argued that peacebuilding mechanisms were successful in BiH. Until then, however, BiH will remain the unfortunate case study of “what not to do” when trying to implement successful peacebuilding mechanisms. It is essential to remember that if another conflict were to erupt in BiH, the potential for a domino effect on other Eastern European countries would make an impact across the globe - which is why it is infinitely better to work towards prevention now, rather than rely on conflict resolution later.

“What we have right now is not peace. We have a war that is using everything else but weapons.”¹²¹

¹²¹ Alen, male, 39, imam.

VIII. Appendix I – Interview Questions

Interview - Truth, Memory, and Justice in Post-Conflict Bosnia-Herzegovina

Demographic Information

Name/Age/Ethnicity (Bosniak, Serb, Croat)

Years of schooling/level of education

Current family situation (married, single, divorced)

Children (Yes or no)/Occupation

Where did you live during the 1991-1995 war? Did you move after the war?

Where is your family from originally?

Truth

What is your definition of truth (in general)?

What is your definition of truth about the war in Bosnia?

Do you think perpetrators have told the complete truth about the war?

Do you think there are more mass graves that have yet to be discovered? How do you think the rest will be found (if more remain)?

What else needs to be told in order for you to feel like the whole truth has been uncovered?

Once the truth gets out, is there any way that perpetrators can compensate victims and victim's families? What about bystanders (who knew and were silent for 20 years)?

Memory

How do you think that the country has dealt with the memories of genocide and war?

How have you dealt with the memory of war? Do you think about it often?

What triggers these memories?

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when I mention the war in Bosnia?

Did you have friends of other ethno-religious identities before the war? Do you now?

Justice

How do you feel the international court has done in bringing justice to perpetrators (i.e., the Hague)?

How do you feel the national court has done in bringing justice to perpetrators and victims? How about the local court in Sanski Most?

Overall

How do you feel about the path to reconciliation in Bosnia-Herzegovina?

Do you think there is healing between victims and perpetrators? How long do you think it will take for society to heal (if ever)?

What do you think Bosnia will be like in 5-10 years? Do you see yourself still in Bosnia, or somewhere else?

What do you think is most important to healing and post-conflict reconstruction (truth, memory, justice)? What will make society whole again?

Youth (18-25)- Does the memory of the war impact you, even though you weren't alive at the time? If yes, how so? Adults (26+)- Do you think the memory of war will impact your children?

What role do you believe the European Union and the United States played during the war in Bosnia? What role do they play now?

IX. Appendix II- Stories of Survival

Throughout my interviews with local citizens in BiH, I heard incredible stories of survival, as many of the respondents had vivid memories of suffering throughout the war from 1992-1995. These stories served as an essential part of the interviews, as they provided the background and personal experiences of each respondent. They allowed me, as a researcher, to understand the past behind their present, and to seek to comprehend their feelings about modern-day BiH. The quotes serve as supplemental material that was essential to my research and understanding, but did not precisely fit into either of the previous chapters. They are organized by the pseudonyms of each respondent, along with their gender, age, and occupation (corresponding to the previous footnotes).

Samra

Female, 31, project assistant in tourist office

- “My father went missing [from Prijedor] at the beginning of the war. We heard he was in a concentration camp...but we didn’t find his remains until 2002. They were in a mass grave in a mine close by.”
- “My great grandfather was an imam in Prijedor. He lived in a house attached to the mosque. The Serbs bombed the mosques first [at the beginning of the war].... My uncle, aunt, great grandmother, and great grandfather...they all died. Only the children survived. I was eight when that happened [when the mosque was bombed]. To me it was as if my Serb neighbors just woke up that morning and decided to become a mass murderer...to children, this is what it looked like. There was no place to hide, because we all lived together...Serbs and Bosniaks.”

- “Two years after the beginning of the war, my grandfather saw his best man (from his wedding), who was a Serb, and he asked him ‘Have you seen my son? Is he alive?’ and the man responded ‘No, but if I do [see him], I will kill him myself.’ Before the war, they were best friends...I played with his children when I was little. It was really shocking.”

Aldin

Male, 20, student

- “After the war ended, we were refugees in Germany for three years, then came back to Sanski Most and had to build our house...again.”

Damir

Male, 52, former soldier

- “I was in Prijedor [when the war began]. Serb soldiers and police officers separated men from women and children. Women and children were moved to refugee camps in a convoy...Men were killed. I only survived because I was lucky, and a woman hid me in her truck. Over 240 people in my convoy were killed...only five of those responsible have since been prosecuted.”
- “I was shot twice during the war. Once in my head, the second time in my shoulder... Despite all this, I would do it again. It is a survival instinct- to fight back when you are attacked and humiliated.”
- “I struggle with high blood pressure now. The doctors said my coronary system is in bad condition because of the constant adrenaline and stress I felt during the war. My heart couldn’t handle it.”

Sabina

Female, 42, manager of a nursing home

- “When I was at university in Sarajevo, I had a Serb friend who told me to go home to my family, because something bad was going to happen soon. She told me I had to flee, because in a few days, it would be chaos. It started on Saturday, April 6, 1992- the first day of Ramadan.”
- “After I fled from Sarajevo, I went to my grandmother’s house in Bosanski Novi. We heard that Serbs were taking Bosniak men from their houses. My grandmother asked her Serb neighbor to hide my father in her flat, because the soldiers weren’t knocking on Serb doors...she said yes, even though if Serbs had found out, she would have been killed. We were lucky.”
- “Two Serb soldiers came to our door and asked if any Bosniak men lived there. Then one [of the soldiers] asked me to marry him. I was so scared; I was already lying about my father, and said no. They were in full uniform and had big guns.”
- “When war happens, we have to escape to stay alive. Our life is the most precious thing we have, and there is no point in staying and dying. In war there are no rules...those who stay are killed.”
- “The war changed everything...Destinies and lives. I could be somewhere else, I could have finished university in Sarajevo and been a doctor...But the war took what was supposed to be the best years of my life.”

Ada

Female, 50, manager of a soup kitchen

- “I think about the war often. My husband was in the Omarska concentration camp for four months. Every time I look at him I remember...we are living with these memories every day.”

Djeno

Male, 33, imam

- “During the war, you cannot imagine how big the media blockade was. The Serbs were killing us and putting us in concentration camps...but the news said ‘Muslims are killing each other,’ and even in schools, this is what kids learned.”
- “We had a friend who worked in a news station during the war. After the war, Bosniaks called her a traitor for the lies she said on TV. When we met with her, she cried and said that they held a gun to her head and said they would kill her and her whole family if she did not read the news they gave her...This shows again how the war was very well planned and organized.”
- “I spent one day in a concentration camp, but for me, that’s the place of the most suffering and humiliation for me and my family. Today, where the camp used to be [in a school] there is a monument for the Serb soldiers who died during the war. To put a monument for the perpetrators in front of the site where people were raped, where someone’s father or brother were killed...For me, this is one of the biggest barriers to reconciliation. It is also a kind of trauma trigger for me, because it is showing me that we [Bosniaks] are not welcome in RS.”

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