

THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS IN THE PROCESS OF RECONCILIATION AND PEACEBUILDING – A CASE STUDY OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA (AHMIĆI, TRUSINA AND BRADINA)

Abstract. Bosnia and Herzegovina is a young, post-conflict and ethnically divided country in Europe. It is well known for being the scene of a conflict centred on religious divisions. For the researcher, this raises a number of interesting questions. What is the role of religious institutions in conflict and peacebuilding? Why is religion politicised? Can religious dialogue be perceived as a factor in the process of reconciling opposing ethnic communities; in this case, Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks? A section of this article is devoted to the stories of survivors from Bosniak, Croatian and Serbian families¹. Each of these three ethnic groups suffered during the massacres in Ahmići, Trusina and Bradina, which took place in the first half of the 1990s. In addition, the authors analyse the role played by institutions like the Inter Religious Council in Sarajevo and the Maximilian Kolbe Foundation in order to assess their contribution to reconciliation and peacebuilding. In this regard, the purpose of the article is to conceptualise the issue of religious peacebuilding in the wider context of peace and conflict studies, as well as to call attention to the ubiquitous unobjective and unbalanced perceptions of the role of religion in contemporary conflicts and conflict resolution.

Keywords: religion and politics, peacebuilding, reconciliation, ethnicity, memory, victims, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Introduction

The history of Bosnia and Herzegovina is interspersed with periods of hatred, conflict as well as mutual cooperation and peace in the areas of politics, culture and religion. On one side, as Vjekoslav Perica notes, the

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¹ The order is alphabetical.

first ecumenical movements appeared in the 19th century. An example is Josip Juraj Strossmayer, who urged Catholic Croatian and Orthodox Serbs to work together against Hungarian nationalism. Similarly, in the 1960s, the Catholic Church began annual interreligious dialogue and prayers (Perica, 2006a: 64, 98–104). On the other side, in the time of Yugoslavia (1918–1992) religion and religious institutions played a great role in inter-ethnic relations. Radmila Radić wrote that during the existence of Yugoslavia religious institutions did not establish genuine cooperation and this was another reason for the collapse of Yugoslavia. The struggle of individual religious institutions for ‘their nations’ led to mutual intolerance and open hostility between Orthodox, Catholic and Muslim Yugoslavs (Radić, 2003: 196–207). The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the 1990s occurred on ethnic fronts, with each seeking to protect the interests of individual groups and create statehood as part of their own identity. In all the states that arose from the ruins of Yugoslavia, as Vjekoslav Perica states, religion has become the most important foundation of nationality, except in Slovenia (Perica, 2006b: 104).

Contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is a young, post-conflict, ethnically divided country in Europe. Its history towards the end of the 20th century has had an impact on the socio-political climate today and the peacebuilding/reconciliation process. From 1991 to 1995, BiH was a fragile state, fighting for independence and international recognition. The nationalistic demands of the larger ethnic groups coupled with a policy centred on cooperation with kin states were important drivers of the conflict. The Srebrenica massacre created international tension and became a symbol of remembrance. The complicated status of BiH and the peacebuilding process raises many questions for the researcher. Who is responsible for BiH’s future and for the reconciliation process? Is it society (including civil society and politicians), religious leaders, the international community or NGOs? What is the role of religious institutions in peacebuilding? Can religious dialogue be perceived as a factor in the reconciliation of conflicted ethnic communities in BiH at the local level, in particular of Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks?

The article draws on the workshop “European workshop on dealing with the violence burdened past in Bosnia and Herzegovina. A contribution to dialogue and a culture of listening and solidarity” held in Sarajevo in April 2018. This workshop primarily focused on the complex ethnic, social, cultural, political and economic situation of those affected by resettlement, ethnic cleansing, displacement and other forms of exclusion. The article is divided into two parts, the first of which examines state and non-state strategies of conflict resolution/peacebuilding and the development of a more holistic and anthropocentric approach to conflict and peace in the post-Cold War period. The term “peacebuilding” is borrowed from Johan

Galtung. The concept of religious peacebuilding is explained in the wider context of the transformative and relational approach. Reconciliation and forgiveness are considered as 'bridging' concepts which bring together religious and secular dimensions of conflict resolution and peacebuilding. The second part of the article analyses case studies of events which unfolded in Bradina, Ahmići and Trusina, with a section devoted to the stories of Bosniak, Croatian and Serbian survivors². Contributors to reconciliation and peacebuilding include religious institutions such as the Interreligious Council in Sarajevo and the Maximilian Kolbe Foundation, both of which are included in the analysis.

From peacebuilding to reconciliation: a redefinition of conflict in the post-Cold War era

The term peacebuilding entered public and scientific discourse in the 1990s³ after first being conceptualised by Johan Galtung in the 1960s (Bartoli, 2013: 200). Galtung understood peacebuilding as the practical implementation of peaceful social change through socio-economic reconstruction and development. Johan Galtung later expanded his initial definition, noting that peacebuilding involves radical change aimed at overcoming contradictions that lie at the root of conflict (Galtung, 1996: 112). This broadened perspective, which took both structural and cultural factors into account, became increasingly influential in the post-Cold War era, when the nature of conflicts fought on a global scale changed from external to internal.

The "wars of our time", which apparently somewhat resemble wars fought in the pre-Westphalian world (Münkler, 2004: 7-11), are now mainly wars continuing as internal conflicts, either civil or ethnic (Nye, 2009: 22). Often described as "new wars" (Kaldor, 1999: 2) or "post-national wars" (Münkler, 2004: 165), these contemporary conflicts revolve more around identity politics than geopolitical or ideological issues, which were once the principal source of conflicts (Kaldor, 1999: 6). While mainly internal, they undergo a process of internationalisation, thereby becoming "internal and internationalized" (Lederach, 1997: 11-12). Cultural factors, especially those relating to identity, play a significant role in such conflicts and, in their own specific way, contribute to their nature. As John Paul Lederach points out, in contemporary conflicts

² The order is alphabetical.

³ The term entered public discourse following the publication of "An Agenda for Peace" by UN Secretary General Boutros Ghali in 1992.

*cohesion and identity [...] tend to form within increasingly narrower lines than those that encompass national citizenship. In situations of armed conflict, people seek **security** by identifying with something close to their experience and over which they have some control. In today's settings that unit of identity may be clan, ethnicity, religion, or geographic/regional affiliation, or a mix of these. In the worst scenarios, this narrowing of identity becomes what was once called the 'Lebanonization' and may now be called the 'Somalization' of conflict. (ibid.: 13)*

Discussions about identity raise the question of a balanced and comprehensive modus operandi, especially when considering religious factors as its key components. After conducting extensive research into armed conflict, Jonathan Fox concluded that these factors should be approached in a complex, multidimensional way. Drawing on data on internal conflicts he had gathered (Fox, 2006: 2), including data of an ethnic nature, Fox stresses that although religious factors are present in many and these factors are playing an ever more powerful role, they cannot be seen as the sole determinant of those conflicts (Fox, 2004: 62). While many contemporary conflicts, including those in Northern Ireland and Bosnia, are classified as religious, such a perception may result in other determinants of conflicts being overlooked or ignored. The complex nature of those conflicts can only fully be understood in a wider historical and social context. Social identities either unite or divide people and, in certain circumstances, may contribute to hostilities, although whether a conflict actually develops depends on the context. By themselves, "identity markers" such as ethnicity and religion are not enough to provoke conflict (Martin, 1997: 19). Each conflict is different and unique (Lüer, 2018).

One of the questions raised in the debate surrounding the broadened understanding of peace and conflict in the post-Cold War era concerns the definition and redefinition of conflict itself. In his work, Johan Galtung writes not about the resolution of conflicts, but about their transformation. He views conflict as a natural part of life and an opportunity to create a new, better reality achieved as a result of a common, creative effort (Galtung, 2007: 14); in his eyes, conflict is both the "Destroyer" and the "Creator" (Galtung, 2000: 2). He claims that while conflicts were analysed in the past, the processes of their peaceful transformation were not taken into consideration (Galtung, 1985: 141-148). His *concept* of "transcending and transforming" is therefore aimed at re-evaluating the way in which conflict should be perceived and dealt with. Galtung believes that relations establish the starting point of any theoretical or practical considerations. A similar view is found in the work of John Paul Lederach. Johan Galtung notes that relations are the essence of peace. Unlike security, peace can solely be perceived through the prism of relations as it is in itself a relationship between

parties (Galtung, 2007: 14). It depends on the transformation of that other type of relationship: conflict. In this view, violence is the result of untransformed conflict.

This makes it advisable to examine the roots of ethnic conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Socio-psychological factors are often listed among its causes. In her empirical, anthropological and historical analyses, H. Zeynep Bulutgil states that unresolved issues concerning the elections in the 1990s and World War II violence create ethnic divisions in BiH (Bulutgil, 2016: 149). A strong sense of community coupled with hatred of outsiders was fostered over many years: a sentiment chiefly fuelled by revenge and violence. Erin K. Jenne lists several drivers of ethnic cleansing, such as nationalism and national self-determination, both of which were used to justify policies of ethnic cleansing and ultimately led to state-supported genocide. Further, “grievances from past experiences of victimisation and collective desires for revenge may lead victims of ethnic cleansing to become perpetrators in later periods” (Jenne, 2011: 116). It is worth noting that over the last 200 years or so BiH has experienced conflict on average every 40 years, starting with the Austro-Hungarian occupation in the 19th and 20th centuries, through both World Wars and ending with the Bosnian war of independence in the 1990s. These events preserved the ‘unhealed memory’ which, after decades of accumulation, led to a tragic outcome in the form of rising nationalism and harmful stereotyping, which eventually caused the conflict to reach alarming proportions.

Factors contributing to the ethnic cleansing that took place in BiH include economic competition, social divisions among ethnic groups, mutual enmity and a fear of victimisation associated with political transition, state policy or nation-building. A desire for personal gain might also have been a contributing factor (Jenne, 2011: 117-118). Many experts make a connection between ethnic conflict and modernisation, between fanning the flames of nationalism and the role of leaders (Jesse, Williams, 2011). In the post-Cold War era, a proposed explanation of ethnic conflict has been the concept of ancient hatreds. Raymond C. Taras and Rajat Ganguly refer to it as a “concept that was mainly the creation of journalists and media personnel covering the Balkan ethnic conflicts and the various ethnic civil wars in sub-Saharan Africa” (Taras, Ganguly, 2010: 4). Signed in 1995, the Dayton Peace Agreement established Bosnia and Herzegovina as a federated state comprising three constitutive nations (Serbs, Bosniaks and Croats). This moment marked the beginning of deep ethnic divisions. It was in these unfavourable conditions, following the end of the war, that a comprehensive peacebuilding initiative was finally launched.

Concepts like “relationship”, “meeting” and “reconciliation” form the basis of all the initiatives related to transforming the conflict (Lederach, 1997:

24–26). The key lies in “indigenous empowerment” which perceives the transformation of conflict and the recognition and inclusion of human and cultural resources from the inside. In the long term, the transformation of conflict should therefore be understood as a shift in perspective whereby the people involved in the conflict are no longer seen as the source of the problem, but as its solution. It is therefore necessary to create an infrastructure for peace at every level of the conflicted community. It is vital to identify cultural aspects and internal sources of conflict in order to reduce mutual hostility in the short term and, in the long run, to introduce reforms (e.g. political reforms) (Lederach, 1995: 212). Strong emphasis is placed on bottom-up peacebuilding which, according to Jean Paul Lederach, is more “elicitive”⁴ and transformative than direct and prescriptive (Ramsbotham et al., 2011: 235).

The transformative approach to peacebuilding may be viewed as a key aspect of the new post-Cold War perspective on conflict resolution, but also as a broad platform for cooperation between various civil society actors (Abu-Nimer, 2001: ix). This approach focuses less on the material and technical aspects of peacebuilding and is associated with the comprehensive relational perspective which emphasises the role of interactions between conflicting parties. This perspective brings together a number of mostly non-state actors; a privileged position among them is occupied by cultural, religious and faith-based subjects who are the most active and hold the greatest experience in the areas of conflict resolution and peacebuilding. In the last few decades their contributions have held both normative and practical implications and contributed significantly to the shift in discourse towards a less structural or material and more identity-oriented approach. During the post-Cold War debate, religious and faith-based entities therefore contributed to the emergence of a more holistic and anthropocentric approach to conflicts. At the same time, the relational and transformative approach became a crucial element of the broadly defined “new diplomacy” and, more precisely, track II or citizen diplomacy which implies the recognition and inclusion of non-state actors in processes traditionally reserved for state actors. The key idea bridging these two domains is most fully represented by the concept of reconciliation which, while rooted in religion, has become the universally applied strategy for moving from conflict to peace.

Religion: between peace and conflict

Matters concerning secular and religious perspectives while studying security and peacebuilding can be approached from a neo-liberal point of view, with an emphasis on the role of non-state actors. In this case, the

⁴ “Elicitive” refers to the creation or emergence of a brand-new reality.

terminology mostly revolves around concepts like reconciliation, forgiveness and restorative justice, which are all examples of the 'bridging' phenomenon between religious and non-religious perceptions of conflict resolution and peacebuilding, and increasingly rely on the involvement of non-state actors, both religious and secular. Interestingly, since the early 1990s one can find the growing area of both the normative overlapping and empirical realisation of the tenets of secular and religious theory and practice. Several different categories can be identified, such as the role of civil society in peacebuilding and track II or civil diplomacy, as well as a bottom-up approach and transformation of conflict. These categories are not only connected to, but in fact rooted in an 'old/new' attitude to peacebuilding known as the relational approach.

The essence of the relational approach is its focus on the interactions between people and, more precisely, on the transformation of these interactions perceived as the purpose and the method of conflict resolution. Daniel Philpott and Jeniffer Llewellyn describe the relational approach as contextual, general, integrating and holistic (Llewellyn, Philpott, 2014: 15-16) and state that both restorative justice and reconciliation are relational concepts of justice. They refer not only to committing 'wrong', but also to the harm and consequences of wrongdoing at different levels, from the individual through group, community, national or even international level. The fundamental question in this approach concerns what must be done when confronted with wrongdoing in order to establish and sustain peaceful relations and to ensure that the conditions which led to the wrongdoing are not replicated. The purpose of this idea of justice is to create and protect the "reconciled" relations in both the present and the future (*ibid.*: 16).

The relational approach forms the basis of the post-Cold War perception of non-state perspectives in the areas of conflict resolution and peacebuilding and represents the essence of religious peacebuilding which, although known and used in the past, has only recently (in the last few decades) become a feature of the alternative, "non-state-centric" approach to conflict resolution and peacebuilding. In both the theoretical and practical domain, religious peacebuilding may be viewed as the bridge between activities undertaken by religious and non-religious actors in the field of conflict and post-conflict reconstruction, an example being Bosnia and Herzegovina. An important symptom of this phenomenon has been the inclusion of "non-political" terms associated with religion in political and social science discourse: terms like just peace (Philpott, 2012), brotherhood (Heo, 2012: 7), friendship (von Heyking, Avramenko, 2008), love (Nussbaum, 2015) and hope (Moisi, 2012) which since the early 1990s have been studied as elements of not only the alternative approach to conflict and peace, but also of politics itself (Butler et al., 2011). This approach is characterised by an emphasis on the 'soft' aspects

of peace and conflict, that is mainly psychological and cultural factors, especially religion. Acknowledgement of the religious factor in political science discourse enables researchers to surpass or transcend the secular approach which for the last few decades has dominated the field of political science and social science in general and hindered the inclusion of non-Western cultural perspectives in scholarly reflection. Consequently, the idea of establishing a more holistic and anthropocentric vision of peace, as postulated since the end of the Cold War, becomes more realistic. The concept of post-secularism comes to mind here; first coined by Jürgen Habermas, it suggests that the continued exclusion of religion from the public sphere is not only impossible but also harmful to society itself (Habermas, 2008).

Reconciliation has become a key concept in the area of peace and conflict; it has been transferred from religious discourse (Rotfeld, 2014: 8) and carries moral connotations. It is a very complex term which implies a change in attitude at the individual, interpersonal and institutional levels (Andrieu, 2018). On the basic level, reconciliation is understood as a change or improvement in relations between opposing parties (Renner, Spencer, 2012: 2) and a process which enables society to move from a divided past toward a common future (Bloomfield et al., 2003: 12). Another term closely linked to reconciliation is coexistence, although the presumptions and conditions associated with reconciliation and coexistence are very differently perceived, depending on the author. For Johan Galtung, reconciliation means “closure” and “healing” and requires that various psychological, social, theological, philosophical and “human” aspects be considered (Galtung, 2001: 4). Daniel Philpott perceives reconciliation as a concept of justice and peacebuilding based on the holistic healing of wounds caused by war and dictatorship (Philpott, 2010: 94). Oliver Ramsbotham, Tom Woodhouse and Hugh Miall define reconciliation as the restoration of broken bonds and the process of learning how to live together despite radical differences. According to all of these authors, the role of reconciliation cannot be overstated since it should be regarded as the ultimate purpose of conflict resolution.

The concept's complexity and ambiguity becomes evident while analysing the various, minimalist and maximalist, understandings of the term. In the case of the former, reconciliation is taken to mean peaceful coexistence and lack of war. This implies the cessation of violence, respect for the formal rule of law and an obligation to remain part of the same political community. The essence of reconciliation therefore lies in restoring or creating the minimal conditions for the survival of the political community while refraining from attempting to achieve more ambitious and difficult goals like forgiveness and social solidarity (Verdeja, 2014). As Daniel Bloomfield points out, reconciliation in this sense does not mean that former enemies will love or even forgive each other (Bloomfield et al., 2003: 2), but that they

will coexist and develop a level of cooperation that will enable them to live side by side. The maximalist understanding of reconciliation is far more complex. Here, reconciliation is viewed as meaning the long-term process of building lasting peace between former enemies, implemented on both the state and society level. The necessary elements of reconciliation in this case are friendship, trust and empathy, albeit not necessarily forgiveness. Therefore, this understanding comprises elements of both 'soft power' and 'hard power' (Gardner-Feldman, 2012).

Both reconciliation and the much more controversial and contested forgiveness are rooted in religious discourse and have become elements of the "peace and conflict political discourse". Daniel Philpott notes that although the idea may seem surprising, unrealistic or even utopian, victims of even the worst massacres can and do forgive their oppressors. Political reconciliation, which is the result of dialogue between victims and perpetrators, implies the creation of a platform for mutual respect, as well as a responsibility to become members of a civilised society. External manifestations of these processes come in the form of declarations of forgiveness, like those made by the victims of apartheid in South Africa, the genocide in Rwanda or the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although such acts of forgiveness are not a standard practice, they do happen. They are expressed either through voluntary acts motivated by religious beliefs, especially in the case of Christian victims, or following long-term processes of 'the healing of relations', namely, the key method used in conflict areas by peacebuilding actors, including religious and faith-based ones.

Finally, one must bear in mind that human welfare lies in the centre of every discussion about building peace in a post-conflict reality. The concept of human security, as a new approach in analysing security, focuses on the safety of the individual rather than on state security. Vulnerable populations include displaced persons, migrants, refugees, children, women and other groups who are at risk of or suffer from poverty, diseases, social and economic inequalities, human rights violations, ethnic conflicts, natural disasters or environmental pollution (Gasper 2015; Grizold et al., 2012). Human security refers to "the right of people to live in freedom and dignity, free from poverty and despair (...) with an equal opportunity to enjoy all their rights and fully develop their human potential" (paragraph 143, General Assembly resolution 60/1). Human security is interdisciplinary and connects areas such as international relations, peace and conflict studies, human rights, development studies and others. Survivors in BiH not only face economic, social and political problems⁵, but feelings of anger, shame,

⁵ *Human Security identifies seven components of security for the individual: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political.*

guilt and a sense of being a victim. The resulting need for social and spiritual aid poses a challenge, which religious institutions can respond to.

The role of religious institutions

Leif-HagenSeibert indicates that the role of religious institutions as actors in peacebuilding is problematic since these institutions have largely lost their credibility due to their involvement in events of the war. Seibert states that in BiH strong religious institutionalisation, aggressive nationalism and bellicose propaganda have all had a vast impact on religious credibility. And “high religious credibility is achieved only by actors who are able to plausibly distance themselves from spoilers and perpetrators” (Seibert, 2018: 429). Despite this, attempts at inter-religious cooperation are underway to build new and peaceful relationships on both the institutional and social levels.

According to *peacebuildinginitiative.org*, religious actors can contribute to the peacebuilding process in several ways. For instance:

1. Religious beliefs may offer crucial intangible components of peacebuilding;
2. Religious actors traditionally perform a certain number of social functions which can be all the more important at the peacebuilding phase; and
3. Religious actors play an important role as members of local civil society (Religion & Peacebuilding, 2019).

It seems that in the case of Ahmići, Trusina and Bradina the third point is particularly relevant; religious institutions can fulfil a number of different functions, like mobilisation (during a conflict, but also for peace), socialisation through education and training, integration of those excluded from society (via socio-economic development or rebuilding the socio-economic fabric of a post-war society) and taking over the role of political and partisan organisations with regard to certain matters, for example those related to human rights (ibid.).

The main purpose of reconciliation and forgiveness is to transform relations between conflicting parties through inter-religious meetings, address the problems facing survivors, provide spiritual and material support and acknowledge the victim status of all those involved. The crucial aspect is moral inclusion, i.e. rehumanisation of the enemy. Jörg Lüer from the Maximilian Kolbe Foundation introduced a workshop by saying “this is not a workshop, this is a mission”, and in his closing statement encouraged listeners to “be realistic and defend hope”. Therefore, religion is treated here as an agent of change. The workshop was organised by two religious institutions: the Maximilian Kolbe Foundation (MKF) and the Inter-religious Council of BiH. While both organisations are in the category of religious

and faith-based actors and exemplify the involvement of civil society in conflict transformation, the roles they hold are different. The Maximilian Kolbe Foundation (MKF) plays the role of an external actor aiming to implement and promote work on reconciliation in Europe (“to make issues in Europe which have not been reconciled a subject of debate”) and is linked to Maximilian Kolbe Werk. The MKF is primarily concerned with the “culture of remembrance” and aims to develop a “culture of listening”, and as such is regarded as an “ambassador of reconciliation”. The other organisation, the Inter-religious Council of BiH, is an internal party to the conflict. It has existed since 1997 and was established with the support of the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WSCF Europe, 2015) by four religious communities: Orthodox, Jewish, Islamic and Christian. Its key goals include building tolerance and civil society with the help of five working groups: legal, media, education, women’s and youth (MRV BiH, 2019). The council’s most important achievement came in 1997 with the preparation and signing of the Statement of Shared Moral Commitments, in which changing people’s attitudes was one of its key objectives (WSCF Europe, 2015).

Case study: Ahmići, Bradina and Trusina

In BiH, the list of places where ethnic cleansing campaigns unfolded and massacres occurred is very long. This paper particularly focuses on the Ahmići, Trusina and Bradina incidents. Let us begin by analysing the case of Ahmići, a village which before the war had a population of 446 people, 356 of whom were Bosniaks; Croats and Bosniaks live there to this day. When Yugoslavia collapsed, Bosniaks from Travnik and Foča moved to Ahmići. On 16 April 1993, the Croatian army (Hrvatske Vojske Odbrane), called “Jokeri”, launched an attack on civilians. According to Islamic Community member Mahir ef. Husić, 180 buildings, houses and mosques were either damaged or destroyed, 116 people were killed, and 29 individuals were reported missing. The perpetrators were sentenced to either 25 or 16 years of imprisonment.

The second case involved Bradina, which prior to the war was mainly inhabited by Serbs (its population of 665 included 600 Serbs, 16 Muslims, 2 Croats and 2 Yugoslavians, among others). From 25–27 May 1992 a Croatian-Muslim formation carried out an attack on Bradina in which 47 civilians were killed and 130 tortured. Several people remain missing even today. Private property was destroyed, along with the village’s Orthodox church. The third case involved Trusina, where 22 people were murdered en mass on 16 April 1993. These atrocities were committed by the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ARBH) during the Croat-Bosniak War. Eight members of an ARBH special unit named “Zulfikar” faced

criminal charges⁶ (Balkan Insight, 2012 and 2014). As the Franciscan Darko Drljo said, Trusina's inhabitants were complicit in the crime and the perpetrators, who were never sentenced, continue to roam free (Drljo, 2018). One survivor recalled the words of one perpetrator: "Trusina must fall. No Croat is going to live in this area. We're going to cleanse this area. If a Croat is to live here, we have to convert them to Islam" (Survivor 1, 2018). According to the religious leaders who participated in the workshop, common features of all three incidents included a lack of military facilities and the involvement of unarmed civilians who, totally unprepared for the attack, did not retaliate, but were nonetheless tortured and killed. The workshop included testimonies by five survivors from Ahmići and two from Bradina and Trusina, who spoke on behalf of their respective communities.

The approach to religion, reconciliation and peacebuilding in BiH

The process of peacebuilding and reconciliation is complicated; Ed Vulliamy notes that in BiH the issue revolves more around "false reconciliation and clearance". He writes:

In Bosnia, 'reconciliation' is a common word used and abused as often as advertising slogans. It is synonymous with lucrative business and a promising career, although this refers primarily to the 'international institutions' which, during the war, left Bosnia to its tragic fate. These institutions now act on behalf of the 'international community', paying high wages and multiplying costs, and preach reconciliation without achieving any results. (Vulliamy, 2016: 23)

On the other hand, the question arises of whether there is any serious alternative to the reconciliation attempts in BiH and to what extent religious institutions can help in this respect. With regard to reconciliation in Ahmići, Mahir ef. Husić emphasises that: "Islam is a religion of peace. ... Islam calls on people to come together, because we come from one Father, Adam, and one Mother, Eve (Husić, 2018). He also states that the process of reconciliation and dialogue in ethnically-mixed Ahmići is slow:

There is no contact or dialogue between Croats and Bosniaks in Ahmići. They live next to one another, but do not meet or pay each other visits. (Husić, 2018)

⁶ Mensur Memić, Dževad Salčin, Nedžad Hodžić, Senad Hakalović, Nihad Bojadžić, Zulfikar Ališpago, Rasema Handanović, Edin Džeko.

As one of the survivors explained:

Before the war, life here was good, people were going to work, no fights in this area. ... I do not know the reason, the motives for these atrocities. ... I would like to invite my Croat neighbours to sit down and talk about the past. (Survivor 2, 2018)

These days the village of Bradina is abandoned, with only a few people living there on a permanent basis. The Orthodox church has been rebuilt and a memorial to the victims erected, but the destroyed Serbian houses stand derelict to this day. According to Orthodox religious leaders, those Serbs who survived moved to Canada, Australia and the USA, or to Trebinje in BiH, which is also where the bones of the people killed in Bradina were transferred. In the case of Trusina, half of the village's population before the war was Croatian. Nowadays, no Croats live in Trusina and there is little prospect of them returning.

In terms of the reconciliation process, survivors from the Serbian and Croatian communities have forgiven their perpetrators, with the families of Trusina survivors claiming to harbour no desire for revenge. Survivor 1 clearly stated that "I have forgiven, I have not forgotten" (Survivor 1, 2018), whereas survivors from the Islamic community never mentioned forgiveness. A Franciscan priest remarked that "time does not heal wounds, time deepens wounds" (Drljo, 2018; Kardinal, 2018). A survivor does not forget what happened to them. However, it should be stressed that during the workshop meeting all local religious leaders (Catholic, Islamic and Orthodox) talked about equality for all victims. Drljo, a Catholic representative, mentioned that all three religions work with families but stressed that, due to certain limitations, religious officials should not be the only ones involved in working with victims (Drljo, 2018). These limitations are probably related to funds and ethno-political perspectives in BiH. It was emphasised that the "victims of war should be respected, not politicised. ... Whoever commits a crime is a participant in a crime" (Kardinal, 2018).

State approaches to the reconciliation process: reactions of Serbia and Croatia

The lack of any clear commitment and active involvement of states like the Republic of Serbia or the Republic of Croatia in the reconciliation process is a result of the ethnicisation and divisions in Bosnian society. Although President Kolinda Grabar Kitarović did attend the site of the massacre in Ahmići, her visit was interpreted as a tourist trip and not an official act of reconciliation. In the eyes of the Islamic community, "she came

alone, without media and in silence” (Husić, 2018). With regard to Bradina, there was no reaction from the Serbian, Croatian or Bosnian governments. Perpetrators remain free and no Croats have been sentenced because they emigrated to Croatia, and Bosnia is not allowed to prosecute them. Mutual recriminations seem to aggravate the stand-off: Croatian people accuse Muslims of committing crimes and the reverse is true for the latter. Another classic instance was the Bosniaks prison camp in Čelebići at which Serbian inmates were abused and murdered. As E. Vulliamy writes, the perpetrators of these crimes were convicted in The Hague and the leaders in Sarajevo did not attempt to hide the culprits (Vulliamy, 2016: 63). Other examples of Serbian aggression towards Bosniaks in BiH include the atrocities committed in Srebrenica, Omarska, Prijedor and Karaterm. E. Vulliamy emphasised that in the case of the Omarska incident the lack of a memorial to the victims indicates a process by which victims are erased from the collective memory and forgotten (ibid., 2016: 25). With regard to Trusina, religious officials mentioned that when it comes to reconciliation, reactions of the media and the state are not enough. In an interview with Franciscan Marinko Štrbac, Željko Ivković stated that

Unlike [in the case of] the massacre of Bosniaks in Ahmići, which took place on the same day and prompted a swift response from UNPROFOR as well as extensive news coverage, in the case of the dead on their side, the surviving Croats from the village of Trusina never received media attention. (Ivković, 2018)

Survivors, perpetrators and forgiveness and their current status

The question of the survivors’ current status and their relationship with the perpetrators has only been discussed to a limited extent. The situation of the survivors is described as less than ideal and the general issues raised by all religious establishments are the same and chiefly address the lack of acknowledgement of the atrocities, the victims and their families (Kovačević, 2018; Drljo, 2018). The matter of forgiveness was brought up during the reconciliation process together with the question of whether anyone can really forgive these crimes. In the course of the investigation, we found that both forgiveness and a lack of it, as well as the inability to forget traumatic events, have far-reaching consequences. First, they can reinforce or even cause additional distress instead of helping to deal with the trauma (humiliation, torture). Every individual has their own traumatic memories and lives with stigma. At the same time, those who have lost someone are more responsive to and supportive of peacebuilding initiatives. Survivors

do not harbour hatred or a desire for revenge, but politicians may harness their memories to fuel vindictiveness. Second, the perpetrators still roam free. Frequently, those who committed atrocities are supported by their communities, as in the case of the war criminal Dario Kordić⁷ who was given the support of the Croatian community. One survivor stated that “he should be ashamed” (Survivor 3, 2018). Many of the perpetrators were the victims’ neighbours; one survivor placed the blame on “our Croatian neighbours [who] destroyed our house” (Survivor 4, 2018).

Conclusion

The peacebuilding process in BiH faces many obstacles such as divisions along educational, historical, religious, political and ethnic lines. Thus, in the light of political, economic and social problems, religion and religious institutions can reinforce conflicts. On the other hand, religion and religious institutions can be a factor for peace and reconciliation in BiH, the former through doctrine and ethics and the latter by stimulating various activities, meetings, workshops, projects as well as ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue. According to Jörg Lüer, the key challenges in dealing with a trauma on the micro level include: 1) solidarity with the victims; 2) dealing with individual responsibility and guilt; 3) dealing with the systematic framework of violence; and 4) differentiating the ways of treating the perpetrators (Lüer, 2018). Some obstacles he listed are fear (perpetrators are still honoured and have schools etc. named after them), shame, rejection, uncomfortable discourses (every group creates a reputation system and protects it), grief and commemoration (space for grief, places of suffering) (Lüer, 2018). J. Galtung’s transformation of conflict is applicable to BiH; it begins with destruction and allows for the creation of a new reality and the rebuilding of relations between parties to the conflict.

The process of peacebuilding is related to reconciliation, which is a long-lasting process of social and personal transformation requiring a trans-generational perspective. Not everything can be healed, but it is possible to learn how to live with the present wounds and start all over again with respect to the suffering of the victims. (Lüer, 2018)

When it comes to scholarly analysis of the conflict in the Balkans and, more precisely, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, many different and novel

⁷ Dario Kordić, leader of the Croatian Community of Herceg-Bosna (Hrvatska Zajednica Herceg-Bosna) during the war. The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia sentenced him to 25 years in prison, but he was released in 2014.

concepts and ideas should be considered. While reconciliation and peacebuilding are among the most frequently discussed, in the discourse most probably one still recalls “religious conflict” and “new wars” more than the very concepts of reconciliation and peacebuilding. At the same time, only a few voices are heard recalling the concept of the “ambivalence of the sacred” (Appleby 2000) and point to the pre- and post-war role of religious factors, which are very difficult to define. Since the conflict in Bosnia cannot be perceived as a definite, unambiguous reality, it may serve as an example of a highly complex contemporary conflict while simultaneously showing the emergence of new approaches and instruments for building peace. They in turn constitute creative and promising answers offered by global civil society to the problems facing the modern world. With a more human-oriented approach and the establishment of a growing area of cooperation among different actors, peace may be easier to understand and more likely to change the reality. Currently, there seem to be no other viable options.

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