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CONSTRUING RECONCILIATION – LAY PEOPLE DEFINITIONS IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA: A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

To define intergroup reconciliation is still a dynamic topic in social-psychological research, and lay people are seldom included in the study. Given that post-conflict processes in the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina are still marked by ethnic divisions, the main aim of our research has been to explore how Serbs and Bosniaks define reconciliation. We applied focus groups methodology to investigate this question. Eight mono-ethnic focus groups were conducted with Serbs and Bosniaks, in Sarajevo and Banja Luka. 56 people participated in total. The results showed that both groups defined reconciliation in terms of accepting the outgroup, achieving ordinary life and political reconciliation. However, groups differed in certain definitions. Bosniaks conceptualized reconciliation as facing the past, resolving past issues, economic sustainability, and future orientation. Parts of definition provided mostly by Serbs included cooperation, respect, understanding, and building relationships. Results were discussed in the light of available reconciliation literature, as well as collective narratives about 1990s war.

Key words: Bosnia and Herzegovina, ethnic divisions, post-conflict society, reconciliation

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Introduction

On December 14, 1995, the Dayton Peace Agreement, signed in Paris, ended the 4-year long armed conflict on the grounds of Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H). The conflict left almost 100,000 people killed (Zwierzchowski & Tabeau, 2010), out of which 40% were civilians, and 2,2 million people displaced[2]. Since interethnic issues were in the centre of the conflict, the Dayton Peace Agreement prescribed equal share of powers among three constituent nations of B&H: Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks. However, ethnic divisions continued to be an important part of psychological reality, influencing the everyday life of citizens, as well as political and economic circumstances. These divisions have been institutionalized (Petričušić & Blondel, 2013): students are being taught different versions of history depending on their ethnicity, segregations is still present, for example in having so called 'two schools under one roof', national symbols are widely expressed, political parties carry ethnic quality, etc.

When an armed conflict ends, there are two possible outcomes: divided parties continue living in separate states (e.g., Germany and France), or they continue to live within the borders of the same state, such is the case in South Africa, and in B&H as well. Post-conflict social and psychological processes greatly depend on this outcome. When conflicted parties continue living in the same country, reconciliation refers to political integration, including structural justice and equality, participation of all parties in the system and democracy (Bar-Tal & Bennik, 2004). What is also of great importance in these cases is the prevention of the outburst of new violence (Staub, 2005), which is probable to happen if intergroup relations are not addressed properly (e.g., de la Rey, 2001). In B&H, a certain level of normalization has been achieved, mostly due to the Dayton Peace Agreement, and its supposed equality in governing, decision-making and power sharing. However, this supposed equality is not enough to bring the groups closer together (Petričušić & Blondel, 2013). Signing the peace agreement neither changes the quality of intergroup relationships (Staub et al., 2005), nor changes the psychological reality of the groups (Nadler, 2012; Staub, 2006). Situations similar to the one described in B&H could be observed in Northern Ireland and Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Long after signing the peace agreement in 1998, segregation and poor intergroup relations were still predominant in Northern Ireland (Dixon, 2001; Schubotz, 2005). The conflict between Israel and Palestine even burst out again seven years after the Oslo agreement was signed, due to inadequate work on intergroup reconciliation.

Many studies in the after-1990s-wars Balkan region dealt with peace and reconciliation. However, they studied only a part of the process or set reconciliation as the ultimate goal to which their research aimed to contribute. They included studying social reconstruction (e.g., Čorkalo Biruški et al., 2014), col-

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[2] https://www.unhcr.org/4bbb422512.html

lective guilt (Čehajić-Clancy et al., 2011; Niškanović & Petrović, 2016), ethnic and national identities (Pavlaković, 2014; Turjačanin et al., 2017), collective forgiveness (Cehajic et al., 2008; Čorkalo Biruški et al., 2016), narratives of truth and justice (Mannergren Selimovic, 2015), identification with national symbols (e.g., Karić, 2019; Pratto et al., 2017). Almost all the mentioned articles contain the term *reconciliation* as a desired goal, and the studied processes as means to achieve it. However, to our knowledge, no research in the region has yet dealt with *defining* reconciliation, which we find of utmost importance. If we do not know how different groups define reconciliation, measuring covariates can give us a false or incomplete image, and targeted interventions could actually be inappropriate. Since many post-conflict interventions have been implemented in B&H since 1995, although ethnic divisions persist at every level, it may be that these interventions have not taken into account whether different groups perceive this process in a different way.

Definition of Intergroup Reconciliation

An overview of literature on intergroup reconciliation implies that a unique definition of reconciliation does not exist. Although intergroup conflicts are as old as humankind, the concept of reconciliation in the area of political and social psychology is relatively new (Nadler et al., 2008), and its clear definition is lacking. Gibson (2006) argues that "it seems no one knows what it means" (p. 85), and Hermann (2004) notes that "the lack of widely accepted definition… makes reconciliation little more than a fashionable buzzword" (p. 40). We argue that not much has changed ever since. The need to study reconciliation has appeared relatively late in peace and conflict studies, as the question of lasting or *stable* peace emerged. Many processes have been studied so far, including conflict resolution (e.g., Christie & Louis, 2012), conflict transformation (Lederach, 2003), social reconstruction (e.g., Čorkalo Biruški et al., 2014), the ethos of conflict (Bar-Tal, 2000), readiness to reconcile (e.g., Petrović et al., 2019), human potential for reconciliation (Petrović, 2017). However, the very *construct* of reconciliation is still in question.

The definition of reconciliation strongly depends on who defines it. For example, the European Union defines reconciliation in terms of re-establishing normal diplomatic and political relations between divided countries (Touquet & Vermeersch, 2016). Other authors (Staub & Bar-Tal, 2003; Staub et al., 2005) claim that it is a process of healing which ultimately leads to mutual acceptance between the war torn parties. It is also defined as (re)establishing of a good relationship after the conflict ends (Aiken, 2010; Rushton, 2006), building a common future (Rigby, 2001), intergroup forgiveness and subjective evaluation of the past misdeeds, according to the reconciliation orientation model (ROM; Noor et al., 2008), mutual understanding (Nadler et al., 2008) or removing emotional barriers between the parties (Nadler, 2002). Perhaps

a definition that comprehends many of these processes is the one by Shnabel and Nadler (2008), who see reconciliation as a resolution process of removing psychological barriers, such as negative emotions and beliefs, with the goal of creating or restoring positive and sustainable intergroup relations. An additional definition of the problem lies in the fact that reconciliation is considered in the literature so far to be both a process and an outcome (Ugarriza & Nussio, 2017). Another reason why it is impossible to clearly define it is rooted in its abstract nature (Nadler, 2012). In any case, common to all social and political psychology definitions of reconciliation is the change in the nature of relationships between groups, including changes in the group self-image (Cohrs et al., 2018) and in psychological orientation towards the other (Staub et al., 2005).

All these definitions fall under the notion of conceptual stretching (Meierhenrich, 2008). Meierhenrich argues that scholars around the world "follow the line of least resistance" (p. 204) by broadening the meaning of the concept. With this regard, the term reconciliation has been conceptually stretched from coexistence to relationship restoration. An important question posed by Nadler (Nadler, 2012) is: "if reconciliation includes any positive change in intergroup relations, then how can it be conceptualized? Or more importantly, what is it not?" (p. 293). As Krondorfer (2018) argued, "as a concept and phenomenon, reconciliation is polysemic: it cannot be contained in or reduced to a single meaning" (p. 4). Therefore, it is important to explore and understand the construct of reconciliation of each group in question. Studying intergroup relations in Switzerland is important. However, it is completely different than in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the same intergroup processes may have different implications for relationships between the groups.

Lay People Reconciliation

Previous studies have demonstrated many times that the perception of the conflict itself differs between the parties (e.g., Dovidio et al., 2012). This implies that the perception of reconciliation must differ as well, which can easily be an obstacle to its achievement. In recent years, lay people perceptions of the conflict and peace have started to be investigated (Kişlioğlu & Cohrs, 2018; Uluğ & Cohrs, 2016; Uluğ et al., 2017). Although it is considered that understanding of the conflict is a mirror image of the society, little attention has been given by scholars to explore and understand lay people's perceptions and interpretations of conflict resolution and peace building processes (Uluğ et al., 2017). Their voice is rarely taken into account (Lederach, 1999; Uluğ & Cohrs, 2016), and their cultural differences can be a main reason for the conflict outburst(Moore, 2014). In order for the conflicts to be resolved in more participatory ways, all the levels of society need to be taken into account (Lederach, 1999). Understanding how lay people think about the conflict provides

information about how they (will) react to conflict resolution and reconciliation (Bar-Tal, 2013; Kaufman et al., 2003).

The basic assumption of reconciliation in B&H is that it is useful for all the parties (Jansen, 2013). Intergroup contact is set as an imperative in this process, and there have been many programs since 1995 that have dealt with the matter. However, ethnic divisions continue to be a *sine qua non,* and it seems that reconciliation efforts have not fulfilled their purpose. Reasons are certainly various. However, we argue that one of them must certainly be a failure to target key issues, since people have never been asked what reconciliation represents to them. Therefore, the main research question of our study is *How Bosniaks and Serbs define reconciliation?* followed by *Whether there are differences in these definitions between the two ethnic groups?* Thereby, we want to explore to what extent are lay people definitions congruent with what has been provided in the literature so far.

Method

Reporting on the method, the analysis and results of this qualitative study will follow the steps proposed by Levitt (2019), and Braun and Clarke (2013), in accordance with the propositions of the American Psychological Association (APA). Therefore, after the method section, results, analysis and interpretation will be presented in a single section, followed by a general conclusion.

Research Design

For the purpose of this study, a qualitative approach has been applied by using the method of focus groups. Focus group is a method of data collection during which participants focus on and discuss one topic (O'hEocha et al., 2012). This discussion is relatively informal and unstructured, but it needs to be guided (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method is suggested when an area of research or a topic are not explored enough (Frith & Gleeson, 2004), or when there is no clear theory that could be in the basis of the study, which is the case with intergroup reconciliation, as explained in the introduction. There are several important characteristics of qualitative research which represent their fundamentals, according to Braun & Clarke (2013): qualitative research is about the meaning, not numbers. It does not provide a single answer, it treats the context as important, it can be experiential or critical, it is underpinned by epistemological and ontological assumptions, ; it involves qualitative methodology and, of course, qualitative thinking. It also values subjectivity and reflexivity.

Study Participants

Researcher Description

The idea for this study was born during the first author's 18-month-stay in B&H, where the author had the opportunity to observe interethnic relationships in many levels. The first author, originally from Serbia, of Serbian ethnicity, collected the data, i.e. led focus groups with Serbs, and then prepared and analysed all data. Two more focus group facilitators were engaged in the study, both of Bosniak ethnic background. One of them was a male sociologist from Banja Luka, and the other one was a female psychologist from Sarajevo. Both of them had a short training in focus group facilitation. The PI planned the study and introduced herself with the qualitative method and the analysis primarily from the work of Creswell (2009, 2007), Braun and Clarke (2013), Mayring (2014) and Levitt (2019), as well as Kuckartz (2014, 2018; Kuckartz et al., 2008)

Participants

56 participants in total took part in eight focus groups, out of which there were 10 Bosniaks from Sarajevo, and 12 Bosniaks from Banja Luka (ethnic majority/minority, respectively), as well as 9 Serbs from Banja Luka and 19 Serbs from Sarajevo (again, ethnic majority/minority). All participants lived in the cities in question at the moment of data collection, all of them were older than 21 (range 21-70, M = 31.02, SD = 12.15), and came from different educational backgrounds: out of 44 of those who reported their background, 6 of them completed high school, 18 of them completed the faculty, and 20 of them were students. All the groups were ethnically homogenous and facilitated by a facilitator who was of the same ethnicity as participants. Focus group facilitators were not familiar with participants prior to data collection, except in the case of one focus group with Serbs in Banja Luka, and one focus group with Bosniaks in Sarajevo.

Participant Recruitment

Serbs from Banja Luka were recruited through personal contacts of the first author and her acquaintances. In Sarajevo, one group of Serbs was recruited with help of an employee at the Faculty of Philosophy in Pale, East Sarajevo, and the other group was recruited with help of a member of Interreligious council of B&H and via contacts of the local orthodox priest. Bosniaks from Banja Luka were recruited in cooperation with Merhamet (a charity organization) of the Islamic Community, and the researchers in Sarajevo were helped by contacts from the Faculty of Political Science and the NGO 'Education builds B&H'. The number of participants across the focus groups ranged from four to

eleven. All groups were planned to have between five and eight participants according to recommendations from the literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Krueger & Casey, 2009). However, in one group with Serbs from Banja Luka, there was a female participant who did not want to answer any questions, and who left the group after she was asked a few questions (the group with four participants). There was only one group with 11 participants, which was due to inadequate communication between the researcher and the helpers in the process of recruitment. All the other groups ranged from five to eight participants. After introductory description of the process and conditions of participation, including making audio records of discussions, all participants consented to take part in the discussion. Each group had an appropriate debriefing, which was also conducted to a person who left the group. The study was approved by the Ethical Committee of the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad.

Data Collection

Focus group protocol was developed prior to conduction of the research, partially based on theoretical assumptions, and partially aiming at exploring what is not familiar in the context of B&H. The development of the focus group protocol was done with the support of colleagues at the Department of Psychology, University of Banja Luka, who already had an experience in planning and conducting them. The protocol was piloted with two groups of students from the University of Banja Luka. Five groups of questions included the following subtopics: *What is reconciliation?*, *What is achievable reconciliation?*, *What and how much is ingroup ready to give for reconciliation?*, *What does the ingroup expect from the outgroup for reconciliation?*, and *Where are the two groups now regarding reconciliation?* Focus groups lasted between 50 and 90 minutes. Discussions were recorded and transformed into verbatim transcripts, any personal details were anonymized, and these transcripts were further used in the analysis. Only the parts of transcripts which included answers to the questions *what is reconciliation*, i.e. *how would you define reconciliation between Serbs and Bosniaks in B&H, how would you know if reconciliation was achieved , how does it look like?* and *do you think that reconciliation between Serbs and Bosniaks is achieved in B&H after the war?* will be presented in this paper.

During the focus groups, the facilitators moderated the discussion, asking questions and sub-questions, and making sure that participants were focused on the topic. Facilitators did not, verbally or non-verbally, express their own opinions and beliefs about the topic and participants' answers.

Data Analysis

The analysis was conducted in MAXQDA Pro 2020 software. MAXQDA software for processing qualitative data offers many possibilities for their analysis, including three types of procedures: thematic analysis, evaluative text analysis, and type-building text analysis (Kuckartz, 2014). It provides insights into qualitative data without suggesting interpretations, similar to other qualitative data analysis software used in Psychology research. MAXQDA is used in both qualitative and mixed-method studies. It can calculate inter-coder reliability, and use clustering of codes. An inductive-deductive approach was applied for qualitative content analysis, performed following Mayring's guidelines (Mayring, 2014). This approach includes both pre-defined set of codes, and creates new codes during the coding process, if necessary. The initial set of codes was adopted from *International Handbook of Peace and Reconciliation* (Malley-Morrison et al., 2013). This international study aimed at exploring definitions of peace and reconciliation across the world. The chapter that described definitions in Russia and the Balkans (Miheljak et al., 2013) did not include B&H in its sample. That was why it was assumed that this set of codes would not suffice to include all possible codes that would emerge in the data. Additional codes were added if no existing codes could comprehend certain segments. The codebook is provided in Appendix A.

Focus groups audio files were transcribed verbatim, including all verbal utterances. Transcripts were anonymised by providing pseudonyms and all potential information that could lead to identification of participants, which were changed accordingly.

The units of analysis included parts or whole sentences, with additional contextual text included. Sometimes one word was coded, if it had no pertaining sentence or accompanying text (e.g. an answer to the question *What is ingroup ready to give – Nothing*). One segment could be coded with more than one code. Therefore, it was included under one or several coding categories. After familiarization with the data, the first coder coded all segments by using already existing codes and adding new codes when the existing ones could not comprehend a segment. Although the concept of inter-coder reliability was questioned among qualitative research methodologists (e.g., Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2007), in order to ensure greater objectivity of coding and interpretation, we calculated inter-coder reliability. After initial coding, another check was performed, after which 30% of randomly selected parts of the text were coded by the second, independent coder. The intercoder agreement was 94.92% after the initial check,and the disagreements were resolved after discussion about the remaining segments.

Results and Discussion

Appendix B shows the table with quantitative data, i.e. the frequency of coded segments under each code, and percentage in the total number of segments *per code,* as well as the percentage of each code in the total number of codes *per group.*. 285 segments in total were coded within the topic of defining reconciliation.

When asked whether reconciliation in B&H was achieved, 77% of Serbs and 89.3% of Bosniaks said that it was not. Only 4% of Bosniaks claimed that they did not know and could not provide the answers, while the rest think that it was achieved (23% of Serbs and 6.7% of Bosniaks).

General Tendencies in Defining Reconciliation

The biggest percentage of the overall coded segments falls under the definition of reconciliation as *recognize/acknowledge/accept.* It is followed by *ordinary life* and *individual approach*. Above 5% of share within the total number of codes are *resolve/fix* and *political reconciliation*.

When it comes to the category of *recognize/acknowledge/accept*, the topics include two content directions. The first is acknowledging and accepting the past of each group by admitting and accepting 'the truth', no matter how hard that is.

> In order to accept something, we have to face the truth, however it is, or was, or will be. We have been more developed at the consciousness level, to accept both differences and negative events that have happened in this country, and turn ourselves towards something better for the sake of future. We must accept each other, because I absolutely, me personally, don't see any other option. We can have diverging attitudes, we can have diverging opinions, feelings and everything, but we have to accept each other, and we have to live, if not together, then next to each other. That is simply, for me, the destiny of this country. (Bosniak, Banja Luka)
> I would like to say regarding the reconciliation between Serbs and Bosniaks what I think, that the key thing which would actually lead to reconciliation, if that is possible at all, is to find room in each community, and understand other communities in the context of accepting their interpretation of the past. (Serb, Sarajevo)

Another direction points to acknowledging the culture of the outgroup and differences between the groups, and accepting each other regardless of ethnicity or religious background.

> For me, reconciliation is a beginning to accept each other in the way we are, regardless of the national group. (Bosniak, Sarajevo)
> It's when my Bosniak friend can visit me at (Orthodox) Christmas, and when we can celebrate it, and when I could visit him at Ramadan, with no restrictions at all, and also at Christmas on December 25th. That is reconciliation for me. (Serb, Banja Luka)

It comes as no surprise that the biggest share of coded segments falls under the category of recognizing, acknowledging and accepting the past and the outgroup. The definitions provided in the previous literature have often emphasized these elements of reconciliation. For example, the definition by Bar-Tal (Bar-Tal & Bennink, 2004; Staub & Bar-Tal, 2003) considers reconciliation to be a process of healing that eventually leads to mutual acceptance between the groups. Kelman (2008) defines reconciliation in terms of relationship transformation, which includes changes in thinking, feeling, and acting towards the outgroup. Nadler et al. (2008) also tend to define reconciliation as mutual understanding. In our study, the content of definitions referring to this quality includes acknowledging and accepting members of the outgroup regardless of their ethnic or religious background, 'or their name', as participants used to explain (Bosniak and Serbian names differ greatly, and usually make it easy to distinguish group membership). Participants have emphasized the importance of 'de-grouping', i.e. perceiving other people not as group members, but rather as individuals who have their qualities regardless of whether they are Muslim, Orthodox, Serbs or Bosniaks.

When defining reconciliation as an *ordinary life*, the content of responses includes mostly normal everyday functioning, in the sense of communicating, spending time together with the members of the outgroup, dealing with everyday activities such as work or education, and discussing these freely with the outgroup members.

> I would like to live to see that, and I consider that to be reconciliation, when people talk for three years and eleven months about their jobs, about hanging out, travelling, what they read, what nice things they saw, and only one month, and even that is a lot, about politics, before elections. (Bosniak, Banja Luka)
> It means to live an ordinary life, do your job, go to school, educate yourself, everything according to possibilities and then, I think, if every man deals with himself and his own problems … he wouldn't have time to think about who is a greater Serb, who is a greater Croat, who is a greater Muslim. (Serb, Sarajevo)

An importance of the contact for intergroup relations is a widely researched topic in social psychology. The four processes of change through the intergroup contact were described by Pettigrew (1998), including learning

about the outgroup, changing behaviour, generating affective ties, and ingroup reappraisal. Besides the widest category of Recognize/acknowledge/ respect, which includes all these processes, our participants have emphasized the importance of the contact, cooperation and solving common problems, such as employment, progress, survival, which can lead to improved intergroup relations (e.g., Gaertner et al., 2000; Pettigrew et al., 2011). There were several responses in which it was mentioned that the 'normal life' was what they had in Bosnia before the war.

> I wouldn't look at it as reconciliation, but rather going back to normal. Normal was what we had before the war, this now is not normal. (Bosniak, Banja Luka)

Yugoslavia was a socialist country, in which group differences were suppressed and "brotherhood and unity" were promoted. Spasić (2012) explored the perception of Yugoslavia in a qualitative study. Participants mentioned exactly the same syntagm, 'ordinary life'. It stood for material and social well-being, employment opportunities, free education, and especially a moral universe, the set of beliefs and behaviours that enabled for brotherhood and unity to persist. The so-called Yugo-nostalgia seems to be a common phenomenon in the region.

The content of the segments coded under *individual approach* was mostly about personal views, emphasizing the role of the individual in reconciliation. Respondents repeatedly emphasized that they could only speak from their own point of view and about themselves, that they were not fighting with anyone, so they could not reconcile accordingly. The other group of comments stressed the importance of individual development in a sense that every person should think for himself/herself and work on his/her own personal development, in order to be able to accept the outgroup and reconcile.

> Individually speaking, I have many friends of other nationality and religious group, my parents also had, and they stayed in touch with them. (Serb, Sarajevo)
> I think that generally people should be working on themselves primarily, on enhancing their personalities, maybe even work on understanding, maybe tend to get to know the other nation, because, from my own personal experience, the greatest Serbs or nationalists are those who have the lest contact with the other nation. (Serb, Banja Luka)

Emphasizing the individual instead of the group aspect of reconciliation could be a consequence of group detachment, and may be a mechanism to protect the positive group self-image (Bilali & Vollhardt, 2019).

When it comes to defining reconciliation as a *political reconciliation*, the content comprehends naming politicians and politics as key reconciliation agents. Respondents stated that politicians were those who were supposed to reconcile their politics in order to be able to say that reconciliation existed in B&H. Current political structures were called manipulative and said to be using national divisions as means for staying in their positions.

> Simply, in my opinion, further steps towards reconciliation , depend on politicians. And politicians don't aim for that. Politicians aim to keep the status quo, to radicalize it even more, and they are getting rich in this situation. (Bosniak, Banja Luka)
> It seems to me that these politics…(should be) reconciliation politics, where those in charge should reconcile with one another, those who lead the people and say 'what we are doing now, we will be doing in a completely different way than before, it's both our fault and we both have made mistakes', should make the step towards that political, a real political reconciliation. (Serb, Banja Luka)

The politics of reconciliation includes not only personal relationships among politicians, but rather restructuring of institutions, developing politics that aim at making connections, inclusion and reintegration, democratization and restorative justice (Bar-Tal et al., 2012), building a common future (Rigby, 2001), unofficial diplomacy for building mutual trust (Christie & Louis, 2012), and institutional cooperation (Kelman, 2008). In the context of B&H, the aspects of political reconciliation are clearly lacking. Leading politicians representing all three ethnic groups keep denying war crimes undermining reconciliation accordingly (Spoerri, 2012; Subotić, 2010). What *is* institutionalized are ethnic divisions (Petričušić & Blondel, 2013). The content of responses of our participants supports these views. They recognize the importance of the role of politicians, and explain that politicians 'keep turning against one another' and 'heating up the wounds of war' being supported by the media. This significantly undermines the trust building, which is considered important for intergroup reconciliation (Bar-Siman-Tov, 2004; Cehajic et al., 2008; Kelman, 2010).

Similarities and Differences between Bosniaks and Serbs in Defining Reconciliation

Both groups tend to define reconciliation most often as *recognize/acknowledge/accept*. However, definitions by Bosniaks fall under both tendencies described in the previous section, while Serbs, when defining reconciliation in

these terms, in all but one case talk about decreasing prejudice and divisions, and accepting the outgroup members regardless of their ethnicity or religion.

Around 10% of the segments fall under the category of *ordinary life.* The content is similar in both groups, including freedom to go to any part of the country without fear, and communication and cooperation at daily level. Although *individual approach* and *political reconciliation* are used to define reconciliation in both groups, Serbs are somewhat more prone to these definitions. The content of *individual approach* mostly overlapps (see previous section for examples). When talking about *political reconciliation*, Bosniaks tend to speak in more general terms of accountability of politicians in general to make the change. Serbs also define political reconciliation in those terms, but they also mention concrete steps that could be taken to achieve it.

> I can tell you right now, a concrete step would be to have elections in B&H less frequently, at least every four years, not every two years, for example. Because as soon as we stabilize relations a bit, new elections come, and then again the political rhetoric wins the points to them by producing conflicts between us (Serb, Banja Luka)

Other definitions are more or less exclusively produced by one of the two groups. *Economical sustainability* is one of the most important aspects of reconciliation according to Bosniaks. The content includes opinions about economic stability and sustainability as reconciliatory factors. If the economy were strong enough and people had enough material resources, there would be reconciliation.

> In my opinion, war itself is economical. It's easier when a man is poor, weary, when he has nothing, it's the easiest then to make him believe it's my mistake, his, her mistake. ... Those are the moments when a man is psychologically being influenced, every day, in various ways. (Bosniak, Banja Luka)
> If they made a good company now, with good salaries, half Serbs, half Muslims, Bosniaks, no one would be in conflict with anyone, everyone would be working there. And thinking 'when is the salary day?'. ... Reconciliation, I have no idea how to get to it, but economy is the key, as well as connecting,young people to spend time together, and including the youth in life in general, and political life, and economic life... (Bosniak, Banja Luka)

The rationale for economy as a factor of reconciliation lies in the opinion that ordinary people could be more easily manipulated if they were poor. If there were enough jobs and reimbursements, people would focus more on that, and the economy would connect people. The significance of the ability of

the state to maintain peace is widely recognized (Taydas & Peksen, 2012). The authors have found that the investment in social welfare decreases preference for the violence and the conflict among citizens: improved living standards lead to a bigger cost of insurgence (Taydas & Peksen, 2012). Also, the rise in GDP decreases readiness to take part in the conflict and the outburst of the conflict in the first place (Diener & Tov, 2007). Our lay participants have also recognized the impact which business could have on reconciliation. Namely, by engaging in track two diplomacies, business organizations can contribute to reconciliation (Fort & Schipani, 2004) by lowering tensions and improving communication and mutual understanding (Spreitzer, 2007). Nevertheless, why do Bosniaks find economy more important than Serbs? One possible interpretation is that economy is an important part of the state functioning, and since Bosniaks tend to perceive themselves as a majority (which, numerically speaking, they are; Pratto et al., 2017), they may think more in terms of what would be good for the whole state. Serbs are more pro-partition oriented, and they have a 'backup state' (Karić, 2019) which also helps by financing them[3].

Bosniaks also tend to define reconciliation as *coexistence*. This category includes segments that overlap with ordinary life. However, there is also another type of definition: coexistence instead of reconciliation, living one by the other with respect for each other. In a number of segments, they stress that coexistence already exists.

> Coexistence, living one by the other, but with respect and appreciation (Bosniak, Banja Luka)
> In my opinion, not reconciliation, but rather coexistence, is a better term. Living together. The tolerance and respect, simply respect. ... If we respect each other and don't do what we don't want to be done to us, I think that's it. (Bosniak, Banja Luka)

In this case, reconciliation is not integration, but rather coexistence in multiculturality. The group does not reject their culture, it neither accepts, nor rejects the outgroup's culture. Perhaps then we could be talking about multicultural coexistence (Erten et al., 2018). The peaceful coexistence is also defined as lack of friendly relationships, but the possibility to interact freely and safely, without obliging to 'inflated' reconciliation (Worchel & Coutant, 2008), or how Petrović (2005) summarized it, it is an intergroup relationship in which neither of the groups tries to destroy the other (p. 79).

Another category used to define reconciliation by Bosniaks is *resolve/fix*. This category mostly includes comments on the need to resolve issues emerging from the past misdeeds, e.g. to acknowledge that there has been a genocide

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[3] http://www.vladars.net/eng/vlada/ic/ns/Pages/Press-Release-following-the-52nd-Government-session-.aspx

in Srebrenica, as well as to enable repatriation and the open discussion about what has happened during the conflicts.

> To find a way to live with perspective, in a way that things from the past which are crystallized through the court rules, are accepted by everyone. (Bosniak, Sarajevo)
>
> Then we could probably call it reconciliation. Being able to talk almost completely openly. At the same level. Without making numbers, counting the dead, God forbid, I mean, to make any kind of statistics or something like that. (Bosniak, Sarajevo)

Defining reconciliation as *facing the past* is also almost exclusively mentioned by Bosniaks. This definition includes admitting to misdeeds on both sides, prosecuting the responsible.

> When we achieve to have the same version of history of what happened during the 90s. What she said, the guilt will be pleaded, i.e. the responsibility should be on both sides. (Bosniak, Sarajevo)
>
> When talking about admitting misdeeds, I think that no one was a goody two-shoes in war. No one, not one side, so it's about time for both sides to admit everything. (Bosniak, Sarajevo)

It was theorised in the previous literature that resistance to reconciliation could be a consequence of psychological wounds caused by the outgroup's misdeeds (Noor et al., 2008). In order for reconciliation to be achieved, it was necessary for both sides to face their past. However, it was interesting that these definitions were almost exclusively provided by Bosniaks. According to ICTY, 65-70% of all victims in the Bosnian war were Bosniaks (Zwierzchowski & Tabeau, 2010). This could explain the importance they were posing to this aspect of reconciliation, in comparison to Serbs.

The category of *future orientation* is almost exclusively named by Bosniaks. The content includes turning towards the future, and setting goals that people should tend to achieve in order to overcome what has happened to them.

> To have the same goal, trying to reach that goal, to set reconciliation as a goal for all of us, and to build the state, to make it better for all of us. (Bosniak, Sarajevo)
>
> We, the youth, should completely turn ourselves towards pulling out lessons from the past, directing them towards the future. Our reconciliation is there, and there is no way to reconcile differently. (Bosniak, Banja Luka)

Moving forward, another category mostly used by Bosniaks, refers to forgetting the past, turning away from it, and keeping living with experiences they have had during the war.

> Of course, I can't forget what happened to me during the 90s war, but I have to continue living with it, because whatever happens, it will neither bring back those I lost, nor my years, nor my family, nothing. (Bosniak, Sarajevo)
>
> In my opinion, history cannot be redrawn, the facts cannot be erased, but we can move past that to the end of having a better tomorrow for, if not us, the future generations. (Bosniak, Banja Luka)

The two categories may seem similar at first. However, the content of future orientation is mostly oriented towards an active role, including setting common goals and turning *to* the future, as opposed to moving forward as turning *away* from the past. Future orientation seems like a healthy adaptation mechanism, which can help to reduce intergroup divisions. It includes future-oriented behaviours, such as planning or investing in future (Hofstede, 2003). Also, future-oriented cultures invest in long-term society benefits, take into account both present and future generations, and increase the probability of lasting peace (House et al., 2004). Besides, not all identities of the group members are equally marked by victimization (Vollhardt & Nair, 2018). Some group members may consider that it is more important to move on, remember the past, but not let it shape future (Bilali & Vollhardt, 2019).

Future goals named by Bosniaks are *unitary B&H*, a country without entity borders, with only one president and also without mental borders. They believe that the threat coming from possibility of division affects the intergroup relations. This may be true if the importance of cooperation and building mutual trust is considered.

> We will have one state without entities, and one system, national education program instead of two schools under one roof. We won't have interstate borders like now, like 'Welcome to the Federation' or 'Welcome to Republika Srpska'. (Bosniak, Sarajevo)
>
> Somehow, we just need to tear down the walls between us, and then reconciliation will be there, in the last stadium, the best one. (Bosniak, Banja Luka)

Serbs, on the other hand, define reconciliation more often in terms of *cooperation, respect, building new relationships with the outgroup,* and *reaching understanding.*

> Actually, establishing those normalized economic relations, in which people can function and cooperate with one another, regardless of their ethnicity, (Serb, Sarajevo)
> I think reconciliation is respecting religious freedom, respecting national and all other possible freedoms necessary for a man. (Serb, Sarajevo)
> A kind of rebuilding broken relationships after the 1990s war (Serb, Sarajevo)
> Not to accept it (outgroup view) in the sense of treating it true, but at least to understand it, to understand each other in different interpretations of the past, and to really allow each other to have different interpretations of the past, and then not to deal with it too much, but rather to deal with the real problems. (Serb, Sarajevo)

All these aspects could fall under the instrumental processes (Nadler, 2012), with the aim to rebuild trust between groups through cooperation and shared goals and projects. Mutual trust is considered the base of reconciliation (e.g., Halperin & Bar-Tal, 2011; Kelman, 2010; Nadler, 2012). The benefits of cooperation, which would improve intergroup relations based on well-maintained intergroup contact (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), trust and increased tolerance, are improved intergroup experiences, which promote reconciliation (MacDonald, 2009). (Re)building intergroup relationships is certainly recognized as important (e.g., Bar-Tal et al., 2012; Christie & Louis, 2012), and is considered to be a part of the intergroup forgiveness process (Čehajić-Clancy, 2007). Given that Serbs are considered aggressors in the Bosnian war narrative (Ruiz Jiménez, 2013), the necessity to gain trust of the outgroup, as well as insisting on accepting each person regardless of his/her group membership, might be understandable. Bosniaks insist more on facing the past and acknowledging the war victims, which may also be in function of the aforementioned narrative.

When it comes to admitting *aggressor/victim roles*, Serbs are prone to defining reconciliation in these terms more often than Bosniaks. Defining reconciliation as building new relationships with the other group is also stated as a definition only by Serbs.

> In my opinion, we should give up the Hollywood narrative about total aggressors and total victims. Because, I think, my personal experience and the experience of my family and other families, imply that neither Serbs were aggressors in Sarajevo, nor Sarajevo Muslims were exclusive victims of the 'aggressors'. (Serb, Sarajevo)

They claim that there are victims and aggressors on both sides, and that it should be recognized officially. Kelman (2010) argues that, in order to achieve reconciliation, groups have to remove negative elements in their self-identity, including perceiving oneself as an aggressor, and perceiving oneself as a victim. However, both groups should go through this process in order to make the change and stop insisting on victim and aggressor identities. Groups that are both aggressors and victims, such is the case with Bosniaks and Serbs, both have needs of victims and of aggressors. They tend to justify their deeds (Staub & Pearlman, 2006) *and* be recognized as victims (Vollhardt et al., 2014). Nadler (2012) recognizes change of this victim-aggressor relationship as one of the main reconciliation outcomes.

There is also certain percentage of answers by Serbs which include *inability to define reconciliation since it cannot be achieved*. Even when they are not sure how to define it in a more precise manner, they claim it cannot be achieved. This may be due to the emotional and cognitive processes that are present in aggressors, that enable them to keep the perception of group morality and defend from the overwhelming negative feelings. Thus, they tend to minimize the war and post-war events (Shnabel & Noor, 2012), and engage in historical defensiveness (Bilewicz et al., 2017; Bilewicz, 2016).

Conclusion

The study presented in this paper aimed to explore definitions of reconciliation provided by Serbs and Bosniaks from two major cities in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Since intergroup reconciliation was not clearly defined in the literature, we found it of a great importance to first define the concept in the given context in order to be able to address future research on the topic, as well as provide background for future interventions. We applied the qualitative method including focus group interviews.

Diversity of answers to the question of defining reconciliation, i.e. the lack of codes with big share in the overall percentage, signals the complexity of defining such an abstract concept in terms that it could be useful for potential interventions (or for the sake of defining it at all). General tendencies in defining reconciliation tend to view it as an individual, internal task, intergroup process, but also as a political quest, which should all lead to acknowledging and accepting the outgroup and its own past. Both groups agree on the importance of changing psychological orientation towards the other, which is the common place in almost every definition of reconciliation in social psychology (Staub et al., 2005). This change in psychological orientation includes different emotional, cognitive and behavioural processes, depending on the definition (Bar-Tal, 2000; Kriesberg, 1998). Our participants seem to have recognized all three aspects: beliefs and prejudice need to be changed, the outgroup culture needs

to be recognized and acknowledged. These changes need to be demonstrated in behaviour, and emotions such as fear or anger, which will thus be minimized.

It may differ which type of changes should occur, and in which direction,, and this is exactly what could be observed in our study. Participants agree about the importance to transform the relationship, including acknowledging and accepting the outgroup members, making individual efforts to do so, and the importance of setting political grounds for achieving true reconciliation. It is the differences in these definitions that may pose threats to reconciling. One group finds reconciliation to be the act of admitting misdeeds by the outgroup, while the other thinks it is important to abandon the narrative in which they are exclusive aggressors. They see other aspects that differ as important reconciliation elements. This is important for a couple of reasons. First, practitioners and policy makers should take into account the differences in definitions or what is supposed to be the ultimate aim of their actions, and to make use of those elements that are common for both groups. Although there are similarities and differences between the groups in construing reconciliation, what is ruinous is the high percentage of participants in both groups who find that reconciliation is not achieved. Twenty-five years after the armed conflict ended, the high numbers do not provide an optimistic image. One of the reasons can certainly be a partial targeting of what reconciliation is 'supposed' to be.

Additionally, we believe that this study contributes to the topic of intergroup reconciliation after violent conflicts. Although it seems familiar and explained, there are numerous questions of reconciliation that still need to be answered. For example, when can it be considered achieved? What makes it different from other processes, such as conflict resolution or normalization? How can it be transferred from small to large groups? Is it a process or an outcome? To what extent is it contextually dependent? Our study sheds light on the very definition of the process, on its *conceptualization*, which is based on lay people's opinions, which is both rare and necessary to be explored within the area. We have also demonstrated that different parties can have different constructions of the concept, which must be taken into account in future research. As Bilali and Vollhardt (2019) argue, most reconciliation strategies in the literature do not take into account different construals of collective violence, and consequently, we argue, different construals of reconciliation. A qualitative approach is useful because it enables lay people reality regarding reconciliation for assessing the genuine construction. As important, we would also emphasize the finding that there is a part of the variance of reconciliation that is defined by both groups as important, but also a group-specific part, revealing differences between the groups. Future research should focus more on exploring lay people definitions of this concept in other post-conflict societies, as well as apply a mixed-method research to deepen the understanding of the topic.

Limitations and strengths. As many qualitative studies, our study has limitations as well regarding the sample of the focus group participants. The

number of participants varied in each group, which could have been an issue in the sense that a more fruitful discussion could be produced, but the number of participants was sometimes small. In addition, the majority of participants were highly educated, which could have biased the sample. Focus groups could have been conducted in other towns in B&H. However, this was logistically difficult to conduct. Nevertheless, the value of this study is multiple. As already mentioned, it contributes to defining reconciliation, as well as to understanding this concept in a particular context. Lay people should be included more often in studies that deal with phenomena which directly influences their everyday lives. We believe that our study have set grounds for a more purposeful future work on reconciliation in B&H.

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Appendix A

Codebook

1. Definitions of reconciliation	1.2.14 Apology and forgiveness
1.1 Economic sustainability	1.2.15 Move forward
1.2 Process	1.2.16 Actively move forward
1.2.1. Facing the past	1.3 Future orientation
1.2.2 Cooperation	1.4 Question of achievability/ideal
1.2.3 Coexistence	1.4.1 Strive for
1.2.4 Respect	1.5 Human characteristics
1.2.5 Superordinate category	1.6 State
1.2.6 Aggressor/victim	1.6.1. Peace
1.2.7 Prevent future violence or conflict	1.7 Ordinary life
1.2.8 Unite	1.8 Lack of definition/unachievable reconciliation
1.2.8.1 Building new relationships with the outgroup	1.9 Equality
1.2.8.2 Healing/reuniting	1.10 Individual approach
1.2.9 Reach understanding	1.11 Political reconciliation
1.2.10 Come to terms/agreement/compromise/negotiate	**2. Is reconciliation achieved**
1.2.11 Recognize/acknowledge/respect	2.1 Yes
1.2.12 Resolve/fix	2.2 No
1.2.13 Make reparations/compensations	

*grey-field codes are taken from Malley-Morrison et al., 2013.

Appendix B

Prevalence of Codes within the Total Number of Coded Segments

Definition of reconciliation	Prevalence per code						Prevalence per ethnic group		
	Bosniaks		Serbs		Total		Bosniaks	Serbs	Total
	f	%	f	%	f	%	%	%	%
1.1 Economic sustainability	15	78.9	4	21.1	19	100	9.74	3.05	6.67
1.2 Process	3	75.0	1	25.0	4	100	1.95	0.76	1.40
1.2.1. Facing the past	6	85.7	1	14.3	7	100	3.90	0.76	2.46
1.2.2 Cooperation	3	33.3	6	66.7	9	100	1.95	4.58	3.16
1.2.3 Coexistence	11	84.6	2	15.4	13	100	7.14	1.53	4.56
1.2.4 Respect	4	40.0	6	60.0	10	100	2.60	4.58	3.51
1.2.5 Superordinate category	3	75.0	1	25.0	4	100	1.95	0.76	1.40
1.2.6 Aggressor/ victim	2	28.6	5	71.4	7	100	1.30	3.82	2.46
1.2.7 Prevent future violence or conflict	1	100	0	0	1	100	0.65	0.00	0.35
1.2.8 Unite	9	81.8	2	18.2	11	100	5.84	1.53	3.86
1.2.8.1 Building new relationships with the outgroup	0	0	6	100	6	100	0.00	4.58	2.11
1.2.8.2 Healing/ reuniting	1	100	0	0	1	100	0.65	0.00	0.35
1.2.9 Reach understanding	3	33.3	6	66.7	9	100	1.95	4.58	3.16
1.2.10 Come to terms/ agreement/ compromise/ negotiate	5	55.6	4	44.4	9	100	3.25	3.05	3.16
1.2.11 Recognize/ acknowledge/ respect	21	47.7	23	52.3	44	100	13.64	17.56	15.44
1.2.12 Resolve/ fix	11	73.3	4	26.7	15	100	7.14	3.05	5.26

1.2.13 Make reparations/ compensations	0	0	1	100	1	100	0.00	0.76	0.35
1.2.14 Apology and forgiveness	1	33.3	2	66.7	3	100	0.65	1.53	1.05
1.2.15 Move forward	8	80.0	2	20.0	10	100	5.19	1.53	3.51
1.2.16 Actively move forward	5	83.3	1	16.7	6	100	3.25	0.76	2.11
1.3 Future orientation	10	90.9	1	9.1	11	100	6.49	0.76	3.86
1.4 Question of achievability/ideal	0	0	1	100	1	100	0.00	0.76	0.35
1.4.1 Strive for	0	0	1	100	1	100	0.00	0.76	0.35
1.5 Human characteristics	0	0	1	100	1	100	0.00	0.76	0.35
1.6 Peace	0	0	1	100	1	100	0.00	0.76	0.35
1.7 Ordinary life	14	53.8	12	46.2	26	100	9.09	9.16	9.12
1.8 Lack of definition/ unachievable reconciliation	1	14.3	6	85.7	7	100	0.65	4.58	2.46
1.9 Equality	1	16.7	5	83.3	6	100	0.65	3.82	2.11
1.10 Individual approach	8	34.8	15	65.2	23	100	5.19	11.45	8.07
1.11 Political reconciliation	8	47.1	9	52.9	17	100	5.19	6.87	5.96

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KONSTRUISANJE POMIRENJA – LAIČKE DEFINICIJE U BOSNI I HERCEGOVINI: KVALITATIVNI PRISTUP

Definisanje međugrupnog pomirenja nakon konflikta je u socijalnoj psihologiji i dalje neadekvatno. Definicije pomirenja zavisi od toga ko tu definiciju daje, te su tako u skladu s tim različiti autori istraživali različite aspekte ovog procesa, vodeći se različitim pojmovima. Mnoge date definicije potpadaju pod konceptualno rastezanje te zapravo ne doprinose razjašnjenju toga šta pomirenje nije, a šta jeste. U ovom radu predstavljeni su rezultati kvalitativnog istraživanja koje je sprovedeno u Bosni i Hercegovini, a koje se tiče upravo toga kako različite etničke grupe konstruišu, odnosno definišu pomirenje. U BiH su 25 godina nakon završetka oružanih konflikata i dalje prisutne etničke podele, koje su institucionalizovane, i kao takve utiču na međugrupne odnose i na svakodnevnu realnost stanovnika. Od potpisivanja Dejtonskog sporazuma 1995, u ovoj zemlji je primenjen veliki broj intervencija radi postizanja pomirenja; međutim, izgleda kao da je njihov efekat neznatan, a mi smatramo da je jedan od važnih faktora to što nije jasno definisano na šta se konkretno cilja. Uključivanje laika u istraživanja o međugrupnom pomirenju je prilično recentna pojava, te su istraživanja sa ovakvim uzorcima veoma malobrojna. Zbog svega navedenog, glavno istraživačko pitanje je kako Bošnjaci i Srbi definišu pomirenje i da li smatraju da je postignuto. U ovoj studiji rezultati su prikupljeni metodom fokus grupa, u kojima je učestvovalo 56 Srba i Bošnjaka iz Sarajeva i Banjaluke, u osam fokus grupa. Grupe su bile etnički homogene i voditelji su bili iste etničke pozadine kao i učesnici. Učesnici su regrutovani putem saradnje sa fakultetima i drugim organizacijama u pomenutim gradovima. U ovom radu predstavljeni su rezultati odgovora na pitanja o samom definisanju pomirenja između Bošnjaka i Srba u BiH, kao i da li smatraju da je to pomirenje postignuto. Analiza podataka vršena je u MAXQDA softveru. Rezultati su pokazali da nešto više od dve trećine učesnika iz obe grupe smatraju da pomirenje u BiH nije postignuto. Kada je u pitanju definisanje pomirenja, postoje delovi definicije koji se preklapaju, odnosno javljaju u obe grupe. Ovi segmenti najpre se tiču priznavanja i prihvatanja pripadnika druge grupe bez obzira na njihovu grupnu pripadnost, tj. religiju, ime, etničku pripadnost. Takođe, obe grupe smatraju da je značajan deo pomirenja

normalan život, odnosno ostvarivanje i održavanje kontakata, provođenje vreme i svakodnevna razmena informacija između grupa. Određen procenat odgovora o definiciji pomirenja potpada pod kategoriju individualnog pristupa, odnosno potrebe da ljudi najpre rade na sebi i svom razvoju kako bi mogli da pristupe pomirenju sa drugima. Takođe, u obe grupe se navodi značaj pomirenja na političkom nivou. Kada su u pitanju razlike između Bošnjaka i Srba, predstavljene su kategorije koje se javljaju u najvećoj meri ekskluzivno samo kod jedne grupe. Za Bošnjake, značaj deo definicije čine ekonomska stabilnost, koegzistencija, odnosno suživot, ali i niz kategorija koje se tiču suočavanja sa prošlošću, prihvatanja zlodela koje je grupa učinila, kažnjavanje ratnih zločinaca i priznavanje žrtava. Takođe, kod njih se javljaju kategorije koje se tiču okretanja ka budućnosti i postavljanje zajedničkih ciljeva, od kojih kao jedan navode unitarnu Bosnu i Hercegovinu. Srbi, sa druge strane, češće definišu pomirenje kao saradnju, poštovanje, izgradnju novih veza sa drugom grupom i razumevanje. Srbi takođe govore i o odnosu između uloga žrtve i zločinca, odnosno kao bitan segment pomirenja vide uklanjanje ekskluzivne uloge zločinca koja im je pripisana. Dobijeni rezultati su diskutovani u svetlu procesa koji su i ranije u literaturi dovođeni u vezu sa pomirenjem, ali i u skladu sa kontekstualnim specifičnostima BiH. Neke od navedenih kategorija javljale su se u ranijim istraživanjima, npr. izgradnja međugrupnog poverenja i suočavanje sa prošlošću. Međutim, ono što je značajno i što je pokazano ovim istraživanjem jeste da postoji jedan deo varijanse pomirenja koji kao važan definišu obe grupe, ali i jedan deo koji je grupno-specifičan, odnosno postoje bitne razlike u definisanju između Bošnjaka i Srba. Smatramo da je moguće da intervencije koje su do sada primenjene u BiH nisu uzele u obzir ove međugrupne razlike, te su ciljale neadekvatne procese kod obe grupe.

Ključne reči: Bosna i Hercegovina, etničke podele, pomirenje, post-konfliktno društvo