

Peace for Whom: Agency and Intersectionality in Post-War Bosnia and Herzegovina

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With intrastate wars regarded as clashes between different groups, frequently ethnic ones, peace is commonly viewed as a mirror image of the war, a state of those groups coming together. This understanding, using the prism of *groupism* whereby (ethnic) groups are approached as primary societal actors, ascribed with particular characteristics and agency, presupposes homogeneity of the groups in question. Such understanding of peace has been overwhelmingly present in scholars', practitioners', and donors' approaches in engaging with post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina. To that end, while the 'crossings' of ethnic boundaries for Bosnians and Herzegovinians have been mere practical dimensions of everyday life, they have often been perceived as a vanguard for reconciliation in the foreign gaze. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that most international donors continue to have separate funding for 'inter-ethnic reconciliation' to date. Overall, with most of the peacebuilding efforts focusing on return and reconciliation as primary ways of 'redressing the wrong' or reversing the consequences of an ethnically understood conflict, there has been a notable disregard of the heterogeneous intra-ethnic understandings of peace and what it could and should entail.

In an attempt to unpack the consequences of this approach and to shed light on the diverging understandings of peace, this thesis grapples with the question of how the understanding of peace in ethnic terms affected different actors in Bosnia and post-war societies that have experienced international intervention more broadly. What kinds of subjectivity and agency are enacted as a result of an ethnic understanding of peace and which ones are excluded and silenced? How does the discourse of peace in these terms, along with other liberal discourses of global governance, enable and circumscribe local agency? Equally importantly, what relations and practices of inequality that shape people's lived experiences are introduced and consolidated in the process?

In its analysis, the thesis is decisively interdisciplinary, engaging literature and approaches from Peace and Conflict Studies, Gender Studies, Political Economy, Critical Geography, Development Studies, as well as post-colonial and de-colonial literature. Its primary engagement, nonetheless, is with Critical Peace and Conflict Studies and the understandings of post-war societal dynamics. Namely, in recent years, there has been a growing critical literature that questions the motives, the assumptions, and the activities undertaken in the name of peace. Seeing the interventions as primarily driven by the Global North, an increasing number of scholars have criticised the liberal peacebuilding

enterprise as being top-down, dismissive and inconsiderate of local cultures, and most of all, based on a worldview of liberal righteousness. In addition, they have highlighted the necessity to reflect and include the 'local', its context and the everyday in the understanding of peace, marking a so-called 'local turn' in studying peacebuilding efforts and post-war societies. Still, within this research and emerging body of literature it is mostly the political agency of the post-war society population that has come under scrutiny, while issues of socioeconomic concerns, basic livelihoods, and everyday practices of normality remain marginalised and understudied.

By taking a particular post-war society in its cultural, social, and historical complexity as a starting point, this thesis addresses that gap. The main argument of the thesis is that understanding peace solely in inter-ethnic terms and in opposition to the war, along with the promotion of a market economy as a necessary component of the liberal peacebuilding project, exacerbates certain inequalities and prevents a significant part of the post-war society from exercising their agency. Furthermore, the findings of the thesis show that for many people the rebuilding of a 'normal life', which primarily relates to socioeconomic concerns but also to a sense of agency, rather than ethnic identity politics, is the basic component for a stable peace. This is not to say that ethnicity as a category and social identity is not meaningful, but simply that it is not fixed. Problematizing and reconceptualising agency at the level of post-war societies through an ethnographic narrative of three case studies from Bosnia and Herzegovina, this thesis sheds light on the social dynamics, practices of inequality and modalities of agency that many peacebuilding initiatives help (re)inscribe. Using intersectionality as a heuristic device, the research accounts for the multiplicity and complexity of subjectivities that exist beyond the ethnic category. In so doing, it not only moves beyond the 'snapshot' and unidimensional approach present in most of the existing literature in this field, but it also allows for categories such as gender, class, and age to be brought to the fore as factors that can enable or limit one's exercise of agency.

As a country that has received both an unprecedented amount of foreign attention, aid, and intervention altogether, and significant scholarly attention, Bosnia and Herzegovina offers a valuable opportunity to juxtapose the novelty of the research approach and its usefulness in the policy domain. Drawing on a ten-month ethnographic research, the three case studies have ethnicity, gender, and class as analytic entry points. The first case study looks at the lives and practices of people living near the Inter-Entity Boundary Line, the second one zeroes in on women that have taken out micro loans aimed at addressing household poverty and promoting gender equality and female empowerment through entrepreneurship, while the third case study relates to the subsistence and informal economies, with particular focus on the people working at the Arizona market near Brčko and taxi drivers in various Bosnian towns. Finally, relating the Bosnian and Herzegovinian examples to macro processes, the thesis offers a number of recommendations for peacebuilding practitioners and scholars.