# Of wolves and men: Postwar reconciliation and the gender of inter-national encounters

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*Abstract:* This article confronts the grammar of liberal reconciliation discourses with the gendered practices of post-war encounters. After violence that is considered national, meetings between people of different nationalities, and the reconciliation of which they are seen to be a vanguard, tend to be considered as morally good in and of themselves. This article subjects such liberal reconciliation discourse to a double ethnographic intervention: first, by privileging the practice of non-elite inter-national encounters over abstract notions of reconciliation, and, second, by tracing the particular gendered subject positions of sameness that shaped and were shaped by such encounters. The article explores how, after the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, men who met across former frontlines evoked "normal life" through mutual recognition of performative competence of motifs of hegemonizing masculinities.

*Keywords:* Bosnia and Herzegovina, masculinity, post-war encounters, reconciliation

*Ljudi smo, nismo vukovi!* [We are people, not wolves!]
—Banner above a reconciliatory stage event in Pjer Žalica's 2003 film *Gori vatra*

## Meeting as men in no-man's land

A similar reference to this epitaph appears in a story told in the Bosnian[1] novel *Derviš i smrt* (Death and the Dervish). In the story, recalled by a character named Hasan, two enemy soldiers in a forest fight each other all day, "since this was their trade" (Selimović 1966: 159). Then one suggests a break because "we are not wolves, but people" [*nismo vukovi, već ljudi*]. They sit down, compliment each other's fighting abilities, nurse their wounds, and

"they talked about everything, about their families, their children, their hard lives. All about them was similar, much was the same. They understood each other, grew closer, then stood up and, satisfied, said 'Eh, we had a really good talk, as people. Look, we even forgot about our wounds. Let's now finish what we set out to do.' And they took out their knives and laid each other to rest" (Selimović 1966: 159).

In yet another work of fiction from Bosnia and Herzegovina three soldiers find themselves in

an abandoned trench in-between their respective army units' positions in the 1992–1995 war. Danis Tanović's 2001 film *Ničija Zemlja* (No man's land) follows Nino, recently mobilized in the Army of Republika Srpska (VRS), and Čiki and Cera, more experienced and typically less well-equipped soldiers in a unit of the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (AR-BiH). Although it can be deduced that Nino is a Bosnian Serb and the two others are probably Bosniacs, the film hardly touches on issues of nationality[2] per se—the key differentiation between the protagonists being their engagement in conflicting armies with regard to the future (or lack thereof) of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a political configuration. The ARBiH's numerical advantage is canceled out by the fact that Nino's fellow VRS soldier, now killed, has placed Cera's body on a mine that will explode if they remove his weight. Dependent on each other for survival, the relationship between Čiki and Nino remains characterized by apprehension and fear. In addition to some verbal sparring, including a tragicomical discussion about who started the war (with the "winning" argument decided by control over the one weapon they have), they wound each other in the course of the story, and ultimately they both die: Čiki shoots Nino and is himself killed by a UN soldier. The latter shooting is the climax of the ineffective, divided, and even counterproductive foreign military and media involvement in the action.

This article builds on the intersection of two dimensions of those stories: the gendered nature of the encounters they describe and the latter's relation to the notion of reconciliation. As we saw, Selimović's soldiers, whose "trade" was to fight, briefly found each other as fathers, talking about everyday predicaments. Tanović's protagonists also meet as men, but differently. For the purpose of this article, a key interaction in *No man's land* occurs when Čiki and Nino, exhausted by continuous vigilance, await the results of a collaborative rescue attempt in which, wearing nothing but underwear and boots, they had waved white cloths to their respective units. Nino asks Čiki whether he has known Cera for

long. They met at the beginning of the war, Čiki says. Nino indicates that he had no close ties with the VRS soldier he arrived with (now dead), who, the viewer knows, had persistently treated him as an inexperienced, pen-pushing coward. When it becomes clear that Nino is far from a highly motivated fighter for the Serbian cause, but that he has been recently mobilized, the following conversation develops:

ČIKI: So you're from Banja Luka?

NINO: How do you know?

ČIKI (*knowing smile*): I used to have a bird [*trebu*] in Banja Luka.

NINO: (*disinterested shrug*)

ČIKI: Sanja.

NINO: I know a Sanja too.

ČIKI: This one had … (*gestures large breasts*)

NINO: This one too.

ČIKI (*gestures hair*)

NINO: … blonde.

ČIKI: Yeah! (*gestures height*)

NINO: … tall.

ČIKI: Yeah! (*points to his face*)

NINO: … beauty mark above her mouth.

ČIKI: Sanja Čengić!

NINO: I went to school with her.

ČIKI: Don't talk bollocks!

NINO: I swear!

ČIKI: Cera! He knows that Sanja from Banja Luka I told you about!

CERA (*sarcastic*): Great!

ČIKI: What is she up to now?

NINO: She went abroad.

ČIKI: That's the cleverest thing to do.

This conversation is unique in the film: it is the only point where the two protagonists, however reluctantly, interact beyond war-imposed categories. It is important to note here that, to post-Yugoslav viewers, Čiki —despite his reference to "his village"—cuts an "urban" character, with a T-shirt with the Rolling Stones logo testifying to his popular cultural capital. Bespectacled Nino, from the city of Banja Luka, comes across as a

learned type—perhaps a student. The two are of similar age, and share "modern" Yugoslav Bosnia and Herzegovina as their past everyday framework of reference for "normal life," brutally interrupted by what Čiki calls *ovaj usrani rat* (this shitty war). In the above conversation they find a short-lived forum for mutual recognition as Bosnians with such life experiences, and, crucially for my argument here, as men.

Like in Selimović's *Death and the Dervish,* this story's momentary instance of mutual recognition fails to prevent the death of both soldiers. The final scene of *No man's land,* which leaves wounded Cera (read: Bosnia and Herzegovina) abandoned on the mine, indicates there is no reconciliation on the horizon. Selimović, in contrast, does not leave it there. In a multi-layered passage Hasan, who narrates the tale, proceeds to say that the story about the two soldiers cheered him up and gave him courage. Perhaps, he says,

"someone else would have said that these soldiers in the forest parted as friends. But that would have been a filthy lie, even if it had happened. Like this, the bitter ending of the story is truthful, perhaps especially because I fear [a different ending] would represent them as better than they are. And yet—this conclusion I could not reasonably explain even to myself—precisely because the ending is brutally truthful, within me remained a childish thought, a relentless hope, that they *did* reconcile themselves. If not those two soldiers, then perhaps some others" (Selimović 1966: 159–60).

In my reading, it is not a simple desire for reconciliation that is at stake in this extraordinary passage. Rather, in a literary masterstroke, Meša Selimović invites us to reflect on *whose* reconciliation is being desired here, *by whom, for whom,* and *what for.*

## The "sides" in reconciliation

If to reconcile means "to render no longer opposed" (Borneman 2002: 281), we should ask whether dissolving opposition is always good per se, and, where it is, which opposition should be considered as the key one to be dissolved. Reconciliation, thus, always implies a political exercise of defining "the opposing sides" in a conflict (Jansen and Löfving 2008: 9; Löfving 2008: 158) and it can have rather diverse political implications, depending on who advocates it and for what purposes.

In the post-Yugoslav context, contrary to what one may intuitively expect, reconciliation has actually long been a major priority for nationalist elites. Their focus was squarely on the *intra*-national level. Often aimed at dissolving oppositions between fellow-nationals associated with opposed ideologies in World War II, these efforts effectively amounted to programs of national homogenization that can be understood as attempts to erase antagonism by establishing discursive closure (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 88). Such intra-national reconciliation attempts emerged in various ways. For example, in 1998, in Croatia, the Tuđman government called for a joint monument for "all victims of World War II," including fascists and anti-fascists, at the site of the Ustaša concentration camp in Jasenovac. In 2004, the post-Milošević government in Serbia aimed to foster unity by allocating Četnik veterans the same pensions as their surviving World War II partisan opponents. Right from the early 1990s on, promoting intra-national unity was also a key programmatic point for the Bosniac nationalists around Alija Izetbegović. The Kosovo Albanian case was more specific: in the early 1990s the nationalist movement led by Ibrahim Rugova organized large reconciliation ceremonies to overcome blood feuds between Albanian families. As is well-documented, all those *intra*-national reconciliation efforts have served to exacerbate *inter*-national relations—indeed, they became part and parcel of the 1990s wars.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, where we shall focus in this text, after those wars *inter*-national reconciliation became a major preoccupation for the foreign intervention agencies. The different "sides" who needed to be rendered no longer opposed here were *nations,* thereby im-

plying the imposition of an exclusively national idiom on the war itself too (Jansen 2005a, 2005b). Notwithstanding the tendency of nationalist elites involved to use precisely this idiom, and despite the noble intentions of many of those working for reconciliation, this reductive definition of the "sides" in the war remains disputable: it is itself a depoliticizing intervention pretending to neutrally name existing categories. As such it tends to be invoked frequently by those who consider the violence to have been exclusively a "civil war" between national "sides," who are then often attributed more-or-less equal responsibility. Although I cannot elaborate on this issue here, I want to point out that reducing the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina to a simple three-way fight among Bosniacs, Serbs, and Croats clouds power differentials and conflicting legitimacy claims. It also obscures the fact that it *also* encompassed, for example, a political conflict over state formation, a scramble for resources between political elites from within and from outside Bosnia and Herzegovina, and an opportunity for looters and other businessmen.

During the first post-war decade the ambitions of post-Yugoslav inter-national reconciliation efforts were necessarily modest. With the 1990s conflict, which had radically unmixed the population in terms of nationality, very real national boundaries had emerged even for those who had not previously considered them to be of determining significance. Indeed, to a high degree and in many contexts, people had come to be understood as nationals first, and the relationships between those of different nationalities now required navigation of socially sanctioned segregation and, often, ex-frontlines. Reconciliation efforts promoted by the foreign intervention agencies in divided Bosnia and Herzegovina thus usually simply attempted to bring about some degree of rapprochement between Bosnians of different nationalities. Reconciling *nations* concretely required encounters between persons defined as *nationals,* but the significance of national divisions had intensified so much that this was not self-evident for most. Still, in one way or another, even relatively shortly after the

war, hundreds of thousands of Bosnians engaged in inter-national encounters. Yet did they see this as a moral act in a reconciliation process?

The liberal and normative view dominant in most foreign scholarly and geopolitical-humanitarian discourses on Bosnia and Herzegovina, tends to consider inter-national encounters—the crossing of boundaries between presumably discrete collectivities—to be morally commendable acts. Far from rendering the different sides no longer opposed, most initiatives of inter-national reconciliation were thus aimed at merely allowing people to cross the boundaries between those sides and thereby rendering Bosnians slightly less actively opposed as nationals. Hence, inter-national reconciliation was framed in a mosaic model, which—like Western liberal-pluralist multiculturalism—tended to solidify national-cultural dividing lines and to represent them as discrete at the expense of other differences and struggles (Jansen 2005b). The idea, then, was to return the conflicting sides to their presumed pre-war status of co-existing peoples.[3] In this framework, inter-national interactions were portrayed as more desirable than intra-national ones—and, as every NGO worker in Bosnia and Herzegovina knows, a project proposal that included beneficiaries with different nationalities was on average much more likely to attract foreign funding than one that did not. There were, of course, rather obvious reasons for this, and it is not my intention here to assess such funding prioritizations. What I aim to highlight is that "national boundary crossings" came to be seen as a vanguard for reconciliation in the foreign gaze but not necessarily among the Bosnians engaging in them (see also Helms, this volume). Remembered mundane pre-war "national boundary crossings"—if they had been experienced as such at all—had normally not been self-consciously reconciliatory acts but practical dimensions of everyday life. Indeed, for some—predominantly in a few larger cities—post-war inter-national interaction was simply a continuation of everyday practice that had not disappeared during the 1990s, although it had been drastically reduced due to war-related population movements. But even in other cases,

where such encounters did involve crossing former frontlines, they were not necessarily experienced as geared toward reconciliation.

Quite simply, after a war that had ended with a foreign-sanctioned stalemate instead of a clear winner, many Bosnians treated inter-national reconciliation as a Western-imposed idea. Some people supported it as desirable in principle, and saw it as a route toward a functioning, unified Bosnia and Herzegovina (a view found mainly among Bosniacs, shared by a smaller proportion of others). Others had no wish for future co-existence in a state called "Bosnia and Herzegovina" but did want good neighborly relations between peacefully consolidated polities in a different set-up (a proposition one heard mainly, but not exclusively, from Bosnian Serbs in Republika Srpska and Bosnian Croats in Western Herzegovina, as well as from their co-nationals who had fled to Serbia and Croatia). Regardless of their particular positionings, even those who argued in favor of reconciliation believed it should be preceded by apologies, punishment, and compensation. Some, of course, rejected reconciliation altogether.

We should not take the desirability of reconciliation for granted—either from the perspective of those who would be reconciled or even from that of a higher goal such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, or Euro-Atlantic Integration, or even Peace (see Brudholm 2006). However, rather than simplistically reducing differing perspectives on such issues to national sides, they must be seen in terms of possible futures too. For most Bosnians, reconciliation was just not a priority: their main preoccupations were perhaps best summarized as justice and "getting on with it." Because justice was both hard to define and its establishment considered out of the reach of ordinary people, everyday practice largely focused on securing an immediate future. As I have argued elsewhere (e.g., Jansen 2006, 2008b), the object of hope here was overwhelmingly "a normal life." Of course, Bosnian past "normal lives"—a key reference point—had included inter-national coexistence, but with regard to hopes for the future this aspect was much less prominent.

## Gendered affirmative essentialism in post-war encounters

Having traced its political embedding and implications in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina, I now subject liberal reconciliation discourse to a double ethnographic intervention. First, I privilege the practice of actual post-war encounters of Bosnians with different nationalities and associated with different "sides" of the war (regardless of whether they actually considered themselves as such) over the normative abstractions of liberal, foreign-projected notions of reconciliation. Second, I trace the particular gendered subject positions of sameness that shaped and were shaped by such encounters. In other words, instead of asking the questions most frequently underlying foreign scholarly and policy approaches—"How can we reconcile Bosnians?" or even "How is reconciliation in Bosnia and Herzegovina advancing?"—I ask in what ways Bosnians of different nationalities did actually meet across former frontlines in the early post-war years. Specifically, I investigate gendered forms of mutual recognition that underlay their meetings as men. But why turn the spotlight on men only?

Reconciliation projects in the Abrahamic tradition (Derrida 1999) are grounded in the assumption that the various parties share equal and inalienable humanity. After the 1990s wars, post-Yugoslav antinationalism and efforts to (re-)establish inter-national relationships and/or to restore co-existence systematically relied on such a universal humanistic framework, from theoretical writings on individual responsibilities and liberal rights, to the expression with which post-war cross-frontline encounters were often justified on the most elementary level: *ljudi smo!* (we are people!). Yet people do not engage with each other based on some abstract common humanity, even if they may feel this sets them apart from other animals, such as wolves. Rather common humanity is given specific, often socially sanctioned shapes in particular contexts. It is because of the well-documented relation between patriarchy and nationalism that I focus here on the gendered dimension of this process.

Reflecting more general patterns (Nagel 1998) competing post-Yugoslav nationalisms articulated restrictive nationalized subject positions for both men and women, foregrounding the physically protective dimensions of masculinity and the nurturing, in-need-of-protection dimensions of femininity. If war was seen as belonging to a masculine sphere (both positively, as a man's job, and, negatively, as an expression of traditional Balkan patriarchy), then peace often came to be placed in women's hands. Many foreign-driven reconciliation projects involved handiwork or nurturing activities with women (and children), whereas men still overwhelmingly populated the political negotiation tables (cf. Pessar 2001). As Elissa Helms (2003, 2007) has analyzed in detail, cross-frontline initiatives of women's organizations frequently relied on "affirmative essentialisms" of femininity. Women were to mutually recognize each other's humanity as women, through the sisterhood of emancipatory feminism or, more frequently, through patriarchally[4] understood motherhood, meeting as sufferers (for example, because they "know what it is like to lose a son").

But what about men? If nationalist war was associated with "Balkan" patriarchy and machismo, did boundary crossing necessarily involve the development of "alternative" masculinities (Bracewell 2000: 579)? Or, if patriarchal subjectivities contained bridging potential for women, could the same be said for men? Recalling the depoliticizing effects of reducing the conflict in and over Bosnia and Herzegovina to a war between national "sides", we should note here that frequent boundary crossings and brotherly collaboration certainly flourished among many of its protagonists. The same "enemies" against whom reputations as "national heroes" were established, were business partners for arms, drugs, prostitution, and other transactions, during and after the wars. Many had known each other for years from Yugoslav military and intelligence circles, the European criminal circuit and the French Foreign Legion (Vasić 2004: 204–13). Media reports on such collaboration show a comfortable atmosphere of men who understand and respect each other. Although this was not the image promoted in liberal reconciliation discourse, memoirs and recollections indicate that foreign-promoted peace efforts for Bosnia and Herzegovina were not that different. Their climax—the US government-led negotiations in Dayton, Ohio, which involved only one woman negotiator in all delegations put together (including the US one)—followed almost caricatured macho scenarios of whiskey-fueled sleepless nights in smoke-filled rooms.

How did such gendered patterns play out in the practice of low-level boundary crossings, outside the spotlight of foreign tutelage?[5] To my own political discomfort, I want to explore how, in such non-elite encounters too, common ground for mutual recognition could be negotiated through performances not of alternative, but of hegemonizing, patriarchal masculinities. In an approach that does not take for granted the moral superiority of liberal reconciliation or even of boundary crossing within a mosaic per se, my question is: Along which normative and normalized gendered trajectories could ordinary men in Bosnia and Herzegovina cross previous frontlines *as men*?

## Zubovo, 2001

In the spring of 2001 I attended a foreign-presided organizational meeting of a return project in a village I shall call Zubovo, at the Inter-Entity Boundary Line (IEBL) in North East Bosnia and Herzegovina. During the war Zubovo had fallen under VRS control and almost all Bosniac inhabitants had fled to nearby territory held by ARBiH, while many Serbian displaced persons had arrived from elsewhere. Allocated to Republika Srpska in the Dayton Agreement, it became a target area for Bosniac return in the late 1990s. At the meeting I attended most participants spoke in their capacity as representatives either of potential Bosniac returnees or of Serbs who had remained in Zubovo throughout the war. No one of Zubovo's numerous displaced Serbs had taken part, but, afterward, when we went for coffee on a nearby terrace, some of them, mainly young men, loitered there, drink-

ing bottled beer and observing us with silent hostility. Here I focus on those around our table: all men too, with big differences between them, cross-cutting nationality. For example, there was an elderly man who was commended for his wisdom and experience, a young and highly educated one, and a few middle-age ones (one with good connections in humanitarian organizations, one recent returnee from Germany who was obviously better-off than most, one member of a non-nationalist political party, and so on).

Despite those differences, our boundary crossing conversation on the terrace, initially rather reserved, quickly took off when it converged around two apparently consensual themes: first, the need for foreign funds to provide conditions for recreating a "normal life" in the village (through de-mining, house reconstruction, and employment provision); second, Zubovo's wonderful yet underestimated qualities. The latter dimension was partly shaped didactically around my presence. Zubovo, I was informed, was one of the oldest settlements in the Balkans, with archaeological finds to prove it. Particularly in comparison with the nearby village across the heavily mined IEBL where the displaced Bosniacs now lived, it was far superior. That place, it was argued in inter-national unison, was inhabited by high-minded pretenders, but actually their wealth had always been the result of their village's prime location for black market trading. In contrast, the story continued, Zubovo folk had always been known as very industrious. And, someone added, as people who knew how to party—revelers had come from all around, particularly because Zubovo "had always had the best girls." This was met with general approval, and set the tone for the next hour or so. Nationality did not feature in this conversation, which focused—jokingly, loudly, and jovially—on the relative merits of Zubovo in its capacity to project and fulfill heterosexual masculine desire.

This format of cross-boundary interaction became familiar to me when attending low-level return initiatives in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2000–2001. First there would be an official meet-

ing under foreign tutelage, largely structuring the various participants' positionings around national sides through its articulation with displacement. Then an unsupervised, informal gathering would often be preceded by a brief spell of reluctance to engage. Matters of war-time responsibility and justice, so present in intra-national interaction—even if often formulaically—were avoided, and many men who were prepared to meet across former frontlines as ordinary citizens shared an aversion of *politika* ("politics",) denoting a power game beyond the control of "ordinary people". In fact, if low-level inter-national interaction did address wartime actions of the interacting men, this could result in heated disputes and, ultimately, deadlock along national or non-national lines (Jansen 2007).

## Two motifs of masculinity

For my analysis here, the key point in the above vignette, and in the excerpts from *No man's land* and *Death and the Dervish,* is that a degree of mutual recognition was achieved, however partially, in a highly gendered manner, allowing men to meet as men. Although much writing on gender in the post-Yugoslav context associates boundary crossing and antinationalism with alternative forms of masculinity, the Zubovo episode renders questionable just how different the masculinities prevalent here were from those promoted by nationalism. At most, I would argue, this was a matter of degree.

Based on an analysis of popular culture from 1990s Croatia and Serbia, Pavlović (1999: 142–45) has argued that essentialized sexualized categories of men and women, often accompanied by expectations of masculine predatory heterosexuality, were also widespread in non- or antinationalist contexts. I share Pavlović's aversion of what she terms hypermasculinity and its misogyny and homophobia (see also Bjelić and Cole 2002: 295; Čolović 1994: 76), even though I would be reluctant to link such patterns specifically to the Balkans. But, for the purpose of my argument here, the most telling dimension

of her text is that it points to the possibility that men across former frontlines are equivalent in their relation to women as objects of heterosexual desire. If so, this has important implications for a gendered analysis of boundary crossings. For, much as they have been articulated into nationalist violence, patriarchal masculinities may then also have the capacity to shape mutual recognition. By that logic, even if nothing else, men associated with opposed national "sides" may at least be expected to act in congruence with similar expectations of masculinity.

A key question is then: Which modalities of masculinities allowed men to cross post-war boundaries in Bosnia and Herzegovina as men? One possible post-war ground for mutual recognition would be the "defensive identity" that Bašić (2004: 108) found to be dominant among her ex-soldier interviewees in Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. They reconstructed their war experience as a lack of choice in extraordinary circumstances: one simply had to defend one's household (especially one's women) and one's territory. Such a guilt-avoiding perspective, Bašić points out, allowed the reconstruction of a positive self-image in deeply gendered terms, for defense was seen as a man's job (2004: 109; see also Milićević 2006). In my research among displaced and returned Bosnians on both sides of the IEBL I too found such self-perceptions to be common, but the situation became more complicated in contexts of actual boundary crossings such as in Zubovo. These were encounters of men who might share each other's "defensive" self-representation, but who believed they had defended themselves against attack by other men around the table.[6]

In such boundary crossings, as in the momentary mutual recognition in *No man's land*, the emphasis usually came to rest on one particular dimension of this "defensive" leitmotif: lack of choice in exceptional circumstances. Although some did express a degree of respect for those who had fought in another army (as opposed to those who hadn't fought at all), I seldom heard this equivalent experience of having served in national defense evoked in the pres-

ence of those former enemies—except half-jokingly. Instead, in those low-level boundary crossings, it was much more common to refer broadly and vaguely to "the situation" that had prevailed then. Often in the presence of men who had not carried arms, this allowed inclusive commonality around the need to deal with a difficult, unexpected predicament. As a conversation topic, the responsibility for placing mines was overshadowed by the need for their removal. As we saw, the building of bridges between the pieces of the national mosaic of Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina, as promoted in foreign-driven reconciliation efforts, relied heavily on silence (see Stefansson, this volume)—and one way to avoid controversial issues was precisely to emphasize the extraordinariness of war-time, thereby consolidating the importance attached to rebuilding "normal life."

Yet if life in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina was considered far from "normal", how did men establish mutual recognition of their humanity associated with this "normal life" in gendered terms? Rather than uncovering "alternative" masculinities that could be associated with non-nationalism and reconciliation, I now analyze how, in post-war encounters across former Bosnian frontlines, men evoked "normal life" through mutual recognition of performative competence of hegemonizing masculinities. I focus on two particularly prevalent motifs: "the father" (a provider to a household constituted through patriarchal kinship) and "the *frajer*" (a stylized subject of heterosexual desire). In the precarious context of post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina, both could be evoked as normalized gendered expectations to different degrees in different circumstances.

Some inspiration for my approach is derived from Michael Herzfeld's *The poetics of manhood,* in which he develops the notion of "performative excellence." Herzfeld argues that for the Cretan villagers he worked with, the emphasis was not so much on "being a good man" but rather on "being *good at* being a man", namely "the ability to foreground manhood by means of deeds that strikingly 'speak for themselves'" (Herzfeld 1985: 16). In Bosnia and Herzego-

vina, I too was sometimes confronted with such valuation of "performative excellence," but among non-elite people in the post-war context there usually seemed to be less emphasis on such ostentatious, individual(ist) self-presentations. Instead, most frequently I found a normative stress on adequacy: men were expected to prove themselves to be "men enough," to sufficiently conform to hegemonizing expectations of masculinity. I shall therefore speak of "performative competence." Focusing on boundary crossings, let us now investigate how men deployed the *frajer* and the father motifs to give substance to mutual recognition of common humanity.

## The *frajer*

The common ground that momentarily exists between Čiki and Nino—the protagonists in *No man's land*—is not governed by abstract reference to common humanity, but developed through particular motifs of masculinity. The conversation about Sanja, who is not commented on beyond her physical appearance, subjectifies Čiki and Nino as two men who share heterosexual desire. Even Nino, far from a macho character, has his heterosexual masculinity redeemed when Čiki finds a suggestive photograph of a naked man in the wallet of his (fellow Serbian) tormentor. As we saw, the horizon against which their boundary crossing conversation takes place is one of "normal life" in pre-war Bosnia and Herzegovina. References to human rights or reconciliation are absent, and there is also a clear distance from the traditionalist masculinity attributed to "peasants" and associated with nationalism. Instead, reproducing much of the formal aspects of such a "traditional" model, Čiki and Nino's national boundary crossing is shaped through the display of performative competence of a masculinity that positions them as "modern" heterosexual connoisseurs of women as sexual objects. I call this motif "the *frajer*."

In Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian, the term *frajer* is a widespread colloquial term, used both by men and women, denoting a "guy" who displays a certain degree of cool. While often employed as a neutral word for any man, when used on its own as a predicate ("he's a *frajer*") it usually refers to a form of youngish, irresponsible, ostentatious, yet nonchalant heterosexual masculinity. Importantly, the term is used both in positive and in negative, slightly ironic ways.[7] Although trying hard to be a *frajer* is often considered funny in the case of a small boy, for an adult man a balancing act is required. Performative competence as a *frajer* requires that one should not try too hard, because exaggerating it is bound to make one a target for mockery. The notion of *frajer* thus includes a broad display of performative competence, but here I focus particularly on its dimension of projecting heterosexual desire and its link with "normal life." Čiki and Nino's short-lived mutual recognition as *frajeri* evokes such a wider yearned-for normality, and the Zubovo episode also extolled that heterosexual, masculine aspect of "normal life."

Another example occurred during a visit to a hamlet in Republika Srpska with a nationally mixed team of Bosnians exploring the possibilities of reconstruction and return. An elderly man walked up to us and, addressing all of us, including a few middle-age fathers, systematically as *momci* (young men, unmarried status implied), he lamented the departure of his children who had sought refuge abroad, and the destruction of his house:

"Nine of us lived in there. For that house, I sweated four years in Iraq. And look at it now. All this was pointless, there was no need for any of it. It was *politika* that screwed us over. Some people up there knew what happened, and it was not right at all. Who needed all this? *Momci* like you died. But *momci* shouldn't die, they should be chasing girls."

As we have seen, war experiences could be given meaning within expectations of hegemonizing masculinities through the invocation of its defense dimension. But these cases show that it was also possible to deploy such expectations through a representation of men as *frajeri*, driven, in "normal life"—unburdened by the

responsibility of defense required in extraordinary circumstances—by a healthy heterosexual desire. It is worth noting that such celebratory representations of men's desire for female bodies were staple ingredients of Bosnian-Yugoslav popular culture.

The *frajer* motif risks to be seen simply as a more modern, popular-cultural version of the "Balkan man" stereotype: the attribution of congruence to machismo and Balkan cultural forms that is so prominent in representations by Westerners (Bjelić and Cole 2002; Bracewell 2005; Todorova 1997) and by many Bosnians themselves (Helms 2006, 2008; Jansen 2008a). One reason why this style of masculine performance has received much attention (e.g., Simić 1969, 1983; van de Port 1994) may be its colorful, dramatic character, and its associated claims of Balkan/Western differences (parallel to the Western interest in Mediterranean and Latin American masculinity). As a North West European, I too tend to simply notice such performances of masculinity more readily, and certainly their potential to be worked into juicy anthropological analysis is more easily recognizable than that of others.

However, it is not my objective to assess whether a specific Balkan masculinity exists, much less whether it can explain the 1990s violence (for one thing, this would require comparative work with men in non-Balkan contexts). I do argue, however, that we must acknowledge the relative consensus not only among local and foreign scholars but also among most other Bosnians on the importance of particular forms of masculinity in the recent war, even if evaluated differentially. Self-proclaimed warriors for the national cause deployed "traditional masculinity" as a positive idiom of self-identification, and were in turn blamed for that by their opponents who considered themselves at least defanged from such Balkan machismo.[8] Hence, although we must guard ourselves against our unwitting Balkanisms, we cannot explain away the significance of socially sanctioned expectations of masculinity as a function of the exoticism of Western ethnographers only.

Correcting the generalizations of some earlier writings, recent work on masculinities dispels impressions of homogenous gender models,[9] and my emphasis may seem to take a step back in this respect. However, I remain unapologetic about not focusing on non- or counter-hegemonic masculinities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, even though I know very well that they exist. I believe that, in addition to diversity and resistance, anthropology should *also* investigate sameness and conformity. In particular, this may contribute to explanations of how certain patterns of behavior and interaction come to be seen as a normative part of cultural intimacy (Herzfeld 1996). For my analysis here, then, rather than implying that all men in the Balkans share some specific masculinity, this means acknowledging that certain actively generalized, homogenized patterns of masculinity are perceived, by most Westerners and Bosnians alike, as being somehow typical of Bosnia and Herzegovina (or of the Balkans). For any one individual, this perception may be part of a sense of pride, or shame, or irritation, but it is hard to ignore it. In addition to studying how people resist this, ethnography is well-placed to investigate how degrees of enthusiastic or reluctant compliance to such expectations make sense to particular persons in particular contexts, and how these persons' practice thus comes to shape degrees of hegemony. Hence, to remain true to the dynamic Gramscian conceptualization of hegemony as subject to never-completed struggle, I speak of hegemonizing masculinities.

The notion of the *frajer,* I suggest, captures one motif of hegemonizing masculinity—largely consensual and naturalized (Connell 1995; Gutmann 1997)—that men in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina felt they could deploy in order to attain mutual recognition across national boundaries. Displaying performative competence as a *frajer* did not imply that men's lives actually reflected such normative expectations, but they were unlikely to be able to ignore them altogether, for they exerted influence, at the very least, as stereotypes. Over the years in the post-Yugoslav states, women and men with different sociolog-

ical profiles have tested my own performative competence with regard to what was posited as proper masculinity. The widespread jocular national rankings of different post-Yugoslav masculinities seemed to lose significance in comparison with me, the unwilling representative of all things Western, who was straightforwardly attributed a lower degree of *frajer* credibility. Although some men would pride themselves on their higher degree of *frajer*-hood in relation to Westerners, others would distance themselves from what they considered typically Balkan gender expectations, and proclaim to have more "European", "modern", "Western" values in this respect (see also Helms 2006). Elsewhere, in a study of refugee men, I have analyzed this latter pattern, often focused on men as responsible, providing fathers, and contextualized it in the de-industrializing Western capitalist context in which they had settled (Jansen 2008a). There, Balkanism was maintained in an attempt to occupy a positioning on the Western pole. Yet, both in Bosnia and Herzegovina and abroad, others framed this emphasis on parental provision itself in Balkanist terms and argued that stronger, warmer family ties, including a more developed sense of fatherly responsibility, were actually typically Balkan and had been lost in the cold, rootless, money-grabbing West.

However it was framed, this means I must broaden the argument, for I found that performative competence as a *frajer* was only one of the main hegemonizing gendered motifs through which men who met across national boundaries in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina could facilitate mutual recognition. Even in the conversation between Nino and Čiki, the last lines, referring to Sanja having left Bosnia and Herzegovina, show that the evocation of "normal life" as a common ground went beyond *frajer* credibility. Selimović's two soldiers discussed their families and their hard lives. Likewise, a closer analysis of inter-national encounters in postwar Bosnia and Herzegovina highlights another dominant motif, performative competence of which allowed mutual recognition: perhaps more important, if less striking at first sight, was what I call the father motif.

## From *frajer* to father (and occasionally back again)

Although the father and *frajer* motifs are opposed to each other in certain ways (protective/predatory, serious/unserious, responsible/irresponsible, economic/spend thrifty, modest/ostentatious), they can be analyzed as variations on a hegemonizing theme of normative expectations of heterosexual patriarchal masculinity. In my research in Bosnia and Herzegovina, I found them generally to be considered two phases in the life course—from *frajer* to father—but, certainly in the realm of verbal performance, there was ample possibility for switching.

We saw how, in addition to the question of whose girls were the most attractive, Zubovo terrace interactions gained momentum around another theme: the need for foreign funds to recreate a context in which the villagers' industriousness could re-emerge as part of "normal life." Indeed, whilst men with different sociological profiles frequently regaled me with references to heterosexual conquest, I was at least equally often made aware of the importance of fatherly responsibilities. War stories too often focused on household survival, not frontline action. The ability to provide for one's household through paid employment was a crucial part of longer-term performative competence as a man. Again, my own position was relevant here and I often came to function as a soundboard for reflections on masculinity. As a young, unmarried, childless foreigner, men and women assured me on countless occasions—often jokingly, sometimes threateningly—that they "would find me one of their girls (*naćićemo ti jednu našu*)." This meant different things to different people, for it could be a sexual partner for the *frajer* that I could have been, or a wife for the father I could become. As such, the above-mentioned quizzing and assessment was not simply about my ("typically Western") lack of

performative competence as a *frajer*. Rather it was on account of me failing to fit nicely into one of the two dominant motifs of acceptable masculinity attributed to me in "normal life": a serious, highly educated, well-earning, married father or an unserious, irresponsible, unattached *frajer* on the prowl. Being neither but having some of the characteristics of both, such comments were staple ingredients of my life in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Rather than representing a strict chronological sequence in life trajectories, the motifs of *frajer* and father could thus be intertwined and evoked alternately. For example, after having been reminded by the elderly man in the hamlet in Republika Srpska that, in "normal life," young men should be chasing girls, our nationally mixed group went for drinks in a grimy *kafana*. With no more technical issues to discuss, shrouded in the smells of frying oil and cigarette smoke, and surrounded by men in leather jackets and tracksuits, it took us several rounds of *rakija* (brandy) to break the inter-national ice over the stained table cloths. The atmosphere relaxed with conversation topics varying from commodity prices, music, smuggling, football, house construction, and women. My presence was taken as an occasion for much Balkanist self-stereotyping and teasing questionings as to my masculinity. As usual, *politika* was carefully avoided, except as a shortcut to evoke the source of all evil. Even when discussing refugee return and evictions, general references to the predicament of displacement served to avoid potential flash points. Most of the men in the group had been acquainted with each other before the war, allowing some limited recollections about common friends. But such topics could turn sensitive, as in an aborted exchange between Dragan Milić, a displaced Serbian urban planner from Sarajevo, and Faruk Sokolović, a displaced Bosniac engineer from Bratunac. Both were middle-age fathers and when the first asked the second if he knew a certain Izet, his old university friend whom he hadn't seen for fifteen years, the answer sounded: "Yes, of course … He died. He was in Srebrenica. He didn't make it out." After that, the conversation quickly shifted to the worries they shared as fathers trying to secure life opportunities for their children.

However, Faruk Sokolović deftly switched between displaying his performative competence as a father and as a *frajer* when he entered a dialogue with another man at the table: a thirty-five year old, unmarried, displaced Serb known to everyone as Pirate. With his thick gold chain and shiny white tracksuit, Pirate oozed the ostentatious display of a small-time mafioso. Smoking expensive foreign cigarettes, he boasted about the financial proceeds of his involvement in the smuggling of luxury goods and in music recording. Pirate referred to the period he had spent in the Serbian capital Beograd as the time of his life:

"I was God! There were days when I sat back, crossed my legs over the table, and *still* the money was coming in: 500DM here, 1000DM there. I am telling you: there was drink, pussy, and money [*piće, pičke i pare*]. Those were the days!"

Addressing Pirate after having engaged in mutual recognition as fathers with Dragan Milić, Faruk Sokolović immediately moved to the *frajer* motif, recalling his youthful days of driving fast cars, frequenting discotheques, and chatting up girls. Although using a rather different idiom from Pirate's, he too displayed performative competence as a *frajer,* even if only through retrospective reference to "the days."

Clearly, we must understand the tensions surrounding the successful performance of the father motif against the precarious socio-economic background of postwar, postsocialist Bosnia and Herzegovina (Jansen 2006, 2008a; Jansen and Helms 2009). Take my friend Samir and his ex-colleague Robi, both in their fifties (Jansen 2007). Robi had left for his native Serbia at the outset of the war, and Samir had spent the war years in Germany and returned with his wife Lejla and their teenage daughter just before they would have been forcibly repatriated in the late 1990s. Five years after the war, Robi regained his old job in their now mainly Bosniac-inhabited town in Bosnia and Herzegovina, commuting

weekly from Serbia, where his family now lived. The two friends met very regularly and engaged in mutual family visits. They did not need to build post-war mutual recognition, for they had never lost it, despite having Bosniac and Serbian national backgrounds respectively. Samir liked to regale me and other men with tales about his days as a *frajer,* a party animal and an irresponsible *jebivjetar* ("windfucker"). This self-portrayal was confirmed by others, including Robi, but it had now become the stuff of verbal performance only. In practice, Samir fretted endlessly over how to fulfill his duties as a responsible father and husband. In their frequent interactions, Robi and he largely avoided controversial issues of *politika,* and the dominant motif of masculinity in their interaction was that of the father. Although Robi was able to provide for his wife and children, unemployed Samir was not. Despite his attempts to earn some money through informal economic activity, his wife was the household's breadwinner. I have never seen Samir so lost as on the day when Lejla was refused a visa to return to Germany to work. He spent that night outside drinking, and I could not decide what was torturing him most: her being turned down at the embassy, or his own inability to fulfill the part of hegemonizing masculinity, which had led to her application in the first place.

## Reconsidering reconciliation

In conclusion, I return to what I read as Meša Selimović's invitation that we reflect on *whose* reconciliation is being desired here—*by whom, for whom,* and *what for.* I schematically propose four routes of further investigation that emerge from my ethnographic refraction of post-war encounters between Bosnian men associated with different "sides" against normative, liberal discourses of reconciliation.

First, the Bosnian men who crossed former frontlines after the war rarely inscribed themselves in any foreign-promoted reconciliation discourse. If men now associated with opposing national "sides" met, they did not define this as an example of a crossing of national boundaries in a mosaic that was good in and by itself. Nor did they remember previous inter-national interactions as such. Instead such meetings had been just one part of "normal life," and it was that "normal life" which featured as their main object of desire. Insofar as crossing national boundaries might further the continuation or, more frequently, the re-establishment of some dimensions of "normal life" for themselves and their households, some were prepared to engage in them. Scholars and activists interested in reconciliation thus have to ask: What, if anything, does reconciliation mean to those who are supposed to be reconciling?

Second, with such evocations of "normal life" as the common ground on which inter-national encounters could exist, these men did not practice mutual recognition with reference to a general common humanity. They did not simply meet as human being X and human being Y, but as multiply positioned persons, for example in terms of class, education, war experience, and gender. Focusing on the latter dimension, I showed how this did not involve a particular emphasis on alternative masculinities, but rather certain hegemonizing gendered subject positions. I analyzed this in terms of the display of performative competence of two motifs of hegemonizing masculinities—the *frajer* and the father—which allowed them to meet as men. Few considered these motifs to be either pro- or antinationalist. Nor were they seen to be mutually exclusive, even though they were often normatively represented in chronological sequence in the life course. Rather, they were evoked as normalized gendered expectations to different degrees in different circumstances, both by these men and by men and women around them. From the perspective of reconciliation efforts, one may thus ask: Which socially sanctioned subject positions (in terms of gender as well as beyond that) allow mutual recognition across former frontlines?

Third, the gender practices explored here functioned as a kind of "shared presents", which Borneman considers central to successful reconciliation (2002: 291). Yet they strike me as

rather closed and with little tendency to transformation: they did not do much to acknowledge "the heterogeneity of life projects" or to explore "new experiences of sociality" (Ibid.). The specific boundary crossing potential of normative and normalized expectations of masculinity in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina revolved around the opposite: these Bosnian men's partial overcoming of national differences was predicated precisely on the consolidation of gender differences, as they met across national boundaries as men who stood, as *frajeri* or as fathers, in equivalent relations to women. Reconciliation projects more broadly have similarly been found to confirm existing social patterns that crosscut the "sides" involved. The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, for example, often praised for its facilitation of a transition from Apartheid to a democratic South Africa without recourse to revenge, has been criticized for leaving relatively untouched the structures of socio-economic and gender inequality that underlay Apartheid (Feldman 2002; Ross 2003; Wilson 2001). This suggests an important route of investigation: Which social practices and relations of inequality are consolidated by particular definitions of "sides" to be reconciled?

Fourth, the invariably short-lived and partial inter-national encounters analyzed in this text relied not only on a presence (of hegemonizing masculinities) but also on an absence (of discussions of *politika* and war-time responsibility). For those concerned with reconciliation, this consensual silencing—in line with the liberal multiculturalist desire to flatten out any social antagonism that cannot be understood as "cultural" (Žižek 1997)—begs the question to what extent such meetings may be developed into less superficial bonds. Authors who see, like Borneman (2002), a remedy in rendering different "sides" no longer opposed, may discern a replication here of Titoist selective silencing of World War II memories, so often blamed for the outbreak of 1990s violence. More important than this possible similarity, in my view, is a radical difference. Yugoslav socialist reconstruction after World War II was an integral part of a revolutionary project of social transformation. Practical, collective tasks of building a new society were legitimized, often through authoritarian means, with regard not to purity, tradition, and continuity (as in the current nationalist discourses), nor to individual enterprise, property, and liberal rights in a mosaic (as in the current foreign intervention), but to a common, qualitatively different future-to-be-built. The boundary crossings investigated in this article did not just silence sensitive war-time issues but they also largely failed to evoke such a future, remaining on the level of mutual confirmations of the importance of "normal life." This poses the most challenging question in political terms: What role, if any, can reconciliation play in relation to other processes of social change in order to turn ceasefires into starting points for better futures?

## Acknowledgments

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## Notes

An earlier version of parts of this article appeared in the conference proceedings of a 2007 Dubrovnik Summer Course as "Frajer i otac: međunacionalna prepoznavanja muškosti poslije rata u Bosni i Hercegovini" (The frajer and the father: cross-national recognitions of masculinity after the Bosnian war), in *Promišljanje sjevera i juga u postkolonijalnosti / Rethinking North and South in post-coloniality,* ed. Renata Jambrešić-Kirin and Sandra Prlenda, 42–62, 173–95 (Zagreb: Institut za etnologiju i folkloristiku/Centar za ženske studije, 2008).

1. For reasons of brevity I use the non-nationally specific term Bosnian as shorthand for Bosnian-Herzegovinian. All names in this text are pseudonyms, all translations are mine.
2. I use the term national to refer to what many other authors name ethno-national or ethnic.
3. An irony not lost on Bosnians was that the form of the resulting "multi-kulti" campaigns was often resonant of Titoist exhortations to Brotherhood and Unity, without the socialism.
4. I use "patriarchal" here to refer to a structural predominance of the masculine gender in a context of normative heterosexual kinship relations. Although I explore some specific dimensions of masculinities in encounters in Bosnia and Herzegovina, this does not imply any claims on Bosnia being particularly patriarchal, as I have no experience of a society that I would not call patriarchal.
5. My presence, of course, still implied a foreign gaze. I never worked for a foreign (non-)governmental organization but undoubtedly my indelible Western-ness led some people to play down attitudes they expected me to find primitive.
6. Very disturbing parallels with this process can be found in the fateful Srebrenica conversations between Dutchbat colonel Karremans and VRS general Mladić (De Leeuw 2002).
7. Gutmann (1996) notes similar patterns for the macho motif in Latin America. *Frajer* is etymologically derived from the German *Freier,* denoting a man who frequents prostitutes. In Yiddish and Polish it stands for a nerd or a mug. Dictionaries indicate similar negative meanings in Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian, but I have never heard it used like that. Its meaning seems to be closer to that in Czech, where, for example, Stuart Rosenberg's film *Cool Hand Luke* (1967) has been translated as *Frajer Luke.*
8. In such a gendered Balkanist framework, men involved in antinationalist efforts were often denounced as lacking in manhood. This is not to say that nationalism's self-association with masculinity straightforwardly led to a (dis)qualification of antinationalism as feminine. Rather antinationalist activists were sometimes depicted as insufficiently heterosexual (Helms 2006, 2007; Jansen 2005a). Crucially, such gendered and sexual inadequacy was also attributed to women-activists, particularly, but not only, if they were feminists.
9. See Loizos & Papataxiarchis (1991); Cornwall and Lindisfarne (1994); Vale de Almeida (1995); Gutmann (1996, 1997). My focus on normative and normalized expectations of masculinity encapsulated in the father and *frajer* motifs may recall Gilmore's model of "Man-the-Impregnator-Protector-Provider" (1990). However, I do not subscribe to Gilmore's functionalist approach, conceptualizing masculinity as a series of models of manhood that provide social order, nor am I in a position to argue that this trinity defines a "Ubiquitous if not Universal Male" (Gilmore 1990). At the same time, I believe the best counter-argument does not lie in reducing these motifs of masculinity to either purely Western stereotypes or a culturally specific Balkan complex.

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