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The Transnational Dimensions of Societal Reconciliation

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INTRODUCTION

In academic and policy discussions about the contemporary nature of war and peace-building in post-war situations, a dominant view has emerged of “diasporas”² as less amenable to compromise than homeland populations (Anderson, 1999: 18; Bigombe et al., 2000: 333-334; Collier, 2000: 851; Collier et al., 2003: 85-86; Collier and Hoeffler, 2007: 797; Golan and Gal, 2009: 127; Kaldor, 2001: 85; Kaldor-Robinson, 2002:181; Lyons, 2006: 128, 2007: 530; Newman, 2006: 96). These uncompromising views are believed to motivate diasporas to contribute to political instability and war even when local people favor conciliation. However, in recent years a growing body of case study evidence is challenging this view, showing that diasporas are in fact diverse populations whose activities may have both “peace-making” and “peace-wrecking” effects (e.g. Smith and Stares, 2007). But while recent attention has been paid to documenting the peace-promoting impact of diaspora activities in various cases of civil war and post-war reconstruction, no study has attempted to examine the fundamental question of whether or not diaspora populations are less compromising than homeland populations. In particular, the human perspective is conspicuously absent from previous quantitative research. We know very little about the general attitudes present in diaspora populations toward homeland politics and conflicts.

In an earlier co-authored working paper in this series the author shows through regression analysis how the variation of structural integration helps to explain the variation of reconciliatory attitudes among respondents to a nationally representative survey of Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs living in Sweden (Hall and Kostic, 2009). Namely, factors that contribute to improving one’s social position in Sweden, such as a secure legal status, higher education or better labor market position, seem to empower diasporas to contextualize and process war-related experiences and make sense of daily life, and develop more optimism about prospects for peaceful coexistence among former adversaries in the homeland. This finding helps to explain differences in reconciliatory attitudes among individuals within the diaspora population, but not differences between the diaspora and homeland population, at least not directly.

The present paper offers several contributions to knowledge in this area. In order to help answer the fundamental descriptive question of whether or not diasporas are less reconciliatory than their homeland counterparts, it provides a straightforward comparison of the reconciliatory attitudes of the diaspora population in Sweden and local population in Bosnia-Herzegovina (hereafter referred to as BiH). The analysis involves nationally representative survey data collected systematically in both countries, employing identical survey questions in each survey to make the comparison possible. Previous studies have

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² Here it suffices to define the term “diaspora” as referring to “that segment of people living outside the homeland.” See Connor (1986: 16).

highlighted the importance of diasporas to the study of armed conflict and conflict resolution. But the present study is, as far as the author can tell, the first attempt to survey the attitudes and beliefs of both diaspora and local populations following mass violence. In particular, it presents new perception data about the nature of the war, societal goals, the adversary group, the in-group, intergroup relations and the nature of peace.³ It highlights the transnational dimension of reconciliation, conceiving it as the outcome of a process occurring not only within the borders of post-war states, but simultaneously in diaspora populations as well. If diasporas matter for peace, then the conditions under which reconciliation as a transnational societal process succeeds or fails must be better understood. This paper is an attempt to contribute to the understanding of this important yet largely overlooked area of research and policy.

The paper thus examines the case of Post-Dayton BiH and related diaspora populations in Sweden. This case is theoretically interesting for many reasons. As a host-country, Sweden offers the right set of conditions for examining existing theory, which focuses on diaspora communities in wealthy, liberal and democratic states in the North, particularly in Europe and North America (Anderson, 1991). Most of the respondents came to Sweden in the early 1990s as a result of the war, which allows for examining the attitudes and activities of conflict-generated diasporas (Lyons, 2007). BiH was the main theory-building case for the “new wars” perspective in which diasporas have played a prominent role. This paper returns to this case to examine the claim that diasporas are less moderate than people in the homeland (an argument made for example in Kaldor, 2001: 85). The main comparison is thus not over time but between the diaspora and local populations. Since the early 1990s conditions have greatly changed in BiH, and attitudes certainly have changed along with them. Previous research expects that the diaspora will remain uncompromising long after the peace dividend tempers the homeland population (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004). Since nearly fifteen years have passed since the Dayton Accords were signed, this case offers an appropriate comparison in order to examine this claim.

DATA, CONCEPTS AND MEASURES

Survey Data from BiH and Sweden

The data were collected in BiH and Sweden using survey instruments asking identical questions about reconciliation, and including a set of control variables. BiH was formerly a unit of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and today consists of three constituent nations: Bosnian Croats, Bosnian Serbs and Bosniaks. Both the data from Sweden and BiH are stratified so as to represent equally the three constituent nations and are in this way comparable. Dr. Roland Kostic collected the data from BiH in collaboration with the Research Institute PULS in Sarajevo in 2005 (for more information, see Kostic, 2007). They collected a random national sample stratified geographically so as to include a similar number of respondents for each group (N=2500). This author, together with Roland Kostic, collected a second set of data in 2008 in Sweden from a nation-wide sample of respondents whom had previously lived in BiH.⁴ The data are stratified to be as comparable with the PULS data and as representative as possible and so include equal numbers of Bosniak,

³ On reconciliation as a societal process, see Bar-Tal (2000: 357-59).

⁴ For more detailed information on the data collection procedure, see Hall and Kostic (2010).

Serbian and Croatian family names located using the freely available online public database Eniro (N=199).⁵

Reconciliation

Reconciliatory attitudes are measured on the individual as opposed to the national level (Borer, 2006). Reconciliation here is understood as a social-psychological process, distinguishable from conflict resolution among political elites, through which societal beliefs forming a conflictive ethos are replaced by those stemming from an ethos of peace (Bar-Tal, 2000). It is helpful to distinguish between the process of reconciliation and the goals of reconciliation (Bar-Tal and Bennink, 2004). Here the focus is on capturing the extent to which the goals of reconciliation have been achieved. The process of reconciliation establishes relationships built on mutual acceptance and that are both cooperative and sustainable (Ericson, 2001; Galtung, 2001). Arriving at a common understanding of the past, acknowledging the past experience of other groups and forgiveness provide the starting point for building a common future where trust, positive attitudes and the mutual consideration of needs underpin social relations (Bar-Tal, 2000; Hayner, 2001; Lederach, 2002; Rigby, 2001; Long and Brecke, 2003). Central to this process are changes in beliefs about societal goals, the adversary group, the in-group, intergroup relations and the nature of peace (Bar-Tal, 2000: 357-59). To evaluate the extent of reconciliation, Hayner (2001) suggests measuring how the past is integrated and spoken about between former enemies, if contradictory versions of the past have been reconciled, and if relationships are based on the present rather than the past.

Six indicators are used to evaluate the extent to which reconciliatory attitudes are present among survey respondents. Answers to these questions represent respondents' views on: how the last war in BiH should be defined; the extent to which the participation of their own group should be understood as purely defensive; whether one should forgive those who persecuted their compatriots; the importance they place on their own ethnic belonging; the ideal arrangement of multicultural society in BiH, including the role of ethnicity, cultural mixing and intermarriage; and belief in the possibility of peaceful coexistence among Bosnian Croats, Bosnian Serbs and Bosniaks in BiH unsupervised by external actors.

To help examine whether differences in reconciliatory attitudes are explained by the difference between belonging to the diaspora or homeland population, national identity is held constant in order to see whether the relationship holds within each identity group. Most of the respondents chose to identify themselves as belonging to the Bosnian Serb, Bosnian Croat, Bosniak or Yugoslav people. On the Swedish survey, Swedish was also provided as an option but none of the respondents identified themselves this way. The category "other" was available in order to write in an alternative to the choices provided. Responses in this category were a handful of other minorities from the former Yugoslavia and were excluded for the purposes of this analysis.

⁵ See www.eniro.se. Last accessed 6 August 2010.

COMPARING THE RECONCILIATORY ATTITUDES OF DIASPORA AND LOCAL POPULATIONS

Even a glance at the data would reveal that the diaspora in Sweden should be considered “conflict-generated.” The vast majority of the sample (82 percent) arrived in Sweden between 1988 and 1998, a period encompassing a few years prior to the outbreak of fighting in 1992, through the war, up to a few years after the signing of the Dayton Agreement in 1995. A majority (54 percent) describes their emigration to Sweden for humanitarian reasons; and a substantial minority (15 percent) for political reasons. During the war a majority lost property (79 percent). And as a result of the war most are missing a close family member (53 percent). Many were either wounded or imprisoned in a camp during the fighting (22 percent). And a sizeable minority acknowledges having participated in fighting units (20 percent).

The external expression of group identity often takes the form of symbols. Symbols are markers of identity boundaries, and identifying with particular symbols is a way of signaling membership and exclusion (Barth, 1969: 15; Smith, 1993). An interesting descriptive finding in relation to identity should be presented at the outset: Table 1 shows that over a fifth of the respondents in Sweden identify with *Hej Slaveni*, the national anthem of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (21 percent). This may not seem surprising at first, since most of the respondents grew up during its existence. However, very few in BiH chose to identify themselves this way (less than 5 percent). There are a few reasons for this. First, those of mixed marriages are probably more likely to identify as Yugoslavs (Sekulic et al., 1994). Since many feared all sides would disproportionately target this group during the war, they were given preference for refuge and asylum. In addition, during intractable conflicts a conflictual ethos develops that enables groups to survive, sustain the war effort and maintain a positive self-image. These beliefs affect the social identity of group members. This social-psychological infrastructure is disseminated through societal channels of communication, creating a rigid prism through which reality is continually interpreted (Bartal, 2007). Under such conditions, the Yugoslav identity, with its origins in the progressive, socialist ideology of the Yugoslav Partisans who took power in Yugoslavia following World War II, would be comparatively more difficult to sustain in the homeland than abroad (Connor, 1984; Sekulic et al., 1994). In effect, the Yugoslav identity represents a nation-building project at odds with those of the Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks. One salient aspect of diasporic life may be that it mediates diaspora identity to a certain extent by enabling greater circumvention of the conflictive ethos that are supporting nation-building in BiH today. Beliefs shaped during war tend to endure following a peace agreement due to societal insecurities generated by wartime violence and the destruction of the economy, and as in the case of BiH, intrusive external state-building measures attempting to build a common national identity (Kostic, 2007). Many of the factors that cause insecurity and buttress the conflict ethos in BiH are simply absent in Sweden.

Table 1

Which of these anthems best expresses your feeling towards your homeland (Percent)

	BH	SE
Boze Pravde (Serbian)	30	9
Nacionalna Himna Bosne i Hercegovine (Bosnian)	34	30
Lijepa Nasa (Croatian)	25	29
Hej Slaveni (Ex-Yugoslavian)	5	21
Du Gamla, Du Fria (Swedish)	-	9
Don't know	6	2

Notes: "BH" columns represent the views of respondents in BiH. "SE" columns represent the views of respondents in Sweden.

It is notable that the percentages in Sweden and BiH identifying with the Bosnian and Croatian national anthems are much more similar than the percentages of those identifying with the Serbian national anthem. It seems likely that those who might otherwise identify as Bosnian Serbs in BiH identify as Yugoslavs in Sweden. This is probably due in part to their traditional minority status in BiH (Sekulic et al., 1994: 91), but this doesn't entirely explain this finding since Bosnian Croats are in a similar position and all three nations are well represented. It is also possible that many Bosnian Serbs feel greater ownership over the Yugoslav nation-building project than do Bosnian Croats or Bosniaks. This hypothesis is supported by the data from BiH, which indicate higher rates of identification with the national anthem *Hej Slaveni* among Bosnian Serbs (7.8 percent) than among Bosniaks (4 percent) or Bosnian Croats (1.9 percent) (Kostic, 2007: 304).

As stated above, one way to measure reconciliation is how former enemies speak about the past and the extent to which contradictory versions of the past have been reconciled. Table 2 presents how respondents' define the last war in BiH. After the war, competing explanatory narratives emerged. Some view the war as primarily an internal conflict in which all sides participated, while others see it as the result of external aggression on BiH by Serbia or both Serbia and Croatia. From Table 2 it is clear that in both diaspora and local populations there remains much disagreement among the groups about the nature of the war.

Table 2

According to you, what is the best definition of the last war in Bosnia? (Percent)

	National Identity								Total	
	Bosniaks		Serbs		Croats		Yugo	B		
	BH	SE	B	SE	B	SE			SE	B
Aggression	95	89	9	9	73	69	19	60	64	
Civil war	4	8	84	59	17	19	62	34	24	
Don't know	1	3	7	32	10	12	19	6	12	

Notes: See notes for Table 1. The "Yugo" column represents the views of respondents in Sweden who identify themselves as Yugoslavs. The attitudes of Yugoslavs in Sweden are presented but not the attitudes of Yugoslavs in BiH since so few respondents in BiH identify as such (4.6 percent).

The vast majority of Bosniaks and Bosnian Croats in BiH view the war as an aggression, while the vast majority of Bosnian Serbs in BiH view it as civil war. The pattern is similar in the diaspora population in Sweden, however within each national group there is less support for the dominant view. The difference is most prominent among Bosnian Serbs; only 59 percent of those living in Sweden view the conflict as a civil war, compared with 84 percent of those living in BiH. There is greater uncertainty about the answer to this question among respondents in Sweden, especially for Bosnian Serbs, 37 percent of who answered “Don’t know”. In BiH itself, only 7 percent answered “Don’t know” to how they view the conflict. In the literature, it is often suggested that the diaspora has a less complex view of the situation in the homeland. Kaldor (2001: 85) argues that in the case of BiH “disaffected groups living far away...find solace in fantasies about their origins which are often far removed from reality.” This finding seems to suggest otherwise. Reality is more black and white among respondents in BiH. To respondents in Sweden, things appear more complicated, especially to Bosnian Serbs.

Another important question addressing the past represents respondents’ beliefs about the role of their own group during the war. The war in Bosnia-Herzegovina was an incredibly complex conflict, and all sides committed atrocities. However, social identities shaped by a conflictive ethos tend to justify and glorify the participation of one’s own group during the war, and to portray the out-group as an aggressor rather than a victim. We asked respondents to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the statement “My people fought only wars of defense.” Less support for this statement indicates less in-group favoritism and more acknowledgement of the past suffering of former enemies. Here the difference in attitudes between the diaspora and local populations was quite pronounced. Looking at each national group separately (Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks), in the diaspora population there is substantially less support for this statement compared to the local population. In BiH, for example, no one totally disagreed with this statement. However in Sweden 11 percent of Bosniaks, 8 percent of Bosnian Serbs, and 7 Percent of Bosnian Croats did, indicating very strong reconciliatory attitudes. Most striking is the fact that fully 29 percent of Yugoslavs totally disagreed that their people fought only defensive wars. Since the proportion of Yugoslavs in the Swedish sample (21 percent) is so much larger than the proportion of Yugoslavs in BiH (5 percent), it is safe to conclude that this represents a substantial increase in reconciliatory attitudes among respondents in the Swedish sample. Once again, there is greater uncertainty among respondents in Sweden, suggesting less in-group favoritism, more agreement among respondents regarding the past and a greater acknowledgement of the suffering of other groups.

Table 3
My people fought only wars of defense (Percent)

	National Identity								
	Bosniaks		Serbs		Croats		Yugo	Total	
	BH	SE	B	SE	B	SE	SE	B	SE
		H		H			H		
Totally disagree	0	11	0	8	0	7	29	0	12
Somewhat disagree	1	1	4	16	2	12	12	3	9
Somewhat agree	9	9	15	20	19	20	18	15	16
Totally agree	89	73	80	52	73	49	12	79	52
Don’t know	1	6	1	4	6	12	29	3	12

In addition to a shared understanding of the past and acknowledgement of the suffering of former enemies, forgiveness is believed to help provide a starting point for establishing positive relationships in the aftermath of war. Table 4 presents respondents' views about forgiveness, asking, "Should one forgive those who persecuted your compatriots?" The differences are striking and reveal much more support for forgiveness among respondents in the diaspora population. Across all national groups, half the respondents in BiH believe that "No, one should never forgive." By comparison, only 29 percent of respondents in Sweden feel the same way, and a clear majority believes one should forgive (63 percent). It is interesting to note that among those who choose to forgive, respondents in BiH overwhelmingly want to "Forgive, but never forget," while those in Sweden overwhelmingly want to "Forgive and forget." In the literature on reconciliation, some argue forgiveness should be separated from reconciliation because of the risk of forgetting. However, the argument against forgetting is made in regard to national unity and reconciliation (not reconciliation at the individual level), and is based upon the notion that it is perpetrators who want to forget, that victims could never forget, and that forgetting makes it possible for future governments to deny history and repeat the past (Brouneus 2003: 12, 18, and notes 19, 48). The data from Sweden appear to contradict the argument against forgetting. First, at the individual level it shows that victims do not overwhelmingly want to continue to remember their traumatic experiences. Among those who were wounded or imprisoned in a camp during the war, 58 percent believe one should forgive and forget, while none believe one should forgive, but never forget. As Smythe argues, the question of whether or not one should remember past atrocities is a question "usually asked by people who have a choice" (Smythe, 1998: 32, quoted in Brouneus, 2003: 11). As argued above, diasporic life offers an ability to exist outside of the socialpsychological infrastructure created by war. Perhaps on the individual level, forgetting is preferable if it is made possible.

Table 4
Should one forgive those who persecuted your compatriots? (Percent)

	National Identity								
	Bosniaks		Serbs		Croats		Yugo	Total	
	BH	SE	B	SE	B	SE	SE	B	SE
Yes, one should forgive and forget	2	59	4	60	3	81	35	3	59
One should forgive, but never forget	36	4	43	12	58	3	0	45	4
No, one should never forgive	61	29	50	12	37	13	35	50	29
Don't know	1	8	3	16	2	3	30	2	8

As mentioned, beliefs about the adversary group, the in-group, and intergroup relations are central to the conflictive ethos. Because social comparisons are by nature competitive, all these factors revolve around the salience of particular social identities and in-group/out-group distinctions. Table 5 presents answers to the question, "How would you describe your relation to your own national belonging?" Again, the relationship is clear; within each national group, respondents in Sweden attach less importance to their own national belonging. In addition, it is remarkable that while very few Bosniaks, Bosnian Serbs and

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Bosnian Croats in either Sweden or BiH feel that national belonging is irrelevant, 35 percent of Yugoslavs in Sweden feel it is.

Table 5
How would you describe your relation to your own national belonging? (Percent)

	National Identity								
	Bosniaks		Serbs		Croats		Yugo	Total	
	BH	SE	B	SE	B	SE	SE	B	SE
National belonging is irrelevant	5	7	4	4	2	4	35	4	12
I accept it but don't think of it much	41	49	50	52	28	47	53	40	47
National belonging is an important part of my life	54	44	46	44	70	49	12	56	41

Also central to the conflictive ethos are beliefs about the nature of peace. After violent conflict, beliefs about the nature of peace are closely related to the way future relations between former adversaries are envisioned. To what extent is it a common future characterized by trust, positive attitudes and the mutual consideration of needs? Table 6 presents respondents' beliefs about the ideal societal arrangement for BiH. Once again, within each national group the difference between the diaspora and local population is stark. 63 percent of Bosniaks in Sweden as opposed to 21 percent in BiH prefer "A society in which ethnic belonging is irrelevant. Individuals socialize freely, and mixed marriages are very common." 20 percent of Bosnian Serbs in Sweden answer the same way, but only 5 percent in BiH do so. 35 percent of Bosnian Croats agree, while only 11 percent in BiH do. Finally, fully 76 percent of Yugoslavs in Sweden feel the same way. In sum, while half of the respondents in Sweden choose this option, in BiH the corresponding number is 12 percent. Moreover, the most common choice among respondents in BiH is at the opposite end of the spectrum, where "Groups don't mix, each protects its own culture, and there are no mixed marriages."

Table 6
People of different nationalities live in BiH. According to you, what would be the ideal societal arrangement? (Percent)

	National Identity								
	Bosniaks		Serbs		Croats		Yugo	Total	
	BH	SE	B	SE	B	SE	SE	B	SE
A society in which ethnic belonging is irrelevant. Individuals socialize freely, and mixed marriages are very common	21	63	5	20	11	35	76	12	50
Groups protect their own culture, but there are some mixed marriages	43	21	50	40	26	37	18	40	29
Groups don't mix, each protects its own culture, and there are no mixed marriages	33	13	40	40	57	28	6	43	20
Don't know	3	3	5	0	6	0	0	5	1

Another way of measuring the extent to which the goals of reconciliation have been achieved is to ask whether or not former adversaries feel they can live together peacefully. Table 7 presents responses to the question “Do you think Croats, Serbs and Bosniaks in BiH can live peacefully together without international supervision, or did the war make peaceful coexistence impossible?” Here, within each group the relationship is clear but in the opposite direction. While 66 percent of respondents in BiH believe “They [Croats, Serbs and Bosniaks in BiH] can live together without international supervision,” only 38 percent feel this way in Sweden. However, while this may appear at first to represent a less reconciliatory attitude, there is another, and I would argue better, interpretation about the nature of their answers. Respondents living in Sweden asked about the possibility of peaceful coexistence in the homeland do not have to reflect upon their own capacities, and so their self-esteem and self-worth are less at stake when answering this question. In addition, such a sober judgment in the diaspora population may be seen as additional evidence that respondents in Sweden do not in fact “find solace in fantasies about their origins,” as Kaldor (2001: 85) suggests. More support for this assertion is provided by the fact that within each national group, uncertainty regarding this answer is much higher in the diaspora as opposed to homeland population.

Table 7

Do you think Croats, Serbs and Bosniaks in BiH can live peacefully together without international supervision, or did the war make peaceful coexistence impossible? (Percent)

	National Identity								
	Bosniaks		Serbs		Croats		Yugo	Total	
	BH	SE	B	SE	B	SE	SE	B	SE
They can live together without international supervision	69	42	58	32	71	48	35	66	38
War has made peaceful coexistence impossible	23	37	35	52	15	16	35	24	38
Don't know	8	21	7	16	14	36	30	10	24

CONCLUSIONS

According to the prevailing view in the academic literature, diasporas situated in wealthy, liberal and democratic states in the North, particularly in Europe and North America, are less amenable to compromise than people in the homeland struggling to end wars and build peace. These beliefs are believed to motivate diasporas to fuel homeland conflicts even when local populations favor peace. Contrary to previous expectations, this paper shows that the attitudes of the conflict-generated diaspora population in Sweden are more reconciliatory than those of the homeland population in BiH. Compared to the homeland, the diaspora population shows more agreement among respondents regarding the nature of the war, less in-group favoritism, greater acknowledgement of the suffering of other groups and more support for forgiveness. They attach less importance to their own national belonging, and support a more multicultural vision of society in BiH, including greater interethnic mixing and intermarriage. This relationship remains clear even when controlling for national identity. In addition, the existence of a much larger proportion of Yugoslavs living in Sweden adds additional support to this claim, since on average Yugoslavs display more reconciliatory

attitudes than Bosniaks, Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Serbs. One salient aspect of diasporic life may be that it enables greater circumvention of the conflictive ethos. Beliefs shaped during war tend to endure following a peace agreement due to societal insecurities; meanwhile many of the factors that cause insecurity and buttress the conflict ethos in BiH are simply absent in Sweden.

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