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STRATIFIED RECONCILIATION AND THE POLITICS OF RECOGNITION IN POST-WAR BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA: YOUTH NARRATIVES FROM CAZINSKA KRAJINA

This article examines how young people in north-western Bosnia and Herzegovina construct and negotiate post-war memory and reconciliation in the context of the intra-Bosnia conflict of the 1990s. Drawing on a corpus of online forum discussions among participants aged 18–23 from the Una-Sana Canton, the study applies a critical discourse analysis framework to explore how competing narratives, identity labels, and moral evaluations are articulated in everyday interaction. The analysis focuses on discursive strategies such as nomination (e.g. labels like “autonomaš” [autonomist], or “izdajnik” [traitor]), predication, deontic modality, pronoun use, and metaphorical framing (e.g. “stare rane” [old wounds], “clean start”). Particular attention is given to how participants position themselves in relation to inherited conflict narratives, intergenerational transmission of memory, and present-day socio-economic concerns. Findings show that young participants simultaneously reproduce, question, and reframe dominant narratives of division. While some discourses sustain boundaries rooted in wartime affiliations, others shift focus toward shared structural challenges such as unemployment and political clientelism. The data also reveal tensions between calls for reconciliation and persistent moral polarization, as well as the emergence of future-oriented discourses that imagine distancing from the past. By foregrounding intra-community divisions and everyday meaning-making practices, the paper contributes to critical discourse studies of post-conflict societies and offers insight into how reconciliation is negotiated beyond institutional and elite-level processes.

Keywords: Bosnia and Herzegovina; Cazinska Krajina; youth; collective memory; critical discourse analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION

More than two decades after the end of the 1992–1995 war, public discourse in Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to be shaped by competing interpretations of the past. While much scholarly attention has focused on inter-ethnic divisions, comparatively limited attention has been paid to intra-community conflicts and their long-term effects on younger generations. This paper addresses that gap by examining how young people in the Una-Sana Canton engage with the legacy of the intra-Bosniak conflict associated with the Autonomous Province of Western Bosnia.

The conflict in north-western Bosnia and Herzegovina was marked by the political and military role of Fikret Abdić, whose leadership of the Autonomous Province of Western Bosnia led to armed confrontation with the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This period followed earlier socio-economic transformations linked to the rise and collapse of Agrokomerc, once a major economic enterprise in Velika Kladuša and the surrounding region. The company was closely associated with Abdić's leadership and is widely remembered as a period of local prosperity, shaping how his later political role is understood and evaluated. In the post-war period, Abdić was indicted for war crimes and arrested in Croatia in 2001. He was subsequently tried before a Croatian court in Karlovac and convicted for crimes against civilians committed during the intra-Bosniak conflict, receiving a 20-year prison sentence, later reduced on appeal. He was released in 2012 after serving two-thirds of his sentence. The trial and its outcome have remained subject to competing interpretations in the region, forming a persistent point of reference in local public discourse.

These historical developments continue to shape local identities, and divisions, often in ways that remain insufficiently explained in research focused primarily on broader national dynamics. Young people growing up in this context encounter these histories through family narratives, local discourse, and everyday social interactions. As a result, their understandings of the past are mediated, contested, and reinterpreted in ways that can both reproduce and transform inherited divisions. This raises important questions: How do young people talk about a conflict they did not experience directly? How do they position themselves in relation to competing narratives? And what does this reveal about the possibilities and limits of post-war reconciliation?

Addressing these questions, the analysis shows that young people do not converge on a shared interpretation of the past but instead navigate it through coexisting and unevenly positioned discursive frameworks. Their interactions stabilize a form of co-existence grounded in pragmatic adjustment and moderated disagreement, while underlying moral hierarchies and asymmetries of legitimacy persist. This configuration is best understood as stratified reconciliation.

The article makes three contributions. First, it shifts analytical attention from inter-ethnic to intra-community boundary-making, showing how divisions within a shared ethnonational group are reproduced through discursive practices of labeling, evaluation, and attribution of responsibility. Second, it conceptualizes reconciliation as a durable equilibrium rather than a transitional phase, highlighting how stabilization may coexist with unresolved narrative inequality. Third, it demonstrates how everyday discursive interaction, rather than formal institutional processes alone, constitutes a key site in which reconciliation is negotiated, limited, and deferred.

To address this topic, the study analyzes a corpus of online discussions among young participants (aged 18–23) from the region. Over a seven-day period, participants engaged in moderated discussions prompted by questions about the legacy of the conflict, the political role of Fikret Abdić, and the commemoration of war victims. The discussions were facilitated by the researchers with the assistance of a teaching assistant, whose contribution is acknowledged below. The dataset consists of nearly two hundred comments and replies, allowing for the examination of both individual statements and interactive exchanges.

Methodologically, the paper draws on critical discourse analysis (CDA), treating discourse not as a reflection of attitudes but as a site in which meanings, responsibilities, and boundaries are actively produced and negotiated. The analysis pays particular attention to discursive strategies such as nomination, predication, and modality, as well as to metaphorical and temporal framing.

The findings illustrate how this configuration operates in practice. Young participants navigate a discursive landscape structured by coexisting but unequally positioned interpretations of the past. On the one hand, they reproduce established categories and moral distinctions (e.g. “heroes” versus “traitors”), often reflecting narratives encountered in family or community contexts. On the other hand, they express skepticism toward inherited divisions, shift attention to present-day socio-economic issues, and articulate alternative visions of coexistence. These tensions highlight the ambivalent nature of post-war reconciliation as an ongoing, everyday process rather than a completed political project.

By focusing on intra-community dynamics and everyday discourse, this paper contributes to a more nuanced understanding of post-conflict societies. It shows that reconciliation is not only negotiated in formal political arenas, but also in informal, dialogic spaces where younger generations reinterpret the past and imagine possible futures, often under conditions of uneven expressive confidence and moral hierarchy.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which conceptualizes discourse as a form of social practice through which meanings, identities, and power relations are constructed and negotiated (Fairclough 2003; Reisigl and Wodak 2009). Rather than treating language as a neutral medium, CDA approaches discourse as constitutive of social reality, particularly in contexts marked by conflict and contested histories. The analysis is guided by a multi-level approach that considers textual features, interactional dynamics, and the broader socio-political context in which discourse is produced.

In post-conflict societies, discourse plays a central role in shaping how the past is remembered, interpreted, and mobilized. Collective memory is not fixed but continuously reconstructed through communicative practices, drawing on culturally available narratives and symbolic resources. As Halbwachs (1992) argues, memory is always socially framed, while Assmann (2011) emphasizes its role in stabilizing shared interpretations of the past over time.

Within the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina, memory is particularly fragmented and contested, reflecting competing political, ethnic, and local narratives (Jansen 2007; Kolind 2008). While much of the literature has focused on inter-ethnic divisions, intra-community conflicts, such as those in north-western Bosnia, produce equally complex and often underexplored memory dynamics. These dynamics are not only preserved in institutional and political discourses but are also reproduced and transformed in everyday communication.

The concept of “narrative” is widely used across disciplines, but it carries specific theoretical implications for this paper that require clarification. In narrative theory, scholars such as Jerome Bruner (1991) and Paul Ricoeur (2004) conceptualize narrative as a fundamental mode through which individuals make sense of time, experience, and identity, typically involving temporal sequencing and causality. The present study does not analyze fully developed narratives in this strict sense. Instead, it ex-

amines how narrative elements such as temporal framing, moral evaluation, and causal attribution are articulated within fragmented, interactional, and dialogic contributions produced in an online discussion setting. In this respect, the analysis aligns with discourse-oriented approaches that locate narrative meaning in everyday talk rather than in coherent, structured stories (De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2012)

In order to analyze how participants construct meanings and position themselves in relation to the past, this study draws on the discourse-historical approach (DHA) developed by Wodak (2001; Reisigl and Wodak 2009). This approach emphasizes the identification of recurring discursive strategies through which social actors, events, and processes are represented and evaluated. Particular attention is given to nomination strategies (how social actors are named and categorized), predication strategies (how attributes and qualities are assigned), and forms of deontic modality that express obligation and necessity. In addition, the analysis considers pronoun use and positioning (e.g. constructions of “we” and “they”), metaphorical framing, and temporal references through which past, present, and future are linked. These strategies are especially relevant in post-conflict contexts, where language is used to negotiate responsibility, justify positions, and maintain or challenge symbolic boundaries between groups.

Processes of inclusion and exclusion are central to the construction of collective identities. As Barth (1969) has shown, group identities are maintained not through shared cultural content alone, but through the ongoing production of boundaries between “us” and “them.” In post-conflict settings, these boundaries are frequently reinforced through discourse, particularly through labeling practices and moral categorizations.

In the context of this study, such boundary-making occurs not only between ethnic groups but also within a single community. Labels associated with wartime affiliations (e.g. supporters or opponents of Fikret Abdić) function as markers of social identity that continue to carry meaning for younger generations. These categories are often detached from direct experience and instead operate as inherited interpretative frameworks that shape perception and interaction. At the same time, identity constructions remain fluid and contested. Participants may resist, reinterpret, or relativize these categories, reflecting what Brubaker (2004) describes as the situational and processual nature of groupness. This perspective allows identity to be analyzed as something performed and negotiated in discourse rather than treated as fixed or given.

Discussions of the past in post-conflict contexts are closely tied to questions of responsibility, victimhood, and moral judgment. As Alexander (2004) argues in his

work on cultural trauma, collective representations of suffering are shaped through processes of meaning-making that assign blame, define victims, and establish broader moral frameworks. In the dataset analyzed here, participants frequently engage in such processes by attributing responsibility for past events, evaluating political actors and wartime roles, and negotiating the status of victims and perpetrators. These processes are often marked by ambiguity and contestation, as multiple interpretations coexist within the same interactional space. Rather than producing consensus, discourse becomes a site in which competing moral frameworks are articulated, negotiated, and at times left unresolved.

Reconciliation is often conceptualized in institutional or policy terms, as a set of formal mechanisms aimed at addressing the legacy of conflict. From a discourse-analytic perspective, however, reconciliation can also be understood as an ongoing and everyday process that unfolds through communication. Drawing on Lederach (1997), reconciliation involves not only addressing past harms but also transforming relationships and creating possibilities for coexistence. In this sense, discourse plays a crucial role in shaping how reconciliation is imagined, enabled, or constrained. The analysis therefore pays particular attention to expressions of willingness or resistance to reconciliation, calls for forgetting or remembering, and future-oriented imaginaries (e.g. notions of a “clean start”). These elements reveal how participants position themselves in relation to both the past and the future, highlighting the tensions between continuity and change in post-conflict settings.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study is based on a qualitative analysis of online discussions conducted with young participants from the Una-Sana Canton in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The data were collected in September 2022 over a period of seven consecutive days through a moderated online discussion forum designed specifically for the purposes of this research, enabling sustained, interactional engagement with sensitive topics over time.

Participants were invited to engage with a series of prompts addressing three broad themes. These are the legacy of the intra-Bosniak conflict in north-western Bosnia, the political role and legacy of Fikret Abdić, and the commemoration of war victims and the politics of memorialization. The discussions were asynchronous, allowing participants to respond at their own pace and to interact with one another through replies and comment threads.

The asynchronous format is analytically significant. It reduces the pressure of real-time confrontation and allows participants to reflect, revise, and position their responses more deliberately. This is particularly important in post-conflict contexts, where face-to-face interaction may inhibit expression due to social risk, reputational concerns, or fear of escalation. The format thus facilitates the articulation of ambivalent, qualified, or minority positions that might otherwise remain unexpressed.

The prompts were formulated in Bosnian and presented in an accessible format. They invited participants to reflect on personal experiences, express opinions, and engage with the views of others. Full versions of the prompts are available from the authors upon request.

The study involved young people aged 18 to 23, primarily students or recent graduates from towns in the Una-Sana Canton, including Bihać, Cazin, and Velika Kladuša. Participants were recruited through university networks and informal peer contacts. To ensure representation across the historical divide, a purposive and opportunity-stratified sampling strategy was employed to approximate balance between participants from families aligned with the ARBiH/Fifth Corps and those associated with the APZB. The final sample consisted of 14 participants, who produced approximately 160–200 comments across multiple discussion threads. All participants were anonymized using pseudonyms.

The discussions were moderated by the researchers, with the assistance of a teaching assistant. Moderation was intentionally minimal and facilitative rather than directive. The role of the moderators was limited to introducing prompts, encouraging participation where necessary, and ensuring respectful communication. No interventions were made in relation to the content of participants' contributions, nor were discussions steered toward particular conclusions. This approach was adopted in order to preserve the spontaneity and interactional character of the data while maintaining a structured discussion environment.

Given the size of the dataset, a purposive and iterative sampling strategy was employed to select excerpts for detailed analysis. Selection was guided by thematic relevance, the presence of discursive strategies (such as labeling, moral evaluation, and modality), and the representation of different viewpoints and interactional dynamics. Excerpts are not treated as isolated statements but are interpreted within the interactional and thematic context of the discussion threads from which they are drawn.

The analysis follows a qualitative, interpretative approach grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis, with particular reference to the discourse-historical approach. Analytical attention is directed to discursive strategies such as nomination (e.g.

“autonomaš” [autonomist], “korporovac” [corps supporter]), predication (e.g. “izdajnik” [traitor], “ratni zločinac” [war criminal]), deontic modality, pronoun positioning, metaphorical framing (e.g. “stare rane” [old wounds]), and temporal framing. In addition to textual features, the analysis considers interactional dynamics such as alignment, contestation, and selective engagement, as well as the broader socio-historical context in which discourse is produced.

The analysis proceeded in three stages. First, the dataset was read iteratively to identify recurring themes and patterns of interaction. Second, excerpts were coded with reference to key discursive strategies derived from the discourse-historical approach. Third, these coded instances were interpreted in relation to their interactional context and broader socio-historical references. This iterative process enabled the identification of patterned configurations across the dataset, which form the basis of the analytical claims presented in the findings.

All excerpts are presented in a standardized format consisting of the original version in Bosnian, an English translation, and analytical commentary. This approach preserves the linguistic specificity of the data while ensuring accessibility for an international audience. Where necessary, brief explanations are provided for culturally specific terms and references.

The study adheres to standard ethical guidelines for research involving human participants. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed about the purpose of the study and the use of their contributions for academic research. All data were anonymized prior to analysis. Identifying details were removed, and pseudonyms were assigned in order to protect participants’ privacy. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, particular care was taken to ensure that participants could express their views without risk of identification or negative consequences.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study is based on a relatively small and regionally specific sample, which limits the generalizability of the findings. The aim, however, is not statistical generalization but in-depth understanding of discursive processes in a particular context. Second, the online discussion format may influence how participants express themselves, potentially encouraging more reflective or performative responses than in face-to-face interaction. Third, the selection and interpretation of excerpts necessarily involve researcher judgment. While efforts were made to ensure transparency and representativeness, the analysis remains interpretative in nature.

It is important to note that all stages of the drafting process, coding, analysis, and writing, were conducted by the authors, while data collection process was completed

by one of the authors with help of a teaching assistant. The interpretations presented are based on close reading and iterative analysis of the dataset.

4. ANALYSIS: MODERATED HIERARCHY AND LAYERED COEXISTENCE

4.1. Overview of Empirical Patterns

The empirical material reveals a patterned configuration rather than a single coherent reconciliation narrative, reflecting the coexistence of what can be described as “communities of memory” within the same group (Olick and Robbins 1998; Hasić 2013). Across the seven-day discussion, participants repeatedly return to a limited set of concerns: inherited divisions, responsibility for the wartime past, and the possibility of coexistence without shared interpretation.

These concerns are not resolved into a unified interpretation. Instead, they are managed through a set of recurring discursive and interactional strategies. Participants reproduce inherited categories of division, compartmentalize competing evaluations of the past, separate legal accountability from social reconciliation, regulate when and how the past is publicly invoked, and stabilize disagreement through moderated interaction.

What emerges is neither entrenched antagonism nor integrated reconciliation. Legal condemnation of wartime responsibility anchors the normative field, yet it is expressed in measured, principle-based language rather than hostility. Alternative framings are present and tolerated, but they do not displace the underlying moral hierarchy. The result is a layered form of coexistence structured by stable boundaries, pragmatic narrowing of conflict, and uneven expressive confidence.

These dynamics are examined across several domains, including the everyday reproduction of inherited divisions, the evaluation of central wartime figures, the distinction between justice and reconciliation, the regulation of memory in public discourse, and the interactional organization of disagreement.

4.2. Everyday Reproduction of Division

Participants frequently construct the intra-community conflict in north-western Bosnia as both temporally distant and socially persistent. While many emphasize that they did not directly experience the war, their contributions demonstrate how its

meanings continue to circulate through everyday discourse. The conflict is often implicitly framed as a fratricidal past, one that is no longer actively fought, but remains embedded in social relations.

This pattern appears across multiple contributions, where participants describe how inherited distinctions continue to structure interaction.

Example 1 (circulation of labels)

“Najmanji sukob ima svoje posljedice... Starije generacije se još uvijek drže priča tipa ‘to je autonomas’ ili ‘to je korpusovac’, što dakako utiče na mlade.”

(“Even the smallest conflict has its consequences... Older generations still hold onto stories like ‘he is an autonomist’ or ‘he is from the corps’, which certainly affects young people.”)

Here, nomination strategies (“autonomas”, “korpusovac”) function as socially recognizable labels that index wartime affiliations. These labels operate as inherited categories, detached from direct experience but still structuring present-day social relations. The use of the present tense (“se drže”, “utiče”) reinforces the ongoing relevance of these classifications.

Such discursive reproduction of the past is further illustrated through anecdotal accounts:

Example 2 (everyday boundary reproduction)

“Primjer iz moga djetinjstva bi bio da se nisam smio/smjela družiti sa djecom čiji roditelji imaju drugačija uvjerenja.”

(“An example from my childhood is that I was not allowed to socialize with children whose parents had different beliefs.”)

This example shows how such distinctions are reproduced through everyday social practices rather than explicit political positioning. Boundary-making is enacted through informal regulation of interaction, indicating that conflict categories are not only remembered but embedded in routine socialization.

At the same time, participants often frame these divisions as irrational or outdated, suggesting a degree of critical distance:

Example 3 (critical distancing)

“Ne razumijem ni emotivno ni mentalno zašto neko uopšte pravi bilo kakvu podjelu.”

(“I don’t understand, emotionally or mentally, why anyone would make any kind of division at all.”)

Such statements attempt to delegitimize inherited categories, positioning them as irrational or outdated. However, this critical stance coexists with acknowledgment

of their continued social effects, revealing a tension between reflexive rejection and ongoing reproduction.

Taken together, these contributions show that conflict persists not as a matter of direct experience, but through the ongoing circulation of labels and the reproduction of social boundaries in everyday interaction. Even where participants question or reject these distinctions, they remain embedded in patterns of classification and social practice, allowing the past to structure the present without requiring active endorsement.

4.3. The Abdić Node and the Structure of Moral Evaluation

Fikret Abdić emerges as a central reference point through which participants organize and stabilize their evaluations of the wartime past. Across multiple contributions, participants bring together potentially conflicting evaluations of economic success, political betrayal, and enduring social division, but do so in a way that keeps these dimensions analytically separate. This produces a recurring pattern of compartmentalization, in which different evaluative registers coexist without being integrated into a unified judgment.

This pattern is visible across contributions and can be illustrated through the following excerpts:

Example 4 (combined evaluation)

“Čovjek je podigao Krajinu... pružio ljudima poslove... ali činjenica je da je izvršio državni udar... i činjenica je da je okrenuo narod protiv države.”

(“The man built up Krajina... provided jobs... but the fact is that he carried out a coup... and the fact is that he turned the people against the state.”)

Here, positive and negative evaluations are explicitly combined within a single statement. Economic contributions are acknowledged, but immediately separated from political judgment, which is framed as objective and non-negotiable. Recognition does not mitigate condemnation.

Example 5 (categorical moral boundary)

“Ratni zločinac je ratni zločinac, taman da mi je rođeni otac.”

(“A war criminal is a war criminal, even if he were my own father.”)

This formulation reinforces the insulation of moral judgment from other evaluative registers. Even when framed in relation to personal ties, moral condemnation is presented as categorical and non-negotiable, thereby preventing economic or social considerations from qualifying it.

Example 6 (interactional stabilization)

Participant A: “Sud je tu da osigura kakvu-takvu pravdu... to neće približiti stavove.”

(“The court is there to ensure some form of justice... it will not bring positions closer.”)

Participant B: “Jučer se nismo slagali, danas se već slažemo...”

(“Yesterday we disagreed, today we already agree...”)

Participant B’s statement marks a shift at the level of interaction. Agreement is performed as the closure of disagreement, not as the convergence of underlying positions. This suggests that participants stabilize interaction by bracketing differences rather than resolving them, allowing discussion to continue without requiring a shared interpretation of the past.

Taken together, these excerpts show that participants do not seek to reconcile competing evaluations of the past into a unified judgment. Instead, they maintain separate evaluative economic, legal, and moral registers that coexist but remain hierarchically ordered. Legal and moral condemnation anchors the overall judgment, while other dimensions are acknowledged but contained. Compartmentalization thus operates as a stable way of managing contradiction, enabling coexistence without requiring reconciliation.

4.4. Justice, Reconciliation, and the Pragmatics of Stability

While the discussion of Abdić reveals how participants manage competing evaluations of the past, a similar pattern of separation appears when they turn to questions of justice and reconciliation. Participants consistently affirm the necessity of legal accountability but draw a clear distinction between justice and reconciliation. Courts are treated as necessary institutions, yet their role is limited: they are not expected to transform relationships or produce agreement between opposing sides.

This distinction appears explicitly in the following statement:

Example 7 (justice without reconciliation)

“Ali zašto bi se Sud vršio u ime pomirenja? Sud je tu da osigura kakvu-takvu pravdu. Zločincima i treba da se sudi. To neće približiti stavove zaraćenih strana.”

(“But why should the Court act in the name of reconciliation? The Court is there to ensure some form of justice. Criminals should be tried. That will not bring the positions of the warring sides any closer.”)

Here, the speaker rejects the idea that justice should serve reconciliation. The phrase “kakvu-takvu pravdu” (“some form of justice”) limits expectations to a basic

institutional function, while the claim that trials will not “bring positions closer” draws a firm boundary between legal accountability and social or moral convergence.

At the same time, participants do not share a single understanding of what reconciliation itself entails. This becomes visible in short exchanges where different interpretations coexist without resolution:

Example 8 (contested meanings of reconciliation)

Participant A: “Da li je moguć napredak bez pomirenja?”

(“Is progress possible without reconciliation?”)

Participant B: “Pomirenje... ne zaborav, ne oprost, ali pomirenje u svrhu bolje zajedničke budućnosti.”

(“Reconciliation... not forgetting, not forgiveness, but reconciliation for the sake of a better shared future.”)

Participant C: “Pa zar nije uspostavljen mir nakon rata? ... Pomirenje se je desilo.”

(“But hasn’t peace already been established after the war? ... Reconciliation has already happened.”)

Rather than converging on a shared definition, participants articulate multiple and incompatible understandings of reconciliation. These definitions are not negotiated or resolved, but allowed to coexist, suggesting that the meaning of reconciliation itself is not a necessary condition for continued interaction.

Across the dataset, a pragmatic orientation becomes visible. Participants frequently shift away from abstract expectations and refer instead to everyday life as evidence of functioning coexistence:

Example 9 (pragmatic coexistence)

“Ljudi rade, školuju se, žive zajedno... to je dovoljno za normalan život.”

(“People work, go to school, live together... that is enough for a normal life.”)

Such statements reframe reconciliation in minimal terms. Coexistence is defined through the continuation of ordinary social life rather than agreement about the past. Stability is thus grounded in the maintenance of everyday practices, not in the resolution of interpretive differences.

Taken together, these discussions show that justice, reconciliation, and coexistence are treated as separate domains. Legal accountability is affirmed but limited to institutional function, while reconciliation is redefined, contested, or rendered unnecessary. Coexistence, in turn, is grounded in everyday practice rather than shared interpretation. This separation allows disagreement about the past to persist without disrupting social stability.

4.5. Managing the Past: Media, Time, and the Limits of Activation

When discussing media coverage, particularly the broadcast of the series *Svi zločini Fikreta Abdića* (All Crimes of Fikret Abdić), participants shift their focus away from judging past events themselves and toward the potential consequences of making them publicly salient again. The central concern is not whether crimes occurred, but what renewed attention to them might produce in the present. In this context, recalling the past is treated as a socially consequential act that carries risks.

This concern is evident in how participants frame the question of whether such content should be broadcast:

Example 10 (memory as risk)

“...da li nam je potreban ovaj serijal... ili ćemo samo probuditi stare rane i napraviti još veći razdor među Krajišnicima...”

(“...do we need this series... or will we only awaken old wounds and create an even greater divide among the people of Krajina...”)

The phrase “probuditi stare rane” (“awaken old wounds”) presents the past as something that can remain latent if left undisturbed. The issue is not the factual status of past events, but the potential consequences of their reactivation in the present.

A related concern appears in discussions of how such content circulates through media:

Example 11 (media as amplifier)

“Baš da se to pusti na Kantonalnoj televiziji... to po meni propagira dalje tenzije i mržnju.”

(“To broadcast that on the cantonal television... in my opinion, that only propagates further tensions and hatred.”)

Here, media are framed as amplifiers that extend the reach and intensity of existing divisions. Public dissemination is not seen as neutral exposure, but as an intervention that can reactivate and escalate conflict dynamics. As a result, participants distinguish between acknowledging past wrongdoing and publicly circulating it, favoring restraint in order to maintain stability.

At the same time, participants frequently shift the prospect of reconciliation into the future. Rather than treating it as something to be actively achieved in the present, they frame it as a process that will occur gradually, most often through generational change.

Example 12 (generational deferral)

“Treba da izumru generacije koje su imale ikakav blizak doticaj sa ratnim dešavanjima pa da ostali žive u miru i rahatluku...”

(“The generations who had any close contact with the war need to pass away so that the rest can live in peace and ease...”)

Here, the persistence of conflict is attributed not to institutions or unresolved political issues, but to the continued presence of those who experienced it. Resolution is not something to be negotiated, but something expected to emerge over time. Responsibility is thus displaced from the present onto a future shaped by generational turnover.

This framing is reinforced in interaction, where participants align around the idea of a temporal break:

Example 13 (interactional alignment)

Participant A: “Treba da izumru generacije...”

(“Those generations need to die off...”)

Participant B: “Znam na šta misliš... bukvalno onaj clean start gdje se nikom neće puniti glava.”

(“I know what you mean... literally that ‘clean start’ where no one’s head will be filled [with these narratives].”)

The notion of a “clean start” frames division as the product of narrative transmission, suggesting that interrupting this transmission would enable renewal. Older generations are positioned as carriers of conflict, while younger ones are imagined as capable of transcending it.

Taken together, these discussions show that participants manage the past through the regulation of its activation and the deferral of its resolution. Public engagement with the past is treated as potentially destabilizing, while meaningful change is displaced into the future. Stability is thus maintained not by resolving disagreement, but by controlling when and how the past enters public discourse and by postponing its transformation.

4.6. Interactional Moderation and Layered Coexistence

Beyond thematic content, the interactional texture of the discussion is analytically significant. Strong evaluative claims are articulated without escalation into personal attack, and disagreements over legitimacy, responsibility, and symbolic status remain measured. Participants typically justify their positions rather than denounce others, and moments of partial agreement, humor, and metacommunicative framing serve to

stabilize the exchange. The discussion thus unfolds not as a site of identity mobilization, but as a form of regulated deliberation in which disagreement is expressed but contained.

Given the historical intensity of this intra-community divide, such moderation is not trivial. It emerges within a closed, password-protected digital setting that functions as a semi-protected deliberative space. Anonymity reduces reputational risk, while the structured prompt format channels contributions toward reflection rather than confrontation. Participants articulate clear boundaries regarding wartime responsibility, yet these are defended in procedural rather than affectively charged terms. The result is not the absence of division, but its controlled expression.

At the same time, this interactional order is not symmetrical. Contributions aligned with the dominant ARBiH-centered moral grammar are more frequent, more elaborated, and more assertively formulated. By contrast, participants articulating positions closer to the stigmatized side intervene less often and in a more cautious register, with shorter, qualified, and hedged contributions. This asymmetry does not take the form of overt silencing. Alternative positions are present and not directly suppressed. However, they require greater discursive effort to sustain. Moral legitimacy thus structures not only what can be said, but the conditions under which it can be said with confidence.

This pattern clarifies how hierarchy operates in this setting. It is not imposed through exclusion or confrontation, but through differential ease of participation. Positions anchored in juridical condemnation and state-centered legitimacy provide a stable discursive footing, while those that diverge from this framework remain more fragile and contingent. The digital environment mitigates overt hostility, yet it does not dissolve the underlying distribution of symbolic authority.

These interactional dynamics do not stand apart from the patterns identified in the preceding sections but consolidate them. The compartmentalization of evaluative registers, the separation of justice from reconciliation, and the cautious regulation of memory all find expression at the level of interaction. Participants are able to maintain moral boundaries, limit the scope of disagreement, and defer deeper resolution, while still sustaining a functional communicative space.

The resulting configuration is neither one of entrenched polarization nor of reconciliatory integration. Instead, it reflects a layered form of coexistence structured by the coexistence of differentiated registers. At the symbolic level, boundaries regarding wartime responsibility remain stable, anchored in juridical condemnation and resistance to moral reclassification. At the same time, alternative orientations such

as economic recognition, procedural pragmatism, or humanitarian concern are accommodated without altering this hierarchy.

At the pragmatic level, coexistence is sustained through narrowing the demands placed on reconciliation. Agreement on the past is not required for social interaction to proceed. Instead, stability is grounded in everyday practices, institutional minimalism, and forward-oriented reasoning, while more fundamental questions of interpretation are left unresolved or displaced.

Interactional moderation both reflects and reinforces this arrangement. Disagreement is expressed, but rarely escalates; differences are acknowledged, but not resolved; participation is open, but unevenly secured. Coexistence is thus achieved under conditions of asymmetrically structured moderation, in which the ability to speak, to assert, and to be taken seriously remains unequally distributed.

Taken together, these findings point to a structured configuration in which coexistence is sustained through the interaction of several distinct but mutually reinforcing mechanisms. Inherited divisions are reproduced through everyday classification, competing evaluations of the past are compartmentalized rather than resolved, and legal accountability is separated from expectations of reconciliation. At the same time, the activation of the past is selectively regulated, while its transformation is deferred into an imagined future.

The resulting configuration is best understood as a layered form of coexistence under structured hierarchy. Conflict is neither resolved nor reactivated, but rendered socially manageable through its containment across symbolic, pragmatic, temporal, and interactional registers. Shared social life is thus sustained without convergence in meaning, and without the disappearance of underlying asymmetries of legitimacy.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings complicate binary assessments of reconciliation as either achieved or failed. In Cazinska Krajina, institutional stability is well established: violence is absent, political life proceeds within the post-Dayton framework, and everyday interaction continues across former wartime divides. Yet beneath this normalized surface, the discursive field remains structured by moral hierarchy, contested memory, and uneven expressive security. Stabilization and stratification coexist.

This configuration was described empirically as layered coexistence. Conceptually, it is captured here as stratified reconciliation. In this formulation, reconciliation denotes a structured form of post-conflict accommodation in which coexistence is

stabilized through domain-specific adjustments while symbolic hierarchy remains intact. What is reconciled is not the meaning of the past, but the conditions of living together under its differentiated interpretation.

Several discursive logics sustain this pattern. Legalistic reasoning anchors legitimacy in juridical culpability and establishes firm evaluative thresholds. Economic nostalgia and procedural realism introduce limited flexibility without displacing these boundaries. Pragmatic narrowing redefines reconciliation as forward-oriented coexistence rather than narrative transformation, while temporal deferral relocates deeper repair into generational succession. Defensive memory practices, in turn, frame renewed public engagement with the past as socially risky. Together, these logics produce a stable but non-integrative equilibrium.

This equilibrium is asymmetrical. The normative center of gravity aligns with legalist condemnation of APZB leadership, and alternative framings operate within limits set by that hierarchy. Even within an anonymous digital setting, expressive confidence is unevenly distributed. Participants associated with the stigmatized position contribute less frequently and with greater caution, while those aligned with the dominant moral grammar speak with greater assurance. Hesitation, brevity, and hedging thus function as indicators of constrained narrative security.

The intra-community character of the conflict intensifies this dynamic. Unlike inter-ethnic reconciliation, which negotiates boundaries between distinct groups, the Krajina case involves the reconfiguration of legitimacy within a shared ethnonational framework. The distinction between “*korpusovci*” and “*autonomaši*” operates as an internal moral boundary, reproduced through naming practices, categorical exclusions, and appeals to state defense. Pragmatic coexistence and humanitarian inclusion mitigate its social consequences, but do not dismantle its symbolic core.

The discussion of social rights for children of deceased APZB members illustrates how limited ethical accommodation unfolds within these constraints. The formulation that “children are children” introduces a humanitarian register that suspends inherited blame and enables convergence around equal access to social rights. However, this convergence remains domain-specific. It does not extend to symbolic recognition or to the reclassification of wartime actors. Ethical inclusion is thus bounded, permitting partial repair without altering the underlying hierarchy of legitimacy.

At the same time, boundary maintenance extends into intimate domains. Expressions of reluctance to form familial ties across the divide suggest that symbolic differentiation continues to shape social imaginaries at the level of kinship and belonging. Civic coexistence may be normalized, but social integration remains limited.

The digital format of the focus group further clarifies these dynamics. As a closed and anonymous micro-public, it reduces reputational exposure and, in principle, enables more symmetrical participation. The persistence of expressive asymmetry under these conditions suggests that hierarchies of legitimacy are internalized rather than solely externally imposed. At the same time, the format allows for the articulation of ambivalence and conditional tolerance, particularly among participants aligned with the dominant position. The digital space thus functions diagnostically, revealing both the endurance of hierarchy and the limited domains in which convergence becomes possible.

These findings challenge linear models of reconciliation that assume gradual movement toward narrative integration. In Cazinska Krajina, stability is achieved through the organization of disagreement across multiple domains. Stratified reconciliation captures this condition of a durable equilibrium in which coexistence is maintained under persistent hierarchy, expressive security remains uneven, and ethical accommodation is limited but consequential.

6. CONCLUSION

This article examined how reconciliation is discursively organized in a context where the primary post-war boundary is internal rather than inter-ethnic. Drawing on Critical Discourse Analysis of an asynchronous online focus group with young participants from Cazinska Krajina, it has shown that post-war accommodation within the Bosniak community is neither a straightforward failure nor a completed moral settlement. Instead, it takes the form of a stabilized configuration in which everyday coexistence is normalized while the moral status of wartime alignments remains differentiated.

Across the discussion, participants manage the legacy of the ARBiH–APZB conflict through a set of coexisting discursive logics. Legalist boundary-making anchors legitimacy in juridical responsibility. Pragmatic narrowing redefines reconciliation as functional coexistence. Defensive regulation of memory frames renewed debate as socially risky. Temporal displacement defers deeper repair to future generations. Bounded humanitarian recognition allows limited ethical inclusion without symbolic equalization. These logics do not converge into a shared narrative but enable a durable mode of living with unresolved difference.

This configuration is structured by hierarchy rather than symmetry. Even within a controlled and anonymous digital environment, participation remains uneven. Positions aligned with the dominant moral grammar are expressed with greater confi-

dence and elaboration, while stigmatized positions are articulated more cautiously. This pattern indicates that post-war legitimacy operates not only at the level of competing claims, but also at the level of discursive authorization. Reconciliation, in this sense, concerns not only what can be said, but who can speak without restraint.

The concept of stratified reconciliation captures this condition. It denotes an equilibrium in which coexistence is sustained through compartmentalization and domain-specific accommodation while moral hierarchy remains intact. What is reconciled is not the past as a shared narrative, but the practical terms of coexistence under conditions of unequal legitimacy. Stability is achieved by narrowing the scope of reconciliation and leaving certain questions, including symbolic equivalence, moral rehabilitation, and full narrative integration, outside the domain of acceptable resolution.

This perspective has broader implications for the study of post-conflict societies. It suggests that long-term stability may coexist with enduring internal hierarchies of recognition, and that the absence of open conflict does not imply equal narrative standing. In contexts such as Cazinska Krajina, the key analytical challenge is not only to trace overt divisions, but to identify the quieter mechanisms through which inequality in legitimacy is maintained. Reconciliation, if assessed empirically, must be examined not only in institutions and commemorations, but in how speech is distributed, how positions are articulated, and under what conditions voices carry equal weight.

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STRATIFICIRANO POMIRENJE I POLITIKA PRIZNANJA U POSLIJERATNOJ BOSNI I HERCEGOVINI: NARATIVI MLADIH IZ CAZINSKE KRAJINE

Sažetak:

Ovaj članak istražuje kako mladi u sjeverozapadnoj Bosni i Hercegovini konstruiraju i pregovaraju o poslijeratnom sjećanju i pomirenju u kontekstu međubošnjačkog konflikta iz 1990-ih. Na osnovu korpusa diskusija na online forumu među učesnicima uzrasta od 18 do 23 godine iz Unsko-sanskog kantona, studija primjenjuje okvir kritičke analize diskursa kako bi istražila na koji način se u svakodnevnoj interakciji artikuliraju konkurentni narativi, identitetske oznake i moralne evaluacije. Analiza se fokusira na diskurzivne strategije poput nominacije (npr. oznake kao što su „autonomaš“ ili „izdajnik“), predikacije, deontičke modalnosti, upotrebe zamjenica i metaforičkog uokviravanja (npr. „stare rane“, „novi početak“). Posebna pažnja posvećena je tome kako se učesnici pozicioniraju u odnosu na nasljeđene narative konflikta, međugeneracijsko prenošenje sjećanja i aktuelne socio-ekonomske izazove. Rezultati pokazuju da mladi učesnici istovremeno reprodukuju, dovode u pitanje i preoblikuju dominantne narative podjela. Dok neki diskursi održavaju granice zasnovane na ratnim afilijacijama, drugi preusmjeravaju fokus na zajedničke strukturne izazove, poput nezaposlenosti i političkog klijentelizma. Podaci također otkrivaju napetosti između poziva na pomirenje i istrajne moralne polarizacije, kao i pojavu diskursa usmjerenih ka budućnosti koji zamišljaju distanciranje od prošlosti. Isticanjem podjela unutar zajednice i svakodnevnih praksi značenjskog konstruisanja, članak doprinosi studijama kritičkog diskursa postkonfliktnih društava i nudi uvid u to kako se pomirenje pregovara izvan institucionalnih i elitnih procesa.

Ključne riječi: Bosna i Hercegovina; Cazinska Krajina; mladi; kolektivno sjećanje; kritička analiza diskursa

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