A PSYCHOSOCIAL MODEL OF HEALING FROM THE TRAUMAS

OF ETHNIC CLEANSING

THE CASE OF BOSNIA

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This psychosocial model was developed as background for a study of the healing process of women in Bosnia & Herzegovina (BiH)[*] five years after the war, carried out in 2001 under the auspices of the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation (see p.30). The focus here is thus on women survivors of ethnic cleansing, although most of the discussion is equally valid for the male part of the population.

I. PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF TRAUMA

There is never any question that damaged buildings, roads, power plants, and factories need to be repaired and rebuilt after a war, but the inner destruction in people's minds is less obvious and is thus often forgotten. Encountering human evil in such a frightening form as during ethnic cleansing changes people forever. It is thus important to include psychosocial support in post-war humanitarian assistance if we want a country to recover swiftly and ethnic rifts to have a chance to be eventually mended. Psychosocial support is an important long-term preventive measure that can reduce the risk of future ethnic confrontations.

"Psychosocial projects in this type of situation have the primary purpose of enabling people to survive emotionally and socially. It is a matter of survival, just enabling mothers to have the strength to take care of themselves and their children at least in a minimal way," says Inger Agger, a psychologist at the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO).[2]

Psychological responses to traumatic experience

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[*] Bosnia is used in the title as a short form for Bosnia & Herzegovina. The term "Bosnian" will be used to refer to all the people living in BiH. The term Bosniac, on the other hand, is used to refer to the Muslim part of the population.

Living through the man-made violence of ethnic cleansing in Bosnia & Herzegovina was like living in hell. Creating a state of terror, it was deliberately used as a tool of expulsion of people from the areas where they had lived for generations. During the ethnic warfare, the whole social web was demolished and there was no natural support system in place.

A study of combat soldiers found four clusters of traumatic war experiences that contributed to psychological trauma: *exposure to fighting, exposure to abusive violence, deprivation, and loss of control and meaning*.[3] The civilians in Bosnia & Herzegovina experienced many of these traumatic situations during the war. "The critical element that makes an event traumatic is the subjective assessment by victims of how threatened and helpless they feel."[4] Large parts of the population were exposed to extreme threats and intense feelings of helplessness.

These long-term traumatic and stressful experiences leave an imprint upon people's inner lives that takes a long time to heal. Even as healing eventually takes place, there are scars that will never leave the person.

Central characteristics of traumatic stress are *the experience of intense fear, helplessness, powerlessness, and the threat to one's life.* "Traumatic reactions occur when action is of no avail. When neither resistance nor escape is possible, the human system of self-defense becomes overwhelmed and disorganized."[5]

In everyday life we live with a "*protective shield of invulnerability.*" When this psychological defense mechanism is shattered in the face of ruthless violence, it can lead to intense sensations of powerlessness and even severe disintegration anxiety. In the aftermath of such overwhelming feelings, people feel highly vulnerable and fearful of potential further threats.

> The ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness. Certain violations of the social compact are too terrible to utter aloud; this is the meaning of the word *unspeakable*.
>
> Judith L. Herman
> Trauma and Recovery

Traumatic stress reactions involve the psyche as well as the body. Upon arousal, adrenalin rushes into the system and affects memory processes so that the precipitating event becomes permanently imprinted in memory with its accompanying strong emotions of anxiety, fear, and anger.

The problem with traumatic memories is that they refuse to be banished from consciousness. Traumatic memories find all sorts of ways to trouble the victim. As Judith Herman comments: "Folk wisdom is filled with ghosts who refuse to rest in their graves until their stories are told."[6] There also is a general stress on the body that can lead to problems with sleep, irritability and anger, panic attacks, anxiety, and so on. "Traumatic events produce profound and lasting changes in physiological arousal, emotion, cognition, and memory."[7] Some victims may "self-medicate" with alcohol to reduce their

arousal symptoms. There also may be long-term problems with anger, especially in men. "Anger, which so often has to be suppressed in the traumatic situation, goes underground and returns as a permanent challenge to the future adjustment of the subject."[8]

The classical trauma reactions are natural reactions to unnatural events, but they can complicate, even terrorize, the lives of the survivors and make them into more or less permanent victims.

The most common post-traumatic stress symptoms are *anxiety, nightmares, intrusive return of memories of the traumatic situation (flashbacks), depression, irritability and anger, difficulties concentrating and sleeping, withdrawal from situations that may revive memories, psychic numbing of emotions, and apathy.*

Judith Herman organizes the different traumatic symptoms in three main categories:
- *Hyper-arousal*
- *Intrusion*
- *Constriction.*

It is important to remember, however, that in war situations the post-traumatic stress reactions are only "part of the pie." Society as a whole is destroyed and needs to be re-constructed. People have in addition to struggle with all their losses: the death of relatives and friends; the destruction of their home and lifetime savings; the loss of their former friends and their social network; and the collapse of a multicultural society that is gone forever.

Traumatic events rob people of their sense of control, connection, and meaning in life. Traumatic events violate the victims´ faith in humanity and in any type of divine order and thus often thrust them into existential crisis. When the perpetrators are neighbors and former friends, as often was the case in BiH, faith in humanity was challenged to the core. "Traumatic events destroy the victim's fundamental assumptions about the safety of the world, the positive value of the self, and the meaningful order of creation."[9] It takes a long time to rebuild an inner foundation of *basic trust* when people have encountered human evil in such a frightening form. However with help from the outside world, the healing of the traumatic wounds and the grieving process of all the losses can be facilitated.

How quickly one is able to rebuild the practical realities in life, such as one's house, getting a job, getting the children into good schools and the possibility of feeling safe in society again, will profoundly influence the healing process. I underscore this further in Section II.

For many people, post-traumatic stress reactions eventually subside as time gives some distance from the war experiences and for the grieving of losses. In some cases, however, the traumatic imprint is so strong that the grieving process is aborted and memories keep impinging on the person at all times, in essence making the past conquer the present. We often then talk about PTSD, post-traumatic stress disorder.

Diagnostic categories for post-traumatic stress

Since 1980, the US diagnostic code, DSM III (presently DSM IV R), has included a category called *Post Traumatic Stress Disorder* (PTSD). It encompasses most of the symptoms mentioned above and is used to give a uniform basis for classification (Annex 1 gives the diagnostic requirements for PTSD). There is also another international classification system, ICD 10, with a similar syndrome.

When serious stress reactions become permanent and leave a physiological imprint, the diagnosis of PTSD gives legitimacy within the medical system, and as such can fill a function. "When people develop PTSD the replaying of the trauma leads to sensitization … (and the) repetitive exposures etches them more and more powerfully into the brain ... (and) trauma related memories become kindled."[10]

Diagnostic systems fill an important function for research, but it is questionable to talk about post-traumatic stress "disorder" when it is a natural response to an unnatural situation. The ethical question raised by using the term "disorder" has been commented on by Becker.[11] Therefore *post-traumatic stress reactions* will be used here to refer to the common and natural reactions of war victims to the stressful events they endured.

It probably also is more accurate to speak about a spectrum of post-traumatic stress reactions in Bosnia & Herzegovina because the traumatic situations differ markedly in character. Even during wartime there were vast differences in the stressful situations that people endured. Some people experienced extremely violent traumas that left an imprint in the psycho-physiological system, an imprint that is difficult to erase. Others experienced long-term stress during a siege without such singular overwhelming traumatic experiences.

Many survivors of war can become free of their more disturbing stress reactions after a period of time, but for others these reactions persist for decades and sometimes even for life. In one study of veterans of WW II, forty years after their combat period, 56% still experienced anxiety and had nightmares about the war.[12]

Expression of traumatic stress in different cultures

"How people embody and give meaning to their distress is significantly influenced by their particular cultural context, which indeed also affects how they identify and deal with it," notes Sara Gibbs[13] after working with traumatized children in Mozambique.

Even if the core trauma symptoms that affect the body are similar, they may be experienced differently. "In many cultures, people use somatic symptoms or talk of bodily illness as idioms of distress."[14] For instance women refugees from the political

terror in El Salvador in the 1980s complained about *"nervios,"* which included affects such as anxiety, anger, and fear as well as body pains, shaking and trembling sensations, and *"calor,"* a sense of heat related to the stress symptoms.[15] Using somatic symptoms as a stress indicator also seems to be a pattern in BiH to some extent.

Betrayal

An additional stress factor in the ethnic war in Bosnia & Herzegovina (as well as in Rwanda) has been a deep sense of betrayal on the part of former neighbors and friends. The people with whom one had watched soccer games, the people who had been guests in one's house, were suddenly burning your house, shooting at you, or serving as your camp guards. People they never dreamed would turn on them did. Betrayals such as these threaten one's core beliefs and lead to an existential crisis and a loss of trust in humanity. Agger & Mimica reported an intense sense of betrayal in their study of two thousand women in psychosocial programs at the end of the war.[16]

Many people also experienced an intense sense of humiliation when they were forced to live as refugees or as internally displaced persons in squalid conditions. They were robbed of all their life belongings and savings and were dependent on others for survival.

Many people in Bosnia were robbed also of their former Yugoslav and multicultural identity. "Bosnians are proud people. The ethnic cleansing struck them at the heart of who they were, individually and as a people. This is another kind of mass rape -- to destroy a people's living pride in what it means to be a Bosnian."[17]

Pervasive losses

While the war was going on, people struggled to survive; but as peace was finally brokered, people were faced with their severe losses. Nearly every family had lost some members and the grieving process for them became acute when life was supposed to "go back to normal." Indeed, *there was no normal life to go back to.*

The loss of their homes was to many displaced Bosnians a severe blow. The home is central to the Bosnian people and they often have put all their savings into the home appliances and furniture. Now the house was often burned or blown up and their former network of friends was shattered. Often people were relocated and not allowed to move back. *People not only lost all their possessions, they lost also their bearings.* Particularly "for the elderly, the wish to go back to their home, their house, their roots, is very strong and when that possibility is blocked due to ethnic stratification, it is a source of deep pain and sadness."[18]

The loss of "the good life" before the war was also a severe loss for most Bosnian people and something that had to be mourned. The economic conditions after the war were very harsh compared to earlier times, with widespread unemployment.

Many people also mourned the years the war had stolen from of their lives. Children were robbed of carefree years, young people of time to date and enjoy youth, parents with small children experienced constant fear instead of enjoying their toddlers and so on.

Treatment of traumatic stress and losses after war

How does one live with the nightmares of ethnic cleansing without becoming a prisoner of those memories? There are quite a few different approaches to individual treatment of post-traumatic stress. The traumatic experiences during war, however, constitute a "collective" trauma, and the most appropriate model of treatment is therefore a group method that allows for shared recovery.

> *Recovery is based upon the empowerment of the survivor and the creation of new connections. Recovery can take place only within the context of relationships;*
> *The survivor recreates the psychological faculties that were damaged or deformed by the traumatic experience. These faculties include the basic capacities for trust, autonomy, initiative, competence, identity, and intimacy.*
>
> Judith L. Herman
> Trauma and Recovery

In a trauma support group, the victims can meet other women with the same type of experiences and have their own reactions validated. With large numbers of traumatized people a group model is also the most feasible. Judith Herman summarizes the many advantages with a trauma group as follows: "The solidarity of a group provides the strongest protection against terror and despair, and the strongest antidote to traumatic experience. *Trauma isolates; the group creates a sense of belonging. Trauma shames and stigmatises; the group bears witness and affirms. Trauma degrades the victim; the group exalts her. Trauma dehumanises the victim; the group restores her humanity.*"[19]

Judith Herman also emphasizes that, as "*trauma robs the victim of a sense of power and control,*" the guiding principle of recovery must therefore restore power and control to the survivor. Groups provide the opportunity not only for mutually rewarding relationships, but also for collective empowerment. People in the group often start to help and encourage each other outside the group. Being able to help others who have suffered ultimately helps the victims to feel valued and valuable.

In BiH, the western model of trauma treatment was applicable and useful and the group model was well adapted to women's social patterns in Bosnia. "Women were saying that it is nice to sit around, and from Central Bosnia they have a tradition of sitting around in the evening, knitting and talking, so this notion of sitting around is a very powerful thing."[20]

In other parts of the world this may not be the case and it is important to use a model that is culturally attuned to the particular world-view of the region at issue. There are many societies where people are not used to talking about feelings outside a narrow family group. There other approaches such as ritual approaches are more relevant. Michael Wessels describes the need for ritual cleansing models in Africa that takes into account the beliefs in the spirits of the dead.[21] John P. Wilson describes the healing rituals that are used by the native Indians, including the sweat lodge purification ritual.[22] Sara Gibbs describes how healing rituals were important in Mozambique, but how also the practical work of rebuilding filled people with new hope: "filling our hearts with work ... we can begin to forget, (and) our hearts are being calmed."[23] The chance to get back to a structured life and rebuilding what has been lost has a healing quality in itself. Also the philosophical outlook in a society is important for the healing process. In Vietnam, the Buddhist monks were the culturally natural trauma therapists.

The road to recovery

A bit simplified one can see the recovery process, as Judith Herman proposes, as a three stage process: [24]

- The establishment of safety.
- Remembrance and mourning.
- Reconnecting with ordinary life.

Following ethnic wars, there are additional societal steps of rebuilding and mourning that are necessary for the healing process to proceed. The third stage could be rephrased as "rebuilding ordinary life" as there is no "ordinary life" to which to reconnect. Life has to be "reconstructed" on almost every level. This will be the focus of the psychosocial model of healing presented in section II.

1. Establishing safety

After studying over two thousand beneficiaries of different psychosocial programs during the last year of the war, Inger Agger concludes that "the greatest need of war-traumatized people is to find a space in which trust in fellow human beings can be re-established and where normal human relationships can be formed. The activities offered in this space are less important than the general atmosphere of communal healing."[25] Women's centers were established already during the war throughout BiH. Often women would come to the center and sit around in a group knitting and talking and thus establishing the center as a safe place.

They could sooner or later sign up for various activities at the center, among them a trauma support group. There were many different versions of these trauma support groups, but ideally a local group leader (who had been through training with trauma specialists) was in charge of creating a safe group atmosphere. At the beginning there

was an educational phase, where women could learn about trauma and stress symptoms and also learn various methods for coping with stress. Gradually the process moves into a phase where women tell their traumatic stories. The role of the group leader is to handle the process so that it does not overwhelm the person again and thus re-traumatize her.

Merely uncovering memories is not enough for healing to take place but sharing the memories in a situation where one feels understood, safe, and accepted can be an important therapeutic experience. All of the women had their own baggage, and sharing their experiences helps them to feel less isolated. The feeling that one is not alone in one's suffering is soothing.

Establishing some control over the memory process is an important step in the healing process. Unpredictable flashbacks can create terror in people's lives. Mastery of such stress symptoms rather than their total elimination is a more realistic goal for individuals who have experienced mass atrocities during ethnic wars. The goal of trauma therapy is often to ensure that "feelings can be felt and named and endured without overwhelming arousal, without defensive numbing and without dissociation."[26]

2. Mourning the losses

War traumas inevitably involve loss. The sharing of their traumatic experience with others in the group is not only a doorway to necessary mourning but also a precondition for the restitution of a sense of a meaningful world. There may also be anger and hatred that needs to be expressed before the mourning can become constructive.

Although mourning is an essential part of reparation, it also is feared. There is a fear that it will be endless and therefore support may be needed for people to venture into these emotions. Writers have described how mourning tends to come in waves, where one intensely remembers the lost ones and then it fades. "Each time the memory comes back to mind, it involves a working through of related themes ... *The process of mourning is, in fact, the process of mastering the loss.*"[27]

An important turning point for the trauma victim is when "time starts to move again." This does not mean that the person will forget the traumatic experience; it will be with her/him for the rest of life; but when the traumatic experience does not command the central place in the person's life any more, constructive life forces can start to regain power. It also leaves some energy to engage in life once more.

Victims of severe trauma can end up in a "frozen stage" where they are unable to mourn, which often was the case with Holocaust survivors.[28] For victims of severe trauma, a group experience can facilitate the process towards mourning. Sometimes, however, it is not enough. In such cases it often is valuable to have an opportunity for individual therapy, perhaps using the EMDR model, which has proven to be effective in several studies (see Shapiro[29]). Women who have been raped have been through situations that

cause intense shame and humiliation and they often also need individual therapy to handle their problems.

"To feel threatened, helpless, and out of control is a vital attack on the capacity to be able to count on oneself,"[30] and people who have experienced such situations need to share their helplessness with others in the group.

When close kin have been killed, it can at times lead to "survivor's guilt," which can complicate the healing process. "The shame- and guilt-provoking conditions contribute to a massive attack on each person's self-esteem and integrity."[31] The opportunity to restore self-esteem can be an important aspect of the work in the group.

3. Reconnecting with life and one's self

The third stage in the healing process involves not only the task of creating a new future but also of re-creating the faculties that were destroyed by the traumatic experience and the establishment of a new post-war identity. The self-image needs to be *reconstructed* to incorporate the effects of the traumatic experiences and the losses. One is not the same person after the war as when the war started.

Beliefs in fundamental reason and justice are often severely damaged in trauma survivors. Ethnic wars produce "a profound mistrust of fellow humans - the impairment of what we could call "*social basic trust.*"[32] In the group, one can rebuild some of that social trust. However, for the inner healing process to proceed it is important that there be a swift re-establishment of "the rule of law" in the post-war society and prompt actions to put war-crimes perpetrators on trial (see Section II).

To feel that one can look forward with hope, one needs to have a chance to work and to earn money so that you can rebuild all that was torn down during the war. I will elaborate on that also in the next section

People have been abruptly confronted with a human capacity for evil that they could never have imagined. The trauma victims thus have suffered a disruption in what McCann & Pearlman[33] call vital cognitive "self-schemes," assumptions, beliefs, and expectations about the self and the world. These need to be reorganized for the person to enjoy life again. The survivors need also to achieve some ego-integration of who one was before and after the war.

During this process, it is important - if possible - to construct some "sense of meaning" to what one has been through, as that helps with ego-integration. Giving some sense of meaning to the traumatic experience lessens the distress, even though this is very difficult in a "senseless" war with extreme brutality.

In other belief systems, where suffering is an integral part of life, as for instance in Buddhism, the victims of war have a somewhat easier task of assigning meaning to the wartime traumas they have endured. For example, the Buddhist faith has had a

remarkable facilitating effect on the healing of war traumas in Vietnam, as I have seen myself.

The construction of meaning is an individual process even though the group experience often can facilitate it. "In recovery the survivor assigns new meaning to the trauma, to the self as trauma survivor and to the world in which traumatic events occur and recur,"[34] psychologist R. Janoff-Bulman comments. The traumatic past can hopefully be imbued with some meaning that is life affirming and self-affirming.

The recovery process is underway when people slowly start to take in the fact that there is a future. The major steps in the psychological healing process are illustrated in Figure 1. This is, however, a healing process in the narrow sense. For healing to take place in a society ravaged by ethnic wars, there are more steps required, as outlined in Section II. The reconstruction of society intimately affects how people are able to look forward to a new future.

Figure 1: *Major steps in the psychological healing process[35]*

SAFETY

MOURNING THE LOSSES

ESTABLISHING SOME MEANING/
UNDERSTANDING OF THE TRAUMATIC EVENT

RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF TRUST

RE-ESTABLISHING SELFCOHERENCE
AND CONTINUITY OF SELF

LOOKING AHEAD WITH HOPE

The recovery process

Recovery from trauma is never complete. Post-traumatic symptoms are likely to recur during stressful conditions that remind the survivor of the original trauma. How one is able to recreate one's life after the war of course affects also the healing process intimately. Here there are differences between older women and younger women, women with some professional training and those without, and so forth.

In many parts of the world, there are few resources for trauma support of any kind. The old saying that emotional wounds will heal over time is correct when it is not related to severe traumatic stress symptoms. A process of self-healing will take place over time for trauma victims where the psycho-physiological system has not been totally over-whelmed (as in PTSD), but it is going to be a slower process and the residual problems may be extensive.

With survivors who suffer from PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder), time is not really a healing agent. This has been illustrated with holocaust victims and veterans of different wars. In such instances a more active approach to trauma therapy is essential. This does not mean that people do not go on with their lives, but their emotional capacities often are in a "lock-box."

In the aftermath of ethnic war, the above psychological model of healing is too limited because it does not include societal factors. During ethnic warfare the whole social web is torn to pieces and thus needs to be rewoven along with the reconstruction of the economy, the reestablishment of the rule of law, and so on. How the rebuilding is carried out will affect the healing process, as it is only when people sense that there is a future that they can leave the traumatic past behind. The psychological model is thus extended and integrated in a psychosocial model in section II that embraces important social and societal factors.

II. A PSYCHOSOCIAL MODEL OF HEALING OF TRAUMAS FROM ETHNIC WARS

> *Reconstruction encompasses rebuilding infrastructure and economies, absorbing traumatic changes in social relations, and rehabilitating every level of society – household, community, civil group, professional association and government – with a grasp of social relations to avoid reinforcing inequality or deepening marginalisation.*
>
> John Pendergast
> in "Frontline Diplomacy"

Trauma theory and therapy often focus on psychological techniques to influence the inner experience of trauma victims within an intact society. This is not enough in ethnic warfare where not only most people are traumatized but the entire social web is torn apart. There are wounds to heal on all levels, individual, social and societal.

People live in a "person-community 'ecosystem' within which an individual experiences, copes with and makes meaning of potentially traumatizing events."[36] Efforts to heal the wounds of individuals in a country ravaged by civil war/ethnic warfare need also to address such issues as the rebuilding of the local community, economic rebuilding, and actions on the societal level that influence the healing process. The work of healing cannot be restricted to trauma therapy in the narrow sense.

This comprehensive model of the healing process stresses that actions on the social and societal level will intimately influence the individual healing. Reconstruction of war-torn societies needs to be done with the healing process in mind, and in a way that avoids "reinforcing inequality."[37]

Before launching into this further, the importance of trauma support measures from a preventive peace-building standpoint needs to be underscored.

Why we need to deal with population trauma

"Some countries simply forget the past and attempt to induce a national amnesia in its people. Of course that is bound to fail - the victims do not, indeed cannot, forget," Judge Richard Goldstone reminds us: "*Instead they will teach their children to hate*." [38]
The deeply ironic background of the ethnic wars in Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo is that Marshall Tito tried a policy of "national amnesia." He rose to power in Yugoslavia after fierce internal vendettas during WW II that killed more people than the fight with the occupying Germans. In an effort to unify the country, he put all those intense ethnic

wounds into the deep freeze of history and proclaimed the motto: "*Brotherhood and Unity*." It worked for fifty years, but when his iron-fist reign was over the old traumatic memories from WWII re-emerged. As those traumas never had been mourned they reappeared as fresh as ever. Nationalist leaders subsequently used them to fan the flames of ethnic fear and hatred that fuelled the wars in Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo.[39]

In interviews with high-ranking officials in 1991, I was struck by the frequency of reports of atrocities from the WWII era in the family background of leaders in Serbia and Croatia, reports that served as a legitimisation for their distrust of other ethnic groups.[40] This observation was later substantiated by reports from other leaders, such as Radovan Karadzic, who we did not interview.[41] Tito's failure to face the traumas led to devastating political consequences.

Unprocessed devastating blows to a people's sense of identity and self-esteem can lead to their being transformed into what the US psychiatrist Vamic Volkan calls *chosen traumas*, which constantly fuel ideas of retribution and redress.[42] This underlying dynamic of unresolved traumatic wounds underscores the importance of a societal mourning process in order that a population may leave its traumatic memories behind.

Failure to deal with the plight of victims can be disastrous for a society in yet another way. As trauma specialists van der Kolk & McFarlane note, "the cost of the re-enactment of trauma in society, in the form of child abuse, (domestic abuse,) continued violence, and lack of productivity, are staggering."[43]

A psychosocial paradigm of healing

The integrated model of healing presented here addresses trauma in ethnic warfare as a broad social concept. It encompasses the personal psychological trauma model but extends beyond it and puts it in its context. It is thus a *psychosocial paradigm for healing*, where what happens in the surrounding society is seen as infinitely affecting the healing process. It contains the following steps:*

1. Individual healing of inner wounds

    A. <u>Trauma group therapy</u>, "testimonial" therapies, or other culturally relevant ritual.

    B. <u>Education, job training,</u> and other measures to empower women.

2. Rebuilding safety, trust and social connectedness in the local community

3. Macro-level reconstruction of society with its impact on healing

    A. <u>Rebuilding of a democratic society</u> where women can feel safe and be members on equal terms.

B. <u>Rebuilding the economy</u> so that women can provide for themselves, rebuild their lives and establish some hope for the future.

C. <u>Re-establishing the rule of law,</u> with the perpetrators of war crimes put on trial.

D. <u>A societal mourning process</u> and rituals of social reparation.

4. Work towards reconciliation between ethnic groups.

On the surface this model may appear similar to the "Five Phase Psychosocial Recovery Model" presented by Kimberly Maynard,[44] but her model is focused on reconciliation rather than the interdependence of personal healing and societal actions, that is the core of my model.

Elaboration of aspects of the psychosocial model:

1. Healing the inner wounds

A. <u>Trauma support group or other culturally relevant rituals</u>

The importance of psychosocial support for people in war-torn societies has already been discussed in Section I. It is important to re-emphasize, however, that this must involve methods that are culturally attuned. In many non-western societies, trauma groups may not be the way to promote healing.

Trauma therapy of some sort is important for all segments of the population, but there is much to be said for doing this work separately for men, women, children, and teenagers. They probably will have a better chance to relate to one another´s experiences in such a group. For children, there are different forms of play therapy and expressive methods using drawing and painting, that can help them work through their traumatic wartime experiences.

Critical voices have noted that trauma therapy may risk "privatising" and "pathologizing" the experience of the victims.[45] This was not an issue in the trauma groups conducted in Bosnia. The group leaders underscored that trauma reactions are *natural reactions to unnatural events.* However, one needs help to overcome the stressful symptoms and the support groups were helpful in this respect. The trauma groups also filled an important empowerment function for women in BiH, and they were culturally attuned.

It is, however, critical, that the atrocities committed are registered and not buried in a trauma group so that they can add to the knowledge base about human evil from which future generations can learn. Testimonial work can be added parallel to or after the support group to address that issue (see 3 C).

An alternative method for trauma support, *testimonial therapy*, emphasizes the political aspect of trauma-inducing events. With this method, one gives testimony to the world about the atrocities experienced and thereby a record is established that is archived. Thus, history can be written based on what happened. One testimonial method was developed in Chile for the torture victims of the Pinochet regime (Agger and Jensen[46]). The psychoanalyst and survivor Dori Laub developed another version of testimonial therapy for Holocaust victims. His model has also been used with refugees from Bosnia in the US (Weine[47]). Testimonial therapy comes close to the statements that are recorded by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa.

Testimonial therapy is an individual model perhaps best adapted to a situation where work with the trauma is delayed. With large numbers of traumatized people who have recently experienced extensive stress reactions, a trauma support group is preferable. It gives victims a chance to work on all the difficult influences of trauma on their inner life. The mutual support in the group is also an important factor and the group setting provides an opportunity for trust to be rebuilt. The trauma groups also offer victimized women a place to go outside the home. It gives a structure to their day and helps them to start their life anew in spite of all their emotional baggage.
Trauma support groups can later be supplemented with testimonials or truth commissions if/when society is ready to accept such a process.

B. <u>Empowerment of women</u>

To leave their traumatic experiences behind, women must be able to perceive that they have a future. Therefore, psychosocial measures that can help empower women to build a new life are essential.

After the war many women are widows or single heads of households. The most important priority for them is an income-producing job so that they can provide for their families. But women in general need a chance to earn money to rebuild their lives. It is also important for them to be able to get out of the home and meet with others, as they can do in a working place.

Women naturally have different empowerment needs depending on their backgrounds-- whether they come from rural or urban areas, if they are young or old, if they have a good education or not. Women from rural areas may never have been exposed to the commercial job market. Development of job skills therefore often needs to be supplemented with work aimed at building these women's self-esteem. For professional women there is a need for leadership training and mentoring so that they will be able to take their place in politics and economics. The empowerment programs thus need to be varied.

Job-training, education, and income-generating projects that can give women access to new employment opportunities are essential to help remove the heavy burden of the economic losses inflicted by the war. In a study some years after the war, one of the main

causes of depression among women was unemployment.[48] Another researcher concludes: "*The centrality of paid work to women's reorganisation of their post-war lives cannot be overemphasized.*"[49] A societal program for job creation is thus essential. Different international organizations have offered micro-credit and income generating projects, to help women find new ways to earn an income and have job satisfaction.

It is important to start with the trauma groups before job training or study groups, so that women can have an opportunity to concentrate and also a chance to regain the inner peace that is necessary to focus on the task. The "Bosnian Women's initiative" (BWI) did not do this and it was correctly challenged by a Gorazde woman who asserted that "*the traumas of these people are not over with the last bullet.*"[50] The project was then extended to include trauma groups and psychosocial rehabilitation.

2. Rebuilding of trust and social connections in the local community

> *Traumatic events destroy the sustaining bonds between individual and community.*
> Judith L. Herman
> Trauma and Recovery

Restoring a trustworthy community has a healing effect for citizens in war-torn societies. In pre-war Bosnia, especially in the rural areas, the community was integrated through the social and reciprocal bonds created by women. "The break-up of these (social) networks has left people without the support systems from which they have drawn both moral and material support and lacking means for mitigating the consequences of the crisis."[51]

Nearly half the population of Bosnia & Herzegovina has been displaced. One million people fled the country and another million was internally displaced.[52] Most of them have had to resettle in new areas, as return to their homes was blocked for ethnic reasons in violation of the Dayton Peace Accords. Viet Q Nguyen-Gillham notes that "*the unraveling of social connections based on intimate inter-ethnonational ties makes the task of reconstruction even more intricate.*"[53]

Many rural women have moved into cities where they feel unwelcome and where they do not have a social network. Sadly enough they often are seen as "second class citizens." They also have their own prejudices against the urban people, which contribute to their problems of integration. To have lost their local network is often devastating for these women and translates into another stress within the family.

An initial restoration of social bonds can take place at women's centers and in the trauma groups. These women can begin to establish some trust in others and they can find the

emotional and practical support they yearn for. This budding trust can then be transferred to other social groups.

When women regain their inner strength, they often turn to helping others. Often they take part in different community activities and organize self-help groups to address urgent issues, such as child-care, support for the elderly, and after-school programs.

Restoring a trustworthy community has a healing effect on people who suffer from traumatic stress reactions, according to Shay.[54] *The Dayton Peace Accords however put very little emphasis on the importance of civil society and the organizations active within it*. However NGOs are the ones that more than any others, have worked to re-weave the fabric of society.[55] Already during the war, women started groups to address all the needs to which the state was unable to attend (providing trauma counseling, legal advice, health care etc.). After the war, when the state services still were in shambles, these organizations grew stronger with international support. Important networks have also been created between different women's NGOs.

Krishna Kuhmar notes that several factors contribute to the growth of women's organizations in post war societies: "Conflict not only undermined the traditional social order but also facilitated increased participation of women in public affairs. Second, some women became disillusioned with the leaders ... (and) founded women's organizations to promote a feminist agenda. Third ...The establishment of democracy, the codification of the right to form organizations and the emergence of relatively free media gave women, as well as other groups, unprecedented freedom to form their own organizations. Fourth, the international community largely channeled funds through NGOs to build up civil society institutions. It provided them generous assistance."[56]

Women often do not see themselves as agents of social change, but local women's groups have taken on the lion's share of this important work in Bosnia & Herzegovina. Much of the force behind social reconstruction comes from women's needs to "restore a semblance of normal life," and it helps give a sense of meaning and purpose even when post-war life is rather grim. The rebuilding of social connections is also part of restoring a social self-image that is essential to women's well-being.

"Women NGOs have also handled problems in society as they have been raised (such as domestic violence, trafficking), much earlier than the international community."[57] The recognition and appreciation of this local competence needs to be increased in international as well as in Bosnian governmental institutions. *Grass-roots organizations that help to restore some of the complicated social web make an important contribution to the healing process.*

A critical question is whether the existing women's NGOs can keep up their important work when the international community withdraws its support. Because there has been no economic progress, all entities in Bosnia & Herzegovina are strapped for resources and no internal funding is available.

3. Rebuilding of society and its effect on healing

A. Rebuilding of a democratic society with human rights protection

Initiating a democratic process that contains safeguards against the kind of atrocities that have been committed is essential. However, to build a society that safeguards the human rights of all citizens', institutions need to support multicultural values and uphold human rights in general.

The rebuilding period is critical because laws and institutions are then created that will be functionally influential for a long time.[58] It is thus crucial for women to be represented at the governmental level to have an impact on law-making and on institution-building. Traditionally, however, rebuilding efforts have neglected the importance of applying a gender perspective. "*The Dayton Peace Accords is very sparse on institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, neither does it mention any proactive measures for inclusion of women at the highest level of state institutions.*"[59] This significant omission has meant that crucial years for instituting long-term improvements for women in Bosnia & Herzegovina have been missed.

"The political agenda in Bosnia and Herzegovina has generally been set by male standards and male politicians."[60] If the goal is a truly democratic society benefiting from all the resources available, one needs to aim at equal participation of women in political and administrative processes. The international community realized their mistake in this respect, and in 1997, the UNDP began a consultative process to prepare the ground for development of a gender strategy in BiH. This program was discontinued, however, in December 1998 before any national mechanisms were put in place.[61]

There are presently no women in ministerial positions nor are there any women in higher governmental administrative positions in BiH who can look out for the interest of women. This lack of representation will seriously impair opportunities for a gender sensitive approach to important issues in society for long periods of time. It also overlooks the important contributions that women can make in society.

After the war, there was "a massive retrenchment of women from public life," as seen in all parliamentary bodies.[62] Many women voters consider politics to be corrupt and dirty and not related to women's needs. In a concerted effort through town meetings, local women's NGOs made women aware of the fact that politicians were the ones responsible for decisions on important issues such as healthcare, education, pensions, and disabilities that directly affect women's lives After a massive campaign before the elections in 1998 "Women in Politics," spearheaded by the OSCE Democratization Department, a quota system was initiated. The representation of women in parliament was vastly improved in these elections and the attitude toward women in politics changed markedly, becoming much more favorable. In the rewriting of the election law, however, some of this ground may again be lost as it is changing from a closed list to an open-list system.

Prevailing gender ideology in Bosnia & Herzegovina doubly constrains women's entry into politics and the economy because men are seen as responsible for the public sector and women for the home.

"Women's specific experiences and knowledge from times of war are also necessary to acknowledge in the work for sustainable and democratic institutions."[63] This was not realized for quite some time in international and governmental agencies and valuable time was lost. "The greatest amount of work for raising public awareness and work for decreasing domestic violence has been done by local women's NGOs throughout the region."[64] Since 1999, thanks to the intense lobbying of women's groups there is now a law in both entities of BiH criminalizing domestic violence. Although a major step forward, there is much work to be done to train the police force and the courts in how to implement the law before there will be any substantial practical results for women.

> *A holistic approach is needed to address institutional and societal as well as economic constraints to the advancement of women.*
> Eugenia Piza Lopez & Candida March
> at OXFAM workshop

B1. Economic rebuilding necessary if you want to start a new life

The economy was in jeopardy in Bosnia & Herzegovina before the war; afterwards it was in total shambles, with unemployment around 80%. On top of recuperating from the stresses of war, Bosnian society is going through a painful transition from a socialist planned economy to a capitalist market economy. The process of privatization is moving slowly and is fraught with complications. As in other parts of the former Eastern bloc, corruption is a serious problem as well. The lessons from the former Soviet Union have shown us the terrible ordeal this economic transition can create for vulnerable parts of the population, such as the elderly, the disabled, women, and children.[65]

The Dayton Peace Accords contained a blueprint for the rebuilding of a multi-cultural society in BiH. The system was set up in such a way, however, that any entity can veto the legislation if it is seen to be against the "national" interest of the particular ethnic group. This veto-power has been used excessively and has stalled the rebuilding process in several ways. The most critical is a lack of economic reforms, which has averted the interest of foreign investors. Thus, very few new companies are registered and the result is widespread unemployment. This has been particularly noticeable among women resulting in new suffering due to poverty, deprivation, and uncertainty about the future.

After the war, the nationalistic leadership in Bosnia and Herzegovina wanted women back at home to have babies (so called "revenge fertility") and the result was that women were squeezed out of the public arena and out of the public work force. In 1997, a draft labor law in the Federation emphasized women's reproductive role, diminishing opportunities for their advancement in the work place.[66] "Sending women back to the

home answers economic needs as well as getting rid of surplus labor and shifting the cost of welfare provisions back to the family."[67]

"Emergency employment programmes such as those implemented by the World Bank, ILO and bilateral donors are focused on large-scale infrastructure and public works aimed primarily at the employment of demobilized soldiers."[68] *There are three times as many jobs created for men as there are for women*. As the existing jobs are reserved for ex-soldiers and men in general there is widespread direct and indirect discrimination against women. Women are kept in low-paying jobs and those few women "who are employed receive wages 20-50 % lower than their male counter-parts."[69]

As there were no women at the peace negotiation table and no gender plan for the rebuilding of the economic structures, there are no women in executive positions or on corporate boards who can influence economic development. It took quite some time before the international community realized the importance of a gender perspective on economic restructuring plans (see *Engendering the Peace Process[70]*).

Rural women with no marketable job skills are doubly disadvantaged in post-war BiH society, but even professional women have few alternatives with the high unemployment rate. Women are left to take matters into their own hands. Some competent women have found work in international organizations or in NGOs funded by the international community. This is, however, a time-limited opportunity. Others have been forced to create jobs within the "gray economy" of market trading, an area that the state is now clamping down on. Still other women have been sucked into the sex-market in order to provide for themselves. Young displaced women in cities are vulnerable to trafficking and pimps when they see no other option to support themselves.[71]

Many young people have lost several years in school and there is a need for adult education where they have a chance to catch up in basic skills and also to become computer-literate. Many women from the countryside need to add on to their primary education as well.

International initiatives with "micro-credits", income-generating projects, and long-term development of work opportunities for women are of great importance, but they are severely lacking. Also, if these private ventures are to have a chance, a revision of the tax code is urgent. A new NGO law is also urgently needed to facilitate for NGOs to start income-generating projects.

"Politics and economics are inextricably linked throughout the world ... and one of the major hurdles to women's full and active participation in political life is their position in the economy."[72] Already when planning the rebuilding the international community needs to fund "labor market research ... to identify actual and potential employment and income-generating opportunities and, therefore, the skills that will be required, which can be developed and promoted through technical assistance."[73] This research has to evaluate the possibilities for men and women separately, which was not done in BiH.

Sara Gibbs notes that "*social and economic reconstruction is an important part of the healing process.*"[74] Getting the economy rolling is a huge undertaking, but an essential one if we want people to recover from their war traumas and have a life worth living. A failure to achieve some improvement in living standards can fuel new social tensions. The sad fact is that the economy has not improved in BiH. The problems with economic rebuilding and the lack of equal opportunities to get a job will probably affect women's possibilities to leave the difficult war times behind them. For the healing process to proceed one needs to have a sense of a future, and a future with an income that can help rebuild one's life.

The privatization process in Bosnia & Herzegovina also affects the housing situation because state enterprises owned many apartment buildings. The property laws go back to earlier patriarchal structures and create difficulties for widowed or divorced women to establish ownership of their apartment/house. Free legal support for women is thus essential to help them rearrange and rebuild their lives after the war. Many women NGOs try to provide this service free of charge, as women do not have the economic means for legal services on their own.

B 2. The dismantling of the well-fare system puts a heavy load on women

The lack of social protection in BiH today also discriminates women. The Bosnian government has signed a structural adjustment program (SAP) demanded by the IMF (International Monetary Fund) before giving loans and credits, which restricts the social welfare programs of the state. "Experience elsewhere has illustrated that women are likely to be disproportionately negatively impacted through the implementation of SAPs, which in Bosnia may also compound the gendered impacts of the war,"[75] Martha Walsh writes after evaluating the work- and economic situation for women in BiH. This is a problem in many places around the globe (see for instance Cullberg Weston, M. & Weston, B.[76]), that the IMF has not been willing to recognize.

Viet Q Nguyen-Gillham found that "*the dismantling of the social welfare net from before the war has been a source of bitter disappointment.* This is especially true of elderly people who now have pensions that they cannot live on and whose life is reduced to a situation in poverty." She finds that *the elderly feel abandoned by society. There is no new beginning for them.* They have gone through two wars and now they are left with ill health and lack of medical care and minuscule amounts in pension. They express their hopelessness and powerlessness in saying that "*waiting for death is all that is left.*"[77]

With the pension system in disarray the elderly constitute a large vulnerable group[78] and their care mostly falls back on women. There are also orphaned children taken care of by the extended family.

More than 200,000 people were wounded in the war, 13,000 of whom have permanent disabilities.[79] War veterans receive the most generous disability support while disabilities

unconnected to the war receive markedly less. Women caring for disabled children or other family members are thus at a marked disadvantage.

The burden to care for the disabled, the elderly, and children typically falls on women, who may then be incapable of holding a job. Single parent families with such burdens are in a "Catch-22" position. Poverty, as so often in the world, becomes an issue particularly daunting for women.

To leave war-time experiences behind, one needs to have a sense of a future, a future where one has an income that can sustain family life. The threat of poverty is not conducive to healing. If women do not feel supported by government vis-à-vis the heavy load they are carrying, this also will hamper the healing process.

C. Rebuilding a sense of justice

> *In a perfect society victims are entitled to full justice, namely trial of the perpetrator and, if found guilty, adequate punishment. The ideal is not possible in the aftermath of massive violence. There are simply too many victims and too many perpetrators. It is for that reason that such societies have to find other solutions.*
> Judge Richard J. Goldstone
> Former chief prosecutor, International Criminal Tribunals
> on the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda

"Nations, like individuals, need to face up to and understand traumatic past events before they can put them aside and move on to normal life,"[80] is the conclusion journalist Tina Rosenberg has come to after studying countries in transition.

Survivors of ethnic violence may feel a strong urge for retribution against perpetrators, but most of all they want a public acknowledgement of the crimes. It is thus important for the healing process that society takes action to assign responsibility for the massive human rights violations and the harm that has been done to people. The injury can never be undone, but the perpetrators need to be brought to trial so that the traumatized persons can rebuild a sense of order and justice. If this is not possible for political reasons there needs to be at least a process where the atrocities and the perpetrators are exposed and where the human rights violations are condemned. If possible, there also should be some form of compensation for the victims.

"*There are no tidy endings following mass atrocity*" is the curt verdict of the legal scholar Martha Minow in her penetrating discussion in *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness*. But "groping for a legal response marks an effort to embrace or renew the commitment to replace violence with words and terror with fairness."[81]

A war-crimes tribunal for the former Yugoslavia was set up in The Hague, but the majority of the perpetrators have not been indicted. Among those who have been indicted, only a fraction have been extradited to stand trial. This will probably be a major stumbling block for the traumatized people of Bosnia in their struggle to leave their past behind. When the perpetrators are left living in society with impunity, it undermines the healing process. It is important, however, that Milosevic has been put on trial at last for his role in the Balkan tragedy.

An estimated 20,000 or more women in BiH were raped during the war (the figures vary and are difficult to ascertain). Still, more than five years after the war, nearly all the rapists remain free as do the military commanders who exploited rape as a weapon. In a 1998 study, Human Rights Watch reported "that women are now saying that they don't want to testify. They want to get on with their lives. Women want justice and they have a need for justice. But they do not think they are going to get it."[82] Tragically, the momentum that was present after the war in Bosnia has been lost. In February 2001, however, the first sentences for rapes committed during the war were established. It is a major victory for women around the globe, however late.

"Trials following mass atrocities can never establish a complete historical record, despite all hopes. ... Only if we acknowledge that prosecutions are slow, partial, and narrow, can we recognize the value of independent commissions, investigating the larger patterns of atrocity and complex lines of responsibility and complicity," Martha Minow concludes.[83]

Restoring dignity to the victims is an important aspect of the healing process. If the legal process is too slow and too limited it might be wise to complement it with other measures, such as a truth commission or other forms of testimony. Such measures have not yet been seriously considered in BiH.

> *Through retribution the community corrects the wrongdoer's false message that the victim was less worthy or valuable than the wrongdoer; through retribution, the community reasserts the truth of the victim's value by inflicting a publicly visible defeat on the wrongdoer.*
>
> Jean Hampton, philosopher,
> quoted in *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness*

A truth commission gives more people a chance to bear witness and to testify about the atrocities, a factor that is important for the healing process. "*Testimony is a way to express truth in a personal and concrete way ...* they are essentially individual accounts but they embody collective experiences. Thus testimony has a double connotation of something private and individual, as well as something public and political," psychologist Inger Agger writes about her experiences from testimony work in Chile.[84]

"If the goal of healing individuals and society after the trauma of mass atrocity is elevated, truth commissions could well be a better option than prosecutions," Martha Minow concludes.[85] Truth commissions on the other hand have often been coupled with amnesty procedures, which can be difficult for victims to accept. The most well-known, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, is a compromise solution. The ANC, led by Nelson Mandela, wanted a truth commission while the old regime wanted a reconciliation commission with an amnesty clause. The acceptance of the amnesty "was the price for allowing a relatively peaceful transition to full democracy," but at least it was granted "only after full disclosure of the misdeeds of the perpetrator."[86]

Probably the best alternative is a combination of truth commissions and prosecution of high level war criminals in a tribunal or criminal court. Such an alternative would address the need for testimony, for letting the world know of the atrocities that took place and simultaneously provide for some redress of the many traumas as well as a chance to re-establish the rule of law.

In Bosnia "truth," however is very difficult to establish inasmuch as there are at least three major truths: the Bosniac, the Croat, and the Serb version of what took place during the war and why it happened. The end of the war did not result in the removal of nationalistic leaders in BiH. Thus there has been no unified platform for a truth-and/or reconciliation commission. To reconcile the different truths will be a major work in itself.

Under these difficult circumstances there is yet another possibility that has not been pursued: a "Testimony Project" wherein all three ethnicities can tell their stories. Victim testimonies would then be collected and documented and filed with some university archive.

> *What the survivor knows of genocide from personal experience can be a knowledge base for the work of making peace and preventing genocide.*
>
> Robert Lifton

The psychiatrist Stevan M. Weine presented this idea after having started an oral history archive in Chicago with testimonies from Bosnian refugees. He emphasizes that international support ought to be forthcoming to such a project because "historical remembering is not only a Bosnian, but a trans-national undertaking. ...The historical lessons of the nightmare of ethnic cleansing are not just for Bosnia and Herzegovina and its people, but for all of us."[87]

Despite good intentions, the slow, narrow, and limited work of the war crimes tribunal in The Hague has hampered the healing process in Bosnia. It is difficult to move on when perpetrators are living in society with impunity. Complementary measures might help people to leave the past behind.

"An allied vital question is that of official reparation for human rights crimes. Victims may better become survivors if some part of the legacy of the past can be addressed. ... *We must also acknowledge the pessimistic lessons of history, that there has always been little redemption for those massively wronged and that historical accounts are seldom settled*," says Derek Summerfield.[88] To secure reparations for victims is often not possible, although it has started to happen belatedly to some Jewish victims of the Nazi crimes, to the victims of political murder in Chile during Pinochet's reign, to the Native Indians in Canada, and so on. There is so far no talk of reparations in BiH and no one has taken the blame for the instigation of the ethnic war and the atrocities.

C. A societal mourning process

Many nations have created memorials such as monuments, sculptures, museums and days of memory to help people in the process of commemoration and healing. There are now numerous Holocaust museums around the world which honor the victims of the Nazi crimes and help the rest of us never to forget. Music, literature, and paintings honor the memories of the millions who suffered and help the victims in making the suffering visible to the world. There are plans for a memorial in Srebrenica and a burial site for some of the 7,000 men who were killed and disappeared when the UN "safe haven" was overrun by Serb militias under general Mladic in 1995. The government in Republica Srpska has so far refused and some four thousand bodies are waiting to be buried in the morgue in Tuzla.

In Chile and other Latin American countries, so called "*rituals of purification*" were performed as part of the collective healing process, where places that were soiled by murders and torture (such as soccer fields, stadiums) were cleansed in a ritual that brought these places back to normal use in society.[89]

Rituals that help the mourning on the societal level are important. When there is new leadership in a country ravaged by mass-killings, there is a greater chance that healing measures can be put in place on the societal level. In BiH, this is not yet the case. The nationalistic leaders also block measures aimed at revising the biased versions of the war taught in history lessons in schools.

The establishment of oral history archives (as Stevan M. Weine has suggested) may be one way to promote the societal mourning process if it is done in a balanced way, with recognition of the suffering among all parts of the Bosnian population. Such a procedure could initially be done separately for each ethnic group.

In many instances an official asking for forgiveness for mass murder takes place decades later, when the perspective on the shameful historical events has been accepted. *"When the war is no longer holy, the heroes become killers*," notes Inger Agger.[90]

The lack of systematic procedures that can support a healing process on the societal level in BiH and the fact that many alleged war criminals are walking around with impunity

have hampered people's chances to deal with their traumas and their chances to go on with their lives. This does not lead to a sense of justice or to law and order.

4. Work towards reconciliation

When a peace treaty is signed on the political level, the real work begins to restore peace in the local communities. The rebuilding of the broken social web is a slow process from the ground up, where the actions and resources at the grass-roots level are important.

Is it possible to forgive those who murdered your husband, your child, your friend? The outside world often links forgiveness and reconciliation. Forgiveness need not be a prerequisite for the process of reconciliation and it should not be pushed by the outside world. Reconciliation is the end product of a long chain of events where trust can gradually be rebuilt. And that takes time. Meanwhile the different (ethnic) groups need to learn to live side by side again -- to live and let live.

To come into a region ravaged by ethnic warfare and immediately start advocating reconciliation, as some international organizations have done, can inflict new traumas on people, who have already suffered enough. It is important to respect their pain and their need for some time for healing their inner wounds before work towards reconciliation can truly take place. It also needs to be a process full of small steps that are carefully orchestrated.

The tone set by leaders is of great importance, as we have seen in South Africa. There are, however, few leaders around the globe with the stature of Nelson Mandela, who managed to advocate reconciliation from the start. With the nationalistic leadership still in power in Bosnia & Herzegovina the work towards reconciliation is stalled.

Bosniac society had a concept called *merhamet*, a concept of *tolerance*, of accepting ethnic and religious diversity and denoting also a generous spirit. The war was an attack on that very Bosniac core value. Many Bosniacs are bitter; they feel that this openness towards others made them unprepared for the evil forces they encountered.

Some Bosniac women may use this core value as a way to be able to forget and go on. There is a risk, however, in leaving the atrocities behind <u>if</u> it is done without a mourning process and/or without some testimonial work. As we saw from Tito's Yugoslavia *forgetting is not the recipe*. That old "system favoured forgetting, this one must favour remembering."[91]

> *The most important thing is to learn how to live with what we went through, --not to forget.*
>
>   Bosnian woman

It is important to find a way of addressing the atrocities and using the experience of the survivors as a reminder to the rest of the world, without getting mired in the past. The way the nationalists manipulated the unmourned memories of atrocities committed by the Ustacha, the Chetnicks, and the Partisans however is a flagrant example of what is an unacceptable and regressive use of collective memories. It was used to fan the flames of ethnic discord and hatred.

There are numerous things that can be done to facilitate a dialogue between the different ethnic fractions, as time has put some distance to the war. People in this region know that they will have to cooperate in the future as they live side by side. There is a long list of measures that are worth implementing, such as joint economic projects, professional dialogues, joint media projects, and so on. *Reconciliation, however, is a long-term project that will have to continue for generations.*

Women are often the ones who have the strength and the courage to start a dialogue. Most often they have not taken an active part in the warfare and thus have a somewhat easier way of relating to other women across the ethnic divide. Many women NGOs have been at the forefront of efforts to affirm commitment to restoring a multi-ethnic and multicultural society. What has happened so far in the form of practical work and dialogue is the work of grass-roots organizations, among them some of the Kvinna till Kvinna partners. Some of the women centers have committed themselves to serving women of different ethnic backgrounds.

Shortly after the war, when hatred flourished, women NGOs managed to meet and co-operate across borders. It was a humbling experience to take part in a meeting in Zenica in June 1996, when women from all the different parts of BiH met for the first time for a conference (sponsored by the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation and HcA) to plan initiatives that would help women in post-war reconstruction. These women plunged into their working groups irrespective of what had taken place during four years of war. At night they sat together and sang the melancholy songs from all parts of the former Yugoslavia, songs from a lost period when they saw themselves as Yugoslavs. These were strong women, exceptional women, and many have followed in their footsteps.

Despite the goal of reconciliation set forth by the international community, not much has yet happened on the "macro" level due to the fact that the nationalistic leaders are still in control in many communities.

> *Experience shows us, women, compared to men, demonstrate a greater degree of adaptability and flexibility in assuming new social and economic roles enforced by the post-war period.*
>
> Emma Bonino
> European Commissioner for Humanitarian Affairs

Women as victims and/or as an asset in the rebuilding phase

The focus of this article is on trauma and its psychological impact, but it is also important to mention the resilience and the survival skills of people in war-torn areas. These qualities are certainly evident among the women in Bosnia & Herzegovina. Many women in BiH were actively engaged in providing help and relief to other women during the war and in the aftermath of the war. Those survival skills and the role of women as active agents in the work to reconstruct society are important to acknowledge in the total picture. To be able to take active part in the reconstruction and to be able to help others is an important empowerment process for women.

Emma Bonino notes[92] that women have an adaptability and flexibility that can be a great resource in the rebuilding phase. With proper support, *women are an abundant, motivated, and resourceful asset in the reconstruction work in post-war countries.* Up till recently this has been overlooked. Women have been captured in the "victim" category, which they certainly also are, but overlooking their resourcefulness is a serious mistake. To be able to take on an active role in the societal rebuilding process can actually contribute to the healing process for women in a major way in and of itself.

Concluding comments about the psychosocial model

The psychosocial model presented here underscores that healing is a multidimensional, long-term process that involves work on the individual, the local community, and "macro" levels in society. Efforts towards reconstruction of a safe, democratic, and economically viable society will benefit individuals struggling with their individual healing processes.
Studies of the healing process after ethnic warfare must include evaluation of the critical aspects of the rebuilding process on the "macro" level in society. These processes intimately influence people's opportunity to rebuild their lives and their hopes for the future, and thus also their opportunities for healing.
This model is used to study and analyze the data about the healing process for women in BiH in the report: *War is not over with the last bullet*, KtK, 2002.

THE KVINNA TILL KVINNA FOUNDATION –
WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT PROJECTS

The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation (KtK) was founded by Swedish women and the peace movement in Sweden in 1993. We work to support women and to strengthen women's position in areas affected by war and conflict, as well as in post-war societies in transition. We started our work in different parts of the former Yugoslavia.

The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation adjusts its support to the social, political and economical situations in the specific country, as well as to the relevant phase (war, cease fire or peace process). In times of conflict and early post-conflict periods, emergency aid, psychosocial support and trauma treatment have to be offered to give people a chance to start to heal and to build the strength to believe in the future. Still, emergency aid has to be followed up by, and combined with, long-term support.
Women need empowerment in terms of strengthening of their self-esteem and further education and job training. They also need knowledge about women's human rights and support in order to be able to take part in the institution-building and in the reconstruction of a true democratic society. Working towards a sustainable development, The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation offers support to local organisations on a long-term basis. We focus on local women's initiatives, long-term engagement, empowerment of women and low key projects that start small.
.
We have supported initiatives such as mobile health service, women's centres providing trauma support groups, study programs, job-training, centres for free legal aid, women's seminars and conferences about gender issues, media programs focussed on women, initiatives to extend the number of women in politics, initiatives to address problems of domestic violence and trafficking in women, and also creating regional networks for women NGOs in different parts of West Balkans.

The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation model is one of co-operation based on mutual respect and close working contact with local organisations. We do not implement projects ourselves. Our local co-operating partners identify problems and formulate measures, based on their competence and knowledge of local needs and situations. With our support they develop the project plan and the funding application. Transfer of know-how takes place through close and continuous contacts between our co-ordinators and the partner organisations, a process that also leads to transparency. As the projects are local initiatives they are more sustainable. The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation contributes financial help, supervision, guidance, and developmental and organizational support. We also serve as an important intermediary in the establishment of women's networks, on local, regional as well as on international levels.

The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation also works to influence the international community in mainstreaming their activities and to introduce a gender perspective on peace negotiations and the peace-building/ reconstruction process. For this purpose we produce a series of reports with a gender perspective on the peace-building and reconstruction process.

We have recently started to support projects also in Israel, Palestine, and in the Caucasus region (Georgia).

Appendix I: The diagnostic criteria for PTSD in DSM IV[*]

A. <u>The person has been exposed to a traumatic event in which both of the following were present:</u>
1) the person experienced, witnessed, or was confronted with an event/events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others
2) the person's response involved intense fear, helplessness, or horror.

B. <u>The traumatic event is persistently re-experienced in one (or more) of the following ways</u>:
1) recurrent and intrusive distressing recollections of the event, including images, thoughts or perceptions
2) recurrent distressing dreams of the event
3) acting or feeling as if the traumatic event were recurring (includes a sense of reliving the experience, illusions, hallucinations, and dissociative flashback episodes, including those that occur on awakening or when intoxicated)
4) intense psychological distress at exposure to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble and aspect of the traumatic event
5) physiological reactivity on exposure to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event.

C. <u>Persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma and numbing of general responsiveness (not present before the trauma), as indicated by three (or more) of the following</u>:
1) efforts to avoid thoughts, feelings, or conversations associated with the trauma
2) efforts to avoid activities, places, or people that arouse recollections of the trauma
3) inability to recall an important aspect of the trauma
4) markedly diminished interest or participation in significant activities
5) feeling of detachment or estrangement from others
6) restricted range of affect (e.g. unable to have loving feelings)
7) sense of a foreshortened future (e.g. does not expect to have a career, marriage,children, or a normal life span).

D. <u>Persistent symptoms of increased arousal (not present before the trauma), as indicated by two (or more) of the following</u>:
1) difficulty falling or staying asleep
2) irritability or outbursts of anger
3) difficulty concentrating
4) hypervigilance
5) exaggerated startle response.

E. <u>Duration of the disturbance (symptoms in Criteria B,C, and D) is more than one month.</u>

F. <u>The disturbance causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.</u>

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[*] From DSM – IV, Fourth Ed., APA, 1994.

References and Notes

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The five steps in Maynard's model are: 1) Establishing safety, 2) Communalization and bereavement, 3) Rebuilding trust and the capacity to trust, 4) Re-establishing personal and social morality, and 5) Reintegrating and restoring democratic discourse.
The first three steps are a limited version of the psychological healing model I have already presented. Step 4 and 5 are phrased in a way that gained my interest and they seem to correspond quite closely to parts of my model. However the important issue of putting the perpetrators of war crimes on trial or some other way to address the atrocities is not mentioned under the fourth phase, nor are the effects of socio-political actions addressed under phase five, instead they are limited to some reconciliation efforts. Neither is the economic restructuring nor the rebuilding of the local community integrated in the model.

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