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Reconciliation Across Religious/Political Borders: Westphalian Norms and the Legacy of the Bosnian War

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The question of reconciliation within the legacy of the 1992-1995 conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina presents religious ethicists with a challenge. A promising resource for this challenge lies in the relationship between religious and political borders, which complements the formal, juridical character of transitional justice. The religious/political borders relationship does not apply to all reconciliation-related cases, yet it does bear on cases in which religious/political identities overlap and questions of sovereign territoriality are at issue. The Bosnian conflict not only fulfills these criteria; its legacy reveals it as a harbinger of contemporary changes in norms associated with sovereignty. Because of their background in the Peace of Westphalia of 1648, these changes can be labeled "toxic Westphalianism," in which adherence to Westphalian norms remains, even as its anchoring distinctions have become unmoored. These claims suggest two further contributions to the ethical engagement with reconciliation. First, the historical approach demonstrates the value of tracing reconciliation to its roots. Second, self-conscious attention to religious-political relations carves out a distinct and important role for religious ethics, which is uniquely placed to navigate between internal and external borders of a religious tradition and promote better forms of public and interfaith engagement.

Introduction

Passing along the major pedestrian thoroughfare in central Sarajevo, one encounters a striking sight. It is a border. Beneath a sign that reads, "Sarajevo Meeting of Cultures," a line cuts across the middle of the street that demarcates not only Habsburg and Ottoman Sarajevo, but also Christian and Muslim spaces. On both sides of this line, the atmosphere is friendly and bustling, the spirit welcoming. Yet just as present across the city are the countless reminders of violence and of pain within a still-remembered past. These reminders include not only the curated sites of the memorial to the Srebrenica tragedy or the Museum of Crimes Against Humanity and Genocide, but also buildings and streets whose damage during the Seige of Sarajevo has gone unrepaired. In spite of the settlement of the Dayton Accords that outlined a General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia

and Herzegovina and ended the 1992-1995 war (which is henceforth referred to as the Bosnian conflict) —and in spite of the resilience of countless inspiring individuals[1]—these damages tell of a country that remains unreconciled decades after the conflict's formal resolution.

The city of Münster, the historic capital of Westphalia, makes a different impression. Its atmosphere is one of stability and quiet contentment. Above the gabled houses of the Prinzipalmarkt, the city's main street, rises the spire of the Church of St. Lamberti, which since 2022 has been electrified with a ladder representing an ascension into Heaven. Just below this ladder's base, however, are three cages that contained the bodies of the leaders of the Anabaptist Rebellion of 1535-1536, which was one of the Reformation's bloodiest episodes.[2] The cages have been fixed, preserved, and displayed in this spot across the destructions of the centuries, most notably the city's reduction to rubble in 1944-1945. If these cages speak of historical violence, only 200 meters from this spot lies the Hall of Peace, where the Peace of Westphalia was signed in 1648 as the resolution of the Thirty Years War and the end of Europe's post-Reformation wars of religion.[3] In a manner that would have surprised the signatories of these treaties, which never once mentioned the word "sovereignty," this event gave rise to what is known as the Westphalian System of international relations, a normative order that came to be associated with territory, statecraft, and borders.

Münster and Sarajevo are not cities that one would typically think to compare. Nevertheless, they are connected in ways that shed light on both the religious/political borders relationship and the search for reconciliation following violent conflict. The two cities are linked as respective bookends of the Westphalian System of international borders and sovereignty, even as they also occupy very different positions relative to the idea of Europe. Münster's historical sites speak from the inception of the Westphalian System, whereas Sarajevo's have been a harbinger of its eclipse. Münster lies firmly within Europe; Sarajevo sits near its borders. Out of these cities' shared histories, contrasting geographies, and entwined legacies can be drawn an invaluable resource for reconciliation, which is the relation of religious and political borders to Westphalian sovereignty.

In its most basic sense, Westphalian sovereignty (or 'Westphalianism') refers to a set of normative assumptions about sovereignty that emerged out of the Protestant Reformation and the rise of European colonialism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, incubated the political and industrial revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, achieved its apex in shaping empirical conditions to align with its normative ideals from the late-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries, and has been steadily losing this capacity since the 1970s through a complex combination of economic, technological, and migration-related factors bound up within globalization. Among the distinctive features of Westphalianism are territory, boundedness, and mutual recognition among states. More precisely, Westphalianism implies singular and undifferentiated

[1] For a chronicle of such heroic persons, see Zilka Spahić Šiljak's *Shining Humanity: Life Stories of Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2014), which pays tribute to the peacebuilding efforts of eleven women across Bosnia and Herzegovina.

[2] For an invaluable local history of this event, see Willem De Bakker, Michael Driedger, and James M. Stayer's 'Städtische Reformation und Täuferbewegung in Münster: Historiographie, Rezeption und Erinnerung in vergleichender Perspektive' (*Westfälische Forschungen* 66, 2016, pp. 39-71).

[3] A similar ceremony also took place in the nearby city of Osnabrück For an authoritative English-language historiography of these treaties, see Derek Croxton's *Westphalia: The Last Christian Peace* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2013).

sovereignty *within* a given territory; sharply discontinuous and mutually exclusive sovereignties *between* multiple territories—a combination which puts an emphasis on territorial borders.

A particular contribution that the article makes is its demonstration of how reconciliation can be linked both to patterns of historical reception and to relationships among different types of borders. A key claim here is that if reconciliation cannot take place except across some kind of border, however nonliteral, and if every border has a history and specifically a point in the past at which it first emerged, then thinking about the history of borders is essential, not for the sake of erasing a given border altogether so much as reimagining it to be less antagonistic or exclusionary. The article responds to a specific type of need for reconciliation, which is defined as a restoration of trust and repair of a damaged bilateral or communal relationship following a rupture or conflict. More precisely, it aims to disclose ethical resources for reconciliation in a specific type of case. As an exemplar of this type, the Bosnian conflict has a legacy in which religious and political identities are mutually enmeshed and reconciliation remains elusive in spite of the formal structures that have been established on behalf of transitional justice.

The article unfolds across four sections. First, it briefly sketches the legacy of the Bosnian conflict in terms of reconciliation, doing so in a way that calls for complementarity between reconciliation and formal procedures on behalf of transitional justice. Second, it expands the frame of reference by contextualizing the Bosnian conflict in terms of the background, coalescence, and toxification of norms associated with the Westphalian System of sovereignty, territoriality, and membership. Third, it traces an account of the relationship between religious and political borders. The argument here is that religious borders—which is to say the borders within and between religious traditions—have the potential to serve as sites for reconciliation that can be applied politically; on this view, religious ethics occupies a crucial role as placed at the intersection of internal and external borders of a religious tradition. Fourth, in a short conclusion, it speculates on further applications.

The Legacy of the Bosnian Conflict

Reflecting on the legacy of the 1992-1995 Bosnian conflict, one can make three rather non-contentious claims. First, in spite of efforts on behalf of transitional justice, including the establishment of a court to adjudicate war crimes charges, neither the society of Bosnia and Herzegovina nor the country's political system has been truly reconciled.[4] Second, religious factors were integral to the conflict, not only in a localized manner but also in a deeper, more historical sense, and engaging with interreligious dynamics is a relevant and valuable component of the search for reconciliation. Third, in spite of agreement among scholars that transitional justice entails truth-telling measures, reparations for victims, and institutional reform[5], and in spite of efforts to standardize these as the first tier of a two-

[4] Dino Abazović. 'Political reconciliation: Illustration from Bosnia and Herzegovina'. Keynote lecture, Societas Ethica Conference in Sarajevo (24 August 2023).

[5] Pablo De Greiff, 'Transitional justice, security, and justice.' Background paper, World Development Report 2011 (29 October 2010). Online at: https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/9245/WDR2011_0015.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y (accessed 18 February 2024), p. 2.

tiered system (with the second tier consisting of less formal measures)[6], approaches to reconciliation are still needed that complement the formal processes of transitional justice. In other words, it is worth exploring reconciliation in a way that complements the formalized work on behalf of transitional justice (which is a difficult practical issue that is understandably dominated by legal and political questions). Although the Bosnian conflict is represented here more as an instructive case than an object of sustained study, there is no question that the larger-scale relations between sovereignty, reconciliation, and borders explored by this article are manifested in its legacy.

Two books bear mentioning that address the role of religion in the Bosnian conflict and explicitly grapple with the topic of reconciliation: R. Scott Appleby's *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation* and Miroslav Volf's *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*. The books approach their topic from different directions. The perspective of Appleby is etic, i.e., from the outside, which reflects his training as a historian and is reflected in his minimalist definition of religion in terms of the sacred. He is interested in grappling with religion as a public phenomenon that can promote peace as well as incite violence. The perspective of Volf is emic, i.e., from the inside, which reflects his training as a theologian and is expressed, for example, in his interpretation of Trinitarian doctrine on behalf of a theology of embrace.

In spite of their different starting points, Appleby's and Volf's books complement one another in important ways. Both authors, for example, write about the Bosnian war as an instructive and cautionary case in which religious and political identities become indistinguishable in a kind of exclusionary fusion. Both authors interpret the conflict as one in which political forces co-opt and appropriate religious symbols with violent consequences. More generally, both authors understand that *internal* divisions within a religious community have consequences for how the *external* border of that community is enforced or maintained. Both authors therefore see a constructive public role for religion as a force for reconciliation.[7] Appleby argues, for example, that it was precisely the lack of religious literacy on the part of the public or engagement on the part of religious leaders in favor of peace that resulted in the peacebuilding tendencies in the Catholic, Orthodox, or Muslim communities to be neglected.[8] In that regard, Volf's book, as a thoughtful struggle with violence and reconciliation that is also deeply theological from within a life of faith, actually embodies some of what Appleby believes religions are capable of at their best.

As much promise as there is in these two texts as brought together, there is an important historical dimension that is missing from both books. To his credit, Volf recognizes this in an updated edition of *Exclusion and Embrace*, providing some historical perspective. As he puts it, "The whole globe looks now more like Yugoslavia did on the eve of the outbreak of hostilities among its ethnic groups than like Europe did when the Berlin Wall, that symbol of the bipolar world, came down and the European Union was expanding."[9] Yet Volf's analysis of either the present situation in Europe or of Bosnia in

[6] Line Engbo Gissel, 'The standardisation of transitional justice', *European Journal of International Relations* 28:4 (2022), pp. 859-884, at p. 864.

[7] This has continued with more recent works, e.g., R. Scott Appleby, 'The Global Resurgence of Religion: Prospects and Perils for World Peace', *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World*, edited by Indunil J. Kodithuwakku K. (Libreria Editrice Vaticana: Pontifical Council on Interreligious Dialogue, 2022), pp. 373-388.

[8] R. Scott. Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), p. 69.

[9] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace, Revised and Updated: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2019), p. xiv.

the 1990s does not extend back beyond the twentieth century, nor for that matter does Appleby's, other than a brief historical overview of the respective historical trajectories of the Muslim, Catholic, and Orthodox communities in the Balkan Peninsula. Such an oversight can be corrected through investigation into the history of Europe and the ambivalence of borders.

Bosnia and the Westphalian System

The present section charts the rise and eclipse—or as I more specifically put it, the toxification—of the norms of the Westphalian System as relevant to reconciliation in general and the Bosnian conflict in particular. The argument I make here is that, from their origins in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Westphalian norms—bounded, uniform, mutually-recognized, and mutually-exclusive territorial states—blended politics, religion, membership, and sovereign territoriality in historically specific ways. These norms are historically powerful, and they remain so, even in what I call toxic form.

The idea that Westphalian norms have become toxic is unique and bears unpacking. This phrase, "toxic Westphalianism," expresses the pining for a sense of political space that never truly existed in actuality, yet is now being vehemently defended and exploited to mobilize the attainment of political power, especially as the global order comes decreasingly to resemble the Westphalian normative framework. The term, like "toxic masculinity" relative to masculinity per se, is meant to be understood as a specific—and specifically bad—version of Westphalianism more broadly. Specific characteristics of Toxic Westphalianism include: hardening territorial borders *physically* as a counterpart to "the border" rising in prominence within public discourse *symbolically*; a discrepancy of norms/facts that excludes non-members of the polity from political participation, blurs religion and politics, and transgresses planetary boundaries precisely to the extent that empirical conditions diverge from norms; and the ambivalent appearance within politics of forces that were constitutively excluded from the political in Westphalian sovereignty at the time of its formation: religious, colonized, and nonhuman agencies; this is ambivalent because, in spite of the liberative potential of these forces, they risk being coopted by—or even furthering—political antagonisms.

To the extent that the claim that the current period is characterized by "Toxic Westphalianism" is innovative, the innovation lies in how it attends to the changing dynamics among anchoring distinctions essential to the Westphalian System (religion/politics, Europe/non-Europe, human/nonhuman), which have become unsettled in recent decades through a complex combination of economic, ecological, technological, and geopolitical forces, even as Westphalian norms have retained their hold in the popular imagination on questions of sovereignty, territory, and belonging.[10] For an

[10] This is a claim for which there is considerable scholarly support. For a study that focuses on the colonial dimension, see, for example, the notion of 1492 and a massive "exclusion" in Enrique Dussel's *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of "the Other" and the Myth of Modernity*. Translated by M.D. Barber (New York: Continuum, 1995). For an approach that opens onto ecological questions and philosophy of science, see Bruno Latour's *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991). For a richly detailed global systems approach, see Saskia Sassen's *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006). For a particularly challenging corroboration, see Carl Schmitt's *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum* (New York: Telos Press Publishing, 2006). Schmitt's account shares certain traits with the account given here, including a sense that an older order (nomos) has been eclipsed, an order in which a political theology remained embedded and which depended on a sharp

analogy from moral philosophy, consider Alasdair MacIntyre's "disquieting suggestion" that begins his book, *After Virtue*. MacIntyre describes a scenario in which the natural sciences have fallen into some catastrophe and then been subject to an effort of reconstruction. MacIntyre's suggestion is that discourses on morality have suffered some such fracturing. "What we possess," he suggests, "are the fragments of a conceptual scheme, parts which now lack those contexts from which their significance derived," even as "[w]e possess simulacra[…]and we continue to use many of the key expressions."[11] In using the term "toxic Westphalianism," I am suggesting that something like this has occurred with respect to the vocabularies of sovereignty, territoriality, and borders associated with the Westphalian System.

The idea of toxic Westphalianism can only be understood relative to the historical arc of Westphalian sovereignty from its origins in early-modern Europe.[12] Fundamental to the historical background from which the Westphalian System emerged were two world-historical events: the onset of the age of discovery and intercontinental European colonization beginning in the late fifteenth century and the Protestant Reformation and subsequent wars of religion in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In both cases, fundamental questions of religious membership, political identity, and sovereign territoriality were being worked out, often at an enormous cost in human life. The date of 1492, for example, is significant for two reasons, both of which have been captured by José Casanova. On one hand, 1492 "marks the decision of the most 'Catholic Kings' to expel Jews and Muslims from Spain in order to create a religiously homogeneous realm."[13] On the other hand, the year "is also the symbolic marker of the beginning of the European global colonial expansion initiated by the Iberian monarchies."[14] These developments represent a significant step from pre-modern to modern borders, in that modern bordering has always existed within a global context that reaches well beyond Europe. Modern bordering has also entailed the capacity of the state to recognize political membership, often in ways that overlap with cultural identities, including religious ones.

Another step from medieval toward Westphalian norms came in 1555, which was the date of the Peace of Augsburg, an attempt at a political settlement in the wake of the fracturing of Christendom in northern Europe brought about by the Protestant Reformation. The Peace of Augsburg sought to resolve the social upheaval—and considerable violence—that had followed in Central Europe in the wake of the Protestant Reformation. Particularly significant for the Augsburg peace was the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio*, which assigned membership in a given religious denomination (at the time, only Catholic and Lutheran options were considered) to a given territory based on whichever identity was professed by the ruling figure in that territory. What makes this significant in the story of the rise of modern bordering is that the respective states' interests in internal homogeneity, or at least the power to seek such homogeneity, existed alongside an intricate patchwork of political entities in close proximity with one another.

Europe/non-Europe distinction. However, Schmitt is no friend of the notion of reconciliation, seeing as he does the distinction between friend and enemy as the *sine qua non* of the political.

[11] *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, Third Edition (South Bend, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), p. 1.

[12] This section of the article revisits arguments developed within my monograph, *Our Common, Bordered Home: Laudato si' and the Promise of an Integrated Migration-Ecological Ethics* (Leiden: Brill, 2024); see pp. 64-68.

[13] José Casanova, *Global Religious and Secular Dynamics: The Modern System of Classification.* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), p. 18.

[14] Casanova, *Global Religious and Secular Dynamics*, p. 18.

The date that, understandably, has most been associated with the Westphalian System is 1648, which was the year that the treaties that brought an end to the Thirty Years War were signed in the towns of Münster and Osnabrück. The significance of these treaties, which are often known as the Peace of Westphalia, with regard to modern sovereignty has been contested by historians.[15] Even though such criticisms are well taken, it is nevertheless possible to identify developments germinal for modern sovereignty in association with this date. Matthew Longo sums up the legacy of Westphalia as "important first and foremost in establishing sovereignty over territory as an organizing principle of the system of states –i.e., the 'territorialization' of space."[16] As already noted, this legacy is also bundled up with a set of deeply ingrained norms, including the uniform distribution of sovereignty within a given territory, mutual recognition on the part of neighboring states, and, ideally, a kind of geometric purity of borders as lines that divide territory into clean and easily recognizable zones.

For the sake of historical accuracy, it is important to point out that at no time—not in 1648, not now—have real-world conditions matched the norms bundled together under the Westphalian heading. Initially, however, the settlement of 1648 and the stability ushered in in its aftermath did bring about an *increase* in those conditions. This is in contrast to the present situation, in which conditions are moving *away* from said norms. This shift is an important and comparatively proximate background to the claim that Westphalianism has become toxic. This transition can be charted in an evolution on the part of key distinctions that anchored Westphalian sovereignty from its origins in early modernity.

Three distinctions, in particular, emerged in the decades after 1648 and became bound up with Westphalian assumptions about modern territory and politics, two of which are especially relevant for present purposes: Europe/non-Europe and politics/religion.[17] Regarding the former distinction, Europe/non-Europe can be transposed in the form of a parallel distinction: border/frontier. The word *border*, which has a Saxon etymology, suggests "a place of friction or meeting where alterity is negotiated." As Anne-Laure Amilhat-Szary points out, "[B]orders are a kind of space where the relationship with otherness can be developed in such a way as to allow for identity-building and place-making."[18] *Frontier*, derived from Latin, is very different, having "its roots in the 'front'" and attesting to the "rivalries and battles that took place before linear devices known as boundaries were in use."[19] At the risk of oversimplification, at the moment the European political order was settling into an equilibrium of mutually

[15] For example, according to Andreas Osiander, the Peace of Westphalia "did not establish the 'Westphalian system' based on the sovereign state" so much as confirm and perfect a "system of mutual relations among autonomous political units"('Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Westphalian Myth', *International Organization* 55:2, 2001, pp. 251-287, at p. 270).
[16] Matthew Longo, *The Politics of Borders: Sovereignty, Security, and the Citizen After 9/11* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 47.
[17] The third key distinction is human/nonhuman. For more on the relation of this distinction to Westphalian sovereignty, see Rafi Youatt's *Interspecies Politics: Nature, Borders, States* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2020).
[18] Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary, 'Boundaries and borders', *Handbook of Political Geography*, edited by Agnew, John et al. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), pp. 13-25, at p. 2.
[19] Amilhat Szary, 'Boundaries and borders', p. 2.

recognized states via borders, these same states were competing for territory via the frontiers of expanding colonial empires.[20]

As for the religion/politics distinction, Derek Croxton has called the 1648 Peace of Westphalia the "last Christian peace," not because religion ceased to be a factor in European politics, but because "[n]ever again would religious dissention be the driving force behind a major European conflict."[21] As Andreas Osiander has noted, the 1648 Peace "mandated a certain amount of legal protection for the adherents of minority faiths,"[22] which might at first seem like a diminishment of state powers. However, the removal—or perhaps more accurately, the sublimation—of religion from the decisive role it had played in political identity *enhanced* state powers. This is because the state's power to determine its subjects' status was now removed of a powerful intermediary, a major step toward modern forms of state-sanctioned political belonging within a territory. William Cavanaugh has corroborated this claim, arguing that even the 1555 Peace of Augsburg was a sign of dominance of secular rulers over the Church.[23]

A key claim of this article is that a link between Bosnia and Westphalia exists in what I call "toxic Westphalianism," the recognition of which is an essential step toward realizing the potential of religious borders as a resource for reconciliation. As argued above, the outward appearance of Westphalian norms persists in public life even as the Europe/non-Europe and religion/politics distinctions have become confounded and blurred. Regarding religion/politics, for example, there has been a resurgence in recent years of religious populism in politics that transcends religious traditions.[24] When interacting with the persistent norms of the Westphalian system, the capacity of religions to motivate tribalism and exclusion is clear.[25] With regard to Europe/non-Europe, at the outset of the "age of discovery" and for a long time thereafter, the prevailing attitude among Europeans toward non-European territories, above all the Americas, was one of frontiers, a vacuum, a *terra nullius* to be filled. The divergence between frontier and border, non-Europe and Europe, was not only driven by the same forces, and thus profoundly intertwined. Now, this distinction is becoming less clear. According to Dipesh Chakrabarty, "we stand today on the threshold of an age when borders are becoming frontiers again."[26] In the midst of such a widespread sense of a loss of control, sovereignty

[20] For further nuance on different phases of colonial expansion in view of a pre/post-1648 distinction, see Walter Mignolo's *Local Histories/Global Designs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).
[21] Croxton, *Westphalia: The Last Christian Peace*, p. 345.
[22] Osiander, 'Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Westphalian Myth', p. 272.
[23] William T. Cavanaugh, "A Fire Strong Enough to Consume the House': The Wars of Religion and the Rise of the State', *Modern Theology* 11:4 (1995), pp. 397-420, at p. 400. For an expansion of this claim, see Cavanaugh's *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
[24] For an exploration of these developments across diverse perspectives, see Ulrich Schmiedel and Joshua Ralston's co-edited volume, *The Spirit of Populism: Political Theologies in Polarized Times* (Leiden: Brill Press, 2021).
[25] This is evidenced by the "Rosary at the Borders," which was an event in Poland in October 2017 in which thousands marched along the Polish national borders in defense of a "Catholic Poland" against an "Islamic invasion." For further exploration of this event, see Valentina Napolitano's 'Francis, a Criollo Pope', *Religion and Society* 10:1 (2019), pp. 63-80, at p. 74.
[26] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *The Crises of Civilization: Exploring Global and Planetary Histories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 232.

becomes a spectacle that must be performed, and borders become the prime theater of this performance.[27]

That the contemporary turn toward toxic Westphalianism was prefigured in the 1992-1995 Bosnian conflict is evidenced in how that conflict confounded both the Europe/non-Europe and religion/politics distinctions. This claim finds support from an essay from political theorist Étienne Balibar, "At the Borders of Europe." Reflecting on the Bosnian conflict in relation to Europe/non-Europe, for example, Balibar notes, "[O]n the one hand, the Balkans are a part of Europe and, on the other, they are not." [28] As he puts it, "Either Europe will recognize in the Balkan situation not a monstrosity grafted to its breast, a pathological 'aftereffect' of underdevelopment or of communism, but rather an effect and effect of its own history[…].[29] Regarding religion/politics, Balibar links the Bosnian conflict to the intermingling of religious and secular identities, albeit indirectly through the notion of borders. For Balibar, "the zones called peripheral, where secular and religious cultures confront one another, where differences in economic prosperity become more pronounced and strained, constitute the melting pot for the formation of a people[…].[30] By the assumptions bound up with Westphalian norms, interreligious relations are to be politically submerged and sidelined in a world in which the norms of politics, at least outwardly, remain defined by sovereign and territorially bounded nation-states. However, in the Bosnian conflict, not only were religious and political identities imbricated in empirically documented and challenging ways, but the very notion of sovereignty arguably manifested what theologian Catherine Keller has referred to as a "largely hidden theology always at play, for good or for ill, *within* the political."[31] In its demonstration of the unmooring of the Europe/non-Europe and religion/politics distinctions that had anchored Westphalian normativity, the Bosnian conflict was a harbinger.

There is an argument to be made, however, that if religious borders are foundational to the normative order of the Westphalian system and its achievement of political borders, then there is a way to rethink religious borders with political consequences that is relevant for reconciliation. To articulate this argument, it is necessary to explore the relationship between religious and political borders at greater depth.

Borders: Religious and Political

One finds, in political borders, the *need* for reconciliation, in religious borders, the *capacity* for reconciliation, and, in the mutual ambivalence of both borders types, a *connective point* by which reconciliation in one category of bordering can be extended to and applied in the other. To support this claim, it is necessary to be clear on how the respective types of borders are defined, and also how they can influence one another.

At its most general, a *border* is simply a signified distinction between two things. *Religious* borders are points at which the contrasts between or within religious traditions

[27] See, for example, Wendy Brown's *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).
[28] Étienne Balibar, *We, The People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 4.
[29] Balibar, *We, The People of Europe?*, p. 6.
[30] Balibar, *We, The People of Europe?,* p. 1.
[31] Catherine Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), p. 10. See also Robert Yelle's *Sovereignty and the Sacred: Secularism and the Political Economy of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).

become explicit and self-conscious to the members of the cultures in question or third parties, giving rise to narratives that reinforce said contrasts. *Political* borders are demarcations between neighboring sovereign territories, in which sovereignty is typically understood in adherence to the norms of mutual recognition, mutual exclusion, and uniform distribution across each territory in question. There are also three basic points worth making as to how borders are to be understood.

First, borders represent both an analytical opportunity and moral challenge. As Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson write, "Insofar as it serves at once to make divisions and establish connections, the border is an epistemological device, which is at work whenever a distinction between subject and object is established."[32] However, as Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary also admits, "[A]ny kind of place where an object and a subject are to be thought together is a theater of unequal relations and domination processes."[33] This puts borders in the odd position of being both relevant to ethics as a problem but also beneficial to ethics as a resource. Either way, they demand ethical attention.

Second, engaging with borders opens onto norms, communities, and practices and can reveal a lot about how communities think. As Richard B. Miller writes with respect to Christianity, for example, "Boundaries are important because they define an order of being and value, along with corresponding attitudes that should structure the Christian life."[34] Normatively, it is important to point out in this regard that both forms of borders have a normative significance that exceeds their descriptive significance.[35] This is the case because borders are constitutively semiotic, in that the meaning of borders lies in how they signify something to someone who interprets them. This means that they are bound up with all kinds of assumptions.

Third, it is possible to think across multiple distinctions, multiple types of borders *together*, exploring how one distinction affects another. One can do this deductively, in thinking through what follows in bringing logical pairs together, or inductively, in seeking to taxonomize things observed from the world. In such reasoning, the logical operations of metaphor and metonymy both play valuable roles.[36] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson capture the distinction between metaphor and metonymy as "different *kinds* of processes."[37] As they put it, "Metaphor is principally a way of conceiving one thing in terms

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[32] Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor* (New York: Duke University Press, 2013), p. 16.
[33] Amilhat Szary, 'Boundaries and Borders', p. 10.
[34] Richard B. Miller, 'Christian Attitudes toward Boundaries: Metaphysical and Geographical', *Boundaries and Justice: Diverse Ethical Perspectives*, edited by David Miller and Sohail H. Hasmi (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 15-37, at p. 16.
[35] John Thatamanil, 'Do religions have borders? Geography, porosity, and the question of appropriation', *TheoPodcast*, Universität Münster (20 September 2023), online at https://www.uni-muenster.de/FB2/aktuelles/ics/TheoPodcastJohnThatamanil.html (accessed 20-09-2023).
[36] For a comprehensive survey of applications for borders in nonliteral forms of reference, see Dina Krichker's 'Making Sense of Borderscapes: Space, Imagination and Experience', *Geopolitics* 26:4 (2019), pp. 1224-1242. For an exploration of borders' metonymic dimension with specific considerations for religion, see Hans-Joachim Sander's 'Difference and Contested Caricatures: Reaching out for Religious Complexity through Metonymies', *Religion and Difference: Contested Contemporary Issues*, edited by T. Wyller, D. Pezzoli-Olgiati, S. Knauss, H-G. Heimbrock, H-J. Sander, & C. Danani (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020), pp. 91-115. For a rich theoretical engagement with the links between the rhetorical and phenomenological dimensions of borders, see Thomas Nail's *Theory of the Border* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
[37] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 36.

of another, and its primary function is understanding." [38] Metonymy, on the other hand, "has primarily a referential function, that is, it allows us to use one entity to *stand for* another."[39] These points apply to political and religious borders, which are metaphorical relative to each other—albeit with an obvious nonmetaphorical dimension for political borders that is not present in religious borders—and metonymic relative to dynamics that exist in history, culture, and politics.

From the point of view of promoting reconciliation, the normativity of both types of borders is ambivalent, which is to say that both political or religious borders can be either obstacles to or resources for reconciliation depending on the context. Marianne Heimbach-Steins, for example, in her essay "The Ambivalence of Borders and the Challenge of an Ethics of Liminality," frames political borders as an agent of both connection and division regarding political participation and social membership.[40] As for religion, Appleby's *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*, in addition to its relevance specifically to the Bosnian case, frames religion as ambivalent, in that it is capable of stimulating powerful impulses to death as well as life, peace as well as violence.[41] Although Appleby doesn't explicitly apply the notion of ambivalence to religious *borders*, the many detailed cases in his book, describe conditions that easily meet the definition of religious borders given in this article.

Even if the normativity of each type of borders can plausibly be described as ambivalent, it is nevertheless the case that the two borders types are not exactly ambivalent in the same way. To put it simply, the ambivalence of religious borders can be reframed as an unambiguously positive good in a way that is not possible for political borders. In the words of the theologian John Thatamanil, it is possible "not to regard religious diversity begrudgingly as a reality that must be navigated but as a promise to be received."[42] Political borders, by contrast, however successful they may be for maintaining order, exist in the shadow of the violence that characterizes the origins of political sovereignty. As Mark Salter has put it, "The border naturalises the violence that was necessary to create it."[43] This is not to say that political borders *only* represent something normatively bad; as noted, they are ambivalent, and so they can take better or worse forms. The point is simply that it is much more difficult to make an unambiguously positive case for political borders than it is for religious borders, which, however likely they may be to generate acts of violence, lack such a categorical connection to violence.

In claiming that religious borders can be normatively defended in ways not possible for political borders, this claim is meant to apply exclusively to religious perspectives about other religious perspectives. It is *not* meant to apply to religious perspectives on political borders. Religious perspectives on political borders matter, of course, but these do not escape the critical claims about political borders made just

[38] Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, p. 36.
[39] Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, p. 36.
[40] Marianne Heimbach-Steins, 'The Ambivalence of Borders and the Challenge of an Ethics of Liminality', *Living With(out) Borders: Catholic Theological Ethics on the Migrations of Peoples*, edited by A.M. Brazal and M.T. Dávila (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2016), pp. 236-245.
[41] Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*, pp. 28-30.
[42] John Thatamanil, *Circling the Elephant. A Comparative Theology of Religious Diversity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020), p. 23. For a comparatively tragic perspective on religious borders, see Daniel Boyarin's *Border Lines: The Partition of Judeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).
[43] Mark B. Salter, 'Theory of the /: The Suture and Critical Border Studies', *Geopolitics* 17:4 (2012), pp. 734-755, at p. 735.

preceding. From an ethical perspective, many contemporary political borders are not only rendered indefensible by current conditions and practices—a point which would apply to religious violence, too—but their link to sovereign violence is too ineradicable.[44] There is a difficult point embedded here, which is not just that religious borders have the capacity to be normatively positive. It is also that, as religious borders, they can exist, at least in part, external to the violence at the historical/geographic edges of sovereignty—or in Carl Schmitt's terms, as outside of the friend/enemy distinction that defines the political. Precisely because of this externality to political borders, religious borders have the capacity to promote reconciliation in ways that trespass across a sharp religious/political distinction. This is not to make a normative claim that a religious perspective should *dictate* political borders and control political spaces in the manner of a kind of pre-modern theocracy or a dictatorial sovereign along the lines of Schmitt. Nor is it to express some kind of longing for a return to a pre-Westphalian version of Christendom, which is neither possible nor desirable. Rather, the normative claim here is that religious borders can and should *serve* an interdisciplinary and public conversation in which a variety of coalition partners can work together and build relationships.

There is thus a potential role here for interreligious relationships as a resource for reconciliation. Consider Thomas Brady, Jr.'s point that "the keys to possible global community in the future lie in the history not of states but of religions," which smartly takes care to refer to "religions" in the plural.[45] As with Brady's possible global community, the possibility for reconciliation may be real, but its actualization is by no means assured. According to Saskia Sassen, "out of the partial unbundling of what had been dominant and centripetal normative orders," i.e., territorial sovereignty at the heart of the Westphalian System, "normative orders such as religion reassume great importance where they had been confined to distinct specialized spheres arising into multiple particularized segmentations."[46] One of the implications of toxic Westphalianism is that the religion/politics distinction has become unmoored, which suggests manifold possibilities for how religion can influence politics. If the apparent trajectories of global events are any guide, many of these possibilities do not promote reconciliation.

In this atmosphere, religious ethics becomes especially important as a field not only positioned between the world and religious community but perhaps able to tilt toward the positive side of ambivalence in a way that actually has consequences for society on behalf of transitional justice and reconciliation. As Volf puts it, "Differences among identity struggles are often tied to ambivalence in the process of boundary maintenance, specifically to the blurry lines in boundary maintenance in the mode of other-rejecting exclusion and in the mode of identity-constituting differentiation."[47] Religious ethicists are uniquely placed to engage with a given faith tradition to find resources for engaging outsiders to promote reconciliation.

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[44] For a political critique of contemporary borders, see Harsha Walia's *Border and Rule: Global Capitalism, Migration, and the Rise of Racist Nationalism.* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2021). For a religious critique, see Justin P. Ashworth's 'Who Are Our People? Toward a Christian Witness Against Borders', *Modern Theology* 34:4 (2018), pp. 495-518. For a nuanced set of religious perspectives on political borders, see Daisy L. Machado, Bryan Turner, and Trygve Wyller's volume *Borderland Religion: Ambiguous Practices of Difference, Hope, and Beyond* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018).

[45] Brady, 'Limits of Religious Violence in Early Modern Europe', p. 151.

[46] Saskia Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights. From Medieval to Global Assemblages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 423.

[47] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace,* pp. xv-xvi.

There are two ways in which religious ethicists might apply the aforementioned lessons on borders. The first is to investigate interreligious dynamics in view of deep histories. An example of this approach can be found in the work of rabbinic theologian Peter Ochs, who is a founding figure in the interfaith movement Scriptural Reasoning. In terms of investigating deep histories, Ochs's work demonstrates what has been called *reparative reasoning*.[48] Nicholas Adams has described Ochs's approach in this group as the "conjunction of scientific inquiry, historical investigation, and ethnographic description," in which these disciplines respectively fashion hypotheses, investigate traditions, and engage practices.[49] This involves tracing histories of damaging logics, often binary logics, back to embedded and inherited points of divergence, and rethinking, from within a tradition, these damaging logics in light of contemporary consequences. By looking back into these histories, the possibility exists for moving out of seemingly intractable divides in the present. Ochs has applied to the task of peacebuilding between religious traditions in politically sensitive contexts—South Africa, for example.[50] Important in Ochs's approach to peacebuilding is the retaining of religious difference or, in other words, religious boundaries. As he puts it in "The Possibilities and Limits of Inter-Religious Dialogue":

> Inter-religious peace cannot be won by suppressing inter-religious difference. Whether attempted through prudent speeches or by force of arms, the suppression of inter-religious difference introduces the seeds of violence rather than peace, because religions live in and through their differences."[51]

Ochs's work in peacebuilding complements his background in Scriptural Reasoning (SR), which is an interfaith movement that furnishes a critical method that is clear and falsifiable while remaining sensitive to the inherited habits by which communities address the world. He describes the practices of SR in a manner with real resonance with Appleby, in that participants come to understand that the way they interpret the signs of their religious faith is not the only way one can see things; this, in turn, makes them a bit less hostile toward others outside of their specific religious culture. Ochs lays out a relationship between a state of suffering ("the condition of someone who cannot fix some everyday problem"), a healer ("someone who, after engaging the sufferer in dialogue, can eventually *hear* in the sufferer's report symptoms of an identifiable problem"), and hearing (a critical component of healing, the sum of perception, attention, and hypothesis, i.e., diagnosis, on the part of the healer and trust on the part of the sufferer).[52] His emphasis on *hearing* and *healing* suggests the ability to bring a moral vision into specific situations, address specific obstacles, and realize specific opportunities.

A second key contribution from religious ethicists concerns the intersection between internal and external boundaries with respect to a given tradition. If, as has been

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[48] Nicholas Adams, 'Reparative Reasoning', *Modern Theology* 24:3 (2008), pp. 447-457. This is an instructive contrast to Miroslav Volf's *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2021), which makes a stronger case for forgetting along with remembering as part of the processes of reconciliation.

[49] Adams, 'Reparative Reasoning', p. 450.

[50] See Peter Ochs's *Religion Without Violence* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2019).

[51] Peter Ochs, 'The Possibilities and Limits of Inter-Religious Dialogue', *The Oxford Handbook in Religion, Peace, and Conflict Resolutions*, edited by R. Scott Appleby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 488-515, at p. 509.

[52] Ochs, *Peirce, Pragmatism, and the Logic of Scripture*, p. 253.

claimed, one type of border can affect another, then it follows that how a member of a given faith tradition approaches the divisions within their own faith bears also on how the external boundaries of that faith are perceived. One contribution that the religious ethicist can make is to identify different tendencies and maximize those that best contribute to connection-across-boundaries rather than insularity and suspicion. For example, to name one tradition, Christianity, there is a long history in putting intersecting distinctions at the center of doctrinal formulations. Richard B. Miller has been explicit about the ways in which boundaries of one sort affect those of another sort within the Christian imagination, albeit not so much with internal and external boundaries as "metaphysical" and "geographic" boundaries. As Miller puts it, "How Christians assess territorial boundaries is largely a function of how they conceive the boundary that distinguishes creation from its Creator."[53] Especially helpful commentary in this regard comes from Appleby. For example, Appleby has pointed out that it was precisely the internal diversity of Roman Catholicism that brought about a pivotal shift, most notably at Vatican II but extended beyond it, in the Church's relationship with the world, away from retrenchment and resistance to modernity and toward the support of human rights and democratic politics.[54]

Conclusion

It is important to take a measured view of the applications of an approach to reconciliation by way of the religious/political borders distinction. Even with respect to Bosnia, the pragmatic question of what kind of difference this might make for reconciliatory practices requires considerable further investigation. Moreover, with regard to the question of transitional justice and the claim, which was averred at the outset of this article, that the approach shown here is a complement to the formal processes of transitional justice, it must be acknowledged that toxic Westphalianism, if an accurate depiction of contemporary trends in sovereignty, raises implications that could challenge the "liberal-cosmopolitan justice" the governs the standardization of transitional justice, which has been, as Line Engbo Gissel puts it. "informed by the imperative of criminal accountability, the centrality of individual culpability, the benefits of truth and acknowledgment, the importance of victim participation, the possibility of reconciliation and the existence of a common humanity."[55] Examining the implications of this claim while also tracing the concrete evidence for toxic Westphalianism would amount to a much larger project.

Nevertheless, if toxic Westphalianism raises challenges for the thesis of this article, it also suggests the possibility of further application to cases beyond the Bosnian conflict. Granted, Bosnia is a specific case in which being at the edge of Europe and bound up with Westphalian norms, as well as its interreligious dimension, represents a unique set of circumstances. However, further possibilities to pursue do arise. Amidst contemporary cases of partial relevance, such as the borderlands between the United States and Mexico (which manifests an unmooring of the borders/frontiers distinction but is not overtly interreligious) or India and Pakistan (which exists against a background of both colonial exclusion and interreligious violence, but which is also a vital site of encounter), especially

[53] Richard B. Miller, 'Christian Attitudes toward Boundaries: Metaphysical and Geographical', *Boundaries and Justice: Diverse Ethical Perspectives*, edited by David Miller and Sohail H. Hasmi (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 15-37, at p. 16.
[54] Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*, pp. 42-54.
[55] Gissel, 'The standardisation of transitional justice', p. 871.

germane is the war in Ukraine, which lacks the interreligious but has been shaped by an implicit theology and questions of deep ambivalence about Europe and sovereignty. The need for creativity in pursuing reconciliation will remain.

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