The book *The Psychological Basis of Reconciliation Between Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks* by Nebojša Petrović examines a number of complex, fascinating, and important psycho-social issues. Considering the book was originally published in 2005, the author clearly has a passion for and commitment to advancing the cause of reconciliation in the former Yugoslavia. Thus, Petrović’s book can be regarded as an icebreaker in the emerging reconciliation discourse in the Balkans, in an era when, as the author notes, there are still remnants of the recent war present in various forms. These include mistrust, hate, prejudice, and growing ‘ethnic distance’ between different — or, in fact, quite similar! — ethnic groups that not-so-long-ago shared much more than a common homeland (such as language, popular culture, common memories, and experiences of living in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia). In this book the author does not over-ambitiously attempt to prescribe a recipe for how reconciliation should be achieved; rather, he attempts to identify the potential and willingness for reconciliation among ordinary Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks.

Organised into seven tightly written chapters, the book provides a comprehensive overview of the meanings and importance of reconciliation at both individual and societal levels. The first five chapters discuss different theoretical and methodological approaches to reconciliation — referring to key concepts, experiences, and attitudes towards reconciliation before and beyond the Balkans (including Northern Ireland, South Africa, and Rwanda). The second part of the book, chapters VI and VII, describes empirical aspects of reconciliation between Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks, based on a study conducted by the author and his research collaborators, using semi-structured questionnaires and one-hour interviews with 60 people in Bosnia, Serbia, and Croatia, each (ethnic) group represented by twenty people. Despite expressions by various interviewees of prejudice, mistrust, and blame of the ‘other’ for the causes and consequences of the war, the author concludes that reconciliation is not only desired but also critical in restoring trust and preventing future conflicts.

While the author admits that the sample of twenty people from each of the three ethnic groups included in the first phase of the study is not representative and therefore not amenable to generalisations (p. 213), he nonetheless draws many conclusions from this limited sample (pp. 214-268). This could be seen as a weakness of the book, not only in terms of sample size but also because the relationship of the interviewees to the war (e.g. survivors, refugees, IDPs, war widows, war veterans, perpetrators of war crimes) is not made clear. This is a critical factor when exploring the potential and willingness for reconciliation — as the way individuals and communities have been affected by the war will surely influence their attitude towards the ‘other’ with whom they are expected to engage in the process. Having conducted the research before 2005, there is also a question of whether the findings may be outdated, as many developments have taken place in the region since then.

1) Translated by Hariz Halilovich from the original title in Serbian. All further citations have been translated into English from Serbian by Hariz Halilovich.
Another limitation of the book is the ‘ethnicisation’ of reconciliation, an approach that essentialises individual and group identities, reducing them to the rigidly prescribed ethnic categories (Bosniaks, Croats, Serbs). While this reflects a general trend in academia and in policies dealing with the conflicts in former Yugoslavia, it simplifies the issue of reconciliation (and conflict) by implying that individuals can engage in the process of reconciliation only as members of ‘their’ respective ethnic groups. Thus, according to the author, reconciliation always involves members from different ethnic groups as the ‘other’ (p. 200). While it would be much easier to theorise and practise reconciliation as a two- or three-way process — between Serbs on the one side and Bosniaks and Croats on the other, or ‘separately,’ between Serbs and Croats, Serbs and Bosniaks, and Bosniaks and Croats — this approach ignores the complex realities found on the ground. For instance, do the Serbs who remained in besieged Tuzla or Sarajevo need to declare themselves as Bosniaks in order to reconcile with their fellow ethnic Serbs who fired at them from Trebević or Majevica? How should ‘ethnic reconciliation’ work between Bosniaks in the Bihać pocket and their fellow Bosniaks from Cazin-Kladuša, the so-called autonomaši, who fought a ferocious war between each other? Is there any need for ‘ethnic reconciliation’ between Bosniaks of Podrinje and Posavina with Croats, as the ethnic conflict between Bosniaks and Croats (or ABiH and HVO) was limited to Herzegovina and central Bosnia? How to deal with reconciliation between members of the rival Croatian militias HOS and HVO, who also spilled their own ‘ethnic’ blood? These and many other examples highlight the inherent limitations of the ethnic reconciliation model and point to the need for a de-ethnicised approach to address many of the local, regional, and inter-ethnic variations of ‘bad blood.’

A different issue that readers may find problematic in Petrović’s book is the writing style, which at times is too scientific — even clinical — with elements of utopian rhetoric and prescriptiveness. For instance, the author’s “aim to construct an instrument for measuring individuals’ potential, readiness, and willingness to engage in the process of reconciliation” (p. 15) — a diagnostic tool or detector of sorts — even if highly desired, remains scientific utopianism. Similarly, the reference in the Introduction to the universalism of reconciliation, extending it to the animal kingdom with the description of how reconciliation works between rival chimpanzee males — as if to suggest “if the monkeys can do it, Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks can too” — gives a reductionist scientific gloss to what is fundamentally of human culpability. It is difficult to imagine genocide survivors from Srebrenica (not included in the study), or any other survivors, finding this either insightful or acceptable. When the author attempts to be less scientific, he falls into a trap of empty rhetoric, writing, for instance that “we need to continue the march on which the people have been for centuries, trying to distance themselves as much as possible from violence and getting closer to peace, to exchange the long nights of fear with bright days of freedom and realise their great vision of a peaceful, harmonious, and prosperous future in the spirit of brotherhood and cooperation” (p. 65). As visionary and Gandhian as this may sound at first blush, it represents exactly the problem many survivors have with the concept of reconciliation — the promise of unrealistic goals like ‘harmony,’ ‘prosperous future,’ ‘brotherhood,’ and ‘cooperation,’ when what they expect and need are truth, justice, and recognition.