CARE International in Bosnia and Herzegovina
Civil Society Programme

Engaging with civil society in Bosnia and Herzegovina
A Narrative Account

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PROTEUS
“awakening thinking, facilitating change”

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Some Fundamentals

“I turn my ears back to the souls of my feet, so that I may hear if a story is in the wind”.

X’abbo, Bushman prisoner
(19th Century South Africa)

The Consultant as Narrator

Because this paper might strike the reader as somewhat other than expected, a few introductory words are in order.

I was asked by CARE BHCSM (Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro) to support its programme development in regard to civil society programming, with a geographic focus on Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), “through an analytic piece of research that will contribute to the development of a programme strategy”.

Why me, I wondered? I am not a civil society specialist; neither have I had any experience with BiH. I was given two weeks to do the research - two weeks in a context which is one of the most confusing and complex imaginable. Why not a civil society expert, an academic; why not at least someone with a thorough working knowledge of the society in question? Was I up to tackling so daunting, so presumptuous, an assignment? Would I be able to do justice to the society into which I was parachuted?

I do have many years experience with issues of social development, and, yes, inevitably with the discourse around civil society. I have written extensively with respect to social development issues, particularly around issues of facilitation and practice in direct engagement with social situations. All of my work has taken place within the arena of civil society (though I question the concept and the arena, as will become apparent). But I am not a civil society expert, neither did I know anything at all (apart from hearsay) about BiH, neither was I at all familiar with the discourse and proceedings of CARE international. And I had ridiculously little time. So why me?

I discovered that some of my work, some of my writing, had come to the attention of CARE BiH’s most significant partner in the civil society field, Mozaik Community Development Foundation (Mozaik), and that, together, CARE BiH and Mozaik had felt that they needed a fresh perspective on the question of civil society in BiH, for the sake not only of CARE BiH programming but also as a contribution to other actors in BiH. Such a consultancy, then, might be an intervention into both CARE BiH and BiH itself.

But an intervention of a particular kind. There is already an overwhelming amount of attention that has been paid, analytically speaking, to civil society (and social issues in general) in BiH, but much of it tends to be of the “superficial” kind, I was told, with an emphasis on short term and immediate results, quantifiable indicators, imported concepts of civil society from a predominantly “American” perspective (“American” taken as an approach rather than a country). Much of the work that is being done, evidently,
focuses on generating a surface veneer of civil society, rather than going in depth into
the real underlying and (often) seemingly intractable constraints around the building of
civil society in BiH. I, on the other hand, am evidently known as a practitioner and writer
who tries to get to the underlying and “invisible” dynamics which lie at the core of social
situations that have reached a point of stasis and repetition. I try to get at the heart of
social situations, the (cultural) dynamics which constrain or free a social situation. To
get under the skin of the situation and so find the facilitative possibilities which may
release that situation so that it may more easily emerge and evolve once more. To look
in depth, and long term. To focus on the qualitative elements of the system, rather than
on the quantitative.

I honestly do not know whether I am able to achieve the kind of depth that all this
implies, though I do know that this is what interests me, and I do believe that the
problem with the aid industry and the development endeavour in general is that it largely
avoids this kind of approach. I am interested less in the outer circumstances and more
in exploring the inner nature of the situation in question. The reason I put all this down,
at the outset of this paper, is so that you, the reader, will know something of what to
expect, and what not to expect.

This paper is not an academic analysis; neither is it a detailed analysis of the history of
CARE BiH programming, neither will it purport to recommend a detailed strategy for
CARE BiH to follow in future. It is an attempt, rather, to “see through” the surface
details to the underlying dynamics at play, and to indicate to both actors in BiH as well
as to CARE BiH, consequent approaches that may be taken into the future.

I start this paper on such a personal note also because that is the way I intend to
continue. When I was in BiH I read a number of international papers which - relevant
and helpful to me as they were - did not state the author’s name, but only the name of
the commissioning institution. One is expected to believe that one is reading the voice
of the institution itself; and there is a strange assumption here that when the institution
speaks then the piece carries more weight, that it is somehow more objective, formal,
valid, expert. Yet there is, for me, something less than human, less than social, less
than true, at play here; a spurious “objectivity”, a bogus “science”. I am taking the
opposite line - all that you read here is the “take” of one individual; subjective, personal,
flawed. This is the only way I know to “get under the skin” of a social situation; when
one goes in, the less institutional and theoretical baggage that one takes the more one
might be able to “see”. Better to be honest: what follows is my perspective, and through
observation I become a participant as well. Bound in such complex relationship, this
text is an impression only, not a factual or verifiable account. This does not mean that it
is less valuable. On the contrary, I hope some of its value may derive from the fact that
it does not purport to be anything other than it is.

I was in BiH for two short weeks. I came from working in Brazil, where the sun shone
brightly, where civil society is robust and energetic, where everyone - whatever colour,
whatever creed, whatever origin - is embraced as a Brazilian if they make the country
their home and speak Portuguese. I arrived to cold and snow, to dark mountains, a
dread history, a divided society seemingly still mute with the trauma of violence, a
country under the yoke of foreign powers, a country with the barest veneer of “civil
“society”, much of it force-fed from outside. I arrived without much information, without any in depth knowledge, of the society that I was entering. I read some riveting papers and books - though a drop in the ocean only - whilst still in Brazil, on the flights over, and throughout my stay in BiH. I visited Sarajevo, Bratanac, Srebinita, Banja Luka. I spoke to a whole range of very interesting and helpful people and organisations. I listened intently, paid assiduous attention, tried continuously to understand, to come to grips with the underlying story, the narrative dynamic running through BiH.

All this is woefully inadequate. Whilst in BiH, a meeting with Jacob Finci drove this home forcibly. He told me the joke about an expert who had come to investigate BiH, and had met with a local. When did you arrive, the local asked. Yesterday. When do you leave? Tomorrow. What do you hope to achieve? A report entitled ‘The Definitive BiH Reader: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow’.

The point is well taken; the assumptions we make are absurd. Under such circumstances - and not to mitigate such presumption but simply to keep head above water - I have tried at all times to focus not on individual pieces of data but on the connections between them, to try to hear the story that connects the whelter of information I was exposed to. Always to listen for the storyline.

So what follows is an attempt at a storyline - of BiH, of civil society, of local and international actors, of CARE BiH. It is an attempt to put all this together such that something essential might be revealed which may help relevant actors to take matters further. It is a “think piece”. As such, it tries to separate the essential from the inessential; it uses “facts” as background to thinking, but it does not foreground these here. I do not want to confuse the text with too many variables; I want a story, a line of argument, to emerge. It is the attempt, at least, is to uncover an essential narrative of civil society in BiH. Not to analyse the situation into pieces, but to portray the situation as a whole, as one story which is created by all parts (aspects) working together.

**Narrative as a Response to Complexity**

Increasingly we are coming to understand that social situations are complex phenomena. In order to come to terms with this, to gain some control over our field of work, the development sector generates diverse and many management tools and procedures and methods of analysis in order to separate out the plethora of detail and data, categorise it all into manageable chunks, analyse it into cause and effect variables, and strategise as to what to focus on when, so that particular results may be attained, in specified (shortest possible) time-frames, with the least possible resources.

This does not do sufficient justice to the nature of complexity. It is not just that matters are complicated, made up of too many variables, so that we need management tools to manage our interventions. Complexity implies not just complicated, but “dynamically complex”. What this latter concept means is that each and every variable and aspect - to the extent that we can separate them meaningfully into discrete entities in the first place - affects and is affected by each and every other aspect. In other words, we cannot understand one aspect without understanding it *in terms of* all other aspects.
They are all in dynamic interplay with each other; the picture keeps shifting, also depending on where we are looking from and what we are focusing on. Analysis into discrete parts fragments this dynamic whole, the coherence of the “story”. Analysis may hold the temptation of enabling argument, choice and management, and as such is a necessary component of strategic thinking. But it can do a disservice as well, in that we lose a sense of the “whole picture”. I try, in this text, to present as whole a picture as I can.

Thus, this text attempts to *portray* the situation as a narrative storyline in which all parts are connected into one coherent whole. In other words, I try to “read” for the connections between the “pieces”, to unearth some of the (invisible) dynamics at play, and in so doing to make some meaning of the whole phenomenon.

Because, as complex social situations go, there can be little more complex than the situation this paper is trying to come to grips with. BiH is sufficiently complex in itself, with its very long and textured history, the extremity of its social divisions, the relationships between economics and political systems and geographic and cultural factors, the relationships with the outside world (in which actors have their own less than transparent intentions and complexities). BiH is a society with such a complex array of divisions that the very imagination is beggared; is BiH a coherent country, or even entity, with a fathomable future, at all? (This text will at all times assume that it is; but this may be a fatal flaw in the argument.)

Add to this the complexity and confusion that is inherent in the many and diverse - and often contradictory - attempts to understand the concept of civil society. Not merely to understand, but - for many actors - to use it as a programming and management tool. Is the concept, such as it is, even relevant to BiH at this particular juncture of time and history, or is it being imposed on the situation from outside, more part of the development sector’s (or aid industry’s) discourse than part of the situation itself?

And then there is CARE BiH, and CARE International. CARE carries its own baggage into situations, and this affects those situations and also its own programming. The institution itself is not beyond questioning, it is not a neutral “catalyst” which acts, itself impervious and insignificant, in a particular situation. CARE itself is a complex phenomenon in its own right, and the phenomenon of CARE - including, but not just, its money and programming - interacts continuously with the reality it is intervening into. The story would not be complete without regarding CARE itself as a significant element, relating in dynamic complexity with all other elements. Perhaps as much in need of change as the situation it is intervening into.

So the story is complex indeed. It is the story of the complexity that is BiH interacting with the complexity that is CARE interacting with the complexity that is civil society. The more I engage in this work, the more I am convinced that a methodology other than that of analytical and quantitative thinking is called for. There are an infinite number of variables to be analysed, an infinite number of categories that may be conceptualised; one can start anywhere and cut the story into an indefinite number of compartments (concepts). All in an attempt to analyse into cause and effect, so that we may, simply and with least fuss, make our strategic choices, set our relatively short term goals, write
the appropriate proposals, set the necessary management structures in place, and have impact. Yet we appear to be having so little impact.

Complex as things are, though, we have to start somewhere; though any start is arbitrary. This paper starts with a look at the social situation which is BiH itself. It then goes on to look at civil society, and the relationship of this concept with BiH itself. Then a portrayal of CARE BiH is added to the mix.

But because everything is affecting everything else, there may be some coherent sense to be made of it all. This is brought together in the final section, with respect to all three of the “variables” which have been dealt with thus far. This final section contains a brief look at some possible implications for CARE BiH and BiH, with a view to taking the conversation further.

(A perspective on) Bosnia & Herzegovina

"Will we make it?" I asked Dr. Jung. "Only if enough of us are conscious", he answered.

Robert Johnson
**First Impressions**

I come from South Africa, a country which has taken matters in hand to create, in the face of great odds, a (relatively) peaceful, free, harmonious, and energetic society in which a once mute citizenry now has a vibrant voice; the sun shines as much in peoples' hearts as it does over the land. I came to BiH directly from working in Brazil, where, whatever its problems, there is an exuberance of social life in which the citizenry is engaged and vocal; there too the sun makes itself felt in an outflow of colour. There is no doubt that the contrast between those experiences, and what I met in BiH, played a part in my initial impressions.

I arrived to darkness; a lowered sky, forbidding mountains, a swirling and gritty snowstorm, cold in the marrow of my bones. This translated easily into a sense of gloom with respect to the society itself, and most of what I learned of that society reinforced that sense of gloom. There was little vibrancy and exuberance here, little sense of the value of working towards a different future, little hope that one’s own efforts might effect significant change. Few of the people I met had a feeling for the future; it was the past, and a benighted present, that swirled with the incessant snow amongst the people I met.

History, and violence, conflict and division hang heavy in BiH. The war is not a memory; it remains a current reality, it gathers closely around every conversation. Pain is never far away. BiH has been socially divided for so long now that it is hard for anyone to imagine any other way of being. The Christian Orthodox Serbs, the Catholic Croats and the Muslim Bosniaks live in the country uneasy, uncomfortably, angrily, bristling at each other, struggling to find common ground; their history of enmity goes back so far, and is so complicated and ingrown, and at times so violent, that it is almost impossible for an outsider to make sense of it all. Especially as all groups look the same, speak the same language (opaque to an outsider), and share many of the same cultural characteristics. The situation felt opaque beyond my ability to penetrate.

BiH does not exist in a vacuum. It is a small mountainous country in the midst of the Balkans, in the midst of the former Yugoslavia, and it is connected to its surroundings through history, culture, economics, and group affiliations. Croatia to one side, Serbia to another, Albania and Montenegro; and all these have deep cultural and historic ties to certain groupings of BiH society and deep enmities and hatreds with respect to the others. BiH is a place of enclaves; deep valleys and high mountains separate one place from another, and the same kind of geography appears repeated within the social formations themselves. BiH has always been a poor country, closed, isolated, dislocated and distant from the centres of world affairs. And violence seems always to have been a major feature of social life, never more so than in its recent past. (I do not mean here only the recent war itself; even during the long period of its inclusion in the former Yugoslavia, it was designated as the site for armaments production by the communist regime. Its history seems to follow it around, never allowing it respite.)
The divisions in the society are so great that it is hard to conceive of it as one country at all. In the wake of the “muteness” imposed on this society through the years of socialist Yugoslavia, the civil war was so devastating, and so unrelenting, that outside powers, the West, so to speak, intervened - itself violently and forcefully. As a result, and because Bosnians are not deemed (by the West) able to look after their own affairs at all equitably and without bloodshed and coercion, a political dispensation has been imposed on the country from the outside which, in the name of “peace and reconciliation”, renders it hardly a viable country at all. It consists now of two distinct entities which are barely on speaking terms - Republika Srpska on the one hand (the Serbian entity), and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina on the other (which belongs to an uneasy alliance between Muslim Bosniaks and Catholic Croats). These two entities have their own political dispensations which more or less bypass each other, though at higher levels there is some meeting between the two. Neither entity, though, and also not BiH as a whole, is an independent country; BiH exists as a colony of the West, ruled by the Office of the High Representative (OHR) on the West’s behalf. The OHR has largely unmitigated and quite overwhelming power to decide the fate of BiH, politically, economically and socially. BiH is, de facto and de jure, not an independent and coherent country at all, but a colony; and its future lies in the hands not of its citizenry but of outside powers. All for the good of that citizenry, supposedly, because they cannot govern themselves. As they become able to do so, the situation will change.

Supposedly. Bosnians have little power to decide their own fate. This lack of any sense of command over their own future (historically as well as currently), coupled with the devastation of the recent past (including the inevitable emotions of shame and guilt and resentment and bitterness and implacable enmity which accompanies it), and with the additions of poverty and corruption in many spheres, renders the populace largely mute. There are exceptions, but by and large the people I met spoke of relentless and overwhelming apathy in the face of their situation. There is little motivation to work towards a different future, little belief that they can affect that future. There is no vibrancy here, no enthusiasm, no real sense of intent; the show goes on, but the society feels, somehow, broken, crippled, limping along in the cold. There is a darkness which feels part of the landscape, part of the people, rising up from the past, clouding the future.

I arrived, then, to darkness, to the sense of a dysfunctionality inbuilt into the society’s genes, as it were. Aspects of this feeling never left me, but gradually, as I learned more, the complexity of what I was seeing humbled me into wondering how much of what I was seeing was inherent to the society, and how much has been visited upon it by outside powers, by the West (and others). And it struck me how much of a Western sensibility I carry, despite that I come from the South, despite what I have learned about the West from the South’s struggles. I carry expectations with me, and these cloud my reading of a situation; and these expectations are tainted with Western presumption. In reality, the situation is much more complex.

Smoke and Mirrors
The Balkans, BiH particularly in this case, are a place of darkness. That this may be so inherently, we will return to as we proceed. But it is at least not necessarily inherent. The darkness is at least to a certain extent, and perhaps to a very large extent, something which has been visited upon the country. By many forces, yes; but the darkness I want to deal with here is that which has been imposed by the West. And there are two aspects to this imposition, two angles to the Western sensibility. The one is unconscious, and so to a large extent hidden. The other is conscious, yet still, and perhaps more nefariously, hidden.

To deal with the unconscious aspect first. The Balkans live as a place of darkness in Western sensibility. This sensibility sees the inhabitants of BiH as a “race of brigands”. It sees the country’s inhabitants “either as congenitally irrational and bloodthirsty mobs, never happier than when they are slitting the throats of their neighbours, or as incompetent clowns in fanciful uniforms that mysteriously invoke a medieval past”. Only in the Balkans is the title of the paper from which the last two quotes are taken, and the title is apt; The Balkans occupy a place in Western consciousness which is synonymous with being “beyond the pale”, as an English expression would have it. Outlandish and inhumanly violent and barbaric things happen there which ‘would never happen in the West’. In Western sensibility, it is an ‘uncivilised’ place, a place that you can invoke to scare children with, a place where Dracula lives. It is possible to be racist about BiH in ways that would shame the West if such sentiments were expressed about other places and people. It occupies a place in the (unconscious) imagination much as the concept of “darkest Africa” always has. Nothing is too farfetched for this imagination; and in this imagination, BiH has been assigned all the dark impulses which the West is unable to accept or recognise or deal with in itself.

Such is the nature of the unconscious. I was brought up to believe that the murder of Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo (which could only have happened in BiH) led to the First World War (and the subsequent history of the 20th Century). Subsequent learning, of course, dispelled this notion; that war was a product of European dislocations. But no amount of reading quite dispelled the ingrained unconscious sensibility of Sarajevo as the kind of place where these things could happen, where they could (uncontrollably) affect ourselves, and even as a matter of course. BiH is a country where we expect the worst to occur, where we assume darkness and violence as a way of life, onto which we can thrust all those unconscious impulses and thoughts which we deny to ourselves in our own ‘fairer’ lives.

In other words, the West, albeit unconsciously (and the more powerfully for that), uses BiH to sanitise its own impulses, to avoid recognition of its own excesses, to maintain its civilised veneer, to achieve the high ground of moral and social life. (It is no accident that the catalyst for WW1 took place beyond the reach of European culpability.) BiH is dark at least partly because it lives in the dark and hidden and unreachable places of the Western sensibility, soul, imagination. We take our own impulses which we do not want to own, and thrust them on the ‘other’ (which is the very essence of racism). BiH has been assigned the role of the other in Western sensibility.

Such an unconscious disposition allows the more conscious impositions of Western agendas on BiH to pass without much notice; that is, to remain hidden. In the article
quoted above, Misha Glenny also notes that: “It would be hard to find academics or Balkan specialists who take the view that the collapse of Yugoslavia was a product of ancient hatreds. But this belief is stubbornly held by the Western media and Western policy makers, including many who have participated or are still participating in the crisis, and whose influence helps to perpetuate the myths”. The West expects BiH to be violent and dysfunctional, and is therefore not at all surprised when it is. Its own complicity in this violence and dysfunctionality is thus allowed more easily to pass unnoticed (at least by those in the West). Yet Western complicity forms a large part of the chaotic stasis of BiH.

There is no doubt that the collapse of Yugoslavia led more or less directly to the situation as we have it now in BiH. There is no doubt either, in the Western imagination, that both what happened in Yugoslavia and what subsequently took place in BiH is largely a result of Serbian intent and aggression; thus the Serbs are the ‘bad guys’, or depicted as such. But, as we have seen above, for the West it’s a ‘bad guy’ scenario all round, and intervention - then and now, military and political - was and is called for, to help save the bad guys from themselves and each other, and to help save us all from the consequences of their conflict.

There are compelling arguments for an alternative reading of events. The relationships between Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks are certainly fraught and stuck now, more than they have ever been, as a result of the recent war. But did such enmity cause the war? Or was the collapse of Yugoslavia, and the demonisation of the Serbs - which led, indeed, to the terribly bitter situation that we have now in BiH - a result of conscious Western intent? Was the demise of Yugoslavia not the result of intentional and hegemonic economic, political and military intervention by the West, or by global capitalism, for its (the West’s and global capitalism’s) own gain? Did the demonisation of the Serbs not goad them into action, as much as their action may have called for outside intervention? Were the divisions between Serb and Croat and Bosniak so cut and dried as they are now, before and during the war? Is it true that Serbs are bad and the others are good, or are all equally bad? Or are none so bad as they are made out, in a story which holds the West up as good; is it possible that the West itself is the bad guy, and that without Western imposition and intervention - for its own sake - events may have taken a very different turn? There is far more to the genesis of this situation than the one-sided story which we are fed by the Western media (intentionally and consciously, aided by the naive gullibility which is generated by our unconscious imaginations and archetypes).

Is it possible to come to truth in this situation? Or is it possible that the truth lies in the very complexity, that all angles are partly true even though none are absolutely true? In which case it may be that the way through, for both participant and observer (though I am realising that there are no observers who are not also participating), is not to look for the one truth that will allow you to rest easy in your answer, but to become more aware of, more conscious to, the complexities and nuances themselves. To hold the questions in consciousness, to embrace the ambiguities that will not recede, and so to begin to treat the ‘other’ with a newfound respect, precisely because ... you never know ... you never know. And at the same time, because you have to act, because even inaction turns out to be an act, to take responsibility for yourself and for your own moves in the
midst of the confusion. To hold the ambiguity even as you act. So we may soften the hard divisions and allow something new to emerge. Because embracing ambiguity is itself an action, an activity of soul, which may allow us to move beyond stuckness, beyond dependency, beyond apathy, and so become an act of leadership towards the (different) future. (But we will come back to this later.)

**Unconscious Deception, Unconscious Collusion**

It’s hard to escape the conclusion that the breakup of Yugoslavia, and the subsequent history of BiH leading to the present, is a direct result of conscious Western intent. This intent has been enabled by the play of the unconscious in Western imagination; Western sensibility was ripe for the deception that has been perpetrated upon it, by politicians, economists and global institutions. The intent by a few powerful players is aided and abetted by the self-deception which the many, in the West, allowed to be perpetrated through their own lack of consciousness. But it is equally hard to escape the conclusion that the breakup of Yugoslavia, and the subsequent history of BiH leading to the present, was enabled by - and was also a direct result of - the forces at play (economic, historical, cultural, political) in Yugoslavia itself. If there was an unconscious deception that was played out in/by the West, there was equally a form of unconscious collusion that was played out in the former Yugoslavia; the society was perhaps unviable in the form that it had assumed, that it had evolved into, and it had not found an alternative.

This same dynamic of deception and collusion may be at play in BiH today. It is hard to escape the conclusion that the colony which is BiH has little say over its own future; therefore there is little enthusiasm for action towards that future, little sense of anything other than apathy. It is equally hard to escape the conclusion that this apathy itself is a large part of the equation; that there is an unconscious collusion taking place. It is hard to imagine that such a deception could take place without active - if unconscious - collusion.

My eyes were opened to this realisation partly by the reading of an article entitled *Governance and Democracy in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Post-industrial Society and the Authoritarian Perspective*, written by the European Stability Initiative - ESI (well, of course not written by the ESI but by an individual or group of individuals who remain nameless; part of the problem I was referring to earlier)\(^{vii}\). I began to understand - and of course one senses this anyway if listening intently enough - that the apathy in BiH is not a recent phenomenon only, but also one of long standing, very long standing. BiH has, in some sense, always been dependent on others for the conditions under which it exists. I was forcibly struck by some lines in that article which read as follows: “Making their case for the occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the Congress of Berlin in 1878, the imperial authorities of Austria-Hungary argued that the chief causes of instability in the remote province were social and economic. Referring to the unresolved ‘agrarian question’ - a system of land tenure which kept the overwhelmingly rural population trapped in underdevelopment - Foreign Minister Andrassy announced: ‘Only a strong and impartial government can solve it’.”\(^{vii}\) Has anything changed at all?
It may once have been the Ottoman Empire; it may once have been the Turks. It may once have been the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It may once have been the Yugoslavian regime, and the various ways in which the regime played out its responsibilities, for better and/or worse. After a short and violent break in such domination by foreign powers, BiH finds itself dependent - for its very definition - on foreign powers once again. And it remains remote, poor, inaccessible, hidden amongst dark mountains, unable to, or not allowed to, care for itself.

One can - a Bosnian can - rail at fate, curse the foreign powers that take freedom away and enforce dependency (or, in fact, curse ‘the other’ generally). But the thing cuts two ways. Power is given by the powerless, it is not only taken by the powerful. It is hard for me to escape the picture that emerges from even a brief and cursory reading of BiH history - that the (unconscious) Western sensibility for BiH was not fabricated out of nothing. If the West is culpable, so too is BiH. It is not the foreign power which will enable BiH to achieve independence and a sense of future, or disable it from doing so. It is the dynamic which lies at the core of BiH society itself. At the very least, this is the only dynamic that Bosnians have any control over. Much as we would wish, we cannot change others. We can only change ourselves.

Very little seems to work adequately in BiH - not the economy, not the political system, not social relationships across groupings; people, the ‘common’ people, have little voice, if any. There is little independent media, little independent business, there remain antagonisms and misunderstandings and old hurts; divides as wide as canyons, as high and impassable as the mountains themselves. Politics is dominated by factions, by money, by old hierarchies. No-one seems to believe in the integrity of anyone else, either what they say or what they intend. There is frustration with the dominance of the old hierarchies; a culture of authoritarianism exists as much within Bosnian society as it does between BiH and the authorities who impose their will from outside. No wonder there is apathy and no sense of future; not simply because of the current dispensation, but because, it seems, there never really has been a sense of (responsibility for) future. So a picture arises of dependency, ages old and numbing in the extent of its ravages in the Bosnian psyche. And dependency is accompanied, as it always will be, by frustration and resentment, by squabbling amongst ourselves rather than turning the struggle outwards, by a cursing of the other and a blaming of the outside and a placing of the problem “out there”. The onset of apathy is inevitable; the acceptance of responsibility for one’s own fate is onerous. These are the marks of dependency.

Most of all, most of all, dependency is marked by a lack of consciousness. (Remarkable that so little of what I read on and for this assignment was written by Bosnians.) As we become more conscious, we take more and more responsibility; as we take responsibility, our consciousness grows. This is a trajectory of development, whether of an individual, a group or a society. As one grows in consciousness, one foregoes dependence; there is no alternative to this (which is why so many choose to remain unconscious, it’s easier to demand of the other than take responsibility for oneself). This lack of consciousness, the acceptance of apathy and the sense of hopelessness, runs through Bosnian society whichever way I turn (though there are exceptional individuals of course). It seems to run through the grain of the society; the
very tenor - the timbre - of the society resonates with acquiescence to power, with infighting, with resignation.

There is indeed a darkness in BiH, one that is not just a residue of war, or of the long years of socialism that preceded it; and one that is not just imposed from without. It is the darkness of compliance, of resignation, of acquiescence, of dependency. It is an old darkness, a darkness which has allowed the Balkans to insert itself so insidiously into the unconscious places in the Western psyche. It is a lack of consciousness; and this lack of consciousness has enabled BiH to collude with the deception practised by the West (by any and all who assume power over BiH). It is this darkness which feels so palpable to me, as though I can reach out and touch it.

So BiH easily accepts the mantle of darkness which has been thrust upon it by the West. And seems to assume that the only way through the morass, the only way to a viable future and independence, is to adopt the Western model, work towards and head for the moral highground of the European Union, adopt its policies, its procedures, its sensibilities, its temptations, its politics, its economics, its social development potential. Is this the way, or is this just another example of acquiescence once again? How can conscious choices be made while the society remains unconscious, still so very much under the influence of outside powers, still so divided within itself? How can BiH awake to itself? This is the question that I left with, and the one that informs my writing now.

AND CIVIL SOCIETY?

I have said nothing thus far of civil society in BiH. What is there to say? I address the question of civil society itself as concept, as practice, as strategy, in the following section. As yet, it would be inadvisable to say too much, before we have explored what in the name of all that is holy we may mean when we speak of civil society. But over and beyond this, what is there really to say about civil society in BiH? Whatever concept of civil society we subscribe to, there seems to be precious little of it to be found in BiH. Foreign academics and experts, foreign donors, and representatives of foreign institutions of various ilks, talk about it, lament its absence, yearn for its presence; a handful of local players, subsidised by the foreign donors, talk about it too, lament its absence, strive for its presence, work under its rubric. But whatever we might mean by civil society, a generality may be stated thus: Neither is the society very civil, nor is there a civil society sector to speak of.

(The vexed question of) Civil Society

“The English language is being destroyed by a deadly virus of management-speak. This clichéd, dumbed-down, inflated and bogus management-speak is deeply depressing. The whole essence of a good, lively democracy is that one has good, lively argument. But this kind of language kills real debate”.

John Humphrys
A Poem, by Walt Whitman

When I heard the learn’d astronomer,
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me,
When I was shown the charts and diagrams, to add, divide and measure them,
When I sitting heard the astronomer where he lectured with much applause in the lecture-room,
How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick,
Till rising and gliding out I wander’d off by myself,
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,
Look’d up in perfect silence at the stars.

Talk is Cheap

I wonder at the similarities between astronomers and civil society specialists; or at least my own response. Despite all the learned debate, civil society as concept remains hard to grasp, vague, ephemeral; it has become a ‘catch-all’ phrase, vacuous and empty, a free-floating concept. It can mean whatever we want it to mean. It is a phrase which has been usurped by the aid industry, by our global institutions, used to justify anything and everything. It is a phrase like so many others I have had to work around over the years, like ‘capacity building’, like ‘poverty reduction’, like ‘good governance’, like ‘a rights-based approach’. (And the concepts begin to link up to each other, producing a compelling but self-serving logic of their own; so for example, we can write that civil society: “is essential to good governance ... a pre-requisite for eliminating poverty.”

How do we justify such assumptions?)

The phrase can obscure, rather than reveal. It sounds good, so good, as if, under its aegis, we are doing the ‘right thing’, and have every reason to think of ourselves as the good guys, and to secure funding. It is, indeed, these days, the key to funding, to the well-written proposal. I cannot remember when last I read a proposal, when last I contracted to do a piece of work, which did not highlight the notion of civil society. Yet, and for this very reason, it rings falsely. It clatters, for me, almost as a distraction, an intentional distraction from the real issues which a society might have to come to grips with. It has become the mantra of the developed world as it intervenes into the less developed world; and the mantra is taken up by recipients - we are all intent on creating civil society now, we have all been convinced, this is the way to go. Yet I cannot escape the feeling that there is wool being pulled over our eyes. (It has been noted that the concept of civil society is “rarely subjected to critical analysis” and that we are not, even as learned texts multiply, achieving “any greater clarity.”

Is it possible that we are deliberately confusing ourselves?)

Why are we talking about, why are we programming with respect to, why are we steering the discourse towards, civil society in BiH? BiH has a particular set of problems that it faces, specific to itself. Yet many interventions gravitate around a generality, an abstraction which is applied equally and uniformly, almost as a matter of
course and procedure, to every situation of social unease anywhere around the globe. It may be that, if we were to forego the notion of civil society, our programming and our interventions could become more specific, more focused, more directly relevant, more consequent. It is as if, in our pursuit of civil society, we ignore the situation on the ground rather than get drawn more directly towards it. Civil society becomes the thing, rather than BiH. We wonder how to build civil society in BiH, rather than wondering what precisely BiH may need. Our eyes are drawn away from, rather than towards.

And could it be, could it be, that the dragging of the concept of civil society all the way round the world to BiH is another of those foreign impositions which maintain BiH as dependent on others for its own direction, its own sense of future? Global institutions may feel that the very use of the concept dispels any possibility of imposition; that the use of the concept implies that their intentions are of the kind that build indigenous capacity, rather than confound it. But this is specious thinking. The concept is not indigenous, it is imposed; and the threads of such imposition, the strings that work the puppets, as it were, run all the way up to the highest realms of global hegemony. It is there, after all, where funding begins and ends.

(All this is not to deny the possibility of civil society as a programming strategy, but it is to begin to wake us up to what this may mean specifically in BiH at this point in time.)

“Definitions”

The problem is, definitions abound; they run riot. Everywhere I look there are more definitions to counter the other definitions. Civil society can mean everything and anything; equally, this might result in its meaning nothing at all.

Civil society might reference a sector of society, a specific set of players - over and against government and commerce - though here the degree of specificity of the players is contested (NGOS and CBOS, or preferably CBOs only?). If a sector, what is its role with respect to itself, and with respect to the other sectors? And what should its relationships with those other sectors look like - adversarial, partnership? And, of course, how can we promote the growth of the sector, and its strategic capacity?

If it is a sector, are all types of NGOs (possibly) and CBOs included in it, even those which may be markedly “uncivil” in the normative sense - that is, those which promote self-interest to the exclusion of others - or do we wish to include only those with an 'emancipatory' agenda, those which are working towards an inclusive version of social transformation? This raises two further issues.

First, when working with CBOs, where self-interest is the inevitable starting point, how do we relate to those CBOs which carry more of a “bonding” agenda (that is, immediate and direct self-interest first) as opposed to those which carry more of a “bridging” agenda (that is, the attempt to reach out to others in a broader social impulse). The jury is still out on which form of NGO would be most beneficial in promoting, for example, peace and reconciliation in BiH, at least as a starting point.
Second, if we include only ‘emancipatory’ organisations, then we immediately imply that civil society is not just a sector, but carries a normative connotation; it may encompass an approach, a set of values, as to the very meaning of the term “civil”. In which case it is not just a sector at all.

Is it then a group of specific actors all organised within a sector which does not include government or business? Or can it be seen as a domain, on the other hand, a social space apart from government and commerce within which groups pursue the social ends that concern them? But how do we begin to work with the concept of “social space”, and once again who is “in” and who is “out”?

Is civil society a collective noun, signifying a group of organisations, or is it an abstract noun, signifying social space? Is it perhaps an adjective? Or is it, as CARE would have it in certain documents, a “process” (rather than a goal)\textsuperscript{xii} - and what exactly might this mean? Does it mean that any work towards promoting ‘associanality’ is valid, or might this entrench existing norms and confound work towards social transformation?\textsuperscript{xiii} What exactly is the problem that we are trying to address here?

Or is civil society a “relational” concept, so that “one of the keys to civil society development is the creation of relationships and networks”\textsuperscript{xiv}, implying a very specific approach to programming that must take the specificity of particular situations into account? But what exactly might this mean, or imply; surely all programming should take the specificities of the situation into account? Surely all strategies, in the development sector at least, must be “relational”? What exactly is the difference between all these “definitions”; they become more confusing the more one tries to pin them down. Most confusing of all, but quite understandable, is that CARE (and others) use these concepts interchangeably in their programming proposals, compounding the notion of civil society as a free-floating concept that can be tweaked to mean anything and everything, but in the end loses meaning altogether.

When NGOs are admitted into the realm of civil society, some whom I interviewed would have it that only those NGOs who are working directly on advocacy towards influencing social and political policies are welcome to the fold, while others hold that any NGO, even when it is working directly and purely with grassroots issues and community development work, are part and parcel of civil society. Which should we take as more worthy of our assistance, given that we admit NGOs at all?

Is there a history of civil society in BiH (that is, in the former Yugoslavia)? Some whom I interviewed asserted that there was, that self-managing associations of various kinds were an integral part of the Yugoslavian system. Others assert that such associations steeped their participants in a form of collective endeavour which contradicts the notion of civil society as an emancipatory project, and that the Yugoslavian notion of civil society, when one is working with CBOs, acts as more of a hindrance than a help, and that we must work to move beyond such a history. Who is ‘right’?

What of relationships between civil society and the state and business? Is it true that “a strong civil society means ensuring a dynamic and beneficial relationship between government, business and the non-profit sector”, in the pursuit of “common interests”\textsuperscript{xv}. 
This implies – on my reading - a very apolitical and 'global' line; it assumes that we are already dealing with a 'developed' society (in the Western sense). At the very least, it seems to imply that civil society is not a means of reaching such a (perhaps) laudable goal, but that it is the goal itself. Under many circumstances, certainly also in BiH, there may be many steps to take before such a rosy picture might emerge; in the meantime, perhaps antagonistic relationships and the pursuit of contrary goals might be a more effective strategy towards social transformation. If civil society is a process, and if the society in question is facing debilitating problems, then there may be many ways in which civil society might effectively act in the society other than the sanitised version implied in the quote above.

Some argue that a strong state is necessary to the emergence of a strong civil society; others argue that a strong civil society is necessary to the emergence of a strong state. There seems to be a general sense that civil society will promote good governance and reduce poverty; but it can equally be argued that these things work the other way around. Perhaps they work simultaneously. In which case, where do we start?

The mind swirls with confusion. Why talk about civil society at all? If we weren't constrained to talk about it - by the ToR for this contract, by the programming and funding rationale, by our immersion in a particular discourse which seems to offer so much (so many millions of development pundits cannot be wrong) - then would we be talking about it at all? I mean, what specifically does the notion of civil society have to say to the particular reality that BiH faces now?

**AN INTERLEADING THOUGHT**

If civil society is a means - say, to a more well-governed and poverty-reduced society - then it invites an instrumental approach; we intervene, much as an engineer might, to build something. If, on the other hand, civil society is a goal - a more equitable society in which all have a voice and influence, perhaps is even invited to join the European Union (as CARE states its intention to be\(^{xvi}\)) - then it invites a normative approach, and once again we intervene instrumentally, a kind of social engineering approach. Both options come to the same thing - that we intervene to help build something that is not there, and that we assume (this something) to be important. But such intervention may be the essence of the problem itself, rather than the solution to it. The essence of the problem, in BiH, as I came to it in the preceding section, is: How can BiH awake to itself? For those who would intervene from the outside, there is great danger of compounding the problem in the name of alleviating it. There is great danger that imported notions of civil society, carved out in the cloistered think-tanks and towers of the West, and stomped in via the hobnailed boots of too much money attached to too many strings, risk achieving the opposite end to that intended. Recipients become mesmerised by notions such as civil society, good governance, European Union, beneficial relationships between government and civil society.

Why, though, are we targeting civil society when the society as a whole is dysfunctional? It can only be that we believe that, as the sector of civil society grows, the society itself will inevitably undergo a transformation. There may be some truth to
this, but from an angle other than that taken above.

In the past, BiH was dictated to by various (foreign) empires and regimes. These have disappeared; but ‘globalisation’ and the dictates of unaccountable global institutions might signal greater danger\textsuperscript{viii}. With the latter, power is wielded in more hidden and insidious ways, through temptation, through assumption, through a compelling discourse which lulls to sleep rather than awakens.

If we would intervene at all, how best can we assist BiH to awaken to itself, to become more conscious of itself, to be able to make choices based on its own reading of its situation; indeed, to be able to read its situation for itself, rather than be read to by a well meaning parent?

To do this, it seems that we have to relinquish the notion of building (or even helping to build) and replace it with the notion of \textit{engaging}.

**Engaging with Civil Society:**

**Outer Circumstance and Inner Nature**

My problem with the discourse around civil society is not that I think that all the various conflicting arguments and positions are wrong, but that they are probably all right. There are many different ways in, there are many different ways to engage. It does depend on a specific reading of the situation. More importantly, it depends on our response to such reading; that is, given a reading, what would we then like to achieve?

If I were to intervene into BiH, if I were to engage (indeed, I am doing so now), I would want to enable BiH to awake to itself, to begin to penetrate the unconscious, habitual and hence hidden places in its psyche; to bring these into the open, that they can be made conscious and dealt with. Divisions that are ages old, dependencies that are ages old, apathies and angers and acquiescences that are ages old; all these go down to the bedrock of social culture. And being built into the cultural bedrock, into habitual ways of functioning, hidden as they are, they generate outer circumstances that conform to their patterning, so that they become reinforced, and the cycle goes round and round and round. This is how it is with the unconscious, with the deep habits we form, as individuals, groups, organisations or societies. Until these are brought into the open, into consciousness, until thinking becomes unclouded by its perennial shadows - and the process is painful indeed, far easier to live as we do, than to change - until such time, the patterns will merely repeat, and repeat, and repeat, as they have done and are doing now.

All interventions that I have seen thus far focus on outer circumstance. Change the policy, change the structure, reform governmental institutions, build more grassroots organisations, engage with projects large and small - and the rest will follow, the society will gradually be transformed, its habits will change. There may be some truth here, but it is at best a partial truth. Once again, it is not that these things are not important, not that they will not have relevant effects - much happens simultaneously, as I noted above - but they remain surface interventions.
Seldom do we look to the inner nature of the thing in question. And it is, ultimately, this inner nature which drives the system. The deep cultural, ingrained habits which lie unseen and unnoticed in the depths of the unconscious. How do we free a stuck social situation? How do we enable development to take place, so that a new future, a consciously self-chosen future, might emerge?

I would contend that a civil society is one which has the ability to reflect on itself, to engage in open and consequent dialogue, to have real conversations which enable unconscious habit to emerge into the light of consciousness, to begin thus to take responsibility for itself. Only through dialogue, only through conversation, only through an increasing ability to reflect on self, to critique self rather than other, to recognise also the greatness (not only the smallness) that lies hidden in one’s own way of doing things. Only through the ability to articulate, to make open and visible and conscious and apparent, the dark and the light, the pain and the promise, the despair and the hope. Only through honest and open conversation.

This is, I believe, the space that must be fought for and won. This would imply many things - networking, horizontal linkages rather than vertical, an emphasis on inclusivity - yes, all these things, and many more. But these are methods, and we can come to them later. The thing is, it is the space for such dialogue that must be fought for and won. (Thinking for oneself - and so also becoming conscious of one’s interdependencies - is precisely the problem to be addressed. Any actor or organisation that moves in the direction of facilitating dialogue has already freed itself to a certain extent from the norms that bedevil BiH. Such cultural freedom seems to be the underlying meaning of, and rationale for, civil society organisations in the first place.

**Changing our Thinking**

Let us, at this point, not talk about civil society, but rather focus on what we need to achieve, what we can do, in the here and now. And here I can only repeat - dialogue, conversation, critical self-reflection. Not directed towards a particular point, but to open space in the society to think afresh, to think again, to think anew. To dig deep into the dark and hidden wellsprings of cultural habit, to bring these to the surface, to engage with them, and gradually to be able to choose.

It was Wittgenstein who said: “If you are unwilling to know what you are, your style will be a form of deceit. If anyone is unwilling to descend into themselves because this is too painful, they will remain superficial”. Indeed. All that I write here may seem too vague, too far removed from reality, too general and abstract, too impossible to programme around (we come back to this later); a new discourse which does not easily fit with those who fund proposals. But these arguments will be specious once again, a convenient ‘out’. Truth is, for most of us in the aid industry, and for many in BiH itself, our style is in fact a form of deceit; we pay lip service, we deceive ourselves and others, we follow blindly where others lead.

We may indeed, in the final analysis, be working towards a civil society, but let us
programme what we are really attempting in our work. If I were to say that we are working towards a society that is more conscious, more aware, more responsible for its (long term, therefore inevitably inclusive) future, then - though this may be true - I would similarly be guilty of programming a strategy of similar vagueness and reliance on jargon as the concept of civil society implies. Truly, the two concepts - civil society and consciousness - may well be synonymous, if we really investigate the matter deeply. So, let us not talk of either.

Let us be both more ambitious and more humble at the same time (simultaneously). Let us talk instead of fostering dialogue, conversation, a slow and painful process of (self) articulation. If we could begin to achieve this, then what follows will follow. We do not know where it will lead, we do not know how it will affect outer circumstance, we do not know what configuration the emergent trajectory of this society will take. But we do know that this will begin to address the inner nature of the situation. And we do know that this inner nature goes deep indeed, is largely hidden, and pulls the society along in its wake, such that outer circumstance follows. Or no; perhaps, given the nature of complexity, as we have noted, it all happens simultaneously. But paying primary attention to outer circumstance remains a skating over the surface; there is so little attention being paid to the soul of BiH. And it is here that a nation’s development trajectory unfolds.

Lest this seem vague, I must say here that, on the contrary, it opens very specific and strategic programming possibilities. But to take such programming seriously, two assumptions must be taken into account. First, it takes a very long term perspective, and a different programming rationale and discourse, which might have significant implications.

Second, it cannot be undertaken, even ventured into, by a foreign donor if it is not led by locals, if the impulse does not already exist within the society itself. I have begun to use the word “we” very loosely in this text, it could refer to donors in general, to CARE, to myself, to local actors and organisations. This is dangerous; it is necessary to be careful and specific. I said earlier that outsiders cannot presume to build what is not there, that this simply compounds the problem. We - CARE, myself - can only engage with what is already emerging, with the (genuine) questions that are being asked. Only where there is such questioning taking place, only where something is emerging that might take the form of substantive dialogue and conversation, then, developmentally speaking, is an outsider able to engage.

We cannot change others, we can only change ourselves.

(SOME MATTERS CONCERNING)
CARE BIH

“So command of the world rests increasingly with corporations and the organisations that support them, ...”

Michael Parenti
A Prefatory Note

I have tried, as best I can, to gain and articulate some understanding of BiH and civil society as it pertains to BiH. I have noted, and the evidence is clear, that my writing is impressionistic, an attempt to portray a situation from the inside (or, to portray the inner aspects of the situation). When it comes to CARE BiH (hereafter CARE), this becomes an even more difficult task. So what I have to say about CARE is even more impressionistic than that which has been written thus far. I hesitate to say too much. For the following reason.

The phenomenon that is CARE stretches way back beyond CARE BiH, to CARE BHCSM, and then to CARE MERMU, CARE International and the various CARE country programmes. CARE is a huge and global undertaking, with its own ways of doing things, its own norms and institutional culture, its rules and regulations and connections to sources of funding. Even within BiH, CARE’s overall programming has come to dwarf those aspects that are concerned with civil society (though it was not always so). I touched, and had access to, only the tip of a very large iceberg. In reality, I saw little of the greater CARE; this was not part of my brief. This makes it all the more difficult to come anywhere close to portraying the ‘inner aspect of the situation’ with regard to CARE. CARE, with its complex hierarchies and rules of the road, remains opaque and obtuse to me. Yet the greater CARE certainly impacts powerfully on CARE BiH, and even more so on its civil society programming. I can only mention what I have seen, or what I think I might have understood; I can do little more.

This immediately raises an issue of direct relevance to the rest of this text. I wrote earlier that the complexity of the situation demands a real look at all aspects of it, all characters and players, so to speak, because all interact with every other; “It is the story of the complexity that is BiH interacting with the complexity that is CARE interacting with the complexity that is civil society” - was what I wrote. I have little entry to the complexity that is CARE; this limits my ability to tell the whole story of civil society in BiH. But my very lack of access into the complexity of CARE raises an issue directly pertinent to the story as a whole.

Some Disturbing Impressions

Is CARE BiH particularly interested, as part of its programming, in thinking about itself as an institution interwoven into, and directly affecting, BiH and civil society? I’m not sure; but my sense is that CARE, as institution, chooses to remain outside the debate. The levers which move it are invisible to civil society in BiH; the institution as a whole resides in, and takes its way of being from, those very foreign countries which dictate to BiH in the first place. I have already noted that, in complex situations, things change simultaneously, or not at all. That we can only change ourselves, not others. Yet CARE BiH does not appear interested in changing itself as institution. As institution, so it seems, it has no need to change, or to look at itself. Only in terms of its programming, because it might be able to improve what it is doing with Bosnians in the field. It is possible, though, that the very way CARE is – the way it sources its funds, the way it
programmes, the way it relates to other institutions – impacts on (civil) society in BiH even as CARE engages. There is little indication that CARE reflects on these things.

The role of foreign influence and dominance being as it has been in BiH affairs, this tendency to ignore itself as an integral player in the reality which is BiH may place a great strain on the possibility for BiH to “awaken to itself”. As great a strain as any other foreign influence. And this is especially true when it comes to the question of discourse. It is difficult to critique the care-giver; surely the fact that CARE is there to help, to transfer resources and assistance to Bosnians, is ample proof of its good intentions, of its largesse, at best, and its innocuousness, at worst. But the matter is not so simple, there are unconscious and hidden factors at play.

Willingly or not, CARE is a purveyor not only of money and expertise. How the money and expertise is deployed - and this goes beyond programming issues, it goes to the heart of behaviour and power - is an integral part of what CARE purveys. But more than this, CARE is a purveyor of ideas, of a particular discourse. This is contained in its regulations and procedures, and also in its rhetoric (which, indeed, goes back to its funding sources, beyond the boundaries of BiH). We are, after all, concerned here with the issue of civil society because this is part of the international aid discourse, not because it is necessarily the most important concept to be directly relevant to BiH. It is something that CARE brings to the situation, rather than something it finds there. (I am not referring here to actual CARE programming, which has – at least within the Civil Society Programme – arisen as particular response; I am referring to the discourse that accompanies the programming.)

To the extent that the concept of civil society is a free-floating concept, to the extent that it is a concept applied - purveyed? - by the forces of globalisation to all developing countries, this can become an unconscious use of power; foreign domination once again, subtly carried in the large pockets of the overcoat of assistance. To the extent that CARE itself uses the concept of civil society sometimes confusingly, sometimes contradictorily, the problem is compounded. To the extent that CARE convenes workshops and talkshops, commissions papers and evaluations, and still the concept remains vague, the problem is compounded even more. That this is the case is apparent from a reading of various documents. This is not to say that CARE BiH is doing any of this consciously; but it is precisely the lack of consciousness that is the point, and point of concern, here. Earlier, I more or less equated civil society with a conscious and open society, aware and articulate and transparent. CARE’s responsibility here - for its own consciousness, articulateness and transparency - becomes onerous indeed. For civil society to develop in BiH, it too must think very consequently about itself and its own role, about what exactly it is purveying.

So a sentence like “CARE’s intention in the Balkans ... (is) ... to help countries prepare ... for accession to the EU” might read innocuously enough, but it carries great presumption (and influence); where exactly does such an idea come from? CARE’s use of the word ‘partners’ - which it borrows from the general discourse of its field - is another case in point. Terminology like ‘mainstreaming advocacy’ and ‘a rights-based approach’ role easily off the tongue, and sound intelligent, but is there any real common understanding (even within CARE) as to what they mean? CARE should play an “ever-
increasing role as mentor instead of implementer sounds innocuous and laudable enough, but one cannot decide for oneself to be a mentor to someone else, one is asked to be a mentor (unless one sees the ‘mentee’ as a subordinate). And what precisely does CARE bring that equips it for the role, or is it to be assumed that a moneyed Western institution can inevitably and naturally play that role in a place like BiH?

“For CARE a strong civil society means ensuring a dynamic and beneficial relationship between government, business and the non-profit sector - is CARE aware of the genesis of this reading of civil society, that it may be more a product of a globalised world order than of any emancipatory social project? (As one staff member put it, he learned this approach from his ‘international trainings’.) “CARE recognises the value of productive and collaborative institutional relationships in pursuing common interests - yes, but what if the interests are not common but contrary, what if the situation at hand is in a whole other place? “... improving the delivery of services to people who need them the most - this certainly seems harmless enough, but it is in the very blandness that the problem lies; this ‘institution-speak’ lulls to sleep, reduces consciousness and awareness, allows so much else to pass unnoticed.

There is great danger in using words and phrases that mean nothing, really, except that they smooth the passage of documents through the institutional hierarchies and procedures. Because we fall asleep - and the essence of the project, as I have come to earlier, is to help BiH awake to itself! The institution that is directly concerned with assisting such process must, at the very least, awake to itself, and to the less than conscious and transparent roles that it might be playing in the society it wants to assist.

This is particularly true for a civil society programme. Notably one that lives inside of a much larger institution which may be doing things that contradict the civil society programme’s rationale and intent. The larger CARE, beyond the civil society programme, is, by and large, a public service contractor. It tenders for, and takes on, jobs that are specified far from BiH itself, certainly light years away from civil society in BiH, jobs that those with money (the globalised West) see as valuable and worthwhile (for whom exactly, and according to whose agenda, is another question entirely). CARE, as institution, does not necessarily have an agenda of social emancipation, of the promotion of countervailing power; at the very least, it tenders for jobs that are decided upon by those other than itself. It may do this with sensitivity and with the best of intentions, or it may do this largely unconscious to the greater forces at play. It is not my place to comment here on these matters, except insofar as they affect CARE’s engagement with civil society in BiH. In terms of all that I have written thus far with respect to both BiH and the development of civil society within BiH, it behoves CARE BiH’s civil society programme to think deeply on these things, to articulate itself clearly, directly and simply, and to act with consequence. The civil society programme cannot afford to be anything less than fully conscious to itself.

CARE’s Civil Society Programme

CARE’s civil society programme (CSP) is indeed closely engaged with the society that it
is working in, and has done a lot of thinking about its work. I do not want to convey the impression that it has not. For example, it moved from the limited - both practically and conceptually) - intervention of service delivery towards a more transformative agenda, that of programming towards the building of civil society, by thinking through the implications of Ian Smillie’s evaluation of its work in 1996. But there is more to be done. (I do not say this as an evaluative comment; this is not an evaluation, and there have been real evaluations already undertaken. I am only concerned here with observations that may inform the matter at hand.)

The CSP has engaged with civil society on a number of levels. It has important relationships with certain NGOs, real partnership relationships, for example, with Mozaik Community Development Foundation; and such partnerships go way beyond the disbursement of money, there is real engagement here, long term engagement. CARE CSP thinks alongside these organisations, and is a respected actor. Sometimes this leads to direct collaborative programme work, such as, for example, the policy related advocacy programme that it is discussing with Mozaik and the Centre for Civic Initiative.

In terms of the bulk of its direct programming work though, as it has evolved over the years, CSP has taken the line that it can best contribute to the building of civil society in BiH by focusing its attention and resources on community-based organisations (CBOs) rather than on NGOs. NGOs already receive the bulk of aid money, and in any case they are not the crucial element in the building of civil society. Civil society must be built from the bottom up; local and truly indigenous organisations must be fostered and nurtured; it is the marginalised who must be worked with.

Within its chosen realm, once again, CSP is deeply respected and appreciated, not simply for the money it disburses but for the relationships it forms with its counterparts in the field; relationships which continue over a time period that has nothing to do with money, relationships which counterparts see as helpful and beneficial in many ways, relationships which are respectful, open, engaging and strategically important for those organisations. These relationships are sometimes directly related to the organisations’ particular issues as organisation; at other times the relationships extend to collaboration on certain projects, or to the fostering of networking, linkages and opportunities for dialogue. In the context of other donor institutions in BiH, and perhaps also in the context of what CARE is doing elsewhere in the world, the CSP is a unique programme, courageous and alternative. It is on the ground, in the field, to an extent one could say ‘out there where the people are’, not implementing but assisting in building the capacity of CBOs, through the way it structures its programmes, through the way it engages, through its mix of funding, training and advice. It gets its hands dirty, which most donors in BiH do not.

CSP encourages CBOs to look to their own financial and organisational sustainability, it nurtures helpful relationships and connections with others, it does not swamp organisations with too much money, it provides training and opportunities for strategic reflection. It forms real relationships, not necessarily based on money - perhaps its most important contribution of all. In doing all of this, it hopes to begin to break the culture of dependency and apathy in the face of both foreign and local hierarchy, verticality and power. It is a particular way into the problem, a particular choice of
intervention, and it is having an effect. It is slow and painstaking; but this will be true of any intervention. The picture that I have painted in preceding pages implies that there are alternatives which CSP could be focusing on; it implies that CSP’s chosen route is perhaps not the most efficacious one. But we will return to this in the following section. For now, I look at some of the constraints which seem to appear in its current modality and methodology (not, as I say, by way of evaluation, but by way of informing the alternatives).

There appears to be a confusion between long and short term funding rationales. Clearly the overall strategy - both in terms of building civil society as a whole (organisation by organisation), as well as in terms of building the individual organisation’s capacities in themselves - is a long term one. Yet the funding modality is quite breathtakingly short term. Many grants last for a few months only, or are targeted at a specific project; longer ones may last for a year, though this is exceptional; very little lasts longer than a year. In terms of funding for organisational capacity building, this seems absurdly limited. If money is relevant to capacity building at all, then it is relevant for far longer periods. Small grants, delivered for short periods, mostly demanding a specific project focus by the recipient, linked to heavily formalistic procedures, may have their place; but with respect to organisational capacity building - which is a long term project for most of these organisations - and in the absence of comparable donor interventions, the methodology is a superficial one at best, and a cynical one at worst. My own practice has been built around the strengthening of capacity of both NGOs and CBOs, often in far more auspicious circumstances than those I find in BiH. While there is no doubt that dependency can be created when grant periods and amounts are too long, and focused on the overall institution rather on the specific project, there is equally no doubt that the opposite is also true. A nuanced approach is called for in organisational capacity building, unique responses to unique situations. There is little evidence of that here, with respect to funding modalities, little real flexibility.

Coupled to this is the kind of conditionality and training which are often, it seems, applied. The recipient organisation’s involvement with an advocacy project (often short term) is demanded - understandably but not always appropriately. Training consists of the usual global packages - strategic planning, financial record keeping, logical framework, organisational structures and procedures, monitoring and evaluation systems, and so on. I may be getting this wrong, but it does seem as though training too is short term and superficial; very little goes to the heart of organisational capacity (which has more to do with inner organisational cultural aspects of functioning than it does with the surface trappings of organisational form). And training is in any case not the same as capacity building, which often demands a more specific form of organisational support, in the form of accompaniment, mentoring, and deeper processing of organisational issues. Some CSP staff do engage with this to a certain extent when working with counterparts, but they themselves are not receiving adequate support, training and mentoring to enable them to do this with professional integrity.

There is much rhetoric, in the CSP, with respect to civil society, but there is little in its programming portfolio to give credence to such rhetoric, other than the fact that CBOs are being assisted. Despite all the learned documents and evaluations and workshops
that have been held, as one person put it: “Six years ago CARE was doing capacity building with small local CBOs, and it is still doing this now; nothing has changed. Most of this is being done with CBOs which belong to one (ethnic) group or another, seldom across groups. Yet things are changing, new opportunities are arising all the time; but there is little to see for this in CARE programming”.

On the other hand, there are specific sectors that are being targeted. Some, like youth, have been targeted since the start. Others are newer, or still on the drawing board, like the Roma, like the disabled, like anti-trafficking work by womens’ groups. All commendable and credible sectors to work in, but the problem is as I stated it earlier: because the concept of civil society is so vacuous, anything can be done, regardless, and we can still argue that it is building civil society. The question arises: why talk about civil society at all? If there is a sector of society that you believe needs strengthening, then by all means strengthen it. It is quite acceptable to help in building specific sectors, and they may have great relevance. But I wonder: is there a civil society programme here at all, or would it not be better to say that CARE has a social development programme focusing on specific things, like youth, or human trafficking, or building the capacity of CBOs in specific locations.

Having read the documentation with respect to civil society, I simply do not see the connection to the programming that is being pursued. Except in the sense that almost anything we choose to do, so long as it is assisting local organisations in some way, can be seen as building civil society. But the connection is oftimes inadvertent, and too broad to assist in the strategic thinking of the CSP team.

There is, I believe, generally within the CSP, too little strategic thinking taking place. I see this when I look at the relationships between programming and rhetoric (as above). I see it when I look at the confusing conflation and dislocation of ideas around civil society expressed in documentation (for example, civil society as a process, as relational, and as a sector). I see it when I read evaluation reports which point to contradictions which do not appear to have been taken account of at all in later programming. I see it when I read reports of workshops and ‘international trainings’ that run to many reams of pages that do not seem to have been internalised by CSP staff. I see it when some of these staff themselves tell me that their prognosis for BiH is so dire that they prefer not to think about things at all (least of all the future). I see it when programming seems to run along lines that are dictated to by sources of funding rather than by conscious choice and focused intent (this may be a general CARE tendency which finds its way into the CSP, but this simply proves the point). I see it when programming seems to run along lines that are old grooves carved out by the programme in the past, or that seem to take their direction primarily from global trends. An intense schedule of programming, visits, proposal writing, on the ground mentorship (sometimes unschooled in the specifics), management of portfolios; all this is laudable, yes - the team works hard. But it does not substitute.

My understanding of (the lack of) civil society in BiH is that there is too little thinking going on (thinking that is not constrained by habit and cultural norm, by hidden unconscious impulses, by avoidance of taking responsibility for self, by reliance and dependence on outside influence). Too little new thinking; the society feels mute. This
is why I come to a place which seems to demand a new level of dialogue, conversation and articulation if we are to focus ourselves directly on the building of civil society. I also noted that we cannot change others, we can only change ourselves. All this, therefore, has direct bearing on the way the CSP goes about its business (not simply how it programmes; this will follow). If the CSP is to engage consequentially with civil society in BiH, then it must become, itself, that which it seeks to nurture. Else it merely functions, else it merely repeats, and there is so much repetition already. CARE has many constraints built into its very genes, but it also has great freedom and power. If it cannot change, what hope for BiH?

(IN THE REALM OF)  
THE FUTURE

“What is more valuable than gold? Light. What is more precious than light? Conversation”.

J.W. von Goethe

A NARRATIVE THREAD
It all hangs together, you see, as one underlying whole through which all the parts, all the characters, all the angles form the context for every other, so deriving their meaning and their very definition from each other. Such is the nature of complexity, deep order and form informing surface chaos and fragmentation. No part would be what it is without the others.

Notice how, with respect to BiH, outer and inner affect each other in a continuous dance. The foreign powers which maintain BiH in a state of dependence hold a picture of the dependency of BiH deep within their unconscious, enabling them to maintain their stance as rational. Their picture, though, is a constructed imagination, but is informed by a real state of dependency within BiH itself, which carries a picture, deep within its unconscious, of the need to be governed, to derive its own order from the superior power of others (else it collapses into disorder, chaos, violence). Such imaginations both produce, and are produced by, outer circumstances which gradually harden into patterns that seem irrevocable, implacable. Foreign powers are validated in their imposition of authority; in BiH division and conflict and fragmentation indicate increasing lack of authority for its own future. The dance becomes a repetitive pattern, every move reinforcing every other. And the pattern of the dance is held together through a collaborative lack of consciousness; the dynamic becomes intransigent, the logic unassailable. It begins to appear as if nothing else is possible, outer circumstance finally being what it has become. But focusing on outer circumstance alone leaves us with the endless round of debate and argument, blame and denial, accusation and counter-accusation. The outer, though, is derived from the inner; at least, only an inner shift will enable change, only an inner movement will crack the shell of the situation. Some fluidity is necessary for anything new to emerge.

I want to quote you a definition of power which I learned, with gratitude, many years ago, a developmental definition:

"Power is the potential of Party A (‘the powerful’) in a given social structure/relationship to impose her expectations on Party B (‘the powerless’) in such a way, that Party B sees less chance not to comply with the expectation of Party A."

If it escapes you, read it again, in conjunction with the paragraph above. Does this not ring, when considering the situation of BiH? Who then must act, in such a situation? I call the definition ‘developmental’ because it allows for something new to emerge through growing self-awareness and responsibility. The glory of the powerless is that they can move to consciousness; there is nothing left to lose, everything to gain. On the periphery, on the margins, they can bring new mobility to a stuck situation. The doom of the powerful is that they struggle to move to consciousness; they are vested in maintaining their power, and the situation keeps them blinded to themselves.

What then of CARE BiH, an integral player straddling both worlds? Carrying the largesse of humanitarian aid, it appears of the light. Caught in its own origins, in its own institutional habits, it slumbers in its own darkness. Immersed in its light (and power), blind to its darkness (and powerlessness), CARE can reinforce the patterns that bind, precisely through its very benign largesse. CARE itself is caught in the patterns that bind, and forms part of the pattern itself. Becoming more conscious, awakening to itself...
and its role, CARE could help untie the knots of unconsciousness in BiH, and in so
doing - inevitably, because everything is bound together - contribute to a loosening of
the pattern, freeing itself too from its own assumptions. Every small new move allows
something entirely unpredictable to emerge.

And what of civil society? I think that we confuse ourselves because we think in terms
of nouns - civil society, sector, NGO, CBO, process, domain, space, relations, path,
goal. All are nouns. Nouns signify things, like tables and chairs, inert things, finished
products, each discrete from every other, separate and defined. But nouns are
products of activity, they emerge out of activity. Our discourse is littered with so many
things that we stumble blindly in the dark. If we were to shift our way of seeing, so that
we paid attention to the verb rather than the noun, to the activity rather than to the
product of the activity, then our entire world would change. We would no longer be able
to debate definitions, construct programmes and define policies as though they existed
outside of ourselves, as though they have the power to guide the future. Verbs connect
us immediately to our responsibility for the life we lead; it is in our actions that we come
to know ourselves. The future is carved by what we do and by how we do it, not by
definitions or programmes or policies, not by things, abstract or concrete. We do not, in
the first place, have to construct a programme for future action, we have to act
differently, in the first place, and the rest will follow.

What we actually do, in each and every moment, builds or does not build a civil society.
We have to awake to ourselves, to our own behaviour in the world. All kinds of things
follow, all kinds of things change and shift, when we begin to take responsibility for our
actions. As each of us changes, regardless of anyone else, the dance changes, and
everyone changes.

**Conversation, Lest We Misunderstand**

I am suggesting that the real issue at hand is the question of how BiH may be enabled,
might enable itself, to awake to itself. This may lead to a civil society, but the activity
that BiH is constrained to undertake, if the society is to become functional (with all that
this implies), is that it awake to itself. Become conscious of itself, its inner potential, its
inner constraints. I am suggesting that the way to activate such awakening is through
conversation.

It is easy to dismiss the notion of conversation, of dialogue. Another talkshop, perhaps,
another round of meetings; and nothing to show for it. Money spent on hot air, without
visible impact. Little material output to show for our dollars, apart from reports which
no-one reads. Lest we misunderstand, this is not the kind of talking I am referring to.
Real conversation has real power of transformation in it; it is, in fact, the harbinger of
consciousness, the herald of a new way of being. Conversation opens things up, allows
us to go deep within ourselves, and from within ourselves, find the other. Conversation
is as much about listening as about talking, as much about understanding as being
understood. Real conversation has magic in it, the power of raising the unconscious,
the hidden, the avoided, the denied, to consciousness. Where we cannot escape the
responsibility of our own behaviour.
Whole books have been written about the power of conversation and dialogue. There are many forms which conversation can take (and many diverse programming possibilities, some of which I indicate in the following sub-section). It is not just about people sitting around talking aimlessly, or rehashing, or debating. There is rigour in genuine conversation, an attempt to unearth the formative forces at play, to reveal the hidden, to understand ourselves and the other, to explore the inner nature of the phenomenon in question, to articulate understanding and so enable new understanding. Conversation enables polarities, mired in their own assumptions, to speak to each other, so that a third, and new, reality is able emerge.

Conversation can be facilitated, but facilitative method does not consist of tools, techniques, exercises, procedures. We have to throw away the training manuals, the modules, the pre-set agendas. Facilitated conversation is not about meeting procedures or training programmes. At best it is about a free yet focused and intelligent meeting. Without predetermined or even expected outcome; the emphasis is on the free emergence of observations, thoughts, feelings and ideas from the complexity of conversational, personal, contextual and conceptual interaction. At the same time, the process cannot be simply “left to happen”; it is guided, facilitated, encouraged to develop, to deepen, to enlighten. The facilitative method used in such conversation “cannot be used mechanically ... what it does is not so much to teach us processes we did not know before, but rather opens up a process in us, which was part of us already.”

The facilitator’s task is to ensure open, free and continuous evolution of the process of conversation, to enable an intelligent reading of the situation to emerge. To support and ensure that there is human warmth and respect - which is different from agreement - between those participating; to challenge tendencies towards superficiality, jargon, the glib and fast conclusion or the stickiness of a relationship or pattern. To keep the focus alive and open, yet always focused, and intent. To be awake to where the process is going, where it’s been, how it’s coming into being. To anticipate, and find the right question to move the conversation on. To work with those participating to make meaning of the conversation; be able to draw the threads together, help weave the forming tapestry. Be aware that anything may emerge; be ready to let go to what does emerge.

Find the means, find the possibilities to get these kinds of conversations going in BiH, and - gradually, slowly, painfully, possibly exhilaratingly - the society will move towards a new understanding of itself, open itself to itself, begin to move into the future. Such a process of conversation will be uneven and chaotic, sometimes unmanageable and often deeply challenging; its results will be unpredictable - a society may begin to emerge that bears little resemblance to Western assumptions about correctness - but it will inevitably begin to awake to itself. And its own power. And the mysterious power of collaborative, rather than conflictual, relationships.

Does this paint too idealistic a picture? Certainly the situation is fraught right now with such tension and division, such past hurt and anger, that it may be hard to imagine the possibilities that I outline here. And yes, the path will be long and hard, seemingly
impossible at times. And for a long time, there will be no discernible change to observe (at least in outer circumstance); inevitably so, because this is a path, a route, that works from the inside, out; not from the outside, in. This is not about programmes for policy advocacy, about implementing projects, about training organisations. All these are necessary, but they work from the outside in. It is in the practice of opening society that a civil society will emerge (whatever form this may take).

I was struck by the muteness of this society, its acquiescence, its apathy. However idealistic the picture that I paint may seem, from the vantage point of now, what alternative is there?

**Some Indications for Programming**

The worst possible way to understand what has been said above about conversation would be to take it too literally. For our purposes here, it is about bringing a society into dialogue with itself. There are many ways to do this, many modalities. The principles of conversation mentioned above must serve as guides to the activity of conversing only, not as the call for programming to consist of a plethora of workshops.

I said earlier that this text will not enumerate a set of recommendations for CARE (or BiH, for that matter) to use as a strategy for future programming. It is for CARE (and BiH, for that matter) to think for itself about possible implications; the text is intended as opening up possibilities for new ways of thinking, nothing more. Taking recommendations from an outsider as the content of one’s future programming is to remain asleep to oneself, and that goes against the grain of this paper. Moreover, I have seen so little of what is really possible in BiH, I have met with so few people and organisations. I am not on the ground, that I may construct a CARE (CSP) strategy for its acceptance or rejection.

But, from what I have seen, there are various possibilities that occur to me, perhaps as starting points for discussion. Please take these as indications only, as spurs to thinking. They are nothing more than this.

I met with Jacob Finci, who is wanting to facilitate a kind of Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) - loosely based on the South African model - to come into being. I cannot imagine a more appropriate site of potential for a real conversation to emerge amongst Bosnians, than such an endeavour. It would not, it could not, follow the form of the South African model in any way precisely - there are too many differences between the country situations - but whatever form it took would be an expression of exactly the kind of “opening up to itself” that I am suggesting is the way forward for BiH now. I have no idea what help he may need, whether from international donors like CARE or from local organisations and actors. But support for such a venture seems so obvious that it almost goes without saying.

(As an aside, and to illustrate the difference between programming towards the kind of dialogue I’m talking about and programming towards civil society, if one were to support such an impulse, say by funding, how would you describe it as a programme? Would
Jacob Finci - or the initiative - be an NGO? Would it be a CBO? If it included government and business, would it be located within civil society? If you claimed that you were funding a partnership between sectors, would this really be true - it is not a partnership but an initiative in its own right. If you funded aspects of it, would you be funding ‘civil society’? You would be funding a process of dialogue and conversation, yes, but putting it under the subject of ‘civil society’, or even ‘peace and reconciliation’, presumes pre-ordained outcomes, iminicable to real conversation.)

What about supporting a process of dialogue, amongst a limited set of actors, which could lead to the publication of a book - not academic but a mixture of academic text, creative prose, fiction, poetry, even photography - that would be an intended exploration of Bosnian society, as it finds itself now, in the midst of its current struggle. A book which many could read, finding in it those pieces that responded to their preferred reading tastes. A book which could begin to articulate the society to itself, promoting understanding and dialogue even as it emerges out of conversation between its contributors. Or separate publications - academic, contemporary fiction, poetry. High time that Bosnians wrote about their own situation, from within themselves, for themselves.

What about bringing a bunch of CBOs together to write about what they experience on the ground; or NGOs together to write about what they experience ‘in the air’; both with the mandate to tackle issues honestly, their writing and meeting a continuous round of conversation and dialogue? One of my respondents commented that “Bosnians manufacture history so fast, they cannot digest it, let alone reflect on it, they just vomit it up”. The same could probably be said about many working in NGOs and CBOs, there are so many programmes to attend to, relationships to develop and maintain, funding sources to keep happy, management of the organisation to look after. To give these actors some space to reflect, to consider, to digest, to articulate, to understand, centred around a real intention but open to alternative possibilities - intentional space, so to speak - would already begin to shift things immeasurably.

Find ways of supporting the media. The lack of independent media in BiH is, as we say in South Africa, in Afrikaans, “n skande”, a shame and a disgrace. A society without some form of independent media - radio, print, TV - is a society without ongoing conversation, a mute society, dumb and forlorn. There are journalists whom I met, alive and awake and fighting, working against the odds, needing support. (This is not necessarily to say that the CSP does not provide such media with any support, but ... )

I met with Jan Zlatan Kulenovic, of the Youth Information Agency in Sarajevo, enthusiastic and innovative, running a “school” that “is a half year course of interactive classes with a range of over 50 practical activities for around 20 school attendants per school (young people between 18 and 26 years of age)”. This kind of initiative points the way to the possibility of others - longer term interactive programmes - without set outcome - in which participants, of various ages, could explore issues of history and ethnicity and culture, issues of social development theory and practice, issues of activism and facilitation, the relationship between inner and outer social dynamics, the role and functioning of CBOs and NGOs. “Schools” of facilitation for CBO and NGO workers ...
I met with a psychologist, Vera Kelva of Youth Communications Centre in Banja Luka, an organisation which, amongst other things, offers ‘training programmes’ in peace and reconciliation and conflict resolution, in communication, non-formal education. “We try to help people to think”, she says, “because before the war, people did not have an opportunity to think, there were associational bodies, yes, but without freedom; now we have to help people to deal with freedom, to think for themselves.” So the organisation does run “training programmes”, but these are mostly too short, of limited value. Donors want them tight and short, though, they have to be completed in tight timeframes. How can you work with issues of reconciliation within these deadlines? Often when the “training programme” is over, people still need psychosocial support, but the emphasis is on teaching reconciliation and, say, advocacy, in short sharp bursts, rather than “real work on reconciliation instead of short pieces which then immediately shift to ‘good governance’ as donors demand”. Real work on reconciliation, she says, takes a long time. “It’s not about playing games with participants from the other side, then everyone saying ‘great’ and going off but still never considering the possibility of marrying people from the other party. It’s about working with each party separately first, for a long time, getting people to understand themselves, their own responsibility, then getting them to understand things from the others’ perspective, before even bringing them together. It’s long term, very intensive work, not short term work for the masses. Yet donors will only fund the latter”.

The specific subject that she is talking about is reconciliation, but the same scenario is true throughout BiH with respect to all subjects. Short term training programmes are the donors’ call, inevitably superficial, assuming that a bit of information delivered will cause people to change. No understanding here at all of a developmental approach, a deeper approach, a more exploratory and conversational methodology, an approach which encourages people to go within, penetrate their own vulnerabilities, understand and listen to the other. This is true whether we are dealing with reconciliation, or CBO functioning, or advocacy, or leadership, or social development, or organisation development, or whatever. The deal is - deliver a training programme in the shortest possible time; snippets of information shall set you free. Rather than - facilitate an exploration of the issue in question so that participants are encouraged to think for themselves, to dig deep, to penetrate their relationship to a particular issue, to find their own ways forward, to find themselves and each other, without knowing beforehand what exactly will emerge from these interactions.

Mozaik Community Development Foundation encourages communities to undertake collaborative projects through providing grants, but also through a facilitative methodology carried out by community development advisors who themselves live and work in similar communities. These advisors are ‘trained’ by Mozaik. The kind of facilitation work that I understand to be carried out by these advisors focuses not just on project design and implementation but also on participatory ways of bringing communities into dialogue, within themselves and across boundaries. Such facilitative experience is invaluable, and could be spread amongst other NGO and CBO workers, and deepened to include issues of dialogue and conversational facilitation, exploration of cultural/historical constraints and possibilities, understanding of social development issues and so on. Opportunities to extend the work that Mozaik has been doing with
advisors - extend both in scope of ‘content’ as well as in length of contact and numbers of advisors - may begin to enable a cadre of facilitators, able to deal with open and emergent conversations and situations, to work with increasing numbers of communities.

If one is to support CBOs as a means of building civil society from the bottom up, this can be done in ways that encourage a far deeper level of thinking and conversation to take place. In the first place, longer grants, specific to the grantees’ needs of the time, would encourage and demand a different level of conversation between CSP staff and the grantee, which would in turn demand a deeper level of engagement - even with itself - by the grantee. Different kinds of conversation, focusing on the life of the institution/organisation (and within its context), rather than simply on short term projects, SWOT analyses and so on, become possible. Far more demanding of both grant maker and grantee, of course, but far more rewarding. Shifting the nature of the grant to a long term one enables the grant maker to become more rigorous and consequential about the conditionalities of such grants. So, for example, to encourage - even insist on - the CBOs working across groups, to encourage - even insist on - networking and collaborative activities, to encourage the CBO to look broadly and in more depth at its context, at its own evolution as an organisation, at its own future sustainability as part of the community it belongs to, and so on. Opportunities could be made available for real mentoring of CBOs, real accompaniment with respect to organisation development, more in-depth processes of learning and exploration amongst and between CBOs (and NGOs, for that matter). Articulating, writing about, disseminating critical experiences - both within and between CBOs and NGOs - can be facilitated, enabling a culture of learning and collaboration to begin to develop.

These are just some thoughts floated as drops in a very wide ocean. The point is, a shift in mindset is necessary, from an instrumental to a facilitative stance, from surface considerations to engagement with formative processes, from a focus on outer circumstance to inner activity, from an engineering mindset - most visible results in the shortest possible time - to one that considers real engagement as the key to enabling the emergence of a new reality (which is unpredictable in advance). Such that a new way of seeing will beget new ways of seeing, of being, of doing.

**Implications for CARE CSP**

This will be very brief. Just some pointers towards a longer conversation. I have no idea how any of this may sit with you; I do have an idea that institutional constraints may limit your thinking. Because the implications are obvious by now. But I also know that some of what I am writing about is already being practiced within the CSP; there are foundations and experiences of sound practice to work on.

The reading contained in this text calls for a shift from vague rhetoric about civil society to a more focused intent on supporting and nurturing dialogue and conversation throughout the society. This is both a way of working as well as a goal to work towards. It means becoming far more strategic in your approach, far more responsive to situations as they unfold at the same time as being far more directed towards a
particular end. Recognise that the end will be unpredictable, do not detail results before they happen; but work towards that end consciously and rigorously.

Indeed, the approach calls for far more rigour – instead of routine - than has thus far been exercised, because it is at the same time both open and focused. All this in turn calls for a level of robust and consequential thinking, conversation and dialogue amongst the team itself, than is apparent at the moment. Build an innovative, flexible and rigorous approach and team; take time to work things through, support staff in their professional development, enable them to think for themselves, and facilitate others to do so. If the team is not built as your most important tool, then you will not be able to engage with this strategy; you will not be able to engage with civil society in BiH as a civil society organisation in your own right. Become conscious of, and articulate about, your practice, not merely your programmes. This in turn means understanding and critiquing your own organisations’ practices, and starting to adapt them as necessary.

Combine a non-directive, facilitative approach with a stimulating, challenging, innovative approach. The two may seem contradictory, and they are. Yet mastery implies learning to practise them together, simultaneously. The essence of facilitating good conversation. You are working in a society where impulses exist; respond to them. You are working, at the same time, in a mute and apathetic society; stimulate it. You are an integral part of this society; see this, and the rest follows.

Move beyond the short term grant, the quick and easy training programme, the one-off approach, the need to show immediate results. This will play havoc with your funding, your programming, your accountability. Turn the fight around, lobby and advocate on your own behalf, with your principals from the West, as you encourage Bosnians to lobby and advocate on their own behalf. You are not beyond the site of struggle, a neutral bag of money. You are the site of struggle; civil society in BiH depends as much on your moves as it does on anyone else's. Focus on the situation at hand, rather than on donor priorities, and build your proposals accordingly, and go out and argue for them, argue for the space needed to do what you think is necessary. Become so interesting and so credible a programme that you are looked to for guidance and ideas and modalities, rather than the other way around.

Engage with, and become transparent to, your own institution, to CARE BiH and to the wider CARE family. Move beyond 'bureaucracy-speak' and 'management-speak', produce documents that can be read for what they are, for what they actually say, rather than documents over which the eye glosses at the same old timeworn phraseology, empty passages into which anything can be read. Become more consequent in what you write, in how you convey what will be - if you ever take any of this up - an experimental and unproved approach for some time. Articulate the approach for what it is, and avoid that which goes beyond what you know and do. Do not be afraid of questions, keep them uppermost in your communications and discourse; about the only thing that we can be certain of is that there is no-one in this field who can be certain of anything. Questions are the key to keeping your own thinking awake and alive, as well as that of others; whereas a spurious certainty, and the jargon that gathers around it, is a soporific, and erodes muscular thinking.
None of this deals with any of the details. For example, I understand - though I may be very wrong here - that there are thoughts within CARE BiH to bring the public service contracts (that aspect of the work) and the CSP programme much closer together, so that they are enabled to complement each other, to inform each other, to add value to each other. Perhaps; though the implications of what I have been writing here make me very wary of this route. Which aspect of CARE will be influencing a’which? Will this indeed open possibilities up, or will it close the space for a different way of thinking and practicing down?

But these are details, and there is a workshop ahead of us to consider any and all implications in detail. There are radical implications contained in the argument of this report, in my particular reading of the story as I have told it. The primary question is - how does the story sit with you? Implications and details are a subsequent consideration. The latter are the outer circumstances, the former the inner activity with respect to the matter at hand.

**Implications for BiH (and the Civil Society Sector?)**

The CSP cannot respond if there is nothing to respond to. This entire story is as much a call to BiH as it is to the CSP or CARE as a whole; far more so, in fact. If the story does not make sense, or if it does not capture some key truths, then it should be put aside. If it does make sense, if it does capture aspects of truth, then the implications will already be felt, possibly as a turning from within. If it just stimulates an internal questioning process, then it has been worth the writing.

So I refrain from restating the obvious. Instead, I leave you with a personal story.

Immediately on my return from Bosnia and Herzegovina, I spent a full day debriefing with a colleague, telling the story, being listened to, engaging in a conversation around it; the two of us trying to lift hidden nuggets of meaning into the light of day, to find the patterns which might lend coherence to the narrative. With only partial success, of course, it was early days yet for my own thinking around the issues. That night, a balmy Cape summer night, sleeping with the bedroom door open to a wild garden filled with a gentle breeze, I dreamt a dream. A dream so intense that it ripped me out of sleep, sent me wandering around the garden on a bemused meandering path, my mind fretful and concerned. As always with the unconscious, it is hard to penetrate the imagery; it was difficult to understand whether the dream was part of my own story, or whether it belonged to the story of Bosnia and Herzegovina. And even if it did, was it just my feeling about the country, or did it hold a grain of something that maybe I was being asked to work with. Certainly it was not the kind of dream that you walk away from. It consisted only of one image, really, which got more and more intense. It went like this:

> I dreamed that I was being forced to be “morally correct”, to be “good” (I do not know any other way to describe this). And the way I was being so forced, was that every time I did something “wrong”, that action conjured up grotesque, ugly, gigantic and evil characters who came at me menacingly, with frightening intent. The only way I could get away from these characters, save myself from their hideous grasp, was to desist
from the “wrong” action, to “be good”. If I did not, they just got bigger and bigger and more powerful. Gradually I realised that, as they grew in power - from my own inability always to do “the good” - their power increased not only in amount, but also in kind. So that, after awhile, I no longer had to “act wrongly” to bring them after me, I had only to think “wrong” thoughts, and they rose up in size and menace. It was at this point, I think, that I ripped myself awake, for there seemed no escape within the dream itself.

As I wandered the garden, I trembled at how trapped I’d felt. I was being told: “Do what we say you must do, be what we say you must be, or we’ll get bigger and bigger and have you more and more in our grasp”. And that, through the development of the dream, that command - and the back-up of naked power behind it - had become internalised, so that there was no longer any way of breaking free of the clutches of those monsters. To be free, I had to conform. The only way I could gain my freedom from those monsters was if I gave up my freedom by internalising their commands.

Maybe this dream has to do with issues that I myself have to deal with; I’m sure this is the case. I’m equally sure, though, that, simultaneously - to use a concept that has come up often in this story - it has to do with (at least my perspective on) Bosnia and Herzegovina itself. The image that ‘powerful foreigners’ carry in their unconscious about the Balkans becomes internalised within the Balkans themselves. And it is only by bringing such unconscious patterning to conscious awareness, that genuine freedom can be won. Else the paradox of compliance holds sway.

POSTSCRIPT

Subsequent to tabling this as a draft report, I facilitated a three day discussion amongst CARE staff, in Sarajevo. Participants included representatives of CARE civil society programme staff from BiH, Serbia and Croatia, representatives of CARE management (both BHSCM and MERMU), as well as two representatives of BiH civil society organisations.

This report was discussed and found to be accurate and extremely helpful in assisting CARE to face its various possibilities and constraints. Ideas were tabled as to future possibilities with respect to CARE civil society programming, based on the following two ‘summary points emerging from the report and the discussions. First, that focused work on engaging with civil society means helping a mute and largely apathetic society to awake to itself, become more conscious and aware of its constraints and possibilities,
by opening up a space for real dialogue and conversation so that the society can begin to engage critically with its own limitations (rather than always placing blame ‘out there’) and so begin to stimulate its own potential to determine and influence its own future. Second, that CARE is an integral part of the society in which it works, and contributes through the way that it works either to the development of civil society (as pictured in the preceding sentence) or to the society’s continued paralysis and apathy. At present CARE is not sufficiently awake to itself, not sufficiently self-critical and reflective, and does not engage sufficiently in an intelligent appraisal of its strategies and impacts. If CARE is to engage consequentially with the development of civil society in Bosnia (or anywhere) then it must open up space for real conversation, dialogue and learning within its own mission as much as focus on programme work which will open such space in the wider society.

In the light of these points, the workshop process resolved to commit CARE to two new long term intentions as a way both of realizing itself as a civil society organisation and as a way of developing new and effective programmatic directions into the future.

The first ‘intention’ is called ‘thinking’. The idea is to stimulate critical thinking within CARE. It comprises two elements. The first element involves ongoing research into the effects and impacts of CARE programming, for the sake of its own reflections and incremental improvements and adaptations of its programmes (as opposed to more formal and externally driven M&E procedures). The second is the creation of mechanisms and processes through which the habit of individual and team reflections on practice may become the norm rather than the exception. Sharing, deepening, learning, collaborative critique and strategic thinking will be stimulated by this approach. Individuals will be strengthened, programmes will be improved and focused and the institution as a whole will become more robust, rigorous and engaged. (All this will stimulate consequential programme work but will also provide Bosnian civil society with an active player which it may begin to emulate; thus principles and practice come together.)

The second ‘intention’ is called ‘voice’. Voice also comprises two elements. The first involves the development of a marketing and PR approach to CARE’s relationship with the donor and political institutions that comprise its context. This is undertaken to raise CARE’s profile in the region, partly for reasons of own resource procurement and partly because CARE is a credible international NGO with vast experience and much to contribute to the ongoing debate and discussion about various aspects of future possibilities with respect to BiH. The second element involves the focused and direct stimulating of the (at present largely silent) voice of civil society in BiH, by acting as stimulant, catalyst and convener with respect to collaborative and critical processes of dialogue and conversation amongst various actors and players within BiH civil society. CARE has sufficient credibility presence and space to begin to stimulate such possibilities; no-one else is performing this vital and essential task; and this work forms the fundamental tool in the promotion of a vibrant and energetic civil society in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
APPENDIX:

RESPONDENTS

David Gallagher (CARE)
John Crownover (CARE)
Zoran Puljic (Mozaik)
Natasa (Mozaik)
Renato (Mozaik)
Nicola Yordanov (OSCE)
Natasa Tanasijevic (UNDP)
Daniela (Scouts Association of RPLK SRPSKA)
Tanya (Scouts Association of RPLK SRPSKA)
Kurovic Nebocza (Youth Council of RPLK SRPSKA)
Branislav (President, Student’s Union, RPLK SRPASK)
Zelko Paukovic (Youth Communication Centre)
Vera Kelva (Youth Communication Centre)
Igor Stojanovic (Centre for Civil Initiatives)
Alexander Trifunovic (Centre for the Informative Decontamination of Youth)
Aleksandar Zivanovic (Helsinki Citizen’s Assembly)
Aida Spahic (Civil Society Promotion Centre)
Jacob Finci
Jan Zlatan Kulenovic (Youth Information Agency)
Stana Medic (SARA)
Vanja Gagic (SARA)
Zeljana Pjevalica (Priroda)
Jasna Banduka (Priroda)
Tankosava Vujevic (Priroda)
Brankica Tolj (Priroda)
Slobodan Milovanovic (CARE)

ENDNOTES

i Some of these include:

Lessons from Bosnia and Herzegovina: Travails of the European Raj by Gerald Knaus and Felix Martin (Journal of Democracy, Volume 14, Number 3, July 2003)

Only in the Balkans by Misha Glenny (London Review of Books, Volume 21, Number 9, April 1999)

An Introduction to the Non-Profit Sector in the Balkans by Jenny Hyatt (Unpublished, 2000)

Governance and Democracy in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Post-Industrial Society and the Authoritarian Temptation by European Stability Initiative (Part of the Governance Assessment of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2004)


Service Delivery or Civil Society: Non-Governmental Organisations in Bosnia and Herzegovina by Ian Smillie (Produced for CARE, 1996)
Institutions, Civil Society and Nationalism in the Context of Democratic Consolidation: Prospects for Democracy in Bosnia-Herzegovina by Johannes Heiler (unpublished)

How to avoid creating a ‘virtual’ civil society by Zarko Papic (Alliance, Volume 7, Number 5, March 2002)

Civil Society Development Programme: An Independent Evaluation by Aida Bagic and Paul Stubbs (Produced for CARE, 2000)


These are included in the separate Appendix: ‘Respondents’

Agatha Christie, quoted in Misha Glenny (above)

Misha Glenny (above)

ibid

European Stability Initiative (above)

European Stability Initiative (above, p8)

Bagic and Stubbs (above, p3)

Bagic and Stubbs (above, p3)

See, for example, Civil Society in African Settings: Some Issues by David Sogg (unpublished, 2004)

See Freizer (above)

Bagic and Stubbs (above, piv and p3)

See various critiques of Putnam’s work on civil society, by Bagic and Stubbs, Sogge and Freizer (all above)

Bagic and Stubbs (above, p3)

See the contract for this work, available from CARE BHSCM

See contract, as above.

See Perenti (above)

For example:
Report from CARE workshop on Civil Society Strengthening in the Balkans, 2002
Civil Society Strengthening in SEE: some issues and trends (undated) (Creative Development Associates)
Bagic and Stubbs evaluation (above)
(all of these are available from CARE BHSCM)

See contract (above)

See contract (above)

See contract (above)

See contract (above)

See contract (above)

See contract (above)
xxiv  Ian Smillie (above)

xxv  Personal; communication from Fritz Glasl, organisation development and conflict resolution consultant

xxvi  For example:

  Dialogue and the art of thinking together by William Isaacs (Doubleday, New York, 1999)
  Changing Conversations in Organisations by Patricia Shaw (Routledge, London, 2002)
  Conversation as a Form of Social Inquiry by Allan Kaplan (unpublished)

xxvii  A Timeless Way of Building by Christopher Alexander (Oxford University Press, New York, 1979)