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A College-Level Discussion Guide to "Speaking Their Peace: Personal Stories from the Frontlines of War and Peace" by Colette Rausch

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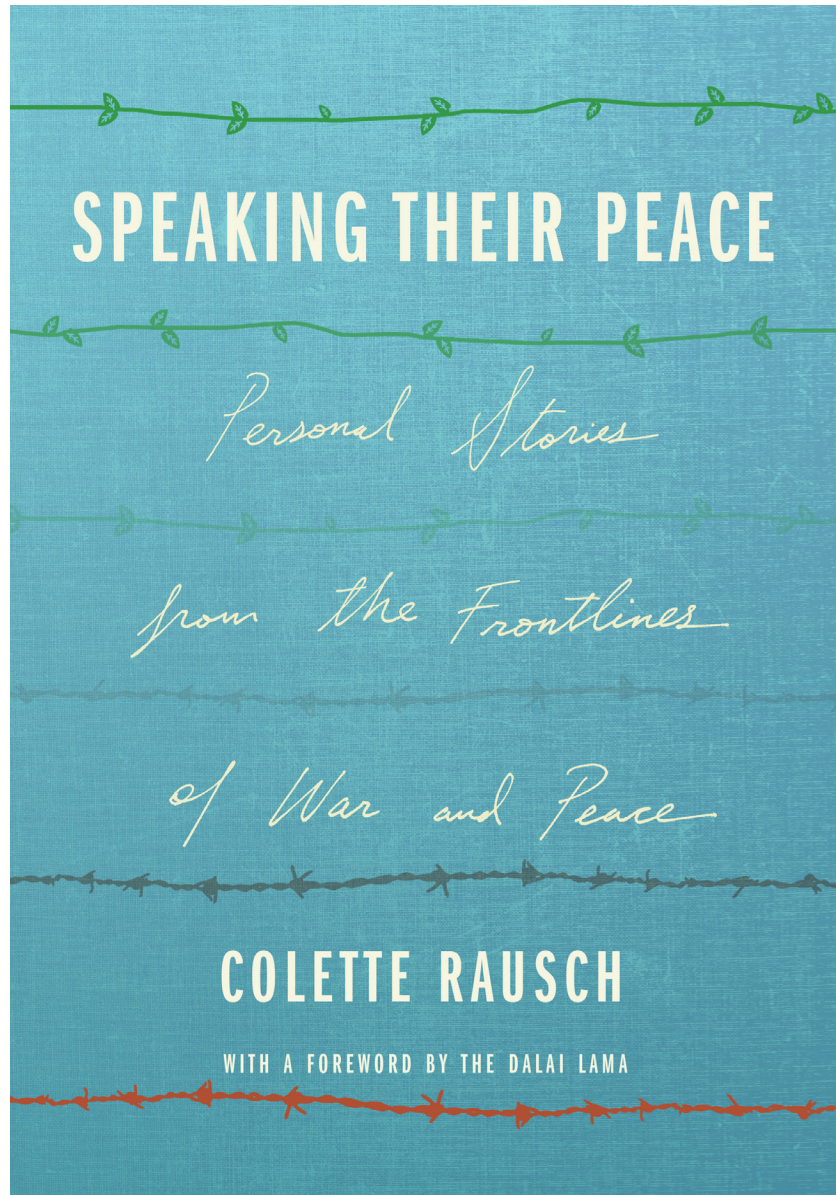
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A COLLEGE-LEVEL DISCUSSION GUIDE TO



**Prepared by Professor Christie S. Warren
with Meghan Phillips and Abby Riley,
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ABOUT *SPEAKING THEIR PEACE*

Speaking Their Peace: Personal Stories from the Frontlines of War and Peace is a collection of eighty interviews with guerrillas and generals, mothers and widows, young people and retirees, government officials and religious leaders, professionals, working people, and “internationals” from eleven conflict zones spanning five continents. The product of a six-year project supported by the United States Institute of Peace, *Speaking Their Peace* presents an eye-opening series of first-person accounts of what it is like to live through conflict and the difficult, dangerous, and unpredictable transition to peace. The book contains raw insights into the toll conflict takes on individuals, families, and communities, and it provides thought-provoking examples of how people from different sides try to make peace with each other and build a fairer society and shared future.

The author, Colette Rausch, has spent twenty years participating in efforts to bring peace and stability to war-torn societies. She is the associate vice president for Governance, Law, and Society at the United States Institute of Peace.

Speaking Their Peace is published by Roaring Forties Press (ISBN 978-1-938901-38-6; www.roaringfortiespress.com).

ABOUT THIS DISCUSSION GUIDE

This guide is appropriate for use in college-level courses in which issues relating to conflict and peacebuilding arise. The questions in the guide are designed to encourage reflection about causes of conflict and ways to build effective bridges from conflict to peace.

The questions are divided into ten sections. The first section asks about the book as a whole; each of the following eight sections focuses on one of the interview chapters; and the final section presents some concluding questions.

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QUESTIONS ABOUT THE BOOK AS A WHOLE

1. What insights does the book provide about root causes of conflict?
2. Is there value in listening to the voices of ordinary people whose lives have been impacted by violence and conflict?
 - Do you think their impressions about causes and reasons for conflict are any different from what political leaders would say?
 - Of all the groups interviewed, who do you think suffered most from the conflicts they lived through?
3. Who or what is ultimately responsible for the causes of conflict?
 - Did you learn how anything from the speakers about how to avoid conflict in the future?
4. What is the relationship between conflict and the rule of law?
 - Does introducing a culture based on the rule of law help prevent future conflict, or do you think people who create and join conflicts do not care about the rule of law?
 - Do you think the existence of the rule of law can deter future conflict? If so, how?

WARFIGHTERS

1. Why do people join armies and rebel groups? F. Henry “Baquilita” Ubeda Zeledon from Nicaragua (pages 44–45) describes how he tried to avoid joining either the Contras or the Sandinistas. Sudhil from Nepal (page 48) also said that joining the army was a last resort for him because he was poor. Eventually, he deserted.
 - What can be done to ensure that people are not pressed into fighting in wars?
 - Do you think those who join because of poverty or pressure should be held less responsible than those who believe in the causes they are fighting for?
 - How can you really tell who joined because they believed in the cause they were fighting for, and who joined because they had no other way to survive?
2. Morlee Gugu Zawoo Sr. and K. Johnson Borh (pages 49–53) describe how child soldiers were used in the conflict in Liberia. Families who lacked food encouraged children to join rebel groups, who then numbed the children with drugs and alco-

- hol to make it easier for them to kill. Later in their interview, they also talk about the difficulties child soldiers have reintegrating into society when victims remain angry about crimes they committed.
- What special problems do child soldiers face when returning home?
 - How can these issues be addressed?
 - Should child soldiers be held less responsible than adults who killed and engaged in violence?
 - Child soldiers who return home after conflict are often stigmatized by their communities. How should communities deal with children who return?
 - Babies are often born in the field to women soldiers, or to women who have been kidnapped to serve as wives to male fighters, or to women who have been raped by soldiers or rebels. These babies are also often stigmatized. What can be done to overcome this problem and give these children a chance to live healthy, productive lives?
3. Fighters such as Ubeda (pages 44–45), Sudhil (page 48), Zawoo, and Bohr (pages 49–53) all resented being pressed into causes they did not believe in, while Ahmed from Libya (pages 63–65), the three Maoists in Nepal (pages 60–62), and Rosa Maria Toruno Montenegro from Nicaragua (pages 46–47) truly believed in the causes for which they were fighting.
- When deciding levels of responsibility for violence, should it matter whether fighters truly believe in the causes for which they are fighting or whether they joined fighting forces to escape bad conditions in their home communities?
 - In conflict studies, the phrase “One man’s terrorist is another’s freedom fighter” is often heard. What does this mean to you?
4. Should it matter whether a fighter does his best to avoid committing war crimes while he is fighting? Nait Hasani from Kosovo (pages 69–70) describes a massacre at Debreva prison that contravened international humanitarian law, and Bibek from Nepal (pages 61–62) talks about the role of the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross in ensuring that humanitarian law is followed during times of conflict.
- Do you think responsibility for making sure that wars are fought legally and fairly should rest with the consciences of individual fighters, or with international organizations?
 - What can international organizations such as the United Nations and the Red Cross do to make sure that international law isn’t broken during war?

5. Do you agree with Sushil from Nepal (pages 71–72) that there is a difference between war and crime, and that in order to win a war, any behavior is justified, even if in other contexts that behavior might constitute criminal activity?

MOTHERS, WIVES, AND WIDOWS

1. After reading the stories of the women in this chapter, do you believe that women suffer more or less deeply than men do in conflict? Do women talk about their experiences in different ways than men—such as fighters, warlords, and politicians—do?
2. Most of these women talk emotionally about their families. Herminia Orea Aquilar (pages 85–86) states that it is important that the Peruvian government make reparations for the harm people suffered—not for the victims themselves, but for their families. Sabitra Adhikari (pages 88–89) talks about the role her son played during her own recovery from war, while Faze Idrizi (page 95) says, “The meaning of my life is my daughter. She means everything to me.” Similarly, Rosa Villaran (pages 108–110) asks, “How to you process death? How do you deal with the desire of revenge that is so natural? What helped me the most was my baby daughter, because she was the triumph of life over death.”
 - What role did these women’s families play in how they were able to endure conflict and the way they suffered?
 - What role did their families play in the way these women recovered from conflict?
 - If you think having a family helps sustain people during and after conflict, is there anything similar people who don’t have families might benefit from during and after conflict?
3. A somewhat different perspective is given by Nekibe Kelmendi (pages 102–105), who states that she was motivated to stay alive and recover by the cause of her country and the desire to be liberated once and for all from Serbian occupation and colonization. Nekibe says this even though her husband and sons were murdered.
 - Do you find her perspective and motivations to be stronger, more important, or just different from what motivates other widows to recover?
 - Is Nekibe herself different from the other women? If so, how?
4. Rosa Villaran (page 108–110) also sees civic engagement as a way forward following conflict. “More than being a victim, you should be a citizen,” she states.

- Do you think focusing on the good of society is a preferable and healthier way of moving forward than engaging in sustained grieving over the loss of family members?
5. Over and over, the women in this chapter place great importance on education for their children. Sabitra Adhikari (page 88–89) states that she will provide the means to educate her children as long as they want to study, even if it means she has to give up food for herself. Faze Idrizi (page 95) speaks with pride about her daughter, who is a university student. Alice Sackey (pages 106–107) in Liberia states “That’s all I am fighting for, to educate my children.”
- Why is their children’s education so significant to these women?
 - Do you think their mothers’ dreams for them might become a burden to the children?
6. Sabitra Adhikari (pages 88–89) states that she does not know anything about rule of law because she is not literate.
- Do you think it is necessary to have an education to understand justice and rule of law, or are these basic ideals that have meaning for everyone, whether or not they are literate and educated?
 - Do you think there are any differences in the way educated and uneducated people view justice and the rule of law?
 - Should people without a formal education be consulted when discussions about transitional justice, constitutional language, and new legislation take place? If so, how would you structure these discussions so people with minimal education can effectively and meaningfully participate?
7. Several mothers spoke about the importance of finding the remains of their deceased children and being able to bury them. Shemsie Hoxha (page 93–94) describes how policemen and Red Cross workers asked her whether she wanted to bury the remains of her son, and she said, “Of course I do.” Other mothers speak about their inability to recover and move forward when they did not know what had happened to their families.
- Why do you think knowing what happened to their dead husbands and children is so important to these women? Wouldn’t you think not knowing might be better, in that there might still be hope that they might be alive and found?
8. Shemsie Hoxha (page 93–94) also says that when the war ended, everyone expected that people would like each other more than they had before. However, the contrary proved to be true. People were jealous, mistrustful, and unsupportive of each other.

- Why do you think this is the case? What does this say about the possibilities for long-term peace?
9. A number of women talk about the role their faith played during the conflicts they lived through. Faze Idrizi (page 95) says that she is living with God's mercy. Um Ahmed (pages 100–101) prays daily and reads the Qur'an to bring peace to herself.
- What role can faith play during and after conflict?
 - Overall, do you think religion is more often a cause of conflict or a pillar upon which to lean during recovery? Are these two mutually exclusive?
10. Most of the women in this chapter seem to place more faith in their families, their children, and their religion than in rule of law. Um Ahmed (pages 100–101) asks, "What has the law done for us? Did the law protect our men? Can the law protect our children now?"
- Do you think women have different expectations about the rule of law than men do?
 - Would these differing expectations, if they exist, make any difference in rebuilding a country following conflict?
11. Um Ahmed (pages 100–101) continues to live very close to the people responsible for the death of her husband. Her neighbors have admitted killing him.
- Why do you think she has not moved away?
 - Do you think it might be easier or more difficult for someone to see the people responsible for killing a family member on a daily basis, or would it be more difficult to live with uncertainty as to who was responsible?
12. Nekibe Kelmendi (pages 102–105) describes how Serbian soldiers tried to force her sons to kill their father, then tried to force the father to shoot his sons. Finally, the soldiers forced the father to watch while they killed his sons.
- Why would soldiers want to do this, as opposed to simply carrying out the shootings?
 - Do you think war and conflict bring out sadistic and inhumane behavior that might otherwise not exist, or does it simply create opportunities for unhealthy tendencies that lie just beneath the surface?
13. Are women less likely than men to go to war?
- Do you think the relationships mothers have with their families and children might impact the willingness of women to pick up arms and fight?

- Do you think that increasing women's participation in politics would result in fewer wars for this reason?
14. Rosa Villaran (pages 108–110) says that the losses she had to deal with made her understand the losses faced by women and widows on the other side of the conflict.
- Do you think women feel the loss of family members in different ways than men do?
 - Do you think that women have a role to play in peacebuilding efforts that men may not be as suitable to play?

CHILDREN AND YOUTH

1. Milos Tomic (pages 120–122) describes his work in Kosovo with the Ghetto Theater Group. He believes international organizations focus too much on politics and neglect the benefits of art and culture in rebuilding society.
- Why are art, music, and culture important to people? Do you agree with Salwa Al-Tajoury from Libya (pages 201–203), who states that art is important because of its symbolism and because it helps people cope with trauma? What does she mean when she talks about the symbolic value of art after conflict?
 - Do you think art and culture are just as important as institutional reform, transitional justice, and other aspects of postconflict reconstruction, or that art should take a secondary place in rebuilding a society and only if there is extra funding?
 - Should communities recovering from conflict be the ones to prioritize postconflict reconstruction activities? Or do you think that international actors who are participating in postconflict reconstruction activities know better and should instruct people how to go about putting their communities back together?
2. Milos Tomic (pages 120–122) describes how Serbs are treated in Kosovo by Albanian survivors who were victims of the war. Many of these victims have turned around and victimized Serbs who, according to Milos, had nothing to do with their past suffering. One Albanian told him, “You Serbs took my truck, so now give me your truck.”
- Does this sound uncomfortably like children squabbling?

- What does this say about cycles of violence and hope for lasting peace and reconciliation in a postconflict society?
 - Do you think that intervention by international actors actually prevents conflict from resolving itself and instead only buries its causes beneath the surface?
 - Would a better solution be to simply let people in conflict “fight it out” until they get the anger out of their systems?
3. Many conflicts between ethnic or religious groups have started over battles for political and economic control. For example, one theory about the conflict in Rwanda is that Belgian colonizers placed the minority Tutsis in higher status positions over the majority Hutus. Similarly, in Iraq Saddam Hussein gave many government jobs to Sunnis, who were in the numerical minority. In Bosnia, ethnic Serbs and Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims) fought over territory.
- Do conflicts in these kinds of cases arise simply because majority groups are taking back majority rule after they had been unjustly marginalized?
 - What kinds of systems might protect majority rule while guaranteeing minority rights?
4. Raul Arotoma Ore (pages 123–125) works with APRODE, a Peruvian NGO that assists families of disappeared people seeking justice. He describes the impunity enjoyed by perpetrators of grave human rights atrocities in Peru. The man who sanctioned the disappearance of his parents, for example, has still not been brought to justice because he is in the military and the government does not want to prosecute him.
- Is it ever in the best interest of a community recovering from conflict for perpetrators to be given immunity from prosecution?
 - Who should decide whether immunity should be given to those who initiated and perpetrated conflict—members of the community, the government, international actors, or someone else?
 - Should the preferences of the international community override the wishes of local communities when deciding whether or not to prosecute war criminals? What should happen if local communities simply prefer to forgive and forget following conflict and the commission of war crimes?
 - Do you see any relationship between granting immunity to people who committed war crimes and difficulties in establishing the rule of law after conflict?
5. Sofia Montenegro (pages 207–210) states that many of those involved in the conflict in Nicaragua were “kids.”

- What is the role of universities, students, and youth in postconflict reconstruction?
 - Does the age of fighters have an impact on rebuilding society?
 - Can you predict problems rebuilding a community if most of its young people were involved in protracted conflict instead of getting an education that would allow them to participate in rebuilding strong institutions?
6. Govinda Rijal (page 223–226) was politically active in Nepal at the age of fourteen or fifteen. He describes how students organized protests.
- Why are students so often involved in many of the protest movements around the world?
 - Do they view the world in ways that are different than their parents?
 - Do you think young people might be more easily exploited by actors and groups with ulterior motives than older people would?
7. “The devil is in the hand of the educated ones,” Yarkpawolo Bucket (pages 152–153) asserts, while arguing that education is also the key to avoiding future conflict.
- How can education be used to both block and foster peace?
 - When can education be most constructive in moving a state forward after conflict?
 - What is the best way to teach history when different groups adopt different narratives about the cause and conduct of conflict?
 - Are there dangers in adopting histories about conflict that favor one group over others and may not include actual truth?
 - Who determines what the true version of facts is? Does this matter?

GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

1. Often, rule of law is characterized as a national issue, and problems are considered to stem from corrupt government actors or dysfunctional governments. As Shrish Rana (pages 149–151) points out, however, for the rule of law to truly exist, international actors must also abide by it.
- How can the international community foster the rule of law among its own actors during postconflict reconstruction activities?

- How can governmental actors and other groups encourage more accountability by international powers?
2. Is aid donated by international actors a form of political or cultural imperialism, as Shrish Rana (pages 149–151) believes? He criticizes the political role that NGOs and INGOs play in Nepal. He is also critical of Western-style democracy, which he says comes at the expense of nationalism and sovereignty of the people.
 - If international actors donate large amounts of money to assist with postconflict efforts, should they be allowed to control the reconstruction agenda?
 - Is democracy the best model for every country? Does your answer depend on whether traditional democratic models are part of national traditions?
 3. Joko Moses Kuyon (pages 154–156) thinks that the label “democracy” is just a shield for imperialist actions. He resents the imposition of a Western human rights culture on the people of Liberia, not because he is against the rights themselves, but because the Western human rights paradigm shows a lack of understanding and respect for Liberian culture and traditions. Kuyon cites an example of Western aid workers telling Liberians not to accept a job without being paid up front, although traditional Liberian practice is to pay after the work is completed because employers often do not have money up front. The result of this clash, he claims, is a breakdown of the Liberian economic system. Employers cannot afford to hire anyone, leaving potential workers without work.
 - What is the solution to culture clashes such as this one?
 - Do you think it is right for international actors to use postconflict reconstruction activities as an opportunity to change cultural practices?
 4. “The women’s rights, child rights, all these rights [the international community is] bringing, they are foreign to us,” Joko Moses Kuyon says (page 155).
 - Is there room for universal rights and traditional practices to coexist?
 - As a peacekeeper, how would you address clashes between universal rights and local customary practices?
 - Should communities themselves be allowed to decide what rights and values they wish to adopt?
 5. The relationship between liberty and security is often described as a continuum, in which more security results in less liberty.
 - Do you think there can be peace without security?
 - Can there be peace without liberty?

6. U Sit Aye (pages 143–145) seems to think that ensuring security is a necessary first step before peace can be established, but focusing exclusively on security undermines other development. He says, “whenever there is peace, development follows,” and then laments that security fears, such as when insurgents control the use of roads, can make governments reluctant to invest in infrastructure even though it would be good for the people.
 - What do you think people want most after they have suffered through long wars?
 - Should they be willing to wait for basic development to start until security and peace have been firmly established?
7. It can take a long time to establish security and peace after protracted conflict.
 - What would you want to do most if you had been confined for a long time due to conflict—and then were suddenly free to begin your life again?
8. For Muhammed Ali (pages 220–222), security and safety are also major concerns. He describes how tension between various tribal groups has made travel on roads unsafe and beyond anyone’s control, and declares that the Yemeni state is nonexistent.
 - Is security not only fundamental to peace but also necessary for the establishment of the state? Or must a state be established before security can be achieved?
9. Do you agree that “everything will come naturally,” as Nebojsa Popovic from Kosovo says (pages 157–158) after peace returns and people have jobs? Are security and economic well-being the most important factors for peace to take root?
 - If you disagree, what factors do you consider to be more important?
 - Are there other things that could interfere with people returning to normal lives, even if peace returns and people have returned to work?
10. Interviewers are very interested in asking these officials about the role of rule of law in postconflict contexts.
 - How can civilians believe in and live according to the rule of law every day, especially if they live under corrupt government systems?
 - Are there small things every person can do to build a rule of law culture?
 - Would you argue that ordinary people have a duty to live according to the rule of law even when they know their government is corrupt?

- Is there individual benefit to living morally, peacefully, and ethically even when everyone around you is living corruptly, or is this too much to expect of ordinary people?

RELIGIOUS LEADERS

1. Mother Covadonga from Peru (page 164–166) says, “rule of law means that you have the opportunity to lead a full life as a human being. If you don’t have that possibility, there is no rule of law.”
 - Do you agree?
 - What do you think is required to live a full life as a human being?
 - Would protracted conflict interfere with your ability to live life fully? If so, how?
2. Is the rule of law different from justice? If so, how?
 - What does George Payne of Liberia (pages 193–194) say about this question?
 - How do secular and religious notions of justice intersect, or are they different?
3. Wallah Wilsitow of Liberia (pages 185–186) states, “There are three Gs that rule the world: God, government, and guns. . . . Under the gun there will be no justice.”
 - Under which “G” do you think justice is most often achieved?
 - Does your answer change depending on the situation? Consider corrupt governments and theocracies that repress certain groups’ rights.
4. Shaikh Ahmed Zabeen Atiah, an Islamic judge in Yemen (pages 170–173), states, “I issue a ruling of punishment, but I entrust implementation of the punishment to the state. There is a kind of cooperation between us, police and prosecution, because the courts have become almost crippled and litigants rarely turn to these courts in cases of divorce, marriage, or personal contracts.”
 - What do you think of this as a solution to breakdowns in court systems in postconflict states?
 - If you don’t like this division of responsibility in implementing justice, can you offer a better solution when a judicial system has broken down?
5. Shaikh Atiah also states (page 172), “When Yemen has a government, a state, we can ask about justice. Currently, there is no government in Yemen.”

- Do you think it is true that justice can only be achieved when there is a functioning government?
 - How do people live when there is no justice? Are there any dangers in this situation?
 - Why does Shaikh Atiah emphasize the importance of Yemen becoming a state? Do you agree that security concerns there will inevitably lessen once a government is firmly established?
6. Another of Shaikh Atiah's memorable statements (page 172) is "Nothing can scratch your skin like your own fingernails."
- What does this mean? Do you agree?
7. Anoja Guruma (pages 174–176) says that equality for women will "be good in all three: family, society, and nation."
- Do you agree that society and country benefit from women's equality? Can you think of situations when this might not be true?
 - Must women achieve equality in their families before they can attain it in society and the nation? Or should women first seek recognition in the workforce and use that to leverage more power within their families?
8. S Lont Mon from Myanmar (Burma) (pages 177–179) talks about identity narratives and ways that communities either come together or separate based on different distinctions.
- Do you agree with the idea that people do—or should—identify themselves in certain ways?
 - Does self-identification help or hinder communities in postconflict contexts?
 - Can you think of ways that identity and categorization can contribute to conflict?
9. S Lont Mon says (page 179) to the international community, "Thank you so much for your time and resources, but be with us. Don't rush us."
- What does he mean by this?
 - Should the international community require that societies put themselves back together according to a timetable after conflict?
 - Does your answer to this depend on whether funding for postconflict reconstruction is being supplied by international actors?
 - Are there times when firm deadlines are appropriate in peacebuilding?

10. Keshab Chaulagain from Nepal (pages 180–182) says, “If the political conflict turned into a religious conflict, the country wouldn’t be able to bear it.”
 - What does he mean by this?
 - Are there differences between political and religious conflicts?
 - Is one worse than the other?
11. Many religious leaders advocate for peaceful means to resolve conflict, whereas nonreligious leaders do not necessarily support this view.
 - Do you think that peaceful means of conflict resolution are potentially applicable in all societies, or are there cases in which only violent means can produce change?
12. Thyn Zar Oo from Myanmar (Burma) (pages 197–198) states, “[The rule of law] doesn’t mean anything for me unless the law and the rule make sense for us. We’ve been brainwashed, and for all four decades of my life, the rule of law doesn’t mean anything to me.”
 - What does she mean by this?
 - Are there times when the rule of law can be harmful to people?
 - As an international peacebuilder, how would you deal with feelings like this if they were expressed by many people in a community?
13. Thyn Zar Oo also states (page 198), “And the worst thing I could do, the thing that I’m afraid of most, is that I will be disillusioned. So I try to stay as clear as possible.”
 - Why do you think it is important to avoid disillusionment after conflict?
 - How can someone fight disillusionment after living through a war and losing family members and friends?
 - Is there anything a government or the international community can do to encourage optimism, or does the ability to remain optimistic just depend on individual personality?

PROFESSIONALS

1. Hasan Arzuallxhiuv (pages 204–206) states, “I love my country and that’s the main thing. I would stay here even if it becomes a corrupted country.”
 - This love of country is not always present following conflict. In some postconflict countries, such as in Kosovo, there are mass migrations to other parts of

Europe. Why do you think this might be happening?

- Is a love for one's country a necessary element in postconflict reconstruction?
 - Do you think it is possible to participate in rebuilding a country even if you were disappointed in the behavior of its leaders during conflict?
2. Sofia Montenegro (pages 207–210) talks about ways in which economic, political, and social concerns overlap. She says when any one of these concerns collapses, the others are in jeopardy—creating a “perfect storm.” In particular, she notes that the international community prioritized the creation of a Supreme Court of Justice over the economic needs of civil society in her country.
- If what she says is true, is it possible to prioritize reconstruction efforts, or do all problems need to be addressed at the same time? Wouldn't this approach be excessively burdensome and complicated?
 - Who should decide in which order reconstruction activities are carried out?
 - How can international assistance contribute to and/or remedy political, social, and economic imbalances that led to conflict?
3. Oscar (pages 199–200) proposes a solution to resolving tensions between locals and internationals in Iraq. She suggests conducting a series of field visits to talk to local people about how to tailor activities and methodologies to best fit their own population. She points out that what might work in Rwanda, for example, is not necessarily applicable in the Iraqi context. She suggests that no one will be better at finding solutions than those who are in the midst of the problem themselves.
- Salwa Al-Tajoury from Libya (pages 201–203) also emphasizes the importance of going into the field in order to gain an accurate understanding of what is actually happening. She criticizes international actors who stay in their offices with other internationals instead of going out with translators to meet the people they claim to want to help.
- Do you agree with these statements?
 - Do you think a willingness to work in the field is an important part of post-conflict reconstruction efforts by international actors?
 - One option in postconflict reconstruction is to focus on top-down approaches, in which political elites are engaged. This might not require traveling to local communities to engage with people recovering from conflict. Is one option better than the other?

WORKING PEOPLE

1. Rexhep Hajdin Bobaj (pages 214–216) states, “War is not a bad thing to everyone. But war is done by those whose minds are poisoned, by those who do not want to find other means of resolving issues.”
 - Do you agree that war is the result of poisonous thinking?
 - Does war ever produce a positive outcome? Can war be healthy? If so, how can you tell the difference when you are in the middle of conflict whether it is justified or not? Does this question matter?
2. Govinda Rijal (pages 223–226) has a profound story to tell about reconciliation and forgiveness. He suffered from police brutality while protesting, and although at first he wanted revenge, he later realized it was not the police officers themselves that he wanted to be held accountable, but rather the institution of the police.
 - How can more people like Govinda break the cycle of violence and revenge and take a more holistic view of systematic change and reconciliation?
3. Is it inappropriate to place the burden of forgiveness on victims? Herminia Orea Aquilar (pages 84–85) says that “sometimes I just don’t want to remember” the torture inflicted on her and her husband. Some psychologists believe that asking victims to forgive is unhealthy and is a form of revictimization. They believe that socially compelled forgiveness does not improve victims’ situations, and it requires them to forget things that happened and suppress legitimate emotions of anger and sadness for the good of society. Perpetrators of violence may also not be adequately punished if the burden is placed on victims to forgive, thereby perpetuating cultures of violence.
 - Do you agree that forgiveness can be detrimental to societies that are recovering from conflict?
 - Does the good to society that comes from victims forgiving their abusers outweigh any harm that may come from pressuring victims to forgive?
 - Do you think it is possible for victims to forgive if perpetrators of violence show no remorse and do not ask for forgiveness?
4. What impact does conflict have on the elderly? Rexhep Hajdin Bobaj (pages 214–216) says that the elderly in Kosovo have been neglected during the rebuilding process and that the stresses of the conflict weigh especially heavily on them.
 - How can elderly people be incorporated into reconstruction efforts?

- Should the bulk of reconstruction efforts be undertaken by young people, because it is their future that is impacted the most?
5. Muhammed Ali (pages 220–222) discusses the use of conventional justice mechanisms, including courts and attorneys, in his divorce proceedings. George Paye from Liberia (pages 185–186) talks about alternative justice mechanisms and the methods he uses as a religious mediator when mediating conflicts between parishioners. He believes conventional justice is only accessible to those with money.
- What do you think the correct balance is between conventional justice and alternative justice?
 - Is alternative justice just a gap-filler in countries lacking institutional capacity? Or should it be a permanent part of the justice system?
 - Are there situations in which alternative justice might be preferable to state-sponsored justice?
6. During conflict, many people are forced to flee their communities. Thyn Zar Oo from Myanmar (Burma) (pages 197–198) talks about how her cousin, who was an activist, became a doctor and left the country never to return, because it holds too many bad memories of his persecution. She, however, is more optimistic and wants to rebuild the country through her work.
- Sukraman Lama from Nepal (pages 227–228) is also optimistic. When asked if he would leave Nepal to seek work abroad, as many of his countrymen have done, he answered that if he works hard he can do just as well in Nepal as abroad. Ferdis, also from Nepal (pages 232–234), describes how his brothers fled the conflict and now live all over the world, resulting in a sort of familial diaspora. He says, however, that they all want to return.
- Should refugees be allowed to decide if they wish to return, or should they be deemed unwelcome because they abandoned their countries and families when things became difficult?
 - Do they have an obligation to help rebuild their countries after conflict even if they remain abroad?
 - What are some of the problems that can arise if large numbers of people flee their country because of conflict and decide not to return? Should these people be allowed to retain citizenship in their home countries?

INTERNATIONALS

1. The section on Internationals (beginning at page 235) provides perspectives on international actors working in postconflict settings. Their work has been commented on throughout the book by other interviewees.
 - Are there differences in the way international actors view their work and the way people living in conflict-afflicted communities view it?
 - What are the qualities international peacebuilders should have? What kinds of backgrounds might be most useful in preparing people for this work?
 - Where should their loyalties lie? Does your answer depend on who is funding reconstruction activities?
2. Fiona Mangan (page 238–240) says that international actors can't really contribute to peacebuilding work unless they are in the places where the conflict occurred.
 - Do you agree or disagree with her position?
 - Are there downsides to large numbers of international workers arriving in a postconflict environment while people are struggling to get back on their feet?
 - Conversely, are there ways in which the presence of international actors can help maintain peace in postconflict settings?
3. Ashton (pages 241–243) recalls realizing, “Holy Smokes, there’s nothing we can do here that’s good, nothing that will ultimately be effective without [working in partnership with local actors].”
 - Do you agree that international actors should never decide by themselves what steps to take to rebuild a war-torn society?
 - Who should have the right to decide whether one type of system serves a postconflict society’s interests better—people who live in affected communities or international actors?
 - Do international actors have access to better ideas and better information about reconstructing government institutions and judicial systems than people in war-torn societies?
 - Are there times when it might be useful for international workers to be outspoken and proactive?
4. Ali Chahine (pages 250–252) talks about how there is always hope and always something beautiful in life.

- Does this perspective seem simplistic and overly romantic to you?
 - Do you think the ability to find beauty in life is necessary for people to recover from conflict, or are there other approaches that might be equally successful?
5. Mohamed Abdulaziz Ibrahim (pages 253–255) discusses how his knowledge of the Qur'an and Islamic law impacted his ability to work in foreign justice systems.
- Do you think all international actors working in postconflict settings should be required to study religion?
 - Do you think international actors who belong to one religion have anything to contribute to peacebuilding efforts in countries that follow another religion?
 - How has his religious knowledge helped Mohamed's work?
6. David Marshall (pages 256–258) notes that “working on justice issues is adult-only viewing; do not show your children the rebuilding of criminal justice systems.”
- What does he mean by this?
 - Do you agree, or are there lessons children can (or should) learn at an early age about conflict and recovery from it?
7. Marshall also says that his early view of the rule of law, “quickly building a fair and effective justice system that would deliver justice,” was naïve. However, he admits that the international community doesn't seem to have a better goal.
- Was his earlier (naïve) view really wrong?
 - What do you think the end goal of postconflict reconstruction should be?
 - Why do you think it is so difficult to build a fair and effective justice system after conflict?
8. Marshall also discusses “cultural security.” What does this mean?
9. At what point should the international community end postconflict reconstruction efforts? George Paye from Liberia (pages 185–186) says that he knows that the UN Mission in Liberia must leave one day, but he feels that UN peacekeepers need to stay and better train the Liberian security sector before leaving, because the population is still experiencing systematic security problems such as armed robbery. Hasan Arzuallxhiuv (pages 204–206) argues that the international community left Kosovo too soon. Its departure, he argues, contributed to rampant corruption by national actors.
- Given that international actors must eventually leave, how can problems such as these be prevented?

- At what point should international actors leave a country and allow local populations to complete reconstruction efforts themselves?
- How can international actors know that they should leave because their continued presence is hurting, not helping a country's stability and growth?

CONCLUDING QUESTIONS

1. Although the people interviewed in the book are from different regions of the world and lived through different types of conflict, do you think there were any similarities in their experiences and in the causes of conflicts they lived through—or was each experience different?
2. Do people from different parts of the world have anything to learn from each other?
3. Do you think ordinary people should have a voice when their leaders decide whether to go to war? If so, why?
4. After reading this book, did your understanding of the meaning of “rule of law” change?
5. Almost all of the interviewees are asked, “What does ‘rule of law’ mean to you?”
 - Do you think there is one right answer? Or are there so many different answers that the phrase doesn't really mean anything in particular?
 - Is the phrase overused and hollow? S Lont Mon from Myanmar (Burma) (pages 177–179), for example, accuses politicians of making it “incomprehensible, unreal, like putting make-up on a face,” and therefore prefers that they not use the term at all. Do you agree with him?
6. Do you see any differences in the way different groups in the book define rule of law?
 - What do you think accounts for differences or similarities?
 - Do different groups want different things from the rule of law?
 - Does the rule of law serve some groups better than it does others?
7. Should people in politically stable countries learn about the rule of law, or is this a topic that is only relevant to people in places where the rule of law has broken down?
 - Why or why not?

8. Will human beings ever be able to stop war and conflict?
 - Is it useful to study conflicts to learn how to avoid them in the future, or is there some other reason to study them?
9. Often groups that did not arm themselves during the conflict are excluded from peace negotiations and therefore also future political power in their country.
 - Is it fair that only armed groups should be allowed to participate in negotiations and power-sharing arrangements?
 - How can international actors make sure that women, youth and other unarmed groups are included in peace processes?
10. Gregory H. Stanton of Genocide Watch writes that genocides take place in eight stages: classification, symbolization, dehumanization, polarization, preparation, extermination, and denial. Although few of the countries in this book experienced genocide, Stanton's eight stages can nevertheless be found in the histories of many of the countries described as conflicts began and escalated.
 - Do you think people in the countries described in this book were aware that seemingly small events such as classification and symbolization were actually important steps on the path to conflict and war?
 - What can be done to prevent situations from devolving into violence and genocide?
 - Is there a stage when violence can be prevented?
 - Are you confident that you would recognize any of the eight stages if they happened near where you live?
 - Do you think people who stand by and do nothing in the face of violence should be held accountable? Are they more or less accountable than those who actually fought?
 - Did any of the lessons in this book help you to identify emerging conflicts in the world today or give you information that might help you prevent conflict?
11. After reading what the internationals said about their experiences, and what other interviewees thought of the internationals:
 - Do you have a better or worse opinion of international intervention in conflict-afflicted countries?

- Do you think better or worse of the people who work for international organizations in postconflict countries?
- Are you interested in pursuing a career as an international? Why?

