



Hybridity, ethnicity and nationhood: legacies of interethnic war, wartime rape and the potential for bridging the ethnic divide in post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina

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ABSTRACT

Relying on the biographical narrative *Leila, a girl from Bosnia* and the recorded narratives by adolescents born of wartime rape in Bosnia and Herzegovina we illustrate the difficulties and symbolic implications associated with negotiating hybrid identities in post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina against the dominant post-conflict discourse based on 'pure' ethnicities. We argue that in today's Bosnia and Herzegovina, hybrid identities are marginalized by official politics and societal structures as a legacy of the war. However, they simultaneously embody the symbolic tools through which ethnic divisions could be overcome, envisioning and recalling a multi-ethnic Bosnia and Herzegovina as a supra-national designation.

KEYWORDS

Bosnia and Herzegovina; nationalism; ethnicity; wartime rape; children born of wartime rape; hybridity; 'mixed' identities

Introduction

In her 2010 book, *Sarajevo: A Bosnian kaleidoscope*, Fran Markowitz describes her study as being about 'the contemporary nation- and state-building projects that connect heterogeneity to hybridity and impinge upon the people and places that are Sarajevo' (2010, p. 14). Refusing to accept the conclusion that ethnic cleansing and ethnic divisions have become the hegemonic, 'seemingly natural', 'correct standard of political and cultural life', as well as a 'demographic fait accompli', her book strives to illustrate a more complex living reality in Sarajevo based on 'competing, yet dialectically engaged stances of tolerance, cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism and hostility, ethnic exclusivity, nationalism and their ever changing results' (2010, p. 14). Sarajevo's status as 'the most Yugoslav of Yugoslav cities' (Donia & Fine, 1994, p. 192), 'a multiethnic and multicultural city where no one national group held the majority' (Markowitz, 2010, p. 27), and a city marked by 'ethnic diversity and religious pluralism of its structures and its people' provides the basis for Markowitz's key metaphor of a kaleidoscope. She uses this metaphor to convey 'the fluid and dynamic variety' of the Bosnian capital, and its 'multiplicity of ethnic, confessional and philosophical trajectories that combine and separate, creating dozens of never-stable, always interrelated patterns' (2010, p. 4). Building on Markowitz's complex ethnographic perspective on Sarajevo and Bosnia and Herzegovina as a historically 'transnational hodgepodge of dissonant traditions' (2010, p. 13), as well as Brubaker's

(2004, p. 152) argument that ‘ethnicity and nationalism need to be understood as particular ways of talking about and experiencing the social world and a particular way of framing political claims, not as real boundaries inscribed in the nature of things’, in this paper we analyze narratives by adolescents born to Bosniak mothers as a consequence of wartime rape committed by Serb and Croat militias. Through their own narratives drawn from two scholarly studies by Karmen Erjavec and Zala Volčič (2010), we examine what the adolescents’ mixed ethnicity and hybrid identities mean in a local context where political, cultural and social systems are structured around single ethnicities. Although rape during the Bosnian conflict happened across all ethnic lines and also affected women of Serb and Croat backgrounds (Daniel-Wrabetz, 2007; Nikolic-Ristanovic, 2000; Stiglmayer, 1994), in this paper we focus on the recorded narratives of Bosniak women who were raped and their children in order to illustrate the long-term consequences of the war and the persisting ethnic divide with regard to a group that was affected in the greatest recorded number, between 25,000 and 40,000 (Sharratt, 2011, p. 1; Skjelsbaek, 2006, pp. 374–375). Utilizing a broader interpretive framework supplied by a little known biography published in German for the first time in 2000 by Alexandra Cavelius, *Leila, ein bosnisches Mädchen* (*Leila, a girl from Bosnia*) we illustrate the difficulties as well as the positive symbolic implications associated with negotiating a ‘mixed’ ethnic identity in post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina. Our analysis seeks to reveal the extent to which these narratives reflect a sense of identity defined through an exclusionary ethno-political discourse but also the ways in which they challenge and undermine the dominant identity construction by providing alternative ways of envisioning what it means to be Bosnian, beyond the impositions of ‘pure’ ethnic identities. The above narratives reveal, on the one hand, that national and ethnic identities are indeed the product of macro-structural forces shaped by political and economic determinants (Fox & Miller-Idriss, 2008, p. 537) but also that they are ‘accomplished’ in the everyday practices of ordinary people who simultaneously negotiate and reproduce official versions of nationalist discourses while also undermining and subverting them. In a country still deeply divided along ethnic lines, in their ethnically liminal status the adolescents born of war rape in particular challenge the problematic tenets upon which post-conflict Bosnian society continues to be organized. They simultaneously embody the nationalist hatred of the Balkan conflict itself and offer the symbolic tools through which ethnic divisions could be overcome, envisioning the possibility of a unified multi-ethnic Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Theoretical framework

In our analysis, we are relying on theories of nationhood as defined by Fox and Miller-Idriss (2008). The authors point out that the nation is a discursive construct, constituted largely by and through discursive claims that produce collective identity, mobilize people for collective projects and evaluate people and practices. Discursive acts that construct national and ethnic identities are not simply descriptive of social reality, but they are ‘simultaneously constitutive of that reality, willing into existence that which they name’ (Fox & Miller-Idriss, 2008, p. 538). The implications for how we see ethnic and national identity in post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina is that individual choices and decisions regarding identity can potentially help shape and re-imagine larger discourses concerning citizenship, and influence broader regulative political frameworks.

Theories of hybridity further inform our analysis. Hybridity posits that cultural hybrids, people who have lived in more than one culture or come from 'mixed' cultural backgrounds, are in a position to challenge the collective cultural discourses of the national imagined community (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 59) as such communities operate on the basis of excluding and marginalizing those defined and perceived as the Other. Such exclusionary practices of 'national imagined communities' toward cultural hybrids become particularly apparent in times of crisis or conflict given that people who have an ethnic, cultural or religious background that diverges from the projected ethno-national identity are in a position to destabilize and disrupt the normativity of national cultural forms and practices and homogenous identities (Bhabha, 2006; Erel, 1999). The narratives under scrutiny articulate in vivid terms the difficulties of negotiating a personal identity in present-day Bosnia and Herzegovina that does not fit into the monolithic ethnic categories of Bosniak, Croat and Serb projected by the dominant political discourse.

Another pillar in our analysis of the narratives will be the concept of 'stickiness' as defined by Sara Ahmed. Ahmed explains how stickiness is created through a repetitive use of language by which a community (or nation) rejects what or whom it refers to, a process through which the thing or person referred to becomes an abject Other, that is, repulsive and expelled: '[it is] the metonymic contact between objects and signs that allows them to be felt as disgusting as if that was a material or objective quality' (2004, p. 88). This mechanism of creating the abject Other is very much present in the narratives analyzed and it demonstrates how unwelcome non-homogeneous, that is, hybrid ethnic identities are in contemporary Bosnian society.

In order to better position the narratives and our analysis, we are providing a brief historical background so as to contextualize dominant discourses that have shaped Bosnian society before, during and after the war.

Historical background

Most recent discussions of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the strained relations among the different ethnic groups within it focus on the nature and extent of the ethnic divides that have been institutionalized by the Dayton Accords or Dayton Peace Agreement (signed on 21 November 1995) that ended the armed conflict, and that separated the formerly Yugoslav republic into three areas divided along ethnic lines: two entities, the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina (the primarily Bosniak and Croat part of the country), and the Serb-dominated Republika Srpska, in addition to the small neutral, self-governing territory of the Brčko District belonging to both entities. The Federation was further subdivided into cantons dominated by one ethnic group (either Bosniak or Croat). Even though the original intention of the Dayton Agreement may have been to 'recreate multi-ethnic Bosnia through the right of return for refugees and internally displaced persons' (Guzina, 2007, p. 223) – a right upheld in the country's Constitutions – the political and social realities of daily life in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the most part continue to be organized along rigid ethno-national principles. As Guzina (2007, p. 226) remarks, 'the ambiguous constitutional and legal definitions of citizenship effectively preclude the re-emergence of overlapping, multiple national identities that were the norm in Bosnia before the war, when one could be, at the same time, a Serb/Croat/Bosniak, Bosnian and Yugoslav'. Bosnia and Herzegovina is thus 'primarily a country of its constituent

nations', with the consequence that only those who belong to the 'correct' ethnic majority within each local context are assured that their rights will be upheld (Guzina, 2007, p. 227).

It has been widely acknowledged in recent scholarship that the causes of extremist nationalist ideologies leading to the Balkan war cannot be easily ascribed to long-standing and politically suppressed ethnic hostilities, and to so-called 'ancient hatreds' among different ethnic groups that comprised former Yugoslavia. Knowledge of Bosnia's history, for one thing, easily precludes such postulates, as many studies have shown (Dizdarevic, 1994; Kurspahic, 1997; Mahmutcehajic, 2000; Mann, 2001; Markowitz, 2010; Pejanovic, 2004; Tanovic-Miller, 2001; Woodward, 1995). From earliest recorded history, 'Bosnia differed from other European states in that its territory was a site of ethnic diversity and religious tolerance among its mixed populace based on the overlapping influences and practices of Western Christianity, Eastern Christianity, Judaism and Islam' (Malcolm, 1996, p. xix; Markowitz, 2010, p. 15). The post-Second World War strategy of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY)¹ to 'elevate the Yugoslav state to a political status exceeding that of any nationality' (Hodson, Sekulic, & Massey, 1994, p. 1538) resulted in the secularization of urban society and in the relegation of cultural and ethnic differences to the area of lifestyle rather than political economy, thus encouraging mobility and mixing among people of different backgrounds (Denich, 1993; Denitch, 1976). Unifying ethnic national differences around a multilayered model of national rights included 'a peculiar mixture of suppression and compromise' (Volčič, 2007, p. 69), where differences were known and acknowledged but also tolerated and even embraced as a natural part of daily life. What facilitated the implementation of this model was the fact that the majority of people on the territories of former Yugoslavia are ethnic Slavs, with a common ancestry, the same or a closely related language, sharing a similar culture in dress, food and lifestyle (Hodson et al., 1994, p. 1541).

Bosnia and Herzegovina (alongside the Vojvodina), was the most diverse and ethnically heterogeneous Yugoslav region, with Muslims making up 39.5% of the population, and showing the highest levels of tolerance toward other nationalities with respect to choosing a marriage partner (Hodson et al., 1994, pp. 1543–1544). Ethnically mixed marriages in pre-conflict Bosnia were thus a consequence of a considerable history of relatively good multi-ethnic relations in the region, signifying not only peaceful multi-ethnic coexistence but also multi-ethnic cohesion (Korac, 1998).

However, it also has to be acknowledged that ethnically mixed marriages were more commonly found and socially acceptable in urban centers (especially in Sarajevo, Tuzla and Mostar). The story of *Leila, ein bosnisches Mädchen* (*Leila, a girl from Bosnia*) offers an example of this pre-conflict environment in which Leila grew up in a small town near Sarajevo, where despite cultural and ethnic mixing stereotypes along ethnic lines still persisted. When her mother, following her divorce from a Muslim man, marries a Croat, the news of this interethnic relationship is not readily accepted in her small community. Because of her stepfather, Leila has to suffer a period of rejection by her friends: 'A Muslim woman in love with a Croat. This was too good to be true. The everyday occurrence of mixed marriages in big cities had not made its way to B. yet' (Cavelius, 2011, p. 21).² But the ethnic divide is soon overcome, Leila's friends are back a couple of months later and the enlarged family happily celebrates both Christian and Muslim holidays.

Over the years, interethnic marriages became less uncommon in rural areas as well (Ahmić, 2013; Korac, 1998). Over the span of three decades preceding the war that

would break up Yugoslavia, this multi-ethnic composition was yielding a new Bosnian hybrid identity, a blending of Muslim, Serb, Croat backgrounds of people (including various minorities, Jewish, Roma and others) who intermarried and intermingled their contributions in culture and society (Denich, 1993, p. 48). According to a 1985 study, about two million people in the entire Yugoslav region were either parents or children in ethnically mixed marriages, with Bosnia and Herzegovina having the highest number of 'mixed' children, 15.9% (Denich, 1993, p. 48; Hayden, 1996, p. 786). The signing of the Dayton Accords not only 'silenced the commonalities that had united the region's inhabitants' but also sidelined and silenced those who, despite the war and its divisive legacy, identify in mixed ethnic, pan ethnic or non-ethnic terms (Markowitz, 2010, p. 145). In political terms, those of mixed heritage who do not wish or are not able to claim a single ethnicity, or those who wish to reject ethno-national labels have no real access to political power, and often civic rights either. In social and personal terms, the political structure translates into matrices of systematic exclusion, intolerance, victimization and discrimination for those branded Other.

At the same time, however, the voices of those with hybrid identities, or those who wish to identify themselves in terms of civic identity only, challenge the ethno-national divisions of Bosnian society by sending a 'provocative message that transcultural experiences and the transgressive vision of a hybrid nation-state are no less part of Bosnia-Herzegovina than the constitutionally sanctioned split of the country into three constituent nations' (Markowitz, 2010, p. 147). Providing means of integrating their perspectives and forms of transnational identification into the country's political and social structures would be a step in the right direction with regard to establishing a common Bosnian civic identity.

The challenges of (re)constructing hybrid identities in post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina

The dynamic and dialectical process of discursive constructions of national and ethnic belonging, and by the same token, exclusion, as described above, is manifest in Leila's story in a narrative based on real events that took place in Bosnia and Herzegovina during and after the conflict. Written in German, *Leila, ein bosnisches Mädchen* tells the true story of a young Bosniak rape survivor with an altered name to protect her identity. This first-person narrative is told from the perspective of 24-year-old Leila, slated to appear as a crown witness at the International Crime Tribunal in The Hague. Toward the end of the war, in which she experiences brutal rapes by Serbs but also by some Muslim militia,³ she is rescued by and subsequently forms a personal relationship with a Bosnian Serb, and has a child with him. Leila's narrative reveals that she and the child she bears after the war with a Bosnian Serb carry not only the trauma of the war but also the 'stickiness' of the rapes committed by the enemy and/or of sexual relations with the 'enemy'. For Leila, the stickiness is twofold: in addition to the rapes she has survived, she has a 'mixed' child whose hybridity goes against the national division lines of post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina drawn between three formerly warring groups. The name she and her partner choose for the child is telling of their desire to assign him an identity that transcends narrow ethnic affiliations: 'It had to be something neutral. Under no circumstances should the child be rejected by others because of his name. We chose Zoran. This name exists among the Serbs, the Croats and the Muslims. It means something like "dawn"' (Cavelius, 2011, p. 164). Leila

and Ratko thus try to protect the child from carrying the 'stickiness' of what others may associate with his hybrid identity. By choosing a name that cannot identify the child as belonging to any particular ethnic group, Leila and Ratko articulate the potential to enlarge the repertoire of available identities in ethnically divided Bosnia and Herzegovina, with the hope that a new 'dawn' of multi-ethnic tolerance might be possible. But when Leila leaves the Republika Srpska to visit her family in the Federation, both she and her child are harassed: Leila because she is seen as a 'Serbian whore' and her child because he is the product of a 'mixed' union deemed undesirable and 'contaminated'.

Leila's narrative signifies several important realities. First, it showcases the stigma associated with rape, as well as the ethnicization of sexual violence during the war. Leila's association with a Serb after the war marks her as a betrayer of her ethnic group, with the child representing the embodiment of that betrayal and a symbolic repository of ethnic hatred that animated the conflict. The treatment she and her child receive at the hands of post-conflict Bosnian society is decidedly hostile and reflects rigid ethnic demarcation lines between 'us' and 'them'. The child virtually has no place and no available identity category. At the same time, however, Leila's choice to form a close relationship with a Serb and bear a child with him after the war signals that for her, even after the harrowing experiences she suffered during the war, ethnic labels are meaningless beyond the ideological contexts that construct them, and that it is individual choices that matter. Through her own choices Leila thus subverts and undermines dominant ethno-nationalist discourses of identity that operate on the basis of ethnic purity and exclusion by loosening the grip of ethnic identifications that predominate in Bosnian society.

Lastly, her narrative illustrates that national and ethnic labels are not only a product of macro-structural forces but are also discursively invoked and constituted by ordinary people through everyday practices: in this case, referring to the practice of those who reject Leila, her child, and her association with a Serb, but also Leila's own personal choices through which she actively negotiates and reconfigures her war and post-war experiences. Her choices imply her desire to envision a larger repertoire of available identities, one that offers the possibility to recognize hybrid identities in post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina.

While recent scholarship on nation and nationhood provides a useful analytical and theoretical lens through which to examine the problems associated with 'mixed' identities in today's Bosnia and Herzegovina, Leila's narrative offers a socio-cultural framework rooted in real events for analyzing those identities. From within this framework it becomes possible to interrogate the 'self-making' practices (Markowitz, 2010, p. 31) of those marked as Other, practices that can challenge and potentially reshape 'the collective cultural discourses of the national imagined community' (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 59). This analytic framework offers a more nuanced perspective on interethnic tension and division by locating the seeds of reconciliation in the very nature of the divisions themselves.

The narratives of adolescents born of war rape further articulate the problematic of negotiating a personal identity in Bosnia and Herzegovina that does not fit into the monolithic ethnic categories projected by the dominant political discourse. The stories of these young adults, like Leila's narrative, foreground the nature of ethnic divisions that typify post-conflict Bosnian society, as well as the extent to which the war that ended more than 20 years ago and the violent legacy it left behind, reorganized the identification matrix of people in many Bosnian communities with regard to ideas about identity and national belonging. It is difficult to assess the number of children born to mothers who

had been raped in the war, partly due to the reluctance of many survivors to speak of the rapes (given that the topic is still taboo in many communities), and partly due to poorly kept statistics. When possible, many survivors chose an abortion. Those who did not have access to safe abortion or who saw no other alternatives killed their children upon birth. Others chose not to raise their children and gave them up for adoption. The number of women who found the courage to care for the children against the continued rejection by their family and community is difficult to estimate. The children themselves continue to face marginalization in their communities and struggle with their hybrid identity that most of them, just like their communities, perceive as 'sticky' and 'unclean'. More than 20 years after the war in former Yugoslavia, the political discourse of victimhood regarding the raped women who 'helped to create a national image of the enemy as well as the image of the nation as victim' (Kašić, 2002, p. 198) carries strong resonance. As pointed out by Helms (2007, p. 252), 'there remains a considerable social stigma against victims of rape, even wartime rape, despite official appeals to the contrary'. But while women's traumatizing experiences have been instrumentalized to create 'notions of victimization such as the "helpless motherland"' (Kašić, 2002, p. 198), the children conceived between enemy lines have fallen by the wayside. Hybridity does not seem to be a desired option of identity in a country that is still licking its wounds left over from a terrible war. Although Muslim as well as Catholic religious leaders have called for compassion toward Bosniak and Croat women rape survivors and their children, they have also lobbied for a mono-ethnic identity creation for the children rejecting mixed marriages as 'failed', 'destructive', even 'evil' (Daniel-Wrabetz, 2007, pp. 28–29; Helms, 2013, pp. 76–77).

Despite the attention accorded to rape as a crime against humanity in the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina and some efforts to assist women rape survivors and their children born of rape, these children, now young adults, continue to suffer in a society that stigmatizes and victimizes them in a number of structural ways (Carpenter, 2007; Daniel-Wrabetz, 2007). The 'stickiness' seen in Leila's narrative attributed to both mother and child can be reframed in a context in which national and ethnic identity are not immutable attributes, but constructed and reconstructed by ordinary people in everyday interactions. Since the 'nation is discursively invoked and constituted by ordinary people' in their daily practices (Fox & Miller-Idriss, 2008, p. 538), we highlight the voices of those who 'speak back', resist and reframe the exclusions based on alternative constructions of identity. This is especially relevant for the children born of rape in Bosnia who will be expected to contribute to the social and political life of a country that continues to marginalize them.

Although all sides involved in the war committed rape and enforced impregnation, the small body of recorded testimonies that exists in Bosnian and English comprises mainly Bosniak women rape survivors' testimonies and those of their children. Some researchers suggest that the lack of official disclosure about war rapes of Croat women, and we would add, Serb women as well, enabled the men of those two groups to 'publically retain their honor and their face' (Olujic, 1998, p. 44). The lack of official disclosure on the part of these two groups also served to further strengthen and legitimize the building and maintaining of powerful ethno-nationalist agendas that still animate internal politics in both Croatia and Serbia.

The ethnically motivated and genocidal intention behind the rapes is evidenced from the narrative accounts of the survivors' experiences. Some Bosniak and Croat women rape survivors reported being told by Serb soldiers that they were held in the rape camps with

the purpose of impregnating them with a 'Serb child' or 'little Chetnik', that is, little nationalist soldiers who would later turn against their biological mothers (Takševa, 2015a). One of the motivations behind the enforced impregnation was to create the rejection of raped mothers and their children, and thus destabilize their social and ethnic group (Allen, 1996; Erjavec & Volčič, 2010a, p. 361; Sharratt, 2011; Snyder, 2006).

In this context, we draw upon two 2010 studies by Erjavec and Volčič that were based on semi-structured interviews with 11 and 19 adolescent girls, respectively, who were born as a result of wartime rape. Most of the adolescents identify as Bosniak. The purpose of the studies was to analyze their self-representation strategies and the metaphors of their self-representation. Here we extend the original analytical purpose in order to examine the implications and significance of the narratives with respect to constructions of nationality and ethnic hybridity in a post-war context. The voices of these adolescents reveal that both they and their mothers have been ostracized, sometimes by their own close and extended families, and have suffered discrimination and stigmatization daily, including continued verbal and physical abuse. In a Bosnia and Herzegovina still deeply divided along ethnic lines, the dominant cultural discourse constructs them as 'children of the enemy', 'bastard children', 'Chetnik's whore child' and 'children of hate' (Erjavec & Volčič, 2010a, p. 368; Grieg, 2001). Politically, they remain neglected in the development of peace and reconciliation processes (McEvoy-Levy, 2007). Media reports and governmental policies in Bosnia and Herzegovina reproduce this conceptualization while often manipulating it for their own political agendas (Weitsman, 2007). The mothers' community tends to construct their identity as being determined by the ethnicity of the biological father, and as such being marked by violent ethnically inscribed hatred (Daniel-Wrabetz, 2007; Takševa, 2015b). But the children born to Bosniak mothers have a destabilizing effect on Serb communities in Bosnia as well; in these cases the rapists' injunction to the women that they will bear a 'little Chetnik' seems of little consequence, as the child is seen as an unwanted reminder of the violence of which the Serbs stand accused. The children's ethnic hybridity, conferred upon them through an act of violence by an enemy group, continues to carry the 'stickiness' whereby they remain the abject Other of war trauma. The fear of this abject Other explains the subsequent politics of exclusion. However, some of the adolescents' own words also point to their agency and clear resistance to and reframing of the dominant ethno-nationalist discourses that exclude them.

Children of wartime rape and mixed identity as embodiment of nationalist hatred

The adolescents' narratives illustrate the negative effects on personal identity of the almost mythological belief now embedded in Bosnian society that the Other is to blame for all war crimes and wrongdoing. In several narratives the symbol of the scapegoat emerges to describe the sense of being liminal to all available identity categories, of being neither one nor the other but a third category treated as the abject Other into which everyone's hatred is channeled, as illustrated by the following narrative:

I see myself as a scapegoat because I have Serbian blood and in this way, I am kind of ... available for everyone to hate me. I am a channel for their sadness ... I am guilty for their pain. I am guilty for their misery, that lives on. And no one likes me, everyone avoids me, everyone hates me. (Zerina in Erjavec & Volčič, 2010a, p. 367)

There are two concepts of identity that can be applied to the analysis of this and other testimonies. In a basic sense, identity can be defined as a set of behavioral or personal traits by which an individual is recognizable as a member of a group (Greenfield, 2016). More specifically, in the sense defined by Vygotsky (1978), identity is a complex emergent phenomenon continually produced in and by individuals in their interchanges with others. Like any dimension of the self, ethnic identity is understood to constitute a dynamic social product, residing in individual psychological processes (Smith, 1986). Socio-cultural and socio-historical conditions generate and maintain specific patterns of ethnic identification among individuals. The reality of the young Bosnians born of war rape reveals the importance of using analyses of identity that combine intra-psychic and socio-cultural levels of experience. It is clear from the above narrative that Zerina's perception of her very existence as undesirable emerges from her interchanges with others in her community. Her words reveal various forms of social exclusion to the point that she is unable to recognize herself, and for others to recognize her as a member of either ethnic group. Her hybrid identity is thus constructed as inappropriate, as something that embodies the ethnic hatred generated through the violence of the war, and is encoded and valorized in the post-conflict political division of the country. Zerina's identity is thus defined in negative terms, as a dynamic social product, produced and reproduced daily in an exclusionary and prejudicial way, resulting in negative individual psychological processes.

Another adolescent, Lejla, draws upon metaphors of warfare to describe her perception of the state of Bosnian society:

For me, the situation is a war; it's a state of war. I don't know any other reality, with no war. I don't know peace ... Children and their mothers shouting at me and after me that I am a Chetnik and a whore child ... I got used to the fact that they would, sometimes, kick me or beat me ... but the worst is that I am alone. I don't really have and can't have friends. [...] I am a scapegoat for the Bosnian war, hated and disliked by everyone. I am also unwanted by all – since I remind everyone that the war is still going on here ... the war has not ended. We haven't reconciled, and some haven't paid yet for their sins. They shoot at me. This is the war going on, and it's the same war still raging on. (Lejla in Erjavec & Volčič, 2010a, p. 368)

The language of warfare prevalent in Lejla's account signals the cultural and structural violence and continued marginalization and victimization to which she is subjected. Jasenka's words echo these realities:

Whoever says that in Bosnia there is peace is lying. There is no peace. And the worst of it all is that I am the victim. I have nothing to do with the Serbs; I hate them, too, but everyone sees a little Chetnik in me. (Erjavec & Volčič, 2010a, p. 369)

The girls' construction of self as being in the middle of violent warfare urges a more nuanced understanding of violence as a post-conflict barometer in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Their claims that there is 'no peace in Bosnia' is an important indicator of the Bosnian situation where structural and psychological violence, an inequitable social order, and ethnic apartheid persisted even in 2015, thus 20 years after the official end of the conflict (Christie, 2006; Pauker, 2012). The adolescents' statements effectively negate the claim that is sometimes made with respect to post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina, namely, that the country is experiencing 'negative peace', defined by the absence of physical forms of violence (Simić, Volčič, & Philpot, 2012, p. 3) since they are daily subjected to both verbal and physical violence. Their words make visible the prejudices

projected against ethnically 'mixed' identities, and urge the understanding that structural forms of peace need to be developed to allow all members of society to experience a sense of fairness along with the means to voice and redress matters that affect their well-being (Simić et al., 2012, p. 9).

In several narratives there is a recurring trope of identity expressed in metaphors of illness as 'cancerous' and 'destructive'. This shows that these adolescents have a very negative self-image, and that they have interiorized a sense of depersonalization from being individuals to being soiled exemplars of a community that continues to reject them, as seen in Marina's narrative: 'I see myself as a cancer ... as a cancer that divides the weak and sick cells in the blood and destroys all the strong, good cells' (Marina in Erjavec & Volčič, 2010b, p. 535). Similar images of destruction occur in other girls' narratives as well, such as Dina's: 'You want me to describe how I see myself? ... I see myself as ... a destroyer. A destroyer of everything ... and everyone around me' (Dina in Erjavec & Volčič, 2010a, p. 371). Sabina uses very similar images when referring to herself as a destructive force: 'I think I am kind of a destructive force ... a negative character, who typically ruins other people's lives' (Sabina in Erjavec & Volčič, 2010a, p. 371).

The girls impart that they have also internalized 'a sense of guilt, and understand themselves as "agents" complicit in the deconstruction of their relationships with others, expressing the internalized popular belief in Bosnia that they are responsible for their own misfortune and misery' (Erjavec & Volčič, 2010b, p. 535). The children born of wartime rape become subjects of contempt because according to the dominant ethno-nationalist discourse as expressed in the controversial words of Bosnian Serb actor and director Nikola Kolja Pejaković published in an article entitled *Mixed Meat*, they are, just like children from mixed marriages, 'frustrated bastards' as they 'do not know who they are, what they are, nor do they belong to anyone' (Perišić, 2012).⁴ The adolescents' hybrid identity thus marks them, both in the eyes of their community and in their own, as the abject Other. The testimonies speak to a sense of hybrid identity that is profoundly fractured, and relationships and social connections resulting from it are constructed as problematic. In their interchanges with others in their communities, the adolescents are denied recognition as members of any group. In a country still deeply divided along ethnic lines, their ethnically liminal status challenges the problematic tenets upon which post-conflict Bosnian society continues to be organized.

Two of the adolescents also articulate the ways in which their ethnic Otherness is constructed in daily interactions that take place in their communities but also in their schools, pointing to the harms of the segregated education system in post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina: Until 2012, the educational practice was characterized by the so called phenomenon of 'two schools under one roof', that is, dividing Bosniak, Croat and Serb children attending the same school into different classrooms and taught different curricula, including different versions of past and recent history. Mirsada's narrative gives us a sense of the exclusion she experienced in such an ethnically 'pure' environment that extends into the school system:

The people around me, you know, almost all my classmates, our neighbors, even our relatives despise and hate me ... My classmates, they are constantly kicking and teasing me, since in a way I am the only one who could be used for their frustrations and anger ... I am a Chetnik girl for them, and they excluded me from their mainstream clique. And that's why I tell you that the war has not ended yet (Mirsada in Erjavec & Volčič, 2010a, p. 369)

The 'mainstream clique' refers to the ethnically 'pure' group of Bosniaks whose group membership is enacted and validated by turning Mirsada into the 'sticky' and abject Other. Mirsada experiences this exclusion as a perpetual state of war that marks her existence in an ostensibly peaceful Bosnia. Sanja's articulated perception of exclusion is even more extreme, in that she sees herself as a 'target', a person selected as the 'sticky' aim for daily attacks:

I am a target that everyone uses ... The schoolmates exclude me on a regular basis, they shout at me 'you dirty Chetnik', they beat me up, throw stones ... [Cry] ... They all attack me ... every day, over and over, I have to fight ... yes, I am a shooting target. (Sanja in Erjavec & Volčič, 2010b, p. 532)

While this violence and discrimination are part of the ethnic group's policing of its own ethnically 'pure' boundaries, Sanja's words 'I have to fight' point to her sense of agency and a resolve to resist the actions of her community. In this sense, Sanja repositions herself from being seen merely as a victim, to being someone who actively responds to the injustice she perceives, thus participating in a dialectical discursive and physical renegotiation of the meaning of national and ethnic identity.

In fact, several of the respondents identify their daily lives and social interactions in agentive terms. While they all acknowledge the difficulties they experience as a result of the exclusionary practices of their communities, they also speak of their ongoing fight with these attitudes and the people who practice them. When asked about a crucial event that defines her life, Enita says: 'Every day ... over and over again ... all my life, I fight with them, and I fight them' (Enita in Erjavec & Volčič, 2010b, p. 530). Harija also speaks of her willingness to oppose the violence that surrounds her: 'My life is a fight; my life is one big struggle. You know, the war here still goes on, it hasn't ended yet' (Harija in Erjavec & Volčič, 2010b, p. 534).

In more decisive terms, Jasenka articulates a clear moral and ethical stance in relation to her community and their mistaken views and actions: 'They are cowards, they are cowardly enemies, because they shoot at me but they don't shoot at the real enemies ... who really cause their suffering. It is not my fault that they lost their fathers or their mothers' (Jasenka in Erjavec & Volčič, 2010b, p. 532). By identifying the community's words and actions as 'cowardly', Jasenka demonstrates her awareness that the true guilt lies with those who are responsible for inflicting pain and suffering on the population during the war. She also implies that the 'real enemies' in the present are those who encourage and propagate ethno-nationalist policies, according to which the only acceptable form of ethnic identity is a 'pure' one. Jasenka's narrative thus points to the possibility of reframing the dominant discourse of identity in Bosnia and Herzegovina to allow for neither-nor, that is, hybrid identity formations.

The narratives vividly and poignantly embody the limitations of current political, judicial and educational structures in Bosnia and Herzegovina – one country only in name. The extent to which political and social frameworks articulated along separate ethnic lines are entrenched and inflexible but simultaneously hollow and limiting is evident in politics as well as the education system. Bosnia and Herzegovina has 13 educational ministries; in addition to the overall Federation ministry, there are 10 cantonal ones in the Federation alone, 1 in Republika Srpska and 1 in Brčko district. This means that changing the education system also means changing the country's complex political system (Dzidic,

2015). In 2012, the Education Ministry of the Federation made an attempt to put an end to the segregated school system by calling for the formation of multi-ethnic classes and administrative and legal acts to unite divided teaching institutions (Jukic, 2012). This decision, however, initiated a number of protests by Bosniak parents who launched a legal case at a cantonal court in Mostar and who continue to fight the decision despite a 2014 Supreme Court Ruling that the practice is discriminatory. Recent reports show that much remains to be done to implement this plan and to develop an integrated curriculum that would ensure that all students are taught the same regardless of their ethnicity (Dzidic, 2015). Bosnia and Herzegovina's education system thus continues to operate in terms of an ideological battleground.

The stories told by Zerina, Jasenka, Mirsada and others like them – be they children born of wartime rape or children of 'mixed' ethnicity in general – who do not easily fit into the ethnically 'pure' vision of community are evidence of the harm that segregated institutions bring to Bosnian youth by systematically legitimating ethnicity as the main marker of identity. However, despite these undeniably grim realities and ideological struggles, which are exacerbated by the country's dire economic situation,⁵ a more nuanced perspective on interethnic tension and division shows that the seeds of reconciliation can be found in the very nature of the divisions themselves.

Ethnically mixed identity as a symbolic tool for reconfiguring a supra-national civic identity

While most of the recorded narratives of adolescents born of wartime rape speak about their experience and perception of their hybrid identity in negative terms, there are also some that articulate in explicit terms a more enabling view of ethnic hybridity in Bosnian society today, and as such can serve as a symbolic model for overcoming the ethnic divide in present-day Bosnia and Herzegovina. The significance of these narratives as symbolic tools for peace-building is all the greater since they come from children born of wartime rape whose very source of identity is marked by violence, warfare and ethnic hatred. Two of the interviewed adolescent girls in particular repositioned their 'mixed' identities as a source of unique strength and agency.

What becomes evident from Seada's narrative is that she provides a radically different perspective on her own position as the product of two different ethnicities:

I perceive myself as a rescuer, as someone who can connect enemies ... who are otherwise unable to come to the table and confront each other. Having blood of both sides in me, the Bosniak and Serbian, it is my duty to speak against injustices and continuing struggles. I can work toward a better future of Sarajevo – it is here we could all live together, without anger or hate. My mother always says we have to put the past behind and move on. The point is not to forget, but just somehow to forgive. (Seada in Erjavec & Volčič, 2010a, p. 377)

Seada articulates a completely positive view of her mixed ethnicity, and redefines it as a source of strength. For her, her hybrid identity and therefore ethnically liminal status enable her to envision an identity that transcends narrowly defined ethnic allegiances, one built on the positive capacity for reconciliation and reconstructing a multi-ethnic social fabric. Furthermore, Seada is not only able to reimagine and reshape what it

means to be of 'mixed' ethnicity, she is also committed to actively working toward enlarging the repertoire of available identity categories:

How can I bring people closer? Well, in school for example, I want to explain to my school-mates that it is important to collaborate and to understand or get to know each other better. We should not be divided into different ethnic groups. You know, now the Serbs have their own school lessons on the second floor, the Muslims on the third floor. The Croats are on the ground floor. So we don't intermingle. With my friends we started a rock group – I sing and write lyrics. The band is mixed – our drummer is a Muslim, and guitarist is a Serb. We mostly sing about love. (Seada in Erjavec & Volčič, 2010a, p. 377)

Here Seada identifies herself in terms of social activism to make Bosnia and Herzegovina a more tolerant society where identity is envisioned as a civic category rather than reduced to ethnic labels. Although she acknowledges the harmful educational segregation, she also articulates an enabling alternative, embodied in the multi-ethnic youth band. The band's desire to 'sing about love' symbolizes the possibility of youth coming together around common interests that supersede ethnicity and point toward a better future.

Amda also articulates her ethnic hybridity in enabling terms, as the basis for her ongoing effort to be a 'peace-keeper' among still warring parties:

I perceive myself as a fighter for peace ... I think that's me, I think I need to be that ... because as a child who has blood from two different groups, I am able to negotiate more, and act as a peace-keeper ... between both nations in order to overcome divisions and conflicts. What we need is to eliminate this war situation [...] We the young ones ... we should not allow ourselves to become collateral damage of the enemies, of the nationalists on all different sides. Regardless of ethnic belonging, we should sign a pact that will allow for cooperation in the future ... That is basically what I fight for. (Amda in Erjavec & Volčič, 2010b, p. 537)

Although these two adolescents also use metaphors from the semantic field of warfare to define themselves, they reverse the negativity associated with 'fighting' into positive images of someone who becomes a fighter for peace and for building bridges between former enemies, whereby they manage to reorganize their hybrid 'identification matrix' (Volčič, 2007, p. 69) endowing it with political agency. They articulate and imagine an identity that can be termed Bosnian in a supra-national sense. Fighting for peace in the statements of these two adolescents represents a struggle for a common good that transcends ethnic divisions and is united on the basis of common values, such as peace and collaboration, reminiscent of the nature of interethnic relations during Yugoslavia. The girls' hybrid identity, their 'mixed blood' is here recast in terms of an advantage, as it allows them to be in a position to overcome interpersonal and social tensions in an ethnically divided Bosnia and Herzegovina. Like Leila's son Zoran, they stand for a new dawn (*zora*) in Bosnian society.

The girls' words represent a call to Bosnian adults 'to model intergroup behaviors that are conducive to amicable interethnic norms' (Simić et al., 2012, p. 12). That it is difficult but possible to redefine the terms of national and ethnic belonging in the country is also evidenced in two additional recent examples. One is the Sejdić and Finci case, where two Bosnian citizens, one Roma and one Jewish, were declared ineligible to stand for political office because they did not belong to any of the three ethnic groups – Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs – recognized under the Dayton Accords as eligible 'to stand for election to the House of Peoples or for the Presidency' (Open Society, 2015).

After they challenged the Constitution in domestic and European courts, in December 2009 the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights ruled that their continued ineligibility to stand for election ‘lacked an objective and reasonable justification and was therefore discriminatory’ (Open Society, 2015). Although little has been done since the delivery of the judgment, the case is significant in promoting equal political rights for all people in Bosnia, regardless of their ethnicity.

The court decision in the Faruk (Kemal) Salaka case is also significant in promoting the idea of a civic identity, beyond ethnic labels. Upon his birth, Faruk’s parents wanted him to be registered as a Bosnian, but in Bosnia and Herzegovina newborn children could only be registered as Bosniaks, Croats, Serbs or Other. After mounting a legal challenge, in 2015 Faruk Salaka became the first child to be registered as ‘Bosnian’ (Jukic, 2015). This set a legal precedent that makes it possible to declare a Bosnian civic national identity. The symbolic value of cases like these and children with a hybrid background is significant as they represent possible alternatives to ethno-nationalist articulations of identity, and create and revive a civic national identity based on tolerance and respect for all.

Conclusion

The above analysis of Leila’s narrative along with narratives of children born of wartime rape provide evidence that interethnic violence, intolerance and discrimination continue to shape Bosnian society two decades after the end of the war. Like Leila’s biographical narrative, some of the adolescents’ narratives defy the paradigm of the passive, silent victim. Both Leila and other survivors have demonstrated great courage to go public with their stories (even though anonymously) showing that myths of national purity are untenable in a hybrid and multicultural reality. Stories such as Leila’s and those of children born beyond the ethnic division lines remind us that attempts to impose myths of national purity can only create suffering. They also serve as a warning for the twenty-first century where these myths are far from disappearing. Recognizing the hybridity of cultures is a step toward creating a better future for children like Leila’s son Zoran and for the now young adults born of wartime rape, as well as all others who have children with partners from a different ethnic group. As Bhabha (2006, p. 156) reminds us, ‘cultures are never unitary in themselves, nor simply dualistic in relation of Self to Other’. However, the hybrid children of the Bosnian war, who have by now reached adulthood, continue to represent a vulnerable group. Yet rather than being treated as ‘sticky’ abject Others scapegoated for past suffering and present divisions, they should be embraced and integrated into the nation’s identity on the path toward healing and reconciliation and a future of tolerance and recognition of cultural hybridity.

At the same time, more agentic and affirmative narratives can serve as a discursive blueprint for peace that aims to eradicate structural inequalities that systematically disadvantage and harm people like Leila and her family and adolescents born of wartime rape. Such narratives can also help overcome cultural and structural violence and envision a peaceful future for multi-ethnic Bosnia by articulating a truly Bosnian national identity based on forgiveness, tolerance and integration of the three major ethnic groups as well as all minorities. The narratives analyzed clearly demonstrate the dynamic character of ethnic identities as they are being shaped and reshaped, imagined and re-imagined. If current intervening political actors in Bosnia and Herzegovina acknowledged this reality,

they would create the conditions that constitute the beginning of a transformative movement toward a gradual reconciliation, multi-ethnic tolerance and truly peaceful coexistence. The words of the adolescents born of war rape give urgent personal affirmation to the need to undermine the appeal of nationalist politics, to desegregate neighborhoods, establish objective truth commissions as the medium for a dialogue between the three formerly warring groups, to set up a single national curriculum, and overall to reduce the salience of national identity based on ethnic affiliation. As a group, along with all others who live in ethnically 'mixed' households, they offer the potential for establishing a path toward post-war democratization, and engaging Bosnian citizens in alternative forms of national identification that promote hybridity, inter-group connections and civic rather than ethnic politics and social engagement.

Notes

1. League of Communists of Yugoslavia (Savez Komunista Jugoslavije) was the official name of the only political party in Tito's Yugoslavia.
2. All translations from the German original by Agatha Schwartz.
3. Leila had also consented to be a witness at the Sarajevo trial of Iuvuz Begić, one of Fikret Abdić's henchmen in charge of a concentration camp in which Leila was held a prisoner and sexually assaulted for months at the age of 16.
4. Translated by Tatjana Takševa.
5. The overall unemployment rate in Bosnia and Herzegovina is over 40%, whereas the youth unemployment rate nears 60%.

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