Ethnic Solidarities, Networks, and the Diasporic Imaginary: The Case of "Old" and "New" Bosnian Diaspora in the United States

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Abstract

This ethnographic study examines ethnic solidarities, networks and the diasporic imaginary of Bosnians who settled in the United States up until the early 2000s. While the elders cling on to the "old" pre-existing narratives of belonging as shaped by one's ethno-religious identity, we argue that many diasporic youths have a "new" Americanized perspective on what it means to be Bosnian abroad. They not only question the symbolic value of ethnicity, but also the importance of country-of-origin background, on the one hand, and ties with their "co-ethnics", on the other. Drawing from ethnographic fieldwork and twenty lived histories of Bosniak diaspora during their visit to Banja Luka, Tuzla and Sarajevo, this paper pushes forward a discussion on ethnic solidarities that goes beyond the considerations of Dayton-imposed identity formation, questioning how post-war affiliations are informed by ethnic attitudes in young adults living abroad. It contributes to existing discussions on transnational spaces, connections and practices, by showing that both time and space of one's settlement greatly shape the identities of what we define as the "old" and the "new" Bosnian diaspora.

Keywords: ethnic solidarities, diasporic imaginary, Bosnians, Bosnian diaspora, networks, generations, ethnicity.

The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina generated large migration flows. It is estimated that approximately 1.2 million people left the country as a result of the 1992-1995 conflict. This, coupled with two additional periods or stages of migration – during the 1960s and 1970s, when tens of thousands of Bosnian guest workers migrated to western European countries; and the current, post-war migration – resulted in 1.4 million Bosnians, or 38 per cent of the Bosnian population, living outside Bosnia (Valenta and Ramet 2011: 1). Whereas scholars in varying fields have discussed, directly or indirectly, migration and refugee-related issues (Bieber 2006; Eastmond 2006; Williams 2006; Jakobsen 2011; Halilovich 2012), one question that re-emerges is the extent to which Bosnians living in countries of settlement can be considered a "diaspora". In his research

on the misplaced masculinities experienced by middle-aged, professional, educated fathers who had fled Bosnia during the 1990s, Jansen (2008) refers to "non-transnational Bosnian refugees", pointing to the importance of "specific remembered localized life practices", and not merely country-to-country relations (p. 181). The author explains that these men often cling to their remembered personhood, located in places where they recalled "having counted as someone". Hence, as Halilovich (2013) shows in his study of "places of pain", for Bosnian refugees, a major issue has been not only a change of place but also other, no less dramatic changes, including loss of status and misplacement of gender relationships within refugee families.

Writing about the meanings of home in the lives of Bosnian refugees, Huttunen (2005) is sim-

ilarly reluctant to speak about an actual diaspora. The author refers instead to "a hesitant diaspora" because of "the refugees' hesitation between their country of origin and their new country of settlement as their 'homes' in changing situations" (p. 177). Through careful reading of life stories written by two refugees, both of Bosniak[1] origin, Huttunen highlights these dynamic processes of negotiating belonging in diasporic situations. She notes that "becoming a refugee is a final step in the gradual process whereby [...] home turns into a hostile and threatening place" (p. 188). What makes a home lose its essential characteristics like security and togetherness cannot be explained through the trivialised and oversimplified theory of "ancient ethnic hatred", according to which violence is pre-programmed into Balkan societies since the dawn of humankind and erupts, with eerie regularity, for irrational and inexplicable reasons. Rather, as Huttunen suggests, violence is brought to ethnically mixed communities by politicised discourses which interpret the language of ethnicity in "extremely [...] exclusive ways" (2005: 191). When home becomes politicised in ethnic terms, it also becomes problematicised as a home.

Be that as it may, as theorising on diasporas indicates, many groups retain both symbolic and practical relationships to their country of origin, often regarded as the "true" home (Safran 1991; Wahlbeck 1999). The role of ethnicity is important in this regard because "in exile, ethnicity becomes a compelling discourse for talking about identity in a new way" (Huttunen 2005: 188). Ethnicity makes possible talking about links to home while living abroad. Showing "who we are" and "where we come from" is also a common practice within national frameworks of multiculturalism, in which ethnic communities are invited to share their "culture" with the broader community. In what follows, we provide an ethnographic account of ethnicity as experienced and enacted by two generations of Bosnians who settled in the United States, one of the most

multicultural, ethnically diverse countries in the world. We argue that elderly Bosnians – those in their late fifties and sixties – typically cling on to the "old" pre-existing narratives of belonging as shaped by one's ethno-religious identity, and try to accommodate these narratives in their daily lives in the United States. Young Bosnians – those in their twenties and thirties – meanwhile, have a "new", Americanized perspective on their diasporic identities and thus resist, reject, and render irrelevant the narratives of belonging as articulated by their elders.

Literature Review

In their research on Bosnian and Hungarian migrants' experiences of belonging in Australia, Voloder and Andits (2016) argue that focus on ethnicity in a multicultural context works to "create dominant stereotypes, wherein the cultures of immigrant communities are essentialised, reified and bounded as belonging to a discrete, homogeneous group" (305). Bosnian migrants who generally experience less discrimination when compared with non-European migrant groups (Colic-Peisker 2005; Valenta and Ramet 2011) seek to challenge stereotypes by negotiating "a sense of belonging [that] involves intersecting process of identifying with specific notions of culture and culturedness, while disidentifying with others" (Voloder and Andits 2016: 313). To be a member of a "cultured" ethnic community thus means to negate association with communism and ethnic nationalism, to distance oneself from association with the Balkans and war, and align oneself with notions of democracy, multiculturalism, classic education as well as middle or high class symbols and identities. Important to note here is that, once transplanted, ethnicity, along with ethnic culture and ethnic life, evolves separately from that of the homeland.

Flanagan (2010) shows that in addition to being moulded by multicultural frameworks of the host society, ethnicity is shaped by generational changes, as each new generation further modifies its heritage "according to what is useful or adaptable from old beliefs, style, and cus-

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1   Bosniak – Bosnian Muslim.

toms" (p. 121). There is, however, dispute over the magnitudes of the tendency for each generation to modify the content of its ethnic identity. These endless adaptations are seen as a basic feature of the ethnic phenomenon, although they can be construed as types of ethnic adaptions, particularly observed in the United States, and as a gradual weakening of ethnicity. Stein and Hill, meanwhile, argue that the contemporary version of ethnicity, where people may selectively retain what they like of the old country's culture and discard the rest is "dime-store ethnicity" and very different than earlier forms of ethnic solidarity attributed to the immigrant generation itself (1977: 22-23). Furthermore, Steinberg (1981) states that different generations of migrants typically do very little together and that the symbolic value of ethnicity is not enough to ensure the continuation of solidarity. His conclusion is based in part on the idea that the tradition of ethnic pluralism in the United States was built on systematic inequalities that existed among different immigrant groups. Waters (1994) adds to this argument, and notes that there are three types of identities evident among the second generation black immigrants in New York City – a black American identity, an ethnic or hyphenated national origin identity, and an immigrant identity. These different identities are, as the author explains, "related to different perceptions and understandings of race relations and of opportunities in the United States" (1994: 795) and often vary from identities as expressed by the first generation.

The centrality of context is also highlighted by Koinova (2017), who links it to diaspora mobilisations, and Korac (2013), who sees it as key when focusing on agency of the people in migratory processes. In turn, this "helps to explain specific migratory processes unfolding at a particular point in time and linking particular locations" (Korac 2013: 228). The separation between the "old" and the "new" diasporas thus reflects the very different conditions that produced them. As Mishra (2007) explains in his research on the Indian diaspora, the separation becomes even

clearer when "we note that the 'new' […] comes with globalisation and hypermobility, it comes with modern means of communication already fully formed or in the making" (p. 3). Unlike the earlier diaspora where imagination was triggered by a photograph or a song, the "new" diaspora can easily contain their homeland in one's bedroom in a city such as Vancouver, Sacramento or Perth – "in short, networking now takes over from the imaginary" (ibid). But even with the "new" diaspora, this is only a part of the story. "The Afghan refugee to Australia or the Fiji-Indian who is illegally ensconced in Vancouver is neither global nor […] mobile" (Mishra 2007: 4).

Against the backdrop of these diasporic differences, Mishra explores somewhat confused attempts to answer the question "where are you from?". He puts forth the example of the Indian Muslim community in Bombay, which had gotten increasingly ambivalent since the partition of India in 1947, in order to demonstrate that the answer used to imply the beginning of inclusion in a community. Now, however, it is shadowed by another question – "what do we do with them?". This underlying question is what Mishra calls an "interrogative dominant" in the cultural logic of diaspora, because "the diasporic imaginary is so crucially connected to the idea of a 'homing desire', the idea that against one's […] home country, the present locality is […] another country" (2007: 5). Behind the use of "home country" are ethnic doctrines based on exclusivity and purity, and linked very often to a religiously communal solidarity of the *ethnie,* which ignores that the homelands of diasporas are themselves "contaminated […] and are not pure, unified spaces in the first place" (ibid).

While Mishra looks at the salience of religiously based communal solidarity of the *ethnie*, Nielsen (1985) considers the role of class, and notes that "ethnic boundaries coincide with lines of structural differentiation" (133). Where the stratification system links ethnic identity and economic status, it also bestows a meaning to ethnic identity that endures so long as this connection between status and ascriptive stigma

remains. Hereby, "ethnic solidarity is reinforced by the perceived exploitation of the subordinate group by the superordinate" (Nielsen 1985: 133). According to Flanagan, ethnic and minority-majority group processes "need to be kept analytically distinct, as cultural and political categories, respectively" (2010: 121). He does suggest, however, that the theme of having suffered together through injustice at some point in the past has proven to be "one of the most cohesive themes in preserving strong feelings of ethnicity in subsequent generations" (ibid). Much of an ethnic group's vitality may lie in its political struggles, "but the expression of its ethnicity is a cultural celebration of such themes – which, conceivably, may grow in symbolic importance over generations of retelling" (ibid). How these struggles intertwine with policy-making and institutional practice has been explored by Eastmond (2010), who looks at the role and changing meanings of trauma against the backdrop of Sweden's admission of Bosnian refugees in the early 1990s, and Koinova and Karabegović (2017), who explore the role of diaspora in initiatives to memorialize atrocities committed at the former Omarska concentration camp in Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereafter BiH).

Chung (2007) also explores the links between transnational diaspora mobilisation, symbolic politics, and minority-majority group processes. She notes that "detachment from mainstream society contributes to the formation of a male-dominated elite that is able to manipulate the political agendas and resources of the self-governing ethnic community" (15). These internal hierarchies pass their legacy onto the next generation of ethnic leadership in a contradictory manner. The author shows that a new generation of political leadership, with more Americanized perspectives, is constrained by "the hierarchical structures of the immigrant community and their relations with first-generation powerholders who are better equipped to mobilise financial capital, ethnic-based networks of support, and other resources within the immigrant-dominated enclave" (2007: 21). Hence, despite

strong intergenerational conflicts and competition in terms of divergent political agendas, existing hierarchical structures create conditions for intergenerational dependency between "those who dominate the institutions of the traditional ethnic community and those who have the tools to create new bridges into mainstream society" (ibid). What remains unanswered is how intergenerational dependency constructs a sense of ethnic solidarity in a community fragmented by so many competing interests. As Chung shows, political agendas of the second generation do not necessarily accommodate easily to immigrant power structures. "[They] bring Americanised ideas about the ethnic community and its place within mainstream society that clash with the traditional ideologies and value systems of the immigrant elite to varying degree" (2007: 21).

Our aim in this paper is to push forth the discussion on ethnicity in general and ethnic solidarity, networks and imaginary in particular in the context of several contingent criteria that shape the experiences of the "old" and the "new" Bosnian diaspora. The "old" hereby refers not only to those who emerged "before the world was thoroughly consolidated as transnational" (Spivak 1996: 245), but also those who had settled in the United States having fled the 1992-1995 war. The "new" diaspora, meanwhile, encompasses those who arrived since the early 2000s. Though related, these two groups are drastically different when it comes to the making of their diasporic identities. Generational differences, as we will see later, stem from historical conditions that can be traced back to the homeland – the shared Yugoslav legacy, on the one hand, and the memories of the 1992-1995 war, on the other. In order to fully understand how homeland conditions shape the making of the "old" and the "new" Bosnian diaspora, we examine the time and the space variable or, better put, the period in which our participants arrived to the United States and the presence of associative diaspora networks which act as a main source of cohesion and solidarity for all three major ethnic groups from Bosnia and Herzegovina. We examine the

role of these two factors in the lives of Bosnians in the United States and their negotiation of belonging.

In what follows, our discussion goes beyond the considerations of Dayton-imposed identity making and questions of how post-war affiliations are informed by ethnic attitudes in both old and young Bosnians living abroad. We look at, on the one hand, elderly Bosnians who, as Jansen also recognises, cling onto what they had left behind, and, on the other hand, young Bosnians who perceive their homeland as a physical home only, a place of tradition and family, and use this as a base for the making of new identities in the wake of post-Dayton social and economic ills. Therefore, while both groups wish to belong to the host society, their embodied experiences, feelings, and identities need to be examined with attention to the sense of ethic solidarity and nostalgia for Bosnia and Herzegovina. The literature that focuses on the Bosnian diaspora shows that integration outcomes and transnational practices are interconnected (Eastmond 2006; Valenta 2007; Valenta and Ramet 2011). Here, we add to this exciting body of work by exploring "the symbolic value of ethnicity" (Steinber 1981) in the rising tensions between the "old", pre-existing and home-imposed solidarities, and the "new", Americanised perspectives of those individuals who are "lost to the group", i.e., who do not maintain ties with co-ethnics, do not belong to ethnic clubs and associations, do not consider their country-of-origin background meaningful, etc.

Methodology

The present study draws from an ethnographic research conducted by the authors from June until September 2016.[2] A portion of what we present is data gathered during interviews[3] with

ten members of the Bosnian diaspora associations in the United States and ten Bosnians who do not belong to official associations but view themselves as members of the Bosnian diaspora.[4]

Pseudonym	Age	Occupation	City of Origin/ Current City
Sakib	61	Retiree	Sarajevo/ Atlanta
Sanela	60	Housewife	Sarajevo/ Atlanta
Mahira	57	Shop Assistant	Banja Luka/ Saint Louis
Dragan	60	Construction Worker	Tešanj/ Atlanta
Amila	36	Medical Doctor	Sarajevo/ Saint Louis
Indira	32	University Professor	Tuzla/ Akron
Mido	59	Environmental Scientist	Banja Luka/ Atlanta
Goran	29	Light-Show Artist	Sarajevo/ Saint Louis
Naida	31	Accountant	Sarajevo/ Atlanta
Lamija	52	Lawyer	Tuzla/ Akron
Ismet	63	Gardener	Sarajevo/ Akron
Vasvija	60	Waitress	Sarajevo/ Akron
Nikolina	25	Master student	Banja Luka/ Saint Louis
Nermina	31	PhD Student and Translator	Sarajevo/ Akron
Mario	43	Dentist	Sarajevo/ Atlanta
Damir	28	Student	Tuzla/ Atlanta

First, we engaged in ethnographic fieldwork that included two trips of different length (between two and three days) to Banja Luka (for the summer gathering of Bosnian diaspora from the

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[2] Table 1 below provides detailed information about each participant.
[3] Direct quotations from 15 interviews were used throughout the paper. The authors did not quote every single respondent, but their responses were used to form wider observations as will be noted in the pa-

per. The age of each participant is added in the brackets following the first mention of respondent's name.
[4] The names used in this study are not respondents' real names, but pseudonyms which we created for the purposes of this work.

United States) and Tuzla (for a set of interviews while our interviewees were on vacation). Second, we interviewed participants who were visiting their families in Sarajevo. All interviews were done by the authors in English or Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian. More general conclusions were drawn from the combination of qualitative field research and a wider literature reviews on the Bosnian diaspora.

We are aware of our biases as we spent the entire time working with Bosnians who live in the predominantly urban areas of the United States thus forming networks with the urban population. We also categorized the participants according to the time that they arrived to the United States, the reasons they cited for their arrival, and the relationship they have with their homeland. We did not take into account the ethnic backgrounds of our participants, although they did emerge during all of the interviews and were mentioned by the interviewees themselves. Lastly, we wish to state that this work should not be taken as an archetype of the Bosnian diaspora experience. Rather, by relying on various life histories we aimed to highlight a plethora of experiences, memories and identities that help research a diasporic community that some have labelled as hesitant, detached and unconsituted (Huttunen 2005; Jansen 2008).

In the following sections, the lived histories recounted will be used to explore the diasporic imaginary of Bosnians who settled in the United States until early 2000s. More precisely, we use the "old" vs. "new" members discourse to portray the difference that exist between the pre-existing narratives of belonging, as intrinsically linked to ethno-religious identity, and the "new" Americanized perspective on what it means to be Bosnian abroad. In exploring such diametrical interpretations, this article advances the existing findings by demonstrating that both time and space of one's settlement abroad largely shape the identity discourse of what we define as "old" and the "new" Bosnian diaspora.

How Time and Space of Arrival Influence the Divisions between the "Old" and the "New" Bosnian Diaspora: Ethnic Solidarities as Influenced by Post-Dayton Politics

Sakib (61) arrived to Utica in early summer of 1992. He first fled to Croatia with a humanitarian convoy and then to the United States. The entire family moved at once, a story not typical of other respondents in this research, where fathers and boys of age stayed behind. "I thought we would come back. The idea of going further away from Croatia was not appealing to us, but when a friend from Utica invited us to stay at his home until the end of the war, I agreed. I agreed because he also promised a job as a waiter in the association of our diaspora…I was a high school professor back home, but this did not matter. The prospect of working, even as a waiter, in the midst of the chaos was very attractive…". His wife, Sanela (60) readily jumps in: "Yes, I immediately said we will save the money for plane tickets to return directly to Sarajevo". These words expose the general spirit among Bosnian refugees in the early 1990s who today form a vibrant Bosnian diaspora on the American East Coast – the plan to return after the conflict was an overwhelming thought for predominantly then-young families with one or more children. "I said to Sakib: 'we will be fine, we will join our people, it won't be too much different and he told you that you will work in his restaurant. It will not be forever". Such statements nicely portray Nielsen's thoughts on ethnic solidarity as strongly linked to "exploitation of the subordinate group by the superordinate" (1985: 133). In the case of Sakib's family, this type of relationship with the already existing Bosnian community in a foreign land was a deciding factor for their American future. Yet, a large majority of the Bosnian diaspora in the United States remained on after the end of the war, thus forming a diaspora. The reasons cited by seven families that we interviewed were all the same: prospects of living in a *normal* country yet among their own people, expressions used by all our interviewees, were much more attractive than returning to damaged homes were "all

money earned would have been spent on reconstructing a house and then sitting in it without a job, but even worse, a friend to sip coffee with", as Sakib puts it.

Despite the fact that, for many Bosnian refugees, the United States was initially considered a temporary place of residence until they were able to return to their homes in Bosnia and Herzegovina, all of the ten interviewees who arrived to the United States until 1995 remained. Each story they recounted[5] exposes the disillusionment with post-war development of BiH – the intention to return coupled with uncertainties of "yet another new life" in a highly fragmented country and "new neighbours at old homes" resulted in a decision to stay. Consequently, these transplanted lives, along with traditional ethnic life, including ethnic divisions at home and as remembered from the past characterize this group of respondents. In such constellations, the concept of "return" is linked with home and identity left behind, a way to speak of home while living abroad (Huttunen, 2005, Halilovich, 2013) and a means of connecting past experiences and identities with new (post-Dayton) socio-political contexts.

This reflection of conditioned return, dependent solely on homeland's socio-economic development is captured by Mahira (57), a seller at a local baker's shop in Saint Louis. "I really wanted to return to Sarajevo. After more than twenty years of living in America I still don't feel like I belong here. Americans point to my 'Russian' accent as they call it, so, how can I feel American? Yes, I have an American passport, my son can hardly speak Bosnian, but I am not American. I am Bosnian with all my heart and I really don't want to be American. But, if I returned to Sarajevo it would be even worse. I don't know the people living in my old building; they have all arrived from somewhere else. I feel like I would

be an outsider and I would probably feel more American than Bosnian, because I have adopted certain American 'ways'". Dragan (60) is a construction worker in Atlanta and expresses his identification with Bosnia in a similar way: "I am Bosnian and one day my wish is to return. However, I am very cautious of this. Whenever I travel to Bosnia I see the despair of my friends and family who are still there. I mostly see new faces. Sometimes I pass through my town of Tešanj and see nobody I know. I know, if I ever return, that I would not count as somebody who has skill and knowledge. I would not be able to practice law as I did during Tito's times. I would simply not count…" These stories portray the label of middle-aged fathers that Jansen (2008) attach to experienced-middle aged professionals who fled Bosnian towns during the 1990s. What attaches them to their homeland is not merely a relationship with their country, but the remembered and localized life practices, which translate into temporary nostalgia whereby they felt important in pre-war BiH. Still, they are attached to the old home, since the place where they recalled having counted as someone is not present-day BiH. Consequently, the respondents who arrived as refugees began to view their temporary place of residence as a permanent home. Solidarity, in this context, has thus become the one relating to one's own ethnicity away from the homeland. For those described as the middle-aged fathers of Bosnia, home, and consequently the return to home, has lost its traditional form of attachment; it has become problematic due to missing ethnic togetherness and security.

Contrary to middle-aged Bosnians who arrived to the United States during the 1992-1995 war, younger Bosnians who moved here in the early 2000s and onwards, share a different story. "I was a doctor in Bosnia. I had a decent job, relatively well-paid, but I could not really stand the uncertainty, the fact that sometimes I would cramp and wait for the first Monday of the month and stare at my phone for a whole day expecting a message from the bank that my salary has arrived. I would live for days on just a few dollars, because

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[5] Stories of disillusionment with post-war development of BiH, new neighborhoods and friends and financial uncertainties were mentioned in all 20 interviewees as ultimately linked with current conditions in BiH and as factors which stop their return.

our salaries serve only to get you through the month…literally. And bear in mind that I was a doctor", says Amila (36), a single female from Tuzla. For her, a decision to move to the United States was a "natural inclination since the end of student days", a life-long wish for a better life in, again, "a normal country". Similar to her is Indira (32), who just recently married to an American. "I moved here when I was eighteen, to study. I wanted to experience life in a normal country, to study and then to remain in the United States in order to work. I think I did well," she states with a smile. Today, Indira holds a PhD in sociology and has just started teaching at a large state university. Both Amila and Indira are very hesitant about returning to Bosnia. "Yes, I was somebody there, but I am much better here. I don't feel misplaced; I feel exactly in place. I think about my parents in Sarajevo, but I earn enough to be able to visit. However, I prefer that they visit me, as they enjoy it here as much as I do." Indira thinks in similar terms: "Home is where my parents are. If they are here, here is home. I feel totally detached from Bosnia. In fact, Bosnia has never given me anything. The US gave me everything – good education, a well-paid job, a total sense of having control over what I do. This, I am positive, would not have been the case in Bosnia. And no, I will not return". Al-Ali (2001: 582) claims that there is evidence that the immersion into a new life in the country of residence is accompanied by increasing links with the home country through the exchange of ideas and knowledge, regular contact and visit and involvement in community associations, but these statements do not hold entirely true for Bosnians living in the United States, notably the younger generations who feel almost entirely detached. "I don't want to join an association. The idea of gathering and listening to Bosnian singers, mainly those who come to sing for masses of homesick Bosnians who have been in here for decades is sickening to me. Plus, what association to join? They are all 'ethnically charged' and their activities focus only on ethnic talks. It's like being stuck in time, being in Bosnia in the early 1990s. I visit home, but only to see

my parents. Maybe you found a wrong person for your interview, but what classifies me as a Bosnian is only my passport and nothing else" says Indira.

Just as Huttunen (2005) suggests, it is not the ancient hatred narrative per se that discourages these young people to feel almost complete detachment from their own diasporic community. Instead, the politicized discourses that characterize the nature of ethnic solidarity among diasporic groups create a sense of non-belonging among young cohorts of newly arrived professional immigrants who not only push forward the discourse on ethnic solidarity beyond its traditional forms, but problematized home as the source of ethnic grievances. This "dime-store ethnicity" (Stein and Hill, 1997 cited in Flanagan 2010: 121), whereby members of a diasporic community upkeep the selected norms and values of the homeland and discard the rest, is very typical for all the interviewees. Alternatively, ethnic grievances that permeate all three ethnic groups representing Bosnian diaspora in the United States, contribute to the situation in which ethnic solidarity is conditioned upon the politics of the homeland, that is, as several young respondents point "politicization of ethnicity and consequently ethnic discourse, which undermines the value of ethnicity". Hence, the continuation of ethnic solidarity, just as Mishra (2007) points in his work, the one brought from home, is not ensured.

The time and space of arrival of "old" and "new" diasporic communities cuts across these drastically perceived differences between them. The symbolic meaning of "return" which manifests as a desire, but the one that is inevitably linked to ethnic belonging and identity, is the most observable trait of Bosnian refugees who, today, are American citizens and whose children have limited attachment to their ethnic cultures. Yet, the fact that they came to the United States with the desire to return translates into a lingering and omnipresent feeling to actually do so "once the day comes". What is obvious is that the actual time of arrival, the days of the bloody

war in their homeland, represent the symbol of their desire to return – they left without wanting to leave and dwelled in a "limbo, being caught between their wish to return, unfavourable circumstances in BiH and the difficulties of starting a new life in their country of residence" (Al-Ali et al. 2001: 582). Conversely, the young Bosnian diaspora, present-day citizens of BiH, live an entirely different story, the one that has little to do with the war, but with post-conflict socio-political and economic development of their homeland. Their time of arrival indicates different desires, feelings and denotes even newly emerging identities, which are more connected to their new home than the one they left behind. The formation of very different attitudes towards ethnic home and ethnic group that emerge between the *old* and the *new* members of Bosnian diaspora in the United States contribute to a new form of diversity that can be observed within this migrant community.

Another interesting aspect that emerged from the interview data was a shared perception that the current socio-political set-up in Bosnia and Herzegovina is guilty for not creating favourable grounds for the old diaspora to return and for the new one to emerge. "If they were smart enough (the government) they would be able to see that we have so much to offer to them in terms of improving the ways the society works, in terms of knowledge that our children who were educated in the United States have to offer, but most importantly the connections that we are able to create" says Mido (59), an environmental scientist from Atlanta. "Politicians in Bosnia currently invest little effort in communicating with their diaspora. Yes, I would return. In fact, I long to return. I have the money, a house in Bosnia, but what would I do there?" he says adding that whenever he visits Bosnia his friends tell him "not to be stupid and return, because nobody would care what he has to offer in terms of skills, knowledge and experience. When I think about it, they are right. And that's not my fault; it's the fault of Bosnian politicians". The overwhelming feeling of "not being counted as a somebody"

among the diaspora members who arrived during the war is cited as the primary reason for not being able to return. Building upon Huttunen's argument that home loses its essential characteristics like togetherness and security when politics interpret ethnicities in "extremely exclusive ways" (Huttunen 2005: 191), our research extends this discourse by revealing that the overwhelming detachment from what can be considered *home* and *people from home* is a by-product of homeland's policies towards its diasporic groups. Hence, it is also the transnational forms of solidarity that impact diasporic political and cultural consciousness.

Conversely, our respondents who arrived after 2000 were even harsher when it came to blaming the current political set-up for their immigration to a foreign land. More precisely, all ten of those interviewed from this group referred to inadequacies of the current system and cited it as the crucial factor for not wanting to return. In fact, the consequences of "such a carless policy towards the young and educated Bosnian population", as Goran (29), a light-show artist from Sarajevo claims, is the primary reason why all of the respondents from this age group feel "shame", "hesitation", "detachment", and "unwillingness" to return to Bosnia and Herzegovina. The rapidly changing identity that they claim to experience is "a result of a complete lack of care towards the young on behalf of the Bosnian government", in the words of Goran. "My friends are all American, I have no problem with the American way of life, the long hours and little fun" says Naida (31), a young accountant from Sarajevo who is currently working at Ernst and Young Company. "In Bosnia, I would never have the opportunities that I have here and I blame my government for it", she concludes. Hence the political context of the home country emerges as a significant factor in detaching both the "old" and the "new" Bosnian diaspora from transnational social spaces.

When used in a discourse of ethnic solidarity, the time and space variables create interesting symbolic characteristics of the Bosnian diaspora in the United States, which are strongly inter-

twined with the identity discourse. The attachment to the old identity, which is a product of a shared Yugoslav past, among the older generations of Bosnian diaspora is contrary to the rapidly altering identity observable among the young, post-Dayton generation. Older Bosnians[6] have a much clearer picture of what is *home*, yet they have difficulty returning because of what they once called home and what they identified as home has disappeared. In that sense, the old identities remain and seem to be a product of nostalgia rather than ethnic solidarity tied to a real need to return. The "homing desire" (Mishra, 2007: 5) is, thus, the predominant 'diasporic imaginary' of the older cohorts of our respondents. Contrary to this is the feeling of the young who do not have a strong sense of belonging to their homeland, despite the fact that they have arrived to the United States very recently. For them, a new identity is a normal derivative of socially and economically induced migration; it represents freedom of expression as it offers choice. The newly acquired benefits that they gained from their diasporic experiences in the United States are translated into an easy acquisition of a new and presumably more American identity. Thus, despite the fact that the "old" and the "new" respondents do not share the 'diasporic imaginary' induced by the time variable, they both blame the current political context for either inability or unwillingness to return.

Associative Diasporic Networks as a Social Place of Solidarity: Makers and Breakers of Bosnian Diasporic Identities

In the previous section, we introduced the time and space contexts which, as we have demonstrated, largely differentiate between identities and solidarities as exhibited by the "old" and the "new" Bosnian diaspora in the United States. Now we ask how these formulations extend to encompass the existence of associative diasporic networks or, better, whether they, in their pres-

ent form and practiced activities, contribute to the making of a single Bosnian diasporic identity or still challenge the concept of Bosnian diasporic community. Further, we unravel whether these activities, no matter how strong or weak they are, contribute to solidarity among Bosnian diaspora. Flanagan (2010: 121) argues that ethnic culture and life occur separately from that of the home; this change emerges out of generational modifications of heritage, which members of diasporic communities view as useful or adaptable to new social spaces. The empirical research which underpins this work has identified that the primary premise on which Bosnian associative diasporic networks in the United States build its solidarity through social places is embedded in the cultural reproduction, or preservation of traditional, everyday, routinized activities and practices, which depict family hierarchies and gender relations and assert belonging to a community.

Lamija (52) declares herself as a Bosnian refugee, accentuating also that she is a Muslim. Despite the fact that the war is long over, she still sees herself as wartime migrant, something that is making her "entirely different from the American people". She says: "The only place where I can enjoy myself is the *udruženje* (association). I go there for coffee, to speak Bosnian, I feel at home there. My favourite time of the year is when *udruženje* manages to bring over Bosnian singers, so we then can sing our favourite folk songs. We usually do this during *Eid* holidays and we also have lamb, baklava …" She readily continues to show that her *udruženje* is not a place where Serbs and Croats meet, even though they might be from Bosnia: "no, only we[7] meet here". Ismet (63), a gardener from Atlanta also speaks about *Eid* holidays as his favorite time of the year in *udruženje.* "I am a Yugoslav, before the war this is how I declared myself, but I cannot deny that I enjoy our music during *Eid* holidays which I celebrate only in *udruženje* and not at home. My wife and I come here, our kids don't

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7   Bosnian Muslims, but she does not call them Bosniak.

care." He goes on about declaring that he sees the association as "a keeper of Bosnian tradition, but mainly Muslim. We sing *sevdalinka*[8] here, drink our coffee, we eat food from back home. We have a good time; it makes us feel secure and close to each other". His wife Vasvija (60) continues: "I was also a Yugoslav, but I don't mind that we preserve mainly Bosniak tradition. I am also a Muslim, but I would say a very secular one. What matters to me here is that we are able to stick together and try to teach our children about their homeland. It's fun, it doesn't matter to me whether it is Muslim or Serb music. We sing everything" she adds. "I would just like that the politicians in Bosnia realize the potential we have here. I don't mean us the old, but our children… The politicians there don't want to do anything about keeping those children there."

All of the ten respondents who arrived to the United States in early 1990s as refugees speak about *udruženje* as a primary keeper of Bosnian[9] tradition, but eight do not deny their Yugoslav heritage. In this constellation of super-diversity (Vertovec 2007), we observed that cultural reproduction forms the basis for existence of social spaces of ethnic solidarity for the older generation of Bosnian diaspora in the United States. These Bosnians tend to posit identity against tradition of Bosnia and Herzegovina in a Yugoslav context – they are Muslim, they are secular, yet they call themselves Yugoslav and do not refer to the term Bosniak. This turns diasporic associative networks into weak makers or, rather, breakers of the Bosnian diasporic community's identity, in the sense that it neither destroys the old one nor does it create a new one. Clearly, if associative diasporic networks rely upon only one premise of ethnic solidarity, or, better, culture, then we cannot speak of institutional channels of transnational solidarity to transform a diasporic community into a truly harmonized community with a strong sense of a single identity. Understood in a broader sense, the traditional rituals, social gatherings and personal conflicts (us vs. them)

amongst Bosnians who immigrated to the United States as refugees continue to challenge the concept of a single and strong concept of solidarity among members of a diasporic community.

But, the severance between the *us* Bosnians and *other* Bosnians (Serbs or Croats) is not so blatantly avoided in large Bosnian diasporic communities, such as those in Saint Louis and Atlanta. What is more, the overreliance on ethnic differences appears a distinct feature of these diasporic associations, insomuch pronounced as the post-war nuances in some of the most divided areas in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In fact, the separations that exist in their homeland also emerge in a foreign land: "Wartime feelings are still there, especially in the older generations. Associations are largely Bosniak, Serb or Croat and they all see each other as the antagonizers of Yugoslav wars" says Nikolina, twenty-five, a master's student in Saint Louis who arrived there with her parents in the last wave of refugees in 1994-1995. "I was made to say that I was a Serb, their parents and our parents never really spoke, although we lived very close to each other. Back then it was not clear why we were prohibited to speak to each other. It later on crystallized in my head, but still, I didn't understand. Why did we have to bring with us the hatreds we left at home? This is why I avoid going to *udruženje*. The spark is still there". Despite a strong presence of associative networks, the internal antagonisms that occur within a community from a single country of origin have the power to reduce solidarities within diasporic groups of different ethnic, but same national origin. In this context, we can observe the internal hierarchies (parents as 'makers' and children as 'successors' of home-produced ethnic identities) which undermine "Americanized perspectives" (Chung 2007: 15) of the young who are capable of transforming the old interpretations of ethnic belonging and solidarity and contribute to a true, diasporic transnational solidarity of Bosnian diaspora.

In contrast to evidence from this research, which presents the view that the "old" Bosnian diaspora from all three ethnic groups living in the

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[8]   A traditional folk song from Bosnia.
[9]   In connotation with Islamic (Muslim, Bosniak).

United States represent weak bearers of ethnic solidarity despite their strong connections with associative diasporic networks, an alternative observation amongst the "new" Bosnian diaspora in the United States illustrates that they have a more transnational character. This is largely true if we consider that these respondents' decisions to remain outside their homeland is voluntary and permanent, as demonstrated earlier. However, our respondents point out to other reasons: "I absolutely keep contact with my family and friends back home. I send them money or buy them tickets to come and visit me during winter months when I work" says Nermina (31) from Akron, a who is a doctoral student and a part-time translator in a larger city close by. The same is true for Mario (43), a dentist from Atlanta, who keeps connected to his hometown of Sarajevo. But what is important for Mario is his, what he calls, "Bosnian community service". "I don't mean belonging to some kind of association. No, there are plenty here, and they seem to do well for themselves. What I do is that each year, starting from Thanksgiving, I start collecting money to raise funds for rural areas in Bosnia and Herzegovina, for schools, farmers, education and send this money through an organization which than spreads it to those in need". Mario does this with several other Bosnians living in Atlanta, but points out that none of them want to engage in their associative networks in the city and act through them. "They see us 'newcomers' as crazy people who moved for fun. Once I went there to see how I can get involved – boy, was I disappointed! They sit around, drink coffee, music blaring in the background, really very self-interested and, or so it seemed to me, very phlegmatic". Damir (28) also agrees with the fact that Bosnian associative networks are beckons of "generational and ethnic divisions who stop their children from using all the opportunities they have in America. Instead, they seem stuck in 1993. For them *vrh svijeta*[10] is to gather for holidays, eat, drink…I went once for a New Year's

[10] Translated to English: peak of the world. This is a local slang denoting something great and exciting.

party and came home within two hours."

Several other "new" diaspora respondents pointed to the fact that they were not interested in joining a Bosnian associative network. "They are stuck in time, they understand very little about what is going on in Bosnia and seem to linger on in the 1990s. That's not progress, that's not doing things for Bosnians here and at home. I really expected it to be different than this" says Nermina. None of the respondents from this group seem to annunciate ethnic differences when talking about Bosnians. In fact, they came from more or less single-ethnic families, but came to the United States without prejudice towards other groups: "We were there during the war and the war taught us to go along with each other and to help each other whenever possible. This is what separates us from refugees that came here during the war. They understand very little of it and the only image they have of groups in Bosnia is hate. This is what has been in their heads for the past twenty years or more" says Mario. Younger generations of Bosnian diaspora who arrived to the United States in the 2000s preserve strong family links, but also maintain ties to different associations and non-governmental organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Dragan and Nermina have both worked for a Bosnian NGO based in Sarajevo whose aim is to gather young people who moved to the United States in order to finish university degrees and offer them a six-month internship in Bosnia and Herzegovina. They have been working with them for the past seven years and more than 500 young students have passed through the program. Out of this number, some 300 have remained in Bosnia in order to work. "I think our program is successful. We work across the States to find suitable candidates, we head-hunt so to say, and help them get involved in their home country. What I noticed about returnees to the US – they are mostly first generation Bosnian immigrants whose parents fled Bosnia during the war. They return because their families are here."

Notions of solidarity among the "new" Bosnian diaspora in the United States is character-

ized by financial remittances, important connections with institutions from BiH, no links to associative diasporic networks and no focus on ethnic differences. Unlike the old Bosnian diaspora, younger cohorts of the "new" diaspora encourage strong links in spite of their overwhelming dissatisfaction with the present-day political system. They promote collective, rather than purely ethnic identity through social, economic, cultural and political actions that cautions against the issues that are born out of divided ethnic backgrounds. Thus, the "new" Bosnian diaspora can be termed to be the bearer of an emerging singular Bosnian identity, one that is free of ethnic ties and biases that appear to divide the older generations of Bosnians, who despite coming from a single country, prefer to remain close with their own ethnic groups. Hence, these young cohorts of Bosnian migrants foster and push forward the still relatively weak transnational solidarity which has long escaped different Bosnian communities around the world.

Conclusion

In this paper, we explored the experience of being ethnic in diaspora. Through careful reading of various life stories by two different generations of Bosnians living in the United States, we argued that younger Bosnians – those in their twenties and thirties – purposefully cast off the beliefs and customs, including ethnic affiliations, of the older generation. Hoping to assimilate with their peers in the society, younger Bosnians also oppose the lifestyles of their elders. Those in their twenties and thirties do not have a strong sense of attachment to home, despite that their arrival to the United States is quite recent. They forge instead what is believed to be a new "Americanized identity", one that offers opportunities and is thus contrasted to rather limited options for thriving – economically, socially, and politically – in the home country.

By comparison, older Bosnians who arrived to the United States during the 1992-1995 war, established ethnic associations that promoted some sense of cultural continuity. These organ-

isations served as repositories of symbols closely associated with home that many Bosnians in their fifties and sixties felt no longer belonged to them. Here, ethnicity became a compelling discourse for talking about identity in a new way. It is through ethnicity that many older Bosnians were able to talk about their relationship to Bosnia while living in the United States. The home was constructed in moments of nostalgic remembrance and although the hope of return dominated the lives of those we interviewed, they were acutely aware that the possibilities of returning depend on developments both in Bosnia and the United States. The potentials of life as an immigrant in American society, on the one hand, and the political and social developments in Bosnia, on the other, will either open or close both symbolic and practical choices in the future.

This "generational positioning" as Palmberger (2016) terms it, explains the narrative behind the lived histories of the "old" and the "new" members of Bosnian diaspora living in the United States. The experiences of divergent memories of the Yugoslav past, the war trauma and post-conflict hardships mould the ways in which ethnicity and "being ethnic" in a diaspora is understood, in its broader sense, by these individuals. By investigating personal memories, this work extended the understanding of the symbolic value of ethnicity under the umbrella of country-of-origin background and ties with "co-ethnics" by pushing forward the narrative that individual memories never stand alone, but form a part of a broader social frame which is linked to official interpretations of history (Fabian, 2007; Halbwachs 1980, 1992). Hence, this "generational identity" is determined not just by 'what is lived', but how the 'lived' is interpreted through memories and personal understandings of the past and present. In this sense, generations are not and cannot be considered as homogenous cohorts (Palmberger, 2016), but rather as bearers of generational identity which, in turn, decide the interpretations linked to ethnicity and its symbolic value in a diasporic setting.

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