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## New Solidarities: Migration, Mobility, Diaspora, and Ethnic Tolerance in Southeast Europe

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# New Solidarities: Migration, Mobility, Diaspora, and Ethnic Tolerance in Southeast Europe

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## Abstract

The social landscape in Southeast Europe has changed dramatically over the past twenty years: increased globalization, new migration and mobility patterns, the refugee crises, economic uncertainty, and the emergence of other salient identities, have all influenced the region dramatically. However, while the continent-wide increase in Euroskepticism, right-wing populism, and disillusionment with globalization points to the need for examining new solidarities and new permutations of difference, research on the effects of these social changes is scarce. In the following articles, we examine the new cleavages and new solidarities created by these changes: effects of global phenomena such as international youth exchange programs, music/film festivals, language, diaspora and dual citizenship, and migration, and the ways in which they are assuaging or amplifying ethnic tolerance in the region, exploring both the determinants of these societal changes, as well as the effects of the changes: emerging political issues and cleavages, new intersections of identities, and new forms of ethnic (in)tolerance.

## Introduction

The social landscape in Southeast Europe has changed dramatically over the past twenty years: increased globalization, new migration and mobility patterns, the refugee crises, economic uncertainty, and the emergence of other salient identities, have all influenced the region dramatically. Increasing numbers of the region's youth have participated in study abroad programs, leading to a surge in international friendships and marriages, fundamentally transforming youth's sense of national belonging (Carnine 2015). Co-ethnics in the diaspora are heavily engaged in the politics of the region (Štiks 2010, Ragazzi and Balalovska 2011), send remittances that exceed fifteen percent of some of the countries' GDPs

(World Bank 2018), and many of them frequently return to their origin countries or actively engage with them in online communities, influencing local landscapes with the cultures and world-views from their new societies (Stubbs 1999, Skrbiš 1999, Halilovich 2012); trends accompanied by high levels of "brain drain" – and active plans and hopes for emigrating – from all of the SEE countries (Erdei 2010, Sergi et al. 2004). Pressures from the European Union during the accession process of the region's countries, both in terms of formal rules pertaining to policies such as environmental governance and rule of law reform (Kmezić 2016, Fagan and Sircar 2015), and in terms of a transfer of values (e.g. LGBT rights; see Elbasani 2013) and memory politics (Milošević and Touquet 2018), have led to lasting changes on the landscape of Southeast Europe (Džankić et al. 2018). Globalization in all its forms, including environmental trends (Erik-

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sen and Schober 2015), popular culture including music (Baker 2008, Mišina 2011), television and film (Volčič and Andrejević 2010), and sports (Eichberg and Levinsen 2009, Poli 2007, Hughson 2013, Wood 2013), and increased economic precariousness (Flere et al. 2015), has permeated throughout the region, affecting ethnic identities and existing social cleavages.

While these sweeping changes have fundamentally transformed the ethnic landscapes of the region, research on the effects of these social changes is scarce. Most empirical research on identities and tolerance remains focused on ethnic identities as understood through the lens of previous generations. Ethnic identities are still largely measured using questions regarding national pride (see Meitinger 2018), and surveys on blatant and “hot” issues such as war crimes or refugee policies taken as proxies for the level of ethnic tolerance – results that rightly give rise to alarmist warnings that the region is sinking deeper and deeper into the abyss of ethnic intolerance (see Taleski and Hoppe 2015). However, it is precisely the continent-wide increase in Euro-skepticism, right-wing populism, and disillusionment with globalization – which points to the need for examining new *solidarities* (Hoskins, Saisana and Villalba 2015) and new permutations of difference. Migration, mobility, diaspora, and above- and below-ethnic identifications, moulded by novel lifestyles, technologies, educational experiences, consumer/labour markets, gender norms, leisure opportunities, and fashions (Mandić and Trošt 2018), have modified and transformed “old” identities and solidarities and produced new ones. Yet, when hysteria regarding the inflow of refugees from Syria in the Balkans broke out in 2016, for instance, we remained focused on studying old ethnic cleavages towards new outgroups (migrants), while neglecting to consider whether and how these new cleavages interact with old ones (e.g. attitudes towards the local Roma population), or how the refugee crisis affected refugee solidarities as opposed to right-wing mobilization and nativist identities.

Indeed, examples of identifications that are not related primary to ethnic identity, and instead represent cross-ethnic solidarity, are abundant. These include class solidarities: the “Bosnian Spring” movement slogan “We’re hungry in all three languages”, referring to the irrelevance of language politics in the backdrop of mass poverty (see Petritsch and Solioz 2014), demonstrated the degree of fatigue with the assumed primacy of ethnic identities, while other research has pointed to the need to move beyond the dichotomy of the urban, educated, liberal, pro-Europe vs. rural, uneducated “masses” (Vetta 2009, Kalb and Hamai 2011). Other regional and cross-national grassroots and civic society movements have promoted beyond-ethnic attachments, such as anti-fascism movements, Yugonostalgia (Petrović 2013, Palmberger 2008, Velikonja 2013), and the revival of Serbo-Croatian as “our” language as means of transcending ethnic linguistic boundaries (see Bugarški 2012). Cross-ethnic trends are also visible in the realm of popular culture, in sports, film, and music manifestations: celebrities from minority groups in popular shows, regional celebrity advocates of movements such as LGBT rights, international film festivals, “friendship networks” in regional manifestations such as Eurovision (see Dekker 2007), local manifestations attracting regional attendance such as the Exit music festival, rock music, or reality television (Baker 2008, Volčič and Andrejević 2010, Mišina 2011). On an even more grassroots level, local carpooling groups such as “442”, created by individuals traveling frequently between Belgrade and Zagreb, the “442 crew” running team, created in 2015 between the Belgrade Urban Running team and Zagreb Runners “focusing on a future full of miles and smiles”, and the Albanian Serbian Friendship Association group on Facebook, have flourished into “communities based on solidarity, resonating within intimate, artistic, cultural and political fields” (Popović 2017, 2020).

At the same time, these trends have not affected the region’s countries uniformly, nor has their reach extended throughout the par-

ticular countries. Research is increasingly pointing to stark regional and urban-rural differences in ethnic attitudes. For instance, in Croatia, the percentage of people who think that war criminals indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) were heroes range from 44% in Istria vs. 77% in Dalmatia; while at the same time, when looking at how much time people spent traveling/outside the region, a typical indicator of positive social contact exposure, as many as 93% of people living in rural areas of Lika had spent zero days outside of the country during the previous year, compared to less than 50% in Zagreb (Pavasović Trošt 2016, for the full dataset see IPSOS 2010). There are stark regional and urban-rural differences in virtually every attitudinal and behavioural measure we use for capturing ethnic tolerance (Sekulić et al. 2007, Simkus 2007, O'Loughlin 2010). As such, a careful examination of how these patterns have affected ethnic tolerance at local – both below- and above- national – spaces, allows us to study the conditions in which ethnic solidarity becomes more likely.

In this special issue, we examine the new cleavages and new solidarities created by these changes: effects of global phenomena such as international youth exchange programs, music/film festivals, language, diaspora and dual citizenship, and refugees, and the ways in which they are assuaging or amplifying ethnic tolerance in the region. Papers in this issue explore both the *determinants* of these societal changes, as well as the *effects* of the changes: emerging political issues and cleavages, new intersections of identities, and new forms of ethnic (in) tolerance. Southeast Europe represents a particularly interesting case to study these issues, where the above-mentioned processes combine with remnants of post-war politics infused in daily life, brain drain, an ageing population, marked youth exclusion from the labour market (Goldstein and Arias 2013), and extensive adoption combined with distancing from Western cultural products (Roberts 2008). In an era of increasing globalization of culture, travel, and

economic inter-dependence, the countries in the region are still marked by marked ethnonationalism in the public sphere and the instrumentalisation of identity by political elites, offering fruitful ground for exploring new mosaics of ethnic belonging and difference.

The articles, in turn, explore these new mosaics, in particularly the emergence of new ethnic solidarities, in the region. The articles explore the conditions under which new kinds of ethnic solidarities have emerged: Anisimovich examines cinema-related grassroots incentives in Bulgaria, and the extent to which these events create dialogic spaces where the public sphere is constructed by below, evaluating the potential of grassroots cinema initiatives in challenging mainstream media's xenophobic discourse towards refugees. Takševa explores the (re)emergence of Yugonostalgia and Yugoslavism as an ideology of resistance to the unsatisfying political and economic present, as well as a shared cultural identity rooted in civic values of multi-ethnic co-existence and solidarity. Through extensive fieldwork in two Bosnian towns that experienced massive destruction during the war, Djolai explores the conditions under which positive interpersonal relations are more likely to arise given the new cleavages. Relying on two concepts, identity of place, the attachment to home communities, and identity of experience, a result of forced displacement and post-war migration leading to life away from home communities, she emphasizes the importance of studying other, beyond-ethnic, identities that people develop through their life projects, as well as the complex social dynamics at the community level which affect these cleavages.

Further, the papers examine how migration, mobility, and diaspora, have affected the ethnic landscape in the region. Hristova looks at identity dynamics in border regions, exploring how minorities on the border between Serbia, Macedonia, and Bulgaria navigate the spaces "in-between" national and ethnic identities. She shows how members of the Bulgarian minority construct fluid identities to help them navigate



these vague spaces, while Macedonian youth cope by living in a latent state of standby migration, a sort of “placebo identity” while they plan for their future migration to the West. Exploring ethnic dynamics amongst the diaspora, Savić-Bojanić and Jevtić look at how ethnic solidarities and networks differ among various cohorts of Bosnian diaspora in the United States. Through ethnographic research of Bosniak diaspora during their visits “home”, they demonstrate how recent waves of migration have produced new diasporas with very different views on the symbolic value of ethnicity and ties with co-ethnics. Kovačević Bielicki looks at the other side of this process – Bosnian migrants living in Western countries, but voluntarily repatriated to Bosnia and Herzegovina. She demonstrates the importance of not just economic, but also social and economic reasons, including perceived ethno-national sameness “back home”, in understanding voluntary repatriation. All of the articles emphasize the importance of examining new cleavages and new solidarities created by new migration and mobility patterns, the refugee crises, economic uncertainty, and the emergence of other salient identities, and the fruitfulness in studying the conditions under which above-ethnic solidarity – as supposed to ethnic intolerance – is more likely to occur.

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# Solidarity on the Margins: The Role of Cinema-Related Initiatives in Encouraging Diversity and Inclusivity in Post-1989 Bulgaria

by ANTONINA ANISIMOVICH (Edge Hill University's Department of Media)

## Abstract

In the light of the ongoing refugee crisis in Europe, hate speech directed at refugees and ethnic minorities in mainstream Bulgarian media has increased. As a response, several recent cinema-related grassroots initiatives in the capital city Sofia are challenging such negative representations and establishing a more open and constructive dialogue with the Other. I argue that such events have the potential to create *interzones* or *conflictual dialogic spaces* (Halle 2014), where the public sphere is constructed from below, providing an alternative to mainstream media and political discourse. Adopting the theoretical framework proposed by Schober (2013), this paper evaluates the political potential of cinematic events in creating a public space for encountering the Other, both physically (in the same cinema hall) and symbolically (through representations on screen). I focus on one such initiative, a series of film screenings organised by *The House of Cinema* and *The Refugee Project* in Sofia, examining the *House of Cinema's* potential in promoting diversity by challenging the xenophobic mainstream discourse promoted in media.

**Keywords:** Bulgarian cinema, Bulgarian media, European identity, postcolonial studies, collective memory, national identity, refugee crisis, othering

## Introduction

The problematic post-1989 transition in Bulgaria (Bell 1998, Deyanova 2014, Baeva and Kabakchieva 2014) highlights the necessity for new diversity and new solidarities studies in the area. It is evident that there are numerous challenges linked to the division and fragmentation in Bulgarian society, and the new attempts of nation re-building after the fall of the regime in 1989. Similar to some other countries of the former Eastern Bloc, the understanding of national identity in Bulgaria is complicated by the multiplicity of reference points, or national identifiers (Todd and Rougier 2008, Couroucli 1997). These multiple contexts intersect and sometimes complement each other, creating a unique background for a new national identity re-building (Brubacker 1995). This variety has contributed to the fragmentation and fluidity of the Bulgarian national

identity, which has offered a fruitful arena for reactionary nationalist movements that exploiting existing tensions.

In the context of Bulgarian accession into the EU and the constant struggle to prove that Bulgaria is inherently a European country, Bulgarian national identity is often built on the contrast with the 'barbarian' East. This is often done by creating a divide that differentiates Bulgaria from the non-European 'Other', which, in Bulgaria's case, in most general terms is the Orient (Perry 1995). This, in its turn, resulted in the necessity to prove that Bulgaria, in fact, belongs to Europe historically and culturally, which was manifested in the attempts to 'market themselves as civilised, developed, tolerant, or multicultural enough to be geographed as European' (Kovačević 2008: 86). This perceived pressure from the 'true' West

resulted in an accepted discourse of *Europeanisation* that evoked a whole number of problematic collisions within the national identity re-building process. National identity was constructed by the political elites through comparison and contrasting to either larger entities (Europe, East, West) or minorities (Other: Roma, Turkish minorities, and, recently, the refugees). New national ideas are built on 'distancing both the individual self and the "national self" from practices and traits that are considered un-European, while adopting such that are considered European' (Pilbrow 1997: 65). One of the mechanisms of this distancing is the process of marginalizing the minorities that could be stereotypically considered not, or less, European (Pilbrow 1997: 62).

After 1989, the major ideological divide in the Bulgarian political landscape has developed around the confrontation between the former communists and the democratic opposition. This divide has led to a strong association of the former nomenklatura with the 'left' and the democratic (and EU-leaning) forces with the 'right'. Gradually, the divide has been further exploited by the dominant parties who transitioned from promoting liberal values to what has now become a conservative far right ideology. Reinforcing the East/West divide even further, all pro-European parties, therefore, are automatically considered anti-communist and right-centrist (EuroZine 2017). Indeed, the parties represented in the current (2018) Parliament illustrate the recent shifts in the political climate in Bulgaria. They include *GERB (Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria*, pro-European but also conservative and right-centrist), *Bulgarian Socialist Party* (centre-left), *Movement for Rights and Freedoms* (centrist), *Will* (right-wing populism, right-centrist), and the *United Patriots* (an alliance formed by *IMRO – Bulgarian National Movement* (right-wing, Bulgarian nationalism), *National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria* (right-wing, Bulgarian nationalism), and *Attack* (far-right, Bulgarian nationalism)). It is crucial to add that out of these eight parties, at least five are promoting radical nationalist views and

are not hesitant in using extreme xenophobic rhetoric. The very names of these movements are very aggressive (*Attack, Will*) and suggesting that the Bulgarian nation needs to be saved from any foreign influence. Another important implication of such radicalisation is that these parties are non-inclusive, and most of them refer to the traditional Bulgarian values through the prism of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and are, therefore, openly anti-Islamic.

Miglena Todorova argues that the equation between Europeaness and Whiteness is not new, and has been present at least since the early twentieth century (2018). She examines the discourses of racial purity in *National Geographic* magazines and reflects on the origins of the new-coming immigrants from South Eastern Europe. As she demonstrates, even though the Balkan region was described as culturally European, it was still represented as not 'quite white' in terms of race, which put it in the middle position somewhere between the categories of 'white' and 'non-white'. The character traits, as well as the appearance of the Balkan peoples, are described in these magazines as a hybrid of Europeaness and Orientalism, in other words – as 'not-white-but-getting-there' (2006: 405). On the other hand, the discourses of *whiteness as Europeaness* that are now dominating the national public debates in Bulgaria could be considered as a continued legacy of communism as well, not just as a concept blindly inherited from the West. For instance, Todorova (2018) argues that in socialist times, nationalities were racialized by the official state discourse, and the category of race was replaced or hidden behind ethnic nationalism. As Todorova and Tlostanova both argue, this racialization in the Soviet and satellite states involved some 'borrowed' or internalised racist knowledge of the West, which Todorova describes as 'secondary Orientalism' (Tlostanova 2012; Todorova 2018). Specifically in the Bulgarian case, the national identity was still built on the ideals of belonging to Europe, especially in contrast with the 'real' Orient embodied by Muslim women 'as profoundly non-modern

and non-European – and, therefore, non-White’ (Todorova 2018: 122).

Thus, Europeanness was, even within the socialist state, considered and equated to supremacy, civilization, and progress. This suggests that both East and West operated within similar oppressive projects of modernity based on the hegemony and the ideas of racial purity and, broadly, whiteness. As Todorova further notes, on the surface, the Eastern bloc supported the anti-colonial movements in Asia, Africa and Latin America utilizing the opportunity to challenge the capitalist order in the West. Nevertheless, the discursive practices surrounding this support were ironically built on the same categories of exclusion, othering, and orientalisering. Both systems were also based on the praising of the future as progress and blaming the tradition (the past) for everything reactionary and regressive.

Furthermore, the region has been a part of a racialized world for much longer than it is usually suggested (Imre 2005, Baker 2018). For instance, Todorova (2018) argues that, in Soviet times, nationalities were racialised by the official state discourse, and the category of race was not absent but hidden behind the idea of ethnic nationalism. In the Bulgarian case, the continuity of socialist race-related discourses can be observed in the context of the so-called Revival Process and its consequences. The Revival Process was a highly problematic forced assimilation campaign imposed on the Turkish minorities in Bulgaria by the communist party. The campaign that was launched in 1984 and continued until 1989 forbade the use of Turkish (and Muslim) names and entailed repressions in the form of prosecution and imprisonment for those who refused to comply with it (Grosescu 2017). It can be argued that the Revival Process demonstrates the contingency of the race-related discourses in today’s Bulgaria when the clash of ideologies after 1989 introduced even new dimensions to the already existing orientalisering view of the non-titular ethnicities (Kalinova 2014). The continuity of the discourses of race, in its turn, proves the

embeddedness of the Bulgarian local categorisations of race in the world Eurocentric framework equalling whiteness and progress.

However, in some arenas, these dominant categorizations are being challenged. Postcolonial theory might be a useful analytical device when we talk about the East broadly as a discursive space of East and West contestation. Veličković suggests that the potential of such analysis lies in the historical rethinking of the legacies of communism and the role that it plays in the reconstructing of history to serve the modern needs (2012). As she notes, ‘a long overdue critical engagement with this discourse of “the return to Europe” as well as with the various “self-colonizing” practices in eastern Europe is much needed’ (2012: 168). The postcolonial approach to the post-socialist territories, in particular, lies in the diversity and multiplicity of the possible intersections of race, class, gender, and other hierarchal society systems. Such an approach could help challenge the binary hierarchical framework demonising the East or the West, and, instead, offer an analytical tool that Tlostanova calls a feminist border thinking – an approach where special attention is given to the areas characterised by ambiguity and in-betweenness. For instance, as Deiana argues in her analysis of the Sarajevo Film Festival and its role in border crossing practices in the former Yugoslavia region, hybridity entails border crossing on various levels, ‘from geopolitics and institutions to everyday life and cultural practices’ (Deiana 2017: 2). Thus, hybridity as border crossing is a process and a vernacular act of negotiation that has the potential to challenge the official border politics. The focus on the negotiational aspect of cinema provides and opens up an opportunity to view the encounters mediated by cinema as dialogical, vernacular acts of bordercrossing. Viewing the negotiation of borders as a multidimensional and complex process helps to identify the opportunities where ‘dominant border conflict narratives might be challenged and re-imagined’ (Deiana 2017: 5). Therefore, it is argued that the role of cinema is not in resisting boundaries or

destroying them, but in crossing them in various contexts, potentially bridging the gap between 'us' and 'them', 'here' and 'there', the official and the vernacular. Halle's concept of *interzones* as 'conflictual dialogic spaces' (2014: 14) works well to describe the process of border crossing, suggesting that a significant dialogic potential is manifested in the borderline, hybrid, conflictual negotiations present in the cinema.

In order to understand the ways that these boundaries are contested, negotiated, and crossed, we need to look closely at the discourses of *othering* present in the public space. To do so, in this paper I will outline the media coverage of the refugee crisis and the role of ethnic minorities as the Other in the Bulgarian context. This section of the paper will include an overview of the hegemonic/mainstream discourse surrounding the image of the Other in the media and political speeches. Secondly, I will provide an outline of the methodological approach of *interzones* proposed by Halle and show its application to the Bulgarian case as an example of an *interzone*. This section will be focused on the development of small-scale initiatives, urban centres, the role of audiovisual content in inducing dialogue, and the role of alternative spaces in challenging the discursive hegemony, which will be followed by a discussion of the dialogic importance of counter-hegemonic space and diversity. I will rely on a case study of a series of film screenings organised by *The House of Cinema* and *The Refugee Project* to help understand how several urban spaces in Sofia enable this dialogue. I analyse the House of Cinema as an example of an *interzone* in the Bulgarian context, and will evaluate its potential in promoting diversity by challenging the xenophobic mainstream discourse promoted in media.

### **Hegemonic discourses around migration and ethnic minorities in Bulgaria: representations in media and political discourse**

Although on the surface, Bulgaria has been famous for its liberal attitudes towards diversity, and most of all, toward ethnic minorities,

as the previous section shows, the actual situation is far from ideal. The notion of the 'Bulgarian ethnic model' first became prominent in the early 2000s, when the MRF party led by Ahmed Dogan noted that 'Bulgaria has achieved a model for the solution of minority problems unique for the Balkans' (cited in DeDominicis 2011). Particularly, comparing and distancing Bulgaria from the Balkan region and the conflicts in the Former Yugoslavian republic was crucial for the Bulgarian international politics prior to its accession to the European Union. The notion 'Bulgarian Ethnic Model' was used widely to stress the peaceful coexistence of multiple ethnic and religious minorities in Bulgaria, particularly pointing out to the fact that there was no racism and discrimination in the country (Rechel 2008). However, this is far from the truth, as numerous instances of racism and xenophobia have been documented by international organisations and national NGOs, in particular over the last five years (Rechel 2008). At the same time, it seems that the popular idea of the peacefully coexistent nations within the 'Bulgarian Ethnic Model' is used by the political elites to avoid acknowledging and dealing with issues of discrimination and hate speech, thus aggravating the already difficult situation the refugees and ethnic minorities find themselves in modern Bulgaria.

It is difficult to underestimate the crucial role that mainstream media plays in constructing the negative image of the refugees and ethnic minorities in Bulgaria. The recent report by the Institute of Social Integration states that since a very little percentage of Bulgarian citizens have direct contact with foreigners, their primary source of information and opinion-shaping comes from the media, and main speakers such as active politicians, public figures, and party leaders. As the Institute of Social Integration notes, 'Hate speech is the main problem of the refugees in Bulgaria' (2017). Monitoring of 355 national and regional Bulgarian media outlets in the spring of 2017 shows that the refugees are usually depicted as passive 'objects' in the news: they are not allowed to voice their own opinions.

The topic of the refugee crisis becomes particularly employed during election campaigns, when the threatening image of the Other is repeatedly used to consolidate the electorate to vote for far-right populist policies: 'This topic is used to instil fear, threat, mistrust'. An analysis of the transcripts of political speeches of the members of the parliament also shows that the refugees are presented as a threat to national security. Tsvetan Tsvetanov, a Bulgarian politician, recently pointed out the necessity to integrate the arriving refugees, simultaneously using a similar discourse of threat: 'There is a decrease in the refugee flow towards Bulgaria, but this should not calm us'. He specified that 'this should in no case lead Bulgaria to feel relaxed because there is still an influx of refugees on the Turkish border' (DNES BG 2017).

In an attempt to regulate the amount of hate speech in mainstream media, the *Association of European Journalists* provided criticism of the coverage of the most popular online media outlets. Their study demonstrated that the coverage of Roma minorities and the refugees is very rarely positive, and becomes even more radically negative during active election campaigns. Pointing out the extreme dehumanization of the image of the Roma in the Bulgarian media, the study shows that hate speech still dominates in the coverage of any news regarding ethnic minorities or refugees:

The speculative and almost always incompetent talk on the topic of the refugees, the abuse of human stereotypes and prejudices [...] and the lack of a clear demarcation between the concepts of "refugee" and "immigrant" gradually equalled the image of the refugee with that of the traditionally hostile image in the Bulgarian media, namely that of the Roma (AEJ 2017).

Furthermore, the negative depiction of the refugees and Roma has led to a total exclusion of these groups from the public sphere. As a study by Nancheva shows, such discourse has led to the fact that the discussions about hate speech and xenophobia focused on 'protection from the asylum seekers' rather than 'protection of the

asylum seekers' completely replaced any talks on the topics of human rights or consolidation (2016). Thus, in the public discourse, the asylum seekers remained 'passive objects' that, nevertheless, pose a threat to national security, thus reinforcing 'a very visible exclusion of asylum seekers from participation in the political community of the state' (Nancheva 2016: 550). Talking about the extreme Othering techniques in Bulgaria, Kamenova rightfully notes, in the Bulgarian case 'the construction of stereotypes has entered into its full phase, the Othering discourse has attained monstrous dimensions, and the Other is perceived only as a danger' (Kamenova 2014: 181).

Bulgaria, therefore, can be viewed as an example of a public space where an extreme discourse of Othering dominates the mainstream media and politics. In this context, it is crucial to seek official channels to challenge this discourse, acknowledge this as a problem on the governmental level and control the illegal examples of hate speech. In the meantime, there is also a need for non-mainstream grassroots alternatives of public spaces that can challenge the mainstream discourse through a dialogue based on intercultural encounter and dialogue. The following section will examine the role of alternative non-official initiatives in constructing a counter-hegemonic discourse about the minorities.

### **Grassroots initiatives as counter-hegemonic alternatives: interzones and the political potential of cinema**

Since the official discourse both in the political sphere and in the mainstream media is dominated by a hegemonic depiction of ethnic minorities as the Other, the few possibilities of counter-force or counter-hegemonic discourses are limited to grassroots initiatives, particularly active in urban spaces. Such initiatives, communities and art projects, to name a few, include the *Red Dot* art gallery, the *Sofia Film Festival for Students*, the art group *Destructive Creation*, creative space *Æther*, workspace and community centre *SOHO Sofia*, *The Red House Centre for*



*Culture and Debate*, and *KineDok* – an alternative platform for documentary films distribution. The main case study of the paper, however, will be the series of screenings and events organised by the cinema theatre *Doma na Kinoto (House of Cinema)* with the help of the NGO *The Refugee Project* in 2017 in Sofia. Being aware of the limitations of focusing on just one case study, I would suggest that this particular example still provides a fruitful base for an effective discussion. This overview is mainly illustrative, and the analysis is by no means exhaustive. However, I intended to focus on initiatives linked particularly to cinema and the cinema-going experience for the reasons outlined below.

Visual arts and cinema, in particular, have been an essential part of the public space in Bulgaria since the early 1940s, when the process of kinefication<sup>1</sup> led to a complete transformation of the cinema industry and made it one of the most powerful instruments of state ideology. At the same time, the film creators' privileged role as intelligentsia in the dissident movement was also crucial as a counter-force to the regime, as some counter-hegemonic representations were conveyed through these films that were banned by the communist regime. Thus, films were an extremely important part of the public sphere, and their role was always politicized, regardless of their place on the mainstream/dissident spectrum. It can be argued that this is still the case in Bulgaria, even though the political and social climate has changed drastically in the past 25 years.

As the outline of the mainstream discourses in Bulgarian media shows, there is still a lack of counter-hegemonic depictions of the ethnic minorities and refugees. At the same time, the Bulgarian political and social movement scene follows the patterns similar to other countries of

the EU, meaning the rise of nationalist and far-right movements and a rise of the xenophobic discourse (Ghodsee 2008). Given such circumstances, it is crucial that alternative platforms exist that not only offer different representations, but also enable an encounter and dialogue, of the Other.

Several studies in the European context have examined how social interaction between people can influence their perception of growing ethnic diversity. The question most often asked is whether a dialogue is possible and whether it helps establish tolerance and cooperation. Piekut and Valentine (2017), for instance, use social psychological methods to study different types of social encounter spaces. They argue that the particular type of space has a profound effect on the way that ethnic diversity is perceived and the way that the dialogue with the Other is established. Further on in this paper, I analyse the specific features of the space cinema used to build a bridge between ethnically diverse groups in contexts where these groups rarely interact on a day-to-day basis.

In his analysis of the process of Europeanization of cinema, Halle argues that cinema both produces and reflects imaginative communities, which are (as opposed to the original 'imagined communities' by Anderson) dynamic, fluid and transactional (Cooke 2015). Imaginative communities are, therefore, constructed through production and consumption of cinema, through a network of cultural interzones. Halle defines interzones as 'a conflictual dialogic space [...] that develops through bordercrossing in the broadest sense', adding that an interzone is characterized by constant transformation and contestation of diversity (2014: 23). Halle suggests that cinema plays a key role in generating the interzones, as it is described as 'a privileged vehicle for the representation of imaginative communities' (2014: 23). Talking about a specific case of the European coproductions as interzones, Halle notes that the public sphere in the European context is constructed from 'below':

<sup>1</sup> The process of promoting cinema as an ideological tool of the regime, initially conducted through establishing movie theatres in rural areas of Bulgaria, equipping schools and community centres with movie screens or even introducing 'travelling cinemas' to cover the most 'backward' areas (Bojilov 1946, Bratova-Darakchieva 2013).



European solidarity does not develop upward and outward but across, through, from below, sideways, crisscrossing terrains, potentially via urban centers, and equally likely via regional resistance to metropolitan control. Imaginative communities develop now more frequently not as metacommunities but as subcultures, micropolitical associations, ethnic migrant identities, midlevel economic partnering, sexual communities, and other “lower order” distinctive societies. (2014: 184-85)

Rather than imposed from above, interzones strive through grassroots initiatives, art manifestations, and intercultural dialogue. The dialogic essence of the interzones seems suitable for the analysis of the Bulgarian case, not only when we talk on a broader level about the sense of European solidarity. Rather, I argue that the concept of interzones applies to even smaller local spaces, including interactions between different cultures within one particular urban space, such as Sofia.

Schober, similarly, highlights the importance of cinema as a public space, seeing it as ‘an urban space where it is possible to meet the other’ (Schober 2013: 3). Comparing cinema-related initiatives in several cities of central and south-eastern Europe, Schober examines ‘the potential the cinema has as such a space for encountering the other [...] and the effects this has on the level of urban civil society’ (Schober 2013: 4). The originality and novelty of her approach lie in the statement that films should be seen as a space-creating activity. Providing an example of the art installation by Rirkit Tiravanija in Glasgow (1999), Schober introduces the particular ways that help to establish community connectivity and encounter with strangers in the urban public space. Tiravanija created a pop-up outdoor cinema on a traffic intersection in Glasgow, subverting the urban place and transforming its utilitarian use into a space of a direct encounter with the Other. Schober, thus, argues that cinema seems to have a specific potential for creating a public sphere by challenging the processes of ‘the further ‘privatization’ and ‘fragmentation’ of the political that goes along with [these] new media’ (Schober 2013: 16).

It is crucial to study the specific ways that constitute this encounter with the Other, in order to evaluate its potential in negotiating diversity. On the one hand, there is the understanding of the socializing power of cinema as a place that brings people together in a limited space for an experience of uninterrupted film consumption. This premise is, however, challenged by unconventional cinematic spaces, that are not only subverting the usual function within the urban context, but are also creating more possibilities for discussion and interaction. Schober notes that we need to examine the public space as a platform for negotiation of contested identities and ideologies, always remembering that such processes are political:

[...] the cinema has the potential to provoke its viewers into responding to the other, to something or somebody interrupting the smooth viewing process. In doing so, it re-exposes the viewer to the sense, that is, it challenges well-known certainties and allocations, but can also redirect our judgments and even our actions. (Schober 2013: 27)

It is clear then that the public sphere is understood as a dynamic entity, that is constantly constructed by its agents. Therefore, in order to challenge the hegemonic discourse of hate speech and xenophobia, new public spaces are stepping up as alternative opportunities to promote dialogue and negotiation. In the following, concluding section of this article, I look at a case study of a series of events in Sofia and evaluate the key characteristics that enable a dialogue within a given cinematic event, in which the audience, the NGO, and the film text interact with one another, creating a politicized viewing public space.

### **Cinema initiatives as interzones and public space-creating activities: inducing a dialogue and encountering the Other**

This section looks at a case study of an initiative *The Refugee Project* in Sofia, Bulgaria, and its co-project with the Sofia cinema theatre *The House of Cinema*. This initiative includes multiple events promoting diversity and intercultural dialogue, including screenings of films on the sub-

ject of the refugee crisis. The analysis focuses on a screening of the film *The Good Postman* (Hristov 2016) and is based on a textual analysis of the film, an interview with the programming director of the House of Cinema, and a description of the event and the cinema hall as an interzone.

### *The Good Postman*

The film follows the campaign of the local postman Ivan in the remote Bulgarian village of Great Dervent where he is running for mayor. Ivan proposes a scheme which includes integrating refugees into the village, providing them with land and homes in order to bring the aging and dying village back to life. The director, Tonislav Hristov, uses a semi-fictionalised script, that combines documentary and fiction style, whilst leaving the camera to observe the unfolding of the events. This technique allows for highlighting the numerous contrasts surrounding the problem of the refugees, including the *private* versus the *public*, the *national* versus the *local*, *us* versus the *others* and, last but not the least, the *west* versus the *east* (exploring it through some manifestations of communist nostalgia in the village). These contrasting and somewhat contradicting values become evident after a brief examination of the beliefs and motivations of the village inhabitants.

The villagers are represented as an ordinary group of people, who turn out to be easily manipulated and bribed (the pro-communist character attracts voters by providing them with free food). Their views are by no means radical or set in stone, as far as we can tell from the documentary – instead, they are represented to the viewer as bystanders, as ordinary working people, more bothered by the difficulties of their day-to-day life than some potential threat of a ‘refugee invasion’. Nevertheless, we can follow how dangerously easy it is to manipulate these people when someone with even a bit of authority engages them in political discussion. This manipulation is strengthened by the only media to which they have access: the mainstream television and newspapers. An example of one of the

film’s dialogues proves that their understanding of the refugee problem is unclear: ‘Not only Syrians come. Afghans and Taliban come through here as well, and who knows who else...’ <...> ‘Ivan wants to welcome Syrians here! I disagree. Here? Syrians? Why? Is it not enough for him that we already have gypsies?’.

While Ivan visits one household after another trying to convince the villagers to vote for him, their nostalgia for the communist past is gradually revealed. An example of this is the interaction between the protagonist Ivan and his main opponents – pro-communist Putin sympathiser and the current mayor Veska, who could not care less about the refugees sitting in her office and listening to chalga<sup>2</sup>. In his address to the potential voters, the pro-Russian mayor candidate says: ‘Comrades! I want internet for everyone! Like in Putin’s Russia! We need communism’. Viewing the life of the village through the binaries mentioned above provides an interesting insight into the context of the xenophobic sentiments in modern Bulgaria: even though most of the inhabitants of the village can agree that the refugees are ‘just people’, their judgement is very much affected by the media coverage of the refugee crisis.

A very significant scene and a turning point in the film shows the villagers gathered around the TV watching the news together and having disputes about their interpretations of the events. The report they are watching is the shocking story of 71 refugees suffocating to death in a truck while being smuggled through the EU border by a Bulgarian driver. This scene in *The Good Postman* indicates the first time that we see a change of heart in the villagers, as they begin to realise the stakes and the risks that the refugees take to escape their home countries: despite the differences in their attitudes towards the refugees, the villagers’ reaction to the news story is the same – that of a shock. The awareness that there are kids among those people who choose deliberately to risk everything they have for

<sup>2</sup> Bulgarian music genre, also known as ‘pop-folk’, or ethno, became popular in the 1990s.

the opportunity to escape the warzone brings the villagers together. Another related memorable scene in the documentary shows a conflict between a mother and a teenage daughter who tries to persuade her parents that the depiction of the refugees as 'monsters' on TV is not accurate, because they are 'also human, they are just like us'.

Interestingly enough, *The Good Postman* not only offers a critique of the state of the villages in Bulgaria now but also comments on the role of media in shaping and framing the public opinion about the refugees. With this somewhat metaphoric language, the film shows how easily balance can be destroyed and how conflict can emerge through the cracks of the impoverished and troubled postcommunist society, where the main goal remains the same – to find someone to blame for the failures of the system. Unfortunately, as the film demonstrates, it seems that the refugees have already been 'nominated' as Bulgarian's Other in the mainstream media discourse.

#### *The Arab Quarter and the House of Cinema as an interzone*

In 2017, The House of Cinema organized a series of events that included screenings of films about the refugees and events where refugees and whole families of refugees were invited to the cinema. The series of events called *Building Bridges Between Communities* was aimed at establishing a link between various diverse communities of Sofia, including that of the most vulnerable groups, such as the refugees and Roma. I will briefly take a look at an event that took place in October 2017. The Facebook announcement after the event stated: "Last week our friends from Voenna Rampa have been invited by The House of Cinema to see the "The good postman"! We believe that cinema is a powerful tool to bring people on a journey to each other, overcoming hardships in life."

Thus, as we can see, the organisers highlight the importance of cinema in 'building bridges' and establishing connections. The powerful role

of cinema as a storytelling tool lies in its ability to create relatable stories that unite people, despite their differences. In this case, the organisers invited the refugees from *Voenna Rampa*, the refugee centre located in the North parts of Sofia. Importantly, as a cinema located in the city centre, *The House of Cinema* emerges as a meeting point for encountering the Other that is more accessible for a wider variety of audiences. Another example of such initiatives, related to the *Building Bridges Between Communities* was the screening by the Sofia Film Fest for Students, which was conducted in September 2017 in the Roma community in Philipovtsi, Sofia. Their description of the event also touches upon the unifying and motivational role of cinema as a tool for creating a creative space of interaction, essentially establishing an *interzone*.

Both events highlight the importance of the location of the event. It is important to note that an interzone often appears not only broadly in an urban space, but also on the border of two or more different cultural zones, where they can interact both metaphorically (as a symbolic exchange), but also physically (as bordering quarters). I argue that *The House of Cinema* in Sofia can be viewed as an interzone on the urban landscape of Sofia.

*The House of Cinema* works as an example of an interzone situated on the border of two different 'worlds': the most politically, economically and culturally significant area of the city centre and the so-called Arab Quarter. The area of the Vitosha Boulevard and the central Serdika metro station is the main shopping and tourist 'vein' of the city, while this part of the capital is also an important area politically, with the Parliament building and the former *House of the Party* just around the corner. In terms of religion, the square above the Serdika station is informally known as *The Square of Tolerance*, an area where four temples of different religions are situated in a very close proximity, including the Catholic Cathedral of St Joseph, the Eastern Orthodox St. Nedelya Church, the Sofia Synagogue and the main Banya Bashi Mosque.

The Arab Quarter was traditionally an area inhabited by Muslim immigrants, and, beginning in 2012, these streets have seen a new influx of refugees and migrants. While there have been numerous rumours that the quarter is not a safe place, in 2016 a Nova TV (a commercial TV channel) journalist explored the stereotypes and beliefs that people have about the Arab Quarter, and came to the conclusion, that 'Probably, the Arab Quarter is now the safest place in the capital', mainly due to the large numbers of police forces sent to guard these streets against any potential 'threat' (NOVA TV 2016).

In an interview, Hristo Hristosov, the program manager of the *House of Cinema* points out that in the context of the rising amount of hate speech in the media and political discourse, most Bulgarians still do not have any direct contact with the refugees. As Hristosov pointed out, the Bulgarian families are often 'educated by the TV and lacking critical thinking'. The only knowledge they receive comes from media, while the *Arab Quarter* remains isolated from the rest of the city. Hristosov says that the screenings in the House of Cinema are aimed at bridging this gap by organising events that would promote integration of the refugees and their families. Refugees and whole families of refugees are invited to these events: "by inviting families, we show that there are more similarities than differences between 'us' and 'them', there is a sense of acceptance, challenging the overall feeling of fear". In particular, Hristosov points out the importance of the location of the cinema and its role in the local community is highlighted: 'it is on the verge of the Arab Quarter where the refugees live now. So, the role of cinema is also that of creating a safe space for interaction'.

Therefore, the audiences are not only invited to visit the premises of the Arab Quarter to make sure that the place is as safe as any other quarter in Sofia, but they are also sharing a common viewing space with the Other in the movie theatre. The audience is thus encountering the Other on a broader scale on 'their' territory, but is also sharing the more intimate experience of a

common viewing practice. By sharing a peaceful and entertaining activity, the audience becomes united both by the physical structure of the cinema and the symbolic space of the film and its narrative. This last aspect is also reflected in the program selection that aims at showing more films telling the stories of the refugees, including but not limited to *The Good Postman*.

*The Good Postman* is a prime example of an imaginative space of negotiation, while the engagement of the audience through public dialogue can potentially occur when physical interzones are constructed. As Kovačević suggests, 'the need for solidarity and compassion is invoked through narrative perspectives that subject cultural prejudice and economic exploitation to critique while proposing various avenues of subaltern transnationalism' (Kovačević 2013: 197). At the same time, in order to argue and assume that this is indeed the result of viewing such films, more direct engagement with the audiences is required to evaluate to what extent it impels its audiences to rethink hegemonic cultural and political imaginaries in the region.

## Conclusions

The negotiation of national identity cannot be seen in isolation from the political frameworks within which it is embedded. In the Bulgarian case, the building of national identity is constructed through the discourse of comparison and contrast, and this discourse is built on the processes of exclusion and inclusion. It is in these gaps and inconsistencies where we can most evidently witness the points of negotiation. Cinema has the capacity to expose such gaps and facilitate a symbolic conversation between the imagined core (the abstract idea of Europe and the West) and the periphery (Bulgaria), but also between the semi-periphery (Bulgaria) and the periphery including its multiple Others (Roma, refugees, migrants).

In terms of evaluating the effectiveness of cinema-related initiatives, it is of course, very difficult to single out certain factors that contribute to the challenging of the discourse more than

others. As Hristosov pointed out, the expected result of such events is not a 'drastic transformation', since the people who come to these events are oftentimes already progressive. Rather, the goal shifts towards mobilisation of these people who are already more knowledgeable and sympathetic about the lives of the refugees and ethnic minorities. Thus, the aim here is not to turn the worldview of the audience around, but to influence those who are undecided to see the Other in a comfortable safe space unified by a common activity and to inspire these people, energise them to influence their environment, inspire to change.

However, several challenges to the effectiveness of such initiatives arise. First, as Deiana notes, we need to acknowledge that the cinema audiences and festival goers might already be privileged and 'inclined to engage in dialogue and cultural exchange' (Deiana 2017: 14). Nevertheless, even though these encounters with the audiences might be temporary and privileged, they remain an important 'site where to experience and sense everyday border negotiations through cinema's aesthetic and creative energy, and where filmlovers come together and make sense of these experiences' (Deiana 2017: 15). Secondly, from the point of view of the Other, an interzone is supposed to be a movement 'from below', or a grassroots movement, the role of the Other should be equal to that of the other audiences. The refugees who are attending such events should also be given an opportunity to participate in the organisation process, perhaps through discussions after the screenings, or by influencing the programming. Third, the effectiveness of such interzonal initiatives is limited by the strictly urban localisation of such events. Unfortunately, in most cases, such events are limited to the capital, and there is a lack of such initiatives in other cities and more rural areas. This challenge is particularly illustrated in areas outside Sofia, which experience the most conflicts and less tolerance. This includes Harmanli, for example, a town in Haskovo province, where the struggle with the refugee crisis received the

most attention by the media.

Further, it should also be noted that the active and critical engagement of the audience with the representations of diversity should not be simply assumed. In the future, in order to evaluate the more specific mechanisms of engagement triggered by cinematic experiences, more attention should be directed at studying the audiences, and their reactions to the screenings. For example, screenings accompanied by facilitated group discussions could provide more opportunities for intercultural exchange and negotiation. At the same time, the active engagement of the audience is not limited by the duration and the scope of the cinema-related initiatives. Activism is encouraged by introducing and cross-promoting a whole range of other solidarity networks during these events, including the recent campaigns *Toy Drive for Children in Need* and *Together, Tomorrow Will Be Better* co-organised by The House of Cinema and the Refugee Project network.

Nevertheless, as noted in the first section of this paper, cinema spaces have the potential to become public spaces and create opportunities for dialogues that challenge the hegemonic xenophobic discourses prominent in media and mainstream politics. The interview revealed that the role of cinema as a common viewing activity in itself could act as a unifying factor. The dark intimate space of the cinema hall makes the encounter with the Other possible in a 'safe space', where 'they' have the potential to become 'us'. Defying the lack of information around the refugees and the lack of actual contact with the Other, such initiatives act as a counter-hegemonic strategy, which seems particularly effective due to its location (in the Arab Quarter of the city centre) and setting (a small community cinema rather than a large multiplex). The choice of film, of course, has its own important role in the framing of a discussion about the refugees. The depiction of a polarised society modelled in a small abandoned village shows once again the role of media in inducing hate and fear. At the same time, the film shows a more optimistic route, including the attempt for political activism



even on such a small scale. The role of the postman as an ambassador of human rights in the village shows an inspiring though, at times, discouraging path of social activists in Bulgaria. Looking at the rural regions of Bulgaria, this film creates a much-needed connection between the capital Sofia and the remote rural areas, where cinema theatres were non-existent after the post-1989 privatisation of the cinema industry.

Thus, the paper demonstrates both the critical potential of cinematic initiatives in creating spaces for public discussions challenging the hegemonic xenophobic discourse in Bulgaria, as well as the challenges and potential paths forward. While such interzone spaces exist and provide a much-needed alternative to the mainstream media, there is still much to be done, especially regarding access and outreach. In addition to a serious lack of funding, the interview and the analysis of these events pointed out that although these events reach their respective audiences, the outreach is somewhat limited to the people who are already aware of the problem and are already open for a discussion. Not diminishing the mobilising role of cinema events, there is a need to address this issue in terms of providing access to such events to the wider audience, including audiences outside the capital, such as in smaller cities and more rural areas. Therefore, some areas of future improvement include giving more voice to the refugees, making these events more widely publicised to encourage a more inclusive space, outside of the activists' usual circle. In the vein of the inspirational role of such events, perhaps a more direct link should be established with the activism and volunteering opportunities for the audiences of these films. Furthermore, diverse location or festivals-on-the-move would be useful in promoting diversity and challenging the hegemony of mainstream media in the regions where an alternative is much less accessible (smaller cities and rural areas).

While I was conducting my research, a new initiative – the *Global Migration Film Festival* organized by the *Refugee Ocean* (online plat-

form 'designed to connect asylum seekers and refugees with the local community') took place in December 2017 in Sofia as well as in Harmanli, showing that some action is aimed at linking the discourse of diversities and the specific localities where these discussions are most needed.

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# Community, Identity and Locality in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Understanding New Cleavages

by MARIKA DJOLAI (Independent Scholar)

## Abstract

The predominant view in the literature on post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina is that the war has mobilized multi-layered discourses of nationhood and permanently transformed people's identities to ethnic. This view disregards many other identities that people developed through life projects in the past two decades, and tends to simplify otherwise complex social dynamics, particularly at the community level. This includes the influence of migration, mobility, diaspora, and above- and below-ethnic identifications, technologies, educational experiences, consumer/labour markets, gender norms, leisure opportunities and fashions (Mandić and Trošt 2017), producing new identities and cleavages. This paper focuses on geographic community and proposes a concept of *identity of place*; this is attached to home communities and *identity of experience*, which are brought about by forced displacement and post-war migration leading to life away from home communities. Drawing on the concepts of translocality and transcommunal, the paper argues that the drivers of cleavages should be sought in the *identity of place* and strength of commitment and connection with the home community. When the *identity of place is weakened and taken over by the identity of experience*, the bond and commitment one has to home communities dissipates and results in the cleavage between the permanent residents in the community and migrants. Lastly, the paper draws particular attention to the nuances of new, post-war resident heterogeneity. The study uses data from eighteen months of fieldwork and mixed methods data collection in two small towns, Stolac in Southern Herzegovina and Kotor Varoš in Northern Bosnia, between 2012 and 2013.

**Keywords:** translocal, transcommunal, identity, cleavages, ethnicity, Bosnia and Herzegovina

## Introduction

The societal transformations over the last two decades in socialist Southeast Europe followed two distinct paths – some transformations came about by violent means, through wars, while others followed a peaceful trajectory, through globalization, movement of population, financial crisis and post-socialist transition. Wars instigated more dramatic transformation for people, places, and societies because of their violent nature, most notably in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the deadliest violent conflict on the European soil since the Second World War. The violence of this

war most often targeted people based on their ethnic identity in order to create monoethnic territories, which was, to a great extent, achieved (Costalli and Moro 2012, Weidmann 2009). The division along ethnic lines was formally recognized by the peacebuilding architecture outlined in the Dayton Peace Agreement (DAP)<sup>1</sup>, created to end violence and prevent future conflict. This

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<sup>1</sup> Office of the High Representative (OHR), The General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina [http://www.ohr.int/?page\\_id=1252](http://www.ohr.int/?page_id=1252) (last accessed 11/05/2019)

peace solution, however, has been widely criticised for reinforcing ethnic segregation established through violence and eroding state sovereignty (Hromadžić 2011, Fischer 2006). Further criticism of both local ethno-nationalist projects and international caretakers of the country is that they are destroying multi-layered discourses of nationhood that existed in pre-war Bosnia and Herzegovina, characterized as trans-ethnic *narod* (Hromadžić 2013, 259). The literature on Bosnia and Herzegovina demonstrates that both peace-building and state-building approaches lead to assumptions that the war has mobilized and permanently transformed people's identities, fixing them as ethnic and created ethnic cleavages that are permanently set. In an analytical sense, the ethnic nature of the war created what Cohen (1978:961) calls "ubiquitous presence" of ethnicity in the analysis of the social reality and people's identities in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Tone Bringa argued that the view of ethnic groups in English-speaking literature does not reflect the complexity of the connotative power of these terms in BiH (1995), particularly the terms "nation" and "ethnic group" in a Western European sense because their use results in "... ignoring and distorting local conceptualisation." (1995:22) In the context of identity scholarship, Rogers Brubaker (2004, 2014) problematizes how we understand and study social categories and groups and criticizes the tendency to study ethnicity, race, and nationhood as individual parts of a system of bounded and closed groups. Brubaker also criticises 'groupism', which he defines as the "...tendency to take discrete, sharply differentiated, internally homogeneous and externally bounded groups as basic constituents of social life, chief protagonists of social conflicts, and fundamental units of social analysis" (2004:8). In the context of questioning ethnicity as a group, Melešević defines ethnicity as a "social condition, a particular state of individual and collective existence." (2011:79). I argue that that we should accept ethnicity as a context for everyday life in BiH, but not as a dominant ana-

lytical lens for understanding societal ties; in BiH, both solidarities and social cleavages are particularly dominant in a political sphere, even when they involve "identity entrepreneurship" (Posner 2017).

To address these criticisms, new enquiries into the contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina take a step back from ethnicity and turn to investigating other identities, social relations, and societal changes by focusing on generational gaps (Hromadžić 2011, 2015), everyday experiences of fighting economic challenges (Jasarević 2017), the role of space and place in building peace (Bjorkdahl and Kappler 2017), and the significance of local agency (Kappler 2014). Emphasizing complexity and salience of social identities, Mandić and Trost (2017) argue that the emergence of new identities and lifestyles leads to transformation of old solidarities and cleavages and the creation of new ones, which need to come into analytical focus. New identities, they argue, particularly among the youth in the Balkans, emerge from experiences of everyday life amid rapid global changes or from living in a diaspora. With 2.2 million of the Bosnia and Herzegovina population displaced and uprooted from their original place of residence during the war, exposure to such experiences has been very common.

I argue in the paper that emergence of new forms of solidarity and cleavages are particularly palpable at the community level, where the war arguably disrupted what Hromadžić calls "cultural practice of interconnectedness and intermingling among ethnic groups" (2011, 268) and forced people to find new ways of connecting and interacting as part of the emerging new heterogeneity. Historically, regional and local identification was a way of understanding social groups, social norms and cultural practices that are embedded in family heritage, communal and societal histories, prior to emergence of the analytical concept of ethnicity (Fine 2005). Anthropologists who conducted research in BiH before the war in the 1990s found that one predominant identity among the citizens is linked to local-

ity and community (Lockwood 1975, Bringa 1993, 1995). Premilovac (2005) also showed that identities of people in BiH are very much constructed as local identities, coming from a place, and argued that national and ethnic identification in the communities affected by the war fades over time, primarily as a result of shared everyday experiences. I propose to think about these as *identities of place* because they are related to home communities and everyday life, while the new ones resulting from migration and being diaspora should be understood as *identities of experience*. Such approach allows for understanding the complexity of identities in BiH that are never fixed or singular, but multiple and constantly changing and their implications for new cleavages and solidarities. For this reason the scholars who study social relations in BiH, including cleavages, interactions, and networks, should direct discussions away from ethnicity and pay attention to nuances of daily life at the local level to discuss what is being 'seen on the ground' in the analysis of the current BiH society (Bougarel, Helms, and Duijzings 2007a). I argue that even if *identities of place* are maintained in perceptions and emotional discourses, there is a case of declining commitment to restoration of homeland or home community that becomes one of the drivers of cleavages between the *locals* and diaspora.

Seeking to expand the "inward facing identity politics" and overcome ideological divisions based on race or ethnicity, Childs (2003) proposed a concept of transcommunality for exploring the nature of social relations and bonds with the home community. It offers a conceptual framework for integrating differences of actions and opinions and "opens up ways of cooperation and communication" (2003,12) between groups that are connected by a common goal or actions linked to their community, but not always residing in the same locality. Furthermore, the framework of transcommunal cooperation emphasizes coordinated heterogeneity of "identity lines" (Childs 2003, 21) that extends beyond ethnicity, race and gender and is inclusive of

diverse settings organizationally, philosophically and cosmologically (ibid.). The concept is similar to that of translocality, which "usually describes phenomena involving mobility, migration, circulation and spatial interconnectedness not necessarily limited to national boundaries" (Greiner and Sakdapolrak 2013, 373). Translocal approaches found application in examining relationship between migration, territorial bond and identity formation (ibid. 378), particularly in the situations of heightened mobility that we find during conflicts. Similarly, Halilovich (2013) argues that the experiences of forced displacement, memories of violence and the influence of these memories on people and their communities are best captured through the concept of translocality rather than transnationality. The concept of translocality captures the orientation towards home by focusing on emotional connection to place and related *identities of place*, while transcommunality as an analytical framework captures diaspora's commitment to maintenance and restoration of the home communities. In other words, fading transcommunality is one of the key drivers of the cleavages in the communities between local residents and displaced citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Consequently, the following questions need to be addressed: If ethnicity is not the main driver of cleavages at the community level, what are their other determinants? What are the links between new communal heterogeneity, displacement and connection to place in the definition of cleavages? Are the cleavages homogenous across Bosnia and Herzegovina and what are the main drivers of difference? The first section of the paper discusses how community composition changed as a result of the war, forced displacement and post-war labour migration. The next section outlines the research methodology applied for this study, used to elucidate perceptions and discourses about *identities of place*, taking into account ethnicity, religion and the type of residence, including new settlers and diaspora. It continues by analysing relationships between the community members, drawing on the con-



cepts of transcommunality and translocality. I conclude the paper with a discussion of the main findings and answer the question: what are the links between identity, mobility, and community in framing the understanding of the social cleavages in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

### Who are the community members?

*"They [Croats from Central Bosnia] moved from cultivating plums and apples to growing figs and pomegranates, which they had never seen before [...until they came here...]. It is more than certain that these people are longing for their old native land."*

(Private conversation, Stolac)

People make places and once there is a significant change of population, communities will not be the same anymore. The change will affect social relations between community members, their everyday activities and generate cleavages between the residents. This study focuses on geographic community that, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, is a core unit of social organisation and the origin of *identity of place*, born out of the notion that community represents an anchor of everyday life, and investigates community-level cleavages. The data was collected between 2011 and 2013 in two small towns: Stolac in Southern Herzegovina and Kotor Varoš in Northern Bosnia. The towns are the main urban centres of the municipalities with the same name, each with particular context of social relations and population change. The study approached them as two case studies to investigate connections, associations and cleavages related to mobility and transformation of territorially bound identities in a way that could be generalized for places that share common war experiences in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The study observes cleavages between three groups of residents: pre-war residents to whom the study refers as *locals*; diaspora; and newcomers who permanently settled in each of the towns during or after the war. This is not an easy task for outsiders because the cleavages are often invisible or so nuanced that they are apparent only to the people who

are directly involved (Bernard 1973). To address this challenge, the study used comprehensive methodological approach to capture multiple identities of the residents and the complexity of the cleavages between them. It also took into account labels that people use for identification purposes, to accommodate situations, to define themselves and explain their behaviours and differences.

The study of the two towns is set against the background of migration and communal change. Most of the displaced citizens have experienced more than two decades living abroad or holding multiple homes within Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>2</sup>. The legal framework, designed to accommodate return outlined under Annex 7 of the DAP<sup>3</sup>, allowed multiple residences within Bosnia and Herzegovina for internally displaced persons (IDPs), with a legal provision for citizens to be registered both at the pre-war and new place of residence. The movement of people continued during the post-war period because of prolonged economic uncertainties and poverty, giving impetus to labour migration and resulting in another wave of resettlement or temporary relocation for those in search for seasonal work.<sup>4</sup> The constant movement of population resulted in formation of multiple identities connected to both their roots and the new lives in diaspora (Halilovich 2013), both abroad and in Bosnia and Herzegovina. At the same time, experiences of migration and change continue to create in-between spaces that are neither *here* nor *there* and are open to adjustment at either end of a person's temporary placement, Halilovich further argues (2013:1). In other words, migration of diaspora between

<sup>2</sup> According to the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees, the official number of internally displaced persons at the end of 2015 was 98,324. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/bosnia-and-herzegovina> (last accessed 10/02/2018)

<sup>3</sup> The General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina <https://www.osce.org/bih/126173?download=true> (last accessed 11/05/2019)

<sup>4</sup> Bosnia and Herzegovina Migration Profile (April, 2017), Ministry of Security, [http://www.msb.gov.ba/PDF/MIGRATION\\_PROFILE\\_2016\\_2ENG.pdf](http://www.msb.gov.ba/PDF/MIGRATION_PROFILE_2016_2ENG.pdf)



the new home and the homeland where one is born is a reoccurring cycle that should be observed as an integral process of their identity formation. Identity revision (Jenkins 2004) is set at a broad spectrum of ethnic or nonethnic classification (Cohen 1978) such as gender, education or identity related to the place of living or to experience. Jenkins further draws attention to the relevance of stability and constancy of ordinary lives, which is often the main engine in a pursuit of identities (2004, 20). Just like identities, the labels are multi-layered and varying, which need to be taken into consideration in the analysis of the cleavages.

### *Methodology and Data*

Starting with an investigation of the town demographics, the paper aims to account for the new heterogeneity that emerged as a result of the war. Bosnia and Herzegovina held the first post-war census since 1991 in 2013<sup>5</sup>, producing data on residents, households and dwellings, allowing for reliable analysis of the social composition of the municipalities and population change resulting from the war. It shows change in size of each town and settlement and, more importantly, information on dwellers based on their pre-war place of residence. The census was significant because it confirmed that the country lost around one fifth of its population since the last census in 1991, putting the total number of Bosnia and Herzegovina citizens to 3,531 159<sup>6</sup> and showed internal displacement and resettlement. However, at the time of my data collection in 2012 and 2013, information on the residents' pre-war place of origin, current formal or permanent residence, and different patterns of settlement, including return, repatriation and permanent relocation was not yet available. Therefore, I collected this data using a household survey.

Before the war, the central town of Stolac had close to 7,000 inhabitants, while the municipality

population was 18,861<sup>7</sup>. According to the 2013<sup>8</sup> census, the town population was just over 5,000 people with 1,131 households and 1,527 dwellings. The total municipal population was 14,889. Located near the border with Republika Srpska, Stolac is one of the many municipalities in Bosnia and Herzegovina that was divided by the Inter Entity Boundary Line<sup>9</sup> in 1995. Under the present administrative and territorial boundaries, the new municipality of Stolac was allocated 51% of the pre-war territory and became part of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, while the newly established municipality of Berkovići is administratively part of Republic Srpska, positioned to the east of the town. Stolac didn't just lose its residents, who had a strong *identity of place*. The war destroyed cultural heritage and force displaced almost an entire population, predominantly Muslim, which created space for the arrival of a significant influx of new settlers (Kolind 2008, Mahmutcehajic 2011). Kotor Varoš is the urban, administrative and industrial centre of the municipality, less than forty kilometres from Banja Luka. While it didn't go through such a drastic territorial split as Stolac, the municipality and the town lost significant proportion of the population, which, before the war, numbered 36,853<sup>10</sup>. That said, according to the census in 2013<sup>11</sup>, the total municipal population was

<sup>7</sup> Library of Congress, Bosnia and Herzegovina--ethnic population by opština, 1991 census <https://www.loc.gov/resource/g6861e.ct003048/?r=0.039,0.177,0.966,0.606,0> (last accessed 11/03/2018)

<sup>8</sup> Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Preliminary Results of the 2013 Census of Population, Households and dwellings in Bosnia and Herzegovina [http://www.bhas.ba/obavjestenja/PreliminarniRezultati\\_bos.pdf](http://www.bhas.ba/obavjestenja/PreliminarniRezultati_bos.pdf) (last accessed 11/03/2018)

<sup>9</sup> Administrative border between the two Entities, Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republic Srpska

<sup>10</sup> Library of Congress, Bosnia and Herzegovina -- ethnic population by opština, 1991 census <https://www.loc.gov/resource/g6861e.ct003048/?r=0.039,0.177,0.966,0.606,0> (last accessed 11/03/2018)

<sup>11</sup> Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Preliminary Results of the 2013 Census of Population, Households and dwellings in Bosnia and Herzegovina

<sup>5</sup> Bosnia and Herzegovina Statistics Agency, Census 2013 Results <http://www.popis.gov.ba/popis2013/knjigePregled.html> (last accessed 11/05/2019)

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

22,001, majority of which is Serbian population and returning Muslims, while the pre-war Croat residents remain permanently displaced and living as diaspora.

The data collection was divided in three phases. Starting in 2011, I conducted interviews with the representatives of international organisations and the Bosnia and Herzegovina Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees in Sarajevo. The next phase was a selection of the two research locations using the case study approach (Yin 2003), where the fieldwork was conducted from January to December 2012. The choice of case studies was made using most-similar, exploratory selection criteria. Both Kotor Varoš and Stolac had diverse ethnic composition before the war; the post-war population included both new residents and the pre-war residents, who were often returnees. Both towns also experienced ethnic-based violence and forced displacement as local residents in their home communities. The research design entailed a combination of qualitative approaches that employed semi-structured individual and group interviews, collecting in-depth life stories to capture and conceptualise ordinary, quotidian life of people in the two towns, their identities, and their interactions. Social interactions as well as those between the space and the social are used as the main indicator for absence of cleavages. I lived in each town for approximately six months, which allowed me to employ participant observation. However, the study is not an ethnography, as the limited duration of my residence in each town somewhat precluded it from a long-term immersion in the field to build what Geertz (1973) refers to as 'thick description.' Thus, it is more accurate to refer to it as a 'sociological version of ethnography' (Amit 2000). In order to corroborate the same facts from a larger group, this study used data triangulation (Patton 2002, Yin 2003).

The primary qualitative data is comprised of 116 formal interviews that were conducted in

the two towns, out of which thirty-six are life stories or oral histories, while the remaining eighty semi-structured interviews were collected both during the first phase of the fieldwork (qualitative data collection) and as in-depth interviews during the household survey<sup>12</sup>. I surveyed 300 households— 150 in each town— using a mix of random and intentional sampling. The interviews were always conducted in one of the local languages<sup>13</sup>, usually in people's homes or in public spaces. In Stolac, the pre-war population, predominantly Muslim, lives in the old town centre, while the new settlers, predominantly Croats, live in the newly built neighbourhood called Vidovo Polje on the outskirts of the town. In Kotor Varoš, the new settlers are mainly ethnic Serbs, who live in a newly built colony called Bare. More frequently than in Stolac, new settlers bought houses from the permanently exiled Croats and Muslims, which created conditions for leaving next door to the pre-war residents. In order to ensure data validation, crosscheck data, and avoid biases, I used both data and methodological triangulation (Bailey 2007, Gering 2007). The interviewing included both the pre-war population and the new settlers, which allowed for mapping the local residence structure of the sample categories. This also meant that the survey avoided sample selection based on ethnic markers, although it quickly transpired that neighbourhoods tended to be monoethnic and new settlers were not housed together with the pre-war residents but in separate, newly built quarters (Djolai, 2016).

The survey was designed using analysis of the primary, qualitative data collected in the first phase of the fieldwork. It starts with three sections of questions designed to capture the movement of population from rural to urban areas, within and outside the municipality and the towns, and establish whether the residents are

<sup>12</sup> Each household survey respondent was asked by enumerators whether they would like to participate in an in-depth interview, which I followed-up and interviewed these individuals.

<sup>13</sup> Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian

**Table 1 Resident Groups (Author's data 2012-2013)**

Pre-War RESIDENTS		New settlers	
Stolac	Kotor Varoš	Stolac	Kotor Varoš
Permanent: Living in the pre-war place (neighbourhood, house)	Permanent: Living in the pre-war place (neighbourhood, house, MZ)	Arrival path displacement: IDPs from central Bosnia; rural areas of municipality	Arrival path displacement: IDPs from north Bosnia or rural areas of municipality
Diaspora: living abroad, occasional visits	Diaspora: living abroad, occasional visits	Arrival path family connection: New spouses (of the pre-war residents)	Arrival path family connection: New spouses (of the pre-war residents)
Residing somewhere else in Bosnia and Herzegovina; visit frequently or spend protracted periods of time in the town ("weekenders")	Working abroad, formal residence in town, returning home every 2-3 weeks ("weekenders")	Foreigners; artists interested in cultural heritage of Stolac	Labour migrants; work in the local factory

permanent, temporary. The respondents were asked about the place of residence before 1992, the year they arrived in the town (applicable for new settlers), the year they returned to the town (applicable for the displaced pre-war population), and their place of birth. To participate in the survey, the respondents had to be registered<sup>14</sup> at an address in Stolac or Kotor Varoš and had to be born in 1977 or before. The age restriction ensured that respondents were eighteen years or older in 1996, which means they were likely to have lived in the pre-war community and developed *identity of place*. The youngest respondent in the survey was born in 1977, while the oldest was born in 1915. In both towns, a significant number of houses were empty because people live abroad, so enumerators were instructed to knock on every door until they found a respondent. Response rate (successfully conducted interviews divided by all selected and contacted respondents during fieldwork) was 0.38. No incentives were given to the respondents.

#### *Identities and Labels as Drivers of Cleavages*

Table 2 and Table 3 in the paper introduce household composition, residence status, religious and

ethnic affiliation of the survey respondents in both Stolac and Kotor Varoš. They had an option to choose between Muslim and *Bošnjak* [Bosniak] for their ethnicity because both labels are still used in everyday conversations. A majority of those born before the war preferred to describe their ethnic identity as Muslim instead of as *Bošnjak*, while in the interviews and in everyday conversation some talked about their inability to accept the latter identification and found it imposed by the new, post-war sectarian and political reasons. Pre-war residents for analytical purposes in the paper are also referred to as *locals* to emphasize their identification with the place as their primary identity and community of belonging. They referred to themselves as Stočani and Kotorvarošani (derived from the town name), which shows that *identity of place* is the primary identification. The survey respondents reported political and socio-economic barriers they encountered in daily life, in places of practice and through social interactions (Table 5). The barriers are mostly not physical, but invisible and yet often dominant, acting as cleavages in everyday life for the town residents who, as a result, are inadvertently driven to interact with particular identity group.

Amongst non-ethnic labels assigned by the research participants to themselves, the residence status seemed the most significant and

<sup>14</sup> In Bosnia and Herzegovina citizens obtain photo ID at the age of eighteen, which states their Unique Identification Number (JMBG) and address or residence. A person can be registered at one address only.

**Table 2: Household Survey (Author's Data 2013)**

		TOWN	
		Stolac	Kotor Varoš
<b>Gender</b>	Male	72	59
	Female	78	92
<b>Are you the head of the household?</b>	Yes	97	88
	No	53	63
<b>Marital status</b>	Single	11	7
	Married	99	106
	Widowed	36	30
	Separated	1	1
	Divorced	3	5
	Other	0	2
	Don't know	0	0
<b>Do you have children?</b>	Yes	135	141
	No	15	10
<b>Is this your permanent residence?</b>	Yes	143	148
	No	7	3
<b>Where were you born?</b>	This town/MZ	62	45
	Other village in municipality	53	67
	Other municipality in Bosnia and Herzegovina	32	34
	Other country	3	5
<b>Where did you live before 1992?</b>	This town/MZ	102	68
	Other village in municipality	19	48
	Other municipality in Bosnia and Herzegovina	27	20
	Other country	2	15

was identified as one of the key determinants of the post-war cleavage, which is set between the *locals*, the new-settlers and diaspora. This cleavage, as the paper explains later, is a result of the notion that only the long-term residents held strong enough commitment and a bond to the town. Out of total number of the respondents, 143 in Stolac and 148 in Kotor Varoš stated that the house where the interview was being held is their permanent residence. 68% of the survey respondents in Stolac and 45% in Kotor Varoš were living in April 2013 in the same town (but not necessarily the same house) as before the war. In Stolac in particular, the connection to place for the pre-war residents was very strong, which became apparent when a first interviewee from the town explained, “*citizens of Stolac are*

*very patriotic and have this unique (pathological) bond with their town*” (ST310112). Diaspora was not included in the survey, although some of them were interviewed as part of the qualitative data collection, which provided information about their connection with a place and the nature of social relations with the *locals*. Interestingly, the diaspora’s *identity of place* remained strong despite living away from their home communities and they are still referring to themselves as Stočani. This is a clear case of what Childs (2003) referred to as identity lines that extend beyond ethnicity and race and gender, providing unique form of inclusion of diverse settings organizationally and cosmologically.

The majority of the interviewees had been displaced away from their home communities dur-

**Table 3: Household Survey (Author's Data 2013)**

		TOWN	
		Stolac	Kotor Varoš
<b>What best describes your religious beliefs?</b>	Muslim	86	49
	Catholic	54	2
	Orthodox	7	94
	Atheist	0	3
	Other	3	3
	Prefer not to say	0	0
<b>What best describes your ethnicity?</b>	Muslim (Musliman)	13	17
	Bosniak (Bošnjak)	72	31
	Serb (Srbin)	7	92
	Croat (Hrvat)	54	2
	Other (Drugo)	3	6
	Mixed (Miješan/a)	1	3
	Prefer not to say	0	0

ing the war and many had lived in more than one place, either somewhere else in Bosnia and Herzegovina or abroad. Upon return, some of them chose not to live in their village or settlement in the municipality and instead moved to the town. The survey further showed a significant level of rural to urban, mainly post-war, migration in both case studies. In Stolac, around 13% of the survey respondents moved from villages in the municipality to the town after the war, while this figure is significantly higher in Kotor Varoš at 31.8%. Stolac had a larger proportion of respondents who settled in the town from other municipalities in Bosnia and Herzegovina (18%) in comparison to Kotor Varoš (13%), while the latter had more respondents from other countries, almost 10%. The survey data on birthplace showed several interesting trends. Only 40% of the respondents in Stolac and 30% of those in Kotor Varoš were born in the towns before the war, while 35% in Stolac and 44% in Kotor Varoš were born in villages in rural parts of the municipality. In short, around one third of Stolac residents and two thirds of people from Kotor Varoš are living somewhere else as diaspora, while both towns had a significant influx of new settlers from rural areas of the same municipality or from other places in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The *locals*, the pre-war town residents, made a clear differentiation between themselves and those who migrated from rural parts and villages in the municipalities. Mainly based on knowing people individually, particularly in Stolac, interviewees emphasized that only those from the town are Stočani, while those from the villages in the municipality are not.

The arrival of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), mainly between 1993 and 1996, to settle in the town permanently was one of the most important changes in the post-war demographics with direct implications for the interactions. According to a local official who works at Stolac Municipal Council, in the department in charge of return of refugees and displaced population, around 2,000 new residents arrived mainly from central Bosnia, the municipalities of Kakanj, Zenica, Bugojno and, to a smaller extent, other municipalities. Ethnically, they are mainly Croats who were settled in Stolac as part of the population exchange programme under the DAP and didn't have a prior social contact or familiarity with the town. In Stolac, the *locals* more often referred to the new settlers as Bosanci (*identity of place*) rather than as Croats (ethnic identity), while they maintained identity of their pre-war place of residence from which they were dis-



placed. In Kotor Varoš, the change of the resident structure was even more drastic. The forced displacement of 20-25,000 residents during the war, followed by an arrival of few thousand new ones, caused the community to lose social familiarity built through long-term experience of everyday life, actions, and intimate participation in life projects of friends, family, and neighbours. One of the interviewees stated: *"By getting rid of the people you used to know and bringing in the new ones from anywhere will disrupt social relations and create cleavages because it is not easy for new comers to fit in"*. (KV121212) In terms of the level of acceptance by the *locals*, there is a significant difference between the new settlers from the municipal rural areas and those who arrived from other places in Bosnia and Herzegovina or abroad. The first category, from the municipality, commonly has had some form of interactions and shared everyday life in the past with the town residents, through schooling, work or informal social relations, participation in local associations e.g. music orchestra in Stolac or a folklore group in Kotor Varoš. Therefore, the social familiarity built through past interactions, circulation and spatial interconnectedness meant that they formed a connection similar to a translocal bond (Halilovich 2012)<sup>15</sup> that helped them overcome post-war identity cleavages with the *locals*. On the other hand, those who arrived from other places in Bosnia and Herzegovina didn't have the translocal bond and lacked orientation towards the place, which in combination with perceived socioeconomic distance created a cleavage with the *locals*.

In the paper, identities of the new settlers are conceptualised in two ways for analytical reasons. First, they have all the characteristics of diaspora, where they maintain group boundary and member control in the new environment, which determines their interactions with the new place and commonly creates a cleavage between them and

the *locals*. They also maintain very strong attachment to their home communities and former life, which affects their joint social actions and commitment to their new communities. Even in the situation where their aim was to permanently settle in Stolac and Kotor Varoš, the first generation of the new settlers could not elude sociocultural boundaries and cleavage firmly set in place by distinct social norms. Similar to diaspora, the new settlers grapple with the sense of having multiple identities and being caught in between spaces, as argued in the concept of translocality. Second, from the perspective of the current residence status, the new residents became *locals* in comparison to diaspora living abroad; who through experience of everyday life, begin to develop the identity of the new place. The cleavage between them and the pre-war residents is thus diminishing through *identity of experience* in the new place of living, particularly amongst the new generations, who share experiences of everyday life.

#### *Cleavage between diaspora and the locals*

A useful conceptualisation of diaspora for this study comes from Brubaker, who argues that it should be understood as an idiom, a stance, or a claim, rather than as a bounded entity (2005:12). A familiar problem of groupism, discussed earlier in relation to the nation, ethnic or religious group, transpired with the attempt to place boundaries on diaspora in analytical terms or as a category of practice. According to Brubaker (2005), three characteristics make the diaspora: dispersion, homeland orientation, and boundary maintenance in the new place of residence. Diaspora is oriented towards home, which includes preserving the memories of home and the connection and relations of the homeland, while they are committed to the maintenance of home and its restoration (Safran 1991). It can be argued that these characteristics are not far from what Childs (2013) defines as transcommunality. The paper started from the premise that diaspora is not delineated and definite group formed at one point in time when temporal and special com-

<sup>15</sup> Halilovich (2012) provides a review of other authors who contributed to the development or used the term "trans-local".



ponent of the mobility are taken into account. Because of the prolonged movement of the population during the war and during the post-war period, imposing limitations through a group boundary problematizes the use of the concept in the analysis of cleavages at the community level in its restrictive form. This is also partly due to the fact that both towns have a significant number of new residents, who can be classified as internal diaspora. In both towns, most of the diaspora kept their properties and formal address, which gave them access to health and social services and the right to vote, access to reconstruction aid, and, ultimately, a right to repatriate if they wish.

In Stolac, diaspora are local residents who were displaced mainly between 1993 and 1994, and who live abroad, often in the neighbouring Serbia and Croatia. They usually come back during the summer to spend holidays in the town, but the pattern and frequency of these visits are slowly decreasing. In the past diaspora would rush back to *'their Stolac'*; they now return for a shorter time and instead choose a seaside holiday, while many of them have completely stopped with annual visits. This led to emergence of a growing distance from their home community, resulting in a diminished commitment and engagement with the town and causing significant grievances amongst Stolac residents who live there permanently. They perceive the declining interest in the town as disruptive, which, in a group discussion, they explained by saying: *Diaspora people keep telling us what should be done in Stolac. At the same time, they all live on government benefits abroad. Like what we need is they telling us what to do, and they don't invest anything. They don't even bother to register for postal voting, only 105 in the last elections* (GR01052012). Fading transcommunalism among the diaspora is particularly relevant in Stolac, where the emotional attachment to the town and a lasting *identity of place* is considered as necessary for overcoming the cleavages resulting from the diaspora's absence from the participation in everyday life.

In Kotor Varoš, identifying the drivers of cleavages is more complex for analysis because identity of the diaspora overlaps with the ethnic boundaries formed through war violence. In other words, the largest diaspora group in Kotor Varoš are Croats who predominantly live and work in Austria and Germany and they maintain their ethnic boundary in the town. The cleavage between them and local residents is very much structured around the war experience, which resulted in limited interactions, mainly constituting chance encounters in the neighbourhood or possibly rebuilding social relations that existed during the pre-war period. Displaced Croats only visit the town twice a year, typically to celebrate Christmas and Easter; meanwhile, the closed houses with blinds on the windows of their beautifully refurbished homes are a constant reminder of their long absences. Their participation in the restoration of the town is limited to reparation of the former neighbourhoods, particularly infrastructure (electricity, water mains and roads); destroyed cultural and religious Catholic heritage such as churches, and their own, private houses. Their gatherings and interactions are oriented towards religious and cultural activities of their own ethno-religious group, to remembering the victims of war by building monuments and supporting a small community of around 250 local Croats, many of whom are unemployed and disadvantaged. The study hasn't found any commitment to the wider town community, although, due to a lack of data, information about the diaspora orientation and bond with a homeland is very limited.

Apart from the waning commitment to the town, the diaspora's image of the home community is perceived as "the place that was" (Fullilove, 2014), which shapes expectations of their social relations upon return to their nominal homelands. Even if the return is only a temporary visit, the migrant population, because of the "reverse diaspora" effect (Hess, 2008) goes through a process of acculturation in their nominal homelands to get accustomed to the transformations and changes that took place since they left. This

process enables them to overcome the cleavages created by their absence from the quotidian life in the communities that otherwise gradually widen the gap between diaspora and the *locals*. New generations who are born abroad or who grew up there from early age without ever experiencing residence in Stolac or Kotor Varoš are likely to have even weaker transcommunal bond, which was already noticeable among several young returnees that informally took part in the interviews alongside their parents. The reduced frequency of the visits to the home community and the right to “claim” the community and the related *identity of place* will lead to a fading connection, which is likely to reinforce cleavage between the *locals* and diaspora.

#### *Occasional residents and cleavage with the locals*

Diaspora resides abroad, which, in an analytical sense, allows for easier conceptualisation of their past and present attachment and their *identity of place*. However, there is a third category of who are not diaspora but don’t reside in the town permanently, even though they keep a registered addresses in their hometown. This makes them partly absent and partly present in everyday communal life. In Stolac, there is a group of the pre-war residents who are living and working in Sarajevo, where they moved during the war or even before, to study or as labour migrants. Another group is based in Mostar, which was the main displacement locale for the residents after they got evicted from Stolac in 1993. They found work and permanently settled in there, which is only forty kilometres from their home community. While not being willing to abandon their new life, Stočani kept and repaired their houses after the war’s end, which allows them to spend most of their weekends and holidays in Stolac and even longer periods of time during holidays or once they retire. I argue that they need to be assigned a specific category because they can be perceived as diaspora, with characteristics such as the maintenance of a strong community bond while being displaced. However, because they still live in their homeland in a broader

sense, they should not be referred to as diaspora because they have frequent interactions with Stolac and they don’t tend to maintain group boundaries in the new place of residence. The study refers to this group as *weekenders* to highlight the irregularity of their residence and participation in the communal life, but also to distinguish them from the diaspora. The nature of the cleavages between the *locals* and the *weekenders* is specific. For the *weekenders*, cleavages are primarily constructed as ethnic while their ethnic identity has been reported as equally important as the *identity of place*. One of the interviewees commented: *I don’t socialise with anyone, only with these my Muslims in Poplašići*<sup>16</sup>. (ST290612) Because they don’t share everyday life with the new settlers their perceptions of cleavages are different to those of the *locals* whose quotidian life unfolds in Stolac. Even though they share *identity of place* with the *locals*, their commitment to the community restoration and maintenance has been fading similar to diaspora; they are unwilling to move adjust boundaries that were created by the war violence, the cleavage between the two groups is obvious.

Both in Stolac and Kotor Varoš, many residents are temporarily working abroad, such as seasonal workers or labour migrants, while their families are still residing in the towns. This category is particularly dominant in Kotor Varoš, among the Muslim returnees, many of whom work in the neighbouring Slovenia. This is a commutable distance, which allows them to spend weekends at home fortnightly or monthly. These are predominantly men, whose wives and other family members were interviewed as part of the study. Their social dynamics is similar to the *weekenders*, given that their orientation is primarily towards the family, a trend which is typical for all town residents. The survey respondents in both towns were asked about with whom they spend the most time with during the day; their first response was their spouse, children and neighbours (data presented in Table 4). Tempo-

<sup>16</sup> One of the neighborhoods in Stolac.

**Table 4 Household Survey (Author's Data 2013)**

Who do you spend most time with daily?	MUNICIPALITY			
	Stolac		Kotor Varoš	
	N	%	N	%
Spouse	74	49.3	76	50.3
Children	64	42.7	87	57.6
Family	40	26.7	58	38.4
Extended family	2	1.3	12	7.9
Friends	46	30.7	21	13.9
Neighbours	75	50.0	58	38.4
Work colleagues	17	11.3	23	15.2
Spend time alone	4	2.7	9	6.0

**Table 5 Household Survey (Author's Data 2013)**

Have you felt that barriers were erected to keep you out of certain places (physically, economically, socially) since 1996?	MUNICIPALITY			
	Stolac		Kotor Varoš	
	N	%	N	%
Yes	53	35.3	30	19.9
No	97	64.7	121	80.1

rary migrants' time when they are in the town is devoted to their families and homes, which leaves little space for interactions with other community members, although they tend to participate in the community projects. For example, in one of the suburbs of Kotor Varoš, they collectively built a new water system to replace the old one that was destroyed during the war, which indicates certain level of commitment to the community.

### Conclusion

This paper set out to explore what constitutes the cleavages at the community level in two small towns of Stolac and Kotor Varoš in Bosnia and Herzegovina, both of which were exposed to massive destruction and violence during the war. The analysis was conceptualised against the backdrop of forced displacement and migration

that permanently changed the population in both towns, with the large numbers of the pre-war residents becoming diaspora, while IDPs from other parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina permanently settling in. In 2012, they constituted at least 30% of Stolac population and approximately 50% in Kotor Varoš.

The paper argues that the present day cleavages at the community level are not driven by ethnic identities and that it is also necessary to renounce "groupism" in framing ethnicity analytically. It proposes to expand theorising of social relations and cleavages to other identities, particularly *identity of place* and *identity of experience*. In the analysis of cleavages the paper works with crosscutting concepts of transcommunality and translocality that examine relationship between territorial bond and identity formation, as well as the nature of ties to the home community or

between people originating from the same locality. The concept of translocality is an idea of spatial interconnectedness that exists outside the national boundaries amongst the migrant population, implicating strong connection to home communities. This concept ties with an idea of a homeland as a geographic community, understood as the “space produced by the practice of particular place” (de Certeau 1984:117) and a product of interactions between the community members (Bruhn 2011) who live in the place or have a connection to it. For both displaced residents and *locals*, the homeland is expressed through attachment and sense of belonging to the home community, a place where the house is located, where they were born and grew up and provides bases for *identity of place*. It is the primary identification for the many citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, while the new one, developed from being a migrant and diaspora should be viewed as *identity of experience*.

Drawing on the concept of transcommunalism (Childs, 2003), the paper argues that there are three main cleavages between the local residents, diaspora and the new settlers, who are slowly becoming *locals* through the experiences of a quotidian life in the town. The first driver of cleavages is the way in which different resident groups practice and engage in the social processes of everyday life; this engagement leads to promoting interpersonal relations, while its absence results in cleavages. Second, actions through which they work to restore their communities are the main tools for dissolving cleavages. On the other hand, lack of commitment to the home community restoration and maintenance by diaspora is one of the main drivers of the cleavages. The negotiation of actions and cooperation is captured in the wish and aspiration to restore the community and to bring it into a condition that corresponds to the memories, often over idealistic, aspirations of diaspora. The new settlers equally struggle to either identify with the new communities or to overcome the isolation in the new environment by engaging in the communal activities and strengthening coop-

eration. The third cleavage emerges as a result of the diaspora's, the locals', and the new settlers' different perceptions of the community. Living permanently outside the community, or even temporarily, in the *weekenders'* case, leads to a lack of understanding of the communal change, which further deepens the cleavage between them and permanent residents. Despite the fact that diaspora, particularly among families with historic bonds and lasting generations, still carry strong identification with the place, these cleavages are compounded by two decades of separate everyday life and lack of joint experiences.

In the process of investigating cleavages, the paper also problematized the concept of diaspora and its use, arguing that it requires more nuanced analytical framing to account for its temporal and dynamic nature. However, the study struggled to corroborate Brubaker's idea of diaspora not being a group (2005) because the cleavage between them and the locals in the two towns was clearly set in local discourses and in the way social interactions occurred. Residents of the two towns clearly articulated that they considered diaspora as a group living abroad. Furthermore, the paper argues that the new settlers who sought permanent residence in the two towns also have characteristics of diaspora, such as dispersion and boundary maintenance in the new place of residence, which resulted in the cleavages with *locals*. In this sense, cleavages within Bosnia and Herzegovina communities can be analysed in the same way as those of diaspora living abroad, in their new locale of emplacement. In the case of internal diaspora, the cleavages between them and the *locals* are driven by *identities of place*, because they still maintain identity of the pre-war place of residence. The *locals* referred to the new settlers both according to their ethnicity e.g. Croats in Stolac and according to their regional identity i.e. *Bosanci* (from municipalities in Bosnia).

The two case studies show common patterns for many places in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina and offer some clues on how the new cleavages are formed, maintained, and dissolved.

Ethnicity remains the context of social, political and economic life in Bosnia and Herzegovina, including the community level, and needs to be included as a crosscutting category in the analysis of the cleavages. The study has found that ethnicity still plays a significant role in the cleavages exactly because of the way the memories of the violence and forced displacement are maintained within diaspora and the *locals*. However, the survey showed that only 0.7% of respondents in Stolac and 2% of respondents in Kotor Varoš said they were avoiding interactions with someone because they are of different ethnicity (to theirs). The main difference in between Stolac and Kotor Varoš is ethnicity of the diaspora. In Stolac, the diaspora are pre-war, displaced Muslims, which means that the cleavage between them and the locals is identity of experience and lack of transcommunality. In Kotor Varoš, diaspora are displaced Croats and Muslims, which makes it more difficult to delineate between the lack of transcommunality, weakening translocal bond and ethnicity as a cleavage, given that the *locals* are mainly Serbs. It can be argued that despite migration people tend to maintain their ties to the homeland, which has an important role in formation of their identities while ethnicity, as Malesevic (2011) argues, should be understood as a form of collective existence that shapes the society. As authors of this edited volume claim, cleavages are much more complex and their enquiry requires more nuanced conceptual framing, for which I propose transcommunality and translocality as a way forward.

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# In-between Spaces: Dual Citizenship and Placebo Identity at the Triple Border between Serbia, Macedonia and Bulgaria

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## Abstract

This paper examines identity strategizing in the border region between Serbia, Macedonia and Bulgaria, focusing on the processes which affect the young generation's decision-making. I first examine the case of the Bulgarian minority in Bosilegrad, Serbia, where citizens live in a constructed "own" heterotopic space, belonging neither to Serbia, nor Bulgaria; locals, and especially young people, create fluid identities for themselves which help them to inhabit the vague spaces "in-between" national and ethnic identities, state borders, internal and external "others". Second, I look at young Macedonians in Kriva Palanka, Macedonia, where cross-border nation-making politics create a different heterotopia: of youth at the edge of the Balkan states, who live both here and now, but also elsewhere – in the imaginary and future "West", a "promised land" that will remedy them from the disappointments of their reality. They live in a state of *standby migration* characterized by their latent state, guided by the decision and the first steps towards migration; a phenomenon I call *placebo identity*.

**Keywords:** young people, identity, standby migration, dual citizenship, Serbia, Macedonia.

## Introduction

The "Prespa Agreement" was signed on June 17th, 2018, ending the twenty-seven-year "name dispute" between Greece and Macedonia, which concerned the name of the latter; this name has now been officially changed to Republic of North Macedonia. This marked the first steps towards Macedonia's prospective membership in the EU and NATO but left both Greek and Macedonian societies divided. On the following day, Bozhidar Dimitrov<sup>1</sup> announced on National TV<sup>2</sup>

that, while the efforts for resolving the conflict continued, Bulgaria does not have its best interests at heart. According to the former Director of the National Historical Museum (2011-2017), around "120,000 out of about 1,200,000 [in fact the estimate points at 2,200,000] citizens [of Macedonia] *believe they are Bulgarians – they have Bulgarian citizenship and vote in Bulgaria*" (emphasis added). Dimitrov announced that an hour after the signing of the Prespa agreement, he established a local branch of his newly formed political party named "Kubrat" in Kriva Palanka, Macedonia for the town is "full of Bulgarian citizens"<sup>3</sup>. Simultaneously, his team also established a local party structure in the Bulgarian

<sup>1</sup> Bulgarian historian (1945-2018) – infamous among Macedonians and some Bulgarian intellectuals; former Minister without portfolio for the Bulgarians abroad in the previous GERB (Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria; abbreviation GERB meaning in Bulgarian – *coat of arms*) government (July 2009 – February 2011). He has a significant influence in the society, especially with his position concerning Macedonia.

<sup>2</sup> The full interview from June 18th 2018 is available at: <https://btvnovinite.bg/predavanja/tazi-sutrin/prof-bozhidar-dimitrov-ne-zashtitihme-balgarskija->

[interes-dumata-makedonija-ostana.html](https://btvnovinite.bg/predavanja/tazi-sutrin/prof-bozhidar-dimitrov-ne-zashtitihme-balgarskija-) [in Bulgarian].

<sup>3</sup> In his words: "This town [Kriva Palanka] and the villages surrounding it are called Bulgarian villages by the North Macedonians themselves". For the full interview see above.

minority town Dimitrovgrad, Serbia<sup>4</sup>. Dimitrov commented his actions as follows:

I can give myself some credit for this – to have Bulgarian citizens there. Back in 2010 as Minister I helped intensifying these processes. Thirty-five thousand Macedonians received their citizenship then and now are not going to be called with the humiliating “Northern Macedonians”<sup>5</sup>. [In the next] census they shouldn’t add “Bulgarian” category as all Macedonians are Bulgarians.

Bozhidar Dimitrov’s words pose several important issues related to the wider region and dual citizenship. Some of these problems concern the state’s motives for lax dual citizenship policies and how these are employed by the political and intellectual elites to promote irredentist views. Others are related to the identities, identifications and national loyalties of the citizens themselves, as well as their reasons to apply for second citizenship.

The focus of this paper is on the border region between Serbia, Macedonia and Bulgaria, known in the Balkan ethnographic literature as *Shopluk*. It is in Shopluk where the two towns, Kriva Palanka and Dimitrovgrad<sup>6</sup>, are located. The region has a long migration history and strong migratory attitudes which nowadays seem to be a strategy for overcoming the limited access to resources (insufficient salaries, inadequate job opportunities and lifestyle options) for the region’s young people (17-35). Additionally, both borders – between Serbia and Bulgaria and between Macedonia and Bulgaria – are external to the European Union, therefore, providing clear-cut picture of everyday life difficul-

ties “here” opposed to the opportunities available only for the “European inside” (as in Jansen, cited in Erdei 2010) – “there”. Thus, this region provides interesting cases of various identity processes. In this paper, I focus on two issues: First, I examine the meaning “Bulgarian” has for the young representatives of the Bulgarian minority in *Bosilegrad, Serbia*, prior to their moving to Bulgaria. This will be shown alongside the heterotopic realia (following Foucault’s concept) created by the self-perceptions of the locals about the place they live in – in-between two states, inhabited by people who belong to both and none at the same time.

Second, I examine how adopting a second citizenship (Bulgarian), creates a hybrid compensatory identity for those *intending to migrate* from *Kriva Palanka, Macedonia*. The younger citizens live in a state of what I call *standby migration* caused by the intertwining of two factors – disappointment in life conditions provided by the state (leading to detachment) and relying on a more promising future in the “imagined West”. This in-between state causes them to adopt a latent social position, where local young people practically live in the limbo caused by the above-stated factors – living simultaneously here and “somewhere imagined”. This phenomenon I refer to as *placebo identity*.

### Methodology

This paper is based on ethnographic material gathered<sup>7</sup> in a relatively small border region, part of the wider historical-cultural area, known in the Balkan ethnographic literature as *Shopluk*. Research was based in Bosilegrad (Serbia), Kriva Palanka, (Macedonia), and Kyustendil (Bulgaria). I examined how the border affects the mentality of the borderlanders and their identities and identification. The bottom-up approach revealed

<sup>4</sup> During the conversation he uses the old Bulgarian name – Tsaribrod – one of the two big border towns, together with Bosilegrad, with compact Bulgarian minority. This is the reason he noted: “But we have no problems there” – meaning the population is openly declaring its Bulgarian identity in comparison.

<sup>5</sup> Agreement postulates that citizens of the Republic of Northern Macedonia are to be called Macedonians.

<sup>6</sup> Although in the present paper I will focus on presenting the results of my ethnographic fieldwork predominantly from two towns Kriva Palanka and Bosilegrad – the second biggest Bulgarian minority town along the Serbian -Bulgarian border.

<sup>7</sup> Presented data is part of a research project: “Borders and identity construction at the tripoint (Serbia, Macedonia and Bulgaria)”, financed by the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences „Program for career development of young scientists, BAS” (2016-2017 – ДФНП №177).

a complex picture of multi-layered self-identifications that are fluid and contextually dependent. Over the course of my fieldwork in Serbia and Macedonia, I conducted 50 in-depth semi-structured interviews and more than 20 informal conversations. I inquired about everyday life at the border, the economic, political and cultural setting (in retrospective as well) of the communities and how they compare to the rest of the country, as well as to states across the borders: How do they perceive the “others” across the state boundaries? What are the similarities and differences? What does it mean to them to be Bulgarian, Serbian, or Macedonian at the border? While conducting the research, I observed and took part in the everyday life and social, cultural and political events.

During my initial visits to Bosilegrad (in 2009 – long before I commenced my dissertation) and to Kriva Palanka (in 2014) I established contacts with both residents and local administration representatives. During my subsequent stays, I used the snowball technique to find people who were considered to have better knowledge of the topics of inquiry. My respondents have various professional occupations, varying from representatives of the educational and cultural sphere (high school teachers, museum representatives), public sphere (journalists, NGO representatives), local administration, small and medium scale businesses and their employees, former and current politicians, high school students, unemployed. While I present phenomena which in their greater part concern the younger generation (ages seventeen – thirty-five years), some of the empirical findings represent “external” perspective – the one of respondents aged thirty-six to seventy-six, which include the age groups of their parents and grandparents. There is a pronounced gender imbalance, with around 70% of my informants being male<sup>8</sup>. All my respon-

dents have either secondary or higher education. Nearly 60% have a university degree.

My “position” in the field changed with the movement between the border towns. In Bosilegrad among the Bulgarian minority I was perceived as “ours”, in the sense that as a Bulgarian, I was considered close, and having positive attitude towards the community. Therefore, some of the more intimate cultural borders were immediately subverted and I quickly became a “trusted person”. As researcher coming from the “motherland”, I was granted a higher status – that of a person belonging to a respectable institution who can help the community by shedding light on hardships in the relevant political and social circles. Therefore, many came to me and asked for “an interview”. In Kriva Palanka, my position as a Bulgarian was perceived in two ways. First, I was rarely perceived with distrust for my national origin even though many have faced hostile attitudes from Bulgarians over the years (consequence of the “Macedonians are Bulgarians” narrative). Secondly, based on my anthropological traits<sup>9</sup>, people often perceived

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paper’s limitations, I will discuss it only briefly. When approached, most women both in Serbia and Macedonia would answer in a similar fashion: “I don’t understand anything of politics, ask my husband/boyfriend/man”, despite of my re-assurance that we can talk on any aspect of their daily lives, avoiding politicization. Topics of double citizenship, passports, identity, economic situation were perceived by most as highly political/party related (due to the media and political discourses in both countries as evident from the interview with Dimitrov) – spheres usually perceived as male prerogative. Additional concerns, especially in Macedonia, were rising from the worry the authorities (Bulgarian or Macedonian) will suspend the double citizenships if there is too much “fuss” or that Bulgaria will eventually use these “new citizens” to claim a “minority” in the country. Therefore, for fear of information manipulation, or of being heard “by the wrong people”, many young people refused to formally speak (often motivated as – “I don’t bother myself with these matters”). This attitude led to a lot of conversations done in an informal setting – in cafes, restaurants, or bars. Recording or note-taking during our conversations was often not permitted by my informants.

<sup>9</sup> This follows a widely spread belief for the origin of the proto-Bulgarians, who are said to be Tatars in the

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<sup>8</sup> Based on my observations and interviews, I find the main reason for this to be the patriarchal structure underlining the societies’ intra-group relations and consecutively stratifying the public sphere. Despite the topic’s undoubted importance, due to the

me as “their girl” (“*nashe momice*”). Further, my “ancestry” (“*poteklo*”), my great-grandfather was an honoured Macedonian revolutionary, made individuals more comfortable with me and thus more likely to confide. For the younger respondents, I represented an opportunity to gain a friend from the country which citizenship they strive to acquire.

### **Theoretical Framework: Dual Citizenship and Identity**

Over the past two decades, the classical view of citizenship as sacred (Brubaker 1989) territorial, social and identity-exclusive is said to be in decline, becoming “overlapping and portable” (Harpaz and Mateos, 2018: 1). Its “post-exclusive” nature marks “post-territorial turn” in citizenship with many living outside their countries of birth and possessing dual citizenships (ibid 2018). An important role for these processes has the “lightening” of the symbolic value of citizenship (Joppke 2010) leading to its growing “instrumentalization” (Joppke 2018) by the population seeking to profit economically, gain access to “global mobility, a sense of security or even higher social status”. In that context, Harpaz and Mateos define a new “*strategic citizenship*” approach as the bottom-up “instrumental practices pertaining to the acquisition and use of citizenship, along with a concomitant *instrumental-strategic attitude to nationality*” (see also Joppke 2010, emphasis mine), underlining the “key role of global inequality in shaping the meaning and value of citizenship” (2018: 1-2). In a globalized world, where mobility and movement are crucial, dual citizenship becomes a valuable strategy to bypass any constraints (like visa regimes). This leads to inevitable changes in national identity and identifications of the dual passport-holders.

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Macedonian history textbooks and some academic literature.

### *Youth and Young Adults, Culture and Migration in a Globalized World*

The collapse of state socialisms in Eastern Europe, coupled with challenges posed by the globalizing world, left young people exposed to a socio-economic transition. This resulted in political changes and worldwide tendencies of labour market fragmentation, limited job and housing options, populism and rising nationalism, migration – forced and otherwise, etc. These circumstances have made young people nowadays unquestionably different than any other generation before them (Trost and Mandic 2018; Trost 2018), having more fragmented and contested identities in comparison to the “former more gated subcultural” generations (Schwartz and Winkel 2016: 16). Due to the plethora of choices young generations now face with regard to travel, lifestyle, fashion, music, etc., their value systems are changing or in other words, their values are now formed not only under the influence of their families and communities, but also under the impact of external stimuli. Culture becomes inherently multifaceted and fluctuating, largely context-dependent and dynamic, thus complicating the individual’s self-perceptions – which must be “constantly negotiated and repositioned between local places and global spaces” (Schwartz et al) and their relations home and abroad (Van Meijl 2008: 166).

Migration becomes part of everyday life – online and offline, while travel is becoming more and more accessible to the growing number of people. Motives range – from practical (looking for employment) to cultural (“change in lifestyle, as represented in [multiple] global media”) (Van Meijl 2008: 166). It also evokes consequences more “far-reaching” than ever before, due to its “changed scale and diversity” (Van Meijl 2008:172). A large part of the literature on youth and migration examines “push and pull” factors that lead to migration decision. In the region investigated in this article a “culture of migration”, where migratory behaviour “extends throughout a community”, “increasingly enters the calculus of conscious choice and eventually becomes nor-



mative" (Kandel and Massey 2002: 982), exists alongside global trends. In this paper, I focus on an insufficiently explored question: What is the *intent of migration* and its possible effect on ethnic identifications? When such *intent* is turned into "*standby*" migration, how does it alter the ethnic identifications *prior any actual migration at the point of origin*?

Young people face increased uncertainty due to globalization, dynamic political changes, cultural complexity, divergent narratives of modernity and unpredictability of the future and failure of the states, globally and in the region, to provide adequate social conditions (Hermans and Dimaggio 2007). "Over-information" not only implies a sense of lack of control over multitude of phenomena and events, but "openness and comparing one's own life to people who are better off might produce a psychological threat to people's social identities" (Pratto 2017: 6). Furthermore, over-information causes growing individualism among young people in the region I research, and also compels them to adopt a "take the situation in their own hands" mentality in order to gain access to the life they want.

#### *Borders. Identities, Ethnic Identities.*

In this article, borders are generally understood in Frederik Barth terms (1969), in their socio-anthropological dimension – on cultural, ethnic and political level. In his classic work, Barth argues that maintaining the boundaries between ethnic units through "continued dichotomization between members and outsiders", guarantees borders' sustainability. Now it is recognized that ethnicity is highly "dynamic, hybrid and processual" (Mandic and Trost 2018: 3), or as Brubaker notes: identity (ethnic or national) must be analysed in "relational, processual, dynamic, eventful, and disaggregated terms" (as in *ibid.* 3). Many scholars are engaged in a debate on the analytic usefulness of "identity", which has been "over-conceptualized" and therefore vague (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, Brubaker 2004, Malešević 2006), and thus suggesting a shift towards "identification" and "classification" (Maxwell 2018).

Scholarly approaches have gradually abandoned the idea of borders being simple (physical) dividing lines. Emerging under opposing forces and divergent narratives, borders are understood as "translated into motion between separated entities" in a globalizing context (Konrad 2015:1), leading to their uncoupling from the "national scale" and linking to "identity and belonging *within and beyond the state*" (*ibid.* 3). Additionally, a greater "tension builds as result between the demarcation of boundaries and the articulation of mobility" (*ibid.* 4). Brambilla suggests that the concept of *borderscapes* unveils the processual nature of borders, "viewed as dynamic social processes and practices of spatial differentiation" (2015:15). Therefore, the notion marks their fluid and shifting nature "continuously traversed by a number of bodies, discourses, practices, and relationships" relentlessly (re)defining the symbolic borders from within and from the outside (*ibid.*19). Thus, borders become a definition for both exclusion and inclusion; simultaneous obstacles to be overcome and opportunity-providers used and adapted by the borderlanders for their own ends (Rumford 2008); places of constant (re)negotiation of social, cultural and political boundaries. Such "transitional spaces" are becoming "an interstitial zone of displacement and deterritorialization that shapes the identity of the hybridized subject"- *borderlands*, unlinking the previously unquestioned relation of spaces and fixed identities (Gupta and Ferguson 1992:18).

#### **Case Background**

The border region between Serbia, Macedonia, and Bulgaria can be found in the Balkan ethnographic and historic literature under the name of *Shopluk*<sup>10</sup>. Despite showing "some common and stable cultural traits" the region's turbulent history over the past 140 years has led to a five-fold change of borders and national affiliations,

<sup>10</sup> The ethno-historical region remains understudied, as the name origin and clear territory remain largely undefined, (more in: Hristov 2004; Malinov 2008).

leaving the population divided between three national states and different national identities (Hristov 2015: 33). During the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the region was characterised by a temporary male labour migration, which significantly influenced the local cultural system; it changed family and kin structures, specific traditional folk calendar, synchronised with the absence of men.

Following the changing character and destinations of male labourers during different historical periods, Hristov (2015) differentiates four phases in the migration patterns in *Shopluk*. The *first* phase is characterised by agrarian seasonal migration from mountains to valleys (ibid. 35), which ended with the Balkan wars (1912-1913) the dissolution of the Ottoman empire, and the setting of new political boundaries, which separated the region. The *second* phase (beginning of XIX c.) is characterized by seasonal labour migration of builders (especially from the region of Tran, Bosilegrad, Kriva Palanka, Kratovo), caused by the “widespread economic desolation and insecurity” following the dissolving of the Ottoman agricultural system (2015: 37). The *third* phase was characterized by cross-border labour migration. After Bulgaria’s liberation in 1878, Sofia became the preferred destination for builders from the Tran and Tsaribrod’s region and the remaining in the Ottoman empire – Kratovo and Kriva Palanka (Hristov 2004: 6).

In 1919, following the treaty of Neuilly-sur-Seine, the territories of Strumitsa (nowadays Macedonia), Bosilegrad, Tsaribrod (Dimitrovgrad) – then in Bulgaria, were annexed to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. A large part of the border was mechanically drawn running through houses, graveyards, house yards, often leaving families separated. The arbitrary drawing of borders marked collective memory and became a source and basis of the Bulgarian identity in Bosilegrad. This identity incorporated two narratives: the tragic separation from the motherland, and its resulting abandonment. Feelings of being “forgotten”, together with the favourable conditions in the Yugoslav period legitimized a strong Yugoslav identity and led to

the subversion of the Bulgarian identity. This narrative inconsistency passed on from generation to generation is one of the explanations nowadays for the divided loyalties among the young people as we will see later on in the presented results.

Balkan wars and WWI led to newly-formed states and complicated political environment on the Balkans. Border restrictions marked the collapse of the traditional trans-border migration and its re-structuring during the *fourth* phase (Hristov 2015: 42-3). After the establishment of the socialist regimes and the rapid industrialization of the 1950s, migration turned inwards to the big cities where most workers finally settled (ibid. 43). The end of 1960s was marked by bilateral agreements signed by Yugoslavia allowing for guest workers (*gastarbeiters*) to seek employment in Western Europe, this time transforming the labour migration and its general direction towards Central and Western-European countries. This policy, exceptional for a socialist country, brought fame to the Yugoslav passport. Other Eastern European countries, among others, recognized the Yugoslav passport for its “powerful status” which allowed for free border crossing and travel in search of economic prosperity. For both Serbians and Macedonians, the comparison between the unfavourable situation of family and friends in Bulgaria and the prestige of Yugoslavia, the relative freedom and economic wellbeing of its citizens, became a powerful memory and a source for Yugonostalgia. Older respondents expressed this longing through stories of the border meetings which brought bitter feelings when compared to their current socio-economic situation and the “reversal of positions” with Bulgaria. Annually, such meetings (*sabor, svidzanje*) meant to reunite separated kin, were organized at different places along the border (more in Germanov et al. 2015). Historically (until 1989), these meetings had an influential role in the life of the local population as they transformed from emotional social encounters to important trading points for deficient goods, as well as smuggling and some illegal activities.

Logically, with the events surrounding the dissolution of the federation in the 1990s, many felt trapped in their newly formed independent states. One generation, who once knew visa-free travels, was now faced with a visa-imposed reality required for 198 countries and administrative areas (Risteski 2014: 81) until the visa liberalization in December 2009 (European Commission 2009). Furthermore, following international sanctions, the decade brought challenges to Macedonia and Serbia. In the period 1991-1995, Serbia was under UN embargo, re-implemented in 1998, which left the country with a struggling economy and exceptionally high poverty levels. Between 1994 -1995 Macedonia was under Greek embargo due to the so called "name dispute". Despite the devastating effect that these sanctions had on the countries, societies and economies, border towns flourished during this period through illegal activities (most prominently petrol smuggling). These periods led to the establishment of two current everyday life strategies: the forming of smuggling channels, as well as the re-establishment of family ties, new connections, and friendships (business and personal). Economic inconsistencies between Bulgaria, on the one hand, and Serbia and Macedonia, on the other, turned the border into advantage – used by locals in the past and present in times of economic struggle.

After Bulgaria's accession to the European Union in 2007, the border kept its vital role for the towns' economies. While this created differences in the price ranges and standards of living, locals continued to use the well-established patterns of illegal activities (*shvertsa*), such as trading across the border anything from cigarettes and alcohol to clothes and electronics. To overcome the economic disproportion (corresponding to the interdependent borderlands as in Martínez 1994: 8–9) between the countries, the population at the tripoint also engaged in strategic identity appropriation, instrumentalizing ethnicity to gain access to the side of the border deemed to be providing a prospect for a better future. Moreover, for the population in the two

surveyed regions, the receipt of Bulgarian passports became one of the most convenient ways to restore previous freedom of movement.

Culic argues that some Eastern European countries "may have had or still have unresolved or unsettled territorial disputes with former federal units or their inheritors". Therefore, their policies aim to "rectify past injustices" to citizens left outside of the territory of their "mother country", as in the case of the Bulgarian minority in Serbia, even at the price of taking "unfavourable stances towards dual citizenship" (2009:10). The contemporary naturalization policy of Bulgaria is not designed to resolve demographic or work force problems of the country, but to "win some symbolic battles over the past with neighbouring countries as well as to mobilise domestic voters" (Smilov 2008: 230-1). The main target in this is Macedonia, where the concept of "Bulgarian by origin" assumes that there are ethnic Bulgarians living in the country (ibid. 231).

Due to the specific approach of Bulgaria towards Macedonia and Serbia as having "historically formed Bulgarian communities beyond state's borders" (Ministerski savet 2008:10) the procedure for acquiring citizenship was shortened several times. Currently, the only requirements for applicants are to be eighteen years or older, to have no criminal convictions at a Bulgarian court, and to be of Bulgarian origin. According to the statistics provided by the Office of the Bulgarian President, in the period from 2007 – 2017, Macedonians maintained the leading position by acquiring the largest number of citizenships (58,977). They are closely followed by Serbia among the top five countries with 5,610 applicants (Administratsia 2017). There has been a lot of speculation about the validity of this information, particularly with regard to Macedonia (since Serbia has officially recognized Bulgarian minority) by residents of the border area, claiming that more than 80% of Macedonians have Bulgarian passports; media and Bulgarian officials insist that more than 200,000 Macedonians have them (see Hristova 2017a).

**Case I: Bosilegrad, Serbia**

Rural mountain areas in the southeast parts of Serbia are traditionally the least developed in the country, and they are characterized by rapid population decline, relative isolation, and inaccessibility (Miljanović et al. 2010: 259). Approximately 70% of the Bulgarian minority in Serbia is in the two municipalities — Bosilegrad and Dimitrovgrad. According to the Serbian Development Agency (Serbian Development 2016), Bosilegrad is among the five most underdeveloped municipalities with a 48.65% unemployment rate. Most people are employed in the administrative structures (58%), about 10.5% are in the industry (wood processing, textile, mining), trade – 7.1%, building – 1.6% (Ofitsialna stranitsa). Bosilegrad has poor connection with other major urban centres. Even though an international road runs through the town which connects Surdulitsa-Bosilegrad-Kyustendil, the road is in subpar condition, which furthers the isolation and underdevelopment of the town and its surroundings.

According to Raduski, the period of 1991 – 2002 was marked by major changes in the ethnic composition of Serbia due to the migration waves following the dissolution of Yugoslavia (2011:385). In the same period, the ethnically undefined population has doubled (2007: 84). An established tendency in the decrease of the Bulgarian minority population is evident in all census data<sup>11</sup>. Simultaneously, the number of those

who identify themselves as Serbs has increased, while the Yugoslavs (often explained as ethnic mimicry) have decreased, a fact that Raduski attributes to the merging of the two (2011:392). It is interesting to note that, according to the last census in 2012, just over 14% of the population of the municipality has not declared its ethnicity (Obshtina Bosilegrad 2011).

An interesting representation of the coexistence of Bulgarian and Serbian histories is seen on one of the two main streets (“Marshal Tito” and “Georgi Dimitrov”) in Bosilegrad – a monument of the Bulgarian national hero Vasil Levski (built by Bulgarian companies and citizens) and a fountain reading: “With great love for the citizens of Bosilegrad – 8.09.2006” (built by the Municipality; the date is celebrated for the “liberation of Bosilegrad from the Bulgarian fascist occupation”). The social space of the town is intersected by numerous contradicting narratives and boundaries – social, political, ideological, national. The “banal” replication of the past marks a town in a temporal vacuum with an aging population, situated on the very edge between two states, two systems and two ethnic groups.

The political picture in Bosilegrad points to a deep social gap, seen in the split opinion of the population with respect to the town mayor Vladimir Zahariev<sup>12</sup> from the Democratic Party of Serbia<sup>13</sup>. Zahariev has been a mayor for the past 16 years and, according to many locals, he has

<sup>11</sup> Demographic and ethnic data for Bosilegrad Municipality (Savezni zavod... 1961; 1971; 1981; 1991; Republički zavod 2002; 2011).

<sup>12</sup> Vladimir Zahariev is also Chairman of National Council of the Bulgarian National Minority in Serbia, established following the law adopted in 2009.

<sup>13</sup> He left it in 2016 after establishing his own party.

Ethnicity	1961	1971	1981	1991	2002	2011
Bulgarian	-	-	-	-	7,037	5,839
Serbian	291	292	616	1,165	1,308	895
Macedonian	40	58	49	-	42	38
Roma	1	13	10	3	-	162
Muslim	-	1	1	10	-	-
Yugoslav	2	255	3,976	1,649	288	20
Others (Montenegrins, Croats, Albanians, etc.)	27	27	14	11	-	Note: Not stated 1110
Total	18,368	17,306	14,196	11,644	9,931	8,129

monopolized the political, social, and economic sphere at the small town. His name is often seen in the headlines of local and Bulgarian media with allegations of corruption or inappropriate behaviour. Reportedly, the Bulgarian administration “broke ties” with him for “leading personal and vague politics”, including “abuse of power related to Bulgarian citizenship procedures” (BGNES 2018). My respondents shared stories of political pressure around local elections, voter manipulation, and repercussions if they were “against” him (such as: “dropping out” from citizenship lists; their children to be removed from the quotas for the Bulgarian universities – as these are in the municipality’s prerogatives). One of his most prominent opponents is the Culture and Information Center of the Bulgarian Minority in Bosilegrad (CICBMB). The competition between Zahariev and the Centre divides the town along political, ideological and cultural lines. For example, for years there have been two celebrations of 24<sup>th</sup> of May (The day of the Slavonic Alphabet and Bulgarian Culture) and two ceremonies at the monument of V. Levski – one of each “group”.

The specific power relations in the town and in the region are verbally expressed in the phrase “Bulgarian by profession”, often used to mark an “internal other” by the townsmen in both big Bulgarian minority towns at the border. It is used by the inhabitants of Dimitrovgrad for those of Bosilegrad, meaning they “always complain about their miserable situation as forgotten and alienated” (X.<sup>14</sup>, 40), but do not work to improve it. Conversely, it is used by Bosilegrad’s residents in accusation of the Dimitrovgrad townsmen for instrumentalizing their Bulgarian identity to financially profit from the Bulgarian projects. When used by CICBMB for Bosilegrad’s mayor and “his people”, it marks their abuse of the system; the same accusation goes both ways. “Professionalized Bulgarians” are those who use their political and social status for their own purpose, unlike those who work *for* the community and

its better life. This phrase, when used, always signals another social, political and cultural demarcation line, designating a complex system of societal functioning.

### Findings

Bosilegrad was practically empty in the summer of 2016. A girl I met in one of the small grocery stores offered an explanation: most of the young people stay in Bulgaria where they work in Sofia or at the seaside or are on vacation there; others join their families for summer work abroad. Bosilegrad is a town with one of the highest rates of unemployment state-wise and a very limited labour market, and it offers no opportunity for its young citizens. Alexandra, 21, concluded: “*You have to save yourself – there is no life, no prospect, no future*”. Additionally, the students do not have the appropriate socializing infrastructure – no opportunities for after-school activities, no safe social spaces, cinemas or sports halls (except for the several restaurants in the town centre where adults would gather to drink, smoke, and dine). Boredom negatively affects life-evaluation of young people, forcing them to compare their situation with that of their counterparts who study on the other side of the border – in Kyustendil:

*She [his mom] is sorry [to not let him study in Kyustendil] because she sees how well S. is doing in school – it is a good school, more advanced, he has new friends. It is very bad here! There are no new acquaintances; everything is the same old you know. School here is bad. I see how my cousin in Vienna and even S. [who studies in Kyustendil] are studying much more, and it is much harder for them. Here you don’t need to do much to have good grades. [Anton, 17]*

According to *Provision 103 of the Council of Ministers dated 31.05.1993*<sup>15</sup>, the Bulgarian state covers student taxes, the dormitory, and canteen payments of Bosilegrad and Dimitrovgrad

<sup>14</sup> Names and initials have been changed.

<sup>15</sup> Provision 103 regulates the educational activities of the Republic of Bulgaria in regard to foreign citizens and individuals without citizenship who are of Bulgarian origin (*narodnost*) and live in Bulgarian communities abroad. (ПОСТАНОВЛЕНИЕ № 103 1: 1993).



students. While education in Serbia is paid, in Bulgaria students can live relatively well without having to pay for their education or accommodations. Consequently, most families choose to send their children to Bulgaria after high-school. In rare cases this decision is motivated by patriotic feelings towards the “motherland”; it is, instead, just a pragmatic step with the final objective being an “escape plan” from their home region and to secure a training in higher education<sup>16</sup>. Fewer students chose to stay in Serbia to study in Nis or Belgrade. Some of my respondents claim that the decision to stay in Serbia is motivated by students’ “surbianized”<sup>17</sup> family background. A third, in my opinion, much smaller group, stays within the region to work in the re-opened lead and zinc mine in the nearby village of Karamanitsa, or after gaining Bulgarian citizenship, to work as builders in Serbia or in Western Europe (predominantly Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Spain, etc.).

Some of my younger respondents were sarcastic about their peers’ strategies to immerse themselves in the Bulgarian society, or to get a passport:

*Aim? Of course! The first example I can give is with most of the people who sign up to study in Bulgaria. Until they are eighteen, until 12<sup>th</sup> grade, they walk around “wrapped in the Serbian flag”. But then the period for ranking the good students who are to go to study in Bulgaria comes and they practically “bulgarize” themselves to a point when they “drain their brain” from the effort. After they receive their [university] diploma it all goes back the same way, but they don’t return here for already obvious for you reasons. They stay in Bulgaria.*

Life at the border and the feeling of being “in-between” two states and their societies, gives

<sup>16</sup> It is also fair to note that both in Bosilegrad and Kriva Palanka it is perceived that the Bulgarian universities are providing low-grade education and it is thus relatively easy to receive a diploma from one of these institutions. Using their minority status, Bosilegrad’s young people are reporting to receive more attention and less pressure from the professors.

<sup>17</sup> Individuals who have been under strong Serbian cultural and political influence and have consequently started to present themselves as Serbs or express openly pro-Serbian positions.

the Bulgarian minority the chance to manoeuvre its multiple identities as a life-strategy in times of hardship. As I have argued elsewhere (Hristova 2017; Hristova2017a) the life stories of the Bosilegrad borderlanders provide an overview of identity shifts of the society. For example, in the early periods following 1919 until the 1960s, a clear trace of minority’s affiliation with Bulgaria as a beloved kin-state can be seen. It was also due to the fact that most of the actual coevals of the traumatic events from the beginning of the century were still telling their stories and nurturing an emotional relationship with their “lost motherland”. Soon after the Tito regime was established, and the times became “calmer”, the Yugoslav identity became leading for the minority for different reasons. Many felt part of the Yugoslav nations – more secure, loyal to the “country which has provided them with all they had” (a common expression; now used in terms of Serbia) and which was much more powerful and desired even by their relatives across the border. At this point, Bulgaria, being much poorer and conservative than Yugoslavia, was recognized as the state that abandoned them. In the late 1980s, after the first signs of forthcoming dissolution of the federation, the picture started to change. Many felt that “this is not their war, so why should they fight for Serbia, they are after all Bulgarians” (Boyan, 45). In the 1990s, following the initiative of the people from the region, the Bulgarian state launched a new policy of support for the minority. This contributed to the population’s adoption of new positive attitude towards their homeland. The accession to the European Union in 2007 restored the prestige of Bulgaria for them.

Although these identity shifts can be followed linearly, there are also much more conflicted layers of the minority identity. An example is the dubious ethnic self-identification of *bosilegradcani* (but also of the citizens of Dimitrovgrad), following external categorization:

*When we go to Kyustendil, they say “Here are the Serbs again!”, but when we go to Surdulitsa [a nearby Serbian town] they say: “Here are the*

*Bulgarians again!”. So, we say: from Surdulitsa towards Belgrade there are Serbs, from Kyustendil to here – there are Bulgarians. [Stefan, 31]*

Therefore:

*Some say as joke: “When we go to Bulgaria – we are Bulgarians, when we go to Serbia – we are Serbs”. [Anton, 17]*

The complicated minority identity/self-identification system is preconditioned by positions ascribed to them and ascribed by them. Since *bosilegradcani* are a national minority in Serbia, the concepts of citizenship, nationality and ethnicity do not coincide. Often in conversations they would refer to me as “you, the Bulgarians” or “they, the Bulgarians” establishing boundaries with me, which should be by presumption “theirs”. On many occasions my interlocutors would also speak about “there, in Bulgaria” and “there, in Serbia”, creating the heterotopic existence of their own space as a place of “otherness”, of non-belonging and of people who are “half Bulgarian, half Serb” (a main way of the young people to describe themselves, especially in Dimitrovgrad, but in Bosilegrad, too) /“Bulgarians, but not exactly” (most of my older respondents). Therefore, they have a specific “us” self-identification, differentiating them both from their co-ethnics and the Serbians. Divided between the locality, making them “different”, combined with their specific dialect<sup>18</sup>, the Serbian educational system and strong Bulgarian identity narrative, they shift identification to respond to many and ever-changing Others.

According to the context, identity is used strategically to provide the individuals with a “fitting” image for their respective social environment. A main marker of being “a Serbian/Bulgarian” is their use of language, with which the minority would cross ethnic boundaries. Their unbal-

anced education in both mother and national language often ruins “the disguise” in both situations (A., 24) facilitating the feeling most young people have – the simultaneous belonging and non-belonging to neither Bulgarians, nor Serbians. In such gated community – temporally but also infrastructurally, economically and politically delineated from the rest of the country – the divisions along ethnic lines are nurtured mainly in the families, providing the reproduction of divided loyalties.

### Case II: Kriva Palanka, Macedonia

Kriva Palanka is located at the Northeast region of the country, twelve kilometres from *Deve Bair* border crossing, and is considered to be the main region connecting the country with its neighbour, Bulgaria. European corridor G-8 passes through the town connecting Skopje with Sofia. Because of the close proximity to the border, trade (legal as well as the illegal) is well developed, and so is “food” and cultural tourism. Many Bulgarians do their weekly and monthly grocery shopping in Kriva Palanka due to the shared understanding that the food is cheaper and of better quality in Macedonia. Many of them, including organized touristic groups, also visit the “St. Joakim Osogovski” Monastery. Located two kilometers from the town, it attracts many cross-border tourists (Hristova 2014).

Near the town there are two industrial sites – the mines “Toranica” and “Bentomak”, a textile manufacture, etc. The employment rate in the Municipality is among the lowest in the country – 32.0% (Регионите во Македонија 2017:120), while the unemployment rate reaches 42.2%, 18.5% higher than the national average and the highest among the eight regions (Drzhaven zavod 2017: 34). For the entire region, about 41% of the unemployed do not have secondary education diploma, 33% have high school diploma and only 10% have a university degree (Trenovski et al. 2016: 13). Employees in the informal economic sphere have similar percentage to the national one, about 22% (for the aged between 25 and 54). In this respect, the age groups over

<sup>18</sup> Bulgarian linguistic literature marks the dialect as belonging to the group of the so called “transient” dialects marking the linguistic boundary between the languages. The local dialect was called *Shopski* and most respondents would describe it as “something in-between Bulgarian, Serbian and Macedonian”.

65 and of 15 – 24 show the highest levels of 80% and 45%, respectively. The region has a predominantly young population (ibid. 15) and an ethnically homogeneous profile with Macedonians accounting for about 97% of the population<sup>19</sup>.

The end of 2017 led to a change in Macedonia with SDSM winning most of the local elections against VMRO-DPMNE – voter turnout not predicted by any opinion polls. Arsenko Aleksovski (VMRO-DPMNE), mayor of Kriva Palanka for two mandates, lost to Borjanco Micevski (SDSM). According to the Macedonian Center for International Cooperation (MCMS) the former is ninth of the ten wealthiest candidates in the country prior to the elections. Aleksovski, who led the elections list in 2013, declared over € 1.5 million (Либертас 2017). Four different criminal investigations of abuse of political position and power were launched against him before the elections (TV 24 2018). Moreover, due to “serious indications of illegal and dubious activities”, which led to accruing MKD 55 million (about € 900,000) in debt, the new mayor urges an independent audit agency to investigate the Municipality’s documents for the previous year (Либертас 2017a).

During my research, the dominance of VMRO in the social and political sphere was incontrovertible. Everyone praised local and central authorities, and the city’s landscape was marked with many graffiti stating the party’s election number from the lists from previous elections and posters of their candidates. The brand new Virginia stars in front of the Municipality were an alarming reminder of Skopje’s central urban

parts. Conversely, traces of opposition were also evident. Months after the “Colorful Revolution” in Skopje, the Kriva Palanka City Hall still had traces of colorful “bombs” reminding of the events even here – at the very “edge of the state”. “Vandals!”, the old man who guarded the building exclaimed to me. People were not happy to discuss controversial topics such as the wiretapping scandal or even “Skopje 2014”. As I mentioned earlier, the fear of discussing politics and the local and state VMRO party structures was evident. A young man told me his father (who was at a high administrative position, and thus connected to the party) physically threatened one of his teachers, “*because he was being too hard on him*”. Everyone who held a public or administrative position was part of the party structure. This was the case with Y., 43, who shared: “*Here if you are not with them [VMRO] you cannot even come close to my position*”.

### Findings

During the summer of 2016, cafes were full of people throughout the day – an image hardly corresponding to the astoundingly high levels of unemployment in the municipality. Nevertheless, “help needed” signs, placed on the windows of almost every café and shop, remained unanswered. When I asked Igor, age seventeen, why he wouldn’t take such a job but is considering going to Slovenia or Italy as soon as he finishes high-school instead, he answered:

*It’s not a matter of having absolutely no job positions. It’s a matter of how much they pay you... You work for 8-9-10 hours as a waiter and they pay you what? 6000-7000 denars [around 100-120 euro] a month. You can’t afford anything. Here you can’t*

<sup>19</sup> Demographic and ethnic data for the town of Kriva Palanka (Republic of Macedonia 1948-2002).

	Total	Macedonians	Albanians	Turks	Roma	Vlachs	Serbs	Bosniaks	Others
1948	1,967	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1953	2,539	2,009	3	81	336	0	70	-	40
1961	2,844	2,360	1	12	-	-	60	-	411
1971	4,955	4,301	6	16	369	-	118	-	145
1981	8,860	8,243	0	9	297	0	120	-	191
1991	11,271	10,517	0	1	479	1	122	-	151
1994	11,166	10,538	0	0	506	2	65	-	55
2002	14,558	13,758	0	2	668	2	88	1	39

*even go out much. We used to have a disco, now we have only the casino. To go out we have to go to Blagoevgrad [a relatively big Bulgarian border town]. You must save yourself and go abroad.*

Social media and the contact of young people with their families and friends abroad, give them a clear idea of the “dream life”, where you work, and live “as a normal person”. The accumulation of information creates a positive narrative about the migrant experience abroad associated with the image of “the West”. In my conversations with the young citizens of Kriva Palanka, almost all of them were already preparing to leave the town and the country. They described “the West” primarily based on the stories of migrants already living abroad and on social media publications. They considered economic and social well-being self-evident through migrants’ material possessions, such as expensive cars and branded clothes, demonstrated during their visits back home. This “imagined West”, built on the hopes and dreams of better job opportunities, more money, good quality of life, for some – even better education, was a counterpoint of their own disappointing reality<sup>20</sup>. As David, a forty-three year-old school teacher explained:

*Unfortunately, this is a big problem [talking about the passports]. From an economic point of view, young Macedonians between eighteen and twenty think that there, in the European Union, money is falling from the sky. So, they follow the lead and take Bulgarian passports, as this is the only way to go there.*

Plans to go to the “Promised Land” became an indication that young people “take their lives in their hands” and want to prosper, unlike those who remain. For most of my respondents,

choosing the country for provisional migration depends mostly on the size of wages, regardless of the standard of living. Promising narratives of life abroad are insufficiently discussed; aspects like the poor conditions in which many people live in order to save as much money as possible are omitted from conversation. Therefore, young people build high expectations with very little concrete information about their countries of choice. Even more importantly, young people do not want to know more, indicating the “anticipation” of which Merton (1968) speaks. The words of Darko, nineteen, sum up the attitudes of his peers:

*I don't want to study anymore... I just want money [What about the language then? – M.] Well, everyone learns it when they start working there. At least they know enough to get around. My uncle works in a construction brigade and I will probably go live with him...He is in Germany now. But I want a restaurant job or something like that...*

The lack of motivation to become an active part of the prospective society marks the migratory attitude of young people and points to the possible low levels of inclusion if migration is successful. Mobility (labour, permanent or other) becomes an escape plan for young people who are deeply dissatisfied with the current state of affairs in their country, without any prospects for improvement in the near future. Many young people, especially those who do not aim at commencing undergraduate studies, rely predominantly on the social capital they have (family and friendship) to provide them with the necessary environment in the new country.

Young people in Kriva Palanka, ages eighteen to twenty-five, found it very important to show me their positive attitude towards Bulgaria or the Bulgarians, or even better: to show that we are not so different. They often approached me, jokingly asking if I have “good and pretty” girlfriends who would like to marry a Macedonian. This became a common “icebreaker” in the conversations with young *krivopalancani*. Part of their rationale was that a possible marriage would shorten the long wait for passport acquirement.

<sup>20</sup> Counter-intuitively, most of the Kriva Palanka citizens, irrespective of their age, were EU sceptics. Their concerns are due to daily contacts with Bulgarians who were visiting the town for grocery shopping because of the quality of food and lower prices. This gave them a name among the locals: “Meat-tourists”. The fact that their neighbours prefer to travel to another country to ensure even simple supplies, raises concerns about the same outcome for Macedonia after its accession.



In my first days in Kriva Palanka, the cafés were full of young people, as the summer was approaching its end and the festival period (mainly the Monastery's Saint Patron day) was about to begin. This is when all young people come back from Skopje or their work/study abroad (often only once a year) and the streets were crowded. It was easily noticeable that I am not a local, as they have never met me, and after realizing I am Bulgarian, they would usually cheerfully say: "We are all Bulgarians here!" – piling their ID cards on the table, they invitingly said, "Come and sit with us". Of course, it was a common joke and after some time they would say that the Bulgarian passport is nothing more than an "airplane ticket" (*"Bugarski pasos e kao avion!"*- N., 21). Witticism related to the citizenship and their newly acquired status was the usual way my informants preferred to communicate on the topic. Just some fifteen years ago, as Dragan, forty-seven, told me, many were disapproving of that so *"you would keep quiet and eventually they will find out [you took Bulgarian passport] when you leave"*. On the contrary, nowadays "everyone has it" and this is the main legitimizing factor for the young people to apply for their second citizenship. Humour, nevertheless, served to outline contradictions of the topic which are still present in the social discourses. This coping strategy was the way to avoid the stigma associated with the betrayal of their own society and the categorization they considered to have been subjected to by Bulgaria and its society (respectively me). Exaggeration of the citizenship effect downplays the importance of obtaining another passport and aims to ridicule the absurdity of a situation in which they would "be ethnically transformed".

Although all my respondents claim that the process of obtaining a Bulgarian passport does not affect their own national affiliations and loyalties, it still categorizes them institutionally and therefore externally as Bulgarians. Zoki, a twenty-two year-old football player, was invited to play for a team in Western Europe. During the transfer, his Macedonian citizenship became an obstacle

for the team managers because it "was becoming very complicated", so he decided to take a Bulgarian passport to solve the problem. When I asked him if the citizenship interview made him feel "less Macedonian", he denied: *"you just say all those stupid things that you believe in the country, you love it, and you care for it and they give you the passport"*. For Zoki, and many others, obtaining a second citizenship was a way to cope with career obstacles and therefore passport for him bears no symbolic value and does not automatically imply loyalty.

### Discussion: Strategizing Identity

It has become clear that one of the main life strategies of the young people at the border in question is migration, reflected in high positive attitudes toward migration among younger generations. Shared intent of migration itself as well as the actual migratory activity in the region affects those who stay behind – high school students and young people up to age thirty-five, who still have not made a decision about their future life. People's everyday life was underlined by two main discourses: the bad conditions in the country, and in their hometowns specifically, made migration the only way of "saving oneself". Although the case cannot be treated as *forced migration*, its rationale resonates with it. Therefore, as "Thomas Theorem" indicates: "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (Merton 1968: 475). Though my respondents actively decide to migrate, they feel they are forced by the situation to do so and act consecutively.

The inability of individuals to foresee the future of their own society and country is a clear sign of a societal crisis. The group uncertainty resulting from the insurmountable difficulties of the present and disbelief that any qualitative improvement will occur over their lives enhances the longstanding mistrust in the state (whose efforts do not appear to lead to the creation of infrastructure, development or support of the development of the labour market, etc.). Except for the relatively small Roma and Serb communi-



ties in the municipality, Kriva Palanka has a fairly homogenic ethnic profile. However, the population feels that it is under a great threat from the Albanian population of Macedonia, considered to be internal ethnic “other”, aiming to overtake “their” country. This, together with the dissatisfaction with the overall economic situation and the general state of the country, “is not in favour of the civic identity” (Hrsitova, Cekik 2013: 52). This (prolonged) disgruntlement with the state leads to possible delineation of national and ethnic identity, of deterritorialization of ethnicity. In this context, the personal decision for migration is not only possible but also very likely. Migration (or intent of) becomes a part of the everyday life strategies resulting in a closed strategic mental construction: unsatisfactory economic conditions, which cause one to migrate, which would lead to a better social and economic status.

At the state borders, identities proved to be particularly permeable to the “cross – pressures” (Agnew 2008). Identities are being drawn both inward-toward the state, and outward-across borders by, sometimes relevant in their power, social, political and economic ties (such as citizenship, state nationalism, even familial ties) (Wilson, Donnan 1998: 13). Similarly, Anzaldúa (1999) conceptualizes a specific border identity at the US-Mexico frontier – the “new *mes-tiza*” – often composed of *competing narratives* and thus acting pluralistically, creating multicultural “border crossing identities”, operating at an “in-between” space – the border. In the region researched we can see two cases of such pluralistic identities developed, following Foucault (1986), in a type of heterotopic reality. On one hand, the minority at the border is living in a constructed “own” space, belonging neither to Serbia, nor to Bulgaria, creates mutable and fluid identities inhabiting the vague spaces “in-between” national and ethnic identities, state borders, internal and external “others”. On the other hand, all the processes described in Kriva Palanka create a different heterotopia – of youth at the edge of Balkan states that live both here and now, but also elsewhere – in an imaginary

future and place – “the West” – a “promised land”, which will remedy them from the disappointments of their reality.

This is what I called a *placebo identity*<sup>21</sup> – a hybrid compensatory identity, created by a signifier (“Bulgarians”, passports, even the application procedure itself, by detachment from the state and distinction between national and ethnic identity), which somehow equates the *act of search* for solution to the unsatisfactory conditions to the *solution* itself. By acting on migration intent (through the Bulgarian/EU citizenship) my respondents were already detached from the current reality and psychologically remote from their de-valued society. Becoming part of the “European inside” means they have symbolically achieved a membership in a prestigious community, which they so far were able to observe only from the margins. The opportunities it provides are now open to them to benefit at any given moment. This leads to what I call *standby migration*, characterized by their positive migratory attitude and the possibility of leaving immediately if circumstances become (more) discouraging. This standby status marks the inactive status of the community – a pending decision whether to stay or leave (to find jobs, to study, etc.). The placebo identity at that point is mimetic, caused by societal and national identity crisis, and marks the liminal status between “here” and “there” – a “remedy” (for the time being) for the unsatisfactory reality. It thus encompasses and inhabits the margins between the ethnic and civic, and compensates and masks the “shame” of the inconsistency between them and the life choices they provoke.

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<sup>21</sup> A beneficial effect produced by a placebo drug or treatment, which cannot be attributed to the properties of the placebo itself, and must therefore, be due to the patient’s belief in that treatment. Available at: [https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/placebo\\_effect](https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/placebo_effect) [Accessed: 15.01.2017]

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# “Crazy”, or Privileged Enough to Return?: Exploring Voluntary Repatriation to Bosnia and Herzegovina from “the West”

by DRAGANA KOVAČEVIĆ BIELICKI

## Abstract

This article presents the results of a small-scale research study with people who chose to repatriate to post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina from six countries of the so-called West. I analyze the narratives of the individual reasons and perceived conditions of the voluntary return, experiences, and reactions encountered, and reflections on the sustainability of such return, demonstrating that multiple important practical and emotional reasons need to come together for the return to occur and to last. The research shows the predominantly open-ended, and in many ways privileged, nature of the investigated repatriation: repatriation is a viable option only if returnees can benefit from it socially, economically and emotionally, and potential re-emigration is thus a common back-up plan. The article demonstrates the importance of examining how returnees' skills, savings, networks, and education – in addition to perceived ethno-national sameness “back home” – in understanding the reasons for and attitudes toward voluntary repatriation.

**Keywords:** Bosnia and Herzegovina, forced displacement, voluntary return/repatriation, privilege, nation-thinking.

## Introduction

At the end of the twentieth century, the displacement of population of Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereafter BiH) represented the largest so-called refugee crisis in Europe since World War II. After the devastating war (1992-1995) that followed this country's secession from Yugoslavia, forced displacement of an estimated 60% of the country's population both within and outside the borders of Bosnia and Herzegovina resulted in around 2,2 million displaced people, out of which around 1,2 million had fled across the border of the country (see Kälin 2006, Porobić 2017). Presently, more than twenty years after the end of the war, a significant diasporic community still lives outside of the borders of BiH, predominantly people who escaped the war and never managed, or wanted, to return. The consequences of forced displacement and ethnic cleansing thus continue to influence lives, and determine the

place of residence for around 2.5 million people born in BiH who are living elsewhere.

In many migrant-receiving societies, people from BiH are considered to be among the most successfully integrated immigrant groups (see Valenta and Štrabac 2013, Valenta and Ramet 2011). However, the essentially nativist and sedentarist<sup>1</sup> idea of “returning where we came from” figures prominently in discourses of numerous migrants originating from BiH (Kovačević Bielicki 2016, 2017). Various other researchers also suggest that many displaced people from BiH maintain close social ties with their country of origin (Eastmond 2006, Valenta and Rammet 2011, Povrzanović Frykman 2009, 2011, Vrecel 2010, Franz 2000, 2005, Hanlin 2010, Al-Ali 2002, Kelly 2009, Delalić 2001, Grün 2009, Halilovich 2012,

<sup>1</sup> Jansen and Löfving (2008: 45) define sedentarism as discourse prevalent in refugee studies that naturalizes the link between people and place.



Farrel 2008, Colic-Peisker 2003, 2005). The fact that many displaced people from BiH, as well as many other migrant groups in “the West” nurture ethno-nationalist identifications is most often a reaction to exclusion the dominant logic of the nation-thinking omnipresent in, and imposed by the receiving societies in which they reside.<sup>2</sup> Many migrants encounter rising xenophobia and Islamophobia. In the receiving nation-states the migrants’ belonging is highly contested, and the success of the populists all over Europe and in the United States of America is often based on the anti-migrant rhetoric. This is the case particularly for obvious racialized migrant groups in Europe (see El-Tayeb 2011). However, although research on former Yugoslav migrants in Norway (Kovačević Bielicki 2017) and Bosnians in Australia (Colic-Peisker 2005) shows how migrants from former Yugoslavia clearly benefit from a certain degree of white privilege<sup>3</sup>, many also report getting regularly ethnicized, othered, and, in many cases, racialized as well (ibid.).<sup>4</sup>

In the context of post-war BiH, the constructed division between diaspora and homeland dwellers, stayers and leavers (Halilovich 2013), is fruitful ground for researching both new social cleavages and new solidarities in the region. Micinski and Hasić (2018) point to the many new social cleavages that were created as a result of con-

flict, displacement, and repatriation, and how they intersect with ethnic identities in unique ways. Diaspora and returnees in one sense often feel significantly excluded from “fully” belonging to their perceived ethnic groups “back home” due to them often being viewed as foreign, changed, and privileged, while in another sense, their experience of migration and alterity both home and abroad create a space for building new, transnational and inter-ethnic solidarities that intersect a rough general division between migrants and non-migrants.

As such, the post-war return to BiH of Bosnians living abroad is important to look into for at least two important reasons: First, when discussing long-distance nationalism in migration studies (e.g. Anderson 1992), the myth of return is a particularly important phenomenon, common to and nurtured in many diasporic “communities” (see for example Safran 1991 and Markowitz and Stefanssen 2004) and crucially related to nativist nationalist ideologies that strictly regulate individual belonging and limit individuals’ choices. Second, in the case of BiH in particular, sustainable return to pre-war residences is also, with good reason, seen as a crucial tool needed to reverse ethnic cleansing (Phuong 2000, Cox 1998). The long-lasting unstable and unfavorable political and economic situation in BiH following the end of the armed conflict has not been encouraging to any massive and sustainable return, despite the right of all forcibly displaced persons to return, guaranteed by Annex VII of Dayton Peace Accords that brought an end to the armed conflict. Selma Porobić notes that in practice, the decision to return is subject to changing global, regional and local political influences, including pressure from sending and receiving governments and the effects of international protection politics and trends (Porobić 2017). In the case of people displaced to Northern and Western Europe, Australia and North America, what is commonly seen as Western<sup>5</sup> countries or

<sup>2</sup> By nation-thinking I here understand a specific kind of group-thinking focused on a nation as a dominant identifier and a source of group identity, by evoking Arendt’s use of the term race-thinking in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, and Calhoun’s (2007:27) definition of nationalism as a “talking, writing and thinking about the basic units of culture, politics, and belonging that helps to constitute nations as real and powerful dimensions of social life.”

<sup>3</sup> “We need to be able to name the subtle and often unspoken role that whiteness plays in systems of de facto racial injustice so that it does not become even less visible and more insidiously convoluted than it already is. The term “white privilege” attempts to make these systems visible and to decrypt their code words.” (Sullivan 2017)

<sup>4</sup> “According to Foucault, othering is strongly connected with power and knowledge. When we other(v) another group, we point out their perceived weaknesses to make ourselves look stronger or better.” (see Rismyhr 201)

<sup>5</sup> I refer in this research to the term “West” because its BCS counterpart *zapad* it is widespread and com-

*zapad*<sup>6</sup> in the everyday discourse in the region in question, the majority of the displaced people (re)built their lives and they do not consider that the return would be a favorable step for them and their families. Thousands of Bosnian refugees were forcefully repatriated back to BiH after December 1996, when UNHCR declared the end of temporary protection, and it was originally expected that the majority of the returns will be spontaneous (Walsh, Black and Koser 1999).<sup>7</sup> It was clear already in 1997 that this spontaneous voluntary return is not at all massive, and many countries, most notably Germany, initiated and conducted so-called assisted return programs through which people were often repatriated against their own wishes.<sup>8</sup>

According to Al-Ali, Black, and Koser (2010) Bosnian refugees from the 1990s that have "stayed on" after the end of conflicts and reside all over the world, are new and emerging "transnationals". As noted earlier, in many countries former Bosnian refugees have obtained permanent residence rights and (re)built their lives. This is the case particularly for the new generations of people who grew up abroad, having escaped the war while they were children and young adults, and for those born abroad to parents who were refugees. The main trend seems to be for these young and relatively young gen-

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mon word in BiH used to refer to countries in Northern and Western Europe, North America and Australia. What is considered Western or not, where, and why, is a highly contextual and complex issue, for which reason I tend to put the English term in quotation marks.

<sup>6</sup> All words and sentences in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian language (hereafter BCS) in this article will be written in *cursive*.

<sup>7</sup> In this article I use the term repatriation interchangeably with return, which is particularly useful as defined by the Merriam Webster online dictionary, where it is stated that **repatriate** means to restore or return to the country of origin, allegiance, or citizenship (Merriam Webster online 2018). Re-emigration is here used to refer to the case when people who repatriate once again move back to the host country they repatriated from, or emigrate to another country.

<sup>8</sup> Before repatriations, Germany temporarily hosted what is commonly assessed to as many as 350,000 refugees from BiH.

erations to get education, work abroad and to not return to the country of origin, based on my insights from last seven years of intense research on migrants from former Yugoslavia. Voluntary return from those countries that did not undertake any extensive forced repatriation of Bosnian refugees is rare, but it is not an insignificant phenomenon. It is hard to quantify this return due to its open-ended and unregistered character, however there are certainly many more than a few isolated cases of people who voluntarily repatriated. Field observations and informal conversation conducted by Selma Porobić over the period of six years in BiH have shown the substantial increase in self-organized return of refugees settled in Western Europe (Porobić 2017); she labels this return as unrecorded return, as opposed to assisted and organized return. Voluntary return is largely unrecorded, precisely because it is self-organized, often open-ended, and people keep their residence abroad and often commute between the countries, thus living bi-nationally and transnationally.

The case study I present, although very limited in its scope, gives a voice directly to people who chose to return, looks into reasons why they did, and considers how sustainable they think their return can be in future. Many valuable research studies addressed different aspects of return to BiH (Porobić, 2016, 2017, Dahlman and O'Tuathail 2005, Black 2001, 2002, Jansen 2011, Halilovich 2011, Harvey 2006, Philpott 2006, Williams 2006, Čukur et al 2005). However, most of the previous literature focused on the *how* of the return dynamics, namely either on the policies and legal mechanisms available, or ways in which they are used, typically from the top-down perspective. My study directly and explicitly focuses on the *why* of the return from the bottom-up perspective, namely, on the individuals' agency and choice. Keeping in mind the fact that the majority of Bosnians abroad have refugee background and thus had very little or no choice when it came to their original emigration, the focus on their ability to return by choice confirms the resilience and empow-

erment of former refugees. In another sense, due to the importance of studying the effects of ethnic cleansing, researchers of BiH tend to discuss mainly minority return, the cases of persons returning to areas where they would now belong to the minority group (Phuong 2000). In the case study presented here, I found that voluntary returnees tend to repatriate to the areas where they are perceived as members of an ethnic majority. This holds true despite that many of them have original homes in areas dominated by another ethnic group after the war. In addition to other findings that will show how voluntary returnees seek to maximize their privilege and advantages, the practice of majority return also shows how ethno-nationalism is clearly the framework within which returnees choose to function. In that sense, whether they personally subscribe to this ideology or not, they contribute to reproducing and strengthening of the dominant framework of nation-thinking.

The main research question I pose in this study is: Why do (relatively) young, skillful and educated people displaced by war, who grew up in “the West”, return to Bosnia and Herzegovina, with a general intention to settle there? How do these returnees talk about future plans and the sustainability of their return? Through which lens do they think about their return – economic/practical or ethnic/emotional? I show throughout the analysis that, based on the interviews, the actual return happens when several practically and emotionally motivated reasons come together and make the repatriation a desirable and viable option, which will allow returnees to benefit socially and economically. In the following section, I identify a list of potential and actual reasons people return. This list is by no means exhaustive, but it composes some of the most common reasons as identified by the interlocutors. Where potential re-emigration is concerned, all of the interlocutors considered that they permanently resided in Bosnia and Herzegovina at the time when the interviews took place and had no concrete plans to re-emigrate to “the West” in the near future, but nevertheless, a large

number of these people still seemed to see their return as open-ended.

The next section provides the details on where and how the research was conducted. Following this, I present my findings. The first and main group of research relates to the reasons for return, and the experiences and feelings after return. The second group discusses the interlocutors’ views on their future residence and sustainability of their return. The last section of this article presents the conclusions.

### Methodology

The research presented in this article was originally inspired by a two-part special episode of Norwegian official public channel NRKshow *Migrapolis*<sup>9</sup> In one of the episodes aired in 2012, the host, himself a Norwegian Bosnian, interviewed young Norwegian-Bosnian professionals who voluntarily returned from Norway to post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina, with stated plans to stay, work, and live there. I decided to trace down and interview other such young, educated people who returned, not only from Norway but also other “Western” societies, and find out what inspired them to make this perceivably unexpected move. It was clear from the abovementioned TV show that people whose stories were told make active use of different skills and privileges to be able to settle in BiH and build what they personally see as good lives there. This skills and privileges that people use include, for example, foreign education, fluency in several languages, citizenship of a “Western” country, social and professional networks home and abroad, as well as financial power and security in terms of anything from their personal savings acquired while working abroad to the fact that their families are well off for one reason or another. Returnees’ unmarked ethno-national belonging comes an additional advantage that they make use of in BiH, but lack in the countries they returned

<sup>9</sup> NRK (“Norsk rikskringkasting”) Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation.

from.<sup>10</sup> I refer to this opportunity to go ethnically unmarked, together with advantages that are found in the perceived ethno-national sameness with the majority as ethno-national privilege which is a form of social capital<sup>11</sup>. Based on my research, the highly skilled voluntary returnees tend to repatriate to the areas of BiH where they are perceived as belonging to a majority ethnic group and see a clear advantage in the fact that they are seen one of the co-ethnics.

The article analyses a selection of directly quoted and retold narratives from recorded, transcribed and coded interviews. I kept a detailed fieldwork diary where I noted my observations, thus my participant observation and unrecorded conversations in the field supplement and inform my insights and analysis. The interviews were conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina in spring and fall 2013, focusing on individual return from several countries considered to be Western societies, in this case: Sweden, Norway, United Kingdom, United States of America, Italy and Switzerland. Throughout 2013, fifteen selected individuals were located and interviewed as returnees from "the West", using the snow-ball method and personal contacts. All interviewed people were naturalized refugees abroad, meaning they obtained citizenship in the countries from which they returned. I conducted interviews and fieldwork in Sarajevo and Banja Luka, while Selma

Porobić interviewed people in Sarajevo in Sarajevo Canton and surroundings, Mostar and Tuzla. The selected interlocutors were born within the span of 1965 and 1985 and were either children or young people, in their late teens and early twenties, at the time that they escaped war. Due to their age at the time of displacement, they had good preconditions to learn new languages, integrate, and socialize in their new countries. All of the interviewees were highly skilled and fairly well-educated professionals, typically with professional or university degrees.

### Findings: Reasons for Return and Post-Return Experiences

In this section I exemplify how the repatriated interlocutors narrated the main reasons for the decision to move back from six different migrant-receiving societies. The reason I repeatedly label the voluntary repatriation as unusual and unexpected because the majority of people with whom I discussed the return either claim their own or report others' surprised reaction to the fact that anyone raised, educated and settled in what they call *zapad*, "the West", would want to return to BiH.<sup>12</sup> This surprise reportedly comes from considering precariousness and economic instability that a large number of BiH's residents face, continued ethnically-framed tensions and other kinds of political tensions, and perhaps most importantly, because there are so many people who state they want to emigrate from the country. This latter claim was confirmed by my observations prior to and during this research. The "why" of the return is a crucial point in my research. Namely, the interviewees' desire to return is met by skepticism and surprise, and they are often questioned or confronted about this topic. The people interviewed reported that they were directly asked questions in the sense of "Are you crazy?" and "What were you thinking?" by the people they encountered upon

<sup>10</sup> People who return to the areas of BiH dominated by another ethno-national group than their own are certainly in a disadvantageous and challenging position. These returns to ethnically-cleansed areas are most typically assisted, and not self-organized. There were not any such cases in this concrete study, as those interlocutors who were in fact originally displaced from now ethnically-cleansed areas did not return to the towns and villages of origin, but to larger centers such as Mostar, Sarajevo, et cetera.

<sup>11</sup> This in no way means that the privilege and advantage extend to all spheres of voluntary returnees' lives, in fact, many people with whom I conversed reported numerous disadvantages, contestations, and stigmas they faced, both as diaspora members and as returnees. Diasporic identity and returnee identity and the labels attached to those are quite loaded and problematic for many people. Unfortunately, I cannot explore this complex issue in this article.

<sup>12</sup> The same fact was mentioned by several interviewees in the earlier mentioned special edition of Norwegian national TV channel NRK's show "Migrapolis" (part 1 and 2) in 2012 (NRK 2016)



the return. For example, an interlocutor stated: "No one ever told me that I was smart to return, everyone always tells me I am a fool."<sup>13</sup>

In addition to the variety of reasons the interlocutors provided for returning, even in a small sample, I also found that they prepared for their return in various ways.<sup>14</sup> Preparations ranged from a spontaneous, sudden decision to a well-prepared and premeditated move. While many interlocutors narrate how they went through a long decision-making process, and often also a long preparation phase once the decision was made, one interlocutor explicitly labels her return as an impulsive and even an irrational action: "I decided to do that impulsively, I came and I stayed. I do a lot of things without a plan, if I weren't like that I would probably never have returned, if I were to think rationally, I would have never returned."<sup>15</sup>

I identified three main groups of reasons for return:

1. Personal relationships and sociability. This group of reasons revolves around personal connections and socializing, including concrete romantic relationships, kinship and friendship, and general assessments of the quality of social and family life.
2. Nostalgia, nationalism, patriotism (including local patriotism) and similar convictions related to personal emotional attachment to a constructed group identification, place, or an idea of a place.
3. Work, career and status-related reasons, related to favorable socio-economic positioning and advantages.

<sup>13</sup> "Nikad mi niko nije rekao da sam pametan jer sam se vratio, svi mi uvijek kažu da sam budala."

<sup>14</sup> Super-diversity denotes internal diversification and complexity within diverse groups (Vertovec 2007, 2013), and I see super-diversity as relevant to acknowledge even in very small selected groups of people.

<sup>15</sup> "Implusivno sam odlučila da to uradim, došla i ostala. Dosta stvari neplanski radim, da nisam takva vjerovatno se nikad ne bih ni vratila, kada bih racionalno razmišljala ne bih se nikad vratila."

### *Personal relationships and sociability*

My previous research (Kovačević Bielicki 2016) showed many examples of how young people raised abroad follow the practice several interlocutors in that research called "dovesti nekog odozdo" (to bring someone from back home). Namely, in cases when these people get romantically involved with a person who resides back home in the "original homeland", people tend to help those partners migrate to join them abroad. This was reportedly a logical, expected step. However, some of the examples in this case study demonstrate that returnees witness that the opposite practice happens as well: a person in diaspora may repatriate in order to join a romantic partner. One of the interlocutors stated how soon after graduating from high school abroad, where she also grew up, she decided to move to Bosnia and Herzegovina, saying: "Then I enrolled into a faculty in X and met my now husband and that was a reason for return."<sup>16</sup> Her husband resided in Bosnia and Herzegovina and she moved to join him there, although, in own words, she conveyed a feeling of being socially accepted and fulfilled abroad where she grew up and resided. Besides this romantic relationship as her main reason, she, as well as numerous other interlocutors, also stressed the fact that social life is richer and public life in BiH is experienced as more active, eventful and lively than in the country from which they returned. The interlocutor in question specifically refers to streets full of people and how people get together and socialize. Other interlocutors also praise the positive atmosphere in the streets, and what they see as specific spirit of people in BiH, for example an interlocutor that said: "I realized that it was very nice here because also foreigners that come to Sarajevo and walk around Baščaršija, there is this sensation of peace, and that peace

<sup>16</sup> "Onda sam upisala fakultet u X i upoznala svog sadašnjeg muža, i to je bio razlog povratka." In this quote and in the future text, X stands for a host country a particular interlocutor returned from, in order to avoid any possibility to for any of the interlocutors to be identified based on this fact.



and serenity of soul, there is no such thing in the world."<sup>17</sup>

To illustrate, an interlocutor that returned to reside in Mostar lists many reasons why she finds it better where she is now: Most of them revolve around assessed different quality of family and social relations in the two societies, stating also that she personally never felt she fit in abroad where she lived, and felt that she missed her near family and social life in BiH. "It is all individual, I have never fit in, they are colder, we are warmer. Family was not there with me, our way of going out has nothing similar to theirs. Social life – (I was) completely unsatisfied. The kids arrived, we had no social life."<sup>18</sup>

The interlocutor did not specify whether she felt that her lack of social life in the country she returned from had to do with her being othered by the majority, or perhaps she thought that also connections between the members of majority is of a different quality due to *their* coldness. It can be speculated that her statement reflects both of these feelings: She states that she personally could not fit in, arguably and probably due to feeling excluded and being othered. At the same time, the account seems to narrate that "they" are colder in general, arguably also one to another, and not only to "the different ones". In this sense, the interlocutor's words include both an implication of being othered herself and her explicitly othering perceived members of host nation. The interlocutors' ingroup, or "we", "the Bosnians", are here contrasted to "them", the nationals of the country she returned from. The positive characteristics she attributes to the ingroup are opposed to those attributed

to the outgroup. The othering she engages in can be understood as a reaction to having been excluded by the society she returned from and the fact that belonging continues to be framed in nativist terms.<sup>19</sup>

### *Nostalgia, Nationalism, Patriotism*

For one of the interlocutors, although return was dependent upon finding a favorable job, she narrated how she purposefully looked for a job in BiH out of a desire to live in the place from which she originated. She first and foremost decided she wanted to live in what she considered her homeland, and, in the process, she looked for a job that could make this move possible. She returned, however, when she got a concrete job in an international organization: "I did not know that I would get this job, but I had a wish to work in this area. Whether it would be in five or ten years, I would probably come with another organization."<sup>20</sup> While this interlocutor links patriotic tendencies with job-related considerations into a combined main reason to return, several other interlocutors identify *čista nostalgija* (pure nostalgia) as a sole and crucial reason.

Further on, there is an example of an interlocutor's statement that intertwines what can be seen as local patriotism with explicit patriotism as his main reason(s) for a wish to resettle:

"Firstly, I love this city, I was born in it and grew up in it, I almost gave my life for it. I consider that I deserve to live in this city and for me it is nice here ... The key thing, which was the reason for my return, in my case that was patriotism, a pure love for the country and the wish to give it some of the things I have learned."<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> "Shvatio sam da je ovde veoma lijepo zato što i ljudi koji su stranci kad dođu u Sarajevo i prošetaju Baščaršijom, osjeti se jedan mir, i taj mir i ta smirenost duše, to nema u svijetu."

Baščaršija is an old bazaar in Sarajevo originating back to 15th century. It is a historical and cultural center of this city.

<sup>18</sup> "To je sve individualno, ja se nikad nisam uklopila, oni su hladniji mi smo topliji. Familija mi nije bila sa mnom, naši izlasci nisu ni slični njihovim. Socijalni život – totalno nezadovoljna. Došla su i djeca, nikakav socijalni život nismo imali."

<sup>19</sup> It is not uncommon for immigrants in "the West" to engage in strategic, grouping and othering, directly as a reaction to being regularly racialized and in other ways othered.

<sup>20</sup> "Nisam znala da ću biti primljena na ovaj posao ali sam imala želju da radim na ovom području. Da li bi to bilo onda za 5 ili 10 godina, vjerovatno bih došla sa drugom organizacijom."

<sup>21</sup> "Prvo, ja volim ovaj grad, u njemu sam se rodio i njemu sam odrastao, za njega sam zamalo život dao. Smatram da sam zaslužio da živim u ovom gradu i meni je u njemu lijepo...Ključna stvar je, šta je bio razlog povratka, kod mene je bio patriotizam, čista

Another interlocutor returned to Sarajevo already in the early 2000s, in this case also her hometown, after around seven years spent abroad. This interlocutor also explicitly identifies nostalgia as a main reason, although certainly not the only one to make such a decision.

"Total nostalgia, total... We really did come back... we all thought that it would be quite different. Since I was an asylum seeker, I was not able to travel to Bosnia and Herzegovina, and only once I got the citizenship, that was in 2000... I have not been (here) for eight to nine years, because I could not travel and that was a big shock for me. I truly felt like a foreigner, it was terrible for me, I have been dreaming of Sarajevo for years."<sup>22</sup>

In this interview in general, there was much more focus on Sarajevo as a place of longing and object of her pre-return nostalgia, than on Bosnia and Herzegovina as a country and a reference for her belonging. Being a child from a so-called ethnically mixed marriage, the interlocutor reportedly felt alienated to and annoyed by exclusive ethno-religious nationalisms now dominant in the region, particularly pronounced after the war. In her understanding, which is also not uncommon among people from Bosnia, Sarajevo is seen as different than the rest of the country in terms of tolerance and acceptance of difference, multiethnic and multicultural values, as people refer to them. The interlocutor also narrates how the vacation turned into a permanent stay without previous plan to stay exactly that time, due to the fact that she met a man who was to become her husband, which according to her own words made her "brave enough" to return and remain. This example additionally confirms that a combination of main clusters of reasons is identified as a condition for both returning and remaining.

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Ijubav prema zemlji i želja da joj dam nešto od onoga što sam naučio."

<sup>22</sup> "Nostalgija totalna, totalna..Mi smo se stvarno vratili ...svi smo mislili da će biti sasvim drugačije. Pošto sam bila azilant, nisam mogla putovati u BiH, i tek kad sam dobila državljanstvo, to ti je bilo 2000 ...Nisam bila 8-9 godina, zato što nisam mogla putovati i to mi je bio veliki šok Zaista sam se osjećala kao stranac, strašno mi je bilo, ja sam Sarajevo sanjala godinama."

### *Work, Career and Status*

A young woman that grew up in the United States explained in the interview how she temporarily returned to join her sister and did not think she would stay permanently. However, she stated that she eventually found a good job and ended up staying. This example in itself exemplifies the unclear and shifting borders between different clusters of identified reasons to return, as well as the importance of both practical and emotional concerns for one's choice of residence. This last group of identified main reasons revolves around economic and career opportunities and considerations as highly important incentives to return. In cases when economy and career are not direct reasons to undertake the return, they certainly impact the decision whether to remain or not. In the example just described, these reasons are combined with the earlier discussed emotionally-motivated types of reasons. However, although family ties were crucial for her initial return, the opportunity to live a comfortable lifestyle most clearly contributed to the longevity of this return. Although family reunification, romantic reasons, and other emotionally motivated concerns might chronologically or even hierarchically come first in some cases, it would be hard for people to remain where they are, had it not been for the fact that soon after the return they manage to secure their livelihood in ways that benefit their favorable social standing and economic power.

One of the interlocutors answered the question why he returned in following words: "The main reason is work, definitely. Considering that we as a family own a construction business."<sup>23</sup> Another particular interlocutor identified a specific convenient business opportunity he found and established in Sarajevo, as the main reason to return repeatedly throughout the conversation. Further on he claimed that for his line of work and business plans, it is even better and more convenient to work in Bosnia than in the country he left: "I came back because of the firm,

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<sup>23</sup> "Osnovni razlog je posao, definitivno. S obzirom da imamo porodično posao koji se bavi građevinom."

the wish to make something happen, and now I have an opportunity to build more than I could in X. You keep trying in business, and you can achieve more here than up there, it is possible...

".<sup>24</sup> This business opportunity seems to be the interlocutor's primary reason, in his own words. He readily admits that he has a safety net in the country he left, in case he finds his current choice of residence not sustainable and his business expectations not met. Details on why exactly this person thinks he can succeed more in BiH than the country he returned were not explored in the interview. Potentially, this can have a lot to do with the so-called glass ceiling effect in many migrant-receiving societies, when in particular first generation of migrants find it harder to get prestigious jobs and advance their careers past a certain level. Language proficiency and the privilege (or at least lack of disadvantage) found in ethno-national sameness upon return could be another potential explanation for having more open and available opportunities in BiH.

Whatever the explanation is for each of the individual cases, based on the interviews and fieldwork observations, most of people who returned upon the return secured and keep maintaining a quite favorable socio-economic positioning. They work in jobs that provide them with status and money. In some cases, in line with the words of the interlocutor abroad, I heard and observed that jobs and positions many of the interlocutors have in BiH seem more prestigious and their careers more successful than the ones they describe they had prior to the return. Several interlocutors describe BiH as a place where life is good if and when one has good income, as it is the case for most of them. The reported awareness of fact that not many residents of the country share their good fortune and a comfortable way of life is also reoccurring in the interviews. At times people describe their own positioning in terms of a perceived specific privilege,

<sup>24</sup> "Vratio sam se zbog firme, želje da nešto ostvarim, i sada imam mogućnost da stvorim više nego što bih stvorio u X. Vrtiš stalno u biznisu, i možeš postići više ovdje nego gore, može se ..."

that they either themselves admit, or they report how it gets ascribed to them by others. This is exemplified by the two following accounts:

#### Example 1.

"I did not return because of patriotism. The very MA degree from X qualified me for some jobs here ... there came a job offer in the international community."<sup>25 26</sup>

#### Example 2

"[...] there was a lot of talk how all of us who returned brought back money, bought apartments, provided jobs for ourselves, those stories were there... in difference to people who remained during the war in BiH. I think there were a lot of people who commented, "now it is easy, it is easy for those of you who lived abroad." That is either jealousy or dissatisfaction, if they had the same things, they would not be commenting, it is difficult for them."<sup>27</sup>

As an argument against the belief that a foreign, "Western" education and work experience brings advantage, a third interlocutor explicitly stated: "A foreign degree was not an advantage for me."<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> "Nisam se ja vratila zbog patriotizma. Sam magistarski iz X me je kvalificirao za neke poslove ovdje... došla je ponuda posla u međunarodnoj zajednici." This interlocutor directly labels her return as accidental (she used the English word), and connected with career. After the return she met and got married to a person residing in BiH, and her sibling returned as well, which both further influenced long term character of her residence in BiH.

<sup>26</sup> In particular in years right after the end of the conflict, and to a certain degree to the present day, there has been a strong international presence in BiH. Many local people and returnees found employment with international employers, and those people typically used to earn a higher income that way than the average income in BiH.

<sup>27</sup> "[...] bilo je dosta priče da smo svi mi koji smo se vratili donijeli pare, kupili stanove, obezbijedili sebi poslove, bilo je tih priča .... za razliku od ljudi koji su ostali tokom rata u BiH. Ja mislim da je dosta bilo ljudi koji su komentarisali, "i sada je to tako, lako je vama koji ste živjeli vani". Ili je to ljubomora ili nezadovoljstvo, da oni imaju isto tako, ne bi tako komentarisali, teško im je."

<sup>28</sup> "Strana diploma nije mi bila prednost."

She further explains that this isn't because the degree is from abroad, but because she has a particularly art-related degree, which is reportedly seen as something that is not useful there where she lives. In BiH she has not worked in any position that could make use of that degree, but typically had positions international NGOs, that were contract based and not seen as a permanent solution.

Besides NGOs and international governmental agencies, most people whose interviews are included in the research tend to either own their own business (personally or through family), or work in banks and other types of financial institutions. All these jobs tend to provide for a higher income than the average in BiH, which certainly influences the decision whether or not to remain in the country and proves my hypothesis that many people who return enjoy various privileges and seek economic and social advantages, otherwise they would not want to remain in BiH.

#### **After the return: Disappointment, Open-Endedness, and Future Possibilities**

The next topic to be explored is whether the political, social and economic developments in BiH make many people consider eventual re-emigration to "the West", and whether they believe life and situation in general will improve or not in BiH. I treat this question as an additional and subordinate to the main question why people return.

An interlocutor refers to an earlier hope and belief that the situation in the country of origin would get better and different, as a strong reason that used to keep her persistent in her original decision to move back. This hope she has largely lost, according to the interview, however she remains where she is, as she says "za sada" (for now). Another interlocutor similarly stated: "My suffering and the longing to go back was larger than this situation. It will once get better."<sup>29</sup> By referring to *ovo stanje* (this situation) this interlocutor acknowledges the fact that many per-

ceive the life and political situation in BiH as hard and problematic, however, her strong longing to return and live there overrides this disadvantageous fact for this particular interlocutor.

As mentioned earlier, people are not only questioned by others in their surroundings about whether the move back is a good idea or not: Interlocutors themselves seem to constantly reflect on the choice they made and often find themselves reconsidering the wisdom of such a move, whether asked about it or not. Several interlocutors explained that since they had a continuous wish to give return a try, that they went through with this makes them able to reassess their future more realistically. While assessing, many of them make use of the fact that they have open possibilities and privileged options, or as one interlocutor explicitly put it: "In principle, there for nothing for me to lose: There, I was doing well, I can go back, my job awaits, I have an apartment, I have citizenship." Despite this safety net, many explicitly claim they are disappointed with how things are developing in BiH in general.

While only a few people explicitly mention regret, disappointment seem to be a general feeling and a term often mentioned. For some interlocutors, feeling of that disappointment came immediately after they return, and the impressions got a bit better after a while. Others report a more gradually developed feeling of disappointment that seems to be getting worse and not better. To illustrate the first case, the following quote makes a striking example:

"The return was terrible at first, I returned to something that was not the same picture as 14 years ago when we left. I did come in the meantime, but coming during summers was nothing but fun, I was not familiar with the real life... more and more I realize how hard it is to do anything positive in this country."<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> "Povratak je prvo bio užasan, vratio sam se u nešto što nije bila ista slika kao prije 14 godina kad smo otišli. Dolazio sam u međuvremenu, ali dolazak ljeti bio je samo zabava, odmor, nisam bio upućen u stvarni život. ...sve više spoznajem koliko je teško raditi nešto pozitivno u ovoj državi."

<sup>29</sup> "Moja patnja i čežnja da se vratim je bila veća od ovog stanja. Biće nekad bolje."

The interlocutor, who was discussed at the beginning of the previous section, described returning in order to join her husband to be in Bosnia. After graduating from high school abroad, she explains and reassesses her initial decision by using the term *"mladost ludost"* (craziness of youth). This common expression in BCS language commonly used to convey the view that in their youth people can make passionate, emotional, and unwise choices due to their young age, which that they might regret later. The interlocutor continues to explain that her hopes as well have not been fulfilled, despite the optimistic views she used to hold at the time: "If I knew then what I know today, I would had never returned. You keep hoping, but it turned out thirteen years after, that situation on Bosnia keeps getting worse and worse."<sup>31</sup> For another interlocutor, ethno-nationalism and group divisions in BiH would be a strong reason to migrate again, and she stated: "The level of nationalism here is shocking."<sup>32</sup> There was one other interlocutor who explicitly mentioned nationalism in BiH in negative terms as well, by stating the contrast between satisfaction with her own life she built in BiH and dissatisfaction with the political situation in that country. "Now again we built a great life, here where nationalism is terrible, a terrible political situation."<sup>33</sup>

Such explicit expressions of disappointment are, as already argued, quite common among people who returned although this does necessarily mean they are disappointed enough to leave again. The reasons for opting out of repeated (e)migration are multiple, for example awareness that life is not ideal in "the West" either, in particular not for immigrants: "My husband does not work, he would like to leave more than I do. However lately he realized that it is not all peachy there either."<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> "Sad da mi je ova pamet, ne bih se vratila. Sve se nešto nadaš, no pokazalo se nakon trinaest godina, da je situacija u Bosni sve gora i gora."

<sup>32</sup> "Nivo nacionalizma kod nas je šokantan."

<sup>33</sup> "Sad smo opet izgradili super život, tu gdje je užasan nacionalizam, užasna politička situacija."

<sup>34</sup> "Muž ne radi, on bi više volio otići nego ja. Nego je u zadnje vrijeme shvatio da ni tamo ne cvjetaju ruže."

Several interlocutors also stated their dissatisfaction with political developments in BiH without explicitly mentioning nationalism, and they seemed to agree that they would leave again if they or their life partners had no job. Otherwise, many clearly and explicitly leave their future options open, by saying, for example<sup>35</sup>:

"We will see if this will keep sinking."<sup>36</sup>

"It is not excluded that this time next year we will be (up) there."<sup>37</sup>

"For example, I cannot tell you that I returned 100 percent."<sup>38</sup>

"I truly do not know where I will be in three years."<sup>39</sup>

In general, many of the interlocutors and many other people who have an experience of forced displacement claim to be open to changes and moving as they were forced to get used to changes. Despite reported wish to, as some put it, stabilize their lives, their future options and their return are seen as open-ended. This openness of options is their privilege and advantage, but also a result of their earlier traumatic life experiences.

## Conclusions

The small selection of interviews included in this study showed that the main reasons for repatriation can be classified into the following three main categories:

1. Personal relationships and sociability
2. Nostalgia, nationalism, and patriotism
3. Work, career, and status-related reasons

The distinctions above are only conditional, and are frequently overlapping. For example, having a family network and help of family can be seen as a practical concern as well, as having family

<sup>35</sup> Each of the four statements come from a different interlocutor."

<sup>36</sup> "Vidjećemo da li će ovo nastaviti da tone." By *this*, the interlocutor here refers to the general situation in BiH.

<sup>37</sup> "Nije isključeno da ćemo u ovo vreme slijedeće godine biti gore". By "up there" the interlocutor refers to the country he repatriated from.

<sup>38</sup> Na primjer, ja tebi ne mogu reći da sam se ja 100 posto vratio."

<sup>39</sup> "Ja stvarno ne znam gdje ću ja biti za tri godine."



members nearby can help one organize one's life better and make practical matters more convenient. Career choices, again, can have a lot to do with feelings, as people can and do choose jobs they like and enjoy, or jobs where they consider that social connections and relations between coworkers are good, and they can put these concerns over purely practical concerns such as salary or status. Indeed, the reasons for return people have and offer in their narratives are complex, mixed and intertwined in almost all of the interviews; rarely only one of the listed reasons is chosen as the dominant main reason to return, and never as an only one. In all cases there are multiple reasons people choose as important, whether they rank them hierarchically by importance, or list them side by side as equally relevant.<sup>40</sup>

The decision-making and reasoning of the pre-return process and the practice of the return itself are, of course, highly complex and hard to grasp and clearly classify. It is important to note that many of the important reasons remain personal and intimate, accessible only to the individual and often unspoken. For example, while rising xenophobia and contestations of belonging might very well figure prominently in identification processes and feelings of (non)belonging for Bosnian or any other migrants in the ethno-centric and mostly nationalist "Western" societies, xenophobia, racism and similar exclusionary ideologies in host societies were not in any way explicitly mentioned as concrete or main reason to decide return to BiH, by any of the interlocutors. This is why the experiences with and feelings of exclusion are not among the main reported reasons, and this issue will be explored

separately.<sup>41</sup> It seems surprising no one referred to feelings of being different and racialized in "the West" as one of the main and direct reasons for return, while many did in fact talk about such feelings and experiences in other contexts. It is challenging for me to explain here why this was the case, but I speculate that it is partially due to the distance in time and space of their memories of being othered; these recollections may be less prominent and hurtful because of the time that's elapsed since their experiences.

Their perceived ethno-national sameness with the majority in the newly chosen places of residence is strategically used as an additional advantage and a form of an added social capital, whether an individual personally subscribes to nationalist ideologies or not. The perceived sameness, if not adding to the privilege, certainly "evens the field" in the sense that people are not disadvantaged due to their names and origin as they often are abroad where they grew up. Many of the statements in the interviews directly reproduced nativist and sedentarist beliefs on homeland, origins, and the reproduction of the myth of return. A few of the interlocutors directly challenged and criticized some aspects of this ideology, however, as they still saw clear advantages in being ethnically unmarked and accepted as a member of an ethnic ingroup in the place where they repatriated. While this insight primarily shows the prevalence of nation-thinking, it additionally supports my finding that the investigated voluntary return is in many ways a form of privileged and privilege-seeking repatriation.

Although reasons for undertaking return certainly must be seen as individual, complex and multiple, ultimately, the return itself as a choice and an action, sustains the myths of "real home-

<sup>40</sup> In addition to three main identified groups of reasons, a nicer and warmer climate was occasionally mentioned as an additional reason for choosing life in BiH, in particular in case of the returnees from Scandinavian countries. However, this reason seems to regularly get mentioned only as something that comes in addition to more important and crucial other factors and reasons, and thus it is not separately considered and listed in this article.

<sup>41</sup> These exclusionary ideologies were mentioned and implied by interlocutors in other context than as concrete reasons to return, and for this reason can potentially and indirectly be linked to return as well, but no interlocutor has explicitly pointed to those ideologies as main or direct reasons. The connection-making would have to happen through closer analysis of returnees' narratives about (non) belonging in the host societies.

lands". While going back where "we" come from" from somewhere where "we" do not fully belong and feel othered might play a role in returning and settling, based on this research, it is reasonable to conclude that these belonging- and othering-related concerns typically do not suffice as sole incentives for migrants to go back to the place from which they originate. People who have choices, skills and advantages will not return unless belonging-related concerns align with ability to have living conditions, economic power and social connections and privileges. This is also why most people tend leave the option to re-emigrate if these main required conditions cease to exist. It can be hypothesized that this is precisely why long-distance nationalist tendencies widespread among members of the Bosnian diaspora do not result in any massive return: ethno-nationalism is, I argue, a framework within which people in focus here need to function in their double role as migrants abroad and returnees "back home" but it is not necessarily a direct reason to return. The privileges potential returnees would obtain by not being ethno-nationally othered in BiH in the same way that they are abroad are not enough of an incentive, unless people see other advantages from which they could benefit upon their return, for example: satisfaction with social life, job and career opportunities, family ties, socially rich lives and so on. For the interviewed returnees and many other people in similar positions, it is possible to live better and happier individual lives in a society that is commonly seen as less developed and "poorer" than in those that many see as wealthier. The interlocutors were all educated professionals who managed to at least maintain or preferably even elevate their relative social and economic status upon return, in comparison to their relative social positioning during their life abroad.

Based on the study, the voluntary return of Bosnian refugees from "the Western" societies is predominantly envisioned as open-ended return, which additionally confirms its privileged nature. Those people who had access to citizenship and residence rights in the foreign countries where

they resided keep those rights in mind as an exit strategy, as they are aware of challenges, obstacles and disadvantages of life in society to which they were returning. This safety net is needed in particular because, as explained earlier, most returnees report post-return disappointment and regretting their decision to a degree, though not (yet) enough to leave the country. This latter fact is understandable, as I did not interview people who re-emigrated at the time that I conducted the interviews. I do not know if any of the interviewees left afterwards.

The returnees I encountered are not simply, or not at all, "crazy enough" to return. They can rather be described as many other things: skillful, privileged, or, in some cases, simply nostalgic enough to return. As anyone else, these are people that are looking to, as Jansen puts it, maximize life opportunities (Jansen, 2008). This tendency can be also framed in terms of people looking to maximize their privilege, where the privilege is found in, for example ethno-national sameness, financial power, international mobility, or business, family and friend networks that the voluntary returnees can (re)establish and maintain.

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# 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<sup>1</sup> 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-

<sup>1</sup> 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 adaptations, 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 ethnic 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.<sup>2</sup> A portion of what we present is data gathered during interviews<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

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

<sup>2</sup> Table 1 below provides detailed information about each participant.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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 unconstituted (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<sup>5</sup> 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

<sup>5</sup> 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 careless 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<sup>6</sup> 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<sup>7</sup> 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

<sup>6</sup> Those who arrived to the United States in the period from 1992-1995.

<sup>7</sup> 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*<sup>8</sup> 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<sup>9</sup> 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

<sup>8</sup> A traditional folk song from Bosnia.

<sup>9</sup> 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 then 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*<sup>10</sup> is to gather for holidays, eat, drink...I went once for a New Year’s

<sup>10</sup> 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 announce 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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# Post-war Yugoslavism and Yugonostalgia as Expressions of Multiethnic Solidarity and Tolerance in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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## Abstract

Grounded in empirical research conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina based on autoethnographic observations, interviews with women survivors of war rape, children who were born of war rape, and NGO leaders, this discussion extends current work on Yugoslavism (*Jugoslovenstvo*) and Yugonostalgia by positioning the two interrelated discourses not only as ideologies of resistance to an unsatisfying political and economic present, but also as emerging ideologies of a shared cultural identity rooted specifically in the civic values of multiethnic co-existence and solidarity. I argue that in today's Bosnia and Herzegovina post-conflict Yugoslavism and Yugonostalgia constitute an active expression of ethnic tolerance, peaceful multiethnic co-existence and mutual respect. As such, the direct or indirect transmission and articulation of these ideologies among and within different population groups constitute an exceptionally important form of multiethnic postwar solidarity that is of great significance to ongoing peace and reconciliation processes and the continuing development of a meaningful post-war dialogue and a new culture of collective identity.

**Keywords:** Bosnia and Herzegovina, peace, conflict, Yugoslavia, Yugoslavism, Yugonostalgia, diversity, ethnicity, collective identity.

## Introduction

This paper contributes to a growing body of recent literature on Yugoslavism (*Jugoslovenstvo*) and Yugonostalgia as discourses that have emerged in the post-war period on the territories of the former Yugoslavia, and whose political elements are increasingly being theorized (Velikonja 2008; 2014; Kurtović 2011; Bošković 2013; Petrović 2016; Maksimović 2016). It extends current work on the subject by positioning the two interrelated discourses not only as ideologies of resistance to an unsatisfying political and economic present that is the reality in most, if not all, of the new national entities, but also as emerging ideologies of a shared cultural identity rooted specifically in the civic values of multiethnic co-existence and solidarity. Building on recent insights by Maksimović (2017) and Popović (2018), who examine Yugonostalgia as a political subjectivity

that surpasses and opposes nationalism and thus contains the potential for regulating future inter-ethnic relationships by developing a collective sense of identity, and applying them to the context of the federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina specifically, I argue that post-conflict Yugoslavism and Yugonostalgia, as articulated by people living on this territory today constitute an active expression of ethnic tolerance, peaceful multiethnic co-existence, and mutual respect. As such, the direct or indirect transmission and articulation of these ideologies among and within different population groups constitute an exceptionally important form of multiethnic postwar solidarity that is of great significance to ongoing peace and reconciliation processes and the continuing development of a meaningful post-war dialogue and a new culture of collective identity.

In my account I use the definition of “new Yugoslavism” as proposed by Velikonja (2014) to refer to the ideological discourse built around “the narrative heritage of the socialist Yugoslavia and a posteriori constructs about it,” that is, socialist Yugoslavia’s “ideological representations” of the Yugoslav political system, social order, cultural production, everyday life and anti-fascist resistance (60). Velikonja uses the term in a complex, multilayered and contradictory sense, to refer to both positive and negative ideological representations and constructions. Thus, as a positive a posteriori ideological representation of socialist Yugoslavia embodied in individual memories, collective narratives, material and consumer culture, etc., Yugonostalgia overlaps with post-conflict Yugoslavism in its positive orientation. Since this positive and enabling aspect of both discourses is the focus of this study, I will use the two terms throughout the paper interchangeably, in this context specifically to denote a set of cultural and social values derived from Yugoslavia’s socialist past and since the war, deemed desirable by many.

The empirical portion of this study is based on autoethnographic observations during a month-long research-related stay in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the summer of 2017; interviews with primarily Bosniak women who survived rape during the war, interviews with children who were born as a result of those rapes and who now live and work in BiH, as well as conversations and interviews with a number of leaders of NGOs in BiH and ordinary citizens. Through these conversations and observations, what became apparent is that politics, and national and cultural identity are not neatly contained in official publications, policy and discourse, but instead they filter into everyday life, “shaping the landscapes that surround us,” politically and personally (cf. Crooke 86). Women survivors of war rape, and children born of war, in particular, are understudied as agents who participate in the articulation and transmission of the ideologies of Yugoslavism and Yugonostalgia, and whose perspectives in this regard—as secondary

victims of some of the most egregious violence that typified the conflict—have wide-reaching significance for understanding the implications and potential of these ideologies for reconciliation and peacebuilding.

Over the course of my conversations and observations, a complex picture emerged on these issues, consistent with the findings of others who work on the same topic (Kurtović 2011; Velikonja 2008, 2014; Petrović 2016; Maksimović 2017). Petrović, for example, writing about the legitimacy of affective history as it exists in people’s emotions and memories, points out that the attempt to articulate such histories of socialist Yugoslavia is “inevitably complex, messy, fragmentary and resistant to flattening into a linear and consistent historiographic narrative” (518). Kurtović also acknowledges that Yugonostalgia is a “heterogenous and complex phenomenon whose many practices and forms are best studied in the contexts in which they emerge and for the effects they produce” (3). So, on the one hand, it was clear and undeniable the country remains divided along ethnic lines in consequence of the Dayton Peace Agreement (signed on 21 November 1995 to end the open conflict), and that political and social realities of daily life for the most part continue to be organized along ethno-nationalist principles. Some of the people I spoke to made reference to those realities as they are enacted in their family or community circle by those who are complicit with this position and seek to perpetuate it.

On the other hand, there were three significant and equally undeniable themes that emerged through my conversations: the awareness of the need to live and work together in the process of building a peaceful civil society; the absence of hatred for the enemy group of the perpetrator on the part of the women survivors and the children born of war; and the stories of solidarity and friendship that now exist across ethnic lines and that are in fact, for some of my interlocutors, a continuation of those same stories that existed before and during the war. These themes challenge, resist, and actively subvert ethno-nation-

alist official narratives, and speak to the ways in which officially constructed nationhood, as a form of collective identity, is negotiated and in some cases undermined and subverted through the actual practices, memories and narratives of ordinary people in everyday life (Hobsbawm 1991, Billig 1995, Herzfeld 1997, Edensor 2002). More specifically, in the context of Yugoslavism and Yugonostalgia as ideologies of shared cultural identities and multiethnic solidarity, the memories and narratives of individuals relating to interethnic co-existence and friendships as they exist not only in the nostalgic recollections of the older generations who grew up in socialist Yugoslavia, but in younger generations who were born during and even after the war, reassert themselves in what Popović, following Rothberg's work on transnational memory, calls "mnemonic communities" that create a "dialogic space bringing new visions of solidarity and new possibilities of coexistence" into being (46).

Bosnia and Herzegovina suffered the most during the war and was the epicenter for some of the most brutal, genocidal violence and torture that typified the conflict, as well as one of the main sites for ethnic cleansing. According to numbers from the ICTY Demographic Unit, there were 104,732 casualties among the three ethnic groups, with the greatest number of Bosniak deaths.<sup>1</sup> Thus it may be surprising that the positive accounts of the pre-war Yugoslav past, as well as the values associated with it in an ideological sense were brought up and readily discussed by the people I spoke with. In this sense, personal accounts, memories and perspectives relating to Yugoslavism and Yugonostalgia, as they are articulated by Bosnians today do indeed possess a "special kind of tragic irony,"

and acquire a "different sense of urgency" (4) as well as "additional layers of political and ideological complexity" (Kurtović 3). This complexity is evident in the fact that my interlocutors ranged in age and encompassed those who actually remember the pre-war past and who could thus be nostalgic in the common sense of that term, as well as those who were born after the war and in some cases as a direct consequence of the war, and who acquired Yugoslavism as a desirable ideological alternative to the current cultural and political reality. From a historical perspective, however, Yugoslavism and Yugonostalgia in the Bosnian context become less surprising since for centuries Bosnia has been a "fluid site of ethnic diversity and religious tolerance," characterized in the fabric of its daily life by cultural heterogeneity and hybridity and defined by "a multiplicity of ethnic, confessional and philosophical trajectories" (Markowitz 2010, 15, 4). In the preface to his history of Bosnia, a British historian rightly observes that "the great religions and great powers of European history had overlapped and combined there: the empires of Rome, Charlemagne, the Ottomans and the Austro-Hungarians, and the faiths of Western Christianity, Eastern Christianity, Judaism and Islam" (Malcolm 1996, xix). More recently, Kurtović also points out that, "Bosnia historically played a very special role in the Yugoslav socialist imaginary because it was the only republic with no clear national majority, and as such, presented a demographic microcosm of the entire federation" (3). Life in Bosnian society during socialist Yugoslavia simply embodied and reflected in a socio-political sense what had been the defining feature of the cultural imaginary of this territory and its people for centuries. So when today's Bosnians recall the socialist past and articulate aspects of Yugoslavism and Yugonostalgia, they lament the loss of not only the recent political entity itself, but of the values of ethnic heterogeneity, solidarity and respectful multifaith co-existence that they recognize as theirs in a longer historical sense and that Yugoslavia enshrined within its federalist state borders and in its constitution through the

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<sup>1</sup> The 1992-95 War In Bosnia and Herzegovina: Census-Based Multiple System Estimation Of Casualties' Undercount" (pdf). ICTY. Retrieved 27 January 2013.

discourse of “brotherhood and unity.” Memories of the recent violence are still strong, but so are the memories of the peaceful alternative.

Notwithstanding these complexities, or perhaps because of them, many have acknowledged the political, future-oriented and “emancipatory” (Velikonja 2008) aspect of Yugonostalgia as a discourse and an emerging ideology of resistance to official ethnonationalism. In his 2008 study of post-war nostalgia for Josip Broz Tito, Velikonja was among the first to point out that Tito represents not only a specific political system, but also the system of values associated with socialist Yugoslavia, such as, among others, social justice, solidarity and peaceful coexistence, and that the nostalgia associated with Tito can be interpreted in large measure as a desire for establishing a social order that would foster those positive social and cultural values. Others have since demonstrated that this discourse can be “a powerful ideological tool” that allows those who articulate it to “express their views, establish or retain value systems, or achieve a particular goal” (Petrović 2010, 128-129). These claims corroborate with research relating to pre-war inter-ethnic relationships in the former Yugoslavia. Bizumić, for example, points out that the former Yugoslavia was “characterized by relatively weak ethnocentric norms and surveys had generally tended to document interethnic harmony” and that even in 1990, directly before the war, “only a small minority of individuals in ex-Yugoslavia perceived ethnic relations as negative” (51).

With respect to values specifically, Petrović argues that many values and narratives associated with Yugonostalgia, such as continuity, solidarity, social justice, workers’ rights, cosmopolitanism and peaceful, tolerant coexistence, may be sources of resistance, solidarity and collectivity in former Yugoslav states and tools for imagining, building or demanding a desirable future in this regard (2010, 130-131). In his study on the *Lexicon of YU Mythology*, the collectively authored exhibition catalogue of various “things Yugoslav” interwoven with discourses of collective and individual memories and published as a

book in 2004, Bošković highlights the politics of emancipation embodied in the project (2013). He reads the project not as a “regressive idealization of Yugoslav socialist past, but as a critical intervention...in the contemporary postsocialist politics of memory,” arguing that Yugoslav cultural memory could serve as a site for what he calls “the archeology of the future” (55). Maksimović, in particular, argues that the “actions inspired by yugonostalgia can also have an active, progressive face, promoting cooperation, and ultimately, reconciliation among former Yugoslavs” (1078). She argues that with top-down reconciliation initiatives infrequent, the “reconciliatory potential has mostly been discernible in bottom-up activities” embodied in various aspects of Yugonostalgia (1075). Her work shows that Yugonostalgia “fosters the reconciliation process” and voluntary “cultural convergence” by serving as an inspiration for cultural and other cooperation among former Yugoslavs” (ibid; cf. Palmberger 2013). Palmberger’s study on so called “border-crossing” in the post-war ethnically divided city of Mostar shows an example where youth of all ethnic and religious backgrounds “deliberately emphasize those social values from Yugoslavia (and multinational Bosnia) that foster inter-communal trust, encourage reconciliation, and help reconcile conflicting collective memories,” and “consciously choose the socialist past as an inspiration and driving force for cultural cooperation” (ibid). In her account of the regular gatherings that take place in post-conflict Bosnia organized by various groups and associations to celebrate and commemorate aspects of the socialist past, Kurtović notes that these events are rooted in sociality, and “call into being forms of solidarity and relatedness that surpass the political boundaries created by the violence of the 1990s” (3). The true purpose of these meetings is a “re-enactment of a bodily memory and a reproduction of a certain social relationship,” an enactment of a “way of relating socially to others, on which socialist Yugoslavism was founded” (Kurtović 9).

I use the terms Yugoslavism and Yugonostalgia, therefore, to underscore the particular manner



in which these interrelated, emerging discourses function within the post-conflict context and the manner in which they are articulated by Bosnians who belong to understudied populations. Their narratives exemplify that Yugoslavism and Yugonostalgia represent more than simply a good memory of a time past. They constitute an ideological relationship to the present moment that is expressed through reference to values associated with the socialist past as they relate to a potential future. This orientation toward the future pertains precisely to forms of “sociality,” to a mode of living and patterns of interaction that are based on peaceful ethnic co-existence, multicultural curiosity and respect, and a practice of solidarity on the basis of dimensions of civic life that are common to all, regardless of particular ethnic belonging.

Recent theories of nationhood and the construction of personal and collective identity support these claims. Brubaker (2004, 152), for example, points out 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 the theory of nationhood developed by Fox and Miller-Idriss (2008) the nation is posited as a discursive construct, constituted largely through discursive claims that produce personal and collective identity and are used to evaluate people and practices. The authors state that 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 and Miller-Idriss, 2008, 538). This perspective has significant implications for how we see ethnic and national identity in post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina. Through this perspective, individual choices and views regarding identity emerge as discursive acts with a clear political and cultural dimension and have the potential to shape and re-imagine larger discourses concerning citizenship (cf. Takševa 2018; Takševa and Schwartz 2017, 2). This re-

shaping and re-imagining must not be reduced in positivist terms to some imagined desire to re-constitute Yugoslavia as it once was before Tito’s death, or to reinstitute or even endorse communism. Rather, it should be understood as constructions and reconstructions of individual and collective identity in a given historical, post-conflict context: in the aftermath of a bloody war waged on the basis of imagined and real ethnic and religious differences. Bosnians’ references to socialist Yugoslavia exist within several, interrelated current contexts: their current awareness of the political manipulation of ethnic differences effected by the political elite before, during and also, now after the war; their first-hand experience of the conceptual and practical bankruptcy of these manipulations and the imagined category of “pure” ethnicities; and their lived experience during and after the war that involves respectful and tolerant living alongside members of a different ethnicity, and ongoing acts of friendship and solidarity on the basis of shared civic values. Examined from within this perspective, forms of Yugoslavism and Yugonostalgia as they are manifested and articulated through my interlocutors’ words, refer not so much to a particular state formation or communism, but to a mode of living and patterns of interaction predicated on peaceful co-existence, cross-ethnic tolerance and respect, and a practice of solidarity in dimensions of daily life that are common to all, regardless of ethnic or religious belonging. As such, these forms represent cultural and ideological consciousness through which Bosnia’s official ethno-nationalist politics is actively critiqued, subverted and exposed as ineffective.

In all my conversations it was apparent that political and ideological consciousness is “an important marker of social identity” for all respondents and that as such it is grounded in their awareness that the “personal is political, along with the perception that group members have a linked fate” (Ysseldyk et.al 2014, 348; Foster and Matheson 1995; Dawson 1994; Read 2007). Group membership in their narratives operates on two levels: on the level of official

politics that propagates ethnic belonging as the primary form of membership within one's ethnic community, and on the level of their own lived experience and perspective on a larger form of civic belonging to Bosnia as a single state within which multiple ethnicities can peacefully cohabit, united around a set of different, civic values. Through the narratives it often becomes clear that the civic form of multiethnic belonging is put forward as the preferred and desired option.

Alen Muhić,<sup>2</sup> is a 24 year-old man who is a child of war adopted by a Bosniak family and whose Bosniak birth mother was raped by a Serb soldier causing pregnancy of which he is the result. He is among the first from the group of children born of war in Bosnia to speak publicly about his origins. During our conversation Alen started speaking of Tito's Yugoslavia—a period in history that he himself did not witness—without being prompted. He offered his account relating to post-conflict interethnic relations in the context of his critique of the current political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina:

You know what, I have never been a nationalist. All people are the same to me: we share the language, air, food, we drink the same water... I am a Muslim because my adopted family is Muslim. If my adopted family was of a Croatian background I might be a Catholic, maybe Orthodox, or Buddhist, all depends on who would have adopted me... Look, everyone who was born in Bosnia is Bosnian. So be it Serbian, Muslim or Catholic Bosnian he is still just a Bosnian, however you look at it. I would love for that to stay like that, but our current politics... really play on that card, starting with nationality and all the way through ethnic affiliation to ethnic cleansing. If you are Orthodox you cannot work here and that is something that just worsens the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Those are totally idiotic things. If our politics was not like that, life here would be much nicer, there would not be the threat of war... Pardon me but one butt cannot sit on three chairs. Those are things that need to be solved in these three countries - Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia, so that it is better here in Bosnia.

<sup>2</sup> In identifying my conversation partners, I follow their wishes. Some of them indicated that they wish to be identified by their full name, others by their first name only, others yet by initials and/or pseudonyms.

However, that is impossible today with this ruling establishment and we can have war again. It seems that it suits all politicians for war to happen again so that war profiteers could exist again... All of us would be much better if Tito's era was back.

What Muhić's words show is that while he does draw an equivalent relationship between a religious denomination and ethnicity, ethnicity as such is of little relevance. If it does figure as a category of identity it is understood in contingent rather than essentialist terms: "If my adopted family was of a Croatian background I might be a Catholic, maybe Orthodox, or Buddhist, all depends on who would have adopted me." Muhić's bold assertion that "everyone who was born in Bosnia is a Bosnian" represents a direct challenge to and a critique of the current state of affairs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where it is still not possible to declare oneself Bosnian officially. On the last, 2013 census, the only category available for self-identification apart from those referring to the three constituent peoples (Bosniak, Serb and Croat) was the category of "other," the official term for national minorities and people who do not identify with an ethnic label. The consequence of the census was thus to "render national identity secondary and ethnic identity primary, where ethnic identity appears to deny the existence of one's national identity (Doubt 2014, 117). Muhić's assertion also represents his belief that the identity of Bosnian should be a civic identity, rather than a category founded upon ethnic belonging.

What is also revealing about his words is that he links the current ethno-nationalist politics and the nationalist rhetoric it is built on to the threat of another war as well as the cause of the last one. His profound disillusionment with current political structures is evidenced in his understanding that the basis for political action currently depends entirely upon the elite's greed for power, so that it is in their interest to fabricate and maintain divisions along ethnic lines. His awareness that "If our politics was not like that, life here would be much nicer" signals his desire for a better present and a society that that pro-

motes civic values and forms of belonging that in turn result in a better life for all and greater economic and social opportunities. His words imply the wasted energy that goes to support a system of ethnic division when that energy could be more productively employed to improve the lives of all citizens in Bosnia. Muhić's reference to Tito and his conviction that "all of us would be much better if Tito's era was back" are striking, not only in that he is a member of a young generation who cannot remember and does not know first-hand what that era was like, since he was born during the war and after the fall of Yugoslavia. It is striking because he himself is a product of the ethnic conflict, a conflict that in many nationalist narratives is linked to the presumed failure of Tito's vision for "brotherhood and unity" of all nationalities within the Yugoslav federation.

When I asked him to clarify what he meant by his last statement, he said that he has heard of Tito from his adopted father, and has subsequently formed his own opinions of the past, its relationship to the present and a future for Bosnia. He said: "I wish those old times are back since there was order then. There were many more peoples involved, Croats, Macedonians, and still there was no war. When Tito was in charge people did not fight, argue, wage wars against each other, slaughtered each other...Today everything is opposite to that. Today we are fighting against our own country." What he meant, therefore, was to articulate his own version of the brotherhood and unity motto, a model of interethnic cohabitation when people "did not fight, argue, wage wars against each other, slaughter each other." Muhić's concept of "order" is rooted in both Yugoslavism and Yugonostalgia as they articulate a set of social and cultural values, and ways of relating to others. That "order" therefore refers to a mode of living and patterns of interaction predicated on peaceful ethnic co-existence and mutual respect that he associates with Tito's Yugoslavia. The official political rhetoric that fuels ethnic divisions he terms "fighting against our own country" in that the official iterations

of discord and disunity work against the wellbeing of a single, united multicultural Bosnia that embraces all of its citizens regardless of their ethnic belonging. Through his narrative the concept of Yugoslavism functions as a model of peaceful ethnic co-existence which he sees as the foundation upon which a successful and productive society and state can be built.

"Strong Woman," a twenty-two year-old woman, also a child of war, speaks of the question of ethnicity in similar terms, as something that is imposed by current politics, and that only some but not all members of Bosnian society have adopted. Her mother is Bosniak, raped and impregnated by a Croatian soldier during the war. Her mother is one of the few women who decided to keep and raise a child born of war rape. "Strong Woman" places herself as outside of ethnic binaries; she sees ethnicity as only one marker of identity that has a limited ethical and moral currency, and one that is only marginally if at all relevant to how she would like to see her own life and identity:

My mother always told me I should not hate and that if you hate, it is the same as if you hated yourself...She never allowed me to make a difference between people. Never ever...I always had friends who did not have to be strictly Muslim, some were from Croatian families, some from Serbian families and some from Roma families. I was always "diverse" (šarena) like that. She instilled that in me, she never limited me to anything and we do have a lot of nationalistic types around here. Maybe not in Sarajevo, in the city, you will not find it here physically but if you go around to smaller places you will understand what I am talking about, you will see how it really is. But she never told me that is a problem for us, she never forbade me to socialize with someone because his name is Saša [a typical Serbian name].

"Strong Woman" credits her mother for instilling in her the perspective according to which ethnicity is not the primary marker of identity nor a true measure of moral worth. The hatred "Strong Woman" speaks of refers to their personal history – the violence the mother survived at the hands of a Croatian perpetrator and "Strong Woman" as the outcome of that experience. It

also refers to a reality that is the outcome of the war and the ossification of interethnic conflict through the country's constitutional division along ethnic lines. "Strong Woman's" words convey admiration for her mother who adopted a line of reasoning resistant to the official one. Her own self-identification as 'diverse' places her outside the "tribal exclusiveness" (Bulatović 260) typical for the ethno-nationalist rhetoric in much of Bosnian media. From "Strong Woman's" narrative it is also apparent that she perceives differences in people's views on nationalism and ethnicity along an urban-rural divide, with urban centres, like Sarajevo, being traditionally multi-ethnic, cosmopolitan and tolerant of diversity, and rural areas being more likely to understand their identity in terms of ethnicity and religion.<sup>3</sup>

"Strong Woman's" sense of equanimity and self-reflectiveness, as well her critique of the current political climate is evident in the way she understands that the war affected all sides. She also signals the limits of the official public discourse that seeks to "repackage history" (Dragosavac) and the ongoing historical revisionism "guided by open or hidden motives to justify narrow national and political goals" (Luthar a.4):

I cannot say that my mother suffered more just because she is Muslim compared to some woman who is not Muslim. I cannot say it is harder for me than for my friend from Banja Luka and we were born in the same way, on the same day, on two different sides. It is being said that we have different blood. There is no difference between him and me and I cannot say that it is harder for me... I want to see up close what a politician does and what is wrong with that picture...since they do it as soon as the election campaign starts... they talk about what "big" Bosniaks and Muslims we are and yes, there were more Muslims who suffered in great numbers but how can they not understand that

we cannot use election campaigns to talk about how we are the only victims. We were not the only ones. Then we go to Republika Srpska to listen to Dodik and he was threatening some time ago that Srebrenica will be captured again; then there was an argument about whether the mayor will be Bosniak or it will be someone from Republika Srpska. All manipulations, political and legal manipulation. And there is social psychology that explains it all... Every year there is someone new on a political scene and still every year the same old people win. A vote costs 50 KM [Bosnian convertible marks] in this country. ... Everything is connected, from manipulation, to nationalism and corruption. What can you do when your very leadership is corrupted and nationalistic? They are supported by media and you know exactly which media supports which party.

"Strong Woman" articulates a clear sense of solidarity across ethnic lines and on the basis of a shared fate. Her words actively challenge the orientation of nationalist governments on all sides and exposes as fallacious the tendency for each side "to view itself as the victim" without a "hint of self-reflection" or willingness to understand the other (Luthar, a. 6). Scholars have pointed out that the new conservative political elites in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the other former Yugoslav countries, quickly discovered that "the fastest way to win an electoral majority was to play to the dominant nationality's latent resentment and fear of difference and otherness" (Luthar b. 190). "Strong Woman's" words clearly account for this and for the systemic corruption in which everyone knows that votes are and can be bought. In her narrative she rejects essentialist ethno-nationalist perspectives on the past war and the present social and political situation by claiming that there "is no difference" between her and her Serb friend, since they are both harmed by their governments' exclusionary rhetoric.

By virtue of their own "mixed" ethnicity, like children of ethnically "mixed" marriages, "Strong Woman" and Alen Muhić are particularly well-positioned to see the limitations of the current ethno-nationalist politics and the benefits of multi-ethnic tolerance and solidarity, as well

<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed discussion of Bosnia's multi-ethnic history in relation to post-war constructions of identity among children born or war rape see, Tatjana Takševa and Agatha Schwartz, "Hybridity, Ethnicity and Nationhood: Legacies of Interethnic War, Wartime Rape and the Potential for Bridging the Ethnic Divide in Post-Conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina." *National Identities* 2017. DOI: 10.1080/14608944.2017.1298580



as to think of identity as being linked to a civic rather than confessional structures, the way identity functioned in the former Yugoslavia. Their perspectives on multiethnic solidarity and their orientation toward an ethnically tolerant future are especially valuable since their identity is closely linked to the interethnic violence of the recent war. However, this perspective is not limited to children of war. Women survivors of war rape and other extreme forms of sexual, physical and emotional torture also articulate a sense of identity that goes beyond narrow ethnic affiliation despite what they have experienced based on their ethnicity.

When asked how she identified before and after the war in terms of nationality and ethnic belonging, L.O., a Bosniak woman who was held in captivity for one year by Serb militias, tortured, raped and impregnated at the age of 19, said:

I never identified with any side. The war came and went and I still cannot fully distinguish which first names belong to which religion... And I did not identify with anything, I guess I was Yugoslavian. Before the war we never went to any religious institutions, we never went to religious school, so I don't really know much about it. I cannot remember that anyone ever told me that I am Muslim before. I don't remember...It's the same now. I am a human being, a woman, an Earthling.

For L.O., despite the war and the extreme victimization she experienced based on her ethnic belonging, ethnicity remains marginal as a marker of identity. The categories with which she identifies—human being, woman, Earthling—are large, universal categories transcending national, geographic and political boundaries. Her reference to “Yugoslavian” indicates that she thinks of it as being a form of spacious identity that did not require her to declare ethnic belonging (“I did not identify with anything”); she thinks of it as a marker of supranational identity that allowed her the freedom not to think of ethnicity as something to which one should attach importance.

Selma and Alma, each a survivor of torture and rape during the war, similarly spoke of the futility of hatred and the need to work together

on overcoming the barriers put in place by ethno-nationalist politics. Describing her current friendship with a Croat and a Serbian neighbor who stayed in the same small town during and after the war, Selma said:

They are not guilty for what happened to me. I do not know who did that. Maybe they came from Serbia. Those were not neighbours that I know, I cannot name them...People came from different sides to do that...and the persons who committed crimes should be punished. I do not have a reason to hate that neighbour of mine. I hate those people who brought evil upon me. I cannot hate the whole world...It does not matter what names people have, the only thing that matters is being humane. You cannot hate, even though you went through a lot, you can't hate the whole world. You cannot. You have to communicate with people. You have to communicate with people since a person as a lone individual cannot do anything.

Selma's words clearly show solidarity and peaceful coexistence across ethnic lines during and after the war. She makes a clear distinction between the perpetrators, who could belong to any ethnic group, and her friends and neighbours from different ethnic groups: the distinction is not based on ethnicity but on a moral and ethical orientation, such as the intention to commit evil. Selma's words, as well as the words of “Strong Woman,” Alen Muhić, and others, indicate that the kinship structure that holds a very high level of “moral solidarity, sympathy and emotional warmth is the relation called ‘priateljji’” as well as the type of social relation called ‘komšiluk,’ which implies ethnic co-existence and means good neighbourhood” irrespective of the ethnic belonging of those friends and neighbours (Doubt 2014, 101, 133; Palmberger 2013a in Maksimovic). ‘Komšiluk’ is not “just passive tolerance but active goodwill towards neighbours from different ethnic communities” (Doubt 133).

In this respect, S. Š.'s words show what this active good will means, as well as how references to the values and sociality of socialist Yugoslavia contain both a critique of the present and a positive orientation toward the future. S. Š., a Croatian woman in a predominantly Muslim village,



who was imprisoned and raped by – she believes, Muslim--members of the Bosnian army at the age of 13. In describing her decades-long process of recovery, she describes both life before the war and after the war:

We went to school together, we worked together, we just had different names and last names and we had to pronounce certain words in a certain way. I do not think those people are guilty for what happened, but someone somewhere is guilty. Right now, I find Muslims better than Croats, Muslims are readier to help around the house and farm work. Croats will not do it. I was in trouble and realized that Muslims understand better if you are in trouble or are destitute and you have worries that bother you. If a child is sick Muslims ask if they need to take the child somewhere while Croats have not offered something like that. I realized that Muslims are more pleasant than Croats and then I went to see the priest and talked to the priest about it all and I feel much better now. He said it was not their fault, they were just people and they did not start the war. He said I cannot hate my neighbour now because he did nothing wrong. I realized he was right. I cannot hate someone because he did nothing and he is not guilty. Those who did it were some other people.

S. Š. recalls life before the war as representing a typically Yugoslavian multi-ethnic co-existence. Reflecting on the ways in which the war changed the patterns of interaction among people she presents examples from her own experience as a Croatian woman in a predominantly Muslim village. While she is aware that her ethnicity was likely the reason for her victimization, she also realized that it is her Muslim neighbours that she can rely upon for help. What counts is the willingness to offer help when help is needed, not ethnic belonging.

Alma, a Bosniak woman who was brutally raped and impregnated while being imprisoned for over two years at the age of 16 by Serb militias, is even more directly critical of the current political circumstances in Bosnia. She said that she does not follow politics because “there is nothing to see in politics in this country,” citing the names of the current leaders of the three entities. In response to a question about ethnic-

ity and ethnic affiliations she said, “I think those categories should not exist”:

We can't go forward if we are not in it together. See, you can't and shouldn't forget the past, but you must forgive yourself and others in order to go on. Because we have no other way out... I'll give you an example. At the Eurovision contest, when Marija Šerifović performed from Serbia. Who do you think I voted for? For her! Those are my neighbours! That's how I see it, and that's what I'll do. I'll never be able to forget, but you can't view all people according to one man and one event. I think those men were mercenaries, the mercenaries from Serbia, right? They worked for money and under the influence of drugs, because no normal person could have done that. The things they did, what a havoc they made.

Alma points out that although she is never going to be able to forget the violence that was done to her, she calls for forgiveness, and she has a clear vision that if Bosnia and Herzegovina is to “go forward” it needs to be with all ethnicities working toward the same goals. Her perspective, as well as the daily choices she makes, like voting for a Serbian singer, represent a form of active solidarity, an expression of tolerance and a desire for a future where there is a peaceful and productive cooperation and co-existence among the different groups. Her statement that “we can't go forward if we are not together” lends poignant weight to the significance of Yugoslav values--their historical role for this region, as well as a basis for an ideological orientation toward the future.

Other members of society in the Bosnian Federation express similar views. Vahdeta, a Bosniak small-business owner in Baščaršija, the old market in Sarajevo, in whose shop I found a great number of objects related to Tito and Yugoslavia, in conversation recalled life and forms of solidarity during the four year-long siege of Sarajevo thorough which she and her family survived. Her words point to the tragic irony of the fact that while Sarajevo was shelled daily by Serbian military and paramilitary forces, life within the besieged city reflected solidarity and active good will among people of different ethnicities, includ-

ing resident Serbs who decided to remain in the city despite being warned of the impending siege. Their choice reflects that for many, life under siege followed the same patterns of kinship and social interaction as before the war, and that the war and the current official ethnonationalist politics did not disrupt. Vahdeta spoke of this choice made by her Serb neighbors for whom their life and neighbourhood as they knew it all their lives took precedence over ethnic divisions, even though that choice exposed them to suffering violence at the hands of their own as well as the armies of other ethnic groups. She describes an incident involving her then four-year old son who stood up to defend his Serb friend and next-door neighbour against accusations by the other children that he as a Serb must also be a "četnik" (a term used during the conflict to refer to a member of extremist Serb paramilitary armies closely associated with the Orthodox Christian Church, and espousing an ultranationalist Serb ideology; they are held responsible for acts of brutality and torture of people from other ethnic groups):

My son comes to me and says Lola hit me, he says, Srdjan is a četnik, and I say to him he is not, his mother and father are here with us, in the neighbourhood. If he were četnik he would shoot at us. And then Lola beat me. My son was 4 years old then. I had explained to him that there are četniks, ustaše, extremist Islamic fighters, and that there are Serbs, and Croats. And he understood that Srdjan's dad is not a četnik, that he is here with us in the civil defense....People here are wonderful, they still have a lot of spirit left in them, despite politicians who try to impose their faulty politics on them... Here, recently a Serb man died in the neighbourhood, he was here during the entire war, he did not carry a gun, he did not fight, everyone respected him, and his neighbours buried him since he had no relatives. Gaga, a former colleague of mine [a Serb] was imprisoned by the četniks. We did everything we could to bring him back. Another colleague, when the Serbs came for him—I can't really say Serbs, they were not Serbs, they were četniks, and they came to recruit him to fight with them. When he refused they killed him in his own front yard, in front of his wife and two small children. They killed their own man, as it were.... What can I say, there were so many things that happened, on all sides....Two of my very close friends are Sen-

ka and Zana. And I have asked Senka a thousand times during the war, what are you, then, a Serb, a Croat? I still don't really know and I don't really care. We joked about this during the war, saying, I should know what you are since it matters apparently ....

Munira Subašić, the President of the Mothers of Srebrenica and Žepa Enclave Movement, is well-known nationally and internationally for her relentless fight not only for the truth of the genocide to be known and documented, but also for her steadfast commitment to building trust and reconciliation among the ethnic groups, even after and perhaps especially after having experienced great personal losses during the war.<sup>4</sup> My conversation with her reflected this commitment and is embodied in the way in which she speaks about her work with other women and mothers on overcoming hatred within themselves and the new generation of their children after the war:

So, thanks to conversations we had with them, their mothers...now we have a lot of doctors, engineers, professors. You know, when you look at a young man who is successful, he might have lost both father and mother. Or a child that had to watch his mother being raped, father killed, there is no hatred in him. That is the success of us, Bosnian mothers. Hatred is a weakness and we the mothers, we do not want to be weak. We always said that we should not be like the one who does evil. Remember that in our holy book it is written that you cannot do to others what you don't want done to yourself. If you think that a rock doesn't belong in your backyard, do not throw it across the street to your neighbour's yard. And we really made it. There is a Serb woman that runs an organization in Bijeljina and her name is Smilja and for example, she calls me sometimes and my granddaughter tells me: "Granny, you received a phone call from your Smilja, she said to call her back." That is what 'your Smilja' means, it means I build some respect with her, which is the most valuable thing in the world.

Subašić's efforts to build inter-ethnic bridges of trust and forge new forms of solidarity has been

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, an article about Munira Subašić on the portal of the UK-based chapter of the *Remembering Srebrenica* charity: <http://www.srebrenica.org.uk/survivor-stories/munira-subasic/>

unfolding over the last twenty-one years despite official politics that strives to inflame mutual mistrust and sharpen the differences among the three groups. Throughout our conversation she reiterated several times that “there are only two kinds of people, bad people and good people” and that their nationality and ethnic belonging has very little to do with anything.

Esma D. is one of the few recorded women fighters during the recent war; she fought on the side of the Bosnian Defense Army. She is the current President of the Association for Women SEKA in Goražde, and the Coordinator of the Center for Education, Therapy and Democratic Development in the same town. In our conversation, she spoke of being under the influence of what she calls “the Yugoslav spirit” in the context of her work on peace-building and cross-ethnic reconciliation in small towns across Republika Srpska. When I asked her what the Yugoslav spirit means to her, she responded with the following:

[It means w]ell being. Yugoslavia suited me even though I did not like some segments of that society. Even though I did not like communism as communism with one party system, without enough freedom and with restrictions, now when I look around, I would prefer to go into some sort of Yugoslavian spirit than this democracy where supposedly I can do what I want... I am allowed to say what I want but I am not allowed to choose the life I want. So, before, I could choose to go to Banja Luka and sleep well, to go to Belgrade and sleep well, even by the roadside if I wanted to. And today I am not safe even in Goražde, on the bench. Then, I could relax, I could live. It was the system itself, the way it was organized and the comradeship and socializing that it encouraged—there was diversity. Whoever wanted to attend the mosque, the church, they could. We fell from one system into another one that I find difficult since it interferes with how I was raised and attitudes developed from that, and principles I carry from my family. Suddenly I have to declare belonging, to go to church or to a mosque, as if that validates what it means to be a human being. Human and moral values are lost and we took all the worst things from the West....I still do not feel well here in Bosnia and Hercegovina and I see that a lot of youth leaves.

In Esma D's words it is evident that her idea of

the Yugoslav spirit is in fact a form of Yugoslavism that goes beyond a sense of longing for a lost past and that is articulated in terms of social and cultural values based on mutual respect, solidarity and co-existence among people with different ethnicities and religious backgrounds. The values derived from her memories of socialist Yugoslavia provide her with a concrete set of cognitive and practical structures through which she critiques the present, explains the differences between past and present, as well as envision as desirable a peaceful co-existence across ethnic divisions and a collective identity that goes above narrow ethnic and religious affiliations.

Jasminko Halilović, the founder and director of the Museum of War Childhood in Sarajevo, one of the few recent institutions in current Bosnia and Herzegovina seeks to commemorate the war experience of children in a non-partisan manner and is open and welcoming to all citizens and their memories, when asked about his opinion on the widespread presence of Yugoslav-related object of material culture around him, says: “I know for certain that it is in part a nostalgia for a time of peace, and when I say peace I don't only mean the absence of armed conflict, I mean a general and widespread state of peace, the absence of tension...What I am also saying is that currently, our public space is suffused by tensions, by criminality.”<sup>5</sup> In Halilović's words, as in Esma D's, it is clear that forms of Yugoslavism, and even Yugonostalgia, are closely linked to a mode of living and patterns of daily interaction that exist beyond narrow ethnic affiliations and are founded upon peaceful co-existence, and multiethnic tolerance and solidarity focused upon improving aspects of living that are common to all. As such, the discourse of Yugoslavism,

<sup>5</sup> For a more complete account of my interview with Halilović in the context of current local peace-building initiatives in Bosnia and Herzegovina, see Tatjana Takševa, “Building a Culture of Peace and Collective Memory in Post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina: Sarajevo's Museum of War Childhood,” *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, vol. 18. 1, 2018, pp. 3-18. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/sena.12265>

as it emerges from the words of my interlocutors represents a complex conceptual tool with which to critique the present and imagine the possibility of a better civil society.

Since the war, many non-governmental organizations in the Bosnian Federation have been working tirelessly on building peace and solidarity among the different ethnic groups. I became familiar with twelve of those organizations during my stay and had the opportunity to speak to people who are involved in their leadership. In all of those conversations, aspects of Yugoslavism and Yugonostalgia surface in the efforts to develop peaceful co-existence, solidarity and tolerance among all people who live in Bosnia and Herzegovina. At this point in post-conflict Bosnian society, these discourses should be understood as ideologies through which people assert social and cultural values that are more positive than the values promoted by current politics. In 1982, two years after Tito's death, possibly anticipating the potential for the violent dissolution of the Yugoslav state, Predrag Matvejević, a renowned Yugoslav author and thinker, wrote *Yugoslavism Today*, a book about the meaning of Yugoslavism and the role of nationhood, ethnicity and religion within its context. In it he defines the specific set of values embodied in this ideology:

Today, as in the past, there are different forms of Yugoslavism and different reasons to declare oneself Yugoslav, remaining all the while, to a lesser or greater extent, a Serb, a Croat, a Muslim, a Macedonian, Roma, a Turk, etc., as well as for those who wish, simply and only Yugoslav. Some of the most convincing reasons and forms of Yugoslavism are the following: Yugoslavism that strives to preserve, against all external and internal temptations, the Yugoslav community and the dignity of individual, social, and national life within it; Yugoslavism that is not an extended ethnicity emanating from one's original ethnicity (Serb, Croat, etc.) and that cannot be reduced to simple citizenship;...Yugoslavism freed from localism that fails to transcend its local limitations, and from regionalism that cannot become a positive national choice; Yugoslavism that opposes Yugoslav nationalism in the same way that it opposes any particular nationalism; Yugoslavism that rejects pathetic rhetorics on behalf of the na-

tion while respecting the rights of each nationality;...and finally, Yugoslavism for those of us who trace their origins from different Yugoslav ethnicities and who cannot separate or deny any of those parts within themselves (13-14).<sup>6</sup>

Matvejević's is among the most eloquent and succinct articulations of the Yugoslavist ideology as an intellectual attitude, as it existed then from the perspective from which he was writing, as it does now, outside a reference to the specific political entity. The values embodied in this kind of Yugoslavism are the values that inform today's post-conflict Yugoslavism. These values to a great extent embody the meaning of the "good life" for many in socialist Yugoslavia and they are predicated on a peaceful and purposeful living with and relating to others who may on some level (religious, ethnic) be different. For those who lived in the socialist Yugoslavia and who can literally "remember" those values as they permeated their understanding of their identity, this Yugoslavism manifests as Yugonostalgia. For those who were born after the dissolution of the political entity, it is a historically and intellectually-grounded ideological orientation. As such these efforts and ideological perspectives are consistent with theories regarding ethnocentrism and peacebuilding, in that they "emphasize similarities (and underemphasize) differences alongside non-ethnically based dimensions" of daily life among people (Bizumić 47). Post-war Yugoslavism as it is manifested in Bosnia and Herzegovina thus represents an oppositional discourse and a category of cultural and political dissent through which official ethno-nationalist politics is actively critiqued, deconstructed and subverted. It is a discourse that, given the country's recent violent past, stands for a particularly enlightened and progressive orientation toward reconciliation and rebuilding of Bosnian civil society on the principles of mutual respect and solidarity among the different ethnic groups.

<sup>6</sup> Matvejević, *Jugoslovenstvo Danas* (Zagreb: Globus, 1982; Beograd: Beogradski Izdavačko-Grafički Zavod, 1984). Translation from the original Serbo-Croatian is my own.



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