

# 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

<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

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

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 ‘prijatelji’” 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 envisions 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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