Shadows of the past: violent conflict and its repercussions for second-generation Bosnians in the diaspora

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Abstract

This article explores how diaspora youth is impacted by and deals with the legacies of the violent conflict in their parents' homeland of Bosnia. Based on the analysis of narrative-biographic interviews with second-generation Bosnians in Switzerland and ethnographic observations in diaspora spaces, this paper highlights the repercussions that Yugoslav disintegration wars and, particularly, the war in Bosnia (1992–1995) have for young people who were raised in Switzerland. First, it demonstrates that instead of a coherent picture about the past, young people receive fragments and pieces of personal memories and experiences that their families went through. Second, the history of conflict has repercussions for the ways young people establish and articulate their sense of attachment and belonging to the homeland of their parents. Third, while second-generation Bosnians rarely reproduce the conflict dynamic themselves, they move in spaces in which the legacies of conflict continue to be an important discursive and structural force.

keywords: memories of violence, second-generation, intergenerational transmission, Yugoslav wars, Bosnian diaspora

Introduction

> I was born in Zurich but I could almost have been born in Sarajevo… And I always knew, there was a war and our people have suffered but I did not know to what extent. That came only after I learned the term "Yugo". With this also came the image of *us* here, in Switzerland [author's emphasis]. This process, I somehow had to go through. I somehow had to get to know myself as a Bosnian. But also, as a Bosnian Swiss. As both…

This excerpt is from an interview with Aida, a young woman of Bosnian descent who was born and grew up in Switzerland. Her family had to leave their home in Sarajevo at the onset of the Bosnian war (1992–1995), the war that took the life of many members of her extended family. She says she feels at home in Zurich, but she has a deep connection to Sarajevo. The way her

relationship to Bosnia developed was deeply impacted by her family's experiences of forced migration and Bosnia's war past.

While armed conflicts and civil wars are one of the primary reasons for migration on the global scale, there is still scant research on how experiences of violence and displacement exert a long-term impact on people who migrate, on succeeding generations who were born in new residence contexts and on the dynamics of diasporic life. Psychologically based focus on trauma and intergenerational transmission of traumatic experiences is one of the prevalent ways to approach the topic (Kidron, 2010; Dalgaard & Montgomery, 2015; Sangalang & Vang, 2017). Another scholarly focus concerns the ways in which diasporic communities engaged in homeland politics and are mobilized to support particular political causes or reconciliation processes (van Hear & Cohen 2017; Baser 2013; Toivanen & Baser 2020). At the same time, research is needed to study the long-term impact that historical and political contexts of migration have on diasporic subjects, on processes of incorporation into the host contexts, on transnational activities and ties and on successive generations who grew up in the countries to which their parents emigrated[1] (Bloch 2020).

As Levitt has argued, while the children of migrants are not invested in their ancestral homes in the same intensity as their parents, one should not dismiss "the strong potential effect of being raised in a transnational social field" (2009, p. 1226). A range of studies have demonstrated that, contrary to expectations of a gradual "assimilation" of the second generation, young people with migrant backgrounds continue to relate to their parents' homeland, but in different ways to the first generation (Bolzman et al., 2017; Levitt & Waters, 2006; Richter & Nollert, 2014; Wessendorf, 2010). As Levitt and Glick Schiller argue, the experience of being socialized in multiple cultural repertoires constitutes young people's "transnational ways of belonging" that can subsequently provide a basis for the second generation's "transnational ways of being" and more active transnational connections (2004, p. 1011). The political context in parents' homelands can have various repercussions for second-generation youth, influencing their modes of transnationalism, involvement in diasporic activities or humanitarian engagements (Baser 2013; Hess & Korf 2014; Blachnika-Ciacek 2018).

In this article, I examine the ways in which the legacies of war in parents' homelands affect the lives of youth of Bosnian descent in Switzerland and comprises a frequent element of second generations' transnational experiences.[2] While for the most part second-generation youths of Bosnian background in Switzerland do not have first-hand experiences or memories of war, the legacies of violent conflict have various repercussions for them as diasporic subjects. In this

paper, I will discuss three aspects in particular. The first is how memories and experiences of violence and forced migration are communicated in the familial realm. Second-generation Bosnians often receive only fragmented and scarce information about the migration past, with their family experiences being often concealed and encased in silence. Thus, rather than a straightforward and linear transmission, there is a process of a patchy reconstruction of events from the past based on the fragments that young people receive from their parents and their wider surroundings. Second, I reflect on the ways in which legacies of war affect young people's relationships with their parents' homeland and their own articulations of belonging. Similar to other second-generation youths, young people of Bosnian background struggle to claim and gain recognition for a sense of belonging to multiple homelands (Mecheril 2003; Levitt 2009; Allenbach, 2011; Wessendorf 2010). In this process, not only exclusionary discourses about migrants in Swiss society but also conflicting discourses on homeland identity within diaspora, play a role. The contested and fragmented nature of Bosnian nationhood and competition between various modes of identity constitute one of the problematic experiences in the process of identification. The third aspect I will focus on concerns the ways legacies of the war play out in the social worlds of ex-Yugoslav diaspora and how young people navigate the various discourses within diaspora spaces. Thus, while there is a discourse of a shared cultural legacy (including the language) and a shared past that brings young people of ex-Yugoslav background together, at the same time, there are narratives and memories of mass atrocities during the Yugoslav disintegration wars that often function as an invisible barrier. Such narratives can be evoked as part of family memories or in the form of parents' remarks on certain issues. They can also find manifestation in diasporic spaces (like migrant associations but also more informal spaces), during peer interaction but also in the digital media.

The family migration histories of my research participants shows that war-related migration cannot be reduced to refugee migration alone. While parts of some families came to Switzerland through official asylum procedures, others came through family reunification, joining their husbands or wives, who had been in Switzerland since 1970s and '80s as labour migrants. Because of the repatriation campaign after the war, some families were forced to move back to Bosnia or to other countries seeking asylum. Other families had already settled in Switzerland prior to the war but retained transnational connections with Bosnia, and were therefore still affected by the war (by losing extended family members, property or savings). Political conflict thus affects all those who retain transnational links and connections with the homeland and cannot be reduced only to those who have been forcibly displaced.

As I argue, the Bosnian war is not of inherent importance for young people of Bosnian background but its legacies are foregrounded by experiences young people have in Switzerland and in Bosnia. Life-story narrations demonstrate how personal relevance of the violent past changes throughout a lifetime. During certain periods, the engagement with the parents' homeland is more intensive when activated by biographic experiences, representing turning points and transitions for young people.

This article is based on data gathered within the framework of a research project on second-generation Bosnians who live in (mainly German-speaking parts of) Switzerland. So far, 30 in-depth, narrative-biographic interviews with young people aged between 18 and 35 from various ethno-religious backgrounds[3] have been conducted, with some of the interviews involving several sessions. The interviews that provided the bulk of data were complemented by participant observation during diasporic events (e.g. national celebrations, performances and commemorations), often in the company of the interview partners, as well as by semi-structured interviews with experts and migrant activists. While participants were recruited using the snowball technique, the widest possible range of access points was sought to ensure a diversity of socio-economic backgrounds and the degree of involvement in organized migrant life.[4]

In this research project, narrative-biographic interviewing was selected as a method, offering an open-ended procedure in which the issues are not suggested by researcher's questions but addressed (or not addressed) by the interviewees in their own terms, while narrating their life stories. Importantly, biographical narrations are always a particular, time-specific reconstruction and interpretation of a biographical journey, which are continually reinterpreted by individuals within the context of their lives (Rosenthal 2004). Narrative-biographic interviewing is increasingly being used in migration and transnationalism studies not only as a method but also as a research perspective. It allows a close reading of an individual's life story while situating it within the context of the larger socio-political structures and changes in response to which biographical trajectories take shape (Eastmond 2007; Apitzsch & Siouti 2007; Rosenthal & Bogner 2009).

In what follows, I will first introduce the historical context of the Bosnian migration to Switzerland, followed by a discussion of the ways in which young people learn about the history of both their families and their countries of origin. I will then illuminate how these histories are implicated in young people's negotiations of belonging as well as in social interactions in various contexts outside the familial sphere. I will conclude by highlighting important repercussions of

the Bosnian case for the larger debates on the long-term transnational consequences of conflict and forced migration.

The Bosnian diaspora in Switzerland

The migration of citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina to Switzerland began in the early 1960s, as part of labour migration from former Yugoslavia to Western Europe (Brunnbauer, 2019; Halilovich, 2013; Dahinden 2009). As the only socialist country that officially allowed out-migration for economic purposes to capitalist Western Europe, the Yugoslav government encouraged this labour migration in order to tackle domestic economic problems (Brunnbauer 2019). During this period, mainly male, seasonal workers came to Switzerland, and their families often remained in Yugoslavia. In Swiss public discourse, these migrant workers were collectively referred to as "Yugoslavs", with little differentiation made between their ethno-religious backgrounds. Nor were the migrants themselves particularly attentive to ethnic differences: they would all socialize in joint Yugoslav migrant organizations, including sport clubs, cultural associations and professional communities officially supported by the Yugoslav state (Behloul, 2016; Dahinden, 2009).

With the political crisis in Yugoslavia at the end of 1980s, out-migration from Bosnia intensified. During the war in Bosnia (1992–1995), over 24,000 Bosnian refugees arrived in Switzerland, some receiving asylum and others being temporarily admitted (Iseni et al. 2014).[5] Other Bosnians came through family reunification procedures or by other routes (such as undocumented border crossing), joining parts of their family network who had arrived earlier as labour migrants. At the end of the war, a repatriation campaign was undertaken, during which a substantial proportion of the refugees were forced to return to Bosnia or move to third countries (Halilovich, 2013; Iseni et al., 2014; Valenta & Ramet, 2011).[6] After these events, migratory movements from Bosnia-Herzegovina substantially decreased but continue to the present day, due to persistent political and economic instability in the region.

In socialist Yugoslavia, Bosnia was a multi-ethnic republic with a long tradition of ethnic co-existence and the highest rates of inter-ethnic marriage of all the Yugoslav republics (Malcolm 1996; Halilovich, 2013). The war in Bosnia (1992–1995) and the subsequent Dayton Peace Agreement has resulted in ethnic segregation and the division of the country into two entities: the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, predominantly populated by Croats and Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks)[7] and the largely Serb-populated *Republika Srpska* (Bieber 2006). The territory of Bosnia became a battlefield for projects of ethnic purity and homogeneity resulting in the ethnic

fragmentation of the country and a divided political structure (Bieber 2006). This ethnic division legitimized ethnic cleansing campaigns on the political level and is a reason for the dysfunctionality of the government in Bosnia. This reification of ethnic cleavages has also affected Bosnians living in the diaspora. The previously united "Yugoslav diaspora" was divided along ethno-national lines after the war and migrant associations are now similarly organized along ethno-religious lines, rather than by country of origin (Dahinden 2009; Behloul 2016). Thus, Serbs and Croats from Bosnia join (mostly church-based) ethno-national Serbian and Croatian organizations linked to the respective states of Serbia and Croatia, while Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks) have established their own ethno-religious organizations: the so-called *džemats*, which grew in number during the war, since the majority of refugees from Bosnia had a Muslim background (Behloul 2016). These Bosnian Muslim organizations took on the role of promoting the ethno-national identity of Bosniaks in the diaspora. Thus, with the exception of a few smaller initiatives, there are no united Bosnian organizations representing all of the main ethnic communities.

In addition to assisting the incoming migrants with various practical issues, such as dealing with the authorities or finding employment, migrant associations serve as centres for organized social, cultural and religious life for migrants and their descendants. One of their rationales is to strengthen and nurture the links of diaspora members to their homeland, including the promotion of identity and culture of the homeland among the younger generation. Thus, almost all migrant associations within the ex-Yugoslav diaspora organize special activities for young people, such as language lessons, courses on religion and folk-dance groups. Furthermore, there are so-called "homeland language and culture" courses for school-age children that take place in Swiss public schools but are sponsored by migrant organizations or by the embassies of respective post-Yugoslav states.[8]

While divided at the level of associational life, migrants from the republics of former Yugoslavia have a lot in common. Along with many cultural aspects (e.g. language, traditions and food) they also share common experiences of discrimination and stigmatization at the hands of the Swiss majority, which often perceives them as a homogenous group: the "Yugo". Despite the fact that a large proportion of migrants from former Yugoslavia have acquired Swiss citizenship, especially the second generation who were born and/or raised in Switzerland, discriminatory practices and exclusionary attitudes towards them are still commonplace (Fibbi, 2015).

Although only a few of my interviewees are regularly active in established migrant organizations, all of them have at some point in their lives participated (or still participate) in informal diasporic spaces. By this, I mean various spaces of ex-Yugoslav culture in Switzerland, ranging from rock bars to the so-called Balkan discos where young people hang out and socialize. They also join commemoration events and initiatives (such as the commemoration of Srebrenica) as well as humanitarian projects and actions to help their countries of origin (Karabegović, 2014).

The fragments of the past in everyday life

> Actually, we rarely speak about it … about the war directly. It comes up from time to time in specific situations. Somehow it influences our daily life, but I can't explain it. It has an influence on my parents, but they never speak about it directly.

This comment by Kristina, a 22-year-old woman of Bosnian origin, aptly illustrates what many of my other interview partners pointed to. The past is rarely talked about in the family. It remains in the shadows, yet it tacitly influences everyday life. Knowledge about things that happened in the past and that led to migration are communicated sporadically, often in small fragments and over prolonged periods of time. Kristina, whose father migrated to Switzerland in the 1970s as a labour migrant and whose mother left Bosnia during the war, only recently discovered that her maternal grandfather had been detained in a concentration camp during the war. Before coming to Switzerland, her mother had been an internal refugee in Bosnia – and while she knows some details about this period, she feels there is a reluctance within the family to talk about these issues.

Not only are parents reluctant to talk, but the children themselves also refrain from asking about the details of what might have been painful experiences. Referred to as a "double wall of silence" jointly maintained by both generations (Bar-On, 1995), such aspects of (non-)communication function as protective strategies or as ways of keeping distressing and burdensome experiences away from everyday life (Kidron 2010; Wiseman et al., 2006; Maček, 2017; Bloch, 2018). As some of my research partners revealed, parents would be ready to talk about traumatic experiences later, mostly when children are adults themselves and are old enough to deal with this information. The father of one of my informants started to talk with him about his experiences in the concentration camp only after the son married and was himself preparing to become a father.[9] At the same time, this reluctance to talk might be also explained by the first generation's need to work through their experiences, gain a certain emotional distance from them and come to terms with events that they had previously seemed unimaginable. Thus, as materials indicate, the way memories and experiences from the past are communicated within the family

is deeply intertwined with family dynamics and intergenerational relations. As Eastmond (2016: 21) notes, gaps and silences in individual accounts relating to sensitive topics could sometimes be subdued in the management of family life or for the protection of personal relationships. Thus, people can actively manage their memories for the sake of family or inter-group relations (Sorabji, 2006). While such silences and omissions are often interpreted in a psycho-medical idiom, as Eastmond (2016: 21) suggests, they might be better understood in more complex social terms, forming part of what Lambek refers to as a 'moral practice' or 'a practical wisdom' (Lambek 1996: 239, cited in Eastmond 2016).

When the past is talked about in the family, it is often triggered by ordinary situations, both in Switzerland and in Bosnia itself, or is provoked by commemorative dates and events. My interlocutors have recounted how, during visits to Bosnia, their parents would suddenly recount episodes of their war-time life or of their flight. Sensations, such as the taste of food, could also trigger memories in the parents or grandparents, as another interviewee, a young woman of Bosnian origin recalled:

> Just couple of days ago, my grandmother was eating goat cheese from the Swiss supermarket. And then she remembered how back in her village in Bosnia, she had her own goats and what nice milk they produced, what a nice cheese she produced. Then she started to cry and said she had lost everything... I was quite irritated; I told her, can you tell me something positive about the past? Must it always be crying and mourning?

Another interviewee recounted that every time she travelled to Bosnia, she expected people to come out of the woods, because of the stories her father told her of how Bosnians hid in the forests to escape killings. Sometimes, they would start to talk about news from the homeland. For some, knowledge of the past would be communicated not only in stories but also in embodied forms. A number of my interview partners were taught by their parents never to make a particular hand gesture, involving three fingers, that had been used by paramilitaries during the war. Thus, there are not only narrative but also other forms – such as gestures, emotions and images – through which memories can be "handed down" (Stoller, 1997; Blachnicka-Ciacek, 2020).

Thus, in place of systematic knowledge or a wholesome picture of what happened in the past, my research partners have fragments and pieces of personal memories and experiences that their families went through. As one of my informants, who wrote a high school thesis on the genocide in the region his family fled from explained, he wanted acquire the "whole picture" of what had happened, based on historic, objective documents and testimonies of survivors. Yet he did not include in his work the testimonies of his own father, who was a concentration camp

survivor. These fragments and pieces left some of my research partners feeling resentful towards their parents that they could not give a clear picture and a background of the events of the past. They felt alone in this "piecing together", or as one of my interviewees put it, "I had to do all this work on my own". Seeking to create a coherent narrative of the past, they often turned to other sources of information: other family members, friends or publicly available sources of information (like books, documentaries or works of journalism).

In this agency work by the diaspora youth, socio-economic positionality and educational resources seem to play an important role. Those who were on higher or more advanced educational tracks had the chance to gain a more systematic knowledge within the framework of, for example, high school[10] or university studies. Others, who for instance went to vocational school and entered the workforce early on, mostly had little time and resources to engage deeply with these issues. Challenging for many was to orient themselves and find a balanced representation of events amid the extensive sources of information.

While the story of the family or of the war in general is rarely told in a coherent narrative, there are certain representations handed down from parents to children that persist and are reproduced as part of common, not always verbalized, but shared, "common sense" knowledge. The most obvious example is the "victim-perpetrator" narrative. For my interlocutors on the Bosnian Muslim side, it was always clear who was the perpetrator group and that intention was to annihilate Bosniaks as a group. Among diasporic groups of other ethno-religious backgrounds, there are also other narratives. Familial fragments and gaps can be thus filled with narratives that are derived from but also perpetuate the conflict dynamics. As will be shown, these can manifest in various contexts and situations in which diasporic youth finds itself.

Contested meanings of being Bosnian

As young people of ex-Yugoslav background, second-generation Bosnians in Switzerland are subsumed under the category "Yugo" – a slightly derogatory label to refer to people whose origins lie in the region of former Yugoslavia (Rossig 2008; Allenbach 2011). Mainly identified based on names, they are often perceived as a homogenous group and are subjected to xenophobic remarks and prejudice. Young people feel stigmatised by such projections that reflect the Swiss majority image of them as a Balkan "Other" (Todorova 2009).

The confrontation with this label often happens in various contexts of Swiss public life (such as schooling) and it triggers young people to learn more about own migrant background, as was the case for Aida, whose remark opened the paper. In the context of everyday experiences

of othering and attempts to come to terms with migrant roots, stories they heard in the flow of family life receive new meanings. A need emerges to bring the puzzles and fragments together into a more comprehensive picture about individual and family biography and events of the past.

For Aida, one of the puzzling questions was the fate of her uncle. As a child she remembered her cousins talking about their father, who disappeared during the siege of Sarajevo and whose remains had never been found. Her main source of information about the war was another uncle with whom she had long conversations and who provided her with further sources. In this period, which lasted much of her adolescence, she was, as she put it, "obsessed" with the history of Bosnia. In high school she wrote a graduation thesis about the genocide against Muslims in Srebrenica. In the framework of this systematic learning effort she acquired a better understanding of Bosnia's past and her family's history of forced migration.

This newly acquired knowledge on the one side can provide for a more meaningful and emotionally laden connection to the parents' homeland. At the same time, it can also provoke the feelings of distress and the wish to dissociate from the violent past. At some point Aida was so "fed up" with the stories of suffering that she wanted to disassociate herself from this baggage and be just "Swiss. Indeed, some of my interview partners said they intentionally distance themselves from the past and do not want to engage too much with these issues, giving an impression that such issues are a burden they would rather keep away from.

These shifting configurations of attachment to Bosnia manifest not only in the attitudes towards the past but also in the ways they experience regular trips to Bosnia. Most research partners in my sample travel to Bosnia at least once a year, usually spending some weeks during summer and occasionally visiting in winter or spring. The narrations of some of my research partners reveal how their experiences and perceptions of visits to Bosnia have changed throughout their lives. Many have recounted how as children they very much enjoyed summer holidays in Bosnia, as times of reconnection with their extended Bosnian and transnational families, who came from all over the world for the summer. In Bosnia they often felt free to do things that were not allowed in Switzerland. With age, however, they were increasingly exposed to the problematic sides of daily life and to Bosnia's dire political and economic situation decades after the conflict. Pervasive corruption, political insufficiency and absence of perspectives for people there, especially for local youth, have burdened young people's relationship to Bosnia, connecting feelings of uneasiness, insecurity and disappointment to their parents' homeland.

The narrative of Selma, a 25-year-old woman of Bosnian descent, illustrates this point. Being born to a Bosnian migrant family and having difficulties finding an apprenticeship when

she was 16 (because, as she put it, of her "-ić name"), she had something like an "identity crisis". The negatively charged meanings of being Bosnian have problematized her relationship with her migrant roots, as she explains in the following passage:

> During adolescence, I wanted to find out who I was, as I was in the process of finding my identity. I had an identity crisis. I often didn't want to be Bosnian. I wanted to have an identity of a nation which was successful and not the one which was marked as a victim. It stressed me a lot… I often told myself it is a pity we are not Croats. They have the seacoast, tourism, they are doing good. But Bosnia was a third-world country and it stressed me a lot.

The narratives of victimhood and war inscribed into the sense of being Bosnian has provoked a need to disassociate herself from her migrant background. Simultaneously, the exclusionary attitudes in Swiss society made it difficult for her to fully accept Swiss identity. Later, she joined a circle of young people of ex-Yugoslav background who celebrated the musical legacy of the Balkan region, and of Bosnia in particular. During this period, her relationship to Bosnia started to transform. By socializing with peers who celebrated their migrant heritage through engagement with the music, she could connect to Bosnia in positive and rewarding ways.

While the narratives of victimhood often underlie the meanings of being Bosnian among Bosnian Muslims, among those with Bosnian Serb background, it is the image of perpetrators that problematizes their relationship to the parents' homeland (Juhasz, 2009; Mikić & Sommer, 2003). Jelena is a young woman born to a family of migrant workers from Bosnia who came to Switzerland before the war. Her family was committed to the ideas of multi-ethnic Yugoslavia and repudiated nationalistic outlooks. Suddenly, however, these ethnic labels loomed large in Swiss public discourses projecting an identity on her of a "perpetrator" group. She recalls an episode in which, after having seen a Serb war criminal on the front page of a Swiss newspaper, she suddenly felt a need to justify herself as a Bosnian of Serbian origin:

> And I saw this article in the newspaper, there was the tribunal with Carla del Ponte and all that and then… I just... I realized that I, as a Bosnian Serb, I was ascribed an identity [as a member of] an indicted ethnic group, a group responsible for mass killings… I took it personally... I thought, now I have to justify myself! Looking back, I wish my parents would have explained it to me clearly, look – on paper, you belong to this ethnicity, this religion… but you are not guilty for this war…

For Jelena, ethnicity is secondary to her much more outspoken sense of identification with Bosnia as a country. This in contrast to many of her diasporic peers who identify primarily with ethno-religious categories, as she explains below. In her youth Jelena often felt she did not fit into dominant articulations of belonging, which became a reason for her to stop socializing in the circles of second-generation youth:

I don't identify myself as a Serb from Bosnia, or as a Muslim or a Croat from Bosnia… and this was an identity problem which accompanied me during my whole youth… I'm probably an exception, but I simply identify myself as a Bosnian. The problem is that then most of the time a question comes up – not only from the second generation, but also from the Swiss – but what exactly from Bosnia? Meaning which of the three ethnic groups? In my opinion, Bosnia is a sovereign state and I'm not less Bosnian than the others because of my ethnic background!

Her experiences illustrate what repercussions violent conflict can have on the politics of belonging among diaspora youth. Because of war, Bosnian nationhood became deeply contested and fragmented. The multi-ethnic nature of Bosnia, its deeply rooted diversity and ability to band together various ethnic groups, has been largely destroyed by the war, through ethnic cleansing campaigns and through ethno-political division. Decades after the war, the nationalistic forces – both within Bosnia itself and within the diaspora – perpetuate the discourses that question the existence of Bosnia as a legitimate entity, presenting it rather as an "artificial creation" by the international community (Al-Ali 2002; Halilovich 2013).

For diaspora youth this means that ethno-religious identifications and attachment to "ethnic homelands", particularly among the youth of Serb and Croat backgrounds, thus competes with and often overrides the attachment to Bosnia as a homeland. As an instance of a "nationalistic attitude" and negation of Bosnia's existence, Aida recounted an episode in which one of her fellow university students, a Swiss-Bosnian, explicitly declared himself to be from *Republika Srpska*, a Serbian entity within Bosnia. Thus, it is often through an encounter with other peers of ex-Yugoslav background and their views that young people become aware of the conflicting notions and conceptualizations of belonging among diaspora youth. It is against narrow ethno-nationalistic visions of belonging and of Bosnian identity that both Aida and Jelena position themselves.

Yet there was a group of interviewees in my sample that articulated belonging in alternative terms. They neither identify with ethnic labels, nor with post-Yugoslav nation-states, whether Bosnia, Serbia or Croatia, but see themselves primarily as Yugoslavs. These nostalgic articulations of belonging offer a third way for second-generation Bosnians to establish and build an attachment to their parents' homeland. While it is based on idealized representation of the Yugoslav past, these forms of belonging among young people (most of whom never experienced life in socialist Yugoslavia) are deeply embedded in diasporic negotiations over belonging, homeland and the past (Müller-Suleymanova, forthcoming). Such attitudes establish common grounds of solidarity among the second-generation youth of ex-Yugoslav backgrounds who see themselves outside of ethnically segregated migrant associations. Young people socialize and

celebrate the common Yugoslav cultural legacy in these Yugo-nostalgic circles to overcome ethnic cleavages and conflicting interpretations of the past.

Navigating diasporic social worlds

While first-generation migrants might be oriented more towards their own migrant ethnic communities or kinship networks, their children grow up in hybrid, (post-)migrant social worlds of "Secondos", a popular term in Switzerland to describe youth of migrant backgrounds (Juhasz & Mey, 2003; D'Amato, 2010; Allenbach 2011).[11] In these settings, young people often form alliances on a non-ethnic basis and articulate alternative forms of solidarity (Wimmer, 2004; Wessendorf, 2007;). My interviewees reported that they predominantly socialize with other youths of migrant background, pointing to shared experiences of living in multiple cultures and dealing with conflicting expectations from family and peer circles, not to mention experiences of exclusion and discrimination, as a strong foundation for solidarity and friendship. Moreover, they often find themselves in similar socio-economic positions and educational tracks, facing similar obstacles to social mobility (Juhasz & Mey, 2003; Fibbi 2015).

Within various contexts of social interaction, my research participants often referred to a feeling of closeness with peers from former Yugoslavia. Above all, it was a common (ancestral) language that created this feeling, along with such aspects as shared culture, lifestyle (music, food and style of dress), specific patterns of interaction and communication within the family. Similar to what was observed among second-generation Italians by Wessendorf, youth with an ex-Yugoslav background have created this common mutual ground by using the terms and associated values of "Balkan" or "Yugo" in contrast to what was seen as "typically Swiss" values of order, discipline and a strong work ethic (Wessendorf 2010; Ritter, 2018).

An important aspect in the construction of a shared identity is the so-called "Balkan clubs" or "Yugo discos" that are flourishing, mainly in the German-speaking part of Switzerland. Here second-generation youth come together to party, celebrate and consume pop music from their countries of origin, mostly *Turbofolk*, a fusion of pop-cultural genres with traditional Balkan music (Archer, 2012). These clubs, which regularly invite pop stars from the region of former Yugoslavia are prominent examples of transnational social spaces in which diasporic youth socialize and live out the culture of their country of origin.[12] As one of my interview partners put it, "it is like you have been *down there* [meaning in Bosnia – author's emphasis] on holidays". While most of my research partners regularly or sporadically frequented these clubs, their

attitudes towards them were ambivalent. While some did not identify with the ambience and the music played there, others attended these clubs as part of the "group" or under "peer pressure".

At first sight in these diasporic spaces, extensive partying and celebration of Balkan pop music seem to bridge and make ethnic distinctions obsolete. Indeed, in the post-Yugoslav region itself, Balkan pop stars enjoy widespread popularity, transcending the ethno-political borders and tensions of the post-Yugoslav nation-states through their mass concerts across the region. At the same time, there are various, often visual, practices of ethnic marking that can be observed in these clubs, ranging from specific tattoos and accessories signalling ethno-religious belonging, to names and dialects spoken by young people.[13] Moreover, as my research partners have reported, while the clientele of such clubs is ethnically mixed, young people predominantly socialize in smaller, mono-ethnic groups.

Markers of ethnic differentiation might indeed play an important role in such clubs, which function as potential sites for dating. While my interviewees reported that ethnicity does not play a role in friendships, things were more complicated when it came to dating. Dating relationships with a prospect of marriage involved not only two individuals but also the families, including extended families in the countries of origin. Here ethnic, religious and historic factors, including memories and narratives of inter-ethnic violence, might play prominent role. Most of my interview partners stated that they were never explicitly forbidden from entering relationships with someone from the other ethnic group. However, many of them would nonetheless refrain from entering such a relationship. As one of my interview partners said, her father never taught her to hate, but she knows how he would react if she brought someone home from the "other side". Here, the shared, "common sense" knowledge, described earlier, such as the "victim-perpetrator" narratives, start to play out in the lives of young people. My research partners for instance would often say that they "automatically take a distance", they are "cautious" or they just do not feel attracted to those from the "other" side. Yet others would express it more explicitly, saying that they would never dare bring someone from the "other" side home, knowing what their families had been through. Others expected that eventually, conflicts could arise because of religious differences. Such responses point to a range of constraints that young people must deal with when it comes to interaction with other diasporic peers. The memories and legacies of conflict play into these attitudes, reifying and cementing ethno-national boundaries between ethno-religious communities.

These observations reveal that there is a complex, multi-directional dynamic at work in the diasporic social spaces in which young people of ex-Yugoslav background move. On the one

hand, there are common spaces and cultural practices through which young people construct a shared "Yugo" or "Balkan" identity. On the other hand, there are narratives and memories of inter-ethnic violence that resurface as invisible barriers dividing individuals and families and communities alike.

Most of my research partners stated that in daily life and in interactions with their peers from the region they never discuss politics or the past. While some say that they cannot live out conflicts they were not involved in, others say they avoid these discussions because people are little informed, often ignoring or even denying atrocities that happened during the war. While some say it is necessary to forget what happened in order to move forward, others say these things cannot and should not be forgotten. Such diverging views point to deeply unresolved issues and tensions concerning the war, and specifically war crimes, which hamper processes of reconciliation, not only in the whole post-Yugoslav region but also in the diaspora.

Conclusion

Scholars have recently called for increased focus on the historical and political contexts under which migration has taken place and to the impact of these legacies on succeeding generations (Bloch 2020; Bloch & Hirsch 2018). The discussion of second-generation Bosnians offers important insights for this debate.

For second-generation youths, the process of coming to terms with their migrant backgrounds and forming a relationship with their country of origin is not one-dimensional. It is an ongoing process that is often thick with tensions and conflicts. In her analysis of the formation of a relationship to their ancestral homeland among second-generation Palestinians, Blachnicka-Ciacek (2018: 1916) considers how the country of parental origin 'becomes' rather than 'remains' important for the second generation of Palestinians". The relationship with "the ancestral homeland is an ongoing process of 'figuring out': of moulding, making and re-making the relationship with Palestine" (2018: 1921). The past and ongoing violence in the country of origin problematizes and accentuates this relationship in various, often contradictory ways. Second-generation Bosnians in Switzerland have to learn about and come to terms with the history of their families' displacement and the history of extreme violence in their countries of origin. This process takes place against the backdrop of the fragmented and scarce nature of transmission and communication about the past within the families. In this regard, Sorabji suggests thinking about the memories not as actively handed down by elders and absorbed passively by youth but as actively inferred by the younger generations based on information from

elders (Sorabji 2006: 4). This approach highlights the agency of young people and their active involvement in reconstructing knowledge about the past, aspects that become somewhat obscured by the term "transmission".

In the process of figuring out their relationship to the ancestral homeland, second-generation Bosnians develop and articulate various, often diverging, notions of belonging. Along with ethno-religious identification (as Bosniak, Serb or Croat), my interview partners have articulated more nostalgic (e.g. Yugo-nostalgic), religious or civic-oriented (as attachment to multi-ethnic Bosnia) attachments that overlap and co-exist with the feeling of belonging to Switzerland. In the context of former Yugoslavia, with its history of political violence that constantly mobilizes ethno-national and religious identities, categories of identification are highly charged, both emotionally and symbolically (Al-Ali 2002; Eastmond 1998). It illustrates the point made by Stuart Hall (1999: 225) that "cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories… they are names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past". The fact that young people articulate ethno-national categories of identification when referring to themselves and others does not mean that we should take them for granted as unproblematic analytical categories or methodological lenses (Brubaker 2004; Dahinden 2017). Rather, we should demonstrate how they come to identify with these categories and how they can change throughout life. Life-story narrations show that a sense of belonging among young people is dynamic and evolves in response to concrete biographic experiences and challenges, suggesting that a biographical approach should be considered more seriously in studies on migration and transnationalism (Rosenthal & Bogner, 2009). Peer circles are also important mediators of the relationship with the parents' homeland, as in these circles young people discover and cultivate various modes of identification.

The relationship to the parents' homeland is shaped not only through the prism of the past but also through ongoing political and structural (economic, social) violence in the regions of origin. The devastating socio-economic and political situation in Bosnia affects the motivation and readiness of young people to participate in political processes, for example elections, related to Bosnia. Referring to pervasive corruption and ethno-political division within the government, most interviewees did not trust in any possibilities for the diaspora to influence the political situation in Bosnia or help the country move forward. The only possibility they saw to contribute to Bosnia's development and to support people was through concrete financial assistance and humanitarian help.

The discussion furthermore shows that the legacies of conflict manifest themselves in the social worlds of the diaspora that young people navigate. Cleavages and conflict lines within diasporic spaces are important factors in the evolution of second-generation youth as diasporic subjects. Political activism among youth can develop in reaction to mobilization and politicization within diasporic communities, for example in response to events in the homeland, as shown by cases of Palestinian, Kurdish or Tamil diasporic youth (Mavroudi 2007; Baser 2013; Hess & Korf 2014). At the same time, diasporic political cleavages might provoke a decision to remain separate from migrant associations and to keep a distance from migrant activism (Bloch & Hirsch 2018). Yet the conflict lines are not automatically transported from homeland into diasporic context as convincingly argued by Féron (Féron 2016; Féron & Lefort 2019). The dynamics of mobilization in the diasporic contexts might lead to the emergence of post-national forms of diasporic involvement based on transnational, global solidarities (Féron & Lefort 2019; Blachnick-Ciacek 2018).

According to Levitt, second-generation youth is situated between a variety of "different and often competing generational, ideological and moral reference points, including those of their parents and their own real and imagined perspectives about their multiple homelands" (Levitt 2009: 1238). This complex web of meanings includes the histories that unfolded in their countries of origin but have transnational and transgenerational impacts. Diasporic youth is confronted with fragmented knowledge, contested discourses and conflicting narratives on identity and the past, concerning their countries of origin. In this work of piecing together various fragments from the past and present, they seek coherence and a more rewarding way of relating to and dealing with the parents' homeland.

Endnotes

[1] Terms like "host country" or "ancestral homeland" can be problematic, especially in case of second-generation who were born or grew up in new contexts. As Haider (2014) has acknowledged, host/home dichotomies assume a set of linearity in migration processes and do not account for a shift in the definitions of home over time.

[2] I use the term "second generation" broadly to refer to children or grandchildren of migrants, who were born and/or grew up in the country to which their parents immigrated. Though the term has been contested (Mecheril 2003), it continues to be widely used in scholarship.

[3] Bosnian Muslims, Bosnian Serbs, Bosnian Croats and mixed ethnic origin. Interviews were conducted in Swiss German.

[4] The sample is not biased towards more diaspora-linked youth since only a small number of interview partners were recruited through migrant organizations.

[5] Another wave of refugee migration provoked by the disintegration of Yugoslavia was the war in Kosovo (1998–1999), bringing large numbers of Kosovar Albanians to Switzerland.

[6] Around 11,000 refugees were repatriated back to Bosnia from Switzerland. Currently it is estimated that over 60,000 people of Bosnian descent live in Switzerland, although the number may be higher, given that not all Bosnians have Bosnian citizenship.

[7] "Bosniak" is a commonly used name for the Bosnian Muslim population in post-war Bosnia.

[8] *Heimatsprache und Kultur* in German. In contrast to Serbia and Croatia, the Bosnian state does not sponsor such courses for children of Bosnian descent.

[9] The region of Prijedor in Bosnia was home to a number of notorious concentration camps held by Bosnian Serb forces (Kovačević 2020).

[10] Many of my research partners wrote their high school thesis on the topic of the Yugoslav disintegration wars.

[11] In the Swiss context, the term *Secondo* refers broadly to young people of the second and succeeding generations. It is also used for self-description to rally young people with a migrant background in their political struggle for citizenship and political representation in Switzerland (Wessendorf 2007).

[12] Indeed, the whole post-Yugoslav pop industry caters to the Western European diaspora. Pop stars from the region regularly tour Switzerland. Interestingly, Albanian-speaking youth are mostly considered "outsiders" to these Yugo clubs and have their own "Albanian" clubs.

[13] In the former Yugoslavia, and Bosnia in particular, names are the most common ethnic and religious marker. Dialects are less ethnically than regionally determined, but they still can function as signifiers of ethnic belonging.

During my fieldwork, I encountered no instances of open clashes between diaspora youth of various ethno-religious backgrounds from Bosnia.

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