

POST-GENOCIDE BOSNIAN MUSLIM FEMALE IDENTITY: VISUALIZING MOTHERHOOD, VIOLENCE AND VICTIMHOOD

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Abstract

As Yugoslavia fell apart in the 1990s, the Serbs used violence strategically, to achieve permanent divisions between ethnic categories and to thwart future attempts to rebuild trust and normalize interethnic relations. The goal of the violence was to intensify national and religious differences within socialist Yugoslavia's highly multicultural society. The violence of the war, and the sexual violence in particular, influenced the identity of Bosnian Muslims. It heightened their sense of endangerment and consequently, their feeling of belonging to a persecuted group. This paper analyzes the visual representations of motherhood, violence and victimhood in four films directed by Jasmila Žbanić. It finds inspiration in Žarana Papić's critical approach to patriarchy and nationalism and Inger Skjelsbæk's field work among the survivors of sexual violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The paper's main goals are to trace the link between patriarchy, nationalism and the memory of gender-directed violence, and to highlight the transformation of Bosnian Muslim identity within the context of history.

Keywords: Bosnia and Herzegovina; genocide; war crimes; sexual violence; patriarchy; victimhood; motherhood

DOI: 10.14712/23363231.2019.12

This article is based on research supported by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science.

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I extend my gratitude to two anonymous reviewers as well as to the journal editors for their insightful comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this paper.

Introduction

The wars that accompanied the fracturing of the former Yugoslavia were the crystallization of years of propaganda. That propaganda promoted only one possible way for the ethnic groups that until 1991 formed the south Slav nation to survive: the creation, through violence, of ethnically homogeneous territories.

In order to intensify the national and religious differences within socialist Yugoslavia's highly multicultural society, the Serbs used violence strategically, to achieve permanent divisions between ethnic categories and thwart attempts to rebuild trust and normalize interethnic relations. The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina was one of a series of wars that started in 1991 (in Slovenia) and ended in 1999 (in Kosovo) – although it has sometimes been argued that socialist Yugoslavia's dissolution was not complete until Kosovo's proclamation of independence in 2008. It is important to keep in mind that Bosnian ethnic identities must be considered in all their plurality and diversity, because Bosnia and Herzegovina's ethnic and national heterogeneity is the determinant of its past and present. Indeed, Bosnia and Herzegovina is sometimes referred to as a Yugoslavia in miniature. There are in fact numerous ways Bosnia can be compared to the former Yugoslavia. However, by itself, that approach may serve more to obscure than to explain Bosnia's complexity.

Rape has been used as a weapon of war for centuries. Nevertheless, the war in Bosnia produced a particularly systemic pattern of sexualized violence. Bosnian Muslim women were targeted with rape-induced, forced pregnancies because of their ethnicity and because of their gender.¹

However, labeling this violence as targeted solely at female victims would be a dangerous oversimplification. When discussing sexual violence in the context of the Bosnian war (1992–1995), it should be recognized that both men and women were targeted, but in different ways. Similar to the psychological effect of sexual violence against women, the effect of sexual rape and mutilation on men was equally devastating. Moreover, it was systematic. The first case in the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague, in which sexual violence was recognized as part of a wider pattern of severe human rights violations, concerned, among others, a male victim who did not survive his ordeal in the Omarska Camp in Prijedor.² Of course, men were usually tar-

¹ Inger Skjelsbæk, *The Political Psychology of War Rape: Studies from Bosnia and Herzegovina* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 25.

² Case No. IT-94-1-T Indictment and Judgment Decision – Duško Tadić a/k/a/ “Dule,” May 7, 1997, <http://www.icty.org/x/cases/tadic/tjug/en/tad-ts70507JT2-e.pdf>.

geted for immediate execution by the Army of the Republika Srpska (*Vojska Republike Srpske*), most strikingly in Srebrenica in July 1995, where men were the majority of those killed. The prosecutors in The Hague charged the Serbian perpetrators of this crime with genocide, conspiracy to commit genocide, extermination, murder, persecution, and inhumane acts of forcible transfer.³

For this analysis, I rely on the work of the late Yugoslav feminist and sociologist Žarana Papić (1949–2002) who, thanks to her engagement as a young feminist researcher and academic before and during the dismemberment of Yugoslavia, was a valuable first-hand observer of the entanglement of nationalism and patriarchy with late-stage Yugoslav socialism. This entanglement facilitated the proliferation of violence across the country. As she writes, “the socialist regime was a conglomerate of communism, male domination, patriarchy and authoritarianism that was, paradoxically, reinforced with a mixture of progressive women’s rights and a continuing patriarchy that governed women’s true lives.”⁴

Using four films by Bosnian contemporary film director Jasmila Žbanić, this paper analyzes the memory of genocide, nationalism and gender-based violence in the Bosnian war. My intention is to examine how the violence against Bosnian Muslim women played a part in the post-socialist construction of a Bosnian Muslim/Bosniak identity, by casting the Muslims as victims. In addition, I will try to shed light on the effect that the concepts of motherhood, victimhood and violence had on an increasingly unequal post-conflict, post-socialist Bosnian society. As noted by Inger Skjelsbæk:

The female body constitutes yet another field where ethnic conflict can be fought, where a woman’s sexual identity – in conjunction with her political and religious national identity – is the main target for the actions being carried out. Consequently, the way in which women’s victimization takes form is crucial in order to understand the way in which sexual violence has political impact during and after a conflict.⁵

A haunting question for anyone living in the wider post-Yugoslavian space and present day Bosnia and Herzegovina in particular is how the relatively open, multi-ethnic, welfare-oriented Yugoslav state apparatus produced rape and other

³ Case No. IT-05-88/2-T Judgment – Zdravko Tolimir, December 12, 2012, <http://www.icty.org/x/cases/tolimir/tjug/en/121212.pdf>.

⁴ “Od državnog socijalizma do državnog nacionalizma: slučaj Srbije iz rodne perspective,” in Žarana Papić, *Tekstovi 1977–2002* (Beograd: Centar za studije roda i politike, Rekonstrukcija Ženski fond, Žene u crnom, 2012), 297.

⁵ Skjelsbæk, *The Political Psychology of War Rape*, 25.

extremely violent criminal behavior – which in peacetime would be severely sanctioned – to be encouraged and heroicized. Answering this question is not an easy task. I believe that it is important to look at the origins and consequences of the violent acts, since we are living with their memory every day. Today's memory of the trauma is something that must be taken into account in any attempt at an explanation for the degeneration of the Yugoslav ideals.⁶

In the first part of my paper I map out some of the main historical influences on Yugoslav, and consequently Bosnian women's identities, starting with their participation in World War II as doctors and nurses, and later, as partisan fighters. I will feature the Women's Anti-fascist Front (*Antifašistički front žena*, AFŽ), which was an arm of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (*Komunističke partije Jugoslavije*, KPJ) and therefore was also a part of the National Liberation Struggle (*Narodnooslobodilačka borba*, NOB). Then, I will highlight issues that were downplayed under state socialism (nationalism and the persistence of patriarchy), but which have more recently been identified and criticized by feminists, including Žarana Papić.

In the second part of this paper, I will sketch out the historical background of the often-confusing amalgam of class, ethnicity and religious identity that is characteristic of Bosnian Muslims' self-image. In order to establish a link between pre-socialist, socialist and post-socialist interpretations of Bosnian Muslim identity, I refer to the different self-understandings held by the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina over time, both as an ethnic group and as a religious group. I will argue that today's construction of the Bosnian Muslim/Bosniak identity is to a large extent based on the memory of the violence experienced during the 1990s. This understandably traumatic memory has several implications for female and individual identities, which I will examine.

⁶ In "What are Memories for? Functions of Recall in Cognition and Culture," Pascal Boyer explains that from an evolutionary point of view, memories of the past are tools that organize our present and future behavior. Boyer highlights the fact that although memories can be shared by social groups their incorporation into a group's identity is more complicated than the way in which they sustain an individual's identity. Although Boyer does not refer specifically to traumatic memories, it can be deduced from his explanation that the incorporation of individual memories into a larger social group's identity provides a means for collaboration and coordination within the group, and, I would add, for group cohesion. Boyer's concept helps us to explain how traumatic memories are shared among group members who have not lived through an experience themselves and how its members are capable of relating to those memories, even if it is to a certain degree on a fictional or imaginary level. See Pascal Boyer, "What are Memories for? Functions of Recall in Cognition and Culture," in *Memory in Mind and Culture*, ed. Pascal Boyer and James V. Wertsch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 3–28, doi: 10.1017/CBO9780511626999.002.

Finally, in order to gain more insight into how motherhood, violence, and victimhood are perceived in post-genocide Bosnia and Herzegovina, I will turn to four films produced and directed by the Sarajevo-born film director, Jasmila Žbanić (born 1974). I will analyze her films in the light of the ideas found in Inger Skejlsbæk's book, *The Political Psychology of War Rape* (2013) and Žarana Papić's collection of essays, *Tekstovi 1977–2002*, published in 2012.

War-related violence in general, and sexual violence in particular, influenced the construction of Bosnian Muslim identity to a large degree, reinforcing a sense of endangerment and consequently, a sense of membership in a discrete but persecuted group. However, the full extent of the gender-based violence directed at Bosnian Muslims is hardly recognized in Bosnian society, unless it is discussed as a subset of group victimhood. Moreover, Bosnia and Herzegovina's peripheral position in relation to the international capitalist system exacerbates existing social inequalities that have also helped to shape Bosnian identity.

Yugoslav Feminism: Žarana Papić and the Critique of Patriarchy

Exploring the issue of wartime rape in the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and its relation to the broader issue of nationalism(s) and the memory of such gender-based violence in post-Yugoslavia, risks creating an impression that the use of rape as a weapon emerged suddenly in the Bosnian war and was somehow peculiar to the "wild and violent" Balkans. This impression discounts warnings and sustained criticism of nascent nationalism that were voiced by some feminist groups such as the Women in Black (*Žene u crnom*) in Belgrade, and by individual activists and researchers in socialist Yugoslavia who were aware of the signs of imminent disaster.⁷

In the former Yugoslavia, we are today experiencing a clash between various understandings of national belonging, emancipation, immigration, welfare policies and access to diminishing resources. Rights that women gained in the past are today being taken away, and things that earlier were considered normal have become artifacts of a "decadent" past. The post-Yugoslav space has gone through violent changes since the 1990s. Unfortunately, we can see those changes as one example among many of the dangers that arise when aggressive nationalism meets gender-based military violence. This does not mean that gender-based

⁷ For more on the Women in Black's anti-war feminist activism see Orli Fridman, "Alternative Voices in Public Urban Spaces: Serbia's Women in Black," *Ethnologia Balkanica* 10 (2006): 291–303; Orli Fridman, "It Was Like Fighting a War with Our Own People: Anti-War Activism in Serbia during the 1990s," *Nationalities Papers* 39, No. 4 (2011): 507–522, doi: 10.1080/00905992.2011.579953.

violence did not occur during World War I or World War II in Yugoslavia or that it did not occur in the 1990s in other regions of the former Yugoslavia (e.g. Kosovo, Croatia, among others). However, since those places and times are beyond the scope of this paper, they will be left for future examination.

Women's organizations existed since the second half of the nineteenth century in Serbia and the South Slav provinces of the Habsburg Empire,⁸ but feminism strengthened in socialist Yugoslavia thanks to women's participation in the communists' struggle in World War II. Women participated at first as doctors and nurses, and then in larger numbers as resistance fighters.⁹ Jelena Batinić attributes the gradual involvement of women in the struggle to the absence of men, which made the inclusion of women unavoidable. She writes:

An unprecedented number of women, an estimated 100,000, participated in the Partisan struggle against the Nazis during the Second World War. The Communist Partisan movement during the war promised equal rights for women, seeing gender equality as an inevitable by-product of the unfolding communist revolution. Numerous women were active in the AFŽ (*Women's Antifascist Front*) during and after the war. They worked to mobilize women for the war effort, and were later engaged in the rehabilitation of the country ruined by the war, in educational activities, and in the propagation of socialist ideology.¹⁰

According to Ivana Pantelić, "during the war, the idea of equality between men and women was fully accepted among the Partisans."¹¹ Similarly, Drago Borovčanin documents that women contributed to the anti-fascist struggle on an equal basis with men, producing and disseminating political propaganda, hiding members of the Partisan resistance, and helping the families of those arrested: "Starting immediately in 1941, when large numbers of men left for the cities in order to contribute to the uprising, women took over their duties within party

⁸ See Zlatiborka Popov-Momčinović, *Ženski pokret u Bosni i Hercegovini: artikulacija jedne kontra-kulture* (Sarajevo: Sarajevski otvoreni centar, Centar za empirijska istraživanja religije u Bosni i Hercegovini, Fondacija CURE, 2013), 57–66.

⁹ Jelena Batinić, "Feminism, Nationalism, and War: The 'Yugoslav Case' in Feminist Texts," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 3, No. 1 (2001): 4.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹¹ Ivana Pantelić, *Partizanke kao građanke. Društvena emancipacija partizanki u Srbiji 1945–1953* (Beograd: ISI i Evoluta, 2011), 37.

committees and the SKOJ [League of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia, *Savez komunista omladine Jugoslavije*] leadership.”¹²

Borovčanin states that this was when the focus shifted from the struggle for women’s rights to the struggle for national liberation under the authority of the KPJ.¹³ He writes that women fully participated in the network of organizations and structures that conducted the partisan struggle.

As a consequence of their participation in the war, women achieved a significant degree of emancipation in socialist Yugoslavia. However, persisting remnants of the patriarchy required that they adapt to the particularities of the Yugoslavia of the time. In Yugoslav society, women had acquired rights to abortion, the vote, contraception, free medical care, paid maternity leave and free education. Despite having gained such significant rights, full equity with men was not achieved and women’s demands evolved.¹⁴ The power of the patriarchy and the “natural” reproductive role of women as wives and mothers trapped women between the contradictory realities of their private and public lives. This was a problem that was never sufficiently addressed or officially acknowledged.¹⁵

After her early pioneering work in the 1970s among Yugoslav feminists, Žarana Papić focused her attention on feminist issues specific to Yugoslav society that are particularly relevant to the topics mentioned here. In her 1981 paper “Socialism and the Traditional Stance on the Relationship Between the Sexes,” Žarana Papić writes:

The system of patriarchal values is still vigorously rooted in our land despite social efforts towards the creation of equal opportunities for both sexes. Patriarchal patterns of behavior and thought have, of course, experienced tangible erosion, and they are no longer the rule governing individual and social behavior. This, however, does not mean that they have disappeared or that they have been overcome by a new dominant pattern of behavior and relationship between the sexes. The patriarchal system of values – in which the essence of a woman’s nature (unlike the nature of a man) is reduced to her sexual and reproductive role, so that at every moment the perpetuation of this “natural” distinction supports and constitutes this distinction as

¹² Drago Borovčanin, *Izgradnja bosansko-hercegovačke državnosti u uslovima NOR-a* (Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju, 1979), 141.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹⁴ See Chiara Bonfiglioli, “Feminist Translations in a Socialist Context: The Case of Yugoslavia,” *Gender & History* 30, No. 1 (March 2018): 240–254, doi: 10.1111/1468-0424.12343.

¹⁵ It needs to be emphasized that this was also the case with the issue of social class, because it was never truly resolved in Yugoslavia, even though it was commonly assumed to have been.

the cultural and social criteria for the possibilities and role of the sexes – is still both privately (and publicly) a powerful regulator of our social and individual behaviors.¹⁶

Adrijana Zaharijević indicates that since the AFŽ, which was established in 1942 as part of the Unitary National Liberation Front (*Jedinstveni narodnooslobodilački front*, JNOF), was dissolved in 1953 and the Union of Women's Associations (which remained in existence until 1990) was created to replace it, the state *per se* was not the main addressee of feminist demands.¹⁷ Zaharijević traces this misdirection of effort to the subversive and ambivalent nature of the relationship of feminist groups with the Yugoslav state structures.¹⁸

In spite of the legacy of significant success left behind by the AFŽ in the eleven years of its existence, a shift happened in the 1950s, and again in the 1970s, when a new Constitution anointed the working class as the sole bearer of political power in Yugoslavia.¹⁹ For women, this shift marked a transition from the status of fighters that they had gained in World War II to one of workers and mothers.²⁰ For Zaharijević, this reframing of the female role did not imply that Yugoslav socialism was inevitably patriarchal, because she believed that socialism was advancing toward equality and emancipation for women. According to Zaharijević, the moment when the symbiosis between patriarchy and state reached its peak was also the beginning of the end of the socialist regime in the 1990s.²¹ On the other hand, Žarana Papić took a more critical stance towards Yugoslav socialism, particularly in its later stage at the end of the 1980s, when Slobodan Milošević began to gradually purge the Communist Party of Serbia of its non-nationalistic and liberal element.²² Papić wrote in *From State Socialism to State Nationalism* that:

¹⁶ "Socijalizam i tradicionalno stanovište o odnosu polova," in Papić, *Tekstovi 1977–2002*, 103.

¹⁷ Jelena Batinić writes that the AFŽ was dissolved by the Communist Party because it believed that the AFŽ leadership was manifesting bourgeois "feminism" and departing from the party's policies. See Jelena Batinić, *Women and Yugoslav Partisans: A History of World War II Resistance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 15, doi: 10.1017/CBO9781316118627. For AFŽ's organizational structure, see Lydia Sklevcky, *Konji, žene, ratovi* (Zagreb: Ženska infoteka, 1996).

¹⁸ Adrijana Zaharijević, "Fusnota u globalnoj istoriji: Kako se može čitati istorija jugoslovenskog feminizma?" *Sociologija* 57, No. 1 (2014): 72–89.

¹⁹ Constitution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia adopted in 1974, article 88, as quoted in Zaharijević, "Fusnota u globalnoj istoriji," 75.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 75.

²¹ Zaharijević, "Fusnota u globalnoj istoriji," 79.

²² Papić's criticism was especially focused on the state of affairs in Serbia. She contended that it is each individual's first duty to criticize his or her own group's nationalism. She also traced a link between resurgent traditionalism and patriarchy in Serbia (e.g. the shrinking of women's rights

Socialism did not encourage the construction of a complex social fabric that could have been the basis for democratic alternatives. With such totalitarian praxes [the suffocating of “anti-socialist” bourgeois, religious, national, ethnic, cultural and historical tendencies] socialism has actually prevented the creation and expansion of the fundamental conditions necessary for the development of a nation’s democratic character.²³

Papić believed that the fall of communism left behind a vacuum that turned out to be fertile ground for chauvinism and nationalism. Referring to Serb nationalism, Papić contended that in its initial phase, nationalism developed in opposition to communism, but that it was then adopted by the Communist Party structure, fully appropriating and instrumentalizing the existing state structure.²⁴ The simultaneous patriarchization of the state apparatus through a discourse of masculine nationalism, combined with the feminization of citizens’ bodies and Serbia’s perceived enemies, has had numerous significant impacts, some of which are still very tangible today in both Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Islamizirani Slaveni: Slav Muslims and a Historical Perspective on the Issue of the Naming and Recognition of the Muslim Nation in Yugoslavia

The Balkans are often regarded negatively as the “other” Europe,²⁵ although in a different sense than Edward Said’s notion of the “Orient.”²⁶ The ethnic heterogeneity of socialist Yugoslavia (1945–1991) still persists in post-Yugoslav space despite the violence of the 1990s.²⁷ Problems in naming the various groups

when the right to abortion was rescinded) and the violence against the ethnic “other” outside of Serbia.

²³ “Od državnog socijalizma do državnog nacionalizma,” in Papić, *Tekstovi 1977–2002*, 293.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

²⁶ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

²⁷ The post-Yugoslav wars separated Yugoslavia’s heterogeneous population and through violence produced autonomous nation-states. Significant demographic changes have occurred as certain groups’ presence has been drastically reduced in their former homelands (e.g., Croats and Bosniaks in the Republika Srpska entity of Bosnia and Herzegovina). A right to return to one’s place of origin even if it was located in a nearly totally ethnically cleansed territory was guaranteed by the 1995 General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, also known as the Dayton Peace Agreement. The complicated administrative and political organization of the Bosnian state that was established by the Agreement makes it difficult for any one group to maintain control of all political levels (cantons, municipalities, entities, districts, and the national government). Consensus is therefore required to ensure that whole apparatus functions.

living in Bosnia and Herzegovina emerged early on in Yugoslav history, and still are encountered today.²⁸ For example, the name “Bosniak” as a reference to the Bosnian population was applied without regard to any particular religious affiliation in certain documents from 1860 and 1867.²⁹ In other documents, Muslims are referred to as Bosniak Muslims. The epithets “Serb” and “Croat” were not used in connection with the Bosnian population. Non-Muslim Bosniaks were usually referred to as Christians, either Greek-Orthodox or Roman Catholic.³⁰ “Serb” was reserved for references to Serbia’s population.³¹

According to Nira Yuval-Davis, “the specificity of a nationalist discourse and project lies in the claim for separate political representation of its collectivity.”³² That was not the case in the 1960s with regard to Bosnian Muslims in socialist Yugoslavia, even though they were progressively being recognized as a nationality by the KPJ.³³ Although the birth of Bosnian Muslims’ self-perception as a nation can be traced back to that period, since the 1990s their self-image has

²⁸ The variety of names applied to national groups used in, for example, British consular correspondence regarding Bosnia and Herzegovina reflects the difficulties of any attempt to make semantic distinctions among them. For more on this particular topic see Edin Radušić, “Ko su Bošnjaci 19. stoljeća? Bosna, Hercegovina i Bošnjaci u britanskoj konzularno-diplomatskoj korespondenciji od 1857. do 1878. godine,” in *Identitet Bosne i Hercegovine kroz historiju*, ed. Husnija Kamberović (Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju, 2011), 131–156.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 143.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 150.

³¹ These nuances in nomenclature are even more interesting in light of eighteenth and nineteenth century discourses on the Balkans, as Marina Matešić and Svetlana Slapšak showed in *Gender and the Balkans*. According to the authors, the aspects of gender associated with the uncivilized and racially differentiated Balkans created an image in which this undefined zone of fluid borders (and ethnic categories), suspended between the Orient and the Occident, was a wild and retrograde “heart of darkness,” especially when viewed through the prism of writings by foreign female travelers. See Marina Matešić and Svetlana Slapšak, *Rod i Balkan* (Zagreb: Durieux, 2017), 179.

³² Nira Yuval-Davis, “Les femmes et le nationalisme,” *Les cahiers du GRIF*, No. 48 (1994): 89–96.

³³ See Enver Redžić, *Prilozi o nacionalnom pitanju* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1963); “Društveno-istorijski aspekt nacionalnog opredjeljenja Muslimana Bosne i Hercegovine,” *Socijalizam 4*, No. 3 (1961): 31–89; Atif Purivatra, “Prilog proučavanju koncepcije o nacionalnom opredjeljivanju muslimana,” *Pregled 16*, No. 10 (1964): 323–332; Atif Purivatra, “Nacionalnost Muslimana i Peta konferencija KPJ,” in *Peta zemaljska konferencija Komunističke Partije Jugoslavije – Zbornik radova*, ed. Zlatko Čepo and Ivan Jelić (Zagreb: Institut za istoriju radničkog pokreta Hrvatske, 1972), 98–106; Vlado Jokanović, “Elementi koji su kroz istoriju djelovali pozitivno i negativno na stvaranje bošnjaštva kao nacionalnog pokreta,” *Pregled 58*, No. 9 (1968): 241–263; Enver Redžić, “Istoriografija o ‘muslimanskoj’ naciji,” *Prilozi 29* (2000): 233–244; Mustafa Imamović, *Nacionalni fenomen Muslimana – Razvitak građanskih pokreta i ideologije kod Muslimana 1878–1914* (Sarajevo: Fakultet političkih nauka, 1972); Husnija Kamberović, ed., *Rasprave o nacionalnom identitetu Bošnjaka – Zbornik radova* (Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju, 2009); Husnija Kamberović, ed., *Identitet Bosne i Hercegovine kroz vrijeme – Zbornik radova* (Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju, 2011).

undergone “tectonic” changes, in which the memory of war and genocide have played a crucial role.

To unpack those changes, it is necessary to take a look at the overlap of ethnic, national and class identities in Bosnia. In order to better understand this entanglement, we must take into account that the transition from religious group to nationality under socialism was particular to Bosnian Muslims.³⁴ To paraphrase historian Avdo Sućeska, Bosnian Muslim society was built culturally and politically upon its close relationship with the Ottoman state, a relationship that had over time resulted in the conversion of a significant part of the population to Islam.³⁵

In *The Building of Bosnian and Herzegovinian Statehood During the National Liberation War*, Drago Borovčanin writes:

The Slav population of Islamic faith, and Bosnia as their homeland, influenced the construction of a specific ethnic or national group, which we saw develop in the twentieth century. But apart from their faith, Bosnian Muslims did not identify with the Turks, and always emphasized the difference in their origin as well as the importance of their role, despite many things that linked Bosnia to the Ottoman Empire.³⁶

It is difficult to explain in a short essay the full history of the expansion of Islam among the Bosnian medieval population and the (re)definition of Muslims as a distinct nationality within secular Yugoslavia. However, it must be stressed that when the Ottoman Empire disintegrated, the feudal society in which Bosnian Muslims lived came to an abrupt end. The advent of “modernity,” beginning with the Austro-Hungarian Empire’s occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (1878) and later its formal annexation (1908) meant that Bosnia and Herzegovina continued to exist as a colony. The advent of Austro-Hungarian rule represented a rather traumatic transition from Muslim to Catholic governance. One example of the changes it provoked was the formation of the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina (*Islamska zajednica Bosne i Hercegovine*, IZBiH). The IZBiH was established in 1882, shortly after the beginning of the

³⁴ See Xavier Bougarel, “Od ‘Muslimana’ do ‘Bošnjaka’: Pitanje nacionalnog imena bosanskih muslimana,” in *Rasprave o nacionalnom identitetu Bošnjaka – Zbornik radova*, ed. Husnija Kamberović (Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju, 2009), 117–136.

³⁵ Avdo Sućeska, “Neke specifičnosti istorije Bosne pod Turcima,” quoted in *Rasprave o nacionalnom identitetu Bošnjaka – Zbornik radova*, ed. Husnija Kamberović (Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju, 2009), 72.

³⁶ Borovčanin, *Izgradnja bosansko-hercegovačke državnosti*, 24.

Austro-Hungarian rule. It was created in an attempt to enhance communication between the Austrians and the Bosnian Muslims, who made up the largest part of the territory's middle and upper classes.

As they are portrayed by Xavier Bougarel, some of the issues that arose in the twentieth century related to Muslims' self-understanding of their shared identity, particularly in relation to other ethnicities living in Bosnia. That identity was founded on the intersection of various currents of thought, among which historic changes in class and religion played an important role, especially in the period between 1918 and 1941.³⁷

Historian Drago Borovčanin has noted that earlier attempts by the Ottoman state administration to forge a distinct Bosnian ethnic identity, mainly among Muslims in the governing local elite, failed. The reasons why a unique Bosnian nation did not emerge at that time were manifold, but Borovčanin believes the reason for the failure of this "nation building process from above" was its exclusion of the poorer Christian classes.³⁸ Later on, ethno-national divisions were a useful tool of Austro-Hungarian policy in Bosnia and Herzegovina because they diffused potential threats to Austro-Hungarian interests and helped to maintain the status quo. Nevertheless, the Austrians made some attempts to foster a specific Bosnian identity through the establishment of institutions like the *Landesmuseum*, the National Theater, etc.

The idea of unification of the different Yugoslav nationalities gained strength in the early 1900s. It was based on a shared language and on the struggle against what was perceived as foreign occupation by Austria-Hungary. It aimed to overcome the disparity of the ethnic groups that lived in what became Yugoslavia. The idea of Yugoslav nationalism was expressed most vehemently, so to speak, in the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife, Arch-Duchess Sophia, in Sarajevo by the nationalist group *Mlada Bosna* in 1914. Early support for nation-building emerged first among Serbia's bourgeoisie, and then spread to their Croatian counterparts. The Bosnian Muslim elite, whose main concern was the conservation of their social and economic position, came to the idea relatively late. Serbia's political leadership, and its dominance in relation to other Yugoslav nations, was established early on in the provisional State of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs, which united with the Kingdom of Serbia and Montenegro (*Kraljevina Srbija i Crna Gora*) in 1918 to become the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (*Kraljevina Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca*). The new kingdom was not

³⁷ Bougarel, "Od 'Muslimana' do 'Bošnjaka,'" 118–120.

³⁸ Borovčanin, *Izgradnja bosansko-hercegovačke državnosti*, 26–27.

immune to pre-existing inter-ethnic tensions, most particularly between the two dominant elites, Serb and Croat. From the proclamation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929, until 1939 when Croats were recognized as a discrete nationality within Yugoslavia in the Cvetković-Maček agreement, Bosnia and Herzegovina went through several administrative reorganizations. The last one, just before World War II, established provinces (*banovine*) within Bosnia. These Bosnian *banovine*, with one exception, were located on Bosnia's riverine borderland and were heavily influenced by their neighbors in Croatia and Serbia.³⁹

World War II in Yugoslavia was a combination of social revolution, resistance to foreign occupation (by Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, Bulgaria and Hungary), and civil war. It took a heavy toll on all of Yugoslavia's nations. The legacy of World War II was particularly significant for Bosnian Muslims, because they participated in the creation of the Independent State of Croatia (*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*) and collaborated with the Axis powers. Neither Croatians nor Bosnian Muslims bear sole responsibility for collaboration during World War II. For example, officers of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia's army were convicted by the post-war communist regime and executed for collaboration. Many were rehabilitated in the 2000s in Serbia.

With this historical background in mind, let us now turn to the recognition of Muslims as a constituent national group of Yugoslavia in their own right. The process was heavily burdened by the above-mentioned legacy of World War II and did not proceed without a heated debate within the KPJ, which lasted for more than two decades. Historian Husnija Kamberović considers the decision of the KPJ in 1968 to recognize Bosnian Muslims as a nation to be an attempt to gradually marginalize the IZBiH.⁴⁰ After the end of World War II, the KPJ subjected the religious communities in socialist Yugoslavia to its control, most notably the Catholic Church, the Islamic Community and the Serbian Orthodox Church. The religious communities faced severe difficulties, especially as regards the management of their property, which was nationalized, and their finances. However, freedom to practice religion was never abolished altogether. Religious institutions continued to operate under socialism, but with significantly less agency than before.⁴¹

³⁹ Ibid., 51.

⁴⁰ Husnija Kamberović, "Bošnjaci 1968: Politički kontekst priznanja nacionalnog identiteta," in *Rasprave o nacionalnom identitetu Bošnjaka – Zbornik radova*, ed. Husnija Kamberović (Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju, 2009), 79.

⁴¹ See Denis Bećirović, "Normativni i stvarni položaj islamske zajednice u BiH tokom prve decenije nakon završetka II svjetskog rata," in *Identitet Bosne i Hercegovine kroz historiju*, ed. Husnija Kam-

In the socio-political setting of socialist Yugoslavia, the primary concern of the communists was the “national” question rather than the “class” question, as might have been expected.⁴² Muslim identity was enmeshed in Yugoslav society along with many other national, religious, and cultural categories.

In his book *Nations and Nationalism*, Ernest Gellner mentions the case of Yugoslavia’s Bosnian Muslims as an example of a transition from an identity as a religious group to a nationality with a particular claim to the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This differentiated them from other Muslim communities of Yugoslavia, notably the Albanians in Kosovo.⁴³

For instance, Gellner writes that Bosnian Muslims considered themselves to be “Serbo-Croat speakers of Slav ancestry and Muslim cultural background”:

What they meant was that they could not describe themselves as Serb or as Croat (despite sharing a language with Serbs and Croats), because these identifications carried the implications of having been Orthodox or Catholic; and to describe oneself as “Yugoslav” was too abstract, generic and bloodless. They preferred to describe themselves as “Muslim” (and were now at last officially allowed to do so), meaning thereby Bosnian, Slav ex-Muslims who feel as one ethnic group, though not differentiable linguistically from Serbs and Croats, and though the faith which distinguishes them is now a lapsed faith.⁴⁴

The consequences for Gellner’s ex-Muslim Muslims of the entanglement between their former identity (based on class and religion) and their new identity (based on ethnicity) would become prominent during the bloody disintegration of socialist Yugoslavia.

Gellner’s view of Muslim identity aligns with the Yugoslav historical and political context of the 1980s. In addition, Gellner understood the Islamic faith of Bosnian Muslims as a lapsed faith.⁴⁵ Since the 1990s however, religions have regained an important place in post-Yugoslav societies, principally as badges of ethnic difference. According to Žarana Papić, the creation of new but still patriarchal nation-states meant “the disappearance of a communist ‘equality

berović (Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju, 2011), 239–256.

⁴² Hannes Grandits, “Ambivalentnosti u socijalističkoj nacionalnoj politici Bosne i Hercegovine u kasnim 1960-im i u 1970-im: Perspektive odozdo i odozgo,” in *Rasprave o nacionalnom identitetu Bošnjaka – Zbornik radova*, ed. Husnija Kamberović (Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju, 2009), 15–38.

⁴³ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1983), 71–72.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 71–72.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

paradigm' and the rise of an old-new conservative ideology of state, nation or religion" in post-Yugoslavia.⁴⁶

Post-socialist, Post-genocide Bosnian Muslim Female Identity

Gender-based violence is often wrongly described as the result of centuries-old Balkan hatreds. To unlock a gendered perspective on post-Yugoslav violence and war, the following statement by Žarana Papić is helpful. It debunks some of the stereotypes that persistently haunt post-Yugoslav space:

The genocidal brutality of the ethnic wars shows how ethnic hatreds have been provoked/produced in order to construct new frontiers of enemy-otherness.... This means that the wars in the former Yugoslavia cannot be interpreted as a reflection of the tribal and "eternal" barbarian mentality of its peoples, but must be seen as a contemporary phenomenon of violent, post-communist strategies of redistribution of ethnic/gender power by defining new ethnic and sub-ethnic borders *between men*, and their respective (often militarized) elite structures.⁴⁷

The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina was a continuation and escalation of the violence that began first in Slovenia and then spread to Croatia in 1991. In Bosnia, it started after the referendum on independence that was held in March 1992, which was followed by a proclamation of independence. Shortly after the proclamation, the first civilian victims were killed during peaceful demonstrations in the capital, Sarajevo. Outside Sarajevo, the heavily armed, well-prepared Bosnian Serb forces, backed by the Yugoslav National Army (*Jugoslavenska narodna armija*, JNA) started to implement "ethnic cleansing" in those territories they deemed to be Serb, or which they wanted to make Serb. Their tactics combined military maneuvers with terrorizing of the Bosnian Muslim population. The Serbs used violence against non-Serb civilians systematically.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Žarana Papić, "Europe after 1989: Ethnic Wars, the Fascistization of Civil Society and Body Politics in Serbia," in *Thinking Differently: A Reader in European Women's Studies*, ed. Gabriele Griffin and Rosi Braidotti (London: Zed Books, 2002), 128.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁴⁸ According to Human Rights Watch, "the aim of their [Serbian military and paramilitary forces] vicious policy of 'ethnic cleansing' has been to rid an area of an 'enemy ethnic group' through murder, forced displacement, deportation, detention or confinement to ghetto areas, destruction of villages and cultural and religious objects of the 'enemy' ethnic group. Mass rape of women has also been used as a tool of 'ethnic cleansing,' meant to terrorize, torture and demean women and their families and compel them to flee the area." See *The Human Rights Watch Global Report on*

In the early spring of 1992, Bosnian Serb forces started to use rape (among other forms of violence) as a weapon of war across Bosnia and Herzegovina. They targeted one group of Bosnian Muslims in particular – women.⁴⁹ Inger Skjelsbæk has summarized the five hallmarks of sexual violence in war identified by Ruth Seifert. It is: (1) an *integral part of warfare* (part of generalized warfare); (2) an *element of male communication* (symbolic humiliation of a male opponent); (3) a way of *reaffirming masculinity* (masculine solidarity and repression of “weaknesses” seen as feminine among the military); (4) a way of *destroying the culture of the opponent* (destruction of biological basis for future reproduction and interference in the pregnancy outcome); and (5) an outcome of *misogyny* (frustration taken out on the weak).⁵⁰

The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina reached its nadir in Srebrenica in July 1995. The war combined the disintegration of state socialism and an outburst of violence with several other elements, including gender-based violence. It also witnessed the culmination of the historical transformation of Bosnian Muslims from a social group (mainly composed of upper-class land-owners in the Ottoman Empire) into a loose grouping characterized by its religion but divided between Croat and Serb nationalities, and finally into a recognized national group in itself (for which religion played a less important role than before). As the Yugoslav socialist state came to an end, Bosnian Muslims adopted the appellation “Bosniak.” They did so in the context of ethnic cleansing and genocide. Moral superiority, a by-product of victimhood, was an aspect of Serb nationalism following the Serbs’ travails during WWI and even more saliently during WWII. In turn, it became a building block of Bosniak nationalism in the 1990s.⁵¹

Women’s Human Rights (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1995), 8, <https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/general958.pdf>.

⁴⁹ Chronologically speaking, gender-based military violence against women in the Bosnian war was a continuation of policies targeting women that had been seen before in Croatia and that reappeared later in Kosovo.

⁵⁰ Ruth Seifert, *War and Rape: A Preliminary Analysis*, as given in Skjelsbæk, *The Political Psychology of War Rape*, 62–63. Italics in original. All five characteristics fit the Bosnian scenario, while the last one applies as well to the gender-based violence of rape in times of “peace” or in a post-conflict period, especially in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, where women form the largest number of domestic violence victims. See Skjelsbæk, *The Political Psychology of War Rape*, 62–63.

⁵¹ For sacralization of Serbian victimhood in World War I, see Dubravka Stojanović, Teofil Pančić, and Todor Kuljić’s review of Božidar Jezernik’s book *Jugoslavija, zemlja snova* (Beograd: Biblioteka XX vek, 2018), in a December 3, 2018 radio broadcast and transcript, 33:55, Radio Pešćanik, <https://pescanik.net/jugoslavija-zemlja-snova-2/>. Serb World War II trauma and its representation in the media under Milošević’s regime is described by Žarana Papić as “a re-invention of the

In a situation in which a large part of Bosnian and Herzegovinian territory was swept by “ethnic cleansing,” one event symbolized the rupture of relations between Bosnian Muslims and the other former Yugoslav nationalities. On September 27, 1993, the first Bosniak Council (*Prvi Bošnjacki sabor*) was held, which brought together Muslim intellectuals and politicians in besieged Sarajevo. This gathering was the moment when the intellectual and political elites officially replaced the term Bosnian Muslim (which they probably judged too indeterminate of nationality due to its religious connotations), with the term Bosniak (*Bošnjak*), which was linked to the historical territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁵² In his opening speech to this gathering, Alija Isaković, a key figure of the Bosnian Muslim intellectual elite, made reference to female rape victims:

We are here now and there where we are not. With victims, with ruins, with devastated monuments, burned libraries, raped mothers and sisters, with pain. We will never forget this evil. The evil against our people and our land is shaped in such a manner and so expressively that this civilization will view it as a terrifying example which can be studied artistically and scientifically in order for humanity to learn and benefit from this experience, which has brought us so much harm.⁵³

According to Philippe Poutignat and Jocelyne Streiff-Fenart, ethnicity can be regarded as a “sign of solidarity that appears as a response to discrimination and inequality, which in consequence reflects on the political consciousness of the group that aims to neutralize the logic of domination.”⁵⁴ It follows that one of the building blocks of Bosnian Muslim/Bosniak national identity was victimhood. Of course, there are levels of victimhood, which are complicated by post-conflict economic and political tensions.

After reviewing the initial historical background and the fluid naming conventions of the Bosnian Muslims/Bosniaks, and highlighting the patriarchal component of the “state nationalism” that contributed to gender-based violence against women “other” than the Serbs, I will now turn to the construction of

chosen trauma at the level of *the public* political phenomenon and through state media,” see Papić, “Europe after 1989,” 133. Italics in original.

⁵² A video recording of the Sabor is available as “Bošnjacki Sabor 1993,” YouTube video, 1:54:55, posted by 212 Brdska Brigada Srebrenik, May 8, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d5vxp6jhgM>.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 0:40:13–0:40:59.

⁵⁴ Philippe Poutignat and Jocelyne Streiff-Fenart, *Teorije o etnicitetu* (Beograd: Biblioteka XX. vek, 1997), 115–116 as quoted in Jovo Bakić, “Teorijsko-istraživački pristupi etničkoj vezanosti (ethnicity), nacionalizmu i naciji,” *Sociologija* 48, No. 3 (2006): 239.

post-genocide Muslim identity, and in particular female Muslim identity, in the light of what Skjelsbæk calls “the dual identity construction of rape victims as both gendered and ethnic.”⁵⁵

In her book *The Political Psychology of War Rape*, Skjelsbæk maps out various dimensions of the wartime rapes that took place in the 1990s in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Her fieldwork, and more specifically, her interviews with survivors of wartime rape, highlight some of the issues that also surface in Žbanić’s films. Among these issues, one of the most important is the intersection of the social positions of ethnicity and gender, that is, the distinction between “ethnic and survivor versus gendered and victimized”⁵⁶ in the narratives of Skjelsbæk’s interviewees:

At the valued endpoint in their narrative – that is, the turning point in their stories about who they have become – they position themselves as Muslim, that is, Bosniak, women. My interpretation, therefore, is that the ethnic identity of the women is not openly discussed in their stories because it serves as the basic premise for their entire narrative.⁵⁷

Skjelsbæk’s interpretation aligns with the fact that rape victims were targeted in the first place because of their ethnic and gender identity.⁵⁸ The political character of the wartime sexual violence is obvious.⁵⁹ Besides assisting in the Serbs’ political aims of “ethnic cleansing,” terrorizing the Muslim population, and attacking individual/group identity, wartime rapes also – albeit unintentionally – had the consequence of reinforcing sentiments of national belonging of victims and those affiliated with them. “Positioning oneself as an ethnic victim of war violence therefore makes possible the construction of a survivor identity in the post-conflict aftermath.”⁶⁰

Portraying Motherhood, Violence and Victimhood

How is the survivor identity, or narrative, constructed in Jasmila Žbanić’s films, whose broad themes are motherhood, sexual violence and

⁵⁵ Skjelsbæk, *The Political Psychology of War Rape*, 44.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 35.

victimhood? One way to look at the question is through the narrative structures of her films, and in the way survivors narrate their experiences. Skjelsbæk argues that the women she interviewed have two basic approaches to their narratives: chronological and non-chronological, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The narratives are influenced by the social setting (i.e. to whom the story is narrated, what elements are emphasized over others, etc.).⁶¹

Motherhood is a theme of several of Žbanić's films, in several forms. In one of her early works, the 2000 documentary *Red Rubber Boots*,⁶² Žbanić follows Amor Mašović, the head of a team from the International Commission for Missing Persons (ICMP) in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Jasna P., a Bosnian Muslim woman who is looking for the remains of her deceased husband and her two children, four-year old Amar and his 9-month old sister Ajla. The objects by which Jasna P. hopes to identify her children are the red rubber boots that Amar was wearing on the day the children, along with 150 other people from Nevesinje in eastern Herzegovina, disappeared. Jasna's husband and children were taken to a camp by Bosnian Serb forces and gone missing. The short film sketches out an intimate story, and is representative of the struggle experienced by many Bosnians who had to look for the remains of their missing loved ones. The film offers one of the first visual narratives of the experiences of a surviving parent, who in this case is a mother. Jasna's story echoes those of other mothers, particularly from Srebrenica and Žepa, who in the 2000s emerged as a highly visible, pro-active group on Bosnia's political scene.⁶³ The mothers were often the sole survivors of their families. They actively monitored the work of the ICMP, attending exhumations of mass graves, identifying body remains, undergoing DNA testing and sometimes paying for information themselves in the hope of finding the remains of their family members.

In *Grbavica* (2006),⁶⁴ Žbanić tackles a different aspect of gender-based violence, one which targeted the reproductive systems of its victims. The main character, Esmā, was raped during the war by several Bosnian Serb soldiers. She gave birth to a baby girl. Today, Esmā and her adolescent daughter, Sara, live in Sarajevo. Esmā is struggling to make a living as a waitress in a turbo-folk nightclub owned by a war profiteer. Sara is obsessed by her absent father, and frequently asks her mother whether she resembles him. Sara tells other kids that

⁶¹ Ibid., 26–27.

⁶² *Crvene gumene čizme*, 2000, documentary, 0:18:00, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1288396>.

⁶³ For more on the topic, see Elissa Helms, *Innocence and Victimhood: Gender, Nation, and Women's Activism in Postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013).

⁶⁴ *Grbavica*, 2006, feature, 1:35:00, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0464029>.

her father is a *šehid* (or *shaheed*), that is, a Bosnian Army fighter who gave up his life to defend Bosnia.⁶⁵ Sara's questions about her father gradually raise tensions with her mother Esma, because Esma does not want to tell her daughter that she was impregnated during a gang rape and does not know the identity of any of her rapists. The film depicts the difficulties faced by rape victims in reintegrating into daily life. Their trauma is amplified by routine contact with their social environment. Esma attends group therapy organized by an NGO with other women who receive a small compensation for their participation. This therapy bears a resemblance to another gathering of women – the *tevhid* (or *tawheed*) – a funeral ritual in which the dead are mourned with the incantation of Quranic verses. The *tevhid* serves the purpose of calming the mourners down, providing them with peace, and liberating them from fear.⁶⁶ During the siege of Sarajevo, the city's Grbavica neighborhood was under the control of the Bosnian Serb Army. The fact that Esma continues to live there reminds us that victims often remain attached to the place where they were victimized despite their pain.

Both films deal with the physical remains of loved ones. Jasna is searching for her children and her husband; Esma finds her missing and murdered father in one of the many mass graves that surround Sarajevo. The survivors are mostly women, which introduces another aspect into the survivors' inter-generational relationships. The women conceal the fact that they were raped from their mothers, in an attempt to spare their mothers from a form of victimization. Preserving their mothers from the horror leads the women to act like mothers to their own mothers, infantilizing them and at the same time behaving as good children should.⁶⁷

The “moral acceptability” of a woman is something that surfaces in the interviews Skjelsbæk conducted. That concept sheds light on rape victims' understanding of their bodies as something that to a certain extent belongs to someone else. One interviewee refers to herself as “damaged goods” and hides her

⁶⁵ In Islamic theology, Shaheeds are people who have lost their lives while “on Allah's path” and have therefore been granted entry to heaven in the after-life. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, however, the term has a broader meaning, in which (mostly) Bosnian Muslim/Bosniak men, who were either killed in battle during the war or murdered, as in the Srebrenica genocide or other mass crimes, are recognized as Shaheeds, or martyrs. According to an IZBiH decision of January 23, 1995, the second day of the Ramadan Eid is the day of the martyrs and it is observed by family members visiting the cemeteries.

⁶⁶ In Zilka Spahić-Šiljak, ed., *Contesting Female, Feminist and Muslim Identities: Post-Socialist Contexts of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo* (Sarajevo: Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies UNSA, 2012), 268.

⁶⁷ Skjelsbæk, *The Political Psychology of War Rape*, 43.

experience from her husband.⁶⁸ The implication is that she perceives her body to be her husband's property,⁶⁹ and that her post-war body is different from her pre-war one.

In one scene in *Grbavica*, a drunken uniformed soldier, a foreigner, spills beer on the breasts of a hostess who is dancing for him in the club where Esma works. The scene shows how difficult it is for Esma to readjust to normal life. It reflects the re-traumatization that she experiences on a daily basis as she struggles to make ends meet, as a single mother in a misogynistic, economically deprived environment. The film provides insight into Esma's daily difficulties, and shows that in most cases the war led to the downward social mobility of the survivors. For instance, Esma's character was a promising medical student when the war started, but after the war she works in a factory and in the club.

In *On the Path* (2010),⁷⁰ Žbanić explores the loving relationship between Luna and her male partner Amar. Luna is trying to conceive (unsuccessfully), while Amar wanders onto "the path" of extreme Islamic religious ideology, which gradually tears the two lovers apart. Amar, at first a rather unstable, unemployed character with alcoholic tendencies, transforms himself into a strictly religious person, in stark contrast to his earlier personality. Unlike Žbanić's other productions described above, in this film war and the memory of the war are relegated to the background. Nevertheless, Luna's Muslim identity and that of her family are revealed in a scene of Eid festivities that take place at her maternal grand-mother's house. Some of Luna's relatives drink alcohol at one point during the family reunion. Amar, who until recently used to drink heavily himself, openly disapproves. He insists that Islam is incompatible with alcohol and that communism is to blame for its use. However, he is shunned by Luna's grand-mother. Amar thunders: "It is not a coincidence that genocide happened to us, we [Muslims] are non-believers [*nevjernici*]. You should be celebrating Eid at your home in Bijeljina, but you let them [the Serbs] drive you out of your homes and slaughter you." At that point, Luna's grand-mother steps in and throws him out of her house. She decides how Eid will be celebrated in her home; although the grandfather is present, the grandmother is the head of the family. Amar's outburst reflects his belief that the genocide that happened to Bosnian Muslims must be some sort of punishment for their not behaving "properly" in the past. It emphasizes the passive, even feminine identity of Luna's family group, who were

⁶⁸ Ibid., 44.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 44.

⁷⁰ *Na putu*, 2010, feature, 1:40:00, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1156531>.

unable to defend themselves and therefore bear responsibility for the violence perpetrated against them.

Amar stands out as someone who has difficulty finding his place in post-conflict Bosnian society, and who suddenly realizes that religion and a return to an imaginary tradition offer him a chance to restore his self-esteem, manhood, and a sense of belonging. He is willing to let Luna leave him – she openly opposes him – and accepts that they will never have a child together. He considers that a sin anyway, because they are not married.

Later on, we see Luna's emotional visit to her childhood home along with a friend, which resurrects her painful history of leaving the house and the city behind. When she looks at the house, she starts to cry. A little girl, maybe the same age as Luna was when she was forced to flee, asks her why she is crying. When Luna's friend replies for her that the house was once hers, the little girl asks why she left. Luna just pats her gently on the head and leaves.

Luna longs for motherhood, but her chances of getting pregnant are slipping away as she grows apart from Amar. The film is inscribed within a generational setting. She bathes her grand-mother like a baby, and thinks of her own mother, who was killed in the war. During the bath, her grandmother laments: "Men stand by their wives because of children. I should have had more children, instead I only had your mother. May God give her peace, my dear child." Luna wants a child and is actively going for medical treatment in order to achieve a pregnancy. Her grandmother warns her that unless a woman "produces" children, it is socially understandable, if not acceptable, that her male partner should leave her.

The female characters in Žbanić's films are wounded, yet they endure their lives in as purposeful a way as possible. Esma, Luna, Luna's grandmother, and the real-life Jasna P. are all struggling with the aftermath of the war. There are no options available to them other than to find the remains of their children (Jasna), to live for the child they love but did not choose to bear (Esma), or to somehow recast their mother as their daughter even as they try to overcome their body's resistance to pregnancy (Luna).

The 2013 feature film *For Those Who Can Tell No Tales* recounts a true story from a different perspective, that of Kym Vercoe, an Australian actor who decides to spend a summer holiday discovering Bosnia.⁷¹ Vercoe's visit starts brightly in Sarajevo. It is a typical discovery trip of the country and is presented as a visual diary of her time there. She is reading the Yugoslav novel by Nobel Prize-winning author Ivo Andrić, *The Bridge on the Drina* (1945), so she decides

⁷¹ *For Those Who Can Tell No Tales*, 2013, drama, 1:22:00, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3074796>.

to stop in Višegrad to see the famous bridge (which was built in about 1577). She watches a competition of jumping from the bridge into the river and strolls around the city. She books a room in the Vilina Vlas, a spa hotel recommended in a tourist guide book. During her overnight stay in the hotel she has trouble sleeping. In the days after her return to Australia, she discovers that the Vilina Vlas was a rape camp where some 200 Bosnian Muslim women were abused and that people were killed on the bridge and thrown in the Drina River. Back home, Vercoe tells her friends that she was surprised there were no memorials and no sign of the crimes that happened there during the war. She says: "I could not believe you could just clean up a space and pretend nothing ever happened. But I guess this is not surprising. This silence is denial."

Vercoe's experience raises a key issue in post-conflict Bosnia: the memory of the war and the silencing or negation/suppression of its memory. Even though Vercoe is a foreigner, her individual female experience reflects the memory of the war, first through her physical proximity to and body contact with the place (the bridge, the bed, sheets, veranda, etc.) and later through her realization that any reminder of what happened there is absent. The film's plot begins and ends in winter, like a loop linking the end and beginning of the story, with low-key coloration. Vercoe is interrogated by police officers because they find her suspicious – a lone foreign woman asking too many questions about the war. Her Serb interrogators may even have taken part themselves in the "ethnic cleansing" and rape of Višegrad's Muslims. Their impunity and their heroic status among their fellow Serbs, even though they are possible war criminals, indicates how persistent militarized masculinity is and how violence is glorified and normalized. Their glory contrasts with their victims' invisibility and the denial that persists today in Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially in places like Višegrad, where Serbs are the majority. The necessity of denial stems from the need to maintain existing power structures, which have been described by Papić as resulting from "ethnic/gendered power redistribution and the redefining of new ethnic and sub-ethnic categories."⁷²

Conclusion

Gender-based violence in the case of Bosnian Muslim women exhibits a double character in the context of post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina. First off, the group identity assigned to the victims was the motivation for their

⁷² "Žene u Srbiji: postkomunizam, rat i nacionalističke mutacije," in Papić, *Tekstovi 1977–2002*, 306.

being targeted. Following the trauma of war and rape, that identity is an even more inseparable part of their lives. Second, because the violence was intended to harm Bosnian Muslims as a group, the memory of gender-based violence participates in the construction of the post-conflict Bosnian Muslim identity. Because the memory of violence is incorporated into their group identity, the line between the individual victim's trauma and the patriarchal character of the "new" Bosnian Muslim group identity is blurred. The "new" Bosnian Muslim/Bosniak identity is based on a conglomerate of victimhood and rediscovered traditions in which the religious identity component has a significant place. Yet, the patriarchal character of the nationalism that created such violence continues to be overlooked.

Despite the success of *Grbavica* at the Berlinale film festival in 2006, and Žbanić's position as one of the foremost film directors in Bosnia, wartime rape, motherhood, and female sexuality in general remain marginalized in the daily political discourse and agenda of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although the scale of wartime rape has been acknowledged to the public through the medialization of war crimes trials in the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina,⁷³ we would be mistaken to assume that a significant degree of social justice has been achieved.⁷⁴ Most rape victims, male and female, have not been recognized and do not receive medical treatment or psychological support of any sort.⁷⁵ The feminization of the Bosnian Muslim/Bosniak "body" that resulted from systemic gender-based violence and the low visibility of the issue within Bosnian Muslim/Bosniak culture highlight the asymmetric power relationships inherent in the deeply traumatic events experienced relatively recently. They result in their current peripheral role in the culture.⁷⁶

All this must be understood, as indicated earlier, within a post-colonial context. Bosnia and Herzegovina was for most of its history under occupation by

⁷³ Skjelsbæk, *The Political Psychology of War Rape*, 35.

⁷⁴ The Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina was established in 2002 "to ensure the exercise of jurisdiction of the State of Bosnia and Herzegovina, respect for human rights and the rule of law in its territory." See Istorijat Suda BiH, Sud Bosne i Hercegovine, <http://www.sudbih.gov.ba/stranica/86/pregled>.

⁷⁵ "Bosnia and Herzegovina," in *Amnesty International Report 2017/2018: The State of the World's Human Rights*, 95–96, <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/POL1067002018ENGLISH.PDF>.

⁷⁶ This applies to all those who do not "properly" fit the masculine image. I include both male and female victims. Although the topic of victimhood appears in nationalist rhetoric, the Prijedor victims and events at the Omarska and Trnopolje camps do not seem to be of particular concern to the Bosniak political elite.

the Ottoman Empire and a colony of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Today, it still lies on the margins of Europe and the international capitalist system. Bosnia's post-genocide transition from socialism to neo-liberal capitalism bears all the hallmarks of what David Harvey labels "accumulation by dispossession."⁷⁷ A wrecked, post-industrial territory, Bosnia and Herzegovina has been subject to the International Monetary Fund's readjustments and austerity measures since 2015. In the context of rapid and intensified privatization of the commons, such as its water distribution and healthcare systems, social and economic development is a challenge that coexists with the memories of violence described earlier.

In Jasmila Žbanić's films, acts of violence are never shown. Rather, the memory of violence is communicated through incidents from the characters' present day lives – which is something the survivors interviewed by Skjelsbæk also describe. The present-day economic uncertainty and the overwhelming trauma of the war make it increasingly difficult for Bosnian Muslims to re-adjust to life in post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina. All the films analyzed above address issues directly related to Bosnia's post-socialist, post-conflict condition.

As described above, Yugoslav women's engagement as partisan fighters and members of the resistance during World War II laid the foundation for the development of women's rights in socialist Yugoslavia. Nevertheless, despite its emancipatory policies, the Yugoslav state failed to address problems that even then were identified by feminists. These issues were deemed to be dangerously bourgeois, which limited the positive impact of such policies in the years before the disintegration of the Yugoslav state. In her essay "Europe after 1989: Ethnic Wars, the Fascistization of Civil Society and Body Politics in Serbia,"⁷⁸ Žarana Papić addressed the Serbs' politics of representation and the image of reality created by Milošević's media. The main theme of that propaganda, she explains, was the trauma of World War II. She writes: "[the] continuous visual representation of World War II on TV – starting with the exhumation of mass graves in Herzegovina – prepared the terrain for new mass graves much earlier than 1991."⁷⁹

⁷⁷ David Harvey, "The 'New' Imperialism: Accumulation by Dispossession," in *Socialist Register: The New Imperial Challenge*, Vol. 40, ed. Leo Panitch and Colin Leys (London: The Merlin Press, 2003), 63–87. For more on the topic, see Srećko Horvat and Igor Štiks, eds., *Welcome to the Desert of Post-Socialism: Radical Politics After Yugoslavia* (London, New York: Verso, 2014).

⁷⁸ "Europa nakon 1989: etnički ratovi, fašizacija društvenog života i politika tijela u Srbiji," in Papić, *Tekstovi 1977–2002*, 343–372. An English translation was published as Žarana Papić, "Europe after 1989: Ethnic Wars, the Fascistization of Civil Society and Body Politics in Serbia," in *Thinking Differently: A Reader in European Women's Studies*, ed. Gabriele Griffin and Rosi Braidotti (London: Zed Books, 2002), 127–144.

⁷⁹ Papić, "Europa nakon 1989," 353.

It is therefore always necessary to be wary of the potential use or abuse of historical memories of the perpetration of atrocities like the wartime rapes in Bosnia. The same applies to the historical development of Bosniak nationhood. As I have mentioned, during the Ottoman era, Bosnian Muslim/Bosniak identity was primarily based on class and religion. Bosnia and Herzegovina's colonial status under Austria-Hungary delayed the development of a specifically Bosniak group identity. The process only began after World War II and was deeply influenced by the violence perpetrated against Bosniaks in the 1990s. The memory of World War II played an important role in mobilizing the masses in Milošević's Serbia, which raises the question of how the memory of the war and genocide in Bosnia and Herzegovina might be used in Bosnian society in the years to come. Furthermore, the question that must be asked is how the gender-based nature of the Bosnian war violence will affect the patriarchal character of Bosnian society as a whole, in light of the hardships faced by wartime rape survivors.