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Violence and Identification

Everyday Ethnic Identity in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Abstract: Structurally inspired anthropological analyses of war and violence tend to claim that conflicts have an inherent potential to create unambiguous identities. Based on ethnographic data from everyday life among the Muslim population of Stolac in postwar Bosnia and Herzegovina the article shows that this is not necessarily the case. Instead of resorting to the politically created dichotomous categories of ethnic exclusion, the Muslims of Stolac favored ambiguous identifications highlighting coexistence and interethnic respect. In this way of refraining from exclusive ethnic antagonistic identifications they experimented with ways of inhabiting the world together with the ethnic others; mainly the Croat population of Stolac.

Keywords: Bosnia and Herzegovina, ethnic identity, postwar, violence, war

The aim of this article is to account for some of the consequences of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1992 to 1995 on matters of identification in everyday life among the Muslims of Stolac.¹ Or, to put it a little polemically, the lack of effect the war had. Even though the everyday taken-for-granted world of my informants had been radically destroyed and “unmade” (Maček 2009; Nordstom 1997; Scarry 1985), on the level of ethnic identification, changes have not been that absolute. This came as a surprise to me during my fieldwork, and it also stands in opposition to structurally inspired anthropological analyses of war and violence. Such analyses have primarily focused on the inherent potential of violence

and war to create identities. In a condensed form, the line of reasoning goes like this: identity is built on difference, and when differences become too small, identity is at risk; violence then re-creates or reinforces difference. This is, for instance, Anton Blok's (2000) argument. He calls it, following Freud, the "narcissism of minor differences" when violent practices are aimed at destroying resemblance and thereby creating "the other" (see also Olujic 1998). Or as Liisa Malkki concludes in her study of Hutu narratives of Tutsi violence: "Through violence, bodies of individual persons become metamorphosed into *specimens* of the ethnic category for which they are supposed to stand" (Malkki 1998: 88). Violence then creates the structural division on which identity is built: we are us because we fight against them and vice versa. Consider also Simon Harrison's (1993) claim that violence has a structural function, that is, groups do not create war, war creates groups. As he sees it, both gift giving and violence (-giving) create social relations, which is contrary to the view of Marcel Mauss, who saw violence as the failure of the gift (Corbey 2000). Glen Bowman even suggests that violence does not have to be carried out physically to construct identity. It is the imagining of violence that "serves to create the integrities and identities which are in turn subjected to those forms of violence which seek victims" (Bowman 2001: 27); the imagining of violence against the other is a medium through which societies are represented to themselves. On quite a different scale but using the same kind of reasoning, Arjun Appadurai (1999) theorizes ethnic atrocities worldwide. Modernity and globalization, he claims, have disembedded social relations and created uncertain and alienated identities. In a grotesque way, violence thus uses the body to re-create certainty and intimacy.²

I have two objections to structural approaches to violence such as the ones outlined above. First, even if we accept the idea that violence creates unambiguous identities, such consequences should not be confused with explanations of why violence occurs in the first place. Taking Bosnia and Herzegovina as an example, the war did not come from the bottom

up, owing to social relations that had become disembedded or people being alienated (Appadurai's argument), nor was it the result of differences that had been erased. Rather, the war had its origin in a struggle for power on the political level (Bennett 1995; Cohen 1993; Gallagher 1997; Glenny 1996; Hayden 1996; Malcom 1994; Naughton 1994; Oberschall 2000; Ramet 1992a; Sofus 1999; Woodward 1995). The war then to some extent generated its own dynamic, as shown, for instance, by Misha Glenny (1996), and war-related violence reinforced ethnic identities (Olujic 1998; Sorabji 1995; van de Port 1998). However, this is not the same as accounting for the eruption of war, as the structural approach implicitly does, operating with a kind of thermodynamic argument: at a certain point differences become too small and therefore violence erupts.

Second, claiming that violence creates unambiguous identities only accounts for part of the process relevant for understanding the relationship between violence and identification. It is fair to say that violence plays an important part in constructing a general polarized atmosphere of "us and them," but this does not say anything about how people react or relate to such a dichotomized space of identity: it is not violence that is creative, but rather people's reactions to violence that constitute the creative element (Maček 2009).

In regard to Stolac, violence has unmistakably created potentials for unambiguous identities (Kolind 2008) by politically ethnifying all aspects of everyday life. And on the public and political levels, national identities have been promoted as the only salient ones. But when analyzing everyday identifications of the Muslims of Stolac another picture emerges, one that is less clear-cut. Therefore, I will examine how the Muslims of Stolac, when identifying themselves as Muslims, often refrained from exclusive ethnic antagonistic identifications, but instead highlighted coexistence and interethnic respect, which constitute patterns of identifications with clear ties to prewar interethnic social life.

I will take a look at different kinds of identification of relevance to the Muslims of Stolac, each responding to a different level: a local-patriotic identification on the *local level*, an ideal of tolerance on the *national level*, and identification with the Balkans and Europe on the *global level*. The general picture that emerges through these three identifications is that people used and molded already existing categories of identity to fit their new reality (see also Jansen 2006, 2007).

The patterns of identification among the Muslims of Stolac are part of what I label a *counterdiscourse* (Kolind 2007, 2008), which is not necessarily a conscious or outspoken kind of resistance. But taking into account (1) the creation of exclusive national identities on the public level among leading Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina prior to the war, (2) the crystallization of ethnic identities due to the war-related violence, and (3) the division of power along ethnoreligious lines in Stolac during the time of my fieldwork, I term the mere nonuse of ethnic and/or religious identification, as well as the insistence on clinging to ideals and categories of tolerance and coexistence, as a kind of resistance or counterdiscourse.

Before analyzing the three different kinds of identification, I will outline some general features of the *public* creation of an explicit and nonambiguous Muslim national identity throughout the war, and account for the *everyday prewar* status of ethnicity. Both features are relevant to understanding the counterdiscourse among my informants as well as the anchoring of this counterdiscourse in prewar everyday life.

Muslim National Identity in Bosnia and Herzegovina

At the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, the Yugoslavian society eroded and the country experienced religious revitalization, party pluralism, a centralization of power, and most of all, a surge of nationalism (Cohen 1993; Friedman 1996: 143–177; Höpken 1994: 231–239; Malcom 1994: 193–212; Ramet 1992a: 176–186).

From the 1950s until the 1980s, the Bosnian Muslims' interests were primarily secular, and one did find many of Tito's stern followers among this group of secularized Muslims. Religious Muslims played only a secondary role in political life, and attempts at merging religion and national interest were harshly suppressed by the Communist regime. Just before the coming of the war and certainly throughout the war these two aspects became rather suddenly conjoined in the public sphere. Muslim national identity became increasingly defined on the background of faith, and Islam and religious institutions came to play a central role in the nationalist mobilization of the Muslim community.

In 1990, interethnic relations among the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina were becoming increasingly tense, and with the coming of the multiparty election, Bosnia and Herzegovina saw the emergence of distinct political parties representing each of the republic's three ethnic communities, which was a rather crucial change in the formation of Muslim identity. The Muslim Party of Democratic Action (SDA) was formed in 1990, mainly by devout religious members directly involved in Islamic religious activities, and in only a couple of months it managed to mobilize a huge part of the Muslim population of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bougarel 1996: 96–97; Cohen 1998: 58–61; Malcom 1994: 218–222).

Muslim religious nationalism became further strengthened throughout the war. As the carving up the territory of Yugoslavia and Bosnia and Herzegovina along ethnic lines gained more and more predominance and as the war progressed with assaults on Muslims by both Croats and Serbs, leading Muslims became increasingly sectional, religious, and nationalistic, and the space left for imagining a secular multiethnic society became limited. Religious Muslim nationalism spread throughout the society and its institutions—for instance, the Bosnian army (Armija BiH), which was multiethnic at the beginning of the war, soon became dominated by Muslims and controlled by the SDA. Religious education was introduced into the army, and radical Islamic units (including fighters from Islamic countries) appeared

making heavy use of Islamic symbols and preached strict adherence to an Islamic code of conduct (Cohen 1998: 69–70; Mojzes 1998: 95; Velikonja 2003).

In the educational system, religious Muslim nationalism increased with the introduction of Islam into most schools, and especially the subjects of “History” and “Language and Literature” changed in accordance with the ongoing process of formation of Bosnian Muslim identity (Maček 2009). Also, leading Muslims renamed their language Bosnian and tried to make it more “Muslim.” Greetings became a political act and religious greetings appeared more frequent. Street names were changed into Muslim names. TV and radio broadcasting was increasingly oriented toward promoting a Muslim religious national identity, and so forth (Bougarel 2001; Laušević 2000; Maček 2009; Ramet 1992b).

Thus, despite some secular opposition, on a general level Bosnia and Herzegovina saw the rise of a Bosnian Muslim nationalist party and of antagonist Muslim nationalist politics in a relatively short period of time. However, Muslim nationalism grew, not because it had been lying dormant throughout the years, but because the (nationalist) logic of the war created it. In fact, Muslim nationalism had always been weak, among other things because attempts at expressing a solid and unifying Muslim identity had traditionally been centered on confession and/or cultural traditions or pan-Islamism, aspects hindering the growth of a strong national identity (Bougarel 1996, 1997).

While Bosnian Muslim nationalism only seriously began developing in the late 1980s, this does not mean that a strong sense of ethnic belonging was absent among the Bosnian Muslims, particularly as regards the countryside. But it is a sense of belonging one should not confuse with the nationalism of the late 1980s. Several writers have argued that Bosnia and Herzegovina has never been truly modernized, that is, communitarianism (the prevalence of ethnic identities in social relations) has continued to be the most prevalent characteristic of the society, the state project has not succeeded, and over-communal identifications have never

managed to surpass local ethnic identifications (Allcock 2000: 277–311; Bougarel 1996; Simić 1991; Sunic 1998). A central element in these ethnic identifications has been religion: Serbs have been Orthodox, Croats Catholic, and also for the Muslims a strong relationship between faith and ethnic identity existed (Bringa 1995; Lockwood 1975).

To clarify the characteristics of this local identification, Tone Bringa (1995) explores the native concept of *nacije* (ethnoreligious identity). *Nacije* is a combination of religious, cultural, and social identities, something to which many people, especially in the countryside (Lockwood 1975), felt strong emotional attachment, something into which one was born and socialized, and something that was normally “inherited” from parents. National identity in Yugoslavia was, on the contrary, something one could choose from the options given by the state, and it often lacked the essential feeling attached to *nacije* in everyday identification. Bringa concludes that the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina had a strong sense of ethnoreligious identity but a weak sense of national identity. They referred to their collective identity not in a idiom “of shared blood and a myth of common origin,” but “in an idiom which de-emphasized descent and focused instead on a shared environment, cultural practices, a shared sentiment, and common experience” (Bringa 1995: 30). The difference between ethnoreligious identity and nationality was then exploited in the nationalist projects of the late 1980s. In Ivana Maček’s words:

The new national political elites could mobilise the ethno-religious notions of belonging into the new national projects of constitution of sovereign states for Muslims, Serbs and Croats respectively, [by] filling the new national identities with the old ethno-religious feeling of essential belonging. (Maček 2000: 157)

Bosnian Muslim Identity in Everyday Practice

In what follows, I will highlight four related characteristics of prewar embedded, local ethnoreligious identification. First, though Islam was an important identity marker for Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it should not be understood as sets of clearly definable rules of practices, but rather, as Cornelia Sorabji (1996: 54) suggests, as a “domain of loose moral imperatives.” She mentions hospitality, cleanliness, honesty, kindness, courtesy, industry, and the like. Though these values are central to Muslims, they are not exclusively Muslim virtues, but rather part of a general moral codex, which, for instance, overlaps with the ideology of Communism that says “work hard, don’t cheat your neighbours, redistribute your wealth, and so on” (Sorabji 1996: 55). Sorabji seldom found her informants evaluating each other’s actions in religious terms. It was thus, as she reports, not “haram” (Arabic: forbidden by God) to slander someone, but rather “ne valja” (Serbo-Croatian: no good). Lockwood (1975), who did fieldwork fifteen years before Sorabji and Bringa, came to similar conclusions. Though Islam was more visible and pronounced in “his” village, people were still relatively indifferent to doctrine. Such findings are naturally not unique to Bosnia and Herzegovina, but rather in line with other studies of Islam showing that religious life in general is always embedded in actual social life (Marsden and Retsikas 2013).

The second characteristic of prewar local identification was the contrasting aspect of identity. The Catholics and Muslims (and Orthodox/Serbs) continually accentuated differences in establishing identity. The different ethnoreligious groups needed each other to construct identity, and this otherness—though using, for instance, religious practices—was embedded in everyday practices, in contrast to the national identities constructed in the public and national spheres. Local identity was to a great extent premised upon actual local face-to-face interaction. So, religion was not that important in itself but rather due to the difference it was able to make in everyday local life (Bringa 1995; Lockwood 1975).

Third, prewar ethnoreligious identity was one among several types of identity. Work relations, type of education, class, gender, and degree of culturedness were all identities that in certain situations could be more important than ethnicity (Allcock 2000: 170–211). In other words, relatively “ethnic-free” zones of social interaction also existed in which identification depended on the context. Ethnoreligious identification should furthermore be contrasted with other levels of identification. In the town where Bringa did her fieldwork (1995: 65–73), for instance, ethnoreligious identity was connected to the family and sometimes the neighbors, but at a village level a unifying localistic supraethnic identification held sway created through social exchanges like regular private visits, obligations between households, communal voluntary work, and common house building (*akcija*) (Bringa 1995: 65–73). The most central ethos attached to such local superethnic identification was that of *komšilik*, defined by an ethos of hospitality and neighborliness guaranteeing “the pacific nature of relations between the communities, and thus a security of each of them” (Bougarel 1996: 98). However, as Sorabji reminds us, though *komšilik* was—and still is today—an important cultural concept, it did not hold a determining force to either prevent or create war (Sorabji 2008). Also, current evidence seems to suggest that the idea of *komšilik* may today be profoundly changing as a consequence of the postwar predicament (Henig 2012).

The fourth and last element relates to many Bosnians’ capacity to live with difference, which developed throughout the years and should not be romanticized. Monoethnic communities existed all over Bosnia and Herzegovina (Lockwood 1975). Furthermore, we have examples of villages and areas where interethnic coexistence has been marked by cyclic outbursts of violence and interethnic (blood) strife (Boehm 1984); researchers have also observed how traumatic memories from World War II have been passed on to the younger generations (Denich 1994). Some even talk about a myth constructed by Western intellectuals in which the Bosnian mentality is presumably tolerant. The reality is rather—it is argued—

one of interethnic distrust (Simić 2000). I shall not revitalize this sometimes heated debate (see Brandt 2002) for a thorough discussion. My point is that the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina regularly came into contact with members of different ethnoreligious groups in the public sphere and often also in the private sphere. Ethnoreligious identity could then be a significant factor shaping the content and atmosphere of interethnic interaction, but it was seldom a hindrance thereof, and the interaction between the different ethnoreligious groups was often characterized by respect. A central point here is that differences were not downplayed. Instead, differences were persistently nurtured, but in a way that Cvetana Georgieva (1997) has described as “familiarisation of differences,” that is, the net of interconnected lines compromises all levels of everyday life, eliminates otherness, and changes it into familiar difference. The “others” are therefore “perceived not as a menace, but rather as an inseparable part of the complex world of everyday life” (Georgieva 1997: 68).

The war and the war-related nationalism in many ways attempted to destroy these aspects of the Bosnian Muslims’ everyday practice of identification. Religion became much more closely connected to a more doctrinaire reading of Islam. Ethnic identity became increasingly disembedded and was represented in rigid and politicized categories detached from people’s everyday experiences. Ethnic identity surpassed all other identities, colonizing every aspect of life, and was increasingly presented as a hindrance for interaction.

So far I have presented two rather opposing approaches to ethnic identity: a religiously based public nationalist identity highlighting difference and arguing for ethnic segregation, and a local embedded practice of ethnoreligious identity stressing coexistence. Following the logic of the structural approach to violence one should expect the former to prevail after the war. In the following, I will analyze three different types of identifications currently at work among the Muslims of Stolac, which in sum depict a world characterized by complexity and ambiguity rather than clarity or certainty; a world resting as much on prewar everyday

interethnic experiences and cultural categories as on the sudden emergence of a public discourse of nationalist exclusion.

Muslim Identifications in Stolac

Considering the logic of the structural approach and the fact that the war was presented as a struggle based on religion and nationality, one might presume that *Islam* and *Bosnia* were the two most important signifiers in creating a distinct and unambiguous Muslim identity in this region. It is my impression that they were not.

The National Identity That Failed

National Identity

National identity was not central in the identification of the Muslims of Stolac. Neither were the typical aspects through which a nation is often imagined relevant: language, history, blood, flag, race, the dead soldier, and so forth (Anderson 1991; Foster 1991; Mosse 1990). For instance, when talking about actually fighting the war, people seldom said they fought for Bosnia, territory, and cultural traditions; instead they claimed to have fought for survival, for their homes, families, and because they had nowhere to run. People were not proud of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but they were proud of having survived. As one of my informants once said, “everyone who survived the war is a success.” Emir fought in the war.³ Once he showed me some pictures of himself and a friend in uniform, smiling and holding machine guns in the air. Emir’s mother felt embarrassed and did not want me to see the pictures; Emir, on the other hand, appeared proud of what he and his comrades did in the war, but his pride was not related to a Bosnian nation. He said:

We did not fight for any ideas at all. We did not try to create some kind of state or country; we just did it in order to survive. I fought at the front with my weapon just to prevent them from coming and taking my mother. So, that they wouldn't kill her or the children who were with her. There were no ideas in my head at that time, because I was hungry and thirsty and without anything. There were people who only had 10 bullets in their guns, and they fought against tanks in that way. And in that situation you don't think about creating a state.

During the war, the Muslims of Herzegovina were pressed from two sides and had no possibilities of escape. Many of my informants saw this as a major tactical mistake on behalf of the Croats and Serbs. They would have escaped if only they had been given the opportunity. People therefore, felt they became Bosnians because of the tactical war errors of their opponents.

Even during my fieldwork, *Bosnia and Herzegovina* did not function as a meta-narrative that could bestow meaning on people's sufferings, traumas, and material losses. My informants were simply not proud of their country and did not identify with it. They were fed up with what they saw as corrupt politicians; furthermore, they found the educational system to function badly; the unemployment rate to be disastrous; they complained that people did not get their pay or pension in due course; and in general people did not see any future for the kids.

Religious Identity

In the war, religion became politicized and served as a vehicle for expressing a separate Muslim identity. My findings suggest that during my fieldwork religiosity had found a level more or less equal to the prewar situation and did not play a major role in people's everyday

practices of identification (see also Bougarel 2001). To be a good Muslim meant to behave decently and to be morally upright, and this did not relate to religious practices. For some, Islam was totally unimportant. People generally had a very pragmatic relation to their faith.

During the war, I was told, people were more religious than today, which they found normal due to the immense psychic pressure they endured, and consequently there is nothing strange about the decline of religious observance after the war stopped. Often people lamented the loss of sense of community, which existed during the war; however, the issue was not religion but *drustvo* (social intermingling).

Following the Koran one should not drink alcohol, but the majority of my informants had a relaxed attitude to alcohol. In most homes I was offered *loza* (grape brandy), and often it was homemade. Only few people regularly attended the Mosque (or what was left of it when I did fieldwork)—the same number of people as before the war, I was told. And never did I observe people praying during the day/evening. Possibly the use of religious greetings has increased, but only rarely did I hear them; instead people said *dobro dan* (good day), *šta ima* (how are you doing), *šta radi* (what's up) to each other, all of which are secular and religiously neutral greetings. Before the war, children who attended *mekteb* (Koran school) would sometimes learn to recite the Koran in Arabic. Mensur's wife knew some of the Koran in Arabic, but she did not get much credit for that. As Mensur said to her once: "well it doesn't matter—God understands all languages. Why then should we pray in Arabic?" Finally, Ramadan as a codified ritual in Islam could easily have been used as a way to identify and collectively emphasize Muslim identity. But the Ramadan did not attract much attention generally for my informants.

These examples are not meant to illustrate that Islam does not have a place in people's lives. Many people see themselves as believers and respect their God. However, to be a believer is about being a decent human being, behaving properly, taking care of your family

and fellow man. In fact, I often heard people dissociate themselves from more dogmatic religious manifestations. Instead they wanted to stick to what they regarded as the typical Bosnian way of practicing religion.

In the remainder of the article I will analyze how the Muslims of Stolac defined themselves as Muslims, considering the fact that national and politicized religious identity did not suffice. I will look at three different kinds of identifications: (1) localistic identification, (2) an ideal of tolerance and coexistence, and (3) the Balkan/European identification. All of these reinforce resistance to nationalist exclusiveness.

Localistic Identification

Local patriotism in Stolac was strong. Most acknowledged that the city was (or at least had been) special, with a unique atmosphere, beauty, and spirit. This local patriotism focused on Stolac as a center of open-mindedness, a meeting point for different cultures, and stated that Stolac did not exist without its three ethnic groups.

The Aesthetics of Coexistence

The ideal of coexistence was of central importance to many Muslims of Stolac and was often associated with a typical Stolac mentality. They saw Stolac historically as a crossroads for different cultures and stressed that all newcomers had been welcomed. Nusret expressed his idea of local interethnic coexistence in Stolac in the following way:

We want the Stolac spirit to return. And that spirit is the citizens who lived here before the war—*Bošnjaci, i Srbi, i Hrvati*.⁴ And as for those coming from outside [*strani*], the best thing would be if they left [he refers to Croats from central Bosnia⁵].

Another element of the Stolac spirit related to the feeling of oneness with the beauty of the city. People told about the four picturesque Mosques, the big city market built in old Ottoman style; Begovina, the once so beautiful housing complex; the old watermills; and so forth. When I conducted fieldwork, everything had been mined or burned. They talked about the lovely Bregava River running through the town, and they recalled all the industries in town, which employed a lot of people and exported to the whole of Yugoslavia and abroad. In short, they were very proud of their city.

However, the people of Stolac often also had ambivalent feelings for their town. Memories from before the war and present images merged together. Some said they could not remember what the town looked like; others said they were not able to drive through the town without seeing the “real” Stolac in their mind’s eye. When people were in a realistic mood their Stolac did not exist anymore; instead they saw an ugly and ruined city dominated by Croats. But when they talked about Stolac in a more insubstantial manner, the old and real Stolac seemed to rise from the dust and people were again full of pride for their town. In this way the beauty of the city coalesced with the spirit of coexistence, and functioned as a symbolic cultural space with which one could identify.

However, identification with prewar Stolac was also a critique of the Croats who had demolished the old Ottoman-inspired town and who were trying to create a new Catholic and modern Stolac denying the very existence of the prewar town. So, just talking about the past and prewar Stolac was a strongly political act. The last element in local patriotism has to do with the value attached to everything *domaći* (homemade/local), in particular local food. People would proudly tell how the bread, the cheese, the yogurt, the juice, the *loza*, and so on, that they served were all *domaći*. People told about how the local food products were produced without chemicals or fertilizers, which in turn made the *domaći* clean (*čisto*). The positive connotations of everything homemade affected other kinds of classifications. For

instance, people would say that they did not have a problem with Croats originating from Stolac, and they labeled them *naši domaći Hrvati*: our hometown Croats.

The Struggle for Local Identity

There were only a few visible markers of Muslim identity in Stolac. Many are probably afraid of the reactions that visible demonstrations could provoke (see, e.g., Mahmutcehalic 2001), but more important, the Muslims tried to identify themselves by the fact that they *did not use* the same methods as the nationalists: political manifestations such as waving a flag or drawing nationalistic graffiti would, therefore, simply not be supported. The few physical markers of identity I did encounter were rather part of localistic identifications. I will mention three.

Before the war, a local historical pamphlet was published in Stolac with illustrated articles on the history, archaeology, and architecture of the area. After the war and the destruction of the Stolac heritage, these booklets suddenly gained new importance. In 1997, some prominent people originating from Stolac initiated the reprinting of these booklets, along with a section comparing photographs of Stolac then and now, in a book format (Dizdar et al. 1997). The book became evidence of a time and a city that no longer existed. The articles, which hardly anyone read before the war, now became an important source of identity for people living in Stolac, since the book helped to mentally (re)construct the picture of beautiful prewar Stolac, which Croats had destroyed and after the war denied ever existed. Another source of local identity was the River Bregava running through town. People often talked about the river and would sometimes say, “at least we have Bregava.” Here is an excerpt from my notebook written after a conversation with Anvere:

She was laughing a little at the name Sanpero, the name of the restaurant where the cultural centre was before. She also said that before [the war] there was a gallery next to café Galerija, where artists from Stolac exhibited. She then tells me that it is so strange to realize that all this is destroyed. The town really had soul before: “now they have destroyed everything, the Mosques, Begovina . . . it is only Bregava which they haven’t destroyed.” When she said this I realized that this is the only thing people have left of the real Stolac. It is like a symbol saying “we have not given up.”

In Stolac one of the Muslim cafés (Café Galerija) marked a more contested struggle for regaining a territorial marker. The café, located in the center of town opposite some Croatian cafés, was popular. It had big panorama windows so that one could overlook the center, outdoor tables, and beautiful black-and-white drawings of prewar Stolac on the walls, drawings that were part of the mental (re)construction of prewar Stolac. The café had been destroyed twice by Croats, probably because the Muslim café in the center of town was considered as a provocation. On both occasions the café was reopened. For many Muslims the reopenings were a symbol of the integration of the town and the possible coexistence of the ethnic groups in Stolac rather than a sign of antagonism. Some said that Croats also patronized the café, although I never met any. I suppose that people wanted them to come to Café Galerija, thereby legitimizing it and doing their part in (re)constructing the Stolac spirit and reintegrating people in Stolac, and they saw the café as a fight for the city and the Stolac spirit of beauty and coexistence.

These three examples are some of the few visible attempts at redefining the physical/symbolic space of Stolac that I encountered. In addition, there were all the minor daily acts, which were primarily about creating an everyday world, but nonetheless also related to the creation of the Stolac spirit. It is difficult to establish a dividing line between the

everyday construction of small lifeworlds and the more visible conquests of physical/symbolic space. For instance, there were families who keep the road outside their house and garden extremely clean by sweeping it every day, even though the house next to them lay in ruins with a huge pile of litter in front. Were they just fastidious people trying to keep some dignity in an ugly and ruined town? Or is it possible to see such acts as efforts to clean up (parts of) Stolac in order to create a contrast to the state of total decay in which the Croats have left the town? I think both alternatives are true. The Stolac spirit is about the creation of a physical/symbolic space—that is, a space existing in reality: for instance, Bregava, Café Galerija, the mosques—and a cultural space, which is more a (re)construction of ideals and the aesthetic of the town with which one can identify. The Stolac spirit probably existed before the war, but has gained new significance. The Muslims had returned to a town from which they had been expelled, and everything Muslim had been destroyed and the Croats controlled all public administration and buildings. So, it was no longer certain what being a *Stocani* meant. Hence, just to talk about the beauty of the town, the native and tolerant soul of Stolac, to open a café, stroll through the streets, use the River Bregava, produce and praise homemade food, and identify *naši domaći Hrvati*, had some degree of political significance. The Stolac spirit was a source of identification, but it was also a political manifestation, saying we (also) have the right to live here. However, it is important to distinguish such a local identification from a nationalistic or religious one. Localistic identification and the evocation of the Stolac spirit was not about being Muslim, but about being a Muslim citizen of Stolac. In this way, the Stolac spirit redirected focus from a nationalistic identification toward a local one.

The Ideal of Tolerance and Coexistence

The Muslims of Stolac subscribed to an ideal of tolerance and a wish for coexistence with the other ethnic groups. Often this ideal was expressed through people's talk about the past focusing on how everybody lived peacefully together and how ethnicity did not matter. However, one always refers to the past from a particular perspective, and telling about the past also exposes the present. I therefore have no hesitation about grouping people's illuminations of the past together with statements about the present and view both as part of an ideal of tolerance and coexistence. My informants were also rather conscious of the ideal of tolerance and coexistence when it was used in a self-reflexive manner to identify Muslimness, criticize ethnic others, the Croats in particular, and criticize the nationalist vision of ethnic segregation.

Differences Were an Advantage

When talking about the past, my informants often stressed that cultural diversity enriched everyday life: people learned from each other, had more festivals in which to participate, and their social network was large. Ethnicity mattered, not in relation to a larger political nationalistic framework, but in relation to everyday habitual practices of identification. When I did fieldwork, people mourned the loss of these differences, or rather the loss of their respectful and habitual handling. The war highlighted ethnic differences, but it also changed the positive connotations related to these differences and instead promoted an ideology in which ethnic dissimilarity was seen as a hindrance to interaction and a threat to cultural survival. Therefore, talking about ethnic differences in a positive manner was a means to resist the political rhetoric of ethnic separation. And for the Muslims it was a way to identify themselves by saying, "We have no problems interacting with the different ethnic groups; we are a tolerant people." Take Osman, who in this quote reports how the Muslims' tolerant attitude during the war was turned against them:

For instance at Bajram, I invited my Serbian and Croat friends home, and at Christmas, the 25th [of December] and the 7th of January, respectively, the Muslims were invited home to them to roll eggs, but you do not do that today; it is unthinkable. Before the war the other cultures were an advantage for us; if there are only Muslims everybody knows each other, but with other religious communities we learned from each other—it was enrichment. But with the war the differences became our disadvantages and were turned against us.

So, as Osman and most of my informants saw it, difference, respect, and tolerance were three inseparable issues. However, even if the Croats had opened up for interaction, I think many Muslims would have found interaction difficult. More to the point, then, the Muslims (wanted to) perceive themselves as tolerant and ready to resume interethnic relations, whereas they maintained that other ethnic groups did not hold the same ideal. Recollecting and stating that differences were/are no hindrance to interaction, therefore, was also an act of identification.

Nationality Did Not Matter

People also said that before the war everybody lived together and no one cared about ethnicity. This is in keeping with the official ideology of the Yugoslav regime (Brotherhood and Unity), which tried to make ethnicity a thing of the past. Nijaz a man of about thirty-five, depicted the days before the war as joyful, a time when ethnicity was unimportant. This memory was important to him, enabling him to imagine a better future and reminding him of his values, as he lived in a totally different context. He said:

Let me tell you one thing: everybody had their life. We had work—I began building my house before the war, I also started with my business and I was about to open a coffee bar. Things were going well for me. You are born here in Stolac, grow up together and have your friends until you get married, and I married before the war. We had a circle of friends. And that's enough. . . . You have a job, family, some everyday obligations; it was a normal life. Then came the war and turned everything upside down. Now I can find some of my friends all the way from Canada to Australia. And not only Bosnians; also Serbs and Croats. Before the war it did not matter if you were Serb, Muslim or Croat. You did not know what people were, you were not weighed by it. . . . When I was married, my best man was Croat, and at my boy's first birthday his godfather was Serb. Now they live in Canada. That's how it was.

Nijaz's statement entails a contradiction. On the one hand he said, "You did not know what people were." On the other hand, he told me—in line with the tradition of respectful interaction between the different ethnic groups—about the deliberate choice of a Croat and a Serb to be best man and godfather, respectively. However, claiming to be unaware of the ethnic identity of one's friends simply expresses indifference. Moreover, after the war the habitual prewar pattern of tolerant and respectful interethnic interactions has been objectified and constructed by many Muslims as conscious knowledge, relevant in identifying present Muslim identity.

This should become more evident in the following examples. People sometimes told me they had Croat friends and mingled with Croats. Sometimes this was not quite correct. It was as if people wanted to assure me and themselves that they still upheld the ideal of tolerance and interethnic interaction. When I first met him, Safet told me that he had several Croat friends and acquaintances. But some months later, when I asked him if he knew some Croats I

could interview, he said that he did not really know any. And once when I invited Mensur, who had told me that he frequented the Croatian cafés, for a cup of coffee as we were standing outside a Croatian coffee bar, he said “Yes, but then we will go to Galerija,” which was the nearest Muslim café. Although, in practice, interaction was limited, it was important for people to state that they were tolerant and to identify with the ideal of coexistence.

Critique of the Croats—Identification of the Muslims

In talking about past interethnic interaction or present tolerance, sometimes the Muslims blamed the other ethnic groups—especially the Croats—for abandoning these ideals. This blaming and the implicit identification of oneself as tolerant is part of the same logic. Below is an excerpt from an interview with Ada, who was a schoolteacher, living in an area with many Croats. She wished for a better future but was rather despondent:

On the street in Stolac where I lived, there lived Serbs, Croats and Muslims. You received the flats from the factory where you worked and nobody asked about who the neighbors were—if you were Serb, Croat or Muslim. My first neighbor was Croat, and my sisters and I raised their children. We were close. Not a day went by without visiting each other. We talked about everything. We knew each other’s problems. Today she [the Croat neighbor] doesn’t even bother to visit my parents, or even to talk to them. It is senseless.

Other examples touch more explicitly on the issue of identification. People said, for instance, that “Muslims read Serbian or Croatian literature but they do not read ours,” or “we listen to their music, but they do not listen to ours.” Comparisons of this sort meant that “our” tolerance in fact exists as a function of “their” intolerance. Whether the intention was to

criticize them (Croats and Serbs and the nationalistic project) or define what it was to be Muslim is hard to tell. It was probably both.

The war forced people to reflect on prewar practices. Ethnic difference, including the way this difference was nurtured, articulated, and created before, had after the war become objectified and part of the Muslims' conscious identification. The Muslims called this tolerance; I call it the *ideal* of tolerance. In short, practices of interaction (such as the "familiarisation of differences") had become ideals of identification. The habitual tolerant and respectful way characterizing the different ethnic groups' interaction before the war was increasingly seen by the Muslims as a specific Muslim quality, partly because the other ethnic groups were seen as having abandoned the respectful prewar attitude. But persistently highlighting the trouble-free and joyful interaction among ethnic groups in the past, and stressing the possibility of resuming this interaction in the future, was also a way of rejecting the nationalistic rhetoric and practice of ethnic exclusiveness. So, even though the Muslims' ideals of tolerance and coexistence were mixed in this way, they still formed part of a counterdiscourse resisting nationalist ideology.

The Balkans–Europe

The third nonethnic identification present among the Muslims of Stolac related strongly to a symbolic geographical thinking. As was also the case with the two previous forms of identifications, referring to a dichotomy of the Balkans–Europe tended to downplay and blur ethnic nationalist thinking. Once again the exclusive categories of identity, which should be a result of violence according to functionalist anthropology, were opposed by my informants in everyday practice.

Maria Todorova's (1997) analysis of the Western image of the Balkans has shown how the Balkans as a distinct geographical area with specific cultural traits was only

discovered/invented at the end of the eighteenth century, mainly through European travel literature. The Balkans was increasingly associated with the traditional, the noncivilized, tribalism (political underdevelopment), and the rural and uneducated. During the Balkan wars and World War I, a further ingredient was added to this mixture: violence. In fact violence has been a leitmotiv of the perception of the Balkans ever since. After World War II a new demon, communism, was grafted onto the image of the Balkans (see also Bakić-Hayden 1992: 3–4). And during the war in former Yugoslavia, the image of the Balkans came full circle, since Western observers have explained the war as typical evidence of the Balkan mentality (Kaplan 1993). Europe/Balkans has thus been constructed as a hierarchical symbolic geography: The tendency seems to be: the more eastern the more primitive and conservative (Bakić-Hayden 1995; Bakić-Hayden and Hayden 1992; Ritman-Auguštin 1995; Zarkov 1995).

The Balkans/Europe is a conflicting discursive field in which my informants were entangled. Rather than taking solid and consistent positions, they had to make their identifications in the middle of an existing quandary. Sometimes Europe was considered decadent and cold, and at other times it stood for the future and the civilized. Sometimes the Balkans was authentic and honest, and at other times it was violent and crude, and sometimes it was associated with an unavoidable destructive force.

Balkan Identifications in Stolac

When the category “Balkan” was used by my informants in everyday life to evaluate and categorize behavior and attitudes, it often bore negative connotations, being associated with qualities such as laziness, callousness, disrespect, and violence, and with things being unstructured, complicated, corrupt, and unpleasant. It was, for instance, possible to say that a person not behaving properly was displaying a typical Balkan mentality.

But “Balkan” was also used in a more profound way to explain and comprehend the war and violent and complicated postwar situation. “Balkan” then became associated with violence, madness, and death. As Senad once said: “This war could never have occurred in Europe; it is a typical Balkan war. It’s insanity and savagery. We have to try to get rid of it, this Balkanism, but it is a part of us.” The Balkan metaphor was employed to make some kind of sense of the madness, with one element in this Balkan discourse being that people in the Balkans are accustomed to recurrent insane violence—in short they know it by heart. In a similar vein, I occasionally heard people say that every 30 years there is war, or: “We build up everything—houses, family, economy—and then we destroy it all.”

One might have expected that the Muslims of Stolac would have associated the other ethnic groups with this Balkan mentality, and used the label as an ethnic condemnation in disguise. But they seldom did. The war was typically Balkan, rather than being typical of specific ethnic groups. It is my impression that people perceived “the Balkan mentality” as an independent force operating in the Balkan areas that makes people act insanely. People do not positively embrace this violent and destructive Balkan mentality, but they do not feel they can evade it either. People sometimes described themselves as crazy Balkan people, but they were not the subjects that acted: it was the Balkan mentality and its irreversibility that was acting through them. As one of my informants said when talking about this mentality: “Maybe it is something in the air, or maybe in the cigarettes, maybe they put marijuana in the cigarettes here in Bosnia.” The wild and chaotic Balkan mentality is thus enclosed in the middle of culture, but at the same time it is not part of the ordinary. The wild and chaotic Balkan mentality is in this way created as an explanatory yet also isolated factor, thereby helping to uphold a normal and ordered world.

Besides its everyday use and its status as an unavoidable mad mentality, “Balkan” also occasionally had positive connotations. When compared to European mentality it sometimes

represented the authentic, warm, impulsive, and unpretentious, whereas Europe represented the decadent, commercial, false, and cold. People said that it was only after the war, with the presence of the international community, that drugs and prostitution entered Bosnia and Herzegovina in earnest, or that Westerners are often very patronizing and condescending. And many people embraced the well-known stereotypes, saying that they were more emotional than Europeans, or that they had more time, not being so stressed.

Balkan identity is complex and contradictory. It is both a violent and destructive force, and an authentic and creative attitude. Sometimes people embrace the contradictions and adopt the wild and chaotic madness because it also represents something real that is non-European. Here is an excerpt from my diary:

He [Nihad] tells me that “people in the West look at us and think we are crazy; they all think we are crazy.” He is not explicitly referring to a Balkan mentality, but this thing where you at one and the same time hate your culture, the Balkan-like—which is chaos, craziness, violence, war, the incomprehensible—and if not exactly love it then also identifies with it. It is like saying, “I am crazy, insane, and I am proud of it.” It is this embracing of the otherness that they are perfectly aware Westerners see in them. As when Fahrudin says, “people from the West look at us and say we are crazy, abnormal, but here everything is abnormal; that’s why I feel normal.”

The question of Balkanism is not something one normally relates to Muslim ethnoreligious identity. For the Muslims of Stolac, however, it was a central question, which they answered in contradictory ways. One thing, though, uniting their different use of Balkan mentality is the absence of a linkage with ethnicity. This kind of linkage was made extensively throughout the war on the political level, as previously discussed, so one might also have expected that my

informants would have associated negative aspects of the Balkan mentality with the Croats or Serbs, and positive characteristics solely with Muslim identity. This, however, was only seldom the case. When entering the Balkans–Europe dichotomy, my informants entered a more general level of identification at which the sparring partners were European Others, not ethnic Others, and the madness of the area related not to one ethnic group, but to the whole populace.

European Identifications in Stolac

European identifications were contradictory too. Many of my informants associated Europe with peace, prosperity, and orderliness, and believed it could offer a better life. Europe was a dream, and for many an unattainable one. Bosnia and Herzegovina was seen as lagging behind materially and technologically, as well as in regard to the legal system and societal development.

I remember once Nusret showed me some pictures, one of which was of his family during the war. Its quality was bad. The background was a wall with graffiti on it. His children, who looked sad, were wearing ragged clothes, and everything seemed to be run-down. Another picture was taken inside an apartment, in front of an empty peeling wall; one of the boys was sitting on an old mattress full of holes. That is all. Right next to these pictures in the album was one taken by his sister, who lived in Germany. The home was pretty and the quality of the picture was good. The children were well-dressed and well-groomed, pictures were hanging on the wall, and there was nice furniture and china on the table. Everybody looked healthy and lively. Nusret's comment was: "It's the same, right? Totally the same; can't you see it?" He laughed a little; I know he dreamt of being able to give his children and himself such a future. In fact, he immigrated with his family to Sweden two months later.

On other occasions when Muslims compared the Balkans with the charged symbol of Europe, they did not depict themselves as lagging behind, but rather as being no different. They stressed that it was the other peoples in Europe who deemed them to be underdeveloped and abnormal. As Mensur once said, “The Bosnian Muslims are the most intelligent and most educated Muslims in the world, probably because we are from Europe.” Sometimes I was confronted with the view—contrary to the Balkan explanation—that the war could have occurred anywhere, that Europe also has a bloody history, or that it was all due to international as well as national politics, a view with which people resisted attempts at linking up the war with a typical Balkan mentality.

The last aspect of the comparison between the Balkans and Europe is when people stated that Bosnians are in fact better than Europeans, not because they are more authentic, emotional, and hospitable, as was the case when the Balkan discourse was embraced and the Otherness internalized, but because they are more European. The main arguments employed to support this identification relate to education and general knowledge.

Nusret’s father, for instance, clearly placed Bosnia and Herzegovina at the top of Europe. He often talked about the high intellectual level of former Yugoslavia: “We had one of the best school systems in Europe, philosophy, architecture, mathematics. Plato, Aristotle, everything,” and he told me that the West does not reckon the people in the Balkans as capable of anything. One day he told me about a Spanish SFOR soldier who used to come and visit him: “I asked if he knew [he mentioned a Spanish writer whose name I did not catch]; he didn’t, so *I* had to teach *him* Spanish literature.” One day he told me about the superiority of the letter *c* in the Bosnian language: “In German you need three letters to create the same sound: *sch*.” In sum, The Muslims’ rather incongruous Balkans–Europe identifications avoided ethnic connotations, as they were placed beyond ethnicity by my informants, on a more general level of comparison. To be a Muslim of Stolac meant to continually place

oneself somewhere in the discursive tension of the Balkans–Europe dichotomy, and in so doing, ethnic affiliation became less relevant.

Discussion

Though not originating in ethnic and religious differences, the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina surely exploited, enforced, and to some extent constructed them. And though Muslim religious nationalism was definitely more ambiguous than were Serbian and Croatian nationalism, because it adhered to an idea of both ethnic coexistence and ethnic exclusion, it definitely contributed to putting ethnic identity at the forefront. Considering the Bosnian Muslims' nationalism, the structural theories of violence, and finally the fact that Stolac during the time of my fieldwork was totally ethnically divided and marked by nationalistic politics, one might expect the Muslims' identification to be unambiguous, exclusive, based on religious and national values, and strongly focused on "Muslimness." My data show, on the contrary, that local Muslim identifications in Stolac were much more ambiguous, and not as clear-cut as structural theories of violence would have it.

The new Bosnian nation-state (or any other real or imagined state like entity) did not serve as relevant imagined communities for people and such had not been invested with positive connotations. Religion was important, but in the sense of values attached to an everyday morality and not a doctrinaire reading of Islam.

I have pointed out three different identifications central to people's lives in trying to ascertain what it meant to be a postwar Muslim resident of Stolac/Bosnia and Herzegovina. None of these were concerned with defining Muslimness as an exclusive category.

The first one—local patriotism—was about (re)defining Stolac as a place for coexistence partly by constructing an endemic Stolac aesthetic, beautiful and characterized by its unique broad-minded mentality. The second one referred to an objectified habitual prewar practice of

local interethnic interaction characterized by tolerance (“familiarisation of differences” and the value of *komšilik*), an ideal of tolerance that was partly associated with a Muslim mentality. The third one placed the people of Stolac in relation to a more global discourse of the connections/relationship between Europe and the Balkans. Different and contradictory positions exist here, but all are characterized by not focusing on ethnicity. It is not the position toward the other ethnic groups that is central, but the position vis-à-vis Europe.

In sum, the war has definitely changed the way the Muslims of Stolac identify themselves. But the changes have not been as radical as one would expect. Bosnian/Muslim nationalism is not very important, religion has returned to a more or less prewar level, and prewar values such as tolerance, coexistence, solidarity, neighborliness, and civilization (the Balkans/Europe), though somewhat changed, are still central.

Practices of violence certainly have the potential to consolidate, accentuate, or even create identities. However, this is not the same as explaining why violence or war arises. Such a functional argument in which violence is supposed to erupt when differences become too small should be replaced by a focus on political strategies. It was the war and postwar politics that initiated the ethnic division of Stolac because ethnic cleansing was the explicit aim and method of power-seeking nationalistic politicians. War did not occur due to an intrinsic potential of violence; rather the violence in Stolac manifested and augmented the politically created division (Kolind 2008).

Furthermore, the potential of violence for consolidating differences should be related to moves in the opposite direction—that is, everyday attempts to make social relations ambiguous and indistinct. In this article I have analyzed such an opposite move: resistance to nationalism. This counterdiscourse—as I term it—exists through the many ways the Muslims of Stolac rejected the nationalistic paradigm and insisted on prewar values of tolerance, coexistence, and neighborliness, and through their refusal to employ ethnic categories when

accounting for the war and the erosion of their everyday world. However, this counterdiscourse was often flawed. Contradictions existed and “inside” the different types of identification lurked potentials for ethnic hatred. This should come as no surprise, insofar as ethnic groups, including the Muslim population of Stolac, should not be considered internally homogeneous or as unitary collective actors with a common purpose (Brubaker 2004). Though such complexities have not been the focus of this article, differences existed among my informants, as also individuals differed in opinions and approaches depending on the context. However, despite such differences, one can conclude that the majority of the ordinary people of Stolac, contrary to nationalistic politicians, could not afford the luxury of ethnic hatred because they had to live with the consequences of such antagonistic feelings (see also Jansen 2006). What we see instead, to paraphrase Das and Kleinman (2001: 16), are not necessarily grand narratives of forgiveness and redemption, but small local stories in which people are experimenting with ways of inhabiting the world together. So, when people stressed ideals of tolerance and coexistence, but tended to attach such values to Muslimness; when people identified themselves as belonging to Stolac, but implicitly question the Croats’ love for the town; and when people projected themselves as victims and identified the others as responsible for atrocities, they were trapped in contradictions, which were functional since they could facilitate reconciliation by creating possibilities for future coexistence. In my view, potentials for peace and (pragmatic) coexistence come from the bottom up—a situation contradicting the Hobbesian dictum that in the absence of intersocial regulating structures the world would be all against all. The Stolac case is an example of a “human nature” other than the Hobbesian one, and it is characterized by a will to build enduring social relations, not in a romantic or unproblematic way, but pragmatically, contradictorily, and unavoidably.

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Notes

Kommenterede [tmm1]: Typesetter: place notes before references.

¹ Stolac is situated in southern Herzegovina, with approximately 5,000 inhabitants. During the war, Croat soldiers expelled the entire male population and placed them in horrendous prison camps, whereas the women and children were expelled to Muslim-controlled areas. The whole of Stolac was then razed; buildings, objects of art, monuments, Mosques, and so on, bearing witness to the former Ottoman occupation, and most Muslim houses were robbed. In 1996 and 1997, the Muslim population started to return supported by the international community. In the initial phase of their return, the Muslims population were persistently met with violence and threats and houses were mined. But gradually such incidents stopped, and during my fieldwork in September 2000 to April 2001, it seemed as though the Croat citizens of Stolac had accepted the idea that the Muslims would stay; however, the town was still ethnically divided.

² Analyses on such levels are often rather speculative. One could argue otherwise and claim that violence itself has become a disembedded practice (Bauman 1994; Pick 1993).

³ All the informants' names in this article are pseudonyms.

⁴ The reason that I write this in the source language is that I often heard precisely this expression: "Bosniaks, and Serbs and Croats." It seemed to be a deeply felt and engraved turn of phrase.

⁵ The reason these "strangers" were not welcomed was that they occupied Muslim people's houses, making resettlement difficult (see also Stefansson 2007).