
Victim and Survivor: Narrated Social Identities of Women Who Experienced Rape During the War in Bosnia-Herzegovina

This article presents a narrative analysis of interviews with five women who were victims of war rape during the Bosnian war. By giving a voice to women who have experienced such an ordeal and letting them position their experiences, we gain insight into the diverse impacts that war rapes have on different victims, their families and relationships. The narrative analysis makes it possible to analyze the war-rape experiences as unique and different from other war-trauma experiences, while simultaneously recognizing the totality in which the war rapes occurred.

Key Words: *Bosnia-Herzegovina, gender, narrative analysis, sexual violence*

INTRODUCTION

The war in Bosnia-Herzegovina (hereafter, Bosnia) from 1992 to 1995 was marked by the systematic use of rape and sexual violence. While rape in war is by no means a new phenomenon, the international and domestic attention received by this particular aspect of the Bosnian war was extraordinary. This led to a degree of openness about a phenomenon that has historically been hidden and ridden with shame. Because it is openly recognized that systematic use of rape took place in Bosnia, and because numerous victims of these crimes are willing to talk about their ordeals, the Bosnian conflict thus opened up a new possibility for research on this particular form of violence.

It is commonly believed that, when utilized in ethnic conflicts, as in the Bosnian case, sexual violence is employed as a weapon of demoralization against entire societies (Coneth-Morgan, 2004: 22). The demoralization is characterized by a violent invasion of the interior of the victim's body, which thereby consti-

tutes an attack upon the intimate self and dignity of the individual human being (Goldstein, 2001: 362–3). How this attack impacts on its victims and their relationships is however, unanswered. The narratives presented in this text represent one attempt at unfolding the impact sexual violence has had on five Bosnian women.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE DURING THE BOSNIAN WAR OF 1992–95

It was *Newsday* journalist Roy Gutman who reported the first instances of rape and what appeared to be systematic sexual violence against women in Bosnia to the international public. His accounts tell of mass rapes seemingly carried out under orders in a systematic campaign of ethnic cleansing (Gutman, 1993: 64–76, 144–9, 157–67). United Nations (UN) Security Resolution 820 from 17 April 1993 also underscores the systematic use of rape by stating that its use has been ‘massive, organized and systematic’ (S/RES/820/A6). We will never know just how many women (and men) suffered from this particular form of violence, however. Indeed, a range of different estimates have been given by numerous organizations and agencies.¹ Furthermore, alongside attempts to document the crimes, the estimation of numbers has been used and misused for political purposes (see discussions in Nikolic-Ristonavic, 2000; Thomas and Ralph, 1994: 93). Meznaric (1994: 92) summarizes what we can assert with confidence in the following manner:

One could say that there is agreement in the sources concerning several important points: (1) mass rape had at least several thousand victims; (2) there have been many rapes of young girls between the ages of seven and fourteen; (3) rape is often committed in the presence of the victim’s parents/children and generally the rape victim is raped by several assailants.

There exists a rich literature of oral testimonies given by victims of these crimes that confirms Meznaric’s summary (see, for instance, CID, 2002; Helsinki Watch, 1993; Stiglmyer, 1994; Vranic, 1996). The majority of these testimonies come from women who were raped within the first months of the war, when their villages, most of them situated in the rural border areas, were attacked in early April 1992. The Helsinki Watch Report from 1993, documenting war crimes in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Helsinki Watch, 1993), lists the different ways in which rapes were carried out in the various regions of Bosnia. This list includes rape in separate rape camps, in concentration camps, in people’s homes and in facilities made to appear as brothels. The ways in which these acts were carried out were limited only by the imagination of the perpetrators.² Here, it is important to note that the documentary record shows that rape was used as a war strategy by all sides in the conflict. This is pointed out in the Helsinki Watch Report (Helsinki Watch, 1993), which lists the use of rape by all warring parties in the conflict. It

is also emphasized in other publications, such as Nizich (1994); Stiglmayer (1994); UN Economic and Social Council (1993, 1994). However, most commentators are careful to point out that the majority of these crimes were committed by Serb (ir)regular forces against the Muslim population of Bosnia (see, for instance, Nizich, 1994: 25; Stephens, 1993: 13).

Research literature on these crimes emphasizes that sexual violence was carried out in order to humiliate, or destroy, the *identity* of the victim, and that this was the way in which the violence constituted a weapon of war (see, for instance, Allen, 1996; Gutman, 1993; Nikolic-Ristanovic, 2000; Stiglmayer, 1994). In her contested book *Rape Warfare*, Allen (1996: xiii) argues that for the perpetrators it was the female victims' ability to bear children that was most important. Allen characterizes this intention as genocidal because, she argues, the aim of the perpetrators was to create more babies with the perpetrator's ethnicity and through this to destroy and erase the ethnic, religious and national identities of their female victims. Whether or not one chooses to define such acts as genocidal, the issue of forced impregnation stands as a disturbing example of how the identities of victims were violated and misused. In a special report on recognizing forced impregnation as a war crime, Goldstein (1993: 4) argues that 'the assault should be punishable as attempted forced impregnation even if it does not result in pregnancy, so long as the intent to impregnate can be established'. Inherent in this argument is the notion that the female body constitutes yet another battlefield where ethnic conflict can be fought,³ 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.

Although there is a clear need to expand the legal framework to include rape and forced impregnation as war crimes, there is an equally strong need to broaden the scholarly knowledge and understanding of war rape. Not only is there relatively limited (although increasing) research on this form of war violence, there are few, if any, empirically based studies. In addition, argues Hydén on the scholarly literature of battered women, there is a risk of confining abused women to their sufferings and thereby constructing a homogenous and monolithic conceptualization of female victimhood (Hydén, 2005: 172). The literature on sexual violence in war outlined above clearly runs this risk. Hydén (2005: 173) argues that in each story of oppression and suffering there runs a parallel history of opposition. The aim of this article, therefore, is both to generate empirical knowledge about war rape by analysing lived experiences as narrated by five protagonists, and also to show how they employ different strategies for war-rape survival and identity construction. Before doing so, however, a few words on this particular form of analysis are in order.

NARRATIVE THEORY AND ANALYSIS

Narrative analyses have gained increasing momentum within social science research in general, and particularly within social constructionist psychology.⁴ While, in terms of content, this form of analysis is similar to discourse analysis – that is, the study of the relationship between ideas and ideals in our social worlds and how they are represented and manifest on different levels – narrative analysis is more stringent in form and more narrowly focused on the storied nature of the *self*. Sarbin (1986) argues that the narrative form has an ontological status in that it offers a way of being: we are the stories we tell and that are told by others. Along with Bruner (1985, 1990), Gergen (1994) and Polkinghorne (1988), Sarbin shows that we are, indeed, born into a storied world. Epistemologically, the self is seen not as an individual's personal or private structure but as a form of relational discourse about the self performed and framed through language available in the public sphere (Gergen, 2001: 247). Human beings impose structures on experiences and events in such a way that when we recount life experiences as major achievements, disappointments and turning points, we do not normally tell random tales of discrete points in time. On the contrary, argues Gergen (1994, 2001), the stories are put together in a narrative structure, which typically has a beginning, a middle and an end. Within this structure, it is the main plot that brings the elements of the story together. Indeed, Polkinghorne (1995: 5) goes so far as to define a narrative as a way of combining elements into an emplotted story.

According to Gergen (1994: 207), the major function of the narrative is to unite the past with the present and signify future trajectories for the self. In addition, says Murray (2003: 113), the narrative serves as an organized interpretation of a sequence of events in which we attribute agency to the characters in the narrative and infer causal links between the events. The ways in which the narrators attribute agency is through positioning themselves and others within the plot. Davies and Harré (2001: 264) argue that positioning can be seen as a discursive process 'whereby selves are located in conversation as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced story lines'.

Gergen (1994, 2001: 253–4) has identified three different narratives of the self,⁵ and says that they are established according to the following order: a valued endpoint is established; events are selected and ordered in accordance with how relevant they are for the endpoint; identity is presented as stable; causal linkages are made between events; and, finally, narratives are framed by demarcation signs. Within these processes, the narrator creates stories about his- or herself in cooperation with, and in relation to, others. It is these relationships that provide us with our ideologies of self and reinforce and/or contrast our stories. Gergen (1994: 208) argues that 'constructions of the self require a supporting cast', and it is within this network of relationships that identities are formed, altered and maintained.

As we can see from the last quote, within Gergen's terminology *self* and *iden-*

tity are used interchangeably, and both terms denote processes of social construction. In the following, however, I will use the term social construction to refer to the same processes that Gergen has outlined. The reason for this choice of terminology is that I wish to underscore that the locus of analysis is more how the protagonists position and narrate their identities in a *social* context, and less their personal identity (which would have required a different kind of methodology). The object of this study is twofold: first, to analyze the ways in which the five women construct their social identities through their narratives; second, to assess the impact the war rapes have had on their social identity construction. In these processes it is the intersectionality, i.e. the mutual saturation and toning among social categories (Søndergaard, 2005: 192), between victimhood, survival, ethnic and gendered identities that are the core focus.

Because the war rapes happened under extraordinary violent and potentially fatal circumstances, it has been important to find an analytical format that makes it possible to analyze the war rapes separately from other horrific events that happened to these women during the war. By structuring the analysis as a narrative and analyzing the interviews with the victims as narratives, we come closer to an understanding of how the war rapes have affected the victims in unique ways. In this scenario, it is the war rapes that serve as the valued endpoint, and other events and accounts are selected and ordered as they are seen as relevant to these experiences.

METHOD

Setting out to learn about the post-war identities of women subject to the war rapes in Bosnia was difficult. There were practical issues to resolve, such as identifying interview subjects, arranging meeting points and finding suitable interpreters. In addition, there were ethical and psychological concerns: Would my research hurt the interviewees? What kinds of questions could I ask or not ask them? How would I react to their stories? What would I do if an interviewee needed psychological help during or after an interview? In order to address these concerns, I adhered to the following principles: (1) the interviews had to be based on voluntary participation, and an interviewee could at any point during an interview decline to answer my questions; (2) the interviewees had to be recruited through an organization, so that there was a network of people available for them if necessary;⁶ (3) in preparing the questions to ask and how to behave and not behave around severely traumatized women, I interviewed a number of therapists in Bosnia and abroad who had worked with traumatized women, and I studied numerous publications containing oral testimonies from traumatized women in Bosnia.⁷

The narrative analysis that follows is based on seven interviews with five different women. Names have been changed and details withheld to protect the anonymity of the interviewees. Three of these women – ‘Azra’, ‘Ceca’ and

'Danira' – were aged 44 at the time of the interviews (autumn 2001/early spring 2002) and were married and had children before the war. They had remained married to their husbands after the war. 'Berina' was 24 at the time of the interview; she is a widow and has one child. 'Emila' was 25 at the time of the interview and has no children. These women all identify themselves as Bosniak. While it is a well-established fact that Serb and Croat women were also victims of similar forms of sexual violence during the war, this study draws its empirical findings from interviews with Bosniak women. There are pragmatic reasons for this choice. Though many of the local organizations I contacted aim to be multi-ethnic, there are simply more Bosniak women members of such organizations than members from other nationalities. It was therefore easier to get in touch with Bosniak women who were willing to talk than to contact similar women from other nationalities. Further, the study does not aim to compare the impact of sexual violence in a cross-national perspective, but rather focuses on implications for notions of the *self* as victim and survivor. The interviewees are therefore not primarily regarded as ethnic/national subjects. Each of the interviews lasted about 1.5 hours, and they were all structured along thematic lines.⁸ However, the interview format was sufficiently open to permit a great deal of flexibility and changes of topic and focus according to the wishes of the interviewees.

All interviews were carried out with an interpreter. I used two different interpreters, both women. This was a deliberate choice. One had extensive experience with the theme of my research, because she also worked as a project leader at a psychosocial centre for traumatized women. The other had extensive experience with interviews with raped women during the war, when she had worked for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Both interpreters were briefed about my research before the interviews took place. I also instructed them not to carry out simultaneous translation, as this would interfere with the trains of thought of both myself and the interviewees. The interpretation therefore took the form of summaries. As a result, the transcribed text on which the analysis is based is essentially a construction based on three voices: the interviewer, the interviewee and the interpreter. The interviews were psychologically draining for all involved: interpreters, interviewees and myself. Both I and the interpreters cried at several points during the interviews. One of the interpreters told me it was particularly hard to hear the rape stories in the aftermath of war, because it made her realize that she lives among perpetrators and victims of such crimes, and that it was within such a world that her children were growing up. She even contemplated leaving Bosnia after working for me.

The interpreters became very involved in the interview situation. When things grew difficult and painful, they both stepped in and comforted the interviewees, as did I with my very limited language skills. As a result, the interpreters in this study played a much more active role in the social interaction between researcher and interviewee than might be considered appropriate in mainstream textbooks on interview methodologies. However, given the gravity of the themes discussed, I regarded their behaviour as both appropriate and ethical. When confronted with

ordeals like those the interviewees had gone through, it is only human to show how deeply you are touched by their stories – whether you are a researcher or an interpreter.

In order to establish a common point of reference, it was important to ask the interviewees to talk about their rape experiences. However, this was naturally a very delicate endeavour. Both the interviewees and I knew that the reason I wanted to talk to them was because of their war-rape experiences, but at the same time it seemed highly inappropriate to begin the interviews with questions about those particular events. It had been made clear to the interviewees that they should not feel obliged to recount details of their ordeals, yet some sort of acknowledgement of their experiences had to be established in the interview situation in order to be able to link the traumatic events they had experienced to their accounts of post-conflict life. I therefore began each interview with factual questions on such issues as the interviewee's age, educational background, where they had lived before the war, and what their family situation had been like. Gradually, the interviews would move toward the rape issue through questions about their current *relationships* (does your husband/mother know what happened to you during the war?), their *material* life conditions in the past (would you mind telling me what happened to you when your village was destroyed/your house was burned?), possible *bodily* pains (do you sometimes have difficulties sleeping/remembers things?). It was hoped that this would establish a degree of rapport between the interpreter, the interviewee and myself, which in turn would make the interviewee feel more comfortable talking about her traumas. Nevertheless, despite my careful preparations, the ways in which the rape issue was disclosed was surprising and very different in each case, as will be shown below.

ANALYSIS

According to Ricoeur (cited in White, 1987: 51):

Every narrative combines two dimensions in various proportions, one chronological and one nonchronological. The first may be called the episodic dimension, which characterizes the story made out of events. The second is the configurational dimension, according to which the plot construes significant wholes out of scattered events.

The stories to be told over the following pages are characterized by the same chronological outline, which takes the following format:

- *Beginning*: Accounts of pre-war life. This was characterized by material and social security, multi-ethnic coexistence and peace. It is a story of a harmonic life and comes close to a paradise account compared to interviewees' accounts of their current life situations.

- *Middle*: Accounts of war rapes. A major part of the stories are centred on the outbreak of war and the sudden and extreme violence the interviewees experienced. Their accounts of war rapes are told along with other stories of extreme life-changing events, such as loss of homes, family and friends.
- *End*: Accounts of post-conflict life. An equally major part of the stories focuses on the aftermath of war: how and where the interviewees live, their family relationships, poverty and uncertain future prospects.

Within this main chronological structure, two different plots emerge – namely, that of being an *ethnic survivor* versus *gendered victim*. The ways in which these plots come out depend on how the protagonists position themselves within their stories. The different ways of positioning do not simply result from an arbitrary decision on the part of the narrators, but rather depend on the actual and anticipated actions and behaviours of the other characters in their stories. In addition, it is important to point out that the interviewees do not simply position themselves as either ethnic survivor or gendered victim. As Hydén (2005: 178) points out, it is common for interviewees to talk from conflicting, parallel and opposing subject positions within the same story. The plot structures I identify in the following analysis suggest that the interviewees emphasize one structure over the other, but they should not be considered as mutually exclusive plots. Furthermore, as Murray (2003: 116) argues, narrative accounts are not told in a vacuum, but are shaped and encouraged by specific contexts. In other words, there is a layer outside the story – that is, the sociopolitical *context* in which it is told – which influences what, how and why elements within the story are seen as important and relevant. Within this line of thought, the narrator is regarded as a complex psychosocial subject who is an active agent in a social world, and it is through the narrative analysis that we can understand both narrators and their worlds (Murray, 2003: 116).

Narratives of Ethnicity and Survival

Ethnicity is by far the most dominant discourse informing the literature on the Bosnian conflict. At the start of the war, a common perception among US politicians – US president Bill Clinton in particular – was that the reason for the conflict was the age-old hatred between the different ethnic groups in the region, and therefore that international intervention would be futile (Holbrooke, 1999: 22). Witnessing the Bosnian nightmare unfold eventually forced the international community to reconsider its passivity. However, even when the international community did finally intervene,⁹ its belief that the root cause of the conflict was ethnic hatred remained unchanged. The mere division of Bosnia into a Serb Republic and a Croat/Muslim federation after the Dayton Peace Agreement, brokered in December 1995, clearly attests to this.

Domestically, however, the picture is more complex. While ethnic hostilities became stronger throughout the conflict years, accounts of pre-war life in Bosnia

were characterized by multi-ethnic coexistence. Bringa's (1995) study, for instance, describes an ethnically heterogeneous village in central Bosnia in the pre-war years, where it was precisely mutual respect for ethnic and religious differences that characterized the inhabitants' very way of life. Indeed, most of the informants in my study provide a 'paradise' account of the pre-war years, in which multi-ethnicity is a core factor. The outbreak of war – along with the ethnic hatred that came with it – is consequently seen as a sudden and completely unexpected break with the kind of life and ethnic tolerance they had become accustomed to during the Yugoslav years, which were characterized by 'brotherhood and unity', in the words of Tito's infamous slogan.

While it is clear that 'something' must have caused the outbreak of the conflict, and we can strive to identify what that 'something' consists of, it is clear that *through* the conflict ethnic differences came to define friend and foe, compatriots and enemies, perpetrators and victims. War rapes were also defined and understood along these lines: ethnic difference between perpetrator and victim made the rapes political. We assume that the intent of such acts was to destroy and/or severely harm the identity of the victim and those affiliated to her, but we know very little about whether it actually did so – or indeed how this destruction took form. Ultimately, we do not know how it is to be a victim of ethnically based war rape, nor what this ethnic label might do to the individual victim's understanding of self in the aftermath. The stories recounted by Danira and Azra are examples of narratives in which the ethnic dimensions of the conflict are central, and their stories will provide insights on the subject matter.

The first narrative is that of Danira, who was 44 at the time of the interview. She had been separated from one son and her husband during the war, because both had been in the army. Together with one daughter and another son, she spent a year as a refugee in a western European country and was reunited with the other members of her family in Bosnia in 1995. Danira does not elaborate much on her pre-war life. She indicates that she was a housewife, that her husband had a good job, and that her father-in-law had given them some land where they had built a house. She characterizes her pre-war life as very happy, where she had a good life with her husband and children. Danira is the most upfront about the war rapes of all the interviewees. In fact, the interview starts with Danira entering the room, pulling up her sweater and showing me marks of torture stemming from when she was held in detention and raped. Before I had even managed to ask her what had happened, she had told me the elementary facts: where she was imprisoned and how many times she believed she was raped. There was no time to 'ease in', and my interpreter started translating immediately:

Danira: I will tell you everything and you can ask me. Here you can see what they did to me. They put cigarettes here [points to her body] and they bit me here [points to her body]. [She then recounts details of where she came from, where she was imprisoned, and what happened to her fellow villagers.] Since I left the concentration camp I take sedatives.

I: Do you want to tell me what happened to you in the concentration camp?

- Danira: How would you like to start? From the beginning or only the most important details? Do you want to hear about the attack on the village or only about the concentration camp?
- I: We can start with what you feel is most important.
- Danira: They attacked us at 05:00 [she adds the date], and all of us went to a shelter in the forest and we spent seven days there. Around half the village was there. They surrounded us and shot from everywhere and two men were killed. After that, they took us to some barracks and from the first day they raped us. They asked about my husband and my brother and what kinds of weapons they had. I said that they had weapons but they [the enemy] took them away from them, and then they said I should take my clothes off. I asked them to kill me. I was not supposed to have my menstruation, but I immediately started bleeding all over my pants and clothes and then they said a bad word for a Muslim woman, that I was dirty. After that they let me go, but that was just before the real hell started. The youngest woman who was there was only 14 years old. There were about 60 or 90 people there. I cannot tell exactly because there were not only people from my village.
- I: Did it happen many times?
- Danira: It must have happened over 100 times that I was raped. They raped me everywhere, in burnt-out houses and in different rooms in the concentration camp. Once I asked them to kill me, because I could not go back to my kids after this, but they did not do this. Every day there were different men, and usually they came in groups and they would take out some women and rape them and bring them back, and after that a new group came.

Azra has an equally horrific story to tell. Azra was also married and had three children before the war. She was separated from her husband during the war years, but has since been reunited with her entire family. She is somewhat shy and timid, but still firm and upfront about the fact that she was raped. Before the war, Azra was a factory worker and her husband was a construction worker. She does not elaborate much on her pre-war life. In the first interview (I interviewed her twice), she discloses her rape experiences in connection with an explanation about her contact with people from the International War Crimes Tribunal (ICTY). She also talks extensively about how she wants to see the men who raped her get punished:

- I: You told me that you have been in contact with the people from the ICTY in The Hague. Can you tell me how they came in contact with you?
- Azra: It was in [she says the name of the place] in 1995, where the police – the federal police – asked me if I wanted to tell them what happened to me. They knew that I was injured and that I survived the war rapes. You know, what they [the perpetrators] did to me is something wrong. They committed a crime against me, and what they did I will never forget. I want them to be punished for that. They could have killed me, and I do not know why they did not. Maybe it was God's will or destiny – I do not know – but I want them to be responsible for what they did to me, because those things that happened to me are criminal things. They are crimes against humanity.
- I: Can you identify the people who did this to you?
- Azra: Yes. I know them because they were my neighbours.

It is during the second interview that she provides details about how and where the rapes happened. The perpetrators were her young neighbours, and she points to the fact that they had only been boys when she got married. In other words, these perpetrators had gone from being the young boys next door to becoming soldiers and her enemies. We started the interview by recounting what she had talked about in the first interview. When we reached the rape theme, she described the following sequence:

- Azra: These boys they were my neighbours. I remember them as young boys when I got married. One day he [the rapist] came to my house during the war and asked me to show him all the rooms in the house, and my son was playing in the garden when all of a sudden he took a knife and put it under my neck and asked me if I wanted to do it there by my own will or not, and at that point I knew exactly what would happen. He beat me so I could not breathe, and he kicked me in my stomach. I lost consciousness, and when I regained consciousness he raped me and there was blood all over. When he saw what happened, he just left me alone. He went out and asked the two soldiers that were in front of the house if they wanted to come up and rape me too.
- I: And did they?
- Azra: No.
- I: Was this man in uniform or civilian clothes?
- Azra: He was in uniform.

Later in the second interview she makes the following comment:

He [the rapist] said 'halalite' – in our jargon, that I would forgive him before God for raping me. But I will never forgive and I will never forget.

They came back to her house twice more before she escaped and fled barefoot into the forest, leaving her children, who had witnessed what happened to their mother, with another neighbour. Despite the fact that she elaborates somewhat more on the rapes in the second interview, the accounts by Azra of what happened to her during the war are strikingly similar in both interviews. In the second interview, she expanded on core themes (such as her relationship to her family members, her current living situation and her thoughts about the future). Nevertheless, the story she told was more or less the same on both occasions. This might be indicative of the fact that she has told her story many times to various members of the international community, local authorities and health workers. It appears as though her account has taken on a stringent form of its own, which she adheres to in a variety of different settings.

At first sight, the ethnic dimensions of these two narratives may not appear to be central. Indeed, stories about other women or the interviewees' husbands, children and current living conditions are given much more room in these two women's accounts. Nevertheless, ethnicity is present in the stories – and at crucial points. Careful reading reveals that, when describing the war rapes as they took place, both protagonists make reference to their Muslim identities. Danira lets us know that her perpetrators 'said a bad word for a Muslim woman' when

raping her, while Azra explains that her rapists said ‘halalite’, an Islamic term for forgiveness. In other words, at the valued endpoint in their narratives – that is, the turning point in their stories about whom 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. This interpretation can be substantiated by looking at how the ethnic identity is manifest at different levels of their accounts.

Before looking at these different levels, however, it is important to look at how Danira and Azra describe their post-war situation. How do they look upon themselves and their relationships in the aftermath of war? There is one crucial element in their stories of the aftermath of war that unites Danira and Azra, that sets their stories apart from the other three interviewees – namely, the fact that they have disclosed to their husbands that they were raped. Danira chose to acknowledge it to her husband the first time they met, and he was supportive:

Danira: My husband is very supportive. When we met for the first time, he said to me, ‘Do not tell me. I know everything.’ He knew when they took me to the concentration camp what would happen to me, and if he had not been so supportive I would have committed suicide. I know two women who do not talk about what happened to them because they are ashamed, and they have not told their husbands. They do not even want to talk to each other or to other women because they are so ashamed!

I: Do you feel shame?

Danira: I am not ashamed. It did not happen from my will, and everybody knows it. It was like having a knife under your cheek and a gun to your head.

Also, Azra expresses a great deal of appreciation for the support she received from her husband after the war. But, she admits that she hesitated telling him what happened:

Azra: If I had met my husband immediately after what had happened to me, I could not have stayed married to him probably. I felt disgust at males in general. But it was such a long period of time before our reunion, and during that time I sort of calmed down and stayed married to my husband. When we had the first coffee we had together [after the war] I told him. I wanted to tell him instead of somebody else telling him, and then we would have had misunderstandings. I said that this is what happened, so it is your decision if we can continue to live together. If you want to live with me, we can; if not, then you go on with your life and I go on with my life. He has never made any bad comment about what happened to me, because he is aware that women who were much older survived the same experience.

I: If I ask you whether you feel like a victim or a survivor, how would you answer?

Azra: If I survived 1992, I can survive anything! I feel like a survivor, but the situation in Bosnia now is very uncertain. You know it is very confusing [she cries]. You can survive something – yes, definitely I survived and therefore I am a survivor – but I live my life from a distance, without really knowing where I am going with my life. The environment and the life conditions here

are so strange, they are so hard [she cries even more]. You know, I know that I survived, but I do not know why. I can only thank God that I did, but what am I going to do with the fact that I am alive? The life conditions here are so hard and so strange.

I: Do you think it is harder to talk about rape during the war compared to other crimes that people experienced?

Azra: I think so, but it is a new situation now because before nobody talked about these crimes, and now in The Hague [i.e. the ICTY] they talk about it as a very specific crime. It is like killing really, in my opinion. You know, I think sometimes that it would have been better for me if they had killed me instead of raping me.

However, she does not talk about what happened to her daughter and son who witnessed her traumas:

My daughter does not like to think about that even now. She does not like to talk about it, because she does not want to remember.

The quotes above show that, on a personal level, Danira explains that she does not feel shame for what happened to her. The rapes did not happen of her own will, she says, and ‘everybody knows it’. She qualifies this further by stating that it was like ‘having a knife under your cheek and a gun to your head’. Azra describes the rapes as criminal acts and even as crimes against humanity. The latter characterization places her rape experiences alongside other breaches of the Geneva Conventions – that is, the laws of war – and underlines the political nature of the acts. Agger and Jensen (1993: 687) have characterized rape in war as sexual torture, and they argue that ‘the essential part of sexual torture’s traumatic and identity damaging effect is the feeling of being an accomplice in an ambiguous situation that contains both aggressive and libinal elements of a confusing nature’. This description, however, does not fit the narratives of Danira and Azra. They do not regard the war-rape situation as ambiguous, nor do they see themselves as accomplices to the relevant acts. One plausible explanation for this clear-cut perception of non-responsibility (and I do not suggest that this might be wrong) may be that they are certain they were raped during the war because of their Bosniak identity. Zarkov (1997) argues that, in writings on the Bosnian conflict, the perpetrator is more often than not cast as a Serb male, while the identity of the victim is more often than not that of a Bosniak female. Danira and Azra are most likely aware of this dominant understanding of the conflict, and they therefore have an interpretive repertoire available to them through which they can position themselves as ethnic victims. In addition, their victimization places their suffering alongside that of all other Bosniak victims in the war, both male and female. This ‘side-effect’ impinges on male–female relations in ways contrary to what the perpetrators might have anticipated.

On the interpersonal level, the most important element within the stories of Danira and Azra is how supportive their husbands have been after they chose to tell them that they had been raped during the war. Azra lets us know that this was

a difficult choice to make, because she was aware that her husband might leave her. Danira also tells us that she was aware of such a possibility, because she knew of other women's stories where the women had chosen to tell and the husband had left the wife. Again, the stories of Danira and Azra contradict prevalent assumptions about the status of raped women. It is commonly thought that raped women in traditional patriarchal families will be stigmatized by their families and thereby further penalized by husbands and/or male family members. Male honour and women's sexuality are seen as interconnected, and an affront to the woman's body is also an affront to male members of her family. Based on this logic, and in the context of the Bosnian conflict, the argument has frequently been made that the woman subject to war rape was targeted because the abuse carried out against her would, by default, also be an attack on the men within the same ethnic/religious/political groups she was seen to represent (Allen, 1996; Brownmiller, 1994: 181; Card, 1996; MacKinnon, 1994; Seifert, 1994: 65). Indeed, the notion that rape can constitute a weapon of war is, in part, based on this line of thinking. However, the stories of Danira and Azra show us that when the victim positions herself as an ethnic subject, this also creates a possibility for a new-found solidarity between men and women of the same ethnic belonging, a solidarity that can supersede traditional patriarchal relationships within the family. The husbands of Danira and Azra did not reject them, but rather supported them. When they were reunited after the war, they met on equal grounds as fellow ethnic survivors of horrific ordeals. The impact of war rapes within patriarchal family structures may therefore be quite different from what one might expect.

On a societal level, the stories told by Azra and Danira show us that when ethnicity is the dominant discourse forming our – and their – understanding of the conflict, other interpretations of rapes are placed in the background. This comes out very clearly in the case of Azra. She describes what happened to her as war rape, and the organization of which she is a member (and which helped me get in touch with her) presented her to me as a war-rape victim. Unlike the other women in this study, she knew her perpetrators well because they were her neighbours. We also know that she was raped in her own home. Under different circumstances, one might have considered these acts to be the result of criminal, aggressive and abusive behaviour by the two men in question. In the context of war, however, the acts are perceived and defined as political acts where it is the ethnicity of the male perpetrator which is decisive. The fact that the perpetrators wore uniforms also reinforces this political interpretation. For Danira, who was taken to special facilities, kept imprisoned and repeatedly raped by groups of men in uniform (who occasionally had Serbian and Montenegrin accents), the situation is more clear-cut. There was little doubt in her mind that she was raped as part of a war strategy in which her ethnic/national/religious identity was the main target. Since Danira does not feel personal shame, she has taken it upon herself to speak up, and one of the ways in which she does this is by volunteering to testify before the ICTY. Once again, her family is a source of support, and this is how she experienced her first trip to The Hague:

I said yes immediately, and my husband was very supportive. He did not try to stop me, and he was only worried about how my health would be when I had gone through all that. But, I took some medicine. I needed that, and I felt better afterwards [. . .] If they convict more I will go again if they can get the people who raped and tortured me.

In the Bosnian setting, regarding rape in war as a war crime has led to an increased focus on violence against women in general. Azra explains that the way in which rape is perceived has changed in Bosnia. She says that 'it is a new situation now because before nobody talked about these crimes, and now in The Hague [i.e. the ICTY] they talk about it as a very specific crime'. This change has made it easier for these two women to talk, and has made both women eager to travel to The Hague to testify before the ICTY.

By bringing ethnic dimensions to the forefront of their narratives – or rather setting them as a basic premise – Danira and Azra tell stories in which the main plot is that of being a *survivor*. Gergen might have argued that their stories are examples of stable/progressive self narratives with a limited degree of upward mobility. The two protagonists downplay the stigma normally attached to rape victims, and they emphasize that they are first and foremost survivors. It is clear that the support of their husbands contributes to maintaining this understanding. As survivors, the women have taken it upon themselves to testify voluntarily before the ICTY and thereby show that their rape experiences have rendered them neither passive nor silent. Their bodies have been part of the battlefield, but their female identities have not been destroyed. They are still mothers of their children, wives to their husbands and caretakers within their families. All these tasks are performed with difficulty, but nevertheless maintained. The fact that their husbands and children know what happened to them has not changed this. Positioning oneself as an ethnic victim of war violence therefore makes possible the construction of a survivor identity in the post-conflict aftermath.

It is important to underscore, however, that this interpretation does not suggest that Danira and Azra only see themselves as survivors. The rapes they endured happened in the midst of extraordinary violent circumstances and they also very much situate themselves as victims of war in their accounts. The theme of constant suffering is central in both Danira's and Azra's stories. For Danira, her current living conditions are a constant source of worry. Her daughter has a medical condition for which they need to purchase medication and visit the hospital on a regular basis. This is a challenge given their meagre income. Yet she acknowledges that she is not starving and that, compared to others, they are doing OK. All the same, life is strenuous:

Life today is really hard for me. My husband started working recently, but before that he was only getting 50 DM because he is an invalid and that is what they get for that. Now he works for a company that cleans the city, and his salary is 260 DM. But we live in a Serb house and I expect that we have to move anytime. But, we are not starving; we have bread and milk, but nothing special.

Occasionally she gets together with other women from her village who were in the concentration camp with her. She describes how they immediately start talking about what happened to them: they simply cannot stop talking about the suffering they went through. Despite the openness she feels in these settings, she knows that there are women among them who have experienced war rapes that will talk neither with other women nor with their families and husbands about what happened to them. This is because they are ashamed, explains Danira.

Most of the interview with Azra centres on her current life and worries. She is concerned with the future of her children and the uncertainty of their living situation:

We do not pay rent because we live in a deserted house, but the owner applied to get back and get the house, and I will probably be ordered to move from the house. But where shall I move? I do not know what to do, because I cannot go back to my village and I do not have the money to pay the rent here in Sarajevo. It is too expensive. The food is expensive. To send your children to school is expensive. And . . . I mean everything is very expensive when you do not have money.

The ways in which Danira's and Azra's accounts are different from the other stories will become apparent when comparing the next three stories.

Narratives of Gender and Victimization

While it is clear that the women who suffered war rapes in Bosnia were targeted on the basis of their ethnicity, it is also clear that they were targeted with this particular form of violence by men because they were *women*. In other words, it was the combination of their gender identity and their ethnic identity that made them 'eligible' for war rape.

The war zone, in general, is a place of increased gender polarization. Men are called to fight and/or be killed, whereas women, in the words of Enloe (1983: 46), are set to keep the home fires burning. Through this division of labour, women come to represent stability, future prospects and peace. The image of women taking care of the home and family while men are called to fight serves to legitimize the war as such: he is fighting to protect his family and to secure the (peaceful) future for his children. The Bosnian conflict was no exception to this norm: 'In general . . . gender roles have become more polarized by nationalism and war', says Benderly (1997: 60) in her description of the Bosnian conflict. Rape against women in the war zone can therefore be regarded as an attack on current, and future, family formations – in other words, rape can be seen as an attack on the mere legitimization of the male fight because it demonstrates the man's inability to protect his family and home.

How, then, do the victims of war rape regard their experiences from a gendered perspective? In other words, which self narratives are made possible when gender aspects serve as the core theme in their accounts? The first narrative

comes from Ceca who was married and had children before the war. She was separated from her entire family, but was reunited with them all after the war. She is very timid, and she tells me that she has taken tranquilizers before the interview. Ceca says very little about her pre-war life. She simply states where she lived, where she and her husband come from, and what kind of house they had. Ceca is the only one in this sample who admits to having become pregnant from the rapes, and she starts the interview by talking about her physical and psychological pains. She explains that she does not have a job because it is psychologically very difficult, and says that she cannot do basic work at home. She tells of how she suffers from insomnia and has nightmares when she sleeps. She also has occasional stomach pains. The way she starts talking specifically about having been raped is through a description of her youngest son (born after the war) and the negative feelings she has towards him. She is afraid that, because he is a man, he can commit the same crimes she has experienced:

Ceca: Sometimes I think that since he is a man he can do the things that others have done to me. I never told my husband that I have been raped and that my daughter was as well. He does not know what happened to us, and I find excuses all the time to avoid having sex. I also worry about my daughter.

I: Do you and your daughter ever talk about this together?

Ceca: I tried, but my daughter does not want to. She refuses to talk to me about this and has asked me to keep it a secret. She does not want anyone to know about it, and when I suggested that she could join this organization she did not want to. She said it would bring back memories . . .

I: Were you raped many times?

Ceca: I was raped more than a hundred times, I think. I was so destroyed I had to have an operation.

I: Were you in a camp?

Ceca: Yes.

I: Were there many other women there?

Ceca: About 150, I think.

I: And they were all raped?

Ceca: I do not know. I stayed there for two and a half months, and they came and took women and some never came back. They were killed.

I: And your daughter was in the same camp?

Ceca: Yes. We were together the whole time.

I: You told me that after the rapes you fled and were hiding in different places. Did you tell anyone then what had happened to you during that time?

Ceca: I only told my mother. She helped me get an abortion. It was not a proper abortion. I took medicines and different teas – I mean different grasses – and one night I went to the toilet and felt that I lost the baby. I could not bear to have a baby whose father I didn't know, a baby made during those circumstances.

Emila was in her early teens when the war broke out. She had had no sexual experiences prior to the war rapes. Emila talks quietly and jumps from theme to theme. She excuses herself for being inconsistent, but she has suffered from insomnia for long periods of time and has problems focusing on one issue at a time. She lost many of her immediate and extended family members. In the after-

math of war, she acts as a parent for a younger sibling because her mother is incapable of taking care of the young child. Her father is dead. We start the interview by talking about her pre-war life. She explains that she was one of seven siblings living in the same house along with their grandmother and parents. Her father worked in a shop and her mother was at home, and she characterizes her life as 'normal'. It takes a long time before we start talking about the rape issue. Halfway into the interview, she starts talking about what happened to her in order to explain why she has trouble working and going to school to get an education:

I used to work in a shop for 200 DM per month, but now I clean people's houses during the weekend. But the memories of the war are always there, and it is hard to work, but I just have to do something to live.

The interpreter tells me that Emila is ashamed that she has that kind of work, and we take a break in the interview, during which the interpreter assures Emila that cleaning people's houses is a decent job:

I: Do you, or anyone in your family, receive any form of pension from the government?

Emila: My mother gets some money after my brother who died, and she is also trying to get some money from my father. But there are many problems, because they were civilian victims of war.

She goes on to describe details about what happened to her family members during the war.

I: Can you tell me what happened to you during the war?

Emila: At the very beginning I was locked up at home, and after that I was taken to the secondary school in [she says the name of the place]. Would you like me to start from the very beginning?

She goes on to provide details of the first attack on her village; how she became separated from her family; how she saw family members, relatives and neighbours killed; and how she was taken to a house where she was kept prisoner:

I: How long were you imprisoned?

Emila: Altogether, one month. First, we were together in a house, and they moved us to a concentration camp. Everybody who tortured me I knew. It was only during the weekends that they came from Serbia, but on the other days it was the local guys.

I: What did they do to you in the concentration camp?

Emila: They raped me. Sometimes they were old and sometimes they were young, and it happened more than 50 times. I was only 16 years old, and every day I asked them to kill me, because I did not know anything about my family and all this was happening.

I: Can I ask you a difficult question, which you only need to answer if you want to? Did you have any sexual experiences before the rapes?

Emila: No, that was the first. I was raised in that kind of family.

Berina was the youngest interviewee in the group. She was only a year younger than Emila, but was already married and had a baby when the war broke out. Berina is very withdrawn in her way of communicating. She has a child who was born during the early stages of the war, and the father of her child was killed during the same period of time. Before we start the first interview, Berina laughs and tells me she has taken tranquilizers before meeting me. Before the war, Berina was in elementary school. She became pregnant at the age of 14. She was married to the child's father, but did not live with him for very long because the war started. Berina needs a lot of time before she talks about being raped. I interviewed her twice, and during the first interview she only hinted at what happened to her and acknowledged being raped only in passing while describing a series of events during the first weeks of the war. She said that she could tell me what happened to her during the war, but she did not wish to tell 'all the details'. She answered all questions with no more than one or two sentences and was very shy and timid:

The enemy came and then they took my husband and my father to prison, and we still do not know anything about them, and they were chasing us all the time. First in our apartment, and then we moved from that apartment and into another house. Then they would find us and chase us there too. At night, they would take us away to be raped, and then one night I escaped during the night through the woods.

In the second interview, however, she talks more freely, but is still very short and matter-of-fact in her various descriptions of what happened to her during the war. She does not use the word 'rape' herself, but says that her perpetrators 'tortured' her. It was only when I asked her specifically if she was raped that she acknowledged it:

Berina: They came and they took me to the prison. But it was not really a prison. It was more like they locked us up at home. In the beginning, they were coming to our apartment and they tortured us, and then they came to take us to another house.

I: Did they rape you in that house?

Berina: Yes.

She starts crying and does not elaborate on details about the rapes, but changes her focus and talks about how she escaped from her apartment, fled and hid in the forest until she was found by a Serb woman, who took her in and let her live with her for one year.

In the above narratives, the stories about the war rapes are told to explain difficulties and complications the women experience in their everyday lives. In other words, the war rapes have damaged these three women in ways that affect how they view themselves and their relationships. The ways in which their female bodies were made part of the battlefield have altered their female identities and gendered relationships. This destruction is narrated on different levels.

On the personal level, the war rapes are narrated as having destroyed the core of their female identities: their sexual and procreative abilities. They talk about how the war rapes have damaged them by describing bodily pains, and they thereby position themselves as (female) biological subjects within their stories. Ceca lets us know that she suffers from insomnia, takes tranquillizers and sometimes cannot do basic work at home. She goes on to say that she has problems with men in general, and that when a man approaches her she 'immediately has pains in her stomach'. The mass rapes she experienced damaged her to such an extent that she had to have a gynaecological operation after the war. In addition, she is the only woman in this study who admits to having become pregnant as a result of the rapes, but she had an abortion carried out with non-professional assistance. Since the war, she has given birth to a son and, as shown in the first quotes from her interview, it was her feelings about this son that triggered her accounts of being raped. Throughout the entire interview, her victimization is narrated through accounts of her body. For Emila, the war rapes were her first sexual experiences. She says that simply the sight of men in uniform can be a trauma trigger, and can cause her physical discomfort when she is premenstrual. Berina is not as explicit as Ceca and Emila, but she indicates that she has had to take tranquillizers before talking to me about her war experiences, thereby suggesting that being reminded of her war trauma triggers bodily pains. Experiencing bodily pains in the aftermath of severe trauma is not unusual. Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), for which these women have received therapeutic treatment, is characterized by a combination of generalized anxiety symptoms, specific fears and an elevated level of arousal – i.e. their bodies are always on the alert for danger (Herman, 1997: 36). What makes the stories of Ceca, Emila and Berina special cases of PTSD¹⁰ is that their trauma triggers are so clearly *gendered*, through sexual contact, the birth of a son, seeing men in uniform, etc.

On an interpersonal level, the narratives of victimized female bodies become stories of dysfunctional womanhood manifest in the women's social relationships with immediate family members. Ceca considers herself a bad mother to her son who was born after the war. It is as though her son came out of a different body from the body her children born before the war came out of. Her post-war body is presented as foul, as are her feelings towards her son. In addition, Ceca has chosen not to let her husband know about the war rapes, because this is 'something stronger' than her other war experiences. The war rapes have changed the way she looks at herself as a woman, and she fears that it might affect the way her husband looks at her as a wife:

I told him everything except for being raped. That is somehow stronger, and I cannot tell him. I suffer a lot because of the sexual side of our marriage. But what can I do? I do not have the feelings, positive feelings towards that, and all the time I find excuses to avoid having sex.

Her feelings for her youngest son and her daughter are central in the interview. She says that she is often aggressive towards her youngest son, and that she has

many negative feelings towards him. Her daughter was also raped, and she wants to talk to her about this but her daughter refuses to do so. This is a great concern for Ceca. For Emila and Berina, their war-raped bodies affect the relationships they have to their respective mothers. Both have chosen not to disclose to their mothers the fact that they were raped, in order to protect their mothers. In the aftermath of war, Emila has only shared her war-rape experiences with her sister (who also was raped). Her mother does not know about the rapes. Emila has decided to keep it that way because her mother was also raped and lost many of her children, as well as her parents:

My sister knows, because she was also raped. My mother was raped as well, but I cannot tell her because I had a sister who was killed and burnt together with my grandparents. Also, I was separated from her for six years, so I cannot tell her.

Emila still suffers from physical pains linked to the war-rape trauma:

Sometimes, just before I have my period, I have pains and phobias. I cannot see people in uniform. I do not even like the SFOR people.

Emila is very concerned about her living situation and her family's economic instability. She feels that her material living conditions are victimizing her once more:

The authorities are deaf and blind to what has happened [there] when they force us to leave the house we live in now and move back to our houses that have completely burned. [. . .] I understand that everyone has a right to property and everything else, but I cannot understand why I and all the people who experienced all the things I experienced still have to suffer. I suffered a lot and I am still suffering. [. . .] Nobody gave us any form of compensation. I live a life, but it is not really a life. With all these struggles, it is not easy to live.

She sees no justice in the ICTY either:

I was not pleased with the verdicts for those who committed sexual crimes and abuse. They would get 10 to 15 years in prison, and they would use that time to complete their studies and go to school or other things like that, while behind them are the women who were tortured. I do not think that justice in my sense of the word will be done.

Future prospects for marriage are also a great concern and source of sorrow for Emila:

I will never get married . . . I cannot trust anybody, and even if someone is just inviting me to have a coffee somewhere I think that maybe he is going to take me somewhere [. . .] Sometimes I have an impression that everybody knows . . . even though I know that is not possible.

The underlying argument is that letting their mothers know about the rapes would be yet another trauma for them. Emila argues that her mother has suffered enough. Berina makes the same argument, but adds that she also feels shame about the rapes and is unsure how her mother would react if she knew. Today, Berina lives with her child, her mother and a brother. The fact that she has been raped is a secret she has shared only with her sister. She does not want to let her mother know what happened to her:

I would rather tell everybody else than my mother, because she was hurt enough. I also have shame and fear for how she would cope with knowing. Basically, I do not want to hurt my mother more [she is crying].

She fears that her child might ask about her war experiences, and she does not want her to find out either:

My worst fear is that she [the child] will ask me. I do not think that I will tell, because my worst fear is that she will go through the same. Therefore, I do not want to let her know what happened to me.

She wants to remarry but fears that this will be difficult because the family of her child's father might not approve. In addition, she has difficulties with relationships with men:

I had a nice sexual relationship with my husband, and I had a boyfriend after the war. But, I did not feel anything [in the sexual relationship with the new boyfriend]. I had no feelings at all.

Although it is not stated explicitly in the interviews, one might assume that Berina and Emila know that their mothers would worry about their daughters' virginity, and thus their eligibility for marriage later in life. Emila has said that she was a virgin before being raped, and that she was raised in 'that kind of family' – that is, a traditional patriarchal family. Assuming that women's sexuality is linked to family honour, telling their mothers about the rapes would potentially victimize the mothers further through association with their daughters, and Berina and Emila therefore keep silent. If we take Gilligan's (1982) work on motherhood and the ethics of care as a point of departure, it is possible to interpret the decisions by Emila and Berina to keep their war-rape stories secret as a way of letting their mothers maintain a status of 'good motherhood'. According to Gilligan, a woman's moral career is influenced by ethics of care and responsibility for others. Motherhood is the manifestation of this process, because it enables the woman to demonstrate care and responsibility through her connection with others, most notably her children. The war-raped bodies of Emila and Berina, therefore, come to represent failed motherhood through the mothers' 'failure' to protect their own children. Emila and Berina position themselves as good children by keeping their war-rape experiences hidden from their mothers.

They do this, however, as a way of protecting their mothers, and consequently it is Emila and Berina who are ‘mothering’ their mothers.

On a societal level, these three protagonists position themselves as ‘damaged goods’ within a patriarchal culture. This perception comes out most clearly in the story of Emila when she talks about her future prospects for marriage. She thinks that she will never get married, because she has an ‘impression that everybody knows’. What she fears that ‘everybody’ knows is that she is not an untouched woman, she is not a virgin. Because she was ‘raised in that kind of family’ – that is, a traditional patriarchal family – we can assume that she was taught to believe that her virginity was key in her eligibility for marriage. For Ceca, who was already married before the war rapes, her decision not to tell her husband what happened to her is another manifestation of ‘damaged goods’ positioning. Assuming that the relationship between Ceca and her husband is based on patriarchal values, the violations against her body might be seen as violations of her husband’s ‘property’. Her sexuality – and her body – is her husband’s possession. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why she had another baby after the war: as a way of giving something back to her husband after those who raped her had taken something – *her* body – away from him. Berina wants to become re-established with a new man – i.e. a new husband and ideally someone who can be a good father for her child. However, this might prove to be difficult, because she is a single mother. In addition, she lets us know that she has attempted – but found it very difficult – to start a new sexual relationship.

By bringing stories of their bodies and their gendered relationships to the forefront of their narratives, the three protagonists construct stories in which the main plot is that of being a *victim*. They position themselves as stigmatized bodily subjects, and this affects their social relationships (as mothers, daughters and girlfriends/wives) as well as their future prospects (eligibility for marriage). The victim plot structure creates a stable/regressive narrative characterized by a downward development, and the core theme in this story is a violated, and damaged, gender identity.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

In concluding the analysis above, we need to consider *what* the rape stories have told us about rape in war; *how* the context in which the stories are told has affected the storytelling itself; and, finally, *why* narrative analysis has proven to be a particularly viable venue for understanding the impact of rape in war.

First, the five protagonists have taught us that rape in war has an impact upon and violates the social identity of its victims in at least two distinct ways. Because rape in war targets both the *ethnic* and *gendered* identity of its victims, this dual identity violation creates a possibility for dual identity construction in the aftermath. Through their accounts, the five women have created two distinctly different narrative plots, within which their primary positioning within the stories

varies. As ethnic victims, the elements of their stories create a *survivor* plot characterized by absence of guilt, support from family members and active engagement in getting their perpetrators convicted. As female victims, however, the elements of their stories create a *victim* plot characterized by feelings of guilt and shame, hiding their stories from immediate family members, and bodily pains and immobility. These observations show: (1) that the victims have power to redefine their social identities in the post-conflict sociopolitical space; (2) that their ability to do so, however, depends on the material, social and political reality in which they find themselves in the post-conflict setting, as well as the ways in which their 'supporting cast' plays its part; and, finally, (3) that positioning oneself mainly as a victim versus survivor (or the other way around) has different impacts on intrapersonal, interpersonal and societal relations.

Second, it is important to consider the context in which the stories are told, in order to better understand the motivations of the protagonists in telling their stories. This contextual setting is multi-faceted. First, it is important to recognize that asking questions about wartime rape in Bosnia as a foreign, western European and female researcher is in itself a political task. What the interviewees tell me during the interviews is based on an elaborate understanding of the political power relationships that exist between us. As a western European researcher, I am positioned as *international*, and the international presence in Bosnia is so overwhelming that Bose (2002: 6) argues that this constitutes yet another conflict line, in addition to the conflicts that exist between the three main ethnic groups. The international community in Bosnia, furthermore, is an important source of income for the local population, but the taste of the economic benefits thus provided is bitter-sweet. The international presence is of such a nature that it has deprived many Bosnians of a sense of ownership over their own economic, democratic and political development.¹¹ Asking questions about the war as a western European researcher therefore means asking from a position as a power-holder. This comes out clearly in the opposition between *us* and *them*. Although I am a woman and could be part of a female *us*, I am more often cast as an international *them*.¹² As a result, it is highly likely that the stories the interviewees told me were based on an understanding of what they think the international community – that is, the power-holders – ought to know about the ordeals they went through. Members of the organization through which I came in contact with the women in this study told me that many of the raped women felt so forgotten by the world outside that they were very happy to receive a researcher who was interested in their lives now that the cameras and journalists had moved on to other parts of the world. Second, the protagonists are aware that their war-rape stories can be narrated within different genres. In other words, how the stories are to be told is not a given. As we saw in the interviews, two of the interviewees (Danira and Emilia) asked how I would like to have the story told: 'from the beginning' or, alternatively, 'only the most important details'. All the women in this study had previously told their stories to different people (aid workers, representatives for the ICTY and therapists), and in all these contexts

their stories are told to serve different functions. By asking me how I would like to have the story told, they are simultaneously asking me what the function of their story will be for me. In other words, the power relationships between the researcher and the interviewee force both of us to find ways of telling the story – that is, genres – that make them intelligible to us both. The researcher defines the function of the story, and the interviewee adjusts the narration of her experiences accordingly. Finally, it is clear that the political and economic power hierarchy that exists between ‘internationals’ and local Bosnians has created a climate in which having a war story to tell can be regarded as a potential commodity. On my field trips to Bosnia, I heard numerous horror stories describing how international journalists had capitalized on the misery of raped women. Drakulic (1994: 178) describes international journalists coming off the plane at the airport in Zagreb, going to the nearest refugee settlement in which Bosnian refugees were sheltered, and asking the following infamous question: ‘Anyone here been raped and speaks English?’ Having a rape story to tell also means having experiences for sale. Journalists, researchers and non-governmental organization (NGO) workers are all potential ‘buyers’ of these stories. The journalist may be able to write an intriguing story; the researcher (like myself) will have data to analyse in order to generate knowledge production; and NGO workers might use the stories to apply for funding to initiate different kinds of activities. This mutual dependency between the one who has a story to tell and the one who can ‘use’ it is not necessarily unethical, but in trying to ‘buy’ stories to help the women involved the ‘buyer’ walks a fine line in terms of personal benefit. For the women who have stories to tell, however, there is also a potential for empowerment through talking: talking to the ICTY might get perpetrators convicted; talking to therapists might facilitate recovery; and talking to international academics and journalists might bring attention and understanding to a wider audience.

Finally, the narrative analysis has brought an empirically based understanding of the diverse impact that Bosnian war rapes had in the local context. The many commentaries and academic publications on the war-rape tragedy in Bosnia have argued almost with one voice that raped Bosniak women would be stigmatized and ostracized by their families. This analysis has shown that, yes, that did happen – and presumably also to a large extent – but it does not represent the complete picture. The experiences of Ceca and Azra must also have a place in our understanding of the impact of war rapes. In other words, we must not base our understanding only on the findings that confirm our assumptions, but must also be open to findings that might contradict and challenge our initial convictions. This analysis has shown that, to understand the diverse impact of war rape, one must look for local findings. The local findings in this study have shown that the five women intersect multiple social categories in their positioning of their war-rape experiences and in their social identity construction processes. These intersectionalities have different strengths and outcomes as diverse plots (ethnic and survivor versus gendered and victimized) in their respective narratives. Assuming that war rape has universal effects on women because of universal hierarchical

relationships between men and women will not help us to see the complete picture and does not help us see the diverse strategies women employ in living with war rape in its aftermath.

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NOTES

1. At the end of 1992, the Bosnian government released a figure stating that the number of women who had been raped was about 14,000 (Olujic, 1998: 40). Later the same year (in December), the European Community set the number of women of Muslim ethnicity who had been raped by Bosnian Serb soldiers at around 20,000 (Drakulic, 1993: 270; Meznaric, 1994: 92; Olujic, 1998: 40; Nikolic-Ristanovic, 2000: 43; Wing and Merchan, 1993: 11, note 54). The Bosnian Ministry of the Interior set the number at around 50,000 (Olujic, 1998: 40; Nikolic-Ristanovic, 2000: 43; Wing and Merchan, 1993: 11, note 54). In a report by the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) (Becirbasic and Secic, 2002), it is stated that the European Union (EU) Commission estimated the number of victims at 50,000. At a conference entitled 'Violation of the Human Rights of Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina During the War 1992–1995', held in Sarajevo on 10–11 March 1999, the President of the Organizational Committee, Mirsad Tokaca, stated that the Commission for Gathering Facts on War Crimes in Bosnia and Herzegovina set the number of raped women at 20,000 (Tokaca, 1999). Drakulic (1993) reports that the Sarajevo State Commission for Investigation of War Crimes estimates that the number up until October 1992 was 50,000, and she adds that these numbers are highly controversial. Meznaric (1994: 92) writes that the report of the Coordinative Group of Women's Organizations of Bosnia and Herzegovina estimates that between 20,000 and 50,000 women were raped.
2. In an interview in Sarajevo on 13 June 2002 with representatives of the Association of Former Prison Camp Inmates of Bosnia-Herzegovina, I was told that 40 new torture methods had been discovered in Bosnia.
3. Again, there is considerable uncertainty in the estimates of the numbers of children conceived through war rapes. Drakulic (1994: 180) quotes an estimate from the

Bosnian Ministry of Works and Social Affairs that 35,000 women were impregnated through rape and released only when abortion was impossible. Salzman (1998: 363) quotes the same source and confirms the estimate of 35,000 women – primarily Muslim, but also Croat – who became pregnant. He points out, however, that, according to the way in which medical studies estimate the number of cases of intercourse that result in pregnancy (one single act of intercourse results in pregnancy between 1 percent and 4 percent of the time), this would lead to the conclusion that about 3,500,000 acts of rape took place in Bosnia. Salzman concludes that this reveals the shortcomings to obtaining reliable information on the number of rapes and pregnancies. In a population of about 4,000,000, it is simply impossible that as many as 3,500,000 were raped. In general, it is extremely difficult to find approximations of the number of children conceived through such acts owing to the fact that many mothers will not say what happened, many had legal and illegal abortions, and many children were adopted after birth. Further, single-parent female-headed households are not uncommon in post-conflict Bosnia, and mothers who have had, and kept, children conceived through rape do not necessarily stand out in their local communities. This might make it easier for them to conceal the origin of their child.

4. This can be regarded as a sub-field within the larger domain of discourse analysis within social science, in that the locus of the analysis is the individual and discourses of the self. Contrary to the predominant theories within mainstream psychology, in which the self is seen as having a true nature waiting to be discovered and described (see outline and discussion of the traditional approaches in Potter and Wetherell 1987: 95–110), the social constructionist approach takes the position that selves are formed, framed and understood within language. Indeed, the main question becomes how we *talk* about selves and use language to define what it means to be a person (see outline and discussion of this in Burr, 1995: 95–158). This way of thinking is inherently social psychological, because the ways in which we talk about ourselves are highly dependent on the discourses available to us in our social settings. Social constructionist psychology rests on the assumption that sense-making is produced collaboratively in the course of social interaction between people (see Wilkinson, 2003: 187).
5. The stability narrative is one that ‘links events so that the individual’s trajectory remains essentially unchanged in relations to a goal or outcome’ (Gergen, 2001: 253). The progressive narrative links events together over time so that the movement is incremental, while the regressive does the opposite, by creating a narrative with a downward movement.. Further, Gergen (2001: 257) argues that self narratives are immersed within processes of ongoing interchange, and it is these processes that construct the basis for the future. The sustainability of a self narrative (whether progressive or regressive) depends on the willingness of others to play out certain parts of the relationship. Gergen (2001: 258) defines this as a *network of reciprocating identities* and adds that ‘the moment any participant chooses to renege, he or she threatens the array of interdependent constructions’.
6. Most of the interviewees were recruited through a psychosocial centre. This meant that most had been through a minimum of psychological treatment, and it was their therapists who initially contacted them and asked if they would volunteer for the interviews.
7. A complete list of the texts that I went through can be found in Skjelsbæk (1999).
8. The themes covered were: present life situation of the interviewees (work, family, housing/living situation); their lives before the war (work, family, housing/living

- situation); with whom they have shared or revealed their war experiences, and with whom they can seek comfort and trust; what sort of help they have received in the aftermath (psychological, economic and medical); how they would characterize themselves – victim and/or survivor; thoughts about the future.
9. The NATO Stabilization Force (SFOR) in Bosnia-Herzegovina came into place on 20 December 1996. The SFOR operation replaced the Implementation Force (IFOR) that had been deployed the previous year as an immediate result of the General Framework Agreement for Peace (GFAP). Whereas the role of IFOR was to implement the peace, the role of SFOR was to stabilize it. A UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR) had preceded IFOR and was present in Bosnia during the war – that is, from 1992 onwards. IFOR was deployed following UN Security Council Resolution 1031 in December 1995. In December 1996, the Security Council authorized member states to set up a multinational stabilization force to succeed IFOR. The main task of SFOR was to oversee the parts of the 11 annexes to the GFAP that address military issues. Since December 2004, the EU has assumed responsibility for peacekeeping operations through EUFOR, and the SFOR mission, in its original form, has ended.
 10. Hydén (2005: 172) warns against inscribing abused women into the PTSD diagnosis because this reduces the violated woman to her sufferings. This is also a central theme and concern in other feminist critiques of the PTSD diagnoses (e.g. Shaw and Proctor, 2005).
 11. The parliamentary election of October 2002 – the first election the Bosnian authorities organized without the immediate supervision of the Office of the High Representative (OHR) and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) – showed that efforts to ‘educate’ the Bosnia population in democratic values and tolerance had not provided the results hoped for by the international community. Not only was voter turnout extremely low (less than 55 percent), but those who did show up voted for nationalist candidates. In a critical article, Knaus and Martin (2003: 60) criticize the OHR – and High Representative Paddy Ashdown in particular – for demonstrating the ‘unlimited authority of an international mission to overrule all of the democratic institutions of a sovereign member state of the United Nations’.
 12. One woman explained to me that, despite the very frequent use of rape during the conflict, it was first when the SFOR soldiers came to the region that the spreading of venereal diseases became a problem. She explained it thus: ‘It was not *our* men, but *your* men who brought the problem to us’.

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