

Wagadu: A Journal of Transnational Women's & Gender Studies

Volume 10

Issue 1 *Sexual Violence and Armed Conflict:
Gender, Society, and the State*

Article 3

6-1-2012

Living in the Shadows of Past Atrocities: War Babies of Bosnia

Lina Strupinskiene
Vilnius University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.cortland.edu/wagadu>

Recommended Citation

Strupinskiene, Lina (2012) "Living in the Shadows of Past Atrocities: War Babies of Bosnia," *Wagadu: A Journal of Transnational Women's & Gender Studies*: Vol. 10: Iss. 1, Article 3.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.cortland.edu/wagadu/vol10/iss1/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Cortland. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Wagadu: A Journal of Transnational Women's & Gender Studies* by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Cortland. For more information, please contact DigitalCommonsSubmissions@cortland.edu.

THREE

LIVING IN THE SHADOWS OF PAST ATROCITIES: WAR BABIES OF BOSNIA¹

Lina Strupinskiene²

Abstract: For centuries rape has been considered as an inherent part of war-culture, as a natural expression of hatred, and as a way for soldiers to release sexual energy. After the recent atrocities committed by Serbian forces in Bosnia however, it became recognized as having the capacity of a weapon of war and even as a tool for genocide. Women were attacked due to their reproductive ability, aiming to impregnate them with Serb babies. This has led to recent attention to children born of war and attempts to establish their status as victims of human rights violations. Current research is challenged by lack of first-hand information and less than satisfactory analysis of the phenomenon that often results in over-dramatizing their misery or over-estimating the number of shared characteristics they have. This research project starts with a question – who are the war babies and where are they now? Guided by the assumptions of social constructivism, exploratory fieldwork has been conducted in the territory of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). The article starts with investigating the circumstances of the babies' conception, analyzing the predominant patterns of rape and the rationale behind them. It continues with data from the field, shedding light on the social circumstances of Bosnian war babies as well as illustrating scenarios of familial and community acceptance and rejection of these children.

Introduction

Violence, specifically rape against women, has been part of every documented war in history from the battles of Babylonia to the subjugation of Jewish women in World War II (Brownmiller, 1975). However, after the more recent atrocities committed by Serbian forces in Bosnia, it has attracted unprecedented international attention and condemnation. Though rape has commonly been understood to be driven by various motives such as anger, jealousy, and hatred, in the Yugoslav war rape was the carefully planned military strategy to impregnate as many women as possible in order to wipe out the enemy and to create unbearable conditions for future mothers and their children (UN 1993).³ This has led to recent attention to children born of war and attempts to clarify their status as victims of human rights violations.

Upon analyzing the current research projects regarding war babies, it becomes clear that this is an emerging rather than established field of studies. There are only a few scholars

in the world studying the invisibility of children born of rape (Apio, 2007; Baldi & MacKenzie, 2007; Carpenter, 2000; 2005; 2007a; 2007b; DeLaet, 2007; Goodhart, 2007a, 2007b, McEvoy-Levy, 2007). In reviewing the emerging literature, two main deficiencies appear. First, most of the authors are conducting critical analysis without undertaking fieldwork research (Mukangendo, Rimmer, De Laet, McEvoy-Levy in Carpenter, 2007). They base their investigation predominantly on second-hand information that, within the dynamic context of a post-conflict setting, quickly becomes outdated. Second, there is the lack of analysis of the phenomenon itself. Most scholarly works begin with assuming that the problem of "war babies" exists and immediately jump to possible solutions or continue investigating reasons why the "problem" failed to attract international and local attention. Lack of data on war babies often results in false conclusions and unresponsive policies and programs.⁴ Absence of systematic analysis of the experiences of these children can result in additional psycho-social harm in attempts to deal with their needs.

Predicated by this apparent void in comprehensive knowledge, my research project starts with a question – *who are the war babies of Bosnia and where are they now?* Aiming to gather first-hand information and develop insights into the phenomenon of war babies, I have designed and conducted a small-scale exploratory study, aiming to lay ground for more comprehensive future research. The goals of my research are threefold: first, to investigate what is known about the war babies in Bosnia; second, to identify the key informants in the field and ways to approach them; and third, to explore the characteristics of the war babies group. The article starts with investigating the circumstances of conception of the babies, analyzing the predominant patterns of rape and the rationale behind them. It continues with data from the field, shedding light on the current realities of the children.

Methodology

Since the study is an exploration aiming to provide insights and generate new ideas about the children born out of wartime rape in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a qualitative approach was used employing several methods. An extensive review of relevant literature was based on the following sources, country reports, academic journals, media reports, documentaries, witness testimonies for the International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), and NGO field reports. I visited Sarajevo, Tuzla, Zenica, and Mostar in summer 2009. The fieldtrip centered only on the cities of the BiH, not going to Republika Srpska was intentional due to the fact that the majority of raped women are Bosniak who still live in the territory of the Federation (Alisa Muratčauš, personal communication, May 19, 2009).

Prior to going into the field I conducted an extensive literature review and listed various materials that might yield interesting data on war babies. I decided to choose the interviewees from the spectrum of organizations having the most chance of interaction with children: schools, institutions for children without parental care, NGOs (national and international) working with children's rights or women's issues, psycho-social support centers, and representatives from various religious communities in BiH. A thorough description of *target groups/key informants* proved itself to be very useful while in the field. Each possible group of respondents was described using a set of criteria:

- 1) Information available to the group
- 2) Information not available to the group
- 3) Possible bias
- 4) Obstacles in getting the information
- 5) Preventive measures
- 6) Conclusions after fieldwork

For example, international NGOs, with a focus on children's rights were expected to have information on the state of war babies including statistics, information regarding previous research or action done, as well as personal insights arising from participant observation while living in BiH. These organizations were not expected to have much information on individual stories of war babies and their mothers, or stories from their family lives. It was thought that international NGOs may be particularly biased towards showing the situation better than it actually is. In order to defend the position of their organization, they may attempt to diminish the scope of the problem or try to portray it as a part of the general post-war trauma and re-integration issue. Their ability to share information could also be limited by the fact that international NGOs are dependent on the support of the local government and discussing such a controversial issue as war babies could potentially undermine it. Also, strict hierarchic structure and subordination may prevent employees speaking up against the official line of the organization or criticizing their superiors. I tried to overcome this by careful confidentiality arrangements, offering not to tape-record interviews or to meet for coffee instead of an elaborate interview. In addition, I used already established social networks and trustworthy "gatekeepers" to introduce me. After the fieldwork, this group continued its involvement by employing locals and staying in touch with the events on the ground, subject to the official policy lines of their organization, of course.

Twenty-one semi-structured interviews were conducted using: chain sampling as the main device in selecting the interviewees. The interviews were conducted with members of the following communities: (1) Islamic leaders from the Young Muslims, Sarajevo's Medlizes, and Muslim NGO activist; (2) Catholic representatives comprising priests and

NGO activist; (3) Child therapists from Sarajevo's Wings of Hope and Vive Žene in Tuzla; (4) Women's groups consisting of Žene Ženama, BOSFAM, Snaga Žene in Tuzla, La Strada in Mostar, Medica Zenica, and the Section of Women Former Prisoners of War in Sarajevo; (5) Journalists from national radio and television; (6) International aid workers from UNICEF, Nansen Dialogue Centre, and the Centre for Women and Youth Development in Sarajevo.⁵

It is also important to note that one of the advantages of conducting a qualitative research is the richness of data generated. This approach supported my exploratory research well because fewer assumptions were placed on the subjects enabling more complex aspects of that person's experience to be studied in more depth, and allowing participants to provide data in their own words and in their own way. The interviews in the form of a conversation were semi-structured, lasting on average 1.5 hours. The answers given by the respondents provided context for behaviors, revealed interrelationships among multifaceted dimensions of group interactions, allowed me to identify recurring patterns of behavior that participants were unable to recognize, and resulted in conclusion that made the broader trends visible.

Limitations

Due to time and language constraints, I had to interview people that were accessible via Internet or telephone even before the actual fieldwork so I could have some pre-arranged meetings. Most of my interviews were conducted in urban areas comprising Sarajevo, Tuzla, Mostar, and Zenica. Having them take place in metropolitan districts has its own disadvantages. The data I acquired was mainly obtained from middle class workers living in the cities, with university degrees, which have traveled, and are familiar with foreign languages. Therefore, the data is very likely to have an urban bias and cannot be used to draw generalizing conclusions for the whole Federation.

During my fieldwork I did not speak to two of the groups which I initially planned to interview – school teachers and social workers of institutions for children without parental care. The two groups have been replaced by children's therapists and journalists, which in the beginning had not been considered a separate category. The main influencing factor has been accessibility of information and, in the case of school teachers, persistent peer to peer dissuasion from participating in the study. According to the social workers and therapists consulting women and children, the education system in BiH is undergoing a serious crisis. It is burdened by organizational and financial problems and, at the end of the day, teachers have little time and interest in the personal lives of students. Matters of identity, trauma, discrimination, and even sexual education are out of the question most of the time. Journalists were well informed on the topic as many had conducted research on

the phenomenon of war children, however due to the concerns about confidentiality, objectivity, and neutrality with these respondents crosschecking with other sources of information was regularly employed. Children's therapists were a late addition to the study due to initial lack of data on the types and availability of services for children.

Interviews with children and their mothers were not part of the research due to the extremely sensitive character of the topic. Talking to war victims requires special training to prevent re-traumatization. Consequently, the focus was shifted towards community's representatives and professionals working in the field. Reluctance to give information was a common obstacle throughout my research. The rationale behind such reactions was threefold, previous negative experience with journalists and researchers, taboo nature of the topic, and lack of crude data.⁶ However, using people with already established social networks and the trust of the community (gatekeepers) to introduce me and full disclosure about the research project helped to overcome the initial suspicion and distrust. In addition, being a female researcher was also an advantage, as empathy and delicacy were presumed. My Slavic language skill (Russian and Polish) was also a benefit when using an interpreter as I was able to understand enough of a respondent's reply to control the interview and the accuracy of translation. This proved to be extremely important in gathering details and emotional nuance necessary to the delicacy of the topic.

Rape in the Yugoslav War

In December 1992, a European Union fact finding mission determined that the Bosnian Serb Army "as a prolonged form of terror" had raped 20,000 women during the Yugoslav War (Nowak, 1999, p.401). The Bosnian Government estimated the number of raped women closer to 50,000. While all sides in the Yugoslav conflict committed rapes, Serbian forces appear to have used rape on the largest scale, principally against Muslim women (Laber, 1993, p.2). The majority of the cases, perpetrated by soldiers, paramilitary groups, local police, and civilians, occurred between fall of 1991 and the end of 1993, with a concentration of cases between April and November 1992 (United Nations, 1992). Unfortunately, the statistics of rape in general suffer from serious under-reporting. Women all over the world feel ashamed and guilty to report this crime, and their fear is fueled by local traditions and strong patriarchal societal structures. It is highly likely that the actual numbers of women raped were much higher.

The Serbian practice of rape and sexual assault differ from other assaults because "it was a systematic military policy conceived and planned before the outbreak of the war to achieve the ethnic cleansing of Muslims from Serbian territory" (Salzman, 1998, p.355). This statement is corroborated by several reports that led to the adoption of a special resolution by the UN General Assembly on January 5, 1994, stating that "systematic

practice of rape was used as a weapon of war and an instrument of ethnic cleansing against women and children in the areas of armed conflicts in former Yugoslavia, and specially against the Bosniak women and children in BiH" (Nowak, 1999, p.404). The impregnation of women with a belief that they will later on give birth to children of "the enemy" was indeed one of the main motives. Interestingly, respondents considered this particular pattern of rape as the only motive. They portrayed rape as something that Serbs did to Bosniaks, rather than men did to women. For example, a Catholic priest and a professor of pastoral theology living and working in Sarajevo said:

[It was] mostly Serbs, it was well organized. They took women to camps. It was an attempt to kill the nation, kill it in the area of reproduction. Rape was a systematic tactic of genocide. They were doing it to produce more *chetnik* bastards. (Personal communication, May 4, 2009)

Maja Šarić, the executive director of Wings of Hope BiH, explained:

[Rape] was massive, such a huge trauma for the nation. (Maja Šarić, personal communication, May 5, 2009)

The myth about identity – that it is genetically derived from the father no matter the ethnicity of the mother or the social context in which the child grows up – was fueling the rape campaigns and imprinted itself deeply on the collective imagination of the Bosniak population. Serbian soldiers told women who were raped that they were producing "little *chetniks*" (Neier, 1998, pp.172-91 as cited in Mitchell 2005) who will grow up and kill Muslims (personal communication May 21, 2009). Data collected during fieldwork point to a narrative of Serb soldiers as violent and aggressive who will pass these characteristics to the "implanted" baby. This predominant narrative disregards the fact that Bosniak soldiers also committed rapes, that violence against women also occurred *within* ethnic communities, and that many Serbs in fact risked their lives to oppose war and/or gender violence⁷ (Carpenter manuscript in progress).

Wall of Silence

As I started conducting my fieldwork, I faced an immensely strong shield of silence surrounding "war babies" as if they did not exist. Everywhere I went people kept on repeating that they did not want to talk about or did not know anything about "war babies." This is hardly realistic considering that up to 50,000 women may have been raped in a country with a population just over 3 million. It seemed as if the whole country engaged in a secret agreement not to talk about children born of wartime rape. The reactions I have witnessed were not orchestrated from above nor intentionally planned. They were very consistent observable social patterns in the post-war country, consistent with the traditions and patriarchal norms of the society. The reticence of the population

caused careful consideration when interpreting respondent the meaning of silence. Discourse in fact creates an issue and non-articulated social phenomenon is difficult to comprehend. While silence could indeed signify that the community does not consider "war babies" problematic, recurring narratives encountered in the field point to several factors that keep people from talking.

What Breeds the Silence?

Personal physical and social insecurity:

After the war ended, reconstruction and rehabilitation programs focused on returnees, and many people have been resettled to their home villages. However, this did not mean they were secure. Data collected during fieldwork showed that people felt threatened by the perpetrators that are still living in proximity to the survivors. For example, Sabiha Hudić the director of Medica in Zenica, explained:

They are afraid to talk, afraid of what may happen to them or their families.
(Sabiha Hudić, personal communication, May 12, 2009)

Another therapist working with female victims of rape added:

Up to today the government of BiH is not capable of guaranteeing security for the victims and only few of them went under witness protection. Justice has not been served. (Personal communication, May 10, 2009)

According to data from the Women's Section of Released Prisoners of War, district Sarajevo has 504 women registered as victims of rape⁸(Alisa Muratčauš, personal communication, May 19, 2009). Having in mind even the conservative estimates of women raped this data sounds less than convincing. In addition, coming out as a survivor of rape means public exposure and vulnerability in exchange for a questionable number of benefits. Only in February, 2006, was the law on social protection adopted in the Bosnian Parliament. It confirmed the status of survivors of rape and torture as civil victims of war. This resulted from a large demonstration named "For the dignity of Survivors" implemented by 35 NGO's and supported by 50,000 signatures of the citizens of BiH. Such an effect was reached after showing *Grbavica: The Land of My Dreams*, a film which dramatized the experience of war-time rape. The pension for the victims is very small, around 500 KM⁹ (approximately 50 EUR) a month and one has to prove that s/he indeed has been raped. Witnesses or proof of location are required. Even though this in itself is a great achievement, only the rape survivors are currently acknowledged as

victims, there is nothing in the social protection law that would recognize the particular vulnerabilities of their children.

Possible stigmatization and shaming of rape survivors:

After having returned to safe territories, the suffering of women has not ended. As one worker in a women's shelter put it:

We [women] survived war, now we have to survive peace. (Personal communication, May 14, 2009)

According to one leader from the Islamic community:

You have to understand the context in which the Muslim community lived; the enemy knew precisely the conservatism and the moral standing of the group and targeted it. That is why now it is so hard for everybody to deal with it. Women are afraid to speak; they feel ashamed of what has happened to them. (Personal communication, May 21, 2009)

Speaking up about rape means risking being socially excluded and stigmatized. Though success and acceptance stories are present, according to my respondents, the male members of the families react particularly harshly. Rape is considered to be a shame for the whole family, especially to the husband, brothers, and fathers. While in the field I documented testimonies on how male members of the extended families refuse to accept women and their children, which further motivates women to keep silent. The therapists I interviewed claimed that men take the rape of their wives, daughters, or girlfriends very hard, not only because the victims are close to them, but also because of who raped them. Though it is not always the case, babies can be considered to be the enemy and serve as a constant reminder that Bosniaks were not able to protect their women. Stigmatization and exclusion from the societal life might also result in loss of income and means for survival, as many women are heavily dependent on their male counterparts.

Fear of traumatizing the child:

The truth about being a "war baby" is believed to be painful and traumatic for a child. Respondents believed children should be protected from it, as discovering the past may result in a serious identity crisis as well as exclusion from the social circles of friends, exposing kids to mocking and teasing. The therapists at Wings of Hope reported that children get beaten up at school just because they have "a wrong name." They explained that the category of ethnicity is in operation on a daily basis and the boundaries between different ethnic groups are stronger than they used to be prior to the war. This is why a

mixed identity is becoming increasingly problematic (personal communication, May 5, 2009).

Where are the War Babies?

Investigating the concept of war baby inevitably raises the question of awareness. Can a child unaware of his origin still be considered to be a war baby? Does the child face the same problems as others or is the situation in some way unique? A lack of awareness does not exclude a child from belonging to this category. However, it points to a wide variety of possible future outcomes and undermines the assumed homogeneity of the ethnic group. Further the UNHCR, helped pregnant rape survivors give birth abroad. Alisa Muratčauš from the Section of Women Former Prisoners of War in Sarajevo, said:

No, these women do not keep in touch with their relatives over here [in BiH]. They are trying to lead "new and normal" lives. (Alisa Muratčauš, personal communication, May 19, 2009)

In addition, during the war, many children were left without guardians and ended up in orphanages where it was either considered unethical to disclose details of conception or these details were simply unknown. Finally, some families (more often single mothers) decided to keep the children, but raise them while hiding the truth. One of the most common stories told to protect a war baby from the truth is the story of a fictive martyr father (called *shahid*) who died during the war.¹⁰ Since, so many men took part in the conflict this story is convincing and prevents further questions about facts and verification.

Abortion:

One of the dominant patterns of rape occurred in rape camps where women were kept for several months, normally at least until the fourth month of pregnancy when abortion was no longer possible. However, rape occurred in other site like detention facilities or at home where women could not be kept long enough to prevent termination. Abortion was the safe way out of the stigmatizing situation. For example, one child therapist at Vive Žene in Tuzla explained:

If there is no child – there is no evidence of rape, a woman can effectively hide her secret. Abortion worked as a strategy to amend the harms made, it shows refusal on behalf of the women to acknowledge the situation of rape and natural attempt to return to the previous life. On the other hand, abortion is also a way to destroy the hostile baby growing inside her. (Personal communication, May 15, 2009)

By aborting, women were in fact trying to protect themselves from what might happen when the baby grows up. This particular scenario was in operation during the war and was heavily affected by the dominant discourse of Serb military projections when some women were led into believing that hostile "little *chetniks*" were growing inside them. In 1993, the director of the Documentation Center for Genocide and War Crimes in Zagreb stated that women who could not get abortions abandoned their infants "or they kill the babies... although we've never been able to prove it" (Horvath, 1993, p.12 in Carpenter).

Infanticide:

For Bosnian Muslim women raped by Serbian men, suicide and infanticide was often reported preferable to a lifetime of humiliation and pain (Drakulić, 1994). Even though no comprehensive statistics exist, there are several documented cases about women trying to kill their babies at birth, leaving them die from through starvation, or failure to provide care to a sick child (Smith, 2000). Causes for maternal neglect are thought to arise from rape and torture trauma and feelings of shock, humiliation, disgust, influenced by cultural narratives about the hostile identity of the child. If women internalized the messages provided by the perpetrators about the war babies, infanticide could be considered a rational course of action for a mother trying to protect herself and her community.

Orphanages:

Data gathered during the fieldwork pointed to abandonment as the most common way mothers managed the birth of a war baby. Abandoned children normally ended up in institutions for children without parental care. According to the representatives of women's organizations and the Islamic community, most of the women raped left their babies immediately or during the first couple of years after birth. The Red Cross was one of the few organizations that was allowed to enter the seized territories and take the abandoned newborns to safety. Normally they would place them in the institutions for children without parental care located in the safe areas of the country. Most of the interviewees stressed the solidarity of the citizens of BiH and their willingness to adopt abandoned children. However, not all respondents were convinced this was actually happening on a large scale, thus leading to a belief that some of the children spent all their childhood years in orphanages. Among the groups interviewed, the Islamic community was the most skeptical about the acceptance of abandoned babies. For example, during an interview, one leader from the Islamic community remarked:

Go out in the street and ask the first 20 people you meet if they would like to adopt a baby who was born out of wartime rape. Go ahead, do it! Nobody would like to have a child like that at home. (Personal communication, May 21, 2009)

Adoption:

Eventually, some of the children did get adopted, nationally and internationally; though only national adoption was legal, as the Bosnian government "considered the children crucial in re-populating the country" (Daniel-Wrabetz 2003, p.38).¹¹ During my fieldwork I had an opportunity to meet a documentary filmmaker who had made a movie about Alen, a ten-year-old at the time, who was an adopted war baby. Alen currently lives with his foster family in Goražde, BiH.¹² His mother gave birth in a hospital in Goražde and immediately abandoned the child; a doctor who was working at the same hospital later adopted him. Alen's foster parents decided not to tell him the truth about the circumstances of his birth, but he found out about it at school when he got into a fight with some boys and was called "a *chetnik* bastard". Judging from the documentary, speaking up has been liberating for Alen and helped him to overcome an identity crisis caused by his learning the truth.

Sold to foreigners (all trace lost):

While many of the rumors regarding selling the rape orphans are indeed unverifiable and unsubstantiated by statistics, I have encountered the shocking narrative of baby auctions on several occasions. For example, one child therapist stated:

I don't know how they call it in English, but here it was called *trgovina* (market), I heard about one in Zagreb. A lot of babies were on sale, a lot...The Dutch were really active in this as well. (Personal communication, May 15, 2009)

According to the interviewees, the black market was flourishing during the war – the police were paralyzed and the rule of law was effectively dismantled. Babies of European origin became valuable merchandise. However, all trace of them has been totally lost and by now one could only speculate what happened to them. The best-case scenario is foreign adoption in a loving family. However, being sold for organ transplants is just as likely.

Acceptance:

Abandonment and acceptance can go hand in hand in one child's life. For example, there are situations where at first the baby is left alone, and only after some time a mother feels ready to come back. However, taking back the baby does not always end up being a success story. The relationship between a child born of wartime rape and his mother is somewhat ambiguous. For example, one therapist working with female victims of war told me one story about a woman, who decided to take back her child after she left him in the orphanage:

We pressed her a little to take the child, as she seemed ready and it was a perfect timing – her own house was done, a child was about to start school-- but when she did that everything changed. She started drinking, she couldn't look at the kid, every time he got back home from school she hit him, and then she cried at night for doing so. (Personal communication, May 14, 2009)

The Islamic community has told similar stories as well. According to them, the relation between a woman and her child born of wartime rape is far more complicated than it might seem. It is a mixture of love and hate.¹³ Some of the children did stay with their mothers right away; some were even accepted by the husbands of the mothers and raised as their own. However, this was a very rare scenario, as true acceptance did not occur often. If a child stayed with his family, then everything depended upon who knew the origins of the child. The film *Grbavica* tells a very common scenario of a mother-child relationship where the mother does not tell her daughter the truth about having been raped and bearing a child, rather she claims that her husband has died during the war and is a *shahid* – a war hero. As long as the lie stands, the daughter continues to be raised in the mother's community. The story of *shahid*, however, can be easily defeated because a certain document is needed as a proof that the husband was on military service and indeed died during the fighting because this leads to governmental benefits for war widows. However, children themselves do not often require documents from their mothers proving their past; in fact, in some cases there is a mutual understanding and silence, even inside of the family. A child therapist told me a similar story about a woman who took her child back from an orphanage when he was eight years old. Currently they live together, but the boy has never asked her about his past,

Not a single time has he asked the question - who is my father? This is not normal at all, kids start asking these questions when they're four and start playing with others, however this boy keeps silent. On some level he may in fact know, that is why he never asks. There's just so much publicity about the war, children know how many women were raped, and they know that babies were born. If you do not have a father/mother and you're of a certain age – you can do the math. (Personal communication, May 15, 2009)

This comment is indeed enlightening. The publicity surrounding the events of the war was huge and it still is very present with commemoration events, political debates, and continued accusations from various groups. The history of the former Yugoslavia is everyday business for most of the citizenry. For teenagers to make the calculation is not that hard, so it may indeed be true that many of them know their past even without being

told. How they cope with knowledge of this personal identity is a question for further research.

Conclusion

This exploratory research project yielded the following results:

1. *Social networks were established.* Fieldwork created a preliminary list of trusted contacts poised to expand through networking and aid in further research and investigative projects. Women's groups and Islamic NGOs proved tremendously knowledgeable on issues of rape (e.g. location, time, frequency, even witness names) and fate of rape survivors and their children. State-run orphanages though harder to access and distrustful, gave valuable insights on the number and outcome of children born of war. Churches and international organizations were considerably less furnished with data.
2. *Common patterns were identified.* Diversity among the outcomes for war babies was documented, undermining the assumption of a number of shared characteristics of the group. Although the findings cannot be generalized to the entire population they point to one shared experience - abandonment rather than acceptance has been the dominant reaction.
3. *Silence was revealed as a communal coping practice.* It seems that open discussion about war babies is feared in the community and within families raising war babies themselves. In order to overcome the silence and get access to information, sufficient time in the field conducting repeated visits and interviews is necessary. Special attention to confidentiality of the informants must be protected without fail.
4. *Historic narratives surrounding wartime rape were revealed.* Rape was understood as a strategy of ethnic cleansing and a hostile act towards the Bosniak population rather than individual women. The relevance of these cultural narratives on the daily life rape survivors and their children is the logical next step in further developing this research.

Further comprehensive research on the topic of war babies must avoid exposing children psycho-social harm. A rights-based framework and approach to children as rights-bearers should be employed.

REFERENCES

- Apio, E. (2007). *Uganda's Forgotten Children of War*. In Carpenter, Ch. (Ed.). *Born of war: Protecting children of sexual violence survivors in conflict zones*. Bloomfield: Kumarian Press, Inc.

- Askin, K. (1997). *War crimes against women: Prosecution in international war crimes tribunals*. The Hague: M. Nijhoff Publishers.
- Baldi, G. & MacKenzie, M. (2007). *Silent identities: Children born of war in Sierra Leone*. In Carpenter, Ch. (Ed). *Born of war: Protecting children of sexual violence survivors in conflict zones*. Bloomfield: Kumarian Press, Inc.
- Bougarel, X., Helms, E. and Duijzings, G. (Eds.) (2007). *The new Bosnian mosaic: Identities, memories and moral claims in a post-war society*. Aldershot UK: Ashgate.
- Brownmiller, S. (1979). *Against our will: Men, women and rape*. NY: Bantam Books.
- Carpenter, Ch. R. (2000). Surfacing children: Limitations of genocidal rape discourse. *Human Rights Quarterly*, 22 (2),428-477.
- Carpenter, Ch. (2005). *International agenda-setting in world politics: Issue emergence and non-emergence around children and armed conflict*. Working paper No. 30, Human Rights and Human Welfare, presented at the American Political Science Association Annual Conference, Washington DC.
- Carpenter, Ch. (Ed.) (2007a). *Born of war: Protecting children of sexual violence survivors in conflict zones*. Bloomfield: Kumarian Press, Inc.
- Carpenter, Ch. (2007b). Setting the advocacy agenda: Theorizing issue emergence and nonemergence in transnational advocacy networks. *International Studies Quarterly*. 51(1), 99-120
- Carpenter, Ch. *Constructing rights and wrongs*. Manuscript in Progress
- Carpenter, Ch. *War's impact on children born of rape and sexual exploitation: Physical, economic and psychosocial dimensions*, <http://people.umass.edu/charli/childrenbornofwar/Carpenter-WP.pdf>
- DeLaet, D. (2007). Theorizing justice for children born of war. In Carpenter, Ch. (Ed). *Born of war: Protecting children of sexual violence survivors in conflict zones*. Bloomfield: Kumarian Press, Inc.

- Goodhart, M. (2007a). Children born of war and human Rights: Philosophical reflections. In Carpenter, Ch. (2007). *Born of war: Protecting children of sexual violence survivors in conflict zones*. Bloomfield: Kumarian Press, Inc.
- Goodhart, M. (2007b). Sins of the fathers: War rape, wrongful procreation, and children's human rights. *Journal of Human Rights*, 6 (3), 307-324.
- Laber, J. (1993). *Bosnia: Questions of rape*. New York Review of Books.
- McEvoy-Levy, S. (2007). Human rights culture and children born of wartime rape war. In Carpenter, Ch. (Ed). *Born of war: Protecting children of sexual violence survivors in conflict zones*. Bloomfield: Kumarian Press, Inc.
- Mitchell, K. 2005. *Children born from rape: Overlooked victims of human rights violations in conflict settings*. Paper presented in Master of Public Health Capstone Symposium, May 14, 2005, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health Baltimore, Maryland.
- Mukangendo, M., C. (2007). Caring for children born of rape in Rwanda. In Carpenter, Ch. (Ed). *Born of war: Protecting children of sexual violence survivors in conflict zones*. Bloomfield: Kumarian Press, Inc.
- Nowak, M. (1999). *Women as victims of "ethnic cleansing" in Bosnia and Herzegovina*. In Tokača, M. (Ed.) *Grieh šutnje, rizik govora (The Sin of Silence, the Risk of Speech)*. Collection of reports from an International Conference held in Sarajevo on the 10th and 11th of March, 1999 "Violation of Women's Human Rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the War 1992-1995". Sarajevo: Commission for Gathering Facts on War Crimes in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- Omerdić, M. (2002). The position of the Islamic community on the care for children of raped mothers. In Tokača, M. (Ed.) *The Plucked Buds*. Sarajevo: Commission for Gathering Facts on War Crimes in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- Salzman, T. (1998). Rape Camps as a Means of Ethnic Cleansing: Religious, Cultural, and Ethical Responses to Rape Victims in the Former Yugoslavia. *Human Rights Quarterly*, 20 (2), 348-378.
- Smith, H. (2000). *Rape victims' babies pay the price of war*. The Observer, retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2000/apr/16/balkans>

United Nations, Security Council. (1994). *Final report of the commission of experts established pursuant to Security Council Resolution 780 (1992)*, Annex 241 n.65, U.N. Doc. S/ 1994/674.

Weitsman, P. (2007). Children born of war and the politics of identity. In Carpenter, Ch. (Ed). *Born of War: Protecting Children of Sexual Violence survivors in Conflict Zones*. Bloomfield: Kumarian Press, Inc.

Weitsman, P. (2008). The Politics of Identity and Sexual Violence: A Review of Bosnia and Rwanda. *Human Rights Quarterly*, 30 (3), 561-578.

Wrabetz, J., D. (2003). *No man's child: The war rape orphans*. In the *European MA Awarded Thesis for the Academic year 2002/2003*. Venice: Marsilio Editory.

¹ I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for the constructive and detailed comments that have helped improve the quality of the paper. I also wish to thank Chris van der Borgh, my supervisor, for his continuous support throughout my research and all those, who agreed to be interviewed and shared their stories.

² Lina Strupinskiene is a lecturer and a doctoral student at the Institute of International Relations and Political Science, Vilnius University and has interned with the International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia.

³ See Report on the Situation of Human Rights in the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia submitted by Mr. Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Special Rapporteur of the commission on Human Rights (more widely known as the Mazowiecki Report), 10 February, 1993

⁴ In between late 1992 and early 1993 a vast amount of articles appeared in Western media all focusing on horrors of war time rape in Former Yugoslavia. The media hype indeed drew attention to vulnerability of women in conflict and resulted in a very needed influx of help and humanitarian aid, however, at the same time it became almost the only source of information regarding war babies. This led to a tendency of looking at war babies through the lens of women's rather than children's rights.

⁵ Names of the respondents are not identified in order to protect the confidentiality of the respondents and the people they have worked with. In only a few cases a full name of the respondent is disclosed, due to a specific request. For example, the organization Medica Zenica is known for its openness and willingness to communicate with the researchers and the media, therefore, allows and even instructs researchers to publicize the name of the organization and identify the respondent.

⁶ Whenever introduced to the research topic my informants reacted in quite a similar manner – elaborating on how much of a taboo issue this is and that no research has been done, no statistics, no facts and no

tangible information apart from stories and impressions are available (which were considered being of no value).

⁷ In addition to those soldiers who took part in rapes, there were also cases of ethnic Serb soldiers who refused orders to rape and paid for it with their lives. For examples, see Askin, K. (1997). *War Crimes Against Women: Prosecution in International War Crimes Tribunals*.

⁸ It is important to note that the numbers do not represent the number of women raped in Sarajevo. During the war Sarajevo was one of the safe territories, despite the bombing the actual fighting did not break out in the capital. However, a lot of people moved to Sarajevo in search of jobs or trying to get further away from the terrible memories in the aftermath.

⁹ Bosnia-Herzegovina Convertible Marks is the currency in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BA, BiH). The symbol for BAM can be written KM.

¹⁰ This particular story is also used in Jasmina Zbanic's movie "Grbavica: The Land of My Dreams". Though it is fictional, my informants believed it to be highly illustrative of the reality of war babies.

¹¹ Joana Daniel-Wrabetz uses this argument to prove that the government was taking up active action to incorporate children into the society, however, this position is not particularly addressed to children born of rape, it also includes other children who lost their parents during the fighting. From the further neglect of children born of war-time rape in the governmental agenda one can conclude that this position was more directed towards children without parents, trying to keep them in Bosnia, and re-populate the country which lost so many during the war and not specifically towards children born of war.

¹² A documentary "Boy from a War" by Šemsudin Gegić (2004) has been shown in various film festivals around the world, however, is banned from television in BiH until Alen turns 18 years old.

¹³ These were the only two groups who talked about this in such a coherent manner. All the other groups of my interviewees elaborated on acceptance and idealized the mothers who decided to keep the babies as success stories. The reason for such variations could be availability of information. The information available to women's organizations and organizations of Islamic community can actually be different from that available to internationals or the Catholic community. The narratives told by these groups were the most shocking but at the same time were told with the most honesty and richness of detail. These organizations are the ones exposed to actual victims and who try to help them, so the information available to them about individual scenarios of women can come very close to reality, at least of those who eventually start seeking for help.