

The Invisible Ones

Why NGOs in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina do not include children born from war rape in their programmes and projects

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Open your mind, arms and heart to new things and people, we are united in our differences

~

Unknown

Abstract

Non Governmental Organisations in Bosnia and Herzegovina rose out of the ground like mushrooms during and after the destructive Balkan war of the early nineties to provide help to the victims and survivors. During the conflict, tens of thousands of women were raped and an unknown number of them birthed children out of these rapes, who hardly ever received any attention from the national media, state policies or NGOs' programmes and projects. Considering the fact there is and has been a lot of media attention paid to the women who were raped and there are several known organisations that provide them with counselling and medical treatment, even in a patriarchal society as Bosnia and Herzegovina, it became clear that there was no attention whatsoever paid to their children. Wanting to know the reason behind this, I set out to interview NGOs in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina to explore why they did not incorporate this group of children in their programmes and projects. From their answers, I was able to establish three different reasons for this, which all revolve around the concepts of silence, denial and stigmatisation. Therefore, in this thesis I explain the special and difficult status that children born from war rape have in the society of Bosnia and Herzegovina, examine the reasons NGOs gave me for not paying attention to this group along the lines of the conspiracies of silence theory and then look towards the future to explore possible ways to incorporate them in society and to what extent this is actually wanted.

List of abbreviations

| | |
|-------------|---|
| BiH | Bosna i Hercegovina, which translates to Bosnia and Herzegovina |
| FBiH | Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina |
| ICTY | International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia |
| NGO | Non Governmental Organisation |
| RS | Republika Srpska |
| UN | United Nations |

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Introduction

Motivation

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is a country that I first discovered when I was still very young while looking at the map of Europe in my brother's atlas. At that time, it jumped out at me because it had two names, which seemed unique to me and I thought it therefore had to be a special country. In a way, I was right. At that time, I had no idea that this country was the main stage for the most devastating war in Europe since World War II. Leaving well over 97,000 people dead (The Bosnian War Facts, 2007) and many more injured, as well as laying claim to the longest siege of a city – Sarajevo - in the history of modern warfare only begins to account for all the horrors that the people in that war had to endure. However, the reason behind this country regaining my attention many more years later, was not only because of the war in general, but because of a very specific type of warfare: rape as a weapon of war. Having become interested in gender issues and gender based violence in conflict about halfway through my studies at university, I found BiH to be one of the most shocking examples of how conflicts can also be fought.

Background to the conflict

The 1992-1996 conflict was being fought between the three major ethnicities in the country, the Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims), Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats, within the larger setting of the unravelling of Yugoslavia. In their battles for power, the Bosnian Serbs under leadership of Radovan Karadzic publicly proclaimed a fully independent "Republic of the Serbian People in Bosnia-Herzegovina" (US Department of State Background note: Bosnia and Herzegovina) while the Bosniaks and Bosnian Croats signed an agreement in 1994 that created the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH). In 1995, the Dayton Peace Agreement was signed which formally divided the country along ethnic lines, with the FBiH on the one hand and the Republika Srpska on the other, complemented by the sovereign district Brčko, which belongs simultaneously to both aforementioned entities (Ibidem). This three-way division along ethnic lines is still present in every layer of society and furthermore negates the existence of minority groups, such as the Jewish people and the Roma community, leaving a divided country with no mechanisms to overcome this.

During the conflict, sexual violence was used as a form of ethnic cleansing. As ethnic cleansing has as its purpose to create an ethnically homogenous area, several ways of reaching this goal are possible, including killing, torture and destruction of property. However, rape and other forms of sexual violence also proved to be quite successful in furthering this end, like The United Nations Commission of Experts in the Former Yugoslavia presented. They distinguished five patterns

of rape (Price 2002: 259), of which the first mainly consisted of rapes that took place before the widespread fighting broke out, often in combination with looting. The second pattern, which derived from the first, consisted of raping when fighting intensified in the area. Where in both patterns it was common for family members to be forced to watch the raping, in the second pattern rapes also took place in public, only adding to the women's shame and humiliation. The third and fourth patterns encompass rapes in detention: one categorizing rape as a by-product of the detention, where the other purposefully used detention in order to rape and in many cases, also to impregnate women. Lastly, sexual slavery also occurred, leaving women often dead after their captors had no more use for them anymore.

During the 1992-1996 conflict, it is estimated that between twenty to fifty thousand women had been raped, most of them Bosniak women and while rapes were committed by all three sides, the Bosnian Serb army seem to have done this on the largest scale (Erjavec and Volčič 2010a: 261). During the rapes, the rapists often made no effort to conceal their intentions: 'They told us we were going to give birth to Serbian children and that they would do everything they could so we wouldn't ever dare think of coming back again' (Stiglmayer 1994: 109). To make matters worse, BiH is a very patriarchal society in which not only the woman carries shame for getting raped, but also the entire family, therefore breaking families and sometimes even communities apart (Price 2002: 263).

Significance

Considering the wave of attention that gender based violence is getting nowadays, it comes as no surprise that the vast majority of academic literature on this topic is concentrated on the women, their trauma and the consequences for them after the rape. While I am certainly not discouraging this, one can wonder why there is significantly less attention for the children that were born from these rapes. Truthfully, it was not until I read an article about this subject which stated that hardly any attention was paid to the children that came forth of these rapes – by academics and by the people in BiH – that I realised that indeed, there was a whole other group of victims as well: the secondary rape victims (Daniel-Wrabetz 2007: 21) or children born from war rape. I was surprised that this had actually never occurred to me, which only made me more adamant in trying to find out as much as possible about these children. What I discovered however, was that there was actually quite little to find out about, as it is still a relatively new area of research. Due to the lack of extensive information on these children, their status within the current society, their problems and the prospects for their future, I decided that I wanted to know more about them and dedicate the research for my Master thesis on them.

When I made this decision, I became aware of the fact that another (former) Master student did similar research about this subject two years ago, but her focus was mostly on group identity and societal views. Even though we have some overlapping issues and talked to the same organisations on several occasions, I feel that my research has a different focal point, namely: Non Governmental Organisations' (NGOs) reasons for not including children born from war rape in their programmes or projects. On the wider issue of global advocacy for children born from war rape by large international NGOs a study has been done by R. Charli Carpenter (2007b), which also has a few overlapping themes with my study. Despite this, I feel that my study is different because firstly, my research has as its focal point local NGOs in BiH and therefore is more concise than one dealing with NGOs operating on the global level. Moreover, since my study is very recent, it truly depicts the current situation in a country where the political, economical and social climate keeps changing rapidly. Moreover, my target group evidently keeps getting older and because they are now close to adulthood - their ages most likely now range from sixteen to eighteen – it is likely they will start asking more questions about their origin, making it more difficult to keep them in the dark about their conception. Lastly, I feel that my research certainly generated some new insights regarding society's and NGOs views on these children. Therefore, even though my research has not exclusively uncovered new information, I feel that it could contribute to a greater understanding of NGOs lack of focus on children born from war rape and their ideas about how to approach this issue in the future.

Research overview

In this thesis, I would like to take the reader with me on the journey I took starting from before I went into the field with the assumptions of what I would find while there, through the actual information I uncovered, having to change my focus, right up until my return, which left me with some ambiguous answers. Firstly, I will introduce the complexity of the issue 'children born from war rape' by reviewing their self perceptions and the perceptions of society. Even though this is not solely based on my field experience, I feel it is important to thoroughly understand their situation in order to comprehend the problems discussed later in this thesis. Then I will continue with which questions I went into the field, regarding these children's reconciling potential for the society at large and their connection to children from mixed marriages, only to realize that these were the wrong questions to ask. However, I believe that it is important to give an overview of these results because they show other pieces of information that otherwise might not have come to light.

This then leads me to the main question of my thesis, why NGOs in the FBiH do not have a focus on children born from war rape in their programmes and projects. This question shall be answered in three parts, explaining the main reasons for this lack of focus on these children, based

on the information I gathered in the conducted interviews. I shall analyse these findings and try to explain them by using Eviatar Zerubavel's theory on conspiracies of silence, in which he lays out the rules, politics and social structure of denial, an integral prerequisite for silence, as well as the consequences of breaking the silence. Lastly, I shall evaluate my findings and gauge whether there is a want and need for a national policy regarding these children, who should initiate this and what such policies should entail, before I end with my concluding remarks.

Methodology

For this thesis, I conducted qualitative research with my main data collection technique being interviewing. In the course of March to May 2011, I conducted a total of 24 interviews with people either working for an NGO, being a teacher or fitting in the target youth group. Firstly, I set out to interview NGOs that dealt with one of the following topics: women, either specifically targeting sexual violence victims of the war or not, youth, or transitional justice, truth, dialogue and community building. Although this might seem like a very broad range, given the fact that my specific target group – children born from war time rape – is not clearly represented anywhere in society, I was forced to talk to those who could potentially have any ties to this group, or be the ones willing to make such ties. I found all these organisations either on the internet, meaning that they had websites and that they were available in English, or they came recommended to me by other organisations I had interviews with (snowball effect). All these interviews were therefore conducted in English, except for three: one was in German for which I had a translator with me even though I could understand and follow most of it, while the other two were conducted in Bosnian for which I had an English translator. I purposefully chose to conduct the vast majority of my interviews in English as it allowed me to maintain full control over the direction of the interview and react accordingly to the responses.

I approached these organizations through e-mail, in which I explained why I was in BiH and the general purpose of my research. In none of those e-mails I explicitly stated that I was interested in children born from war rape, as the risk was high that they would be unwilling to talk to me, most likely because they did not deal with this group directly. (One large organisation who pressed me into telling about my specific interest rejected me because they did not have the authority or knowledge to talk to me about this). However, since I was more interested in the reasons for their lack of attention to this specific group, and through experience I found that once I started the interview, the interviewees did not mind speaking to me about this, I chose to leave it out of my initial e-mail. All the organizations I approached agreed to meet with me, with the exception of four, of which three claimed to be too busy and the fourth's reason is already mentioned above. Even though selecting

them on having websites available in English limited the organisations I spoke to and can be seen as a weakness of the research, I think it can also be seen as a positive thing. These NGOs obviously had a sufficient amount of funding and the means to maintain a professional website in English, thereby putting themselves “on the map”. This gives me the impression that they are the main organisations in their respective fields who perhaps not only can have the most influence when it comes to implementing new strategies and policies, but also are the most trusted voices of society by the government and the international community.

Secondly, I interviewed three teachers: one worked in a conflict resolution centre, one in the gender studies department (both at the University of Sarajevo), and the last used to work in a children’s NGO and wrote an article I used before I set off to BiH. Therefore, I thought all three could be able to shed some light on the issue at hand, but from a slightly different perspective than the NGO workers could, making the research a bit broader and multifaceted. Lastly, the same goes for the three youngsters I interviewed: as children born from rape also belong to the youth group and I explored the wider context of youth, their views on society and NGOs and their openness towards others, I felt they were relevant for my research. All of the teachers I found through the internet, apart from one whom I was referred to by someone else, as well as all three youngsters (snowball effect). The youngsters did not have to meet any criteria apart from being in the right age group (16-25), since what mattered most to me was their willingness to talk about such a sensitive subject. All these interviews were administered in English, and all youngsters were highly educated, which, along with the fact that I only interviewed three due to a lack of time, significantly influences the outcomes.

All interviews were conducted in Sarajevo, Zenica and Tuzla, as the relevant NGOs for my research were stationed in those cities. This means that my research was exclusively done in the Federation Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH), which was a conscious decision of mine because I felt that, due to the large amount of raped Bosniak women, who mostly live in the FBiH, it would be more valuable to focus on this area. However, opinions on NGOs, governmental structures and policies as well as people from the Republika Srpska (RS) were also expressed in the interviews. I chose to mainly collect my data through the interviewing process as I considered the nature of my topic too sensitive to ask about this in questionnaires or focus groups and the data I wanted to collect could only be gathered by asking the questions that did not have ready answers. I chose to interview outsiders (meaning: non-victims) because my goal was to see why organisations had no focus on these children in their projects and programs and what could be done to change this and if this should be changed at all. Moreover, I believe that my lack of both knowledge of the local

language and a background in psychology made me unfit to talk to my target group or their mothers myself, fearing to re-traumatise them.

During the interviews, I never asked about the interviewee's ethnicity or religious background, as I believed it to be irrelevant for my research. However, very often the interviewee would declare his or her identity on their own. I also did not ask them to make a distinction between ethnicities of children born from war rape, but rather always referred to them as one group of victims. The duration of the interviews ranged from as little as thirty minutes to two and a half hours in one case, although the large majority lasted about one hour. All interviews were recorded, for which I had consent from the interviewee, after which the interviews were transcribed and on one occasion first translated into English. All interviewees were very open in their conversations with me and indeed did not seem to mind discussing even the sensitive issue of children born from war rape. The impression I got from them was that they felt at ease while talking to me and this was reinforced by the amount of time they took to talk to me, their interest in my research and the fact that the large majority allowed me to use their names throughout this thesis.

The other data collection technique I used was literature review and to a lesser extent, archive analysis. I extensively read articles and one book available about children born from war in Bosnia in particular, the problems that these children globally encounter and their human rights violations. Moreover, I read articles on war rape and its use as a weapon of war, about the conflict in Bosnia and the sexual violence cases that were brought to the International Criminal Court of the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the Bosnian War Crimes Court. In order to place my research within the right context, I also read about community building and reconciliation processes, as well as on the climate that NGOs in BiH are operating in. Lastly, it was of course crucial to gain a better understanding of stigmatization, denial and silence, the main concepts that my theoretical framework by Zerubavel revolves around. The archive analyses I did were restricted to analysing the lack of mention of children born from war rape in NGOs' published materials and information guides.

1. The special and difficult status of children born from war rape

1.1 Introduction

In order to write a thesis on NGOs focus on children born from war rape – or the lack thereof - I feel it is necessary to first obtain a clear understanding of who these children really are and how they feel about themselves. Unfortunately, this is also where the problem starts. As stated in the introduction, the estimated amount of raped women has a thirty thousand margin, which is quite a lot. The number of women who got impregnated is not precisely known, but is estimated at 35,000 by the Bosnian Ministry of Works and Social Affairs (Erjavec and Volčič 2010a: 361). Due to the fact that many women refused to come forward and report their rape, or the birth of a child as a consequence of this, leaves the country with no actual statistics on this specific group of children. Furthermore, after they were born, one of the following three things would happen to them: they would either be given up for adoption, they would be abandoned and end up in state institutions like orphanages, or the mothers would keep them (Daniel-Wrabetz 2007: 25). On some rare occasions, the mother would kill her baby after he or she was born, like one woman who came to Medica Zenica did in a moment of “insanity” (Ibidem: 27). Then, there is the issue of whether or not these children know how they were conceived. The majority of my interviewees assumed that in most cases they did not know, even though there is of course no way of checking this information at the moment. Considering the fact that this group is so diverse and divided, it is difficult to see them as one group and draw conclusions about them as such. Therefore, I shall try and make a distinction between their different living circumstances when discussing them and the NGOs’ programmes and projects regarding them.

1.2 The self perception of children born from war

To start, I would like to discuss the self perceptions of the children born from rape that are aware of how they were conceived. Since I have not spoken to any such children directly, I have to rely solely on the study done by Erjavec and Volčič (2010a). They interviewed eleven Bosniak girls from ages fourteen to sixteen, who were aware of their origins along with their community and asked them about their life stories. After that, they asked them only a few questions: how they perceived themselves, who the most influential people in their life were, and what crucial events defined their lives. It appeared that four themes kept recurring in their answers. Firstly, it becomes clear that many of the girls see themselves as scapegoats, as targets of bullying and abuse. They claim that there is no peace for them, that the war is still going on as other people around them – their community –

stigmatizes them for who they are, judging them because of their Serbian blood and calling them names like 'Chetnik's whore child' (Ibidem: 368). Secondly, three of the girls of whom only their family knows of their origins, internalize guilt over what happened. They feel responsible for their mother's pain, feeling dirty and abnormal, leading to a sense of self-hate even (Ibidem: 373). The third theme that became apparent was that of role reversal: these girls ended up taking care of their mothers – mothering them – because they were unable to take care of themselves (Ibidem: 374-375). Lastly, there was one interviewed girl who had a more positive outlook on her situation and saw herself as a reconciler: since she was of mixed blood, she saw it as her duty to connect the enemies, especially in Sarajevo. It must be said though, that she was also the only girl whose mother was very publicly forthcoming about what happened to her, she testified against her rapist in The Hague and passed on this positive attitude on to her daughter. This shows from the daughter's speaking openly about her origins and her efforts to bring people together, as she plays in a band with a Muslim and a Serbian. Moreover, their social and economical situation was substantially better than that of the other girls, who mostly lived in poverty (Ibidem: 377-379).

Even though this is only a small study with a limited amount of participants, it is the first of its kind done in BiH, where the reader truly gets a glimpse of these girls' lives, what their fears and troubles are and how they live, which is certainly helpful for anyone who is trying to gain a better understanding of their needs. What this also shows, in my opinion, is that upbringing and to some extent, living circumstances play a large part in these children's self perception and outlook on the community around them. Now, I would like to compare the views these girls have of themselves to the views other people have of them as will be set out in the next part.

1.3 Other people's perception of children born from war

As became clear from the previous, a large part of these children's self perception stems from the way their mothers, but mostly their community looks at them and treats them. As one girl stated:

For me, this situation is a war; it's a state of war. I don't know any other reality, with no war. I don't know peace. There is a continuing shooting going on. Children and their mothers shouting at me and after me that I am a Chetnik or a whore child . . . well, I got used to this. I got used to the fact that they would, sometimes, kick me or beat me . . . but the worst is that I am alone. I don't really have and can't have friends. No one wants to be with me . . . I'm keep out of all (Erjavec and Volčič 2010a: 368).

This clearly depicts a hostile treatment towards them from their community. However, when I asked my interviewees how society views these children, their answers were not as negative as the above suggested. As previously stated, these children would end up either being adopted, in an orphanage or living with their mother – or sometimes grandparents. What I noticed first, is that there's a large

discrepancy between the interviewees in their views on what happened to these children. I did not directly ask where or how they thought these children currently live, but from the organisations I spoke to, two assumed that these children were in orphanages, three assumed they all lived with their mothers still, one claimed that society thinks that most of them were given up for adoption, while six others mentioned situations where they could either live with their mother or in an orphanage. What I noticed from this last fact, is that all these six people had worked with raped women and therefore might have had a slight advantage in their knowledge about this issue. Other interviewees did not directly comment on their imagined living status and I do not intend to imply that the interviewees who voiced these children's assumed living situation were not also aware of others, but I thought it to be significant that most of them had clear ideas about this which often made them lean towards only one or two of the three most common options.

Another thing that struck me was the difficulty with which some people referred to these children. Although some plainly and without trouble called them 'children born from rape' or an equivalent description, others clearly had more trouble with this. This is proven from their short pauses and hesitations in answers right before pronouncing their status, or their difficulties in creating a sentence around these children, for example: 'Those children that were born from unfortunate environments'¹, 'they have children... result of those victims'². In a study done by Lynn Sorsoli, where she asked four women to speak about being sexually abused as a child, similar behaviour was detected. One woman claimed this was because 'real words are really hard' (2010: 138) and that they made her feel a little sick. Moreover, she believed that people did not always understand that when they pronounced words describing what truly happened to them, they actually *felt* them, they were not just words to her (Ibidem). Though the responses in my study were of a different nature since these were not victims of sexual violence themselves or born as a consequence of this, I did feel that there was a certain tension and unease that accompanied the use of the actual words, clearly showing the sensitive nature of this issue.

Furthermore, by asking questions about these children's status and whether people ever spoke about them, as a consequence I usually got descriptions of how my interviewees perceived them and the situation they were living in, or how they thought society perceived them and their situation. When speaking to organisations that had worked with rape victims and children born from rape, they immediately pointed out their problems, such as having complicated relationships with their mothers. Furthermore, they acknowledged them as victims who deserve to be helped. This is

¹ Author's interview on 17 March 2011 with Maja Šarić, director of Wings of Hope BiH.

² Author's interview on 18 March 2011 with Maria Theresa Maan Besic, programme manager with Žene Ženama.

then true for both children who do not know and those who do, since in the first case they often ask questions such as who their father is, what happened to him, where his family lives, etcetera³ or they are beaten by their mother because she feels both love and hate for her child, while the child does not know what he or she did to deserve the beatings⁴. For those who do come to find out, it is considered necessary to have therapy, to understand and come to terms with their situation⁵.

Another issue that came up in several interviews is the assumption that these children would have identity issues. As Jasna Zečević, the director of one of the largest women's organizations in the country states: 'And when the boy grew up, the problem of identity came. Not just that he is a child of the rape, but also the problem of a different nation inside of him. That is also a big problem'⁶. This problem of identity as a result of war rape has been explored by, amongst others, Patricia Weitsman, who claims that not only society, but also the state and the media are all playing their part in perpetuating these social constructs of the way ethnicity is passed on to children born from rape, having serious consequences (2007: 111). Even though it is usually others who raise them (mothers, caretakers), the identity of children born from rape is linked to their rapist fathers (Ibidem: 112), which is still a large problem today. In contrast, it is noteworthy that during World War II, soldiers were prohibited from raping Jewish women because it was believed that if children would come forth of that, the inferior race, the Jewish identity, would be transferred to the child (Ibidem: 110).

Furthermore, one interviewee thought that even though the parallel was not completely right, maybe children born from rape could be compared to the children whose fathers died as war soldiers. Not because the status of their father was the same, but because she thought the situation of growing up in a family with only a mother who has gone through a lot might be the prevalent common denominator⁷. However, according to Erjavec and Volčič's study, the girls claimed that their schoolmates who had similar situations with one or both of the parents having died, also showed no understanding or compassion towards them (2010a: 371), though of course we must remember that this is just a small sample of the target group. Lastly, one interviewee thought that fear may also be a factor: if the society doesn't have enough knowledge of who those children are, they fear them, which could contribute to the lack of dialogue about them⁸.

³ Author's interview on 13 April 2011 with Sabiha Husić, director of Medica Zenica.

⁴ Author's interview on 6 April 2011 with Branka Antić-Štauber, director of Snaga Žene.

⁵ Author's interview with Sabiha Husić.

⁶ Author's interview on 6 April 2011 with Jasna Zečević, director of Vive Žene.

⁷ Author's interview on 1 April 2011 with Judith Schulte, program developer with Centre for Justice and Reconciliation.

⁸ Author's interview on 5 April with Jasmina Redžepagić-Avdagić, president of the assembly of the Peace Flame House.

Lastly, it also became apparent that the majority of my interviewees assumed that these children did not know about their own origins and also started to answer my questions with that idea in mind. It was not until I brought up the fact that some of them did know because their mothers or community members told them (Erjavec and Volčič 2010a) that they would consider this as a possibility as well. The question then arises whether it is better for these children to know about their origins or not. In the above mentioned study, the world of all girls except for one seemed to have been shattered when they heard the truth, claiming that it was the worst day of their lives that also changed everything for them from then onwards (2010: 369). Some of my interviewees had the same concern, saying that finding out 'would be another traumatisation'⁹ for them, and that 'children would be bastards in local communities'¹⁰ if their origins became known. However, in my conversation with Medica Zenica's director, the best acknowledged organisation in BiH to provide help and counselling for women victims of the war, she told me about a girl who was born from rape whose mother they were helping. This girl found out in school that her mother was raped and that she was born as a consequence and was enraged that her mother had never told her. Consequently, one therapist worked with the mother and one with the girl for eight months, after which they were finally ready to sit together again and listen to each other. After that, they accepted each other and when I asked whether the girl is happier now knowing, Sabiha answered that she indeed was¹¹. In such complicated cases as these, it is practically impossible to say whether or not it would be better for these children to become aware of their origins or not, nor is it my intention to do so. However, it is crucial to be aware of their different circumstances and the consequences of their level of awareness, when we are weighing the suitability of NGOs projects and programs for these children.

1.4 Conclusion

Having reviewed these children's self perceptions and the perceptions that the NGO workers I spoke to have of them, or think society has of them, I noticed that there is a large discrepancy between reality and perceived reality. Even though the study only included eleven girls that were born from rape, their gloomy situation seems to be a prevalent one in BiH, as is continually pointed out by the few academics that do conduct research involving these children and their situations¹². It has become clear that they not only struggle with problems of identity, but also with stigmatization from society

⁹ Author's interview with Branka Antić-Štauber.

¹⁰ Author's interview on 14 April 2011 with Goran Bubalo, project director of Choosing Peace Together of Catholic Relief Service BiH.

¹¹ Author's interview with Sabiha Husić.

¹² R. Charli Carpenter (ed.) her book has a collection of articles by different authors that testify to the hardship these children born from war rape face.

and poor living circumstances, as well as maintain a difficult relationship with their mothers – if they still live with them. Even though the NGOs I spoke to that have worked with rape victims and their children seem to be more aware of the problems they are facing, I am not entirely sure if the other NGOs I spoke to – mainly focused on youth, dialogue, justice and community building – share these perceptions, which makes me wonder if this has anything to do with their lack of attention to this group. Being aware of their problems and struggles of identity is important for the next chapter, as they formed the basis of my initial research idea. Moreover, their difficulties will have to be kept in mind for the remainder of the thesis as they are reiterated in interviewees' statements and are needed to understand their place in society, which is an important element of the following chapters.

2. The possibility for children born from war rape to have a role in the reconciliation process

"A man's errors are his portals of discovery."

~

James Joyce

2.1 Introduction

Intrigued by the one girl from Erjavec and Volčič's study who commented that she saw herself as a reconciler, since she had both Serbian and Muslim blood inside of her, I thought it would be interesting to see if this could apply to more children born of war. I did not assume that they already had such roles at this moment in time, but if it would be a possibility in the - somewhat near - future to turn their victimization around. Since these children were not active participants in the war but merely an outcome of it, it made me wonder if this could possibly allow them to play a special role in the reconciliation process of BiH. To test my ideas, I wanted to approach the "war babies" issue from a reconciliation perspective for the above mentioned reasons, which is outlined below. Moreover, I thought it would be useful to try and draw a parallel between children born of rape and children from mixed marriages, as they both have mixed blood. Since the country is so divided according ethnic lines, I thought perhaps there was a process happening that emphasises the role of people from mixed heritage and to see if NGOs are acting upon this.

2.2 Theoretical framework

Reconciliation is a broad subject that different people give different meanings to. For example, where Kriesberg sees "truth", "remorse and forgiveness", "justice" and "peace" as the main elements of reconciliation (2001), Bloomfield et al. consider "truth telling", "healing", "restorative justice" and "reparation" to be the major concepts (2003). Clearly, this shows different approaches to reconciliation. I would have liked to see a combination of the two, which I found in the social psychological approach by Nadler, Malloy and Fisher. They would define intergroup reconciliation as 'a process that leads to a *stable end* to conflict and is predicated on *changes in the nature of adversarial relations* between the adversaries and *each of the parties' conflict related needs, emotions and cognitions'* (2008: 4. Original emphasis). In their book, they feel there is a threefold strategy to promote "social learning" in divided societies. Social learning is seen as 'changing the motivations, goals, beliefs, attitudes, and emotions of the great majority of society members

regarding the conflict, the nature of the relationship between the parties, and the parties themselves' (Bar-Tal and Bennink 2004, 12).

To promote this, three strategies were developed that target instrumental, socioemotional and distributive reconciliation (Nadler, Malloy and Fisher 2008). Nadler and Schnabel (in Nadler, Malloy and Fisher 2008: 40-45) see socioemotional and instrumental reconciliation as two interdependent processes, though they both have a different target, nature and temporal focus of change, as well as different goals. Firstly, socioemotional change is seen as a social exchange between perpetrator and victim, where psychological commodities are provided to one another. The apology-forgiveness cycle is seen as lying at the heart of socioemotional reconciliation, meaning that a perpetrator who apologises and takes responsibility for their actions, is indebted to the victim, consequently restoring a victim's sense of control and power that was lost during the victimization. On the perpetrator's side, being forgiven can mean inclusion again in their own group, restoring the balance between victim and perpetrator again (Ibidem: 42).

Instrumental reconciliation does not focus on the past, but merely on the present: it aims to let former adversaries cooperate with each other to achieve instrumental goals that benefit both groups, learning to trust and accept each other in the process – based on the contact hypothesis. When comparing the two, we can clearly see the above mentioned categorical differences. The goals differ too: where socioemotional reconciliation aims to integrate both groups into a single social unit, instrumental change merely seeks peaceful co-existence between the two (Ibidem: 42-43). This begs the question of what the ultimate goal is: a minimally acceptable relationship, or a deeper and more fruitful one that includes forgiveness.

Within instrumental reconciliation, there is a third part of the theory that is thought to play a role in the process. Perceived illegitimacy of group power and status is what causes "vertical distance" between groups, distorting their relationship (Harris and Fiske in Nadler, Malloy and Fisher 2008: 308-309). Termed by Nevin Aiken as distributive reconciliation, he claims it should attempt to reduce structural and material inequalities and limit perceptions of inequitable power relations between former antagonists (2010: 6). It is believed that all three strategies are interdependent and the combination should promote social learning, which could reconcile divided societies (Ibidem).

My aim was to take this overarching framework of social learning and to apply these three kinds of reconciliation to the situation of children born from rape in BiH, to discover whether these children could actively play a part in the reconciliation process or become part of the process in the passive sense. That is why I set out to find out how the apology-forgiveness cycle in BiH regarding the numerous rapes that took place was proceeding, look at the reconciliation process going on in terms

of the contact hypothesis and focus on the structural and material inequalities, all concerning rape victims and their children.

2.3 Reconciliation

In order to say something about the role of children born from war in the reconciliation process, one part that needs to be addressed according to the aforementioned theory, is the fact that apologies need to be expressed and offered to the victims. In this case, that would mean that the rapists not only admit to their wrongdoings, but also apologise for this and take responsibility for their actions. Unfortunately, there are no signs of this process coming to fruition. The majority of rapists who are confronted with and accused of their acts concerning sexual violence before the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) by their victims, plead not guilty to the charges (Oosthuizen 2009: 32-43). Furthermore, the perpetrators' family members are known to harass the victims by threatening or bribing them not to testify against their rapist, as Bakira Hasečić, director of the Association of Women Victims of the War, told me during an interview. She claimed that one of the raped women involved with her organisation, was approached by family members of her rapist trying to bribe her not to testify against him¹³. The OSCE in BiH came to the same conclusion, by stating in a report that many people who testify in Court claimed to have been harassed, offered a bribe or intimidated not to testify (OSCE mission to BiH report on Witness Protection and Support in BiH Domestic War Crimes Trials, 2010). Moreover, up until now, the Republika Srpska (RS) still has not acknowledged the fact that there were rape camps in BiH or that there was ever a policy of systematically raping women with the intention of impregnating them (A Cradle of Inhumanity, 2003) going nowhere in furthering – or even starting – the process of taking responsibility and apologising for one's actions. Moreover, it negates the theory of Nadler and Schnabel that apologising will let the perpetrator be accepted back into its community, as the vast majority of the community in this case, is protecting these perpetrators and is complicit in their denial.

The second part of the strategy, instrumental reconciliation, cannot be detected either, based on the discoveries made above. If there is no process of apologies and perpetrators taking responsibility for their actions, there is also no chance of contact between the former adversaries, especially not since the women who were raped are still severely traumatised. This then brings us to the material and structural inequalities between the rape victims and their resulting children which, compared to others in society, are also still quite big. Only recently has the government of BiH passed a law giving victims the "civilian victim of war" status, that should allow sexual violence victims to get

¹³ Author's interview on 10 May 2011 with Bakira Hasečić.

certain social benefits. However, according to Amnesty International, because of gaps in the law and their implementation, a great deal of sexual violence victims do not receive them (Amnesty International report 2010: 7). For instance, in the FBiH a victim has to go through a lengthy process of telling her experience to a municipal officer who has no special training for this, making it difficult and embarrassing for the woman to endure, while in the RS every submission that was made after a certain date would be automatically rejected, even if women were unaware of this deadline (Ibidem). Moreover, women who had children as a result of the rape get no special attention or more compensation, nor do the children receive any help or compensation in an institutionalised way. All in all, it becomes obvious that at the moment, almost nothing is done concerning the reconciliation process between perpetrators and victims, regarding sexual violence. Moreover, the role of the children born from rape within this is even more unclear, as they were not victims of the violence, but merely a consequence of it. Before abandoning this angle of my research completely though, I wanted to explore the possible link between children born from rapes and those from mixed marriage, to see if that might offer some insights.

2.4 The parallel between children born from rape and children from mixed marriages

One of the main problems concerning children born from war rape, apart from the fact that their mothers were brutally abused and forced to carry their perpetrator's child, is that it is believed that ethnicity passes through the blood of the males, therefore making these children Bosnian Serbs, or Chetniks, which also became apparent from these children's self perceptions in chapter I. However, these children usually do not grow up with their biological father, but with their mothers – if they are kept – leaving them to be exposed only to their mother's religion. Moreover, the one girl from Erjavec and Volčič's study who was open about her identity, claimed she was of mixed heritage and mixed blood (2010a: 377) and did not regard herself as exclusively Serbian. To me, it seemed logical to therefore make a connection to children from mixed marriages, as they also come from parents who have different ethnicities – albeit the circumstances of conception were drastically different. Hence, I asked all the representatives from organisations I spoke to how society viewed these children from mixed marriages, the answers to which were to a certain extent quite surprising.

The main thing that seemed to keep coming up in the interviews was the fact that even though these children had issues, they also had an advantage over the rest of the population. First, I shall discuss the problems they encounter. After the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement in November 1995, the current state structure was put into place, basically dividing the country's institutions along lines of the three ethnicities. Though at that time it seemed like the only way possible to stop the fighting, the consequences of this division is still noticeable in everything today,

ranging from the presidential seat, to the division in the schools and their curricula (Brunwasser, 2011). Consequently, it has become normal for one to identify themselves as a Bosnian Muslim, Serb or Croat and anything in between is practically non-existent. As one psychologist from Wings of Hope put it: 'Kids from mixed marriages are, unfortunately in this society, very often children who do not belong anywhere'¹⁴.

I also asked the three youngsters I interviewed about their views of children of mixed marriage, considering the fact that they might have friends belonging to this group and therefore could have a better idea of their problems or attitudes. All of them said that mixed marriage children themselves felt fine about who they were, but that that society tended to be not so accepting, depending on the generation (older or younger people) and the place you live¹⁵. One of them even said that 'when it comes to the community, there will always be comments like "oh that one". They call them... oh this is really terrible: "multi-vitamin". Because they're from different religions and different nationalities and they have all these... that's terrible'¹⁶.

However, being from a mixed marriage is often seen as something that can be beneficial as well. According to the director of an organisation that promotes civil courage:

'they're just more open minded [...] because they are raised very often in a small family environment, they're never poisoned by a hatred against the other ethnic group, which you can find among those students who belong to or came from the family with only one ethnic background'¹⁷.

The director of Wings of Hope echoes this statement, by saying that she sees 'these children as the most healthy in society and the society is crazy... definitely, they are definitely the most healthy children in society, they have the most liberal views'¹⁸ even though she later added that

'you had tendencies during the war that they were pushed to go on one or another side, you have the tendencies as well that people change their names so their children don't get confused about their identity [...] for example I know to people whose mothers changed their names and religion so that the kids don't get confused by the identity'¹⁹.

¹⁴ Author's interview on 18 March 2011 with Enisa Mešić, psychologist with Wings of Hope BiH.

¹⁵ Author's interview on May 7 with an anonymous girl and on 24 May with Jasmin Panjeta.

¹⁶ Author's interview with anonymous girl.

¹⁷ Author's interview on 23 March 2011 with Svetlana Broz, director of Gariwo BiH.

¹⁸ Author's interview with Maja Šarić

¹⁹ Ibidem.

A constantly repeated statement from the interviews that I conducted, was that a great deal about these children's self perceptions was dependent on their upbringing: if their parents taught them to appreciate their dual culture and heritage, their children would often not be bothered so much by nationalistic sentiments. Responding to the question of whether or not these children felt the same way, one girl answered that her friends from mixed marriages were in favour of a unified BiH and that she saw such children as the best proof that a such a multi-religious and multi-ethnic country can exist again and thought these children thought the same way about this²⁰. However, another interviewee said that she once talked about this with a friend of hers who answered 'Nobody cares about me that much, so why should I be the one who's going to change something?'²¹. I also did not hear from anyone else I spoke to about any child born from rape or from a mixed marriage, who was actively lobbying for a reconciliation process. I must acknowledge in this respect though, that the current political division also makes this extremely difficult, if not impossible to break free from the set order that is imposed on everyone and noticeable in every aspect of daily life. All in all, a majority of my interviewees seemed to agree that the children from mixed marriages have the most potential to start to change things, but have public discourse and politics standing in the way of this.

2.5 Minorities in the reconciliation process

When looking at it from a different angle, I wanted to see if these children were maybe not active agents in this process, but if they were then at least subjects of the reconciliation process. Considering the fact that both groups are not fully acknowledged members of any of the three major ethnic groups, I assumed they could be categorized as "Others", to which NGOs often dedicate programmes and projects. However, it seemed that yet again, interviewees mostly answered negatively.

The Centre for Justice and Reconciliation once had a project about minorities, in which they interviewed one person from the Roma community, one person from the Jewish community and one person from 'Others', in this case a girl who was from a mixed marriage, but besides this one time project, they do not consider it a special target group²², nor do any other of the organisations I spoke to. This is not to say that these children are not included or reached in projects or programmes focused on youth in general, as a few of my interviewees who work with children said they have such

²⁰ Author's interview on 23 May 2011 with Aida Mutevelić.

²¹ Author's interview with an anonymous girl.

²² Author's interview with Judith Schulte.

children in their programmes²³ or that they are in therapy with them, though often this was not because they are from a mixed marriage²⁴. However, none of these programmes or projects were aimed at reconciliation or community building in which a role for these children was put aside. The same is true for children born from rape: the only organisations that focus on these children, are the women's organisations who help women who were raped and consequently their children in coping with their trauma, such as Vive Žene and Snaga Žene in Tuzla, Medica in Zenica and The Association for Women Victims of the War in Sarajevo.

What is evident from the previous section, is that the children from mixed marriages are seen as being truly mixed, having a dual ethnicity. One can then wonder why it is believed that children born from rape are mainly seen as having the ethnicity of their father. My initial thought that there could be some sort of parallel between both these two groups of children seemed to be very farfetched, if not non-existent. Even though I brought up both these groups of children right after each other, not one of my interviewees made a comparison between the two and when I mentioned this to one of them, she commented that it would have never crossed her mind [to draw that parallel]²⁵. In the same way, my thought that maybe one or both of these groups could be seen as good examples of the multi-ethnic society that once was and therefore fulfil a special role in the reconciliation process in the country today also seemed to be outlandish.

2.6 Conclusion

When reviewing these results, it dawned on me that I was asking the wrong questions and that I should not focus on what could potentially happen at some point in time, especially when it seemed farfetched, but what was actually happening. Moreover, my question seemed to be too broad and the 'social learning' framework I intended to use to be unsuitable for my small target group. I realised it would actually be unfeasible to test my findings with reconciliation strategies when the existence of my target group is not even really acknowledged. What became clear to me, and as was mentioned earlier, is that in my search for answers to the question if these children could be a part of the reconciliation process, I noticed that NGOs did not focus on children born from rape at all, with the exception of a few organisations offering them counselling. I became increasingly curious about the reasons behind this, as it was clearly obvious that most of these children have severe psychological issues meanwhile suffering from stigmatisation and ostracism by their communities.

²³ Author's interviews with an anonymous girl, on 1 April 2011 with Sabina Postrocki, project manager of International Multireligious and Intercultural Centre Sarajevo, on 15 April with Zilka Spahić-Šiljah, programme manager of TPO Foundation.

²⁴ Author's interviews with Enisa Mešić and Maja Šarić.

²⁵ Author's interview with Jasmina Redžepagić-Avdagić.

Why then do local NGOs in the FBiH not pay any attention to these children, when NGOs are usually the ones standing up for the voiceless? I realised that this was a more valuable question to ask, one that would also generate clearer outcomes. This is why I chose to focus the rest of my thesis on answering this question, with a different framework as outlined in the next chapter, while keeping in mind the information I gathered through my initial questions for background information of the situation.

3. Silence

“And the vision that was planted in my brain

Still remains

Within the sound of silence”

~

Simon & Garfunkel

3.1 Introduction

As the focus of my research changed, so did my main question. My main question now centres around the three most important reasons for NGOs in the FBiH not to dedicate any of their programmes or projects on children born from war time rape, which will be set out in this chapter and the following two. As was made clear in the methodology, these results are only based on my interviewees with the listed NGOs and do not reflect the opinions of all NGOs in FBiH. However, I chose these NGOs because they were closest affiliated with my target group and therefore consider their views on this topic of great importance. However, before setting out the theoretical framework I used to explain the three reasons that answer my main question, it is important to understand the climate that NGOs in BiH operate in. This will allow us to better comprehend their abilities and limits, hence why I shall quickly provide a brief overview of this.

3.2 The NGO sector

After the Dayton Peace Agreement was signed, Non-Governmental Organisations rose out of the ground like mushrooms. Research showed that between 1992 and 2001, there were 8,000 NGOs registered (Sejfija 2006: 125), and several of my interviewees said that today, there were still about 10,000 – 15,000 NGOs in the country. However, it seemed to be common knowledge amongst my interviewees that only a very small number were actually active in their field²⁶ and one of them said that even sports clubs are being considered as NGOs. These discrepancies in the NGO sector in BiH make it more difficult to filter out the good ones that truly achieve something, from the ones who do not. Part of their effectiveness also comes forth of the funding they do or do not receive. It is known that most funding NGOs in BiH receive comes from international donors (Sejfija 2006: 133) and indeed, when asking my interviewees about the climate NGOs were operating in, nearly all stated

²⁶ Author's interviews for instance on 23 March 2011 with Svetlana Broz, director of GARIWO in Sarajevo and with Branka Antić-Štauber.

that they received very little or no funding from local government institutions such as the municipalities or cantons and the state government. This means that the large majority of their funding comes from foreign donors, the consequences of which will be elaborated in the next chapter. Moreover, another problem with NGOs is that they lack sustainability: they are often very project driven, also termed as “projectomania” (Ibidem: 134). The consequence of this is that projects are designed for only a couple of months, after which it is shut down and reports are being written, which of course does nothing for the long term support that is often so very much needed. Many of my interviewees indeed backed up this statement²⁷, expressing their frustration over the fact that there is only funding for small projects and that they would like to have longer lasting programmes to make their results more sustainable. All these conditions need to be kept in mind when reading the coming chapters, as it explains a great deal regarding NGOs focus’ on specific kind of target groups.

3.3 Theoretical framework

When it became clear to me that my new research question revolved around a non-occurrence of something, I realised that this was not only more tricky to research, but it would also be difficult to approach this from a theoretical point of view. Dealing with issues like silence, denial and stigmatisation, I found it difficult to find literature that deals extensively with this matter. That is, until I came across Eviatar Zerubavel’s *The Elephant in the Room. Silence and Denial in Every Day Life* that examines this as a general phenomenon. He describes in the preface of his book how he became fascinated with “open secrets” and the social organization of silence and denial (2006: ix-x), themes that I felt were directly applicable to the situation BiH as well. There, everybody is aware of the fact that these rapes occurred and that children were born from this, yet nobody is speaking publicly about it, leading us to the ‘nuanced tension between what is personally experienced and what is publicly acknowledged’ (Ibidem: ix).

Significant research regarding the issues of silence and denial has been conducted among sexual violence victims, including those who were molested in their childhood, and their difficulties with speaking about their traumatic experiences. However, it was not until Zerubavel wrote his aforementioned book that a general theory of conspiracies of silence within a society were thoroughly explored. In my thesis, I want to explain the inactivity of NGOs concerning the children born from war and therefore, the silence and its origins surrounding this group need to be closer

²⁷ Author’s interviews with for instance an anonymous woman from an anonymous organization, and Goran Bubalo, Jasna Zečević and Sabina Postrocki.

examined. That is why I shall explain where this silence is coming from, why and how it is maintained as well as take a look at attempts that have been made to break this silence and what this has led to. I shall analyse this with guidance of the aforementioned book, which gives us a better understanding of why people always ignore the metaphorical elephant in the room. Zerubavel claims that silence comes forth out of denial, not only of individual, but also collective efforts (2006: 3). By using the word efforts, he already makes clear that he considers silence not to be something that is a coincidental occurrence, but a conscious effort by people not to speak about something. Terming it a “conspiracy of silence”, he claims that the elephant is the object of these conspiracies, as it is so large and noticeable that when anyone fails to notice it, it is done with intent (Ibidem: 10-11). Now, I will examine in what way and to what extent my findings regarding children born from rape can be explained by Zerubavel’s ideas on this concept.

3.4 Taboo

One of the main issues that I kept wondering about, was the issue of the origin of silence surrounding these children born from rape. Is the silence produced by the victims, to which society is responding by also keeping quiet, or is the silence coming from society not wanting to deal with it, to which the victims are responding with more silence? It seemed to be a vicious circle, one that I hoped my interviewees could help me with finding a starting point. However, it seemed as if they too were unsure of where the silence came from. Nonetheless, I shall first examine how the silence around these children can be explained and how it is sustained.

As Zerubavel notes, ignoring is not only something that we learn, but also something that we exercise within social traditions of paying attention, or, in this case, not paying attention (2006: 20). This seems to hold true in the case of BiH as well, since it is a known fact that people still live in a very patriarchal society, something that was echoed by a lot of my informants. Due to this patriarchal society, issues such as these which bring great shame upon men, families and communities are most often ignored. One of my informants claimed that

‘the people here don’t talk about it [children born from rape]. It’s just something that also stayed from the past system, like if there was a crime, any kind of crime, or such rapes or murders or incest or stuff like that, it didn’t come out to the public, it was kept away from the eyes of the public.’²⁸

In this case, the silence is produced by the people who hold the “secret” as a manner of speaking, because they know that it is socially undesirable to bring it up in public. So in this case, it can very

²⁸ Author’s interview with Jasmina Redžepagić-Avdagić.

well be said that 'The struggle of disclosure is thus complicated by the effects of trauma on memory and narrative, as well as perceptions about social acceptability of conveying certain disturbing thoughts and experiences' (Sorsoli 2010: 131). This then leads to something becoming a "taboo". By placing such a label on something, this subject is not supposed to be spoken about and can even leave the object of this taboo nameless (Zerubavel 2006: 26-27), which already showed from chapter I, where interviewees sometimes avoided actually saying 'children born from rape'. Because they are labelled as a taboo subject, it seems to me that people, both the objects and the subjects of this phenomenon, start behaving accordingly and therefore continue this taboo, though I wonder if this is really their intent, or done out of ease. However, to claim that something is a taboo seemed to be enough of an explanation for some of my interviewees as to why NGOs are not addressing this issue and why people don't speak about these children.

Besides the taboo, Zerubavel considers there to a milder form of this, the tact. Dealing with issues with tact constitutes dealing with them in a polite manner, usually along the lines of etiquette. This includes pretending to not see or hear things that are right in front of you or have actually been said, or to not ask questions that might be seen as inappropriate (2006: 29). As one interviewee remarked: 'everyone is "okay, don't mention it, that's terrible". I think people don't mention it out of respect when it comes to these women'²⁹, which corresponds with the aforementioned sense of politely not mentioning something. Another interviewee remarked that in BiH, it is considered to be really rude talking about someone behind their back and he thought that perhaps that is why people refrain from talking about these children³⁰. Therefore, it is plausible that apart from there being a taboo on this, it is also considered to be impolite to discuss such sensitive issues without the victims actually speaking about it themselves. This is then clearly a culturally engrained principle, since of course there is no actual law prohibiting people from speaking about this subject.

But if we would establish that these phenomena of tact and taboo are present in the society, is there then no way of tackling these? According to Zerubavel, what we must consider is that the social underpinnings of things we notice and ignore shift over time and can suddenly become of interest to academia (2006: 19). This can be affirmed from issues like for instance the health consequences of smoking that have not only generated increased public attention, but also caused public condemnation. In BiH, it could be said that similar progress is happening. For instance, even though homosexuality is still very much a taboo subject in the country, one of my interviewees commented that whereas people used to react by saying they should keep these things to themselves, she noticed that with television and projects aimed at raising tolerance towards

²⁹ Author's interview with an anonymous girl.

³⁰ Author's interview with Jasmin Panjeta.

homosexuality, even in schools, the subject has actually become popular with many children now declaring themselves to be homosexual³¹. On a more related note, Medica Zenica's director pointed out that at first, female rape victims also were an invisible group, but now there is a large dialogue between them and NGOs and that is more or less accepted in society now, so she thinks the same could happen for children born from war rape³². Therefore, one can hold out hope that this currently taboo subject can one day become an openly discussed topic. When this time will or should come, is something I shall return to in the final chapter.

Concerning the interest of academia, we can slowly but surely see a change in this as well. Ten years ago, even though people were aware of these children's existence, there was hardly any academic research on this topic. Now, even though it is relatively still considered a small field, there is a lot more international academic interest in this topic, mainly from R. Charli Carpenter, showing from her continued publications on this in the last decade (e.g. 2000, 2007a, 2007b), but also from researchers like DeLaet, McEvoy-Levy, Goodhart and Daniel-Wrabetz (all 2007), and more recently from Erjavec and Volčič (2010a). The effects of this, however, are still questionable because up until now, this increasing attention from international academics has not led to any concrete measures in this field in BiH.

3.5 Attempts to break the silence

When considering all the above, it seems as though nothing has ever been publicly said about these children. Of course, this is also not exactly the case. In 2006, a movie called *Grbavica* was released, which I consider to be an attempt to break the silence. The movie is about a woman, Esmā, who was raped in the war that resulted in a daughter, but she never told her. When the daughter had a school trip coming up, she asked her mother for the declaration that her father was a *shaheed* – a martyr - so she can get a discount for the amount of money needed for school trip. However, when the daughter finds out that her mother paid the entire sum of money, she confronts her mother, that leads her to tell her daughter the truth in an emotional standoff. The daughter is clearly upset and shaves off her hair – her mother told her once that she had her father's hair – before proceeding to go on the school trip, singing songs with her classmates, where the movie ends. The film has been widely acclaimed, receiving numerous awards abroad and was even the official entry for BiH at the 1997 Academy Awards. Since it was publicly screened in Sarajevo, one could say the conspiracy of silence was momentarily broken, equalling noticing the elephant and making it part of public discourse (Zerubavel 2006: 63). However, the movie was not shown in cinemas in the RS, nor did

³¹ Author's interview with Jasmina Redžepagić-Avdagić.

³² Author's interview with Sabiha Husić.

anything regarding these children change in the public discourse: there was still silence. What was the goal of the movie then?

In a statement made by the director of the movie, Jasmila Zbanic, it becomes clear that she sees truth as a main theme in the movie, which she regards as a ‘cosmic power necessary to progress, and very much needed by society in Bosnia and Herzegovina who must strive to reach maturity’ (Jasmila Zbanic Director’s statement). Obviously, it was her intention to make an impact on society, which it certainly did. In most of my interviews, the movie was discussed. Twelve interviewees brought it up themselves when I asked about children born from rape, and I asked four others about it, who were all aware of the movie and its content. When I asked about society’s reactions to the movie, I often heard that a lot of people in society started speaking about the issue and became aware of it. In that sense, it can be considered a small breakthrough in the silence surrounding the topic. However, as quickly as the topic came to be in the spotlight, it immediately disappeared again according to my interviewees, who all said the talk about it died down again not long after the movie was released.

This is not surprising, according to the justice journalist I spoke to, Denis Dzidic: ‘Well yeah, that’s the problem, but that shows you that people are ready to talk about it when you bring it to the front, like the movie *Grbavica* did and then people started talking about it. And of course it died down, because there wasn’t anyone in power who said “okay, this is an issue, we should make it institutionalised to try and solve something”³³. However, one tangible result of this topic being in the spotlight because of the film, is the aforementioned law that enabled women to get social benefits, which was adopted in 2006 after the government felt pressured from all attention the movie garnered and UN Resolution 1325 being promoted everywhere (Bhatti and Kocaoglu, n.d.). Unfortunately, this did not benefit the children born from war rape in any way, which would correspond with what one of my interviewees remarked, that after the movie the discussion was not so much about the children born from rape, but more about the fact that there were no reparations mechanisms for rape victims.³⁴ On a smaller scale, the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network in BiH has a feature called *My Story*, where they give a victim a chance to tell their story. Once, a young woman told her story in this feature, who was raped and got a child out of this³⁵. But even though several articles have appeared on their website about the lack of justice for female rape victims, I was unable to find articles specifically about the children born from rape, showing a lack of

³³ Author’s interview with Denis Dzidic, Justice Report Journalist with Balkan Investigate Reporting Network BiH.

³⁴ Author’s interview on 10 May 2011 with Gorana Mlinarević, academic tutor at the Gender Studies department of the University of Sarajevo.

³⁵ Author’s interview with Denis Dzidic.

awareness of their presence in today's society. All in all, even when there were breakthroughs, small as they may have been, nothing was done with this momentum by anyone and therefore it has been covered with a cloak of silence again over the past couple of years.

3.6 Conclusion

Taking all this into account, we can see that one of the three main reasons for NGOs in the FBiH that I spoke with not implementing a programme or project focused on children born from rape, is because they do not know how to overcome the silence surrounding the topic and the taboo that is associated with these children. Even though I certainly do not doubt the difficulties that arise from dealing with such sensitive issues, one must not forget that sensitive issues too can eventually become more accepted, as was shown from the examples mentioned earlier. Moreover, a small step towards breaking this taboo has been taken when the movie *Grbavica* was released, perhaps having provided the first few bricks for paving the way towards more acceptance and aid for the children born from war rape. However, this still does not explain who actually produces the silence and who returns it, a question that perhaps the next chapters might shed some more light on.

4. Invisible Group

“Setting goals is the first step in turning the invisible into the visible.”

~

Anthony Robbins

4.1 Introduction

After having discussed the intentional silence that is surrounding the children born from rape, another thing that was often brought up by my interviewees, was their invisibility, or the fact that they “just did not come up”. Before I went into the field, I assumed that this group was intentionally being ignored, the reasons for which I wanted to know. However, some of the responses I was given surprised me. A psychologist I spoke to, said to me ‘when you mentioned it yesterday, I hadn’t heard the topic in a long time’³⁶, a sentiment that was echoed by the president of a children’s organisation: ‘In Tuzla, I never thought about it. I heard about the movie [Grbavica], but I never thought about or heard about these children’³⁷. Even someone who formerly worked for an NGO that focused on children and said that they touched upon issues such as stigma, said the children born from rape never came up. When I asked why that was, she seemed to be unsure of it herself: ‘It’s just... I don’t know. I didn’t... It wasn’t in my mind before’³⁸. These answers made me wonder why this topic does not seem to be in the spotlight: can it really be seen as ignoring, or would failing to notice be a better description? What reasons are there for this? And what are the consequences hereof? This is what I intend to set out in this chapter.

4.2 Lack of attention

If NGOs are not noticing this group, what are the reasons for this then? Is this because there is nothing to notice – no media attention for instance – or are they ‘pressured to actively disregard it’ (Zerubavel 2006: 23)? Firstly, as was mentioned in the previous chapter, there was at least one movie that made a big impact on society that left people talking about it, but that was released five years ago and the attention was not sustained. On other fronts, it also remains quiet around these children, even within the courts in BiH. According to Denis Dzidic, a justice report journalist in Sarajevo, only the State Court in Sarajevo, the District Court in Banja Luka and the Sarajevo Cantonal

³⁶ Author’s interview with Enisa Mešić.

³⁷ Author’s interview with Jasmina Redžepagić-Avdagić.

³⁸ Author’s interview on 12 April 2011 with Larisa Kasumagic, English teacher at Sarajevo University.

Court can ensure protected witness testimony³⁹, which does not give women who were raped a lot of chances to safely tell their story. Moreover, I am not aware of any cases that were brought before the Bosnian Courts that have verdicts including the acknowledgement of children being born from rapes. Though the reasons behind this can be explored in studies by itself, as I am sure they will be at some point, considering the many studies so far on children born from rape's human rights violations⁴⁰, I only touch upon this to show that also in court rulings and the consequent reports on this, these children are not mentioned.

Within the political sphere and the laws of BiH, the issue is not addressed either. One interviewee's reasoning behind this is that

'in respect to the state, they think that if they take it up, they'd have to take responsibility and it's gonna be... it's easier not to... that would be another problem to create within the entire so complicated state here at the moment'⁴¹.

Whatever the reason – another study could be devoted to this, too – the fact remains that the RS still has not acknowledged the large amount of rape victims and the children that came forth of this (A Cradle of Inhumanity, 2003), which contributes to the off chance that the state government will initiate a strategy for these children. In general however, my interviewees from NGOs stated that the government did not care about their work, as they were only concerned with themselves. This thought is echoed by Gajo Sekulic, a professor of Philosophy at the University of Sarajevo, who claims that ethno political and civic aspects of society are not compatible in BiH, as nationalist elites do not want to grant civil society too much freedom for fear of losing their control over the public, media and the economy (Sejfija 2006: 132). By looking at it from this perspective, one could argue that the topic children born from rape is not specifically avoided, but merely caught up in the general lack of interest that the government has for civil society and NGOs' work.

Lastly, I think it is important to highlight the lack of attention given to this issue by the international community. Even though a great deal of newspaper articles and reports have been written about Bosnia's children from war rape, no large international NGO has put them on their agenda. Puzzled by the global lack of this issue's – worldwide - emergence on the advocacy agenda of major organisations, R. Charli Carpenter analysed the reasons behind this. She claims that a large organisation such as Children and Armed Conflict (CaAC) has not recognised children born from rape

³⁹ Author's interview with Denis Dzidic.

⁴⁰ See for instance: Goodhart 2007, Carpenter 2007, McEvoy-Levy 2007 (not a conclusive list).

⁴¹ Author's interview with Gorana Mlinarević.

anywhere in the world as a category of concern (2007b: 100) and points out that it is unclear why this topic does not generate as much interest as others. After having analysed the CaAC's guidelines concerning which groups they advocate for, she concludes that their reasons for including certain groups in their programmes actually apply less to the groups that are currently their focus (such as child soldiers) and more to children born from rape, as they better fit the so called profile a group needs to match to generate advocacy (Ibidem: 111-112). This clearly shows that on an international level, where actors can be the gatekeepers of various emerging national issues, that the issue of children born from war rape remains hidden.

When reviewing all these actors – media, courts, politicians and the international community – it becomes clear that they have certain power positions. As Zerubavel sees it, the ones in power are able to control or at least influence the range of other people's attention to a certain topic. A large element of this is "the agenda", already referred to in the international context, and the topics that are on here: the ones who control the agenda, decide what is important enough to deal with, and in that manner can also intently steer away from things they do not want to deal with (2006: 36). Again, we can ask ourselves the question if in this case, the issue is steered clear of intentionally, by all actors and gatekeepers involved, or because it has not been noticed yet as an issue that deserves attention.

4.3 Overburdened country

As was established, the children born from war do not constitute a group that receives a lot of attention or help and people seem to not even think about them. Usually, quickly after this fact was recognized, the next argument would come, almost apologetically sounding: the country had many other problems. This can indeed not be denied. With a decentralised government, two different entities, a segregated school system, unemployment rate of approximately forty per cent (Brunwasser, 2011) and now a lack of a state government since elections in October 2010, there are indeed many other issues that need to be addressed. This is most certainly an argument I heard from a lot of my interviewees, as one of them commented that 'the problem with BiH now is that it's completely concerned and absorbed with surviving as a state'⁴². Four other interviewees agreed by saying that the country was overburdened with problems and that these children born from rape were just one of the categories of people who were traumatised and needed counselling or another form of help⁴³. Even though I can see the reasoning behind this, I was still surprised to hear this, since to me it seems that these children truly have immense problems, as they were not only born from a

⁴² Author's interview with Gorana Mlinarević.

⁴³ Author's interviews with Jasmina Redžepagić-Avdagić, Sabina Postrocki, Enisa Mešić and Maja Šarić.

horrific act, they now also have to struggle with an identity issue and apart from that, are one of the most neglected groups in society. Furthermore, it must be noted that even though not thinking about these children could still constitute as failing to notice it, by saying that many other issues need addressing, we are back to ignoring.

Here again, we can see the “agenda issue” coming up, but this time centred around the national NGOs. Besides the fact that the children born from war rape are seen as a relatively small group – though due to the lack of statistics, there is no way of really knowing – that is not the only group that deserves attention, there were some other reasons I heard that explained NGOs lack of focus on them in their projects and programmes. One of my interviewees stated that ‘I think it still has not been addressed really as a field that you can work on’ and that

‘the field of minorities has just started. [...] Activities in the field of Roma minorities, for example. You have lots of organisations dealing with that, but you hardly have any that are touching upon new stuff, because of the financial situation’⁴⁴.

This financial situation that not only she referred to, but many other interviewees as well, has to do with the donors’ funding. As was made clear before, the NGOs I spoke with mostly focused on social integration of marginalised groups, women, youth or supporting a dialogue within the community. What was conclusive from both my interviews with them and their websites, as well as from the previous chapter, is that the gross of their funding was received from large international organisations, embassies and foreign ministries. The issue with such foreign funders however is, that they only provide funds to NGOs based on certain criteria they have set and the NGOs have to adhere to. The main problem with this is that these funders are usually not well acquainted with the situation on the ground and therefore impose NGOs to work in fields that might not currently be in need of funding, leaving the staff without the possibility to provide input (Sejfića 2006: 134). In addition to this, an interviewee who works a lot with NGOs in BiH stated that funders tend to provide money for the so called “hot topics”, which basically means that money is provided according to what is trendy to be spending money on during that time⁴⁵, leaving the ones that do not comply without the necessary funds even though it could actually be an essential programme. When asking about this problem in my interviews, all interviewees were aware of this and agreed that it was a problem, but by far most of them claimed that their organisation was lucky and did not have to adapt

⁴⁴ Author’s interview with Judith Schulte.

⁴⁵ Author’s interview on 8 April 2011 with an anonymous woman who works for a large organization that shall also remain anonymous.

their programmes or projects to their funders' wishes. What has to be recognized in this respect though, is that I mostly spoke to well established NGOs, that have made a name for themselves and were situated in larger cities in the FBiH, which could account for their relative freedom in deciding their focus, especially since all their programmes and projects stayed close to their core issue of concern. This then poses the question whether or not local NGOs would be capable of presenting this category of children born from rape to their funders as a group in need of help and attention, or if the large international organisations should put it on the agenda: basically the debate between top down, or bottom up approaches.

4.4. Another silenced group

When considering the above, it is evident that there is a fine line between failing to notice something and intentionally ignoring it. Even though it might seem as if this particular topic is not noticed, the fact that people commented that there were plenty of other issues to deal with in the country, and the fact that there has been a movie concerning this that was widely viewed in the country, leads me to believe that perhaps the not noticing actually comes forth out of the silence, which is in fact intentional. In a similar way, though not completely fitting, I would like to draw a parallel to the issue of male victims of rape. Over the last decade and especially the last couple of years, there has been a huge upsurge in the amount of attention female victims of war receive, especially as victims of abuse and rape in conflict. UN Resolution 1325 for instance states that all women and girls must be protected from gender based violence and particularly rape, but men are not mentioned (UNSC 1325, 2000). UN Resolution 1820 also constantly mentions women and girls, but not males (2008). This lack of attention too is striking considering the fact that males are also often victims of rape.

In an article that recently appeared in *The Guardian*, it became clear that there are many male victims of rape currently in East Africa and the Congo, but throughout history, victims are also known to be found in other countries like Chile, Kuwait and the former Yugoslavia (Storr, 2011). The author of this article also reiterates the conspiracy of silence as both perpetrator and victim do not ever admit to what happened, considering the patriarchal societies that most of the victims live in. This topic at the same time is gravely under-researched and not addressed by any aid providing NGOs in the countries that their atrocities happened in (Ibidem), which includes male victims of rape in BiH. Only two of my interviewees mentioned the fact that there were male victims of rape in BiH and only one of them, Bakira Hasečić, said that she even had some male victims of rape who joined her association. The other one commented that 'this is the category we *definitely* do not talk about'.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Authors interviews with Bakira Hasečić and an anonymous woman working for an anonymous organization.

The article referred to above even claims that ‘a study of 6,000 concentration-camp inmates in Sarajevo found that 80% of men reported having been raped’ (Storr, 2011), which shows us how great the number in BiH is, and nothing being done about it. What struck me most about the article was the following statement made by the Refugee Law Project’s director in Kampala: ‘It’s systematically silenced. If you’re very, very lucky they’ll give it a tangential mention at the end of a report. You might get five seconds of: “Oh and men can also be the victims of sexual violence.” But there’s no data, no discussion’ (Ibidem), which pretty much sums up what is happening to the group of children born from war rape in BiH. I do not mean to imply that these two groups are exactly the same, after all: these men are direct rape victims whereas these children are secondary rape victims, which is a big difference. Moreover, the gender roles ascribed to men and women are very different and therefore so are societal reactions. What I do want to point out however, is that, even though this topic additionally needs to be researched further for me to really substantiate my claims, but from what I can tell so far, it seems as if my target group and the male rape victims share the fact that society and institutions are ignoring their problems. It seems that the awareness is there within certain circles, but is pushed back and is not acted upon due to the undesirability of addressing the issue, which then leads to both more silence and invisibility and probably also more unawareness.

4.5 Conclusion

If we now return to Zerubavel’s explanation of the intent behind not noticing things, or rather ignoring them, we must ask ourselves which one is really the case in BiH. Having reviewed the lack of attention given to the group in question by several powerful actors, it seems like the government does have its reasons to not to bring up the subject, whereas in the case of the media, the courts and the international community, I cannot be too sure. It is difficult to know what their reasons are for not covering this topic – and warrants further research – and therefore makes it almost impossible to say that all actors in power are actively ignoring this group, or whether they are truly failing to notice it. What is safe to say however, is that not everyone is unaware of the problems regarding my target group and by not acting upon this, silence is only reinforced and will continue to exist. In this way, it is strongly connected to the outcomes of the previous chapter. As this was the second part of the trilogy, the upcoming chapter will provide us with the third and final reason given to me by NGO staff about why they do not address this issue.

5. Victims should come forward

“If we're growing, we're always going to be out of our comfort zone.”

~

John Maxwell

5.1 Introduction

The last reason that my interviewees occasionally gave me for their non-involvement with children born from war rape, was that they were waiting for the victims themselves to come forward. This is made more complicated by the fact that while my main focus is on the children born from rape, it is almost impossible to see them as separate from their mothers – if they still live with them.

Considering the fact that most of these children do not know about their origins, as many people who work with rape victims told me, their mothers will not come forward with their stories. In case the children are in orphanages, there is a big chance that neither they, nor their care takers know about their origins, even though they could suspect something. Lastly, in case the child was adopted, there is an even bigger chance that they do not know and, depending on their living situation, could be better off this way. But if we examine why victims are not coming forward, in most cases we tend to come back to the situation of the mother and their children. Therefore, I would first like to explore why mothers and children do not come forward and ask for help and then connect this to the NGOs passive attitude towards the problem.

5.2 Reasons for not coming forward

As mentioned before, BiH is a very patriarchal society, in which rape is even a more sensitive subject than in other societies. This act is considered to be so horrible that it is too difficult to speak about. As a psychologist told me: ‘so dealing with that, sometimes, I’m not saying it’s good, but for a person to survive, it’s hard to see all that, it’s easier to deny and to avoid it’⁴⁷. However, Zerubavel thinks trauma is not the only factor that produces silence: ‘Indeed, most conspiracies of silence are generated by the two main reasons we actually use euphemisms, namely fear and embarrassment’ (2006: 6). Fear of society’s reaction and embarrassment over what happened may indeed be very strong motivators for women not to go public with their stories. This holds true especially if you regard his theory that silence comes from both ways: the generator of the silence does not speak about the elephant, whereas the recipient refrains from asking about it. This actually

⁴⁷ Author’s interview with Enisa Mešić.

holds true not only for the victim and the community, but also for the victim and her child. Zerubavel for instance claims that many Holocaust survivors do not tell their children about what they have gone through, because they think it is too painful to deal with and therefore keep it surrounded by silence (2006: 6). This is similar to what Vive Žene's director told me about one mother of a child born from rape: 'And she said to us openly that she will never tell him. But he knows, because everyone knows in the village, everyone in the school knows, and he knows he is...'⁴⁸. However, it appears as if he never directly confronts his mother with this knowledge, therefore keeping the silence between them. Even though this is just one case, several other interviewees that worked with these mothers and children told me that they think the children on some level know, as became clear throughout this text.

Why then, are these mothers, even in cases where their children are aware, not asking for help? Apart from what I discussed before, the denial and the silence surrounding them, there is another related concept that is applicable in this case, namely stigma. A large part of fearing society's response, in my opinion, comes from the stigma that is placed upon these mothers to an extent, but even more so on the children. Many of aforementioned academics who did research on the topic of children born from war mention the stigma that is on them (DeLaet 2007, Erjavec and Volčič 2010a, Daniel-Wrabetz 2007, R.Charli Carpenter 2000) and so did a couple of my interviewees.⁴⁹ However, where I see concepts as silence, denial and stigma connected to each other – perhaps because I immersed myself in the heart of this topic – Zerubavel does not mention the word "stigma" even once in his book. This struck me as odd, considering that a well known definition of stigma is 'the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance' (Goffman, 1963 cited in Barreto and Ellemers, 2010, p.431), which is closely connected to issues such as denial and silence. In the case of children born from war rape, you could most certainly say they are not completely socially integrated.

But what then is the reason for their stigmatization? After all, apart from having been born into this world, these children could not be judged for any of their actions during the conflict, as they were generally born during or after this. I was curious if this group therefore had the outcast status because they came forth of the violation of their mothers' bodies, or if it had more to do with their perceived mixed ethnicity. It is because of this question I asked myself, that I attempted to draw a parallel between them and children from mixed marriage in chapter II, from which became clear that people in BiH – or at least the people I interviewed - do not see similarities between these two

⁴⁸ Author's interview with Jasna Zečević.

⁴⁹ In five of my interviews, it was mentioned by the interviewee that there was a stigma on these children. These interviewees were with Maja Šarić, Enisa Mešić, Sabina Postrocki, Judith Schulte and Larisa Kasumagic.

groups of children. Therefore I thought it may have had less to do with the mixed status, but more with the fact that they were born from rape. However, the fact that these children are sometimes referred to as *Chetniks*, as showed from chapter I, shows that the identity issue truly is also of significance. Therefore, I was unable to find out which of the two weighed heavier on them, but it could also be the combination of the two that makes this a sensitive issue. However, I got the feeling that my interviewees themselves also had difficulties in deciding where the stigma came from. The director of Wings of Hope said that they have an identity issue because they are born from a perpetrator and a victim⁵⁰, but she did not mention the role of ethnicity in this. One of the teachers I spoke to said that, without wanting to compare people's suffering, she regarded the stigma of these children as any other kind of stigma, and that the concept itself should be addressed in general⁵¹. Taking into consideration these discrepancies in views on the stigmatization of these children, I think it might be very valuable to do a study on where exactly this stigma comes from, so that can also be addressed in a better way.

When looking at existing literature on stigmatization, one can see that a lot of research is done on the more "known" stigmatized groups, for instance people with HIV/AIDS, children who have a handicap, people who are black and rape victims. However, I could not find any study being done particularly on the origin of the stigma that children born from rape suffer from and ideas on how to address this. To me, this does seem to be crucial, because it has been said that 'a first aspect of the interactive nature of social stigmatization is that changes in the characteristics of the target as well as changes in the views held by the perpetrators can modify how and when prejudice is expressed' (Kaiser and Wilkins, 2010 cited in Barreto and Ellemers, 2010, p.435). However, I think it is safe to say that changes in views of the perpetrator of prejudice and stigma will not happen on its own, something must be done to make them change their perceptions. In a study done by Tarrant and Hadert, they discovered that when participants of the study read a scenario about a member of a stigmatised group telling about their experiences, the participants would empathise more with the target, which would then also lead to more positive attitudes towards that group (2010: 1635). I think it would be very interesting to do a study like this regarding my target group, considering there are of course specific circumstances surrounding them in the post-war society of BiH. Moreover, if this would also hold true for my target group, it could be used as a starting point for sensitizing society without having to make examples out of actual individuals. This would not only protect the victims' privacy, but would also confirm NGOs' role in initiating this, contradicting their current stance that those victims should come forward. However right now, this is still guess work and

⁵⁰ Author's interview with Maja Šarić.

⁵¹ Author's interview with Larisa Kasumagic.

therefore needs to be further researched as it could contribute greatly to future policies regarding these children born from rape.

5.3 Fear of the truth

Having determined that social stigma on these children exists and explored the ways of dealing with this, we are still left with the fact that currently, many children have not been told by their mothers about their origins, making them unable to ask for help. However, the fact that these children are growing up, getting older and start asking questions makes it more difficult for the mothers to keep their secret, leading to another greatly feared problem: how to tell them? As became clear in chapter I, most girls who found out about their origins had their world turned upside down in a negative way and did not have a chance to receive help with processing this new information. Vive Žene's director commented that

'Like you have any other books and professional articles written, like which intervention to use when she's raped or not, but there is no research in the world that discusses about the issue "when". If you have to tell, when to tell and how to tell. That is why everyone is avoiding that.'⁵²

Moreover, she pointed out that in the end it is the mother who decides if she will tell her child or not, so basically if she can find the strength to break the silence. It is this that some organisations are waiting for, as the program manager for Nansen Dialogue Centre told me: 'There is readiness in local CSOs to help, but everything depends on the will of the victims, it's up to them when they will start to talk. You can't force someone to tell'⁵³.

The academic tutor from the gender studies department told me that she did not consider the topic of rape itself as a taboo, and mentioned a study she had done to find out why the women who were raped did not like to talk about being raped:

'either they were tired because they were speaking to whoever wanted to listen to them immediately after they left the camps of imprisonment, but they were really abused by the media in the sense that their stories just went into the ether and they were never provided proper help in the sense of psychological assistance, something they would feel like justice. And another reason is that there are

⁵² Author's interview with Jasna Zečević.

⁵³ Author's interview on 20 April 2011 with Mustafa Cero, programme manager with Nansen Dialogue Centre Sarajevo.

other traumas connected to war in the family, so they just don't speak about war or their experiences.⁵⁴

These reasons were also mentioned by the programme manager of *Žene Ženama*, a women's organisation in Sarajevo⁵⁵. This does not reflect any fear of society's reaction, which gave me some hope, until I mentioned the children that were born from these rapes, to which Ms. Mlinarević immediately answered that that was indeed a taboo, because society did not know how to deal with that⁵⁶. If this is really the case, in my opinion this could be the cue for NGOs to help society deal with this, which will be further discussed in the next chapter.

Despite these findings that leave little to stay positive about, there are some cases in which both rape victims and their children are already getting some form of help. Confirmed from my interviews with the directors of *Vive Žene*, *Snaga Žene* and *Medica Zenica*, all three organisations provide not only psychological and psychosocial help to rape victims, but also to their children, even if in some cases these children are not completely aware of the underlying reasons for this. Bakira Hasečić, a rape victim herself who now heads the Association of Women Victims of the War in Sarajevo, told me that within her organisation, there are fifty-two women with children born from rape identified, and none of them have told their children about their origins, even though she says one boy probably suspects this. He was not accepted by his half brother and sister which was why he did not live with them, causing the association to help take care of them by providing clothes and money⁵⁷. So we can see that on a small scale and individual basis, these children are getting some help, though it is clear that this reaches only a few people.

This then leaves the children - either living with their mothers or in orphanages - who are aware of their origins, but are not receiving any help, like the ones from Erjavec and Volčič's study. Since in my study, it was hard to get any information about them and I did not personally speak to them, I cannot draw any conclusions on why they are not coming forward or seeking help from any organisation, although some of the reasons named earlier could be an influencing factor. Therefore, I think it is crucial to conduct more studies like the above one, specifically aimed at examining their views on what kind of help they would like and in which way to receive this, so that if any policies are adopted, they are not imposed from above but truly customized to the wishes of the victims.

⁵⁴ Author's interview with Gorana Mlinarević.

⁵⁵ Author's interview with Maria Theresa Maan Besic.

⁵⁶ Author's interview with Gorana Mlinarević.

⁵⁷ Author's interview with Bakira Hasečić.

5.4 Conclusion

Reviewing all the above, it brings us back to Zerubavel who believes that there must always be one person to break the silence, who then has to lead a whole group of conspirators to doing the same (2006: 61). It is clear that some NGOs assume that this is supposed to be done by the victims themselves, which would make them the whistle blowers of their own “public secret”. Since they are currently not doing this, perhaps it can indeed be said that the silence is produced by victims in the first place, but right now, it seems unrealistic that this will change anytime soon. To me, this appears to be because society is putting a stigma on them, that is keeping victims from breaking the silence. Therefore, it seems odd that NGOs are waiting around for victims to come forward, as they could possibly play a role in first addressing the stigma surrounding them, in order to give the victims a chance to break the silence. Having said that, the next and final chapter of this thesis will provide a look into the future, by examining in which way it would be best to deal with the children born from war rape and help them in a way that does not victimise them any more.

6. Future policies

"Desire is the starting point of all achievement."

~

Napoleon Hill

6.1 Introduction

After having reviewed the three most heard reasons from my interviewees for the lack of focus in their programs and projects, it is imperative that we look at the future. In my interviews, I asked my informants what they thought would be best for these children, based on their experience with working in such a complex post-conflict society. Should a dialogue be opened in society to sensitize people to this topic, or should the government initiate strategies to support these children? Would more media attention be desirable, like in the case of the movie *Grbavica*? Or should help be provided in small circles, on an individual basis and only in familial circles? Or should nothing be done while the country waits for the victims to come forward and ask for help? Is this likely to happen? When would be the best time to act on this? It all basically comes down to a simple question with an unimaginably difficult answer: where to go from here? I do not aim to pretend I have discovered all the right answers after this study, this chapter merely serves as an exploration of what could possibly be done to ensure this group of children receives more help and understanding from the society they live in, without hurting them in the process.

6.2 Desire for a policy?

To start, I think it is important to explore whether or not a policy by NGOs focused on children born from rape is actually wanted, since we first and foremost have to think about these children's wellbeing. One interviewee was very clear in her opinion about this: 'I think it is too early for them, even if they know, for insiders to try to talk about it. I suppose that it should pass a period of time, that they should become forty or fifty for them to start to talk about it publicly. [...] It is too private, too intimate, and according to me, too early'⁵⁸. However, she was only one of two⁵⁹ who was so adamant against outside meddling at this moment. Truthfully, the concern about their age and being vulnerable right now did come up in several interviews, but one can wonder whether their young and

⁵⁸ Author's interview with Svetlana Broz.

⁵⁹ The other being Judith Schulte, who also considered it to be too early to intervene.

influential age is a positive or a negative thing. This was also pondered by an anonymous woman who works for a large organisation that mostly deals with justice issues. Even though here she refers to the general process of dialogue and reconciliation, the thought behind it is striking: 'The more time goes by and the more time people live in their exclusive communities, the less incitement they have to actually make this dialogue work. So I don't know if time works for us or against us, right now I think against us'⁶⁰. According to Zerubavel, this makes sense as he reasons that the longer silence exists, the heavier it can become and the harder to break, as silence tends to be self-reinforcing (2006: 58).

If we merely look at what is good for these children, other NGO workers I spoke to were clear about the fact that now was the time to intervene and that we should no longer wait because as a journalist I spoke to told me, he saw no point in dealing with the issue of these children in fifty years, as they would be either very old or most likely dead⁶¹. The programme manager of the Nansen Dialogue Centre also agrees their young age is a positive thing 'because they are still in the process of development, physical and psychological development, and we have to intervene somehow'⁶². Moreover, apart from looking at why it would be positive to address this issue now, we must also look at the consequences of what will happen if the issue is not addressed in a timely manner. Zerubavel points out that while conspiracies of silence might offer some advantages in the short term, it often creates even bigger problems in the long run (2006: 79), as Vive Žene's director aptly explains:

'Because they will become drug abusers, they will become domestic violence perpetrators, criminals, because they have a problem, they have to have a problem, because they have trauma inside them. And if they don't heal that trauma, and their mothers', we will face a new problem. And a new problem could be a new war after twenty years again. Because then they will start to hate, to hate the people who raped their mothers, the people who killed their fathers, or whoever. So if we don't discuss this problem very very soon...'⁶³

Even though my main focus is on the wellbeing of the children born from rape, I also briefly want to examine the consequences of whether or not the issue is addressed on the society and its future. What effects do conspiracies of silence have on post-war countries, in this case, on BiH? The justice

⁶⁰ Author's interview with an anonymous woman with an anonymous large organisation.

⁶¹ Author's interview with Denis Dzidic.

⁶² Author's interview with Mustafa Cero.

⁶³ Author's interview with Jasna Zečević.

report journalist I spoke to was convinced that silence was never the answer. He explained about the situation in BiH after the second World War:

‘And if we learned anything, it is that the way the communist party dealt with that by saying “no, nothing happened” or “whatever happened, it’s just in the past and now we’re all equal” [...] doesn’t work. People need to feel that justice has been done, people need to feel that they’ve somehow reached an end where they’re recognised as victims, where there are memorials forever to stand, to see, that there are victims, and then they can move forward. Because if you don’t do the entire process, you can’t build anything on that, not a country, not a society, you’d just be fundamentally flawed and it would be shaky, and any time there’d be some political unrest, you’ll always have the possibility of it leading to conflict.’⁶⁴

The programme manager of a large women’s association in Sarajevo shared his idea, by saying ‘you’re resolving one issue from a part of the system, so solving it can help a lot, to change the whole system of BiH’⁶⁵. This shows that for society, it is also important to deal with silenced issues, if it wishes to build a strong foundation for the country’s future. However, one must remember that there will always be people unhappy with breaking the silence, as well as with people who break it. Carpenter reminds us that silence not only protects victims, but also perpetrators and that speaking about such things could actually help reduce the stigma they suffer from (2007: 14). But who would those people be, who would or should break the silence surrounding this topic? This is the question I will focus on now.

6.3 Initiators

In case it is deemed necessary to break the silence in order to address the issue, the question then is, who should do this? If help would be provided to these children, who should initiate that? I asked this question to my interviewees and as expected, I got quite a wide range of answers from them. Sabiha Husić, director of Medica Zenica was very clear about who she thought should address the issue of these children, namely NGOs, institutions and also international organizations together⁶⁶. Two of the youngsters I spoke to both commented as well that they thought it should be a joint effort of the government, NGOs, experts and the international community to make a difference⁶⁷. According to Zerubavel, to counteract silence, strength indeed lies in numbers since it is nearly

⁶⁴ Author’s interview with Denis Dzidic.

⁶⁵ Author’s interview with Maria Theresa Maan Besic.

⁶⁶ Author’s interview with Sabiha Husić.

⁶⁷ Author’s interview with Jasmin Panjeta and Aida Mutevelić.

impossible to ignore a combination of bodies speaking out, rather than just one organization or person (2006: 69). Moreover, when more actors join the minority, he predicts there will emerge a tipping point from where social pressure becomes so heavy that it outweighs the pressure to keep denying the elephant's presence. Even though I doubt that this last part of the theory will happen anytime soon in BiH, I do believe that many different factions are needed to have more of an influence.

However, other interviewees thought the government is the one responsible to act on this, as they are on the top level and responsible for everything that goes on in the country. Whether or not they actually would start this, is a whole different matter, as a lot of my interviewees severely doubted their motives and desire to act on this. But Vive Žene's director thinks there is also a special role for the international community to play in this, as they have a certain influence in the country:

'So the power that the international community has, is that they, our politicians, have to listen to them. So if they said "you have to start this topic, and for this topic you can consult, I don't know, Medica [Zenica], Vive Žene, Ministry of whoever". So that is the network that needs to be established between the international community [and the government]',⁶⁸,

a sentiment that was backed by the programme manager of Žene Ženama. Another informant however pointed out that the international community should not keep doing these things, as BiH would never learn to stand on their own feet, but also admitted that right now, they alone were probably incapable of starting anything from the grassroots level⁶⁹.

It must also be noted, with regards to the government, that up until now, they do not have the most impressive track record when it comes to implementing new laws or strategies concerning women's issues and gender based violence. According to Daniel-Wrabetz, the government claimed that these children must be doing fine, since they did not hear any messages that claimed otherwise (2007: 26). The three courts in the country that offer protected witness testimonies were implemented only on the urging of the international community⁷⁰ and according to an Amnesty International report, the government is failing to ensure sexual violence victims have access to the highest standards of mental and physical care, as well as neglect to provide NGOs with resources to offer these women psychological help (Amnesty International report 2010: 7).

⁶⁸ Author's interview with Jasna Zečević.

⁶⁹ Author's interview with Gorana Mlinarevic.

⁷⁰ Author's interview with Denis Dzidic.

This is not to say that the government should not be involved in initiatives regarding the children born from war rape, on the contrary, but I think we must be realistic in our expectations from such a government, that currently seems to be more occupied with the internal divisions in parliament than with stigmatized groups. Moreover, due to the sensitivity of the project, it can very well be the case that the government does not want to initiate anything regarding this, since one of the three parts of it would most likely have reason to prevent them from doing so⁷¹. Actually, as Zerubavel reminds us, there will always be opponents to breaking conspiracies of silence. Not only can the government choose not to break the silence itself, but it can also purposefully choose to ignore the ones that do try, because they are the ones in power (2006: 71). Perhaps this is why Ms Zečević suggested the international community urge them to act, so they are pressured into “unveiling the elephant”.

However, as multiple interviewees pointed out⁷², if you want society to be involved, the victims still would need to come forward so that the people around them would be able to grasp the struggles they go through, but only more silence comes from these women and children. Combining this with chapter V, in which it became clear that NGOs were waiting for victims to ask them for help, it becomes evident that victims themselves can also be seen as an important initiator.

6.4 Design of programmes and projects

I also asked my interviewees in case programmes or projects would be implemented, what these should look like? This holds a close connection to the previous part of this chapter, as the way something is approached obviously is dependent on the implementer. Therefore, some answers might seem obvious, though they are not less important in gauging their opinions on what is needed for these children.

A few of my interviewees⁷³ feel that these children should not be treated as an exclusive group, taking into account both their privacy and society’s reactions, but should be in outreach projects together with other children who have problems working through their issues and try to come to terms with them. However, if this is done, one must realise that the silence will not be broken and the way people in society view children born from rape will most likely not change. The

⁷¹ As mentioned before, not only the Bosnian Serb Army was responsible for the rapes, but they did have rape camps and are currently denying this, as stated in chapter IV. Moreover, the RS considers the Bosnian War Crimes Court to be partial in favor of Bosniaks and against Bosnian Serbs, as showed from the referendum they wanted to hold. Source: Ian Traynor, 2011. ‘Bosnia in worst crisis since war as Serb leader calls referendum’. *The Guardian*, 28 April. [Online] available at: <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/apr/28/bosnia-crisis-serb-leader-referendum>> [Accessed on 9 July 2011].

⁷² For instance Mustafa Cero, Goran Bubalo and Judith Schulte.

⁷³ For instance Sabina Postrocki, Jasmina Redžepagić-Avdagić and an anonymous girl.

same can be said for the ones who consider it to be best for these children to only receive psychological and psychosocial help, as the psychologist from Wings of Hope and the director of Snaga Žene think is best.⁷⁴ In a similar fashion, Denis Dzidic remarked that there are some things that only governments can provide, such as reparations for victims that he felt are necessary⁷⁵, something that is backed up by several other interviewees⁷⁶ and Mustafa Cero, who thinks the state should provide funding and a system of support for these children to overcome this critical period of their lives⁷⁷. He furthermore adds to this that ‘even if it’s some really small activity in some local community in BiH, but it’s a step forward. So we must not wait for others, we have to take things into our own hands, we have to work on it together’, even though he did not elaborate on what kind of activity he exactly envisaged.

Besides providing funding, the director of Vive Žene thought it to be important to bring this issue out in the open:

‘But you see, if you think of the benefit for the children, I think it will be better to discuss openly, because according to all this that we do and read all these years, anything that you suppress will come again to you.’⁷⁸

Even though she is not sure how this approach should be formulated, she is convinced that a network between several NGOs in BiH, the international community and the government has to be put in place, to discuss how to best deal with this. This is exactly how Medica Zenica’s director feels about the issue, as she also called for a strategy to be developed amongst local NGOs, institutions and also international organisations⁷⁹. TPO’s programme manager also thought a dialogue should be started in society to sensitize people, so they would be accepting of these children, but she was clear about the fact that no actual persons should be involved in this, in order to protect them⁸⁰. This last sentiment was echoed by a girl from the target group youth, who works for a children’s NGO. She furthermore suggested that a questionnaire or something should be held among the children who know of their origins, to see how they feel about it⁸¹, which I also suggested earlier.

⁷⁴ Author’s interview with Enisa Mešić and Branka Antić-Štauber.

⁷⁵ Author’s interview with Denis Dzidic.

⁷⁶ Author’s interviews with Bakira Hasečić and an anonymous woman.

⁷⁷ Author’s interview with Mustafa Cero.

⁷⁸ Author’s interview with Jasna Zečević.

⁷⁹ Author’s interview with Sabiha Husić.

⁸⁰ Author’s interview with Zilka Spahić-Šiljah.

⁸¹ Author’s interview with Aida Mutevelić.

6.5 Conclusion

To conclude, I think it is important to acknowledge that there is no single way to best handle this issue, most importantly perhaps because of the great diversity within the group children born from war rape. Due to their different circumstances, and different upbringings, I think it is of the utmost importance to be sensitive to this. In the end however, if the goal is breaking the silence, the issue – and its solving – needs to become part of public discourse, because only one or two people acknowledging the elephant cannot count as breaking conspiracy of silence (Zerubavel 2006: 62-63). One could argue that this is indeed the aim since a society needs to deal with its issues to create a stable foundation to build on, but it is also pertinent that research is done on whether these children, and when applicable their families, actually want this because their wellbeing comes first. Unfortunately, there is no evidence we can draw on to support or discourage making this subject publicly debatable, as this has not happened yet in any of the countries where children born from war rape make up part of the population. However, I do think Zerubavel has a good point when he claims that ‘in fact, we often view conspiracies of silence as far less threatening than the efforts to end them’ (2006: 78). One way or another, I think one of the few things that was agreed upon by my interviewees, is that these children – and their mothers – should receive adequate psychological help, as soon as possible, to help them cope with their situation. Most importantly, think that to be able to reach anything, one must have the will to start something.

Conclusion

Firstly, I have to make clear that this study in no way can be seen as a conclusive overview of NGOs view of and lack of focus on children born from war rape in BiH. This is evident from my lack of knowledge of the Bosnian language, the relatively small amount of interviewed NGOs and the fact that I only conducted my interviews in three cities in the FBiH. Moreover, I want to point out that a great deal more research is needed in order to gain a better understanding of the vast problems surrounding these children, as I made clear throughout my thesis. Having said that, I do think my study can make a humble contribution to existing knowledge and perhaps be a starting point from which other scholars can build, adjust and perfect the theories, thoughts and ideas that I have come up with and are reflected in this thesis.

As stated before, drawing conclusions about these children and possible ways to improve the quality of their lives, is made increasingly difficult by the lack of statistics on them, great variety of their living situations and their awareness of their origins. Not only are they judged by the society around them and suffer from that, they also have severe psychological problems as a consequence of becoming aware of their origins, as showed from Erjavec and Volčič's study. Moreover, interviewees from NGOs who worked with children born from war rape stated that even if they did not know, they also were aware that something was not right and often suffered from physical abuse and/or had psychological problems.

When it dawned on me that no NGO in the FBiH actually had a specific focus in any of their programmes or projects on these children, I became curious about their reasons. Of course I assumed it was because of the highly sensitive nature of this, but considering the fact that there were in fact organisations that helped women who were raped – and were known for this – I thought there might be more to it. I was able to categorise the answers I got from the people who worked at the NGOs into three main reasons, that together seem to have caused – and still maintain – this lack of focus on this particular group. The first one, which is the most obvious one, is the silence that surrounds these children. This silence is purposefully maintained by both the victims and the society and thrives from the denial of the issue at hand. This has led to the topic becoming a taboo, which has become a reason for NGOs to avoid the subject: it seems they do not want to be the ones who break this silence. However, in a way, if imagined as an egg shell, the conspiracy of silence has already shown a little crack. By having produced the movie *Grbavica*, attention was drawn to the fact that there were children born from rapes in a very public way, making it difficult to ignore the issue. However, since nobody capitalized on the captured attention, it disappeared again with no signs of

resurrection. In my opinion, it did show that it is possible to break this silence, perhaps for good, as long as it is done in a careful and well planned and executed way.

The second reason seemed to be in slight contrast with the first one, namely that the group just went unnoticed. Some NGO representatives commented that they had not thought about these children in years before I came to interview them, and others seemed to be preoccupied with the groups they were already supporting and incorporating in their programmes and projects. This can partly be explained by the lack of focus on these children by other bodies such as the media, the War Crimes Court and to some extent, the international community as well. However, whether their lack of focus on this group is intentional ignorance or not is difficult to say and warrants another research study. However, a few interviewees commented that they did not think that these children specifically should be a priority to receive some help, as there were many more issues that deserved NGOs' attention. This clearly shows that for several bodies, it might just be easier to leave well enough alone and not attempt to think of a strategy to help these children, which goes back to an unwillingness to break the silence again.

The last reason that some of them gave to me, was that they thought the initiative should come from the victims themselves – mothers or children. Even though this reasoning is difficult to explain according to Zerubavel's theory, it is clear that NGOs place the ball in the victims' court and expect them to break the silence when they are ready. However, it can also be said that the reason these women – and their children – stay silent, is for fear of stigmatisation. Therefore, even though it might be the victims' task to break the silence, NGOs could at least address the societal stigma on them. This does not mean that some women and their children have not received psychological help yet from various women's organisations, but this has certainly not reached the majority of them. Having taken these answers into consideration, it dawned on me that the more I knew about the topic, the harder it became to say something sensible about it. Even the answers I got regarding what they thought would be best for this children were ambiguous, although it can be said that most of them by far agree that psychological help should be offered to them.

This, however, brings us back to the even more difficult question, whether or not the issue should be publicly debatable. Many have expressed their concern over the wellbeing of these children if the topic were to receive more attention, particularly keeping in mind that they might be re-traumatised. This is only made more difficult by the fact that by far, not all children born from rape know about their origins and a lot of people seem to think it is better for them not to know. I want to make clear that I am not suggesting that these children should suddenly all be told the painful truth, but I do want to point out that these children are reaching an age where they begin to ask more and more questions about their heritage and it will become increasingly difficult to keep

lying to them. In my opinion, if these children come to find out, it is essential that they are taken care of in an appropriate way and that there are people ready to step in and help them overcome their trauma. However, at the moment, not only are both the state and the NGOs unable to provide the necessary mental help for all these victims at the moment, but is society also still not accepting these children as true victims.

Therefore, I consider it to be essential for several NGOs who have experience in dealing with the mothers and their children and those who are motivated to become involved to come together to think about a strategy on how to deal with this issue as they are the ones who know best what is helpful. However, I am aware of the fact that NGOs will need both support and funding in order to make any kind of real difference and would therefore need to involve the international community and/or the state government, which is also the more tricky part. Part of the strategy should entail sensitizing the society to the issue of children born from war rape, without revealing their identities to ensure their privacy. Moreover, we must remember that even though these children are often linked to their mothers, they are in fact separate victim groups with different problems and needs and we should treat them accordingly.

By presenting my recommendation like this, I realise it might come across as simplistic, but I am certainly aware of the fact that this is anything but simple. Having said that, I do believe that in order for a society to become healthy and well functioning again, it needs to have addressed all the issues that are present within its borders. Moreover, for a stigmatized group to feel like full and worthy citizens, they need not only be accepted by themselves and their family, but also by society as a whole, even though this will most likely be a long term process. The biggest challenge then to me seems to be to find a few brave souls who are willing to penetrate the vicious circle of silence so that the proverbial elephant can start to shrink and hopefully, in time, disappear.

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