



Not Supposed to be Born? Narratives of Unwanted Pregnancy, Impossible Motherhood, and Children Born of War Rape in Germany and Bosnia and Herzegovina¹

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Abstract

This article examines the intergenerational impact of sexual violence in conflict zones by drawing from two published literary narratives—the German wartime diary by Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin*, and the novel based on women’s testimonies of war rape and unwanted pregnancies in Bosnia by Slavenka Drakulić, *S.: A Novel About the Balkans*—in addition to published testimonies and unpublished interview data by children born of war rape (CBOWR) in Germany and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Applying feminist narrative analysis, the authors demonstrate the situation of “impossible motherhood” and the experiences of children who were not supposed to be born. The article focuses on the narrative process marked by trauma but also by agency and resilience to challenge dominant stories of war and unwanted pregnancy following rape in armed conflict. The authors propose a resolution for tensions around the ethnic and national identity of CBOWR along what they call maternal lineage as opposed to the imposition of the children’s stigmatized paternal heritage.

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Introduction

The appearance of American second-wave feminist Susan Brownmiller's blockbuster, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* coincided with agitation for women's reproductive rights and opposition to American involvement in a war that encompassed the rape and murder of Vietnamese civilians as well as the birth of Vietnamese children fathered by American soldiers (Brownmiller 1975). Significantly, Brownmiller held that in peacetime and wartime, rape is a traumatic experience common to women, rape in wartime is a magnification of rape in peacetime, and the sequelae of rape, apart from injury, disease, and death, are unwanted pregnancy, abortion, and the birth of children. In a recent article on the use of sexual violence in the current war in Ukraine, acclaimed Croatian writer and feminist Slavenka Drakulić reiterates some of Brownmiller's findings, emphasizing that in armed conflict, rape is used as a weapon of war (Drakulić 2022). Drakulić establishes a parallel between Ukraine and two earlier episodes of sexual violence in conflict zones, namely the mass rape during the war in former Yugoslavia, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina² during the early 1990s, and the rape of German women at the end of WWII.³ Between 1992 and 1995 in war-torn multi-ethnic Bosnia, the Serbian-led Yugoslav army aided by local Serb militia engaged in ethnic cleansing that included the systematic mass rape and forced impregnation of primarily Bosniak (Muslim) women (Schwartz and Takševa 2020; Skjelsbaek 2012; Snyder et al. 2006; Stiglmayer 1994). At the time, the spotlight on Bosnia brought renewed focus on the mass rape of German women at the end of WWII, primarily by members of the Red Army, which was controversial, given Germany's war guilt and responsibility for the Holocaust (Gebhardt 2015b; Grossmann 1995, 2011).

This article invokes these two episodes in twentieth-century European history using a selection of narratives to analyze the complex interplay of victimization and stigmatization on the one hand and agency and resilience on the other. The authors examine the far-reaching personal and social consequences of sexual violence against women in conflict zones, with an emphasis on unwanted pregnancy, abortion, and children born of war rape (CBOWR). These themes are introduced through an analysis of two published literary narratives of war rape from the perspective of the women—the German wartime diary by Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin* (1954), and a novel based on the survivors' testimonies in Bosnia by Drakulić, *S.: A Novel About the Balkans* (1999)—and through published and unpublished first-person narratives from elderly (in the case of Germany) and young adult (in the case of Bosnia) CBOWR. While the specific categories to which these narratives belong may differ, they can all be subsumed under the umbrella term “life writing” as defined by Suzette Henke, who expands the category traditionally limited to autobiography to include memoirs, diaries, and letters but also various “personally inflected fictional texts” (Henke 1998, xiii). Taken together, these narratives shed light on the intergenerational impact of sexual violence in the context of what Yana Hashamova describes as “impossible motherhood” (Hashamova 2012, 214). This concept wrestles with the tension between what the authors of this article call maternal lineage versus paternal heritage, thereby giving rise to the contested identities of CBOWR and the possibility of a solution

²Hereafter referred to as “Bosnia” for brevity's sake.

³Similar to Drakulić, Daina S. Eglitis also draws on the legacy of these two episodes of sexual violence in conflict to explain the use of rape as a strategy of war used by the Russian forces in Ukraine (Eglitis 2022).

beyond the lines of ethnic and national divisions surrounding their existence. Regardless of the different historical contexts and the decades that separate these two episodes of sexual violence in war as well as the generational gap between the two groups of CBOWR, the similarities revealed in the narratives are remarkable.⁴

Methods and Methodologies

As feminist scholars, the authors of this article seek to capture what is remembered, what is put into words, and what is left out of the narratives in order to understand how the narrators construct an image of an acceptable self that gives them agency over loss but also over dominant patriarchal discourses about war, violence, and ethnic and national identity. In addition to the published literary narratives in the English translations of Anonymous and Drakulić, a personal testimony—*mundtot* by Jürgen Schubert published in German—, a published collection of first-person narratives translated from German into English as *Thistleflowers – Russian Children in Germany* by a collective of the same name, and interview data from Bosnian CBOWR available online were used. Finally, open-ended, semi-structured life history interviews (Woods 2010) with some members of *Thistleflowers (Distelblüten)* were conducted in German between 2016 and 2017 by one of the authors of this article (Schwartz). They were recorded, transcribed, and translated into English with the participation of other research team members. The broadly formulated interview questions allowed the participants to tell their stories on their terms and self-identify as they wished. The interviews met the requirements of the University of Ottawa’s Research Ethics Board. All data are used in a way that strictly respects the participants’ consent.

The authors base their method of interpretation on a combination of feminist oral history and narrative methodology. Feminist oral history emphasizes the importance of valuing women’s experiences in a patriarchal cultural context that has historically silenced and controlled their voices (Anderson and Jack 1991). According to Marianne Hirsch, it is about restoring “experiences and life stories that might otherwise remain absent from the historical archive” (Hirsch 2012, 15). In order to access those stories, feminist researchers need to engage in “listening with the third ear” (Anderson and Jack 1991, 19) to better comprehend how difficult experiences may be avoided or expressed indirectly in a narrative. In analyzing such narratives, one must focus both on the “whats” and the “hows” of the narrative process. Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein define the “whats” as the content and the themes encompassed by the narrative, while the “hows” are the ways through which the experiences related in the narrative are formulated (Gubrium and Holstein 2009, 7). Despite the various narrative forms examined, the narratives are united by the fact that they are rooted in difficult memories around which “the will to tell a story cannot be taken for granted” and where “one can also easily think of situations where the facts of the narration are too painful or traumatic for direct expression” (Slembrouck 2015, 247). Therefore, listening with the third ear enables the researcher to understand the complex narrative interplay of trauma and loss but also resilience and survival.

⁴As other scholars have demonstrated, rape in war is a complex phenomenon and may not necessarily be used as a strategy in every episode of armed conflict (Kulick 2022; Wood 2010). However, regarding both WWII (Beavor 2002; Mühlhäuser 2017; Roberts 2008) and the war in Bosnia (Allen 1996; Snyder et al. 2006), it has been repeatedly argued that rape was used as a weapon of war, and the same has been said for numerous other episodes of armed conflict as well. The aim of this article, however, is not to further theorize sexual violence in war.

Rape as a Weapon of War, CBOWR, and Impossible Motherhood

The mass rape of women in Bosnia and Rwanda in the 1990s heightened global awareness of sexual violence against women in conflict zones and its use as a weapon of war, perpetrated to violate the collective body of the enemy (Card 1996; Ivekovic and Mostov 2002; Seifert 1996). While rape in war had already been considered a war crime in WWII (albeit with few penalties for the perpetrators), it was at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY 1993-2017) that for the first time, war rape was included as a crime against humanity. Feminist interventions into the ICTY and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR 1994–2015) helped define rape as a means of perpetrating genocide through the interplay of misogyny, ethnic hatred, and racism in the systematic mass rape and forced impregnation of women (Schwartz and Takševa 2020). However, some researchers criticized the “homogenising narrative of rape as an instrument of the genocide” (Buss 2009, 160) and the ways in which it reinforced gender and ethnic stereotypes along the victim and perpetrator line (Simic 2012).

Although the definition of rape came under scrutiny in recent years—as it can mean oral, vaginal, or anal penetration with a body part or an object and may or may not involve coercion, violence, or the threat of violence (Branche and Virgili 2012; Močnik 2018)—and it could be complicated by what Anna Hájková (2013) calls “sexual barter”, the authors’ attention is on one of the main outcomes of wartime sexual violence: unwanted pregnancies and CBOWR.⁵ Estimates of rape-related pregnancies are usually in the five percent range (Gebhardt 2015a) but may be higher (Lee 2017). Although abortion may be legal in some countries in wartime, contraception and/or abortion services are often unavailable, illegal, or difficult to obtain in a timely fashion from medical personnel, making women especially vulnerable to an unwanted pregnancy resulting from rape (Seto 2013; Swiss and Giller 1993).

CBOWR is a subcategory of children born of war (CBOW), and according to researchers studying the intergenerational impact of sexual violence against women in conflict zones, it needs special consideration. While both categories of children face stigmatization and rejection (Carpenter 2007, 2010; Lee 2017; Lee, Glaesmer, and Stelzl-Marx 2021; Lee and Mochmann 2015; Satjukow and Gries 2015; Stelzl-Marx and Satjukow 2015), CBOWR face additional challenges given their violent conception (Glaesmer 2015; Roupetz, Delic, and Glaesmer 2021; Schwartz 2020). In the words of Virginia M. Bouvier: “There is a tremendous knowledge gap surrounding the issue of children born of conflict-related sexual violence, and even less public policy to address the needs of these children” (Bouvier 2016, 8). The derogatory names applied to CBOWR in diverse conflicts—“Russian brat” in Germany or “Chetnik bastard” in Bosnia—signal the discrimination they face in common but also the patriarchal premium on what we call paternal heritage that is used by their mothers’ ethnic community to obscure, deny, or even obliterate their maternal lineage. The longstanding belief that paternity alone is responsible for the transmission of identity ethnicizes and nationalizes rape, setting CBOWR apart from the ethnic identity of the mother (Močnik 2020).

⁵Similar research on men and boys has grown significantly in recent years (Clark 1996; Gebhardt 2015a; Touquet and Gorris 2016). However, the authors’ focus in this article is only on women.

The stigmatized paternity of CBOWR defies the idea of nations as ethnically homogenous and works to abort CBOWR from an ethnically “pure” national body. CBOWR can be subjected to infanticide, abandonment, institutionalization, maternal neglect, or adoption. Like their mothers, they can be rejected by their communities, their sense of belonging may be questioned, and their well-being compromised (Lee 2017; Mochmann 2017; Roupetz, Delic, and Glaesmer 2021). In her exploration of Drakulić’s *S.: A Novel About the Balkans*, Hashamova asserts that mothers who raise such children are trapped in a situation of impossible motherhood. The term itself may sound misleading as it could suggest that mothering CBOWR is inevitably an impossible task to accomplish, which is not always the case. What is implied in impossible motherhood is rather the struggle of loving one’s own flesh and blood because it is othered as the child of an ethnic “ultimate Other” (Hashamova 2012, 241) and due to the strong social pressures to reject and abandon children fathered by the enemy. The authors suggest that one possibility of resolving this difficult situation for both mother and child is to circumvent the patriarchal significance placed on paternity. The acceptance of maternity, albeit reluctant, can be accomplished only by the psychological and, eventually, legal erasure of the child’s paternal heritage and the mother’s and child’s sole identification with the child’s maternal lineage. This process, however, is a daunting task to the point of making mothering CBOWR almost unfeasible. Nena Močnik elaborates on the impossibility of impossible motherhood for Bosnian women rape survivors and their CBOWR. The women’s struggle between their identity as a “*war-rape survivor*, on the one hand, and *a mother*, on the other” (italics in the original) (Močnik 2020, 4) is exacerbated when they are unable to count on any emotional support, receive neither reparations nor public recognition, or are perceived to have been “sexually disgraced” (Močnik 2020, 56).

Mothers of CBOWR and CBOWR themselves both risk being marked in terms of personal identity exclusively as casualties of war, and their plight can be instrumentalized for a host of reasons (i.e. to render defeated nations as more victim than victimizer, bring perpetrators to court, or demand justice and reparations) (Helms 2013; Močnik 2018, 2019). Both mothers and children walk a tightrope between silence and speech, victim and survivor, passivity and agency as opposed to following, individually or collectively, heavily mediated and over-determined scripts of victimhood (Schwartz and Takševa 2020). While some demonstrate extraordinary resilience, it should not be downplayed that they often experience palpable traumatic outcomes affecting their physical and mental well-being across generations (Močnik 2020).

A Woman in Berlin and S.: A Novel About the Balkans

The selected two narratives from the German and Bosnian contexts, respectively, illustrate how sexual violence in conflict zones affects the women and the choices they face in dealing with its undesired outcomes, first and foremost, unwanted pregnancy and, subsequently, CBOWR. Through these narratives, the authors introduce and contextualize the themes discussed in this article. One of the best-known literary narratives dealing with wartime rape and its consequences is *A Woman in Berlin* by Anonymous. The diary was first published in English in 1954 and in German in 1959 (after being translated into several languages) and republished

in Germany posthumously in 2003.⁶ It has been called “one of the most important personal accounts ever written about the effects of war and defeat” (Beevor 2005, xxi) and was used by Max Färberböck as the basis for his homonymous 2008 feature film *Anonyma – Eine Frau in Berlin*. However, despite this narratives’ relevance, the author’s credibility “was disputed, an all-too-common pattern in dealing with rape victims” (Gebhardt 2016, 12).

Nazi Germany had conducted a ferocious campaign on the Eastern front that included German troops’ mass rape of women and the annihilation of Jews, Slavs, and Communists (Mühlhäuser 2010, 2017). By early January 1945, the Red Army’s counteroffensive had turned the tide of war. The author depicts the shelling, deprivations, and mass rape after the Red Army occupied Berlin in late April 1945, some weeks before the capitulation of Germany. The women of Berlin tremblingly await the Soviet army as their arrival is preceded by numerous accounts of rape—some by survivors who fled to Berlin—on the Eastern front. Soviet soldiers are configured as rapacious “wolves,” ignorant “Ivans,” and drunken “Mongols,” reflecting years of racialized Nazi anti-Soviet propaganda (Grossmann 1995b, 50). Anonymous is surprised to find a Russian-made condom in a room she was cleaning, admitting she “didn’t know they [Russians] even knew there were such things. In any case, where German women were concerned, they didn’t feel it was worth the trouble” (Anonymous 2005, 158). Although she is convinced that she will not become pregnant, rumours circulate that “every second woman is,” followed by the reassurance that “you could go to anyone and have it taken care of,” (195) implying the existence of abortion providers who may or may not be medical personnel. The narrative leaves a gap, however, as to whether the narrator herself may eventually fall among the high percentage of women who became pregnant against their will.

The diarist decides to protect herself from random attacks and humiliations by attaching herself to a Soviet major. Their personal relationship may be categorized as sexual barter as it shields Anonymous from the predations of other soldiers and allows her access to much-needed resources while providing the major with the company of an educated woman. Toward the end of the diary, Anonymous, contrary to her earlier optimism regarding the improbability of pregnancy, visits a doctor who confirms that her period is late. The doctor attributes her late period to the fact that she, like many other malnourished women in wartime, may be calorie deficient and clouds the answer to Anonymous’s question whether she provides abortions for pregnancies resulting from sexual violence in ambiguity: “It is better not to speak of such things” (246). In this brief episode, the narrator is likely an unreliable one. Is it the doctor trying to shroud wartime abortions in silence, or is it the narrator herself who diverts the reader’s attention from a suspicion of unwanted pregnancy brushed off under the rationalization of calorie deficiency? After all, how could have numerous other calorie-deficient women become pregnant? It could well be that Anonymous was pregnant and that the doctor performed an abortion on her, but admitting to it would have been taboo even for this unusually frank narrative. Hence the innuendo: “It is better not to speak of such things.”

More than half a century after the end of WWII and the publication of Anonymous’ diary, Drakulić published *S.: A Novel About the Balkans*, which also thematizes rape in war and

⁶ The authors of this article respect the author’s wish to refer to herself as Anonymous although a German journalist made her alleged identity public following the posthumous new edition of the diary (Schwartz 2015).

unwanted pregnancy but within the context of the war in Bosnia. While the collapse of the Soviet Union led to the peaceful unification of divided Germany, the politically independent Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was heading for a bloody breakup. Following years of ethnic hatred propagated by the media during the 1980s, women's bodies, along with abortion rights, became discursively manipulated in the creation of nationalist body politics (Schwartz and Takševa 2020; Žarkov 2007). The brutal war that erupted in 1991 was fuelled by diverging political interests and tainted by ethnic cleansing that included mass rape perpetrated by all warring parties (Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks). Serbian nationalist forces carried out the largest number of atrocities, particularly against Bosniaks. Part of this strategy was the systematic use of rape and forced impregnation (Allen 1996; Sharrat 2011). Rape camps were established in hangars and other buildings (Rajiva and Schwartz 2018) where, according to various estimates, between 25,000 and 40,000 Bosniak women were imprisoned, tortured, and raped, many of whom were released only after their pregnancies had progressed beyond the possibility of a safe abortion.⁷

These historical events are explored in Drakulić's fictionalized account of real-life stories in *S: A Novel About the Balkans*. The author chose the novel as a literary form so that readers could identify more closely with a central character constructed as a composite of narratives by women and girls who later testified about their own rapes (Kabić 2012). A feature film directed by Juanita Wilson, based on the novel and entitled *As if I Am Not There* (following closely the Croatian title of the novel, *Kao da me nema*), was released in 2010. Whereas the prospect of CBOWR hovers ominously in the background of *A Woman in Berlin*, it is realized front and centre in *S*. The first two sentences of the novel read: "The child is lying naked in his cot. He is stretched out on a sheet, perfectly still, his arms and legs splayed, like someone surrendering" (Drakulić 1999, 1). The story is told in flashbacks. Like Anonymous, S. is an educated, single, working woman. Originally from multiethnic Sarajevo, she is a teacher in a small Muslim village in Bosnia when Serbian soldiers attack, round up the inhabitants and take them to a camp. Many men and boys are killed, whereas the women and girls are imprisoned. Some, including S., are placed in a "woman's room" (8) and selected daily for gang rape, torture, and beatings. Some disappear from the camp and are presumed dead. Although the context in which the rapes happen is very different from the one in Berlin, the women in both situations are locked into a space from which there is no escape. In *S*., it is the camp, whereas for Anonymous and her neighbours, it is their apartment building and the occupied city where hiding from the rapist soldiers is rendered virtually impossible. In either scenario, the women are reduced, as argued by Holger Pötzsch, drawing on Giorgio Agamben's concept of "bare life," to bodies that become "disposable objects that can be mistreated or killed without legal consequences for the perpetrator" (Pötzsch 2012, 20). S. believes initially that she will be spared because of her ethnic Serb mother, but she soon grasps that she is considered Muslim because her father is Bosniak. Here is clear proof of the overvaluation of paternity; despite the fact that S. self-identifies also through her maternal lineage, in the eyes of her ethnically divided community, the latter is rendered irrelevant. Unlike the situation in *A Woman in Berlin*, where the rapists are from another country and culture, S. recognizes a few of the Serbian soldiers as former neighbours

⁷ Some research data indicate that Croatian and Serbian women in Bosnia were also sexually abused and subjected to forced impregnation (Helms 2013; Stiglmayer 1994).

who speak her own language, reinforcing the extent of the collapse of civil society during the Bosnian conflict.

Comparable to Anonymous, S. deliberately seeks out a relationship with a high-ranking soldier—the camp’s commander—as a safeguard against sexual violation by others. Although she calls it a form of self-preservation, she, too, remains conflicted about her actions of sexual barter. Like Anonymous, S. believes she cannot become pregnant because she and the other women stopped menstruating due to calorie deficiency, torture, and abuse. Yet when the camp is emptied in a prisoner exchange and she becomes a refugee, first in Zagreb and subsequently in Stockholm, the Croatian doctor who examines her confirms that not only is she pregnant but that, despite the abortion policies that were still in place at the time, her pregnancy is too advanced for a safe abortion. S. feels that the war continues in her womb, which no longer belongs to her. She develops no connection to the child growing inside her; she does not consider it her own and refers to it as a burden, a tumour, a disease, a parasite she carries as if she were “*a mere receptacle, temporarily housing it, like a rent-a-womb*” (italics in the original) (145). The paragraph from which this quotation, rendered in italics, is taken is written in first person. This technique is used in places throughout the narrative, suggesting that Drakulić incorporated the words of actual survivors. Although the two episodes of war rape thematized in *A Woman in Berlin* and in *S.* are separated historically, temporally, and geographically as well as being set in their distinctive cultural contexts, the treatment of women in times of conflict and the consequences they face are very similar.

All S. can think about throughout this unwanted pregnancy is for the child to be stillborn, a subconscious desire for infanticide. F., one of S.’s roommates at the refugee camp in Zagreb, kills her newborn by pressing the pillow over the little body. While S. does not see a future “for a being conceived by force, in hatred” (144), she resists the temptation to do the same, having “seen so much death that the very thought of it makes her sick” (5). Initially agreeing to an adoption at the Stockholm hospital where she gives birth, she decides to keep her infant son after noting his strong resemblance to her presumably murdered sister. By the end of the narrative, she surmises that only mothers can decide the future of such children, not their absent rapist fathers. She promises to tell her son that he is “her child, hers alone. That he has no father – because this is the truth” (199), reinforcing their bond by breastfeeding him. According to Hashamova (2012), the embrace of these “manic defences” (241) is intended to erase psychologically the child’s paternity (what the authors of this article call paternal heritage), theoretically permitting S. to meet the challenges of impossible motherhood. The agency and resilience she is capable of tapping into despite the trauma haunting her come from the realization that she, a woman who has survived incredible violence, also has the power to show her own flesh-and-blood son “that the hate from which his life emerged can be transformed into love” (Drakulić 1999, 199). While it is difficult for the mother to disentangle her love for her son from the trauma surrounding his conception, the mother-child bond becomes the means through which the maternal lineage serves to identify the child.

Abortion Policies in Germany and Former Yugoslavia

In order to better contextualize the choices the women in the two above narratives face, one ought to understand the respective abortion policies that were in place in Germany and Yugoslavia at the time. In Germany, it is estimated that between 860,000 and two million

women may have been raped by members of the Red Army but also by the Western Allies – American, Canadian, French, and British forces (Gebhardt 2015b, 2019; Grossmann 2007; Lilly 2007; Sander and Jahr 1991-92). Despite a ban against “fraternization” with the enemy, sexual violence as well as consensual relationships and sexual barter were common, and while marriages in the Soviet zone were not possible, in the American zone, thousands of legal marriages were contracted (Goedde 1999). Whether through rape, sexual barter, or consensual romantic relationships—and despite a high rate of abortions—thousands of children were born.

The basis for the German statute regarding abortion originated in the 1851 Prussian Civil Code, outlawing all forms of abortion; it was adopted into the Imperial Penal Code of the German Empire in 1871 as Paragraph 218 and remained in effect post-WWI under the Weimar Republic (Telman 1998). While a constitutional revision in 1926 made limited revisions, permitting abortions under the strict medical indication of “endangerment to life,” all other rationalizations of abortions, including advertising of services, remained criminalized until the end of WWII (Grossmann 1995a, 8). In Nazi Germany, pro-natalist measures encouraged healthy Aryan German women and men to breed for the Fatherland. Access to sterilization and abortion services narrowed over time, and occasionally, the death penalty for abortionists was implemented (Bock 1983; Grossmann 1995a). However, racial hygiene laws not only interdicted sexual intercourse between so-called Aryan Germans and Jews but encouraged compulsory sterilization and abortion as well as euthanasia for the mentally and physically disabled, Jewish, Roma, and mixed-race populations. However, all these measures did not stop the rape of Jewish, Roma, and Slavic women by German troops (Burds 2009; Hedgepeth and Saidel 2010; Mühlhäuser 2017).

Pregnancies resulting from sexual contact between Allied soldiers and German women toward the end and in the immediate aftermath of WWII introduced a “foreign” element into the German population (Grossmann 1995b, 49). Of particular concern were children fathered by African Americans, although the same was true for children fathered by the Soviets (Brauerhoch 2015; Stelzl-Marx 2009). Various priorities intersected in the debate over the legalization of abortion. Women’s organizations called for the distribution of birth control and the introduction of a social indication into abortion legislation (Grossmann 1995a). Protestant leaders deemed abortion permissible to prevent the birth of foreign children in Germany, while the Catholic church remained staunchly opposed to the practice (Schmidt-Harzbach 1984). Access to abortion varied by region. In Bavaria (which was in the American military occupation zone), it was not only restricted by the stronghold of the Catholic church but was also forbidden by the US military government. In August 1945, the Bavarian government legalized abortion under strict medical necessity. However, by the end of 1946, abortions were only allowed if a rape could be proven and was reported within a week, but compliance with these logistical requirements was often unmanageable (Gebhardt 2015b). In the Soviet zone, the situation was more liberal. In Berlin, as of May 1945, doctors could approve abortion into the late stages of pregnancy if the woman filled out an affidavit certifying she had been raped by a foreigner. Women were required to describe their attacker, emphasize his ability to overpower them, and explain that they tried to resist (Fehrenbach 1998). A Berlin doctor recalled: “women came to me, and I helped them. Other colleagues did so as well. They weren’t reported, they weren’t written down. These abortions were done and no one asked any questions” (Schmidt-Harzbach 1984, 60). This echoes the experience of Anonymous and her conversation with the doctor. Illegal abortions and, especially in rural settings, home remedies remained the most (even if not the most reliable) accessible option for women seeking to end a pregnancy, far outnumbering

legal or quasi-legal abortions in all occupational zones. However, objections and legal restrictions on abortion soon re-emerged (Grossmann 1995a).

Unlike Germany, in Yugoslavia, abortion was legal as per medical indication since 1929 (Kingdom of Yugoslavia). Post-WWII, socialist Yugoslavia expanded this regulation rendering it available upon request. In 1969, abortion became freely available in the first trimester and was permissible at any stage of pregnancy related to the endangerment of the woman's life. Yet it was the 1974 Constitution that formally enshrined access to contraception and fertility regulation, making the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia the first state to affirm it was "a human right to decide freely on childbirth" (Kapor-Stanulović and David 1999, 296-97).

The eruption of the war in Bosnia brought special provocations to established sexual health norms. Unlike in WWII Germany, forced impregnation and imprisonment past gestational limits for an abortion were intentional on the part of the perpetrators as a form of ethnic subjugation that would later be classified as a war crime and a means of genocide (Lee 2017). The sparse availability of public healthcare within a war zone impacted the ability to terminate unwanted pregnancies. As in Germany, some women procured their own miscarriages using traditional medicines (Skjelsbaek 2012). Although the Yugoslav abortion legislation was still in place, the ongoing conflict presented restricting circumstances for both doctors and patients. As a result of the war, Bosnian hospitals were frequently at capacity and lacking supplies, thus often unable to assist the women. Those pregnant women who found their way to medical facilities may have undergone a journey that took months, ultimately preventing them from having an abortion due to gestational limits. Drakulić's novel illustrates this situation. Still, abortions did take place; statistics for Sarajevo showed that before and after the war, there were two births for every abortion, whereas, during the war, this ratio was reversed (Disdarević-Stojkanović 1999), suggesting that most women who were forcibly impregnated sought to end the pregnancy. The vast majority of women who carried their unwanted pregnancy to term relinquished the newborns after birth. Post-delivery, they displayed relief noticeably distinct from prepartum states ranging from emotional numbness to depression and suicidal ideation. Although the women also experienced other distressing events—detention, displacement, and the murder of family members—many rejected counselling and kept their rapes, abortions, and the children conceived as a result of rape a secret (Kozaric-Kovacic et al. 1995). What official reports often bypass, and what Drakulić's novel captures on the basis of real-life narratives, is the phenomenon of infanticide committed against CBOWR when abortion was deliberately denied or unavailable under these extreme circumstances.

CBOWR in Germany and Bosnia: The Struggle to Affirm Maternal Lineage

The authors of this article agree with Hashamova that the ending of Drakulić's novel could be construed as hopeful and interpret the central character's acceptance of her newborn son as coming to terms with her trauma by rejecting the patriarchal premium placed on the child's identity and prioritizing the maternal lineage. However, Drakulić herself questioned what the acceptance of CBOWR might mean for mother and child: "Really, what do you tell such a child as he or she is growing up? The truth? Imagine the child's horror" (Drakulić 1999, 8). Within the context of impossible motherhood, even when the mothers maintain their silence about their ordeal, it is projected onto the children by their community and ultimately internalized by them, resulting in the phenomenon that "even if the parent never says a word, traumas may end up on

the shoulders of subsequent generations” (Močnik 2020, 123). This mechanism of intergenerational trauma transmission was identified by Aleida Assmann as located in the transfer of embodied experience within families (quoted in Hirsch 2012) and it has been observed by researchers specifically in the case of CBOWR (Haber Kern 2021).⁸

Despite their different historical, temporal, and geographic contexts, the experiences of CBOWR in Germany and Bosnia show remarkable similarities in terms of the intergenerational transmission of trauma and, consequently, the strain of erasing psychologically (and ultimately legally) their paternal heritage at the expense of sole identification with their maternal lineage. Until recently, in Germany, the truth of CBOWR (and CBOW in general) was not part of cultural memory. These now elderly adults have begun to break the silence surrounding their origins mainly as a result of research interest in them, which continues to this day as they are part of the oldest surviving generation of CBOWR.⁹ Barbara Stelzl-Marx states that “Russian child” or “Russian brat” were common abusive words into the 1960s (Stelzl-Marx 2009, 351).¹⁰ It is, therefore, hardly surprising that members of the *Thistleflowers* group chose silence well into their old age; it only began to crack given the socio-political shifts that took place after 1990 with the end of the Cold War era. Particularly with the media coverage of the war in former Yugoslavia, German psychologists and researchers began to show interest in the remaining German survivors of sexual violence in WWII opening up a new research field that quickly began to expand: CBOWR (Mochmann 2017).

The first “Russian child” to go public with his story was Jürgen Schubert in 1999. Born in 1946 in North Rhine-Westphalia in West Germany to a German refugee woman from Silesia, he was treated as a “war casualty” (Schubert 1999, 72) and labelled the “child of a criminal” (Schubert 1999, 83) carrying the stigma of Germany’s defeat and his mother’s rape by a Soviet officer. Before his passing in 2017, Schubert joined the *Thistleflowers* group founded in 2014 by Winfried Behlau. Group members view themselves as hardy thistle flowers, symbolizing both trauma and resilience. Their goal is to raise public awareness of their and other CBOWR’s “shadow children” existence (Behlau 2015, 6). In his memoir, Schubert explicitly stated that his motivation to go public with his story was rooted in his desire to help war children of younger generations, specifically those born as a result of the war in Bosnia, so that “they don’t have to go through the same experiences” (Schubert 1999, 80). Unlike Schubert, Behlau, and the younger generation of the Bosnian CBOWR, many of the *Thistleflowers* members wish to retain their anonymity and do not use their full names, which reflects their decades-long stigmatization.

⁸Lisa Haber Kern lists various terms that are used to refer to trauma transmission across generations (secondary traumatization, intergenerational transmission, transgenerational transmission etc.). As the authors of this article only looked at the trauma transmission between mother and child, the term intergenerational transmission is more appropriate than transgenerational transmission, which implies several generations.

⁹The recent four-year project EuroWARCHILD launched in Oslo in 2022 is seeking the participation of both German (representing the oldest generation) and Bosnian CBOW (including CBOWR), in addition to a third, youngest generation of children fathered in conflict situations – the children fathered by European fighters of ISIS. See University of Oslo. “EuroWARCHILD.” Accessed March 10, 2023. <https://www.stk.uio.no/english/research/projects/euowarchild/>

¹⁰Unless otherwise specified, all translations from German and Bosnian sources are by Schwartz.

In 2015, Behlau edited a volume by the same name as the group containing members' individual life narratives. It was published in German and translated into English that same year. In this publication and in various interviews, Behlau made public that he was conceived as a result of a Russian soldier's rape of his mother and, like Schubert, was referred to as a "war casualty" in his birth certificate: "that was the same as if a house had collapsed somewhere and a damage had arisen, I was now just like that property damage" (Interview with Behlau 2016). For the group's members, in addition to raising public awareness about their and other CBOWR's existence, the process of communicating and composing their life narratives has opened up a space for working through their traumatic memories. Behlau, who had a difficult relationship with his mother during his youth, stated, "And only since I have now, so to speak, opened up...there is something that fell off, so that I think I've totally changed my way of dealing with people" (Interview with Behlau 2016). Unlike Behlau, Ulrike prefers to use her first name only. She was a child given up for adoption at age three and raised by a loving couple. Like Behlau, Ulrike emphasizes how speaking and writing about her past has helped her come to terms with her conflicted feelings about her identity: "And since 2007, I have written down about thirty pages of my biography. I have also been writing a diary for many, many years. And I would say that writing helped me a lot to express my feelings" (Interview with Ulrike 2017).

The importance of speaking up and shaking off trauma and stigma is thus a process of empowerment and is also emphasized by CBOWR in Bosnia. These children were labelled "Chetnik bastards," "malignant cells of cancer," and "mistakes of war" ("Rede vor der UN" 2019). Now young adults, aided by the growing national and international media and research interest in CBOWR, they began organizing at a far earlier age than their German counterparts and founded the NGO *Zaboravljena djeca rata – Forgotten Children of War* in 2018 with the assistance of Bosnian psychotherapist Amra Delić. It brings together Bosnian CBOWR and CBOW, the latter including those fathered by peacekeepers, born of forced marriages between members of hostile armies and children of women trafficked in conflict zones (Begagić 2018). They have led region-wide campaigns "advocating for rights for the children of war and women survivors of all ethnic groups" (Schwartz and Takševa 2020, 135). Ajna Jusić, a psychologist, feminist, and a young adult born of rape, serves as the president of the group (Anadolija 2018; UN Women 2019). Her story, and that of her mother, inspired the internationally acclaimed 2006 Bosnian film *Grbavica* (directed by Jasmila Žbanić). The film was instrumental not only in breaking the silence over the fate of the Bosnian women and CBOWR but also in leading to a long overdue acknowledgement of these mothers as civilian victims of war. As stated by Jusić, until recently, the Bosnian CBOWR did not receive adequate recognition or state support (UN Women 2019). Aided by the activism of *Forgotten Children of War*, a new law recognizing these children as civilian victims of war was adopted in July 2022 in the Brčko district in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Jusić expressed her hope that the law would soon be applied in the entire Bosnian Federation as well as in the Republika Srpska (Kurt 2022).¹¹

¹¹The 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement divided Bosnia and Herzegovina, formerly a republic within Yugoslavia, into the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republika Srpska, as well as the small Brčko District belonging to both entities.

Many CBOWR may never find out the truth about their violent conception. In Germany, mothers remained silent about their children's paternity whether they had been raped or engaged in a romantic liaison. Behlau was told the truth of his paternity by his mother as a teenager, although he had already had doubts about his birth certificate (Interview with Behlau 2016). Renate heard about her mother's rape as an adult after her mother had passed away. She recalls being told by a family friend that "my mother had been raped by a Mongolian and that I was the child of this rape. The food practically got stuck in my throat when I heard that; it was a shock which burdens me to this day" (Interview with Renate 2016). Her shock not only reverberates with the sexual violence done to her mother but also with the powerful remnants of Nazi racial ideology. Like Renate, Ulrike discovered the truth about her biological origins as an adult following her adoptive parents' death. She finally gained access to birth documents that she used to trace her biological mother, who was still alive at that time (Interview with Ulrike 2017).

One of the most poignant aspects of the narratives of many CBOWR is their acknowledgement that they were not supposed to be born, echoing the previous findings that in the last phases of the war in Germany, abortions were widespread. Indeed, some *Thistleflowers* members recognized that their mothers wanted to abort them. Schubert suggests that his mother took up with a Soviet officer who was an Orthodox Jew, perhaps engaging in sexual barter. Since she claimed she had been raped, she received permission to have a legal abortion but either decided not to proceed with it or the abortion was botched. She abandoned her son under family pressure, and he grew up in an orphanage. Unlike Schubert, Behlau grew up with his birth mother, who decided to keep her unwanted "Russian brat" but wanted to "smack [him] against the wall." Previously, she had tried various home remedies to terminate her pregnancy (Interview with Behlau 2016). Renate tells a similar story about her mother: "My mother wanted to abort [me], but that failed. When she was pregnant with me in the eighth month, she was sent in a cattle wagon to an internment camp in Saxony-Anhalt. And I am certain, had I been born in the camp, I wouldn't be here today" (Interview with Renate 2016). How could Renate be so certain about her mother's intention to abort or possibly commit infanticide? Renate adds that her mother had endured other pregnancies before her birth but that she was "the only surviving child and I assume that they were killed." Listening with the third ear, the interviewer questioned whether her siblings were killed in the war. Renate replied, "No no no. My mother was never married. Everything happened in these three years in the camp. All Russian children, all Russian children" (Interview with Renate 2016). The gaps in Renate's narrative are telling. She does not directly attribute the death of her siblings to abortion or infanticide. Instead, she accepts that they were all fathered out of wedlock by Russians—in all likelihood by rape—during her mother's internment in East Prussia. Yet the narrative omits details that are too painful or uncomfortable to express, putting Renate's fragile survival into perspective.

The violent conception of CBOWR and the prospect of abortion or infanticide have a serious impact on maternal bonding, reinforcing the impossibility of impossible motherhood. The German CBOWR narratives reflect what psychological research has demonstrated regarding "poor mother-child attachment" between mothers who survived sexual violence in conflict and their CBOWR (Roupetz, Delic, and Glaesmer 2021, 115), illustrating one of the most difficult aspects of impossible motherhood. Schubert's childhood and adolescence were characterized by maternal rejection, disappointment, and institutionalization – a fate shared by many CBOWR. Schubert was often kept drugged at the orphanage while Behlau and Renate, growing up with birth mothers who remained single, report being beaten with leather belts, which,

although not an uncommon method of disciplining a child in post-war Germany, devolved into abuse. Behlau's mother often slapped him hard, asserting that she had to "beat the bad character out of the child"; Behlau contemplated, "How could the child be of good or at least acceptable character with a criminal for a father?" (Behlau 2015, 79). The authors of this article could also interpret this as an attempt of the mother to both physically and metaphorically erase her son's paternity lineage. Renate shared similar memories of physical abuse: "I had to lean over the stool, expose my bottom and then she had a leather strap, and she hit me green and blue... Yes, and then I was always told that I am nothing, I am no good, and I will never become anything" (Interview with Renate 2016). It took both Behlau and Renate decades to forgive their mothers and realize, as expressed in the interviews, that they were likely suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, exacerbated by the economic hardship of the post-war years.

Unlike the recent positive developments in Bosnia, women raped by the Allies did not receive any state compensation in Germany, neither for their violation nor for their CBOWR, an omission never rectified. According to Gebhardt, even though a 1955 legislation made federal funds available for German CBOWR, given the virtually impossible requirement to have witnesses of the rape testify, most applications were turned down (Gebhardt 2015a). Moreover, the women were slandered on sexual grounds. Behlau recorded that when his mother went repeatedly to a welfare office to beg for financial aid, she had to "listen to ignorant comments and insults such as 'Must have had fun back then...'" (Behlau 2015, 85). This intersection of sexism, humiliation, stigmatization, and economic hardship intensified the weight of impossible motherhood for both mothers and children. For Behlau, the inclusion of more positive memories about some nurturing aspects of his relationship with his mother only became possible thanks to his activism, writing, and work with researchers following his mother's passing in 2017 (Behlau 2018).

Bosnian CBOWR report similarly conflicted feelings towards their birth mothers. Lejla Damon was born to a Bosniak mother named Safa on Christmas Day in 1992. Damon's story has become an international media item when she was adopted, with Safa's consent, by a BBC journalist couple who raised her in Britain. In a 2018 radio interview in Ottawa, Damon describes why her mother rejected her, raising the threat of infanticide: "I reminded her of all the men that had raped her. I was a constant reminder that if she held me, that she would strangle me" (Lofaro 2018). Safa's reaction is reminiscent of S. in Drakulić's novel. Throughout her unwanted pregnancy, S. is also unable to separate her child's existence and identity from the violence that had led to its conception. Psychologists described this reaction to CBOWR as the identification of the child with the perpetrator of the violent act, which leads to a reliving of the trauma and, ultimately, rejection of the child – something S., unlike Safa, eventually overcame (Roupetz, Delic, and Glaesmer 2021). Damon grew up in London and became an anti-war activist (N1 Sarajevo 2018). Her adoptive parents did not hide the truth of her origins from her. She first visited Bosnia and met Safa in 2016, remaining in contact with her and her half-sister born after the war. Damon came to appreciate why her mother, who suffers from multiple health issues mainly as a result of rape, gave her up for adoption: "As much as I suppose she hated me and she wanted to get rid of me, she also agreed for me to be adopted, so it was kind of one of those things where it is a second chance...It's taken a while for me to see that as a positive without it being all about rejection" (Lofaro 2018). With the help of loving and supportive adoptive parents, Damon has come to understand that for her deeply traumatized birth mother, mothering a child of rape was indeed impossible. This recognition has allowed Damon to accept her birth mother and embrace her biological maternal lineage.

Alen Muhić, another member of *Forgotten Children of War*, was also born to a Bosniak woman who was raped. She abandoned her baby in a Goražde hospital, where he was soon adopted by a Bosniak hospital worker and his wife. Muhić learned the truth about his origins when a schoolmate threw the label “Chetnik bastard” at him. Like Damon, Muhić believes that being adopted into a loving family gave him a chance at a better life, although he grapples with his paternal heritage: “The biggest war for me is the one I fight with myself...I was not born from love; I was born from hate” (Mainichi 2018). His concern echoes S.’s fear about her son’s future in Drakulić’s novel because he, too, was conceived from hate. Muhić has since met his birth mother, who now lives in the USA and has a new family. Her terrible ordeal, however, haunts her to this day (Sullivan 2021). Today, Muhić is happily married, a proud father, and a nurse at the same hospital where he was born. In October 2019, he gave a powerful speech at the UN on behalf of Bosnian CBOWR, insisting that they “do not want to be portrayed falsely as ‘malignant cells of cancer’ that are spreading the seeds of hatred” and that they “are not the mistakes of war but only human beings and should be treated as such” (“Rede vor der UN” 2019). Muhić implicitly formulates the rejection of the CBOWR’s paternal heritage as, in a patriarchal society, it continues to tie ethnic identity to the violent legacy of war and interethnic strife, putting continuous roadblocks to peaceful cohabitation. Allowing CBOWR to embrace their maternal lineage is part of establishing lasting peace in a community still haunted by its violent past.

Unlike the women who birthed Damon and Muhić and gave them up for adoption, Jusić’s mother, Sabina Bašić, decided to keep her. In the film *Grbavica*, based on the story of Bašić and her daughter, a Bosniak woman’s maternal ambivalence toward the child conceived through rape in a camp is poignantly expressed as she moves from wanting an abortion to giving up and eventually breastfeeding her newborn, echoing the experience of S.:

I wanted to kill her. I pounded my stomach with my fists to make her fall out of me. It was no use. My belly grew. Even then they [the rapists] came. In twos, threes, every day. In the hospital, after I gave birth, I said: ‘I don’t want her. Take her away.’ I heard her crying. I heard her through the walls. The next day my milk started flowing. I said: ‘OK, I’ll feed her, but only once!’...And when they brought her, when I took her in my arms, she was so tiny. And she was so beautiful. I had already forgotten that there was anything beautiful in this world. (Žbanić 2006)¹²

Hashamova suggests that *Grbavica* “takes up where Drakulić’s novel leaves off” some fourteen years later but underlines a significant divergence between S. and the enacted story of real-life Bašić (Hashamova 2012, 241). As a single mother, S. is able to prioritize her infant son’s maternal lineage over his paternal heritage in relative security in peaceful, far-away Sweden. Conversely, in the film, single mother Esmā (portraying Bašić) must raise her daughter in the very same community that was destroyed by war, masking her daughter’s paternal heritage with lies about a hero Bosniak father, the impossibility of her impossible motherhood on full display when she finally tells her adolescent daughter: “You’re the bastard of a Chetnik” (quoted in Hashamova 2012, 243).

¹²On the difficulties and ambivalent attitudes in mothering children born of rape see Lee and Mochmann 2015, 35; Takševa 2017.

Once fifteen-year-old Jusić encountered the truth about her paternity, she struggled for months, thinking that her mother must hate her as a constant reminder of her traumatic experience (NOVA TV 2018). What helped mother and daughter come to terms with their relationship was the therapy they received at *Medica Zenica*, an NGO founded in Bosnia by Swiss gynecologist Monika Hauser – the founder of *medica mondiale*. Unlike her daughter, Bašić has only recently been able to speak publicly about the complexities of mothering a CBOWR, encouraged by her daughter’s activism, which she believes will contribute to raising awareness about both the fate of the children and the fate of women raped in the war. She admits that there were trying periods when she was unable to look at her daughter partly because of her physical resemblance to her rapist father: “When she was three, she had to shave off her eyebrows because I couldn’t look at her. There were a thousand painful situations. But when all that was over, she became my greatest support” (Fena 2019). The mother still has doubts about whether life would have been better for her daughter had she given her up for adoption, but today, they both affirm their strong bond (Kožul 2020).¹³ Bašić and Jusić’s story illustrates the stage of acceptance of CBOWR as identified by psychologists, namely, “identification of the child as an independent human being, leading to acceptance of the maternal role and taking responsibility for a biographical turnaround” (Roupetz, Delic, and Glaesmer 2021, 116). More recently, on the Facebook page of *Forgotten Children of War*, Jusić powerfully expressed her self-identification through her maternal lineage stating, “My identity is ‘I am my mother’s child’ and this is something everybody has to accept. We are not, and never will be children of the enemy” (Zaboravljena 2022). Her words echo those of Muhić spoken at the UN.

It has taken the *Thistleflowers* children seventy years to come to terms with their stigmatized identity. In his contribution to the *Thistleflowers* volume, Schubert shakes off the long-held and externally imposed negative labels he had to live with most of his life by stating, “*I am a gift of the Allies*” (italics in the original) (Schubert 1999, 39). For some Bosniak CBOWR, like Jusić, Muhić, and Damon, this process has taken considerably less time due to the heightened global awareness of sexual violence in conflict zones, in addition to the availability of counselling services in Bosnia. There was no such assistance for the German CBOWR, and many of them decided or were able to access those services only in later adulthood. In addition, technological developments such as the Internet have also facilitated the organizing and media outreach of the Bosnian CBOWR at a much younger age. What is common to both groups is that they and their mothers were rejected by their respective ethnic and national communities and discriminated against when it came to social benefits. The Bosnian CBOWR were stigmatized and discriminated against by the state in relation to children whose fathers died in the war as putative heroes. Until recently, they had problems with legal documents that required the inclusion of the father’s name. It is an injustice that the group *Forgotten Children of War* has successfully fought to rectify. Since 2021, several municipalities in Bosnia have introduced new forms that require the name of one parent instead of the name of the father alone, thus breaking with long-held patriarchal traditions that favour paternal heritage over maternal lineage (Arnautović 2021) and leading to the legal acceptance of the latter.

¹³In her essay based on a Bosnian mother-daughter story, Tatjana Takševa is interested specifically in the investigation of empowered motherhood through an analysis of the lived experiences of women mothering CBOWR, a perspective that goes beyond the explorations of the present article (Takševa 2019).

Conclusion

This article has used two examples of twentieth-century armed conflicts in Europe—Germany toward the end of WWII and Bosnia in the 1990s—to illustrate, through a feminist narrative analysis of selected published and unpublished narratives and interview data, the intergenerational impact of rape in war. With a focus on unwanted pregnancy, abortion, and CBOWR, the authors introduced the terms “maternal lineage” and “paternal heritage,” suggesting that the recognition of the former constitutes a feminist reconceptualization of the identity of CBOWR and a potential solution to the conflicts of impossible motherhood. The analysis has demonstrated that through the validation of maternal lineage, the children’s inclusion into their mothers’ ethnic and national community is enabled, and consequently, the stigmatization they both experience because of the overvaluation of the paternal heritage of CBOWR can be overcome. While the selected narratives highlight the violence faced by both the women and CBOWR, they also demonstrate their resilience and display evidence of post-traumatic growth. Tedeschi and Calhoun describe post-traumatic growth in people who survived traumatic situations as a “perception of inner strength” and a “changed philosophy of life” (Tedeschi and Calhoun qtd. in Szymanski and Rosenfeld 2014, 266) without taking away from the pain and suffering that marked their lives.

Although there are substantial numbers of CBOWR in Germany and Bosnia, to date, only a handful of them have been willing to go public, making it all the more important to acknowledge the stories through which they express their conflicted ethnic and national identities but also their own agency. Behlau’s message to his younger Bosnian counterparts is “Speak up and do not feel guilty. And say, you are strong; it happened to your mother, but you are innocent and do not have to pay for what your father has done” (Interview with Behlau 2016). The Bosnian CBOWR who broke their silence did so at a much younger age than their German counterparts from whose experiences they are able to learn. Their greater self-confidence, made possible by greater international awareness about CBOWR and CBOW, is reflected also in the fact that they, unlike many of the German CBOWR, are willing to be identified by their full names.

While millions of women continue to experience sexual violence in conflict zones and suffer from its consequences (Porter 2018; Taylor 2022), and thousands of children continue to be born as a result, it is important to note that the very existence of CBOWR and CBOW defies not only myths of ethnically homogenous nationhood but also the destructive nature of wars that fractures communities and sows animosity. Saskia Mitreuter sees in CBOW not a challenge for societies but a chance towards peace building internationally as they can help to bridge differences (Mitreuter 2021). In his speech at the UN, Muhić broadcast a similar message on behalf of Bosnian CBOWR stating, “I don’t hate anyone. Hate destroys and that’s why I have chosen love. It builds bridges and instills hope. Love is more powerful than hate because love can end violence!” (“Rede vor der UN” 2019). His words echo the trajectory of S. in Drakulić’s novel in accepting her child born of rape as a triumph of love over death, violence, hatred, and destruction.

Silke Satjukow and Rainer Gries call CBOW “children of the future” (Satjukow and Gries 2015, 364). With new generations of CBOWR growing up and being conceived (Ciobanu 2022), it is all the more important to learn from the narratives of the two generations juxtaposed in this article. German and Bosnian CBOWR are meant to encourage other children born under similar circumstances and their mothers to break their silence and share their stories to continue to raise awareness about the complex realities of armed conflict and its aftermath, fighting against

sexual and other forms of violence, stigmatization, ethnic division lines, and hatred in both wartime and peacetime.

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