International Perspectives on Youth Conflict and Development

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CHAPTER 3

Growing Up During the Balkan Wars of the 1990s

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Overview

The youth today in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and Croatia have grown up during times of war and chronic unrest. Since the youth will determine the future of the countries in the still unstable Balkan region, it is critical to understand how their experiences of past wars and current, ongoing violence might relate to the role they will play in the reconstruction of their society.

This chapter focuses on what we learned about youth and violence from a study of young people aged 14 to 16 enrolled in secondary schools in the still deeply divided towns of Mostar in BiH and Vukovar in Croatia. It is part of a larger project that focuses on understanding the contributions of schools, as well as other social institutions, to rebuilding societies after mass atrocity (Freedman, Corkala, et al., 2004; Freedman, Kambanda, et al., 2004; Stover & Weinstein, 2004). With parallel studies in the Balkans and Rwanda, the larger project is particularly interested in helping close gaps between official and local perspectives in order to understand the complexities of social reconstruction. It also aims to learn how the international community might best respond in the aftermath of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide.

This chapter shows that many young people in Mostar and Vukovar suffer from a general sense of depression and apathy. These symptoms may not always be clinically significant, and the same youth simultaneously show some resilience, yet their malaise permeates the culture. It also shows that regardless

of their national affiliation or where they live, the youth feel abandoned by the adults who are responsible for them, both parents and teachers. Finally, for the most part, the youth do not know how to heal or how to think about a positive future. They are conflicted about whether it would be best to focus on trying to forget the past or on trying to remember it and also about whether they will ever be able to forgive others for what happened.

Background on the Region

The political situation was and continues to be complex. Until the early 1990s, Bosnian Muslims, Croats, and Serbs were part of one nation-state called Yugoslavia. Silber and Little (1996) trace the beginning of the breakup of the country to the rise in the 1980s of Serb nationalism, which Serb leader Slobodan Milosovic harnessed to strengthen his control. By the early 1990s, some non-Serb regions, including those dominated by Croats, openly went to war against Milosovic's Yugoslav National Army (JNA), while others, such as the Bosnian areas, were quickly swept along (pp. 26–27). The breakup of the country led not only to these wars but also to crimes against humanity and genocide. The result was the creation of five new countries: (1) Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), which consists of two parts, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republika Srpska; (2) the Republic of Croatia; (3) Serbia and Montenegro (Kosovo is also part of this republic); (4) the Republic of Slovenia; and (5) the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (see the map in fig. 3.1).[1]

These new nation-states are working hard to create their own identities. The process remains tense, largely because the division of land did not neatly give each nationalist group a country. Rather, a situation now exists where populations who have been deeply traumatized by the acts of their neighbors who belong to different groups must find ways to coexist again inside these new states.

Both Mostar in BiH and Vukovar in Croatia are deeply divided along national lines: Croats versus Serbs in Vukovar and Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims) versus Croats in Mostar. Figure 3.1 shows Mostar and Vukovar. Vukovar sits on Croatia's border with Serbia. Clearly visible across the Danube River is Serbian land. Many of the Serbs who live in Vukovar moved there in the 1930s and afterward to work in the Borovo shoe factory. The factory was bombed during the war, an act that effectively destroyed the local economy. Vukovar's Serbs and Croats still live in integrated neighborhoods, but they do all that they can to avoid contact.

Early in the war, the JNA waged a 2-month-long and very bloody siege on Vukovar. The JNA's goal was to create new borders for Yugoslavia cleansed of Croats. After meeting much resistance, the JNA ultimately triumphed on November 18, 1991, and on November 19 eliminated the last pocket of resistance at the hospital, murdering many patients, doctors, and nurses.

Unlike in Vukovar, where Croats and Serbs live unhappily side by side, in Mostar the Croats live mostly on the west side of the Neretva River, while the

FIGURE 3.1 Central Balkan Region

Bosniaks live mostly on the east side. The famous Ottoman bridge, the Stari Most, built in 1566, linked the two sides of the town before it was destroyed by shelling in 1994. At that time the Croat army took the town as it fought to control Croat-dominated land inside Bosnia. According to Maas (1996), the Croat attacks were just as brutal as those mounted by the JNA. The bridge was not rebuilt until 2004, and its ruins served for 10 years as a constant reminder of the division of the population and of the physical, social, and psychological destruction of the recent wars.

Today in Mostar and Vukovar, most young people who belong to one national group have little opportunity to meet young people from other groups. In a society where coffee is central to social life, the cafés are segregated along national lines. The schools are also segregated. In Mostar, the schools on the east side are for the Bosniak population, and those on the west side are for the Croats. A few students cross from one side to the other for specialist training, but they remain rare exceptions to the rule. In Vukovar as well, children go to segregated schools or to the same school but in separate shifts.

People in Mostar and Vukovar also are affected by the fact that much of the Balkan region suffers from an ailing economy. The report of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) on human development in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2002 included a chapter on youth and the "brain drain"; between January 1996 and March 2001, 92,000 young people left BiH, and 62%

of those left behind say they would emigrate if they had the chance (United Nations Development Program [UNDP], 2002, pp. 41–42). The youth of BiH suffer from extraordinarily high rates of unemployment; 34.8% of those aged 19–24, 13.4% of those aged 25–49, and only 9.7% of those aged 50–60 are unemployed (p. 36). Since the wars, there also has been a shift in the percentage of students who continue their education past the primary years. Before the wars, 80% went on to secondary school; in 2000–2001, only 56% enrolled in secondary school (p. 39). It was also the case that 58.5% of the population believed that the educational system was corrupt (pp. 26–27). An active drug trade flourishes on the thriving black market, and many of the youth seek the escape provided by drugs or alcohol. The situation is similar in Vukovar.

In interviews and focus groups for our study, students, their parents, and their teachers in both towns describe a context of ongoing volatility and violence. A young Croat girl from Vukovar explained, "There is always some fight." When asked to provide specifics, she recalled a recent "rough fight between Serbs and Croats" that required police intervention. She explained that the fight "started with provocations, though I don't know who started first" and went on to say, "Mostly everyone has something what he or she went through, what troubles him. The temperaments are high." In Mostar, a Croat boy whom we interviewed reported similar types of violence:

> We get together on a Friday evening and go to the park. That's the central place in Mostar, say. And ahh, Muslims come from the right bank and we quarrel. And finally it turns into a battle and we take revenge on each other.

In both Mostar and Vukovar, the significant, unrepaired physical damage from the wars offers a constant reminder of the past violence; many buildings are scarred by the pockmarks of mortar shells, while others sit in ruins. As one Serb mother in Vukovar lamented, "Children live among ruins. The moment you get out of your house you become aware of where you live. These wounds won't disappear." Besides bad memories and these more tangible reminders, the citizens, including the youth, continue to feel ongoing mistrust across national groups and live with deep divisions stemming from past brutalities.

Theoretical Frame

In the Balkans, how the youth respond to the past wars and ongoing violence is intertwined with how they understand and are affected by the many social institutions and relationships in which they participate. An ecological model, in combination with the theories of Lev Vygotsky (1978) and Mikhail Bakhtin and his followers, helps frame their responses (Bakhtin, 1981; Bakhtin/Medvedev, 1978;[2] Voloshinov, as cited in Morris, 1994). The ecological model posits that many interacting factors lead to civil destruction and the processes of social reconstruction (see Fletcher & Weinstein, 2002). It draws from the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979), Sarason (1972), and Kelly (1968) and assumes that we can say little about universals and instead will learn more from paying particular

attention to context. For youth violence, the implication is that the focus must move beyond the individual to consider the other social institutions that both affect the individual and that the individual affects.

Most helpful to understanding how the youth understand and are affected by violence in their societies is the Bakhtinian concept of "ideological becoming." Freedman and Ball explain that "in Bakhtinian writings 'ideological becoming' refers to how we develop our way of viewing the world, our system of ideas, what Bakhtin calls an ideological self" (2004, p. 5). The development of ideologies, according to Bakhtin and his circle, is part of the development of the whole person.

According to Bakhtin, as we develop our ideologies, we struggle to assimilate two distinct categories of discourse: (1) authoritative discourse and (2) internally persuasive discourse. Bakhtin defines authoritative discourse as "the word of the fathers. Its authority was already *acknowledged* in the past. . . . for example, the authority of religious dogma, or of acknowledged scientific truth or of a currently fashionable book" (1981, pp. 342–343). The discourse of political authorities would be included as well. Internally persuasive discourse, by contrast, includes everyday discourses. It is "denied all privilege, backed by no authority at all, and is frequently not even acknowledged in society" (p. 342).

For the young people aged 14 to 16 whom we studied, their development of ideologies is intertwined with their identity development. Adolescence is a critical time, when young people are defining who they are, both as individuals and as members of social groups. It also is a critical period for the development of thought about conflictual intergroup relations and has been found to be the most impressionable period for the development of collective memory (Pennebaker & Banasik, 1997).

Some researchers have tried to determine the amount and types of clinically diagnosable psychological abnormality among young people who grow up with war. They have relied on self-reports and some information about the youth from the points of view of their mothers. These studies have found that around 40% of the population they studied exhibit measurable psychological abnormalities, mostly some type of anxiety, aggression, or depression (Cairnes & Dawes, 1996; Punamaki, 1996). The amount of difficulty children experience has been found to be related to their specific wartime experiences, with separation from and lack of support from families and exposure to multiple types of trauma (witnessing violent acts, loss of loved ones, and the like), putting them at increased risk (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1996; Ladd & Cairnes, 1996; Macksoud & Aber, 1996). It also has been found that youth in these very difficult contexts may have reserves of resilience (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1996; Garmazey & Rutter, 1985). It seems important to ask whether one has to exhibit diagnosable abnormalities to have been scarred in ways that matter, whether one can show some resilience but still have lingering difficulties coping. Few studies have looked beyond symptoms to the attitudes and feelings that drive young peoples' decision-making or to the interactions that influence their development from day to day.

In spite of this research literature on youth who have experienced war or who

have grown up in politically unstable environments, little is known about the potential consequences for a nation when its adolescents come of age in a post-war society characterized by chronic conflict and ongoing violence. Although it is not possible to determine exact social consequences, it is possible to gain an understanding of the youth that might help one anticipate possible consequences. As we look at young people's experiences of past and ongoing violence and unrest in the context of these broader ecological and socio-historical theories, we consider how the wars and the social structures that remain in their aftermath might affect the development of the youth.

The Study

We do not focus on young people who themselves behave violently so much as on those who have experienced and continue to experience societal violence. Some of these young people lived through the wars, feared for their lives, and witnessed or were victims of horrible atrocities. Some lost parents or other close relatives or have been or are being raised by deeply scarred adults who may have been victims or perpetrators of the atrocities themselves. Some of the children were sent away during the wars or left with their families and now have returned to a society that is vastly different from the one they left. Some have been displaced from their homes and communities. All live in an unstable society where many of the same tensions that led to the wars remain palpable. As they were aged 5 to 8 during the height of the Balkan wars, all have strong memories of that time.

To learn about how young people are responding to ongoing tensions and violence in the society, we talked to students, their teachers, and their parents in Mostar and Vukovar. With local research teams, we conducted 78 interviews and talked to another 140 people in 20 focus groups. Our findings about the young people's responses to violence and unrest and their difficulty moving on are supported by our analysis of transcripts of these interviews and focus groups. The patterns we observed are illustrated with quotations from these transcripts.

We situated our work in the schools because they are a critical social space where many of the tensions within the larger society are replicated. The schools also provide a grand stage where young people can try on different identities and define the groups with which they will affiliate. In this process, they can play out their responses to the wars, violence, and ongoing instability experienced by themselves and the adults who surround them, most especially their parents and their teachers.

We hope to use our study to discover not only the difficulties the youth face but also the kinds of social structures needed to nurture this generation. Through considering issues related to schooling, we examine how the schools as an institution might contribute to the mechanisms of social repair and support the capacities of the youth for resilience. Toward this end, we examine ways teachers, parents, and students think the schools approach issues related to the

healing of the youth. The society expects the schools to play a crucial role in their healing process, albeit not the only role.

The Youth's Responses to Violence and Chronic Unrest

Pervasive Apathy

Adults characterize the young people as a quiet and serious generation who had to grow up before their time. A Croat teacher from Mostar describes students today as "a little nervous," carrying bitterness about the past, carrying burdens. In the focus group of Croat teachers from Mostar, a teacher described this generation as suffering from "some kind of inner discontent," and then went on to say, "They are empty. They wait." In a focus group in Mostar, one of the Croat students expressed his fear for the future, given the characteristics of the youth: "We can't make a modern society when we are so withdrawn, so introverted." A Bosnian father from Mostar described psychological symptoms that his children exhibited during the war. They were afraid to sleep alone and generally were fearful, locking doors and the like. He described these symptoms as better now but with some effects still lingering. A Serb mother from Vukovar concluded:

> Children carry deep wounds. . . . We are not even aware of how deep the wounds are. . . . but I think the wounds inflicted in the postwar period go even deeper because they [Serb children] are constantly being told that they are guilty for something, guilty, guilty.

Regardless of their past experiences, as a group, young people in both Mostar and Vukovar have little hope for their futures. Consistent with the findings of the UNDP report for Bosnia and Herzegovina (2002), many say they want to leave the region to escape what they view as severe limits on what they could accomplish with their lives. The economic depression exacerbates young people's psychological problems and their feelings of apathy. Although the economy of Croatia as a country is stronger than the economy of BiH, the Vukovar economy is seriously depressed. A Serb student who lives in Vukovar reveals her hopelessness:

> When you finish college, you can't find a job, and you're still a burden to your parents who have to support you until they die. And when they die, you are finished because you are used to depending on them. It's like with wild animals—if you take a wild animal and take care of it for some time and then let it go, it wouldn't survive because it wouldn't be able to take care of itself.

This student, like many of her peers, including the Croats, sees no way to become a functioning adult in the culture.

These feelings of despair about the economy came up in Mostar as well. In a focus group of Croat girls from Mostar, one explained: "After you graduate from secondary school or university . . . you can't even find a job washing

glasses in a cafe." In a focus group of Croat boys from Mostar, the moderator asked outright. "Do you want to go abroad when you finish school?" Three students immediately replied that they did. They pointed to the low salaries and lack of job opportunity in BiH as their main reason. The Bosniaks felt similarly.

In Mostar, especially among the Croats, some of the despair seemed to be related to the students' beliefs that opportunities come not because of merit but because of connections, a finding also consistent with the UNDP (2002) report. In the focus group of Croat boys from Mostar, one explained his despair around university admissions:

> However much you've learned, there's not much chance you'll be able to enroll in university. Everything is through connections now, who you know. Some get in with bad marks. . . . The ones who've found some connection are always the ones who get a place. They'll get in before you do even if you've really spent all those years working hard on your education.

Croat teachers in Mostar felt that views about the importance of connections led to the lack of a work ethic. They also discussed the difficulty of teaching when the job outlook for students is so uncertain.

Abandoned by Adults

The youth in both Mostar and Vukovar, regardless of their national affiliation, said that the adults in their lives, both parents and teachers, did not understand the trauma they experienced during the war or their problems today. The youth felt abandoned by most of these adults because they did not want to talk to the youth about wartime experiences, and they did not recognize the youth's pain. The youth portrayed the adults as incapable of giving them the attention and guidance that they needed. Some said that their parents thought they were too little to remember very much and that their parents thought that they themselves were the ones who really suffered most in the wars. A Bosniak student from Mostar reported:

> Lately the teachers have been saying we [the teachers] are the last generation that suffered from the war and we [the students] hardly remember the war. But in fact that's not true, that we hardly remember it. We remember everything and we suffer from it too. I think it's pointless to say we don't remember the war.

She then related specific memories of how her schooling was interrupted during the war.

A Croat student from Mostar explained that her parents avoid talking with her about difficult subjects related to the recent past: "They avoid the subject too at home. I don't know, when I ask Dad something. 'Can you explain it to me?' It's 'Come on, why are you interested in that? Why are you talking about that at home?' " This student thought that parents in the community generally were abdicating their responsibilities toward their children and that as a result many youth were in trouble:

> They [parents] are preoccupied with themselves. I don't know. They do take account of us, but there are plenty of people in the grade, you can see from their parents that they [the parents] are not much interested. . . . There are plenty who are on the wrong path in my grade. Their parents don't see it. . . . There's quite a lot of them who smoke grass, who drink lots of alcohol, even in class. And the parents don't do anything.

By the end of the interview, this student concluded that she suffered because she lacked adult guidance. She suggested that the schools could do a better job in guiding the youth. "Maybe they should bring in someone to give us a bit more guidance about how we should behave towards those other groups. And in class for the teachers to pay a bit more attention to us."

Another Croat student from Mostar explained the importance of talk and communication, across generations and across ethnic divides:

> I think that it would be the best that the society and authority organize different seminars for young people, that there they talk openly. With a dialogue, and not some lectures. . . . Ahhh, maybe some debates, maybe some dialogue between younger and older. Or mixed [ethnicities].

Similarly, a Croat student from Vukovar expressed her need for more talk in school about the recent wars:

> We should learn about the causes of the war and how disputes should be resolved in order to avoid wars. We should be educated about these things. The older ones know what the war was about, but younger generations don't know anything about how this war came about, what were its causes. I believe we should talk about it more.

In the Croat teachers' focus group in Mostar, one shirked responsibility for responding to the students' needs: "With the times as they are, I think teachers aren't in a position, they aren't to blame that is for being unable to offer what school should offer." Another explained that the schools did not teach moral values because the society does not function according to moral values:

> When you teach him, say, respect, that's not welcome anywhere these days. If he's to be honest, realistic, sincere, that doesn't do you any good these days. Everything's back to front these days. It's a real snafu. It does you no good these days to do what God commanded. That doesn't open any doors these days. Who wants an honest trader these days. I don't know for sure. When everyone is based only on how to cheat the other fellow first, who can earn the most the quickest. I mean, it's all very practical and that's life, but there's school too.

Some parents reported talking to their children about the war, although they found it painful; they also said that they held back because they felt a need to try to protect their children. A Serb parent from Vukovar said in her interview that she did not want to talk about the past:

> Terrible things happed in Vukovar, horrible things. It's very difficult to answer why they happened because everyone has their own opinion about that. . . . I

don't want to talk about it because it has a very negative effect on me. I have been through a lot and my children have been though a lot only because we are Serbs. That was a dreadful time and I really don't want to talk about it.

Another Vukovar parent, this one a Croat, also claimed that her children were fine because she protected them by pretending that all was fine. She embedded this information in her story of what happened to her family during the war:

> That summer [1991] when we left Vukovar, in which fighting was still going on, sociologists and psychologists came to visit us and talk to us, the refugees, in all the places we were living at the time. We always had guilty feelings, because we knew there were people suffering in Vukovar, so we didn't want to talk or laugh thinking that if those people couldn't laugh we wouldn't either. We did our best to hide our feelings from our children. My husband was in the prisoners' camp, and in the daytime I was pretending that everything was all right. I was smiling, spending time with my children. Everybody asked me: "How do you manage to do that?" But nobody knows what my nights were like. I used to smoke a pack of cigarettes a day. I didn't sleep at night. But I never let my children feel that. That's why I don't think my children experience any severe trauma. They know what happened and have their own attitude towards ethnicity issues, but, as I said, we tried to protect them as much as we could.

Particularly poignant were the words of a mother who lived in Vukovar but is neither Serb nor Croat. She is married to a Serb, though, and her children, who went to a Serb school, found that they fit nowhere. When they asked her what nationality they were, she didn't want to answer because she didn't want them to think in these terms. Her inability to answer paralyzed her in trying to help them navigate the world in which they lived.

However, her son faced difficult experiences that made her answer of "It isn't important what you are" unsatisfactory. She recounted an incident he experienced on a handball team that was mostly Croat:

> After three or four trainings he comes home and says, "I'm not going there any more." And I say, "Why darling? Why you are not going?" He says, "Nobody will tell me that I'm Serbian pig." I say, "Who told you that?" He says, "Well some kid there." I say, "Darling, he is still very young. He doesn't know what he is saying. It doesn't matter. Don't pay attention. Go if you like to." But then you have group pressure of children his age. . . . Children act imprudently, which leaves marks on other children.

There are no right or wrong answers in such situations. The problem is with the society as a whole. A miniwar continues, with children as both perpetrators and victims at the same time and with adults too often left in situations where they find themselves powerless to protect their children.

Indeed, the special case of children of binational marriages cannot be ignored because the numbers are significant, in Mostar even more than in Vukovar. The children of binational marriages seem to be caught in some kind of no-man's-land. In BiH some people choose to identify as Bosnians, a supranational identity, distinct from Bosniaks, who are specifically Bosnian Muslims. Although there may be other reasons, in most cases those who choose Bosnian

identity are children from so-called binational marriages or those who oppose national identification based on religious origins. Furthermore, Bosnian identity is often related to identification with the state (citizenship), as a clear and strong demonstration against the all-prevailing national divisions in the country.

Paralysis About Moving On—Tensions Surrounding Forgetting and Forgiving

Except for the Vukovar Serbs, who want only to forget about the past, those from other national groups were conflicted about whether it would be best to focus on trying to remember the past and to remind others of it or on trying to put it out of mind and avoid discussing it in schools and elsewhere. Many of the people we talked to were conflicted; they wanted to remember for some reasons but to forget for others. They wanted to remember to learn from past mistakes and to hold on to the memories of those whom they lost or simply because it was not possible to forget such an experience. But they wanted to forget so as to avoid personal pain and trauma and to be able to move on, although some felt that they needed to remember to move on. It is also the case that some connected putting the past out of their minds to forgiving others, while some said that they could keep their memories and still forgive others. Many of the Serbs of Vukovar and some of the Croats of Mostar expressed their need to be forgiven, while the Croats of Vukovar generally did not think they could forgive their neighbors without an apology, which they did not see as forthcoming. The Serbs saw no need to apologize for deeds they did not personally carry out.

A Bosniak student from Mostar voiced conflicts about remembering, presenting contradictory views about keeping memories of the past. At first he claimed that he could forget and that he wanted to forget: "What's past is past. It can be forgotten now." Then later the same student said the past could not and should never be forgotten:

> It would be a good thing for everyone to know what had happened, since it's not some small thing that can be forgotten, is it. . . . During the war I experienced all sorts of things, and I can't say now, "Well, that's that. I'll forget it." I can't. It'll always be there. It's engraved into me.

A Bosniak father said he wrote about his memories of the war so as never to forget them, but he was conflicted, thinking aloud that perhaps it would be better psychologically to try to put the past horrors out of mind, "simply in order to calm down." Then he concluded that children should be taught about the events that transpired so those events would not be forgotten from one generation to the next.

As individuals, the Croats in Mostar feared remembering because, as one student said, "It brings back bad memories for some people and they have some trauma." This student voiced his conflicts as well. At the societal level, he said that he wanted the past to be taught "so that we remember and understand why there was that war, why it shouldn't happen again."

In Vukovar, as was the case in Mostar for both Bosniaks and Croats, Croats voiced internal conflicts about remembering the recent wars. However, the Croats showed intolerance toward Serbs as a group, expressing blame and resentment. This negativity was much stronger than anything voiced by either Bosniaks or Croats in Mostar or by the Serbs in Vukovar. For example, a Croat student from Vukovar said, "As for the Serbs, I don't want to have anything to do with them. I don't need them in my life."

The Croats also wanted to remember only good things about their group. One of the adults talked about not wanting to remember or be reminded of Croats' roles as German collaborators in both world wars. One teacher explained: "I don't think that some questions about Ustashe[3] should be mentioned. . . . Ustashe this, Ustashe that . . . I think that those are stupidities."

Similarly the Serbs did not want to remember or be reminded of the more recent wars. When asked what he thought students should learn about the recent war in Croatia, a Serb student responded: "We shouldn't learn anything about the recent war. . . . These things are meaningless to me. It's pointless to discuss about who is a criminal, about the tribunal. We should . . . forget about these things." A teacher, when asked what he thought parents wanted their children to learn about the recent wars, said he thought they wanted it all to go away, for life to return to what it was before the war: "I'm not sure what the parents think about it, but they might wish that none of that ever happened. Before the war there were many binational marriages in this region. People didn't pay that much attention to ethnic belonging."

With respect to forgiving, the Croats in Vukovar were angry and felt strongly that Serbs would have to take responsibility for their deeds before they could forgive them. A teacher who is a theologian talked a lot about forgiving and in the process explained why the Croats could not forgive the Serbs. An apology was his minimum condition:

> Words that encourage forgiveness and reconciliation have no effect if the vision of the very essence of forgiveness doesn't exist. What I mean is that those who are responsible for what we had to go through in the last eight, nine years should apologize for what they have done and create conditions for healthy relationships in this area. I don't know how to put it differently. If somebody has hurt me, I can forgive that person so that I can have my peace of mind; but in order to achieve peaceful coexistence, the other side has to show the goodwill.

The Serbs tended to blame their leaders and did not understand why they were being asked to take individual responsibility when, as individuals, they felt they did not commit the crimes.

The same teacher also used strong language to characterize the culpability of the Serbs:

> I wouldn't be able to sleep at night if I knew that I had hurt someone, stolen from someone, destroyed someone's life. I think we should be far more humble than we are. The unscrupulousness of the Serbs, their way of presenting things, their statements are not conducive to creating new, democratic, open relationships.

When there is an official void, the opportunity arises for teachers to promote their own interpretations of the events. As a Croat student in Vukovar explained, "We didn't exactly learn about it [the recent conflicts] since these things are not in the textbooks, but we talked about it." He then went on to say, "For instance, we talked about how Serbs, when they finish their schools, find jobs in Vukovar before we do." Similarly, a teacher in a Croat school in Mostar explained that she and her colleagues were teaching the students that they are Croats, not Bosnians: "Casually we are mentioning Croatia, isn't it. We are working on Croatian on the side." The absence of an official curriculum for dealing with the recent past led to the existence of a hidden curriculum, which seemed in many ways to work against reconciliation.

Conclusion

The design of our work allowed us to gain some understanding of the points of view of parents, teachers, and youth on issues related to how the violence of the recent wars and their aftermath affected the youth. Further, it allowed us to examine the youth in relation to their participation in schools and in relation to how a range of social forces affect them. In Bakhtin's terms, these social forces include both the authoritative discourses in the official world of the communities in which they live and also the internally persuasive discourses of their peers and other everyday people. Both types of discourses meet in the schools.

The weak economy and the constant tension between national groups seems to lead to a great deal of distress and ultimately to an overwhelming sense of apathy. Every national group considers itself victimized by the situation in which they live. This general apathy and culture of victimization translates into a kind of apathy that works against the building of a democratic society. If people are apathetic about politics, they will not vote, and democratic processes cannot be built.

The youth seem paralyzed about how to handle their experiences, whether to forgive, and then, if they can forgive, whether they think it best to try to put the past out of mind or to focus on remembering. Only the Vukovar Serbs are certain that they do not want to remember. These tensions around forgiving and trying to forget surface in other Communities in Crisis work in the Balkans with other populations (see Biro et al., 2004). It is also the case that our projects in Rwanda show the complexities of how past memories will influence building the future (Freedman, Kambanda, et al., 2004).

In post-conflict situations, the youth need adult support, but they have difficulty getting the kind of support they need. Isolated teachers talk to the youth in ways that the youth find helpful, and isolated parents are attempting to help the youth navigate very rough social waters. The youth are grateful for any adult support they get, but they need more support than is readily available to them.

Our design and, therefore, our explanations are consistent with an ecological and socio-historical theory that points to how social forces interact and

how different members of a culture affect one another. Our goal is to use our findings to recommend positive directions for the future. Everything we have learned points to the fact that this culture of victimization is destructive. Further, the youth need to be able to talk to adults about their experiences. Several young people praised programs sponsored by nongovernmental organizations from other countries that allowed them the occasional opportunity to talk; they wanted more such programs. Since the adults within the culture have difficulty providing these opportunities, it would be good for the international community to consider ways of providing additional opportunities for the youth but, equally important, to offer programs for adults that would support them in being able to talk to the youth about the many difficult experiences of the recent past.

There are tensions surrounding curriculum that would address these issues. There is, first of all, a general absence of a history curriculum, which seems related to the paralysis we found around adult's reluctance to officially discuss the past and the tensions around forgiving and trying to put the past out of mind. We believe that developing a history curriculum is necessary to working through some of the problems the youth face. These notions of forgiving and trying to forget versus trying to remember may lead to context-bound and grounded ways to talk about historical memory and ultimately to give youth the guidance they call for as they develop their ideologies, their ways of viewing their world. In Rwanda, where the schools are integrated and where the government has an official policy promoting unity and reconciliation, we have begun a project with the Ministry of Education to break the 10-year-old moratorium on the teaching of history (Freedman, Weinstein, & Longman, 2003). This kind of work does not yet seem possible in the Balkans; although it remains to be seen how possible it will be to make constructive progress in Rwanda, at least the conversations have begun.

Finally, we think that the schools in Mostar and Vukovar will have to be integrated at some point in the near future, to give the youth an opportunity to get to know and learn about people across national lines. But integration, too, will need to be accompanied by programs that will support both the youth and the adults in managing the transition. Otherwise, integration will only beget more violence.

All in all, the youth of the Balkans have much to overcome, but through their talk and the talk of their parents and teachers, we were able to learn something about the kinds of support that could make their futures brighter. We have recently gathered some new data that show that life in Mostar may be improving for some people in some pockets of the town. An ethnographer for the larger project, in his most recent report, wrote about changes he is seeing. He found that some young people, now in their thirties, are beginning to be able to talk about the war for the first time. When he asked about this change, one young woman explained that some people are beginning new lives and leaving the recent past behind them:

I asked Maja how she explains the fact that everybody started talking about the war all of a sudden, discussing events about which they had kept silent for ten

years. "People have started new lives. So, now, they can talk about their previous ones," she concluded. (Communities in Crisis, 2002, p. 27)

Symbolically, the reconstruction of the old Ottoman bridge in Mostar marks for many in BiH the psychological end of an era. In Vukovar, the Berkeley Human Rights Center is working with a group of teachers to start a model integrated school. Again, it will take some time to see how that project progresses.

Notes

1. Macedonia is not labeled on the map, but Skopje is in the northern part of Macedonia, and it borders Albania to the west, Greece to the south, and Bulgaria to the east.

2. The question of the authorship of this work is disputed, although according to Morson (personal communication, August 22, 2002), it is now widely believed that this text was written by Medvedev. When we refer to it here, we will use Bakhtin/Medvedev, since this is the authorship ascribed to the text from which we quote.

3. The term *Ustashe* makes reference to a World War II group and a shameful national past. The Ustashe, with Hitler's help, created the so-called Independent State of Croatia during World War II. As a Croatian nationalist terrorist organization, Ustashe served the Germans during World War II and brutally murdered many Jews and Serbs. To call any Croat other than the most radical nationalist a Ustasha is a grave insult.

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