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# 'Home' and ethnicity in the context of war

## *Hesitant diasporas of Bosnian refugees*

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**ABSTRACT** This article examines the meanings of 'home' in the lives of Bosnian refugees living in diaspora after the extremely destructive war in Bosnia. Through careful reading of life stories written by two refugees living in Finland, it highlights the dynamic process of negotiating belonging in diasporic situations. It pays special attention to the ambivalent role of ethnicity in the memories of these writers and their understanding of 'good homes'. The reading does not support the popular 'ancient hatred' explanation of war in Bosnia; the violence of the war does not grow organically from the lives of ethnically mixed communities. Rather, it is brought to the communities by politicized discourses interpreting the language of ethnicity in extremely violent and exclusive ways. This article's orientation is towards 'hesitant diasporas' because of refugees' hesitation between their country of origin and their new country of settlement as their 'homes' in a changing situation.

**KEYWORDS** *Bosnia, diaspora, ethnicity, home, life stories, migration, transnationalism, violence, war*

## Introduction

We usually think that everybody has a home, or at least that everybody should have a home, a specific point of anchorage in the world. However, there are some moments, some circumstances in people's lives when 'homes' in their universalistic taken-for-grantedness, become problematized. These moments allow us to analyse more closely the complex social dynamics involved in the very creation, and maintenance, of homes.

Where is home, or what is home, in a situation where one's home is shattered by a violent war and one is forced into exile? In this article, the meanings of 'home' in the lives of Bosnian refugees are discussed. Three dimensions, or tensions, around the concept of 'home' provide the framework for discussion. First, 'home' refers simultaneously to private and public spaces. Second, homes are lived in through primarily mundane

bodily practice, but they are also both emotionally and politically charged material for symbolic narratives of belonging. Third, traditionally, homes are understood to be fixed in space, while the growing migration and mobility of people has problematized the very fixity of belonging. Finally, the deeply problematic nature of ethnicity in the Bosnian context touches on all these dimensions, and the discussion will draw out its ambivalent role in negotiating 'homes' in exile.

The question of 'home' in Bosnian refugees' lives will be approached by concentrating on life-stories written by two Bosnians living in Finland. One of the writers is male, the other female. Both are of 'Muslim'<sup>1</sup> origin and left Bosnia because of the war (1992–5), ending up as refugees in Finland. Both stories were written for a writing competition for immigrants in Finland in 1997,<sup>2</sup> and were published in Finland in an anthology of immigrant writing (Huttunen, 1999). This article is based on a more comprehensive research project on conceptions of home and belonging in these life-stories by immigrants with different backgrounds (Huttunen, 2002a). Here, the Bosnian stories will be concentrated upon to draw out some specificities of the Bosnian case.

It is essential for this article's reading strategy to consider life-stories simultaneously as communication to other people and as spaces for self-reflection. Life-stories are texts produced in certain contexts and for certain (presumed) audiences. Writing is always an embodied, situated practice. These stories were written in Finland in the late 1990s, in a period of increasing immigration in a country with a rather small immigrant population. But it is equally important to understand the aftermath of the violent war in Bosnia as providing a context for understanding these stories. In exile, narratives are viable spaces for creating continuity, for bridging ruptures in experience (cf. Eastmond, 1996; see also Kaplan, 1996). 'Homes' are lived and experienced but, especially in moments of rupture, they are also narrated and (re)negotiated in language and storytelling. The present author does not read the stories as more or less accurate accounts of past events in the protagonists' lives. Rather, they are read as spaces where problematized homes and identities are made sense of between two geographic places, Finland and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Within the stories the protagonists seek a narrative form that will organize their memories in a meaningful way. Simultaneously, the narratives enable them to negotiate their position as refugees within the transnational space.

According to popular explanations, warfare in the former Yugoslavia was caused by 'ancient' tribal-like hatred between ethnic groups or nationalities. This hatred had been suppressed by Socialist Party rule, and especially by the unifying power of Tito's popularity. The death of Tito and the subsequent end of the socialist system removed all constraints on ethno-nationalism.<sup>3</sup>

Undoubtedly, ethnicity gained new and highly politicized meanings during the dissolution of Yugoslavia, although the processes involved are



much more complex than the model outlined above leads us to think (see e.g. Halpern and Kideckel, 2000; Verdery, 1993). When exploring meanings of home in these stories, this article will pay special attention to the ways in which ethnicity is understood by these writers. It will ask how ethnicity, or ethnic division, figures in these writers' conception of homes, or more precisely, of good homes.

## **'Home' as a space, home as narration**

'Home' as a word or concept carries multiple simultaneous connotations. On the one hand, it refers to the private realm, to 'home' as a house or an apartment, as the space of intimacy, shelter and family life. On the other hand, we talk about 'home country' and 'native place' – that is, public spaces marked by politically loaded questions of belonging. In the latter sense, it invites questions about roots, of coming from somewhere, of memory connected to certain places. As a word, home is emotionally loaded, and thus also easily manipulated for political ends. To be 'at home' refers to a bodily experience of place and space. It connotes bodily feelings of familiarity in a climate and landscape (cf. Ahmed, 2000; Brah, 1996), but homes are created and sustained also by narratives: this is where I come from, or my people come from (Ahmed, 2000).

Mary Douglas (1991) has suggested that a space is turned into 'home' by bringing it under control. Thus, any house or shelter is not home. Conversely, a house or apartment loses its essential qualities as home when control over its boundaries and entrances is lost. The stories discussed in this article will explore this point further.

Home as a private space is necessarily in relation to public spaces. 'Home' in its public sense is clearly politicized in discussions on immigration: who may claim a country as his or her home country? Who is entitled to political and social rights? Public spaces are organized according to different regimes of power, and accordingly it is easier for some to be 'at home' in those spaces than for others – that is, to exercise control, at least to some degree, over their relationship to that space (cf. Huttunen, 2002a). Often in migration studies, immigrants' problematic relationship to public space in the new country of settlement is discussed. Both institutional control of entrance and residence permits, and classificatory power at work in everyday encounters, produces divisions to 'us' and 'them' which regulate life in public space (e.g. Metcalf, 1996). Often, those who are visibly different are reminded that they do not belong, or belong to a lesser degree (cf. Yue, 2000). However, this article will suggest – especially when talking about refugees – that it is equally important to analyse the often-problematic relationship to the public space in refugees' country of origin. It will suggest that when one can no longer feel 'at home' in public places in one's country of origin, one is very likely to choose exile, in order to find other, more safe public spaces.

Recent theorizing on diasporas and transnationality (e.g. Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002; Cohen, 1997; Ong, 1999; Wahlbeck, 1999) has sensitized us to the complexity of 'homes' in today's world, as characterized by different mobilities (cf. Urry, 1999). This line of research has de-essentialized the concept of home by showing quite convincingly that for many migratory people there are many points of reference in the global space. Homes are negotiated between constraints and possibilities connected to different locations. Homes are not necessarily either here or there, but rather in many locations simultaneously.

Time makes the concept of home dynamic: past homes are not necessarily the same as home in the present, or home imagined for the future. At the moment of exile, home as the site of everyday life, as the space of taken-for-granted repetitiveness (Hannerz, 1996), is necessarily questioned. Immigrants have to negotiate a relationship with their new countries of settlement, but at the same time, the relationship to the past and to the country of origin is renegotiated. The past is given meaning in the context of the present.

However, as Liisa Malkki (1997) has pointed out, there is no such thing as a universal refugee experience (or universal immigrant experience). Becoming and being a refugee is always embedded in local social and political relations, and made sense of within cultural and political frameworks provided by each context. Thus, the aim of this article in discussing the ways in which Bosnian refugees negotiate home and belonging in the late 1990s is not to find universal patterns of refugee settlement, but rather to highlight the dynamic nature of such negotiations, as well as to show the interconnectedness of different aspects of belonging.

## **Bosnia before the war: home remembered**

I have chosen two stories to discuss more closely here. One was written by Jasminka,<sup>4</sup> who was born in 1959 in Banja Luka, Bosnia-Herzegovina, in the former Yugoslavia. She studied law there and spent her life in her natal city until 1995, when she was forced to emigrate by Serbian troops occupying the city. The other story was written by Esad, who was born in 1973 in a small town near Prijedor, Bosnia-Herzegovina. Together their stories highlight the tensions and possibilities of negotiating home in a state of exile, as well as some particularities of the Bosnian case. The aim is to trace the shifting meanings of home in these two stories and how experiences of the war are implied in the process of negotiating those meanings.

In both stories the war in Bosnia is the central organizing element around which the overall architecture of the story is built. The time of narration is divided between time before the war and time after the war.<sup>5</sup>

Both Jasminka and Esad remember Bosnia before the war as a good home, in many senses of the word. In both, the landscape is described in detail,



by invoking bodily sensations of inhabiting familiar space. The physical landscape is shared with other people: social dimensions of home are closely intertwined with the physical and sensuous, as in the following extract from Jasminka's childhood memories:

Our house was a low building with eight small apartments. In front of the house, there was a large grass field with lots of trees, and at one end the bank of the Vrbas River, with its ice-cold water running through the city . . . Almost all summer all the front doors were open, and the smells of different food drifted in the corridors. But in autumn the smells were all the same, because then *ajvar* was made in every apartment, and plum jam was cooked, and everybody always made them according to the same recipe. Red peppers were baked on top of a stove. They were peeled, which was the most difficult part of the job, then they were crushed and cooked together with black eggplants. *Ajvar* and plum jam we ate the whole winter . . . I still remember the children's smudgy faces, as my friends played in the courtyard with a piece of bread with plum jam in their hands. We would often run to our mother to ask her to make us plum sandwich as well, and it was a sign for our parents that outside somebody was eating the same kind of sandwich . . . It often happened that somebody's mother would give bread and jam to others' children, because in those days we lived like one big family.<sup>6</sup>

The social and sensation are closely intertwined in the experience of inhabiting space. Together they produce vivid feelings of being at home. Jasminka even includes cooking recipes in her story: when writing in exile in Finland, it is exactly the mundane details of everyday life, the taken-for-granted nature of life that she misses, besides the dense and caring social network. Food conveys the very corporeal dimension of being at home; the same kind of food cooked in every apartment of the house makes visible (and smellable) the shared substance of everyday life. And it is shared across ethnic divisions or, one could say, the very act of sharing dissolves such divisions, renders them invisible or non-existent. It is worth noticing that no one's ethnic affiliation is even mentioned here.<sup>7</sup> Later in the story, such divisions will be reactivated and reseen, but at this moment, in this memory, they are not there.

Esad opens his story by remembering a special event, the construction of his family's house in a small rural town in Bosnia:

Did I wake up because the birds were singing, the clock ticking, because there were sounds coming from outside, because of the smell of the trees, the spring, the sound of cups and plates in the kitchen, or because of something else? . . . I got up and went out. There were a lot of people there, and more were arriving. Then I remembered that we were building our new house. Our relatives and neighbours helped, as always. Everybody was able to do something, but there were also professionals, and they were acting as bosses. This way we did not

need to hire anybody. The cement mixer started its rounds. I kept running back and forth and helped with little chores; I fetched something and sometimes I would take some mortar and throw it onto the wall, but the damage would be fixed later. I would bring cold beer from the creek to be drunk; when we work we also drink. The work would always be done first, and if somebody wanted to drink more, it was possible to do so. The house was erected and the builders were joking together.

This memory tells of building a home in a very concrete sense. In rural Bosnia, family houses gained special significance as the embodiment of a family's wealth and prestige, and as a visible sign of common effort<sup>8</sup> (see Bringa, 1995). Again, the social and sensation are inseparably intertwined in memories of life in prewar Bosnia. Within the frame of the whole story it is especially important to notice that the home is being built together with friends and neighbours. Again, no ethnic or national divisions are depicted.<sup>9</sup> As will be argued below, the war will change the way in which Esad understands this memory. But the memory is there to be told, the memory of a happy childhood, of being at home in both the social and sensual landscape, with no doubts about the sincerity of social relations.

Jasminka is the elder of these two writers. She reached adulthood well before the war broke out. In her story, happiness and harmony are not confined to childhood. A large part of her story describes her life as a lawyer and as a member of her family and community. The different roles of adult life, those of a professional, mother and friend are interwoven to produce a tapestry of a life of fulfilment.

During our half-hour lunch break we used to go to the nearest café, Tango, where all the waiters knew us and they knew the kind of coffee each of us drank, cappuccino or ordinary. We always had a nice time and enjoyed being together, because we knew that we belonged somewhere, we knew the waiters and the people who came to the café, we simply felt at home. This was our Tango, our place to get together, in our free time too, and if we needed to find somebody or make quick arrangements, we would always go to Tango and leave messages, knowing it would be taken care of.

Being part of a community is the aspect of life that is missed intensely here. The café is a symbol of friendship and community. Again, no national or ethnic divisions figure in the description of the community in prewar Bosnia.

As these stories were written in Finland, in exile, the time before the war is given meaning from the perspective of the present. On one level, the loving descriptions of Bosnian landscapes may be seen as simply nostalgia for lost childhood, or times past. Many of us may look at our childhood and youth with a certain amount of nostalgia,<sup>10</sup> and exile certainly accentuates



The extracts above resonate with Avtar Brah's (1996: 192) formulation of home as 'the lived experience of locality, its sounds and smells'. Sara Ahmed (2000: 341) has extended the idea of physically inhabiting a locality: in her formulation the subject and the environment 'leak into each other'. Being at home means bodily sensations of being in an environment that feels familiar, the senses being intruded by homely sensations. Migration to a new environment means, in this respect, strange bodily sensations, bodily discomfort. As Ahmed formulates it, moving to a new place is felt often through surprises in sensation, as well as 'the intrusion of an unexpected space into the body' (2000: 342). Both Esad and Jasminka write their stories soon after moving to Finland: it is easy to understand their nostalgia for the sensual landscape in their situation of 'bodily alienation'.

But in these stories, moments of nostalgic remembrance are framed within stories of political upheaval and radical disruption. They are loaded with specific meaning in the process of renegotiating home. Elsewhere (Huttunen, 2000, 2002a) I have argued that often, in life-stories written by refugees with experience of torture and imprisonment in their countries of origin, social and sensuous landscapes are overshadowed by memories of suffering. There is no nostalgia for their original countries in those stories, they are not remembered as homes. Thus, it is suggested that nostalgia for childhood landscapes is not universal. The fact that the horrors of war have not destroyed these good memories in Esad's and Jasminka's stories, the fact that Bosnia may still be remembered as a good home, makes it possible for them to create diasporic identities in the future.

Naturally, nostalgic remembrance of the past has to be understood in relation to subsequent experiences of war. One may argue that remembering the prewar period as markedly harmonious is itself an outcome of living through the violence of war. Memory is an effective tool in assessing the present, or conversely, different experiences in the present produce different ways of remembering the past (cf. e.g. Ganguly, 1992; Malkki, 1995). But it should be stressed here that remembering the prewar period as devoid of ethnic conflict is a way of criticizing the ethnicized logic of the Bosnian war, rather than simple nostalgia for the past.

### **Politicized home, problematized home**

Ethno-nationalism, as an ideology or form of political organization, figures in neither story in pre-1990s Bosnia to any significant extent. Instead it is 'politics' as a 'top-down' mode of exercising power which enters the stories as a violent force capable of shattering and destroying the harmonious world of earlier memories. In Esad's story, Tito's death is the turning point from harmonious community to the horrors of the war:



During the last years of Tito, Serbian nationalism rose behind his back. They [the Serbians] rejoiced his death. They had already made their plans for 'humanitarian population changes', which meant ethnic cleansing and killing. We did not know that.

Suddenly there is a division between 'us' and 'them', between 'the Serbs' and others in the story. Esad does not 'remember' the working of nationalistic politics; there are no personal memories of it at this point. Rather, he assumes afterwards that it has been there, working behind the backs of Bosnian (non-Serb) people. In his personal memories, life goes on as usual:

I went to school, my father worked and life went on as normal. The house was finished, the roof was built. It was always an important occasion. The last board on the ridge of the roof was fixed, and the site manager shouted so that everybody could hear that the house was finished! A family had a house to live in once more. The custom was that neighbours and relatives would bring gifts such as shirts, blouses, handkerchiefs or a one-litre bottle of alcohol and other stuff. I thought that I was still living in brotherly solidarity, and that there was a feeling of belonging together, in which nobody wanted to hurt others because of their ethnic background... I went to school, and there was no trouble regarding the nationality question. In my class there were people with different national backgrounds, as there had always been.

At the time of writing, Esad had lived through the brutal violence of the war in Bosnia. During the war former neighbours and friends were pitted against each another, across ethnically demarcated faultlines. These experiences made him confused over the interpretation of his own memories: he seems to hesitate over whether to regard the 'brotherly solidarity' characterizing the years of his boyhood as real or illusory. There is a certain dissonance between his memories of different groups living together on the one hand, and later memories of violence on the other. This dissonance, or hesitation, remains unsolved in Esad's story. The ways in which he, and other Bosnians, will be able to work out solutions for this dissonance will have crucial repercussions for the question of 'home'. Is there any possibility of returning to the remembered harmony? Is the remembered harmony only illusion, or was there really at some time brotherly solidarity and real home in Bosnia? Can Bosnia be a real home once again in the future?

Similarly, through experiences of war and exile, past events are revealed to Jasminka in a new light. She reinterprets an event during her teenage years, the imprisonment of her friend's father, within a new framework of meaning provided by later experience:

Our parents were equally strict about our going out until the imprisonment of Duda's father. We were in the second grade of secondary school then. It was a



great shock to Duda's family. His father was a professor, and as we understood it the reason for his imprisonment was political . . . Only now I understand that I can 'thank' those politicians who imprisoned Duda's father for the fact that I do not have my own home anymore, and I don't live in my own city or my own country anymore.

Both writers seem to hesitate as to who to blame for the outbreak of war and the destruction of harmonious community. Jasminka names 'the politicians' as the villains; Esad blames 'the Serbs'. But after naming the Serbs as the initiators, he bursts into bewildered questioning: they used to have Serbian friends and Serbian godparents in his family (see below), so how was this division possible? Why did it produce the brutality of warfare? On closer inspection, it is the Serbs engulfed in nationalistic politics who became dangerous for the whole community and its future, not Serbs as such.

To begin with, ethnic divisions are not lived in the daily lives of the communities described. Both writers interpret the divisions as produced by malevolent (ethno-nationalistic) politicians. When home becomes politicized in ethnic or nationalistic terms, it also becomes seriously problematized as a home. It turns into a home which does not really feel like home anymore. The essential characteristics of 'home' are lost, especially feelings of security and togetherness. Both writers yearn for the time when it was possible to live ordinary lives without the interference of politics.<sup>11</sup>

### **The war: broken homes, political testimonies**

In both stories the outbreak of war is the turning point around which the overall architecture of the stories is organized. Both remember and richly describe the moment when they realize the inescapability of the war, its actual presence and reality in their own lives. In Esad's story, the war approaches gradually but steadily:

Slovenia wanted even more independence and war broke out. We watched the TV, but we couldn't believe that war was in the country in which we lived.<sup>12</sup> Until that time we had followed the war in the Middle East and Iraq, and it was very distant from us; we could not believe that there could be war in our country as well . . . I sat in the garden and listened to the sound of the cannons that could be heard from Croatia, from the other side of the Kozarac mountains. Now it was very near, the war was no longer in the Middle East nor anywhere else; the war was coming right here. It was impossible to believe it, that the war was coming to us: why? We had never quarrelled with the Serbs, we had Serbian friends and godparents in our families on both sides. We always greeted each other in a friendly way and I could not understand why they were attacking us. I went to school, and from the bus window I watched

the rows of cannons and other weapons coming from Croatia. Those who came with weapons were shooting in the air; power lines were often cut. They sat on the top of tanks and held three fingers erect, which is the Serbian emblem, shouting: 'This will all be Serbia!' There were banners stuck to the tanks: 'This is Serbia, Turks [meaning us Bosnians] go home to Turkey, Catholics go home to the Vatican!'

Esad remembers, with disbelief, how the war intruded upon the familiar landscape and changed it to a place of fear and violence. Hatred is ascribed to the intruding military. This is the first actually 'remembered' incident in Esad's narrative when the ethnic division is explicitly acted out. It is important to note here that the violently exclusive interpretation of ethnic divisions was brought to the community from outside; according to Esad, it did not grow organically from the life of the local community. The language of ethnic divisions was there before the war, but the violent interpretation was not. Another point worth paying attention to here is the practice of Othering through naming: the Serbs entering Bosnia call the local Muslims 'Turks', thus indicating that they do not belong to the local landscape, that they are 'from somewhere else'. This reflects the changing dynamics of ethnic nationalism in the Balkans: whereas the 19th-century Serbian and Croatian nationalists argued vehemently over the question of whether Bosnian Muslims should be regarded as Serbs or Croats who had converted to Islam during the Ottoman era (see e.g. Donia and Fine, 1994), in the 1990s, increasingly, Muslims were called 'Turks' by extreme nationalists. Late 20th-century nationalism in the Balkans turned to increasingly exclusive and violent forms.

In Jasminka's story, the reality of war intrudes into her own family:

The war started for me when my brother left Banja Luka. It was in July 1992. At that time, mobilization was being planned in our city, and soldiers with their arms were part of everyday life. I think my brother made his decision one night. I will never know how many nights he had spent thinking it over. I accompanied him and a big suitcase in which he had packed some of his belongings (only when you are forced to leave somewhere forever do you realise how suitcases are too small for all that made your life a life) . . . My brother got into the bus somewhat eagerly but he couldn't fool me; it was all extremely difficult. The last look. He waved to me and gestured that I should go and that I shouldn't cry. Anyway, I did cry, as I am now while writing about it. From that moment, the hard times began in my life.

Here, personal and political are inseparably intertwined. War breaks her family or, to put it another way, the intimate space of family life is intruded upon and shattered by the political. Troubles in public 'home' leak into private sphere, and good life or good homes become impossible.



In both stories the war makes the familiar landscape strange, threatening, dangerous, marked by violence. In Esad's story, his hometown is literally occupied by the Serbs:

One morning in April the roadblocks, sandbags and machine guns were there. The police were Serbs, other policemen had better not enter the building. Groups carrying arms patrolled the town and they checked all passers-by. The local radio station declared that from that day onwards, the place was the Serbian municipality of Prijedor. All the Bosnians and Croats were sent home from work. The Serbs took their place; it did not matter if they were not competent for the work, the most important thing was that they were loyal to the Serbs. Then the attacks on Kozarac began.

At this point Esad's story turns into a stream of anecdotal accounts of atrocities committed by the Serbs. The personal dimension of telling a life-story is suspended for a while; instead of his own memories he carefully reports things that happened to other people. His story turns into a testimony of violence and injustice committed against Bosnian Muslims during the war. His own personal memories link up with this attempt to tell a version of the history of the war. The personal feeds into the public and political.

In Esad's story, the public space is appropriated by hostile Serbs and turned into an arena of extreme violence. In Jasminka's story, home as private space of shelter and intimacy becomes severely threatened:

March 1994 brought new traumas to my family. One evening, three soldiers came to our apartment. They threatened us by saying that the apartment should be vacated within three days, so that one of their soldiers could move in. After this incident, phone calls with threats and insults continued, but we stayed in the apartment until July. But after the incident I could not sleep peacefully any more. Every sound, such as the phone ringing, would wake me up, as well as somebody talking a little bit louder in the corridor or outside the window. We lived on the first floor, and the house had 13 floors, and as the lifts did not work because of electricity shortages everybody had to walk by our front door. I became breathless every time somebody walked on the stairs. If the footsteps continued it was always a relief, and a sigh burst from my lungs.

The boundaries of home as the area of the private cannot be controlled anymore. Fear enters Jasminka's own body. The boundary between public and private is leaking, and both spaces are infused with the threat of violence and loss of control over one's fate. At this point, the boundaries of one's own body also become vulnerable.

Some differences between these two stories can be explained by the protagonists' different places of residence: in the countryside of northern and eastern Bosnia there was severe fighting, whereas in the cities, such as

Banja Luka the actual warfare was more distant, but its effects were felt in other ways. In both stories, however, familiar landscape becomes hostile and alien. The working of nationalistic politics breaks 'homes': neither the public social landscape nor the privacy of one's apartment can provide a feeling of being at home anymore.

### **Exile: hesitant diasporas**

As is suggested above, in both stories the war and events leading to it change the writers' relationship to Bosnia as home. Leaving the country and becoming a refugee is a final step in the gradual process whereby the social and sensual landscape that was lived as home turns into a hostile and threatening place. Bosnia cannot be lived in as a good home anymore.

But as theorizing on diasporas and transnationalism as well as ethnographic evidence suggest, many migrant groups retain both symbolic and practical relationships to their countries of origin. In particular, diasporic social organization means strong orientation towards the country of origin (Safran, 1991; Wahlbeck, 1999): it is regarded as the 'true' home, towards which political and/or economic activities are often directed. The hope of return dominates the lives of diasporic groups and individuals, but sometimes diasporic organization or orientation gives way to more open transnational practices in the lives of groups and individuals (Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002; Ong, 1999).

Both Jasminka's and Esad's stories were written quite soon after their arrival in Finland. It is impossible to say what kinds of relationships they, or the exiled Bosnians in general, will develop to the new state of Bosnia-Herzegovina on the one hand, and to their new countries of settlement on the other. Instead of finding 'final' answers, the aim here is to trace some hints and possibilities of future homes in these stories.

Above, Esad's memory of building the family house was cited – that is, home in its concrete sense – in Bosnia. The whole project of building a house needs to be thoroughly reinterpreted at the time of writing, after the experiences of the war and exile:

The Finns want to be independent, they are not attached to their relatives in the way we are. They travel a lot, both in Finland and abroad, and that is good. Our whole lives we kept building our house and gathered things there, and now we don't have anything left. I have come to understand that a human being can only carry knowledge with him, only what he has learned and what he has inside his head: that is something nobody can take away from him.

Esad seems to suggest that too strong an attachment to a place makes one vulnerable in a world torn by nationalistic policies and power politics. Some kind of cosmopolitan orientation (cf. Hannerz, 1996) would be a solution, a viable identity in the modern world.



Thus, in Esad's story, home in the past was unquestionably in Bosnia. However, it is not clear whether it is possible to imagine home there in the future as well, or whether he should find means to make a home for himself elsewhere. The theme of Islam becoming more important in his personal life runs throughout his story, as well as in the lives of Bosnian Muslims in general. Interestingly, it figures in the closing paragraph of his story:

Despite everything Bosnia is a mother to whom the nation wants to return from all corners of the world, and the country will receive every conscientious citizen . . . Despite everything, some people have returned from Finland. We are what we are, Bosnian Muslims, that we cannot change, and do not want to change. And here, where there is no sun during the winter, I can still feel its warmth on my face as I turn to the East to pray.

Earlier in his story, Esad used exactly the same words for describing bodily sentiments during prayer in Bosnia: now, that feeling is transferred across geographical distance and relived in the bodily practices of prayer. There is a hesitation between nationalistic discourse and a more trans-nationally oriented one in the paragraph. Home produced by the politicized national identity is fixed in geography, while the bodily practices of Islam can produce home wherever one is (cf. Metcalf, 1996). The latter option suggests that a future home could be in Finland as well. The idea of Bosnia as a 'true' home is strongly present in the narrative, as well as deliberation on the possibilities of returning. But Islam as a means of producing 'home' wherever one is complicates the picture: 'home' is not geographically fixed in that case. One could argue also that in exile, ethnicity becomes a compelling discourse for talking about identity in a new way: it is through ethnicity that Esad is able to talk about his relationship to Bosnia while living in Finland.

But neither identities nor 'homes' are something that people create and choose in isolation, solely within their minds. The way in which Esad, and others in similar situations, will resolve their hesitations about identity and possible future homes depends on developments both in Bosnia and Finland (and other countries of settlement). The possibilities of life as an immigrant in Finnish society on the one hand, and the political and social developments in Bosnia<sup>15</sup> on the other, will open or close both symbolic and practical options in the future.

Jasminka does not embrace nationalistic discourse to the extent that Esad does. In her story everyday life, with its dense social networks and fulfilling social roles, created a good home in Bosnia. Exile destroys home in this sense. Here she describes her life in a refugee camp in Germany:

I had a feeling that I was dead, there was just one part of me that was alive. That part walked and spoke, ate and studied, but in reality it was not me. I studied German with a sick fury, as if studying was also a struggle over life and

death . . . I became an automaton without any desires, and what was even worse, without hope. Everything seemed to be senseless and meaningless. My parents had stayed behind in Varazdin, my brother was in Sweden, my friends scattered around the world. There was nothing left: not my work, no cappuccino in the Tango café, not my friend Azra. I was not a lawyer anymore, nor a friend to anyone; now I was only a number in the list of Bosnian refugees, my life was left behind.

Exile is described as the death of the former social self, and her new life in Finland is assessed primarily in the light of social relationships:

I can feel Sandra's [her daughter] warm hand as she wipes my tears. Not everything is lost. Life goes on, because I do have something for which to live. How difficult it must be to recover for those people who lost somebody very dear to them during this war, or many dear ones, and still they have to live on. When I think about them my own sorrow feels tiny . . . Since January 1997 I have lived in Finland. The family is together again. I speak with my brother on the phone quite often; last summer we met. I am studying Swedish,<sup>14</sup> Sandra is happy and so are my parents. How is my life now? I will think about it tomorrow.

There is a possibility that the social self and social networks might be rebuilt in Finland. In which case, Finland might become a new home. Family, rather than ethnicity, provides a point of anchorage. At the time of writing her story, Jasminka had lived in Finland only for a couple of months: her relationship to the Finnish (social and sensuous) landscape was necessarily very different from the one she had to the Bosnian landscape. She closes her story with explicit openness: only time will tell what will happen to her relationship to both Bosnia and Finland, including social networks and the embodied experience of living in a place. All the possibilities are there.

## Conclusions

'Home' in these stories is negotiated between embodied experiences, social networks and politicized and narrativized identities. Embodied experience is appropriated in narration as an element in the process of negotiation. In both stories, the past home is unquestionably in Bosnia, but the future home remains open. Of course, as research employing the concepts 'diaspora' and 'transnationalism' has suggested, it is possible to have 'homely' relationships with more than one place. I call the orientation of these writers 'hesitant diasporas': there is hesitation over where to imagine home in the future and how to orient oneself in the diasporic space. The outcome of such hesitation is dependent on dynamic, changing situations in both ends of the diasporic space: Finland and Bosnia.



This article suggests that there is an intimate connection between home as a private space and 'being at home' in public space, ordered by political discourses and national(istic) regimes. When the political forcefully intrudes on the private, one's relationship to the public is changed profoundly. Home as the place of intimacy characterized by feelings of security becomes insecure, and finally impossible, in a hostile and violent public landscape.

Another aspect of 'hesitant diasporas' opens up the question of the presumed audience(s) of these stories. One may argue that these stories are part of two discourses. When these stories are told to the Finns, they participate in discussion in Finland about immigration, about 'genuine' and 'false' refugees, and about the protagonists' (and other Bosnians') position in Finland. These stories argue very strongly that the Bosnians did have compelling reasons to leave their country of origin and to become refugees.

But at the same time these stories participate in the struggle over the 'truth' of the war in Bosnia. They were written during a time when there was an ongoing battle over what 'really' happened during the war. The War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague is an institutionalized version of this battle. At the same time the battle is fought in the media, in books by journalists who were in the former Yugoslavia during its dissolution and the subsequent wars (see e.g. Maass, 1996; Rieff, 1995), as well as around kitchen tables of former Yugoslavians both back in the Balkans and in diaspora around the world. The 'truth' of the war is closely connected to competing explanations of the dissolution of Yugoslavia. These stories by Bosnian refugees do not support by any means the 'ancient hatred' explanation, according to which Balkan societies are composed of tribe-like ethnic groups whose members have hated each other from time immemorial. Rather, these stories support Verdery's (1993) claim that ethnicity and nationalism, as they are currently manifest in former socialist countries, are very much post-socialist phenomena, reactions to insecurities produced by the collapse of the socialist system (see also Verdery, 1999). In the stories analysed here, violence does not grow from the lives of ethnically mixed communities. Rather, it is brought to communities by politicized discourses which interpret the language of ethnicity in extremely violent and exclusive ways, and by actors who take on such discourses.

The fact that Bosnia is remembered as a good home allows its continuous role as a point of anchorage in Bosnian diaspora. However, what is important to notice here is that struggle over history is not only about the past, but also about the future (cf. McClintock, 1995). These stories participate in a struggle over the kinds of interpretation of history on which future Bosnian society will be built. The deep morality of Bosnian society is at stake here. Whether the hesitant diasporic orientation will materialize in actual return movement depends very much on the outcomes of such struggles.



Finally, by telling of suffering and loss these writers are inviting readers (with any ethnic background) to share their pain. Veena Das (1995) has suggested that by sharing pain we create communities. In this way, these writers are making an effort to create a community across ethnic and national divisions. In these stories, it is precisely the politicizing of such divisions that brings the suffering and destruction of (material and symbolic) homes.

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### Notes

1. In the former Yugoslavia, 'Muslim' (with a capital letter) was adopted as a term to denote an ethnic group as opposed to 'muslim', referring to the religious group. This ethnic group is understood to be composed of those south Slavic (Serbian or Croatian) people in Bosnia whose ancestors had adopted the Muslim faith during the Ottoman era. So, Muslims are not necessarily practising religious muslims, and sometimes 'Bosniak' is used instead of 'Muslim' to refer to this group. On the complexities of naming in Bosnian and the former Yugoslavian context, see e.g. Bringa (1995), Donia and Fine (1994) and Halpern and Kideckel (2000).
2. The competition was organized by the Department of Sociology and Social Psychology at Tampere University, in collaboration with the Finnish Literature Society and the Advisory Board for Refugee and Migration Affairs. The authors were asked to write about their own lives, both before moving to Finland and afterwards. They were encouraged to write about whatever the writers themselves found important or worth conveying. The competition was open to all immigrants living in Finland, regardless of their country of origin or reason for immigration. The resulting 72 stories were produced by writers with 25 different national backgrounds. Five writers came from Bosnia. I have dealt with the body of stories as a whole elsewhere (Huttunen, 2002a).
3. For a thorough critique of the 'ancient hatred' explanation applied to the Balkans, see Verdery (1993); for the complexities in the former Yugoslavia, see Halpern and Kideckel (2000); for an ethnographic account of ethnic relations in prewar Bosnia, see Bringa (1995).
4. Both names are pseudonyms.
5. Marita Eastmond (1996) suggests that immigrants' life-stories are usually divided into the time before the exile and the time following it. In these Bosnian stories, however, the war is the great event dividing time. Rather, exile is seen as a consequence of the war.
6. Both stories were originally written in Bosnian/Serbo-Croatian. They were translated into Finnish by Eeva-Kaarina Belaic. The extracts here are translated from Finnish by the author.



7. During my ongoing ethnographic research among Bosnian refugees living in Finland, interviewees with an urban background in Bosnia have told me repeatedly that in Yugoslav times in urban areas, ethnic divisions were losing their significance in everyday interaction.
8. Burning the houses of other ethnic groups during the war was part of the ethnicized logic of warfare during the Bosnian war.
9. According to prewar social research, in rural Bosnia, intermarriage was less common than in urban areas, and people were more aware of belonging to different ethnic communities than in urban areas; see e.g. Bringa (1995); also Botev (2000). However, the writer of this story does not depict childhood community in ethnic terms.
10. Anni Vilkkö, a Finnish scholar working on Finnish autobiographical texts, has suggested that the landscapes of childhood are remembered and described more intensely by most writers than the landscapes of later life; see Vilkkö (1998).
11. This resonates interestingly with David Campbell's (1999) suggestion that the partition of Bosnia via the Dayton agreement into ethnically marked territories is supported by nationalistically minded Bosnian politicians, but opposed by perhaps the majority of 'ordinary' people. Cf. also Bringa (1995).
12. It is interesting to note that here, 'the country where we live' refers to Yugoslavia, whereas later in his story Esad talks about Bosnia as his country of origin or home country. This slide in naming makes visible how profoundly the war and the dissolution of Yugoslavia changed these people's system of coordinates for making sense of the world.
13. The political and economic situation in the new state of Bosnia-Herzegovina was rather unsettled at the time that these stories were written, and remains so to a considerable extent even today. The unstable political situation, as well as the continuous division of Bosnia to the Serb-dominated part (Republika Srpska) and the so-called federal part, plays a crucial role when possibilities of return are discussed within the refugee community (Huttunen, 2002b). About the division of Bosnia, see Campbell (1999).
14. Some areas in Finland are heavily Swedish-speaking, and in those areas also immigrants learn Swedish instead of Finnish.

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### Biographical note

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