Balkanization of identity:

Rebuilding fragmented identities through narratives

by

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Abstract

Despite extensive research on the politics of war and Yugoslav refugees during the civil war, there has been scant research on identity building in their children. I present the term, “balkanization of identity” to conceptualize experiences of 1.5 generation Balkan women in diaspora. This describes the fragmentation of identity through violence and/or trauma. In this population, this primarily occurs through transgenerational trauma, patriarchal violence, and migration. Women have long been silenced in collective narratives and national identity-building in the Balkans. Yugoslav feminists have used the re-appropriation of gendered oral traditions as resistance against patriarchal violence. Following their tradition and that of narrative therapy, narrative inquiry was used as a methodology. Transcription was guided by the feminist methodology, the Listening Guide, and data analysis followed the Thematic Content Analysis Method. Findings suggest that for this population, identity is relational and transgenerational, rooted in history and politics, and dynamic and uncertain.

Keywords: identity; trauma; intergenerational trauma; diaspora; narratives; Yugoslavia

Dedication

This work is dedicated to community, to the forgotten generation that has never seen themselves represented, and to all of those children around the world who were displaced by war and are trying to find their way back to themselves in the best way they can.

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Finally, thank you to the participants of this study for the honour of trusting me with your stories. You gave me the strength to share my own story and to write this work with authenticity and courage. I hope that this work brings you the peace it did to me.

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Source: The Cartographic Section of the United Nations (2007)

Table 1: A Brief Timeline of Balkans (1912-1980)

1912	First Balkan War
1913	Second Balkan War
1914	Gavrilo Princip, a Bosnian Serb, assassinates Austrian Archduke sparking the July Crisis and subsequently the First World War
1914-1918	First World War
1918	Kingdom of Yugoslavia formed, made up of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes
1939-1945	Second World War
1941	Yugoslavia invaded by German, Italian, and Hungarian forces
1944-45	Yugoslav Partisans (the Communist resistance movement) expel Axis first from Serbia and then the rest of Yugoslavia.
1945	Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia established under one party system. Partisan leader Marshall Broz Tito established as its leader.
1963	The country changes its name to the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) and Tito is named President for life
1980	Tito's death sparks a fight for power and rise in nationalist leaders.

Table 2: Timeline of Conflicts and Disintegration of Yugoslavia

1989	**Slobodan Milošević becomes President of Serbia,** making a speech in Kosovo that stokes already rising ethnic tensions. Milošević is widely considered one of the main aggressors in the civil war(s).
1991	**March:** Demonstrations against Slobodan Milošević in Belgrade. Police and military deployed against the people, killing and injuring protesters. **Croatia and Slovenia declare independence** from Yugoslavia. Slovenia's independence declaration sparks a brief conflict, the **Ten-Day War**, after which their independence is solidified. The Republic of **Macedonia declares independence**, without resistance or conflict
1991-1995	In Croatia, more ethnically diverse than Slovenia, war rages for four years.
1992	The most ethnically diverse of the republics, **Bosnia and Herzegovina declares independence**. Serbia and Montenegro remain a country and **form the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia**, with Slobodan Milošević as the leader.
1992-1995	**International embargo** placed on Yugoslavia, causing rapid inflation and poverty. **War rages in Bosnia and Herzegovina**, with thousands of deaths, war crimes, and mass displacement.
1995	Bosnia, Serbia, and Croatia sign the **Dayton Peace Accord** to end the war in Bosnia, leading to the **partition of Bosnia** into three regions, each governed by one of the three largest ethnic groups in Bosnia.
1996	Tensions rise in Kosovo, with altercations between Serbian policemen and the paramilitary group Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), as well as between ethnic Kosovo Albanians and ethnic Kosovo Serbs.
1998	Milošević sends troops to Kosovo, escalating the tensions to the **Kosovo War** which lasts from **1998 until 1999**.
	Yugoslavia is placed under a second round of **international sanctions**, which begin to lift after Milošević is overthrown in 2000. **The final sanctions are lifted in 2001.**
1999	**NATO launches airstrikes** on Yugoslav targets (in Serbia, Kosovo, and Montenegro).

Table 3: Timeline of post-conflict Balkans

September 2000	Opposition leader Vojislav Koštunica wins elections. Milošević refuses to release the complete results or to step down.
October 2000	Following a general strike in Serbia, over a million people flood the streets of Belgrade and storm the Parliament building. Security and police guarding the Parliament either retreat or join the crowd. **Milošević is overthrown** on October 5, 2000. Koštunica takes office. This has been nicknamed the "**Bulldozer Revolution**."
2001	**Milošević is arrested** by Yugoslav authorities. He is charged with corruption and abuse of power and handed over to the UN International Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in **The Hague.**
2003	The federation of Yugoslavia is replaced with **Serbia and Montenegro.**
2006	Following a referendum, **Montenegro declares independence**, the results of which are accepted by Serbia the next day. This signals the dissolution of the last remaining Yugoslav republics.
	Slobodan Milošević dies in his cell months before the verdict of his trial is to be announced.
2017	After 24 years of investigations and 161 indictments of crimes against humanity, genocide, and other crimes committed in wartime, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia is dissolved.

Chapter 1.

Introduction

As the world watched Yugoslavia collapse in civil war throughout the 1990s, there was no shortage of history books, political analysis, articles, and opinions on the formerly socialist country. These narratives were largely constructed by Western scholars and journalists who Ugrešić (1996) calls "lovers of 'catastrophe tourism,'…hunters of strong emotions… and authorities on other people's misfortune" (p. 26). Most existing global discourse around the former Yugoslavia and the Balkans is primarily around policy, politics, and war. If women are included in the discourse, they are painted as mothers or as victims, and their suffering is politicized – while their voices are erased.

While this work is far from a political commentary, much of the intergenerational trauma and identity of the participants in this research fit within a greater historical and collective context. The Balkans have historically been rife with war and conflict, including centuries of Ottoman occupation, the Balkan Uprisings in the early 20th century, and an active role in both world wars (Calić and Geyer, 2019). After the Second World War, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was created and included Serbia, Kosovo[1], Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Slovenia. The country was under Marshall Broz Tito's communist rule from 1945 until his death in 1980. Tito supported "brotherhood and unity" amongst the various ethnic groups living in Yugoslavia. His death sparked a fight for power and a rise in nationalist leaders. A series of brutal conflicts occurred throughout the 1990s, which included genocide, ethnic cleansing, and mass expulsion and displacement (Calić and Geyer, 2019). In 1999, NATO bombed Yugoslavia and in 2000, Slobodan Milošević (Serbia's authoritarian president, war criminal, and aggressor) was overthrown by the Serbian people.

On top of significant internal displacement throughout the former Yugoslavia, there was mass migration outside of Yugoslavia. Migration continues in some parts as

[1] Kosovo's sovereignty as a country remains contested by Serbia. Serbia's government maintains that Kosovo is an important part of Serbia's history and national identity (Calić and Geyer, 2019). While the intention of this work is to tell stories, not politics, this context is important. Thus, the researcher takes no political stance on this issue.

mass poverty, unemployment, corruption, and discrimination force young people into diaspora. Tradition and patriarchy remain culturally salient aspects of Balkan identity, particularly after the dissolution of socialist Yugoslavia. Nationalist beliefs in the Balkans are often associated with ideas of religiosity, tradition, and patriarchy. The Balkans also remain unwelcoming for LGBTQ+ people and ethnic minorities.

While there was a surge in literature during the war on the refugees from the former Yugoslavia, there has been little research since then. Specifically, scant research exists on their children – the forgotten generation—who themselves survived war and migration. This research aims to fill that research gap. Based on the findings of this study, many in this population experience a "balkanization of identity," that is, the fragmentation of identity through transgenerational trauma, patriarchal violence, and conflict-generated diaspora experiences. Originally the geo-political term "balkanization" was coined to describe fragmentation of countries or states, usually with the presence of conflict and/or tension – although usage has since been expanded (Jakovina, 2014). One of the conclusions of this research is that the key mechanism through which balkanization of identity occurs in this population is through transgenerational trauma, wherein trauma fractures identity and intergenerational connections. It also occurs through the following mechanisms: 1) the loss of cultural identity through migration and transnationalism[2]; 2) the intergenerational "fragmentation" (Moll, 2013) or "balkanization of collective memory" (Jakovina, 2014) that occurred after the dissolution of Yugoslavia; and 3) the impact of patriarchal violence on the identity of women. The research on intergenerational trauma (discussed in more depth in Chapter 2) has shown that intergeneration trauma and fragmentation of identity is often transmitted through the silence; that is, the very gaps in parents' narratives are filled with trauma for the next generation. By using a narrative methodology, this research aims to fill those silences with connection and meaning for Balkan women. This research will explore how narratives and storytelling can contribute to the rebuilding of identities fragmented by factors of inherited trauma, violence, and cultural loss. Recently, "healing" in the context of the former Yugoslavia occurs as reconciliation efforts on a political scale between nation-states. Given the lack of research or attention to this population, there has been no efforts for healing for those growing up in conflict-generated diaspora – something

[2] "Transnationalism" refers to the pluralism of ties that many migrants maintain across nations (Vertovec 2001).

that this study aims to address. This introduction will provide context on the researcher positionality, the historical context of Yugoslavia required to understand participants' positionality, and the gendered ways in which oral traditions have existed in the Balkans. The latter is important to the context of narrative inquiry and feminist methodologies used in this work.

Gendered Narratives and Oral traditions

For the context of this research, it is important to understand how narratives have historically been culturally constructed and how these gendered narratives have influenced Balkan identity. Oral tradition such as epic oral poetry has been one of the building blocks of identity and a way of placing the self within a historical context in many Balkan countries (Palavestra, 1966). One of the most foundational oral traditions in the Balkans is that of myth. Myth was passed on orally, usually through song, until the 19th century. In Serbia, for example, Serbian linguist Vuk Karadzić began reforming the Serbian language in 1818 and was the first to publish traditional myths, songs, and poems in written form (Batinić, 2015). He catalogued oral traditions by gender: epic poetry was *male heroic poetry,* while other genres of love poetry, ballads, and ritual poetry were *women's poetry* (Batinić, 2015; Slapšak, 2001). With oral traditions themselves already gendered, an even larger divide exists between what becomes written history and what remains an oral tradition and is ultimately lost (Alexievich, 2017; Nikolić-Ristanović, 2000). Heroic battles, victories and defeats, and stories of war are recorded in tomes. In war, the losses that women face, mothers' pain, rape, and the hardship of exile remain oral histories that mothers tell daughters, and grandmothers tell granddaughters. Men's losses and defeats in war are heroic, while those of women are considered minor sacrifices for the homeland and for "freedom" (Nikolić-Ristanović, 2000). Women are largely painted as stereotypes. Milojević and Izgarjan (2014) identified four main patterns in the representation of women in Serbian folk tales: 1) Women as either mothers or nurses; 2) Evil women (witches); 3) nameless women and; 4) women as victims of violence.

As national identity is built off of oral traditions, these stereotypes of womanhood maintain dominant patriarchal narratives and continue to subjugate Balkan women. This is clear in the myths told around the Battle of Kosovo, a historic battle that was fought in 1389 between Serbian forces and the invading Ottoman army (Slapšak, 2001). This myth is so significant to Serbian national identity that to this day, it impacts foreign policy (e.g. the sovereignty of Kosovo from Serbia). Amidst the stories of heroism and battle,

there are only two stories of women coming from this myth, both of which have become established archetypes within the culture. The first is that of the nameless Kosovo Maiden, who searches for her betrothed in the battlefield, helping wounded soldiers along the way. Eventually, she discovers that her fiancée has been killed in the battle. The poem ends with a lament of her tragic fortune and reminds Serbian women of their duty to honour and care for their brave men. The second, and most significant, female archetype is that of the Mother Jugović, whose husband and nine sons all die heroically in battle. Mother Jugović is a martyr who has given up all her sons for the country, and her laments are so mournful and so filled with anguish, that her heart breaks with sorrow (Slapšak, 2001). Thus, womanhood is constructed as silent martyrdom, and women's place in Balkan society is as carriers of grief and sorrow. This research takes the narrative inquiry approach as a way of centering women's stories and allowing women to rebuild their own narratives of identity. By placing a feminist lens, women have a voice that has often been silenced in the cultural discourse.

As seen with both Mother Jugović and the Kosovo Maiden's laments, women's ritual oral traditions often revolve around death and mourning – considered the realm of women. Women serve as a connection to the past and the otherworldly as *narikače,* women who perform the ritual lamentation for the dead (Šaulić, 1963). Just as women bring life into the world, it is also their role to mourn those who leave the world. When a man dies, the women prepare the body for the funeral and arrange the wake. The role of *narikače* is to perform a lamentation in epic verses, telling the story of the deceased's glory, tragic death, and the family's sorrow (Šaulić, 1963). Balkan women, particularly elder women, are believed to hold a special connection to their ancestors and the responsibility of mentoring younger generations of women (Keresky-Hali'ern, 1985). Along with this connection to the past and to death, older women are also believed to foretell the future, usually through reading the grounds of Turkish coffee. They also take on the role of healers through home remedies and oral traditions. For example, some rural areas still have a *bajalica,* a female conjurer and traditional folk healer whose wide-ranging methods include oral traditions (Keresky-Hali'ern, 1985; Vivod, 2009). Through this connection to the past, the future, and the otherworldly, women are often seen as carriers of intergenerational knowledge. As carriers of grief and mourning, they are particularly susceptible to intergenerational trauma; however, this connection also serves as an opportunity for intergenerational resilience and healing. Because of this connection and the limited narratives of Balkan women, this research focuses on women

from the former Yugoslavia. Understanding the ways in which these women build healing narratives can have greater implications for the use of alternative narratives in the Balkan context, including for reconciliation efforts, education, and women's empowerment.

The history of the Balkans is complex and rife with conflict even before the most recent conflicts of the 1990s. Oral traditions such as myth have been the building blocks of identity in the Balkans and are inherently deeply gendered. They frame Balkan women's intergenerational connection to the past and the future, to birth and death, and their responsibility to future generations. The history laid out in this introduction provides a context within which participants of this research can frame their identity. While there was significant research on refugees and immigrants from the former Yugoslavia, there is a research gap in the literature that ignores their children. As this research will illustrate, this 'forgotten generation' lives with identity fragmented by intergenerational trauma and conflict-generated diaspora. As carriers of sorrow, stories, and knowledge, women have a unique connection to the generations before them, while also having a unique experience of patriarchal violence. This research aims to not only fill this gap in literature but also to centre narratives of Balkan women. This was done using narrative inquiry by conducting semi-structured qualitative interviews with four Balkan women who grew up in diaspora. Transcription was done with the aid of the feminist Listening Guide (Gilligan et al., 2003) and a descriptive qualitative method was used for data analysis, the Thematic Content Analysis Method (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The research aimed to not only capture the experiences of Balkan women but to also answer how Balkan women experiencing balkanization of identity are able to rebuild narratives of identity. Chapter 2, the literature review, will cover the existing literature on intergenerational trauma, diaspora and transnationalism, and narratives. Chapter 3 will provide an overview of the methodology and procedures used in this research. Chapter 4 will lay out the results of the research and Chapter 5 will provide a discussion of the results.

A note on language and researcher positionality

When discussing identity, I set out to explore specifically how participants constructed ethnic and cultural identity in diaspora. What I discovered as I spoke to participants and engaged in self-reflection was that interpretations of identity were far more complex and expansive than that. In fact, several participants experienced ethnic, cultural, and national categories as so unstable and difficult to define that they relied on

other measures of identity, such as occupational identity, hobbies, or relational identifiers. When I speak about identity in this work, I see it as an experience that is multi-faceted, fluid, and ever evolving. My identity and identity for these participants has often felt defined by things outside of our control. As such, the discourse around identity in this work has been woven through the literature review and narratives rather than being categorized in one section. This is done to reflect that identity is not a static or self-contained category; rather, it exists in many forms and is dependent on context.

When speaking about participants, the language used for their ethnicity or nationality are based on how they have self-identified, while the language used when citing literature largely reflects the language used by the author. When speaking more broadly, I use the terms "Balkan(s)" or "former Yugoslav(ia)" interchangeably. While the Balkans are larger than just the former Yugoslavia and usually include Greece and other countries that were not part of the former Yugoslavia and/or that were not involved in the conflicts, I use this term in this context to reflect regional perspectives or shared experiences of those from the former Yugoslavia and its successor states. Through my research and lived experience, I have still not found a perfect way to address identity or shared regional experiences in a way that is apolitical. Baker (2016) talks about the ways in which we "frame" a narrative in the Balkan context and how the language that we use can be political. That is, the way we choose to represent an event or issue can not only make a political statement but can inadvertently silence other versions or "frames." Baker's (2016) example around postwar Sarajevo shows the ambivalence and the intentional way one must write about the region:

> In presenting a narrative about postwar Sarajevo, for instance, should I use the name "Srpsko Sarajevo" (Serb Sarajevo) or "Istočno Sarajevo" (Eastern Sarajevo) to denote parts of Sarajevo now in the Republika Srpska (the political entity whose name translates as the "Serb Republic")? Either choice implies a particular attitude on the speaker's part towards Serb political control of that territory; it sets the narrative within a particular frame (p. 286)

The language that is used throughout this work cannot ever be apolitical, as none of the participants can move through the world with an apolitical identity. As such, the approach to ethnicity and ethnic identity used in this research is similar to that of Baker (2016), where the focus is the "ethnicization." This describes the subjective experience or process of coming to understand that they have an ethnic identity and what that identity may be, rather than a focus on externally dictated fixed identities. This "processual" way of talking about ethnicity is also reflected in how we talk about the conflicts in the region. The term "ethnic conflict" is rarely used in this work, in keeping

with Baker (2016) and Pieterse (1997), who both posit that the language of ethnicity is part of the conflict and thus should not be used in the analysis; that is, rigid ethnic categories were the basis of nationalism and ethnic cleansing and as such, to use the same categories would not be in service to the participants and survivors for whom identity is often messy, unclear, and ever-changing.

Furthermore, my positionality as an insider researcher is important. As an insider researcher, Golubović (2019) described how those harboring ethno-nationalist views would assume she shared them by nature of her ethnic identity, which was in contrast to experiences by other researchers who found that Bosnian participants were quick to conceal ethno-nationalist sentiments in the presence of a researcher (Jansen, 2016). The identity of the researcher can never be objective and, in some cases, can be deeply political. To deny that and to ignore one's positionality would not only be a disservice to the participants and the narrative but would be unethical. Given that, I have included my own narrative in this introduction not only to address positionality but to connect my story to that of the participants and to the greater topic.

Narrative: Ljudmila

I was born in Belgrade, Serbia. I am ethnically Serbian but of mixed Balkan descent, with direct Croatian, Macedonian, Greek, and Serbian heritage. Because of this and because migration has clouded a nuanced sense of ethnic identity for me, I identify with the fragments that I know—my city of birth and the Balkan region as a whole—more than with a static Serbian ethnic identity. My identity has always been complex and has mirrored the complexities of ethnic and cultural identity in the Balkan region. For example, I am ethnically Serbian and my last name – one of the most common surnames in Serbia and Croatia – is one marker for others of my perceived ethnicity. This name, however, is not really one of long ancestral lineages. In fact, it only goes back a few generations and from family stories, I gather that it has little to do with cultural identity. My great-grandfather moved to Belgrade from Macedonia and started a bakery. He changed his last name from a Macedonian one to "Petrović" as a business tactic. Generations later, existing in diaspora and with my belonging heavily hinging on my name, the arbitrary nature of this name is almost humorous. Furthermore, as with names, ethnic identity is usually patrilineal. My great-grandfather moved back to Macedonia to find a wife and have a son – my grandfather Spiridon or "Spira." Spira would grow up to fight with the Communist partisans in the Second World War and continued to work for Tito's government after the war. While the details are unclear to me, I know that he had to put down a certain ethnicity

down in government documents which, in the multi-ethnic state of Yugoslavia at the time, was significantly more arbitrary than it would become several decades later. He proudly chose Macedonian. My father, who was born into Yugoslavia and grew up in it identified himself as a Yugoslav, but as someone who was born in Belgrade and spent most of his time there, he saw himself as culturally Serbian.

What my ancestors, such as my great-grandfather, could not have known is how their choices would impact their descendants. They could not have known that their descendants would live in diaspora and have to cling to shreds of identity. They also could not have known that this diaspora would exist due to conflicts that would force people to “pick a side” and turn on one another. Before I was born, my father was drafted to go fight in Croatia. Not only were my parents politically opposed to the wars, but my father came from a Croatian mother and having spent his summers in Hvar, Croatia with family, he could not go fight against his own family. Still registered at his family home, he hid at my mother’s apartment until the police stopped looking for him. It is stories like that and like the stories of my participants that remind me of the horror of these wars, of how quickly neighbours and relatives could turn on one another. I know that my parents were both anti-Milošević activists and that my mother spent much of her pregnancy at protests that often turned violent as Milošević would turn the police and tanks on his own people. I grew up hearing the name Milošević spat out as if it was poison. I also know that I was born during a storm and that the sanctions were so tight at the time that the hospital had no anesthesia for childbirth. These stories are some of the threads that connected me to my place of birth, fragments that I carry along with my name, a language that I can barely read, and all the things I’ve read and pieced together to form some semblance of an identity.

When it came to migration, my parents had wanted to go the United States because we had family friends in New York. Without a spouse or direct relative there, however, it was close to impossible. My parents then thought of Australia or Canada. They knew very little about Canada at the time, but my father saw a lineup outside the Canadian embassy in Belgrade, so he decided to apply. They had heard of Toronto, where many people from Yugoslavia were going at the time, but my father saw a tourist poster for Vancouver. Drawn to the beauty of the mountains and ocean, they agreed to Vancouver. We came to Vancouver shortly before my second birthday. While we briefly lived in Burnaby, we largely lived in immigrant neighbourhoods in Vancouver that had a

large diaspora from Yugoslavia. I grew up with the language and with friends from the area who also had immigrant parents, often other conflict-generated diasporas such as those from Iran and Afghanistan. In fact, many of my classmates were also from Balkan immigrant families. So much so that in 1999, when NATO was bombing what remained of Yugoslavia (at that point, it was only Serbia and Montenegro), our teacher spoke to us about what was happening. I remember hushed whispers in the next room and my parents pretending they were okay. I remember learning to ride my bike during this time, riding it in circles in a nearby park while my mother sat on a bench, chewing her lip and staring through me. I remember going to protests with my parents and I remember the night the phone rang in the middle of the night to tell us my grandfather Spira, who had been in the hospital, had been killed in the bombings.

Because of the environment I grew up in, I had very little tension with my ethnic identity until the age of 11 when I switched schools. Until that point, everyone I knew ate the same food, had the same loud parents who I never heard speak English, and everyone lived in small, crowded apartments. It was not uncommon to have grandparents sleeping in the living room or to have shared rooms. Then I saw the houses my new friends lived in, the colourfully packaged snacks they brought, the clothes they wore and the toys they had, and met their parents with the simple names and unaccented tongue. It was only then that I began to see myself and my family as somehow different and in opposition to Canada. There was a time when I not only felt shame about my culture but also about my family's socio-economic status at the time. This faded as I got older and once again had friends from diverse backgrounds, often immigrant backgrounds. But as that faded, I had a different tension arise. As I grew into an adult, I began to realize I didn't have my own connection to where I was from. I knew very little about my extended family, except for the grandmothers I saw in Belgrade and some of my cousins who now lived in Austria. I didn't know many family members and I had a strong desire to spend time in the places I was from. I decided to spend some time there and met my extended family, who accepted me warmly and lovingly. But I also got the sense that even with the language, I didn't have a place there. I had a whole life in Vancouver that felt like home, even when I felt like a part of me was missing.

When visiting family in Croatia, I felt for the first time the tension not only between the "Canadian" and "Balkan" sides of myself, but between the ethnicities that make up my heritage. Because both of my grandmothers currently live in Belgrade, that

was the only place in the Balkans I had gone up until that point. I experienced the "Balkan-ness" as one coherent part of identity that often existed in opposition to the "Canadian-ness"; however, I hadn't experienced the more nuanced tension between the different ethnic groups that made up my heritage (mainly Serbian and Croatian). The extended family was all present because it was the Catholic Easter weekend. Although I'm not Catholic, my Croatian family is devout, and I spent the week between church and endless dinners with them. While most of my immediate family was warm and accepting, several of my Croatian extended family members were suspicious of me and demanded I choose between being Serbian and being Croatian before they would sit down for Easter dinner at the same table as me. Similarly, while my family, friends, and immediate diasporic community held a view that diasporic people from Yugoslavia were broadly *naši (*"ours"), I experienced this tension in diaspora several times as well when I met people who held different views of ethnicity and the diasporic experience. This diasporic nationalism was a significant topic of conversation in the interviews I conducted for this research, where all of the participants shared my experience. It is a big reason that I have difficulty finding my place in my own diasporic community, something that was reflected by participants. I also experienced the politicization of identity that participants spoke to, often being asked to answer on topics I know little about such as Kosovo, why Yugoslavia fell apart, or what the conflicts were about.

In my early 20s, I came out as bisexual/queer, something that to this day remains hidden from extended family and the broader diasporic community. The main thing I grappled with in my first significant queer relationship was my queerness as it related to my cultural identity. Already feeling like an outsider as someone living in diaspora, queerness felt like it existed in complete opposition to my cultural identity; in many ways, it felt like I had to choose one or the other. Something that helped me reconcile the two was to learn the history of queer resistance in the Balkans and to connect with activists in Belgrade. Queer people have always existed in the Balkans and learning about my history not only as a diasporic Balkan woman but as a queer Balkan woman brought me a sense of connection. There has been a rise in nationalism and traditionalism in the Balkans, which goes hand in hand with a neo-religious movement that has risen since the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Being queer, a woman, and someone with strong values around being feminist, pro-choice, pro-LGBTQ+, anti-racist, and anti-nationalist, the Serbian Orthodox Church is an institution that rejects me as much as I reject it, which complicates my identity even further. As an ethnically Serbian woman, Orthodoxy

is supposed to be inherently tied to my identity. In fact, even here in Vancouver, many cultural events of the Serbian diaspora are tied to the church. Learning about pre-Christian Balkan traditions – many of which still exist in certain regions – is helping me connect with traditions that aren't associated to the institution of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

I have spent my life seeking out stories that spoke to me, as a Balkan woman, as a queer woman, as someone living in diaspora. I have looked for stories like mine, of families like mine, of people like me. In all the books I read about Yugoslavia, I never saw myself and I never read my own story. This thesis served to fill a gap in literature but it also served to connect me with stories like mine and to give the same to others like me. When my families spoke about their families, I saw my own. When they talked about their sense of loss, I felt it with them. They shared unique experiences and stories which are their own, but the collaborative nature of the interviews allowed for the normalization and connection through shared experiences. I continue to remain connected to many of the participants in the study and others that I have met through the process of writing this work. Writing this opened me up to connecting with people who share these experiences and, like me, have never felt seen in these experiences. I have had many conversations with people who had never had somebody to talk to about this experience and who had never known how to articulate it. This thesis has served to fill a research gap in academia, but it has also served to connect and build community, to heal through shared experiences, and to encourage conversations that have largely been erased.

Chapter 2.

Literature Review

This research aims to explore the experiences of Yugoslav-born women growing up in diaspora and how they build identity. This population has grown up in conflict-generated diaspora and are likely to experience balkanization of identity; that is, their identities are fragmented through intergeneration trauma, migration, and patriarchal violence. While there is significant scholarship on intergenerational trauma, diaspora, and identity-building, there is little on these topics in the Balkan context and none that apply a feminist and gendered lens to the work. Given the gap in literature on the specific population being addressed in this research, the literature review will outline the existing literature that together forms a basis for understanding this research. First, the literature review will look at intergenerational trauma broadly and more specifically intergenerational trauma and memory in Yugoslavia. The literature review will also look at the nature and impacts of patriarchal violence in the Balkans. Patriarchal violence here is conceptualized as both on an interpersonal level (e.g. family violence, intimate partner violence) and as extending into armed inter-ethnic conflict. Next, the literature review will look at the existing research on diaspora and transnationalism, including the specific qualities of Yugoslav diasporas (such as the politicization and nationalism in Yugoslav diasporas) and the gendered nature of migration and diaspora. The literature review will also look at the transgenerational balkanization of identity and at narratives, including how they have been used for resistance and reconciliation in the Balkans. This overview of literature will show what the existing literature has found and will provide places where this literature is insufficient, and which gaps this project will fill.

Given that there has been scant research in this area, the literature review draws on many different theories and influences to understand identity in this population. Much like this identity, the concepts may seem fragmented and yet they exist simultaneously. The conceptual map in Figure 1 illustrates the different theories and concepts that inform the understanding of identity in this population, as well as offshoots or subcategories. The overarching framework that informs this work lies in feminist and queer theories, as illustrated in Figure 1.

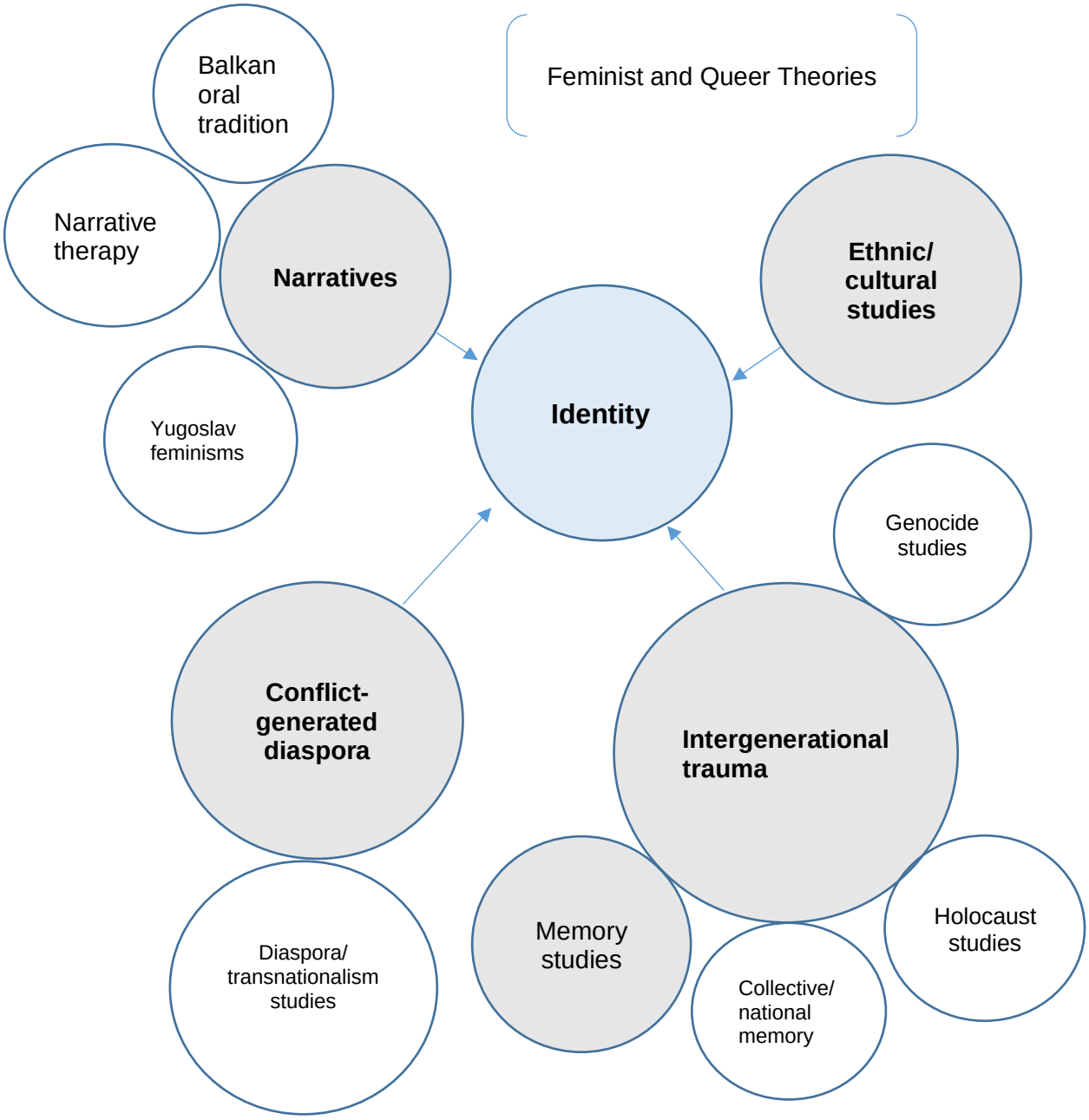

Figure 1 - Conceptual Map

Intergenerational Trauma

The balkanization of identity for Yugoslav diaspora is enacted primarily through intergenerational trauma. The idea of intergenerational trauma – or transgenerational trauma – entered the field of psychology in the late 1960s when professionals began noticing that the descendants of Holocaust survivors were showing symptoms of trauma, despite never having experienced the Holocaust themselves (Rakoff et al., 1966). The impacts of an event such as the Holocaust, which has transgenerational impacts on an individual and their family can be considered a *historical trauma.* The research in this field has since expanded beyond the Holocaust. For example, a significant model of historical trauma was developed by Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart (2000) to describe the intergenerational trauma that Indigenous communities experience as a result of genocide and ongoing colonization. She also talked about the *historical unresolved grief* that accompanies historical trauma and posited ways of healing that integrated cultural knowledge (Brave Heart, 1998; 1999; 2000). While the broader acknowledgment of these psychological concepts began with the Holocaust, the concepts have since been expanded and adjusted for the specific experiences of various communities, including survivors of genocides other than the Holocaust, survivors of ongoing oppressions or traumas, and children of veterans.

The idea of trauma or grief that exists collectively and intergenerationally has existed in cultures far before Western psychology began to acknowledge these ideas in 1966. For example, Chi Kim (2017) writes about the Korean sociocultural concept of *han*:

> *Han* (한 恨) is a Korean sociocultural concept that is popularly understood as a uniquely Korean collective feeling of unresolved resentment, pain, grief, and anger. *Han* is often described as running in the blood of all Koreans, and the quality of Korean sorrow as being different from anything Westerners have experienced or can understand (p. 254)

While this is a uniquely Korean experience, tied up in the specific histories, customs, constructs, and beliefs of Korean culture, the concept of *han* is described as connoting "both the collective and the individual genealogical sense of the hardship of historical experience" (Abelmann, 1996: p. 36–37); that is, it encapsulates the sense of the collective and historical existing within an individual as an affective and embodied

experience. This reflects a similar idea to the unresolved grief due to historical trauma that Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart described in Indigenous communities. Chi Kim (2017) goes on to elaborate that “while a nation does not go through the same psychological processes as an individual, the Korean concept of *han* encapsulates how collective trauma and individual hardship can create a complex feedback loop within the social imaginary” (p. 255). This is to say that the concept of an individual carrying the impacts of familial, collective, and/or historical pain, grief, violence, or trauma is not new for many collectivist cultures, as exemplified by the concept of *han* and work of scholars such as Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart.

Concepts like *han* may be less tangible to Western audiences, but there has been observable evidence of intergenerational transmission of trauma, such as in the behavioural patterns of children. Yael Danieli, widely renowned for her work on intergenerational trauma, examined the adaptive styles of Holocaust survivors and the specific behavioural patterns of their children, who would often themselves be preoccupied with learning about the Holocaust, a high need for control, and a sense of wanting to protect their parents. These are considered “reparative adaptational impacts” wherein children of survivors may show behaviours associated with wanting to repair the world for their parents and grandparents (Danieli, 2016). This has been seen in other populations as well. Bezo and Maggi (2015) examined three generations of Ukrainian families who had survived the Holodomor genocide of 1932-1933. They found that intergenerational trauma was still being transmitted in the grandchildren of survivors and that family members continued to live in what they described as “survival mode.” The authors found that the trauma of the genocide has impacted participants on an individual, familial, and community level and that the survivors showed trauma-based coping strategies and altered emotional states that they passed down to their descendants. For example, their grandchildren were still acting based on their grandparents’ trauma, including stockpiling food, showing social hostility and mistrust, using authoritarian parenting styles, and feeling shame, anger, and decreased self-worth. These descendants of survivors of the mass starvation and famine were thus not only showing the psychological signs of intergenerational trauma (such as increased anxiety) but were also showing behaviours consistent with fear of starvation, as if they themselves had experienced the famine.

Not only are behaviours, emotional states, and coping strategies passed on intergenerationally, but there is now evidence showing that trauma may be transmitted

on the most basic cellular level as well. Recent research, such as that of Holocaust scholar Rachel Yehuda, has examined the epigenetic changes across generations. Preliminary research suggests that the intergenerational transmission of trauma may occur in measurable ways through the body and genetics (Yehuda et al., 2014; Yehuda et al., 2015; Yehuda and Lehrner, 2018; Bierer et al., 2020). Though this body of research is not directly taken up in this project, it is indicative of emerging areas of research on intergenerational transmission of trauma. Although the concept of intergenerational trauma has been present in Western psychology literature for half a century – and longer in some cultures – as technology evolves, so does our understanding of how trauma is transmitted and we are learning of concrete genetic ways that trauma is transmitted, providing further empirical evidence for the phenomenon.

The literature has established that trauma can be transmitted across generations, but the implications are much more complex and they directly relate to the research on identity in conflict-generated diaspora. Trauma causes fragmentation of memory and, by extension, of identity. Experiencing violence fundamentally shifts how a person experiences the world around them, what their place in it is, and how they narrate that experience (Das, Jackson, Kleinman, & Singh, 2014). Assmann (2010) divides memory into four formats: individual, social (or collective), political, and cultural. Assmann argues that the transgenerational continuation of memories can be spurred through a number of catalysts, including family, nation, or politics. As will be discussed later in this work, in the Balkans, memory is passed down in the familial and collective, and is utilized in national narratives and as a political tool. More recently, Assmann (2014) has also addressed transnational memory, which has implications for the ways in which memory can not only be transmitted on the level of individuals, collectives, and nations, but can also be transmitted across oceans in diasporic communities. That is, the fragmentation of memory and identity through trauma transcends generations and migration.

Transnational remembrance and community are an integral part of identity-building in diaspora. Ahmed (2000) explores intergenerational narration of migration and argues that “memory can be understood as a collective act which produces its object (the ‘we’), rather than reflects on it” (p. 90). When these stories are narrated, they can become part of shared past, a shared loss, and the collective nature of the narrative becomes a place of healing. Ahmed (2000) writes:

> The very failure of individual memory is compensated for by collective memory...in the discussion of what 'was all lost' the subject moves from an 'I' to a 'we': when the subject returns to the real Home, the 'we' becomes writeable as a story of a shared past that is already lost... It is the act of forgetting that allows the subject to identify with a history, to find out, to discover, what one has already lost: what is already lost is the fantastic 'we' of a nation, city and house (Ahmed, 2000; p. 78).

That is, the very place where the individual loss and forgetting occurs becomes the collective strength and the place of remembrance and healing. This project aims to repair the individual loss through the collective and relational remembrance and co-creation of narratives. Inversely, however, the absence of this collective memory – or rather, the absence of the narration of the memory – can be particularly disruptive for the children of immigrants. Unlike the direct trauma that immigrant and refugee parents carry, many of those raised in diaspora have grown up in relatively safe environments, in the sense that they live without the threat of war or persecution. Without their own memories – and with limited or no narratives to write a "shared past" – what the "generation after" (i.e. the children of survivors) carries is what Holocaust studies and feminist scholar Marianne Hirsch (2008) describes as "postmemory," which is a connection to both collective and historical traumas, and to the individual traumas of their parents. The inherited narratives of trauma can so greatly dominate the life stories of the "generation after" that they may themselves feel that their own narratives are displaced by their ancestors (Hirsch, 2008). This is partly how transgenerational trauma acts as a mechanism for the fragmentation of memory, identity, and narratives for the second generation. Trauma is transmitted through everything, including body language, words, and silence (Danieli, 1998); it dwells in the home and hangs over the family, intensified by silence (Phillips, 2015). There is a sense of the unknown that comes with silence. Abraham and Torok (1994) have put forth the theory of the *phantom,* of the unnamed, unseen presence of transgenerational trauma that "haunts" the family. Cho (2008) used similar language to name the intergenerational "haunting" that occurs in diaspora for women. These descriptions put forth the idea of trauma as something intangible and yet omnipresent that impacts a family, something that cannot be named but that is always felt. Not being able to name it can have all the more impact on children who may already be trying to build identity from fragments of stories or silences.

The ways in which intergenerational trauma is transmitted is all the more salient in families with migration histories, where there may additionally be generational, language, and cultural gaps between parents and children. Sangalang and Vang (2016)

did a systemic review of the literature on intergenerational trauma in refugee families, primarily the offspring of Holocaust survivors, families from Middle Eastern countries (e.g. Iraq, Lebanon, Syria), and southeast Asian families (e.g. Vietnam and Cambodia). Across studies, there was an understanding that parental mental health and trauma experiences influenced their children's mental health, with the children of refugees often showing higher anxiety and lower mood than their non-refugee counterparts. The majority of studies also examined the ways in which trauma is transmitted, usually through fragmented communication, parental silence, and interrupted attachment. Flanagan et al. (2020) expanded upon Sangalang and Vang (2016) by doing a systemic review of studies that examined the intergenerational transmission of trauma in asylum-seeking and refugee families where the children themselves did not have direct trauma exposure (i.e. second-generation samples). Their findings suggest that parental trauma exposure indirectly impacts children through insecure attachment, decreased parental emotional availability, communication styles, and parental symptomology.

Over the past 50 years since the concept first appeared in Western psychology, there has been significant work done on expanding the concept beyond Holocaust survivors, as well as developing an assessment tool for multigenerational trauma, the Danieli Inventory of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma (Danieli et al., 2015a; Danieli et al., 2015b). Historical trauma has intergenerational impacts on an individual, familial, and collective level. Intergenerational or transgenerational trauma is often transmitted through parental behaviours, commonly through silence, and causes fragmentation in the family, in memory, and in identity. There has been less research on how this trauma is transmitted in the context of conflict-generated diaspora and there are also fewer studies that take a gendered lens. While there has been some research on the mechanisms of transmission in the Balkan context (discussed in the next section), there is still very little and hardly any that take a gendered lens and/or look at diasporic experiences. This project aims to bridge these gaps in literature while centering the stories of Balkan women raised in diaspora.

Transgenerational trauma and memory in Yugoslavia. While to a lesser degree, transgenerational trauma has also been the focus of research in the context of Yugoslavia specifically. In the Balkans, memory is collective, it becomes myth, and it is politicized and mobilized. After the dissolution of Yugoslavia, memory became fragmented. That is, different ethnic groups maintained different, competing narratives of what happened (Moll, 2013). This is what Jakovina (2014) calls the "balkanization of

collective memory." Different ethnic groups will have differing – even opposing—memories of the same events or time periods (Jakovina, 2014; Jansen, 2002), resulting in divergent identity building. This is transmitted both informally and in concrete ways, such as through the "two schools under one roof" approach in parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina.[3] These memories exist even as its carriers are dispersed around the world. In a study on refugees from the former Yugoslavia, narration of traumatic memories occurred on both a personal and historical level (Gemignani, 2011). That is, individual memories and stories are always placed within the context of a greater collective memory.

There is also a generational difference in identity and memory. Palmberger (2013) interviewed people living in post-war Mostar – one of the most ethnically divided towns in the former Yugoslavia. She found that there were both ethnic and generational differences in how groups felt about the wars and their identities. She divided participants into distinct generations: the "First Yugoslavs," the "Last Yugoslavs," and the "Post-Yugoslavs." The "Post-Yugoslav" generation are those "who due to their young age possess very limited or no personal memories of socialist Yugoslavia" (p.15) –which would encompass the participants of this thesis research – while the "Last Yugoslavs" would be their parents (and those who primarily made up the generation of immigrants). While many scholars have examined the impacts of war, Palmberger (2013) explores the impacts of the political-economic transformations that occurred as a result of Yugoslavia's disintegration. This impacted the way that former Yugoslavs build life narratives, particularly the "Last Yugoslavs" generation. Their narratives are framed in relation to *past time* (memory) and *future time* (prospects). The author frames these narratives as showing a "lack of cohesiveness" and oscillating "between different, even opposing, discourses" (p. 21). While the "Post-Yugoslav" generation may build their own narratives based on their experiences of the region as it exists today, those Post-Yugoslavs living in diaspora have little to go off of, other than the fragmented narratives of their parents, the Last Yugoslavs.

[3] This refers to the segregation in schools by ethnic group amongst those otherwise living in the same communities or towns. Originally started under the Dayton Agreement as a way to re-integrate children into schools after conflicts that turned neighbours against one another, these segregated schools have continued since the 1990s and children of different ethnic groups continue to learn different versions of history that frame their ethnic group as the victim/hero and erases atrocities their ethnic group may have committed. For an overview of this system, see the informational sheet by OSCE (n.d.)

The ways in which Balkan immigrants narrate their trauma (if at all) to their children remains fragmented and gendered, much like memory and the trauma itself. Using in-depth interview with families, family trees, and children's drawings, Jordanova (2012) examined the way that war survivors from Bosnia and Herzegovina communicate traumatic experiences to their children. She found that there was often silence around the topic or, when parents did communicate information to their children, it was often fragmented. They may communicate fragmented facts while "avoiding detail and emotion" (p.53). She also found that war memory in the Bosnian participants was deeply gendered. Men often held the role of "horror keepers," their "heroic narrative...firmly bound to a horrific one which is not expected to be shared" which exists in contrast to women's "life-preserving position" during war (p. 53-4). As a result, men's narratives tended to be more fragmented, which often resulted in their family members wondering what the men had done or witnessed during the war. It also isolated the men, who would often only share their war experiences with other men such as in a veterans' group. Women, on the other hand, were more likely to share their experiences with their children more consistently. The fathers would be less likely to communicate their experiences through coherent narratives and would instead communicate through silence, disability, body language, and war jokes. The latter is considered an acceptable form of communicating the war experience without delving into the emotional experience. Jordanova (2012) also found that the first-hand experience of the war tended to amplify earlier problems, such as alcoholism or early childhood experiences of family violence (both common in the Balkans). The most common manifestations of this in Jordanova (2012) was self-harm, amplified sex drive, and drug abuse. Not only is the trauma of the war transmitted intergenerationally, but it often exists in connection to other traumas, such as family violence or poverty. In Balkan families, grandparents are often also close to the children and serve as another source of information on these wars and often on earlier wars as well. This shows the complexity of the family unit and the trauma that is transmitted in the Balkan context. What Jordanova (2012) does not touch on, however, is the diasporic experience, trauma of migration and settlement, possible language barriers, and disconnection from extended family and culture that is often the backdrop for the intra-familial communication that Jordanova (2012) describes. Furthermore, this research does not follow how these narratives impact the children's identity-building as adults – especially in diaspora with additional layers of disconnection. This project aims to build off of this existing literature in a diasporic context and centering

the long-term impact of the patterns described in Jordanova (2012); that is, answering the "and then what" question that arises from reading Jordanova (2012). While Jordanova (2012) explores how parents communicate trauma to their children, this project explores how those children receive and integrate that trauma while building identity in diaspora.

Not only is trauma communicated in distinct ways for Yugoslav-born children, but those living in diaspora exist specifically in *conflict-generated diaspora,* which creates a unique fragmentation at the intersection of migration and conflict or trauma. Svob and Brown (2012) examined the extent to which *conflict knowledge* was transmitted intergenerationally through parental biographies and narratives. They interviewed 30 participants whose parents were Canadian-born (the "non-conflict group") and 30 participants whose parents had come from countries of war and political instability, including Iran, Kurdistan, Lebanon, South Africa, Sierra Leone, and the former Yugoslavia (the "conflict group"). While the data was not disaggregated by country of origin, the authors found common themes among the "conflict group." One of the findings was that almost all of the "conflict group" talked about conflict-related events their parents had experienced and a quarter of the events they spoke about were conflict-related to. The authors found that conflict knowledge was transmitted trans-generationally and conflict remained personally salient for subsequent generations, "even when children are removed from the historical events by time, space, and culture" (p. 1408). What Svob and Brown (2012) are describing is the impact of transgenerational trauma that exists in those with a conflict background, such as the former Yugoslavia. However, as described in Jordanova (2012), conflict and violence are gendered experiences and have different impacts. The findings of Jordanova (2012) and Svob and Brown (2012) indicate that for Yugoslav-born people growing up in diaspora, family stories are often defined by conflict. Furthermore, they receive fragmented information and yet carry their family's conflict knowledge; that is, they carry the trauma without necessarily understanding it or making sense of it.

While there is some recent work on how conflict knowledge and trauma are communicated to children from Yugoslavia, there is little writing on intergenerational trauma in the former Yugoslavia. What little does exist does not take a gendered lens nor does it account for those living in diaspora. In his theoretical writing on transgenerational trauma, Klain (1998) suggests that in the context of the former Yugoslavia, what is transmitted vis-à-vis the patriarchal family, oral traditions, and

religion are “inherited” emotions of hate, revenge, guilt and shame, and authority. His view reflects the dominant hetero-patriarchal discourse of the region and the loudest voice in Balkan collective memory. It is, in fact, the perfect illustration of the stories that are told in the region: the “inherited” emotions are of patriarchal violence and war. Because of this view, there has been a gap in literature on the trauma that women experience as a result of patriarchal violence – particularly intergenerational trauma. Literature on patriarchal violence in the Balkans is limited and the topic has only been addressed in the last few decades. There is no literature that explores the intergenerational impacts of patriarchal violence in the Balkans, nor is there any literature that takes a gendered or feminist lens on the intergenerational transmission of trauma in the Balkans.

Memory in the former Yugoslavia is fragmented and the intergenerational transmission of conflict memory and of trauma remains strong even in diaspora. While memory can be transmitted through politics, nation, education and family, for those in diaspora, family is the central place of transmission. In the familial Balkan culture, this is all the more salient. However, the transmission of trauma narratives in the Balkans also remains highly gendered and often erases the impacts of patriarchal violence in the Balkans, which will be covered in the next section. This project aims to add to the scant research on intergenerational trauma transmission in the Balkans and adding the gendered lens to center the voices of those made marginalized in the Balkans. Furthermore, there is little to scant research on this transmission of trauma in the context of diaspora, which this project aims to address.

Patriarchal violence in the Balkans. Patriarchal violence has always been rampant in the Balkans, but intimate partner violence increased after the dissolution of Yugoslavia, which Djikanović (2010) argues is likely associated with the normalization of violence and increased availability of weapons after the war, as well as the economic instability that followed the transition from communism to a market-oriented economy. However, data is limited on the topic in general. Patriarchal violence is so common and normalized in Balkan countries that it was rarely studied until into the 2000s, well after the dissolution of Yugoslavia. The most common risk factor in the Serbian context was found to be the perpetrator’s own childhood experiences of violence (Djikanović, 2010). Unsurprisingly, intergenerational cycles of patriarchal violence are continued both politically and in the home.

This brief history of patriarchal violence brings into sharp focus the situation for

the women of Yugoslavia, who have long been its silent casualties. Mlađenović (2012) provides an important conceptualization of the violence occurring in ethnic conflicts as an extension of patriarchal violence that women experience in the home. In her first person narrative, *Notes of a Feminist Lesbian during Wartime*, Lepa Mlađenović (2001) writes:

> I was full of stories of women who had suffered through 10, 20 years of male violence from their husbands. Images of concentration camps were vivid in me. And, I thought, I could draw a line from the beginning to the end of how male violence connects nationalism and homophobia, domestic violence, incest and the armed conflict. These images of violence were seething inside my body and my mind long enough until it became evident to me that the same logic underlay the war in Bosnia as the phobias against lesbians and gay men. No, it is not the same thing, each hatred has its own particular form, but underneath there is a common patriarchal code of hatred of the Other. Only because she is a woman, only because she is Roma. (388-389)

This provides context beyond the conflicts to illustrate the broader experience of trauma and resilience of Yugoslav women. Many women saw the wars only as an extension of the patriarchal violence they already knew so well, not as a war being fought in their name (Bilić, 2012; Mlađenović, 2012**).** Women carry different stories, different traumas, and they tell their stories in whispers or not at all. For these reasons, my research turns to women's narratives to consider the voices that have had little space and to center them in ways that allow them to speak their stories for their own healing, rather than as part of a political messaging. Lastly, those growing up in diaspora often feel they have little space to speak of their experiences, often due to language barriers or not feeling they are "enough" to speak to the Balkan experience. This research centers those voices and prioritizes those stories.

These conflicts affected women in unique ways and feminist scholars argue that the civil wars that raged on a political and public platform were not much different from the wars that had been raging in the homes of Balkan women and other marginalized groups (e.g. Bilić, 2012; Mlađenović, 2012**).** While patriarchal violence has long been ignored in the Balkans, violence against women during the conflicts has been used as a political tool. Narratives around wartime rape were largely made to fit narratives of national and ethnic conflict. Discourse around rape as a weapon of war focused largely on ethnicity and rape as a strategy of genocide (Simić, 2018). Just as women were considered to belong to their nation through motherhood, so too did their bodies become the battlefield for ethnic conflict; rhetoric such as "a raped Croat or Bosniak woman stands for a raped Croatia or Bosnia" was used to turn rape into a metaphor of national identity (Kesić, 2003).

For example, because Bosnian Serb armies were the primary perpetrators in the Bosnian conflicts, the rapes of Bosnian Serb women were largely erased from discourse around wartime rape; in discourse that utilizes a victim/perpetrator dichotomy, Bosnian Serb women were considered to belong to the perpetrating side and were thus considered undeserving of a voice (Simić, 2018). Women's bodies were used as a battleground, much as they had endured the same violence in the homes. While there were many court testimonies and subsequent discourse around wartime rape in Bosnia, many survivors stayed silent and did not disclose their experiences for many years, if at all (Delić and Avdibegović, 2016). Drawing on interdisciplinary media, Močnik (2018) talks of the *narrated silence*, the idea "of a universality of silence among survivors that has been seized by different stakeholders and successfully distributed and normalized within our societies," with silences of rape survivors in Bosnia serving to "maintain the distribution of power and identity construction in existing sexual scripts" (p. 1372). As she puts it, **"**the narrated silence operates not only in private, but also in a space of political manipulation of information**"** (p. 1364). That is, both women's stories and their silences are used as tools to uphold ideas of national identity and patriarchal hegemony. Golubović (2019) interviewed Bosnian Serb women in post-conflict Sarajevo and described the ways that silence played out amongst participants in her research, even when they did agree to talk to her:

> It might manifest spatially—as in the choice to meet at home or take a walk together, rather than meeting in a cafe where other people might listen in, and therefore "we couldn't speak as openly." Or, it might be embodied —as in lowered voices or cautionary glances behind one's back when speaking about sensitive matters in public spaces. Or, it might manifest in social practices of concealment (1186-7)

The ways in which silence operates is complex, it is embodied and somatic. Silence may take different forms: it may arise from an overwhelming pain, it may protective or respectful, it may arise from a lack of control or from an exertion of agency (Ross, 2003). After violence or trauma, silence may be a reclamation of agency (Das, 1996; Helms, 2013).

In her ethnographic work with Bosnian Serb women, Golubović (2019) set out to address the gap in the victim-perpetrator dichotomy that is common in narratives around the Balkans and to further the consideration of "the messy reality of war" and the ways in which people "may come to inhabit multiple and contradictory subject positions, how they may be morally complicit in the violence that surrounds them while still experiencing a loss and devastation that deserve some form, however complicated, of recognition"

(Golubović, 2019; p. 1193). In this, she also addresses that it is not always just stories of victimization that are lost in the silence, but stories of ethno-nationalism, of what has been done. With politics and war existing as a masculine space, women fell into a gendered and reductionist category of being more nurturing and peaceful than the men (Helms, 2013). Not only does this further the essentialist victim-perpetrator binary and erases the women who were in fact furthering an ethno-nationalist agenda, but it also played into the narrative that women belonging to a "perpetrator group" (mainly Serbian) "had clearly failed in their gendered roles" as wives and mothers (Helms, 2013:138). As women, they had raised violent sons and supported violent husbands. In looking at the intricacies and complexities of identity – as illustrated in Bosnian Serb women in Sarajevo -- Golubović (2019) found that identity in these women was politicized and ethnic categories remained fluid, dependent on who people were with, where they were, or what the context around them was. Furthermore, she found tension between identity and recognition. That is, how we self-identify may not be how we are seen by others. In a Balkan context, this may be based on subtleties in appearance, dialect or accent, or names. It may be in subtle, seemingly mundane actions that have since become politicized as a marker of ethnicity. For example, participants in post-war Sarajevo described their belief that "people count kisses" (Golubović, 2020). This refers to the fact that Serbians tend to greet others by kissing three times on the cheek, while other Balkan ethnic groups would kiss twice. By concealing these and other actions, the participants are performing ethnic ambiguity and speaking to the subtle ways in which ethnicity and identity can be *felt* and, further than that, politicized:

> Here I am concerned with the subjective, immutable, and inescapable feeling of ethnicity. In dwelling on this feeling, I am attempting to reclaim ethnicity from the nationalists, to foreground ethnicity as a subjective and social experience that can be pried apart from the violence of ethno-nationalism, even if only momentarily. (Golubović, 2020; p. 558).

The complexities of gender, ethnicity and other categories of identity are illustrated clearly here with the politicization of identity in the Balkans. Furthermore, Golubović (2020) speaks to the embodied experience of ethnicity in the face of political violence. On the collective ethnic identity amongst women from the former Yugoslavia, Gedalof (2003) asks: "Can we separate women's individual sense of self out from all sense of collective identity? Is an unspecified 'gender' the only collective category to which women, as individual selves, can be acknowledged to belong?" (p. 99). That is, can we tease out womanhood and gender from the collective identities as Yugoslavs,

Serbs, Bosnians, or other ethnic or national categories? To this question, Morokvasić (1998) posits that "gender relations cross-cut other social and political relations and gender identities are constitutive elements of other identities" (81). This is consistent with the commonly accepted concept in feminism of intersectionality coined by Black feminist theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989). The concept posits that we all live at the intersections of multiple identities that inform how the world views us and how we navigate the world. Crenshaw's original work talked about the intersection of gender and race in regard to the experience of Black women but the term has since expanded in usage to include other facets of identity such as sexual orientation, (dis)ability, and ethnic, national, cultural, and religious identities. In this context, a Bosniak woman would exist not just as a woman, but as a Bosnian and a Muslim woman (amongst other possible intersections of identity). For feminist scholars, this is not a new idea. However, in the Balkan context, many of these categories often exist in binaries, as victim-perpetrator, good-bad, Serb-Croat. These categories are even further complicated in diaspora, where the subtleties are even further erased by distance, loss, and migration. New categories of Balkan-Canadian may arise. Therein lies the power of Balkan women's narratives in all their complexity: in the mess, the uncertainties, the things they do not know, the intricacies of identity.

Just as women have historically been oppressed in the Balkans and have endured violence, LGBTQ+ people in Balkan countries struggle for visibility and grapple with identity in unique ways. Given the lack of acceptance, many queer and trans people may experience their sexual orientation and/or gender identity as seemingly at odds with their national, cultural, or ethnic identity. This was all the more salient during wars that were largely ethnic. In her first person narrative, Mlađenović (2001) describes the lesbian experience of "fragmented identities, desires, motivations" during the wars (p. 387). She writes that many queer women in Serbia at the time rejected the nationalism of the time for a variety of reasons, one of which was the Milošević regime's antagonization of LGBTQ+ Serbs. They did not see themselves reflected or protected by their own state, so why should they identify with the state's hateful wars? Queer women were a large part of peace movements and yet were largely erased from the collective memory of how Milošević was overthrown. In the midst of what was not only the state's war on other countries in the area, but on their own people, feminists in Croatia and Serbia often worked together and brought visibility to queer women within their circles (Mlađenović, 2001). In Zagreb, these were Centre for Women War Victims, then B.a.B.e.

Women's Human Rights Group, the Women's Studies Centre and Women's Infoteka; in Belgrade, the Women in Black, the Autonomous Women's Centre Against Sexual Violence, SOS Hotline and the Centre for Women's Studies. These feminist, anti-war organizations made visible the women who were all the more invisible in patriarchal, heteronormative (and, in fact, explicitly homophobic) Balkan countries. Women and LGBTQ+ people in the Balkans have continually had their voices erased and have experienced violence, their ethnic and national identities erased, weaponized, and/or mobilized for political use. These marginalized communities have had little opportunity to speak to their identities in all of their complexities, where gender and sexual orientation may exist as the most salient part of their identity or merely as one part of a complex individual. Most discourse in the Balkans occurs across ethnic, national, or religious lines and often erases these other parts of identity. This research aims to honour the stories of those who exist in their messy intersections and who may struggle to define their identities.

Diaspora and transnationalism

This section will cover the literature on diaspora and transnationalism, including the definitions and conceptualizations. This section will also look more specifically at the literature on diaspora(s) from the former Yugoslavia and its successor states, in which a significant theme politicization and nationalism in diaspora emerges. Lastly, since this research take a feminist lens and explores women from the former Yugoslavia, this section will cover the gendered nature of migration and diaspora.

In the literature, the use of diaspora and transnationalism are similar. However, as Carl Dahlman explains, 'diaspora is often predicated on transnational social relations. However, transnationalism is not a sufficient condition for diasporas, which additionally imply a common sense of territorial identity among its members, nor are all transnational relations diasporic' (2004: 486). *Transnationalism* refers to the pluralism of ties that many migrants maintain across nations (Vertovec 2001). The scholarship on transnationalism serves to challenge conventional beliefs of home and community as static entities and explores the ways in which migrants may continue to be connected to multiple nations, homelands, and nation-states (Westwood and Phizacklea, 2000). In the collection of theoretical writing, *Uprootings/regroundings: Questions of home and migration,* the authors apply a feminist lens to the discourse around transnationalism, movement across borders, and questions of home and belonging (Ahmed et al., 2003). They ask how migration and the movement through spaces – particularly as it relates to

labour – may be gendered and look at how concepts of diaspora must also include a critical and feminist lens, something that this project aims to apply to the discourse of intergenerational trauma and diasporic experience in the Balkan context.

Brubaker (2005) traces the meaning and usage of "diaspora" from its roots in the Jewish diaspora which was – such as Palestinian and other diasporas – deemed a "catastrophic" or "victim" diaspora (Cohen, 1997). The original usage also often included Greek and Armenian diasporas. Since then, the term has expanded to share "meanings with a larger semantic domain that includes words like immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest-worker, exile community, overseas community, ethnic community" (Tölölyan, 1991; p. 4). Many scholars have differentiated between different "kinds" of diasporas and the ways in which they have moved and migrated, including "trading diasporas" or the "mobilized diaspora" (Armstrong, 1976) which often include conversation around Chinese, Indian, or Baltic German diasporas. Sheffer (2003) has similarly examined the ways that labour migrants and other migrant populations may maintain emotional and social ties to a homeland while living and working abroad. Anderson (1998) has also conceptualized emigrant groups that have continued involvement with homeland politics (including ultra-nationalist movements) as 'long-distance nationalist' diasporas -- something that has been common in Balkan diasporas. This is consistent with what Naujoks (2010) has called *diasporic-civil* identity, which is the maintenance of identity through engagement with government or civic groups in the homeland. Brubaker (2005) also points to the growing reference to transethnic and transborder linguistic categories (e.g. Francophone) and global religious categories (e.g. Sikh or Muslim) that have also been considered diasporas without necessarily being rooted in a shared homeland. Brubaker (2005) argues that the broadening conceptualization of what and who makes up a diaspora "paradoxically, means the disappearance of diaspora….If everyone is diasporic, then no one is distinctively so. The term loses its discriminating power – its ability to pick out phenomena, to make distinctions." (p.3) He sees the expansion of the term beyond the reference to a conceptual homeland as the loss of a 'classical diaspora.' In a feminist analysis of the scholarship on diaspora and transnationalism, Campt and Thomas (2008) acknowledge the tension between a conceptualization of diaspora as necessarily resulting from migration versus a larger conceptualization that explores diaspora as a phenomenon that surpasses the ideas we hold around movement and displacement. According to the authors, these frameworks can serve to establish binaries such as home/host or displacement/homeland. As will be illustrated

later in this literature review when discussing “homeland,” the concepts of home(land) and displacement are much more complex and cannot be seen in binaries. Not only that, but frameworks that try to establish what is a diaspora or a homeland risk perpetuating colonial and often oppressive views of nation-states and borders, often erasing displacement and dispossession that occurs on the same land (e.g. internal displacement and/or the displacement of Indigenous Peoples). Furthermore, while these frameworks aim to set parameters to *concepts*, they end up setting parameters to *people* whose experiences are often much more complex and messier than academic definitions. As seen in the Yugoslav example, many people’s identities are complex and usually exist outside of the established binaries such as victim-perpetrator, good-bad, or Croat-Serb. Additionally, Campt and Thomas (2008) argue that these frameworks can often perpetuate masculine narratives of mobility and diaspora, thus perpetrating hegemonic views and erasing gendered, racialized, and queer experiences of diaspora.

Conceptualizing migration and diaspora as a traumatic experience allows for deeper discussion of the balkanization of identity. Most of the seminal scholarship on diaspora and transnationalism explores components or “pieces” that define diaspora, which are inherently painful. The most commonly used definition of diaspora is the one proposed by Safran (1991), whose classical diaspora paradigm includes: 1) dispersal from a homeland; 2) collective memory of the homeland; 3) lack of integration in the host country; and 4) a ‘myth’ of return and a persistent link with the homeland. Similarly, based on the scholarship on diaspora, Brubaker (2005) posits that there are three components that show up in most definitions or discussions of diaspora: 1) dispersion in space; 2) orientation to a ‘homeland’; and 3) boundary-maintenance. The first, dispersion in space, refers to individuals or groups that migrate, usually outside between formal borders but sometimes within borders (e.g. internal displacement of refugees). Cohen (1996) ameliorated the definition put forth by Safran (1991) in a number of ways, including the specification that dispersal from homeland is often traumatic. In fact, many refugees experience "identity ruptures" related to cultural shocks and hardships during the integration process. (Bâ and LeFrançois, 2011). Children of refugees are usually deeply affected by their parents’ suffering, even when parents report that their trauma and resettlement struggles are not affecting their children (Dalgaard & Montgomery, 2017). Thus, the traumatic nature of forced migration is a transgenerational experience and is a necessarily conceptualization to understand the balkanization of identity that those in Yugoslav diasporas experience.

The second component of diaspora is the broadly understood tie to a "homeland" (Safran, 1991; Brubaker, 2005). This connection to a homeland can be conceptualized in many different ways. While the link to the homeland can often be rooted in nostalgia or intangible yearning, Naujoks (2010) outlines three levels of concrete diasporic engagement and identity: *diasporic-ethnic* identity (having bonds with the ethnic community in host country), *diasporic-national* identity (having bonds with country of origin), and *diasporic-civil* (bond to government, political, and state institutions of the country of origin). However, some scholars challenge this notion of ties to a specific homeland or nation-state. For example, Clifford (1994) challenges this by pointing to groups such as dispersed African or Caribbean diasporas. The nature of some diasporas is not so much that they are oriented towards a specific location and have a desire to return there, but rather that they hold an "ability to recreate a culture in diverse locations" (Clifford, 1994). In forced diasporas (e.g. due to conflict, slavery, colonization), ties to a homeland may not be apparent or possible. Other ethnic groups may exist as "diasporic" without being tied to a clear homeland, such as Romani diasporas. Furthermore, Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2003) writes about belonging and place as an Indigenous woman in an Australian context, a context grounded in the history of violent colonization that is shared by the so-called Americas. She writes that "the sense of belonging, home and place enjoyed by the non-Indigenous subject – colonizer/migrant – is based on the dispossession of the original owners of the land and the denial of our rights under international customary law" (p. 23). The ways in which much of the scholarship on diaspora defines migration and homeland often relies on colonial ideas of borders and nation-states. As Moreton-Robinson writes:

> We are not migrants in the sense that we have moved from one nation state to another, but the policies of removal transferred different indigenous peoples from their specific country to another's…this is a different experience of migrancy to that of the post-colonial subject (33)… Indigenous people's sense of home and place are configured differently to that of migrants. There is no other homeland that provides a place of origin, or place for multiple identities. Instead our rendering of place, home and country through our ontological relation to country is the basis of our ownership (37).

Moreton-Robinson's work points to a significant gap in the understanding of homeland, belonging, and place in much of the scholarship on diaspora and transnationalism. [4] It

[4] While further deconstruction of this topic is outside of the scope of this work, it is an essential subject within conversations of diaspora and transnationalism. One example of deeper analysis of this topic can be found in *Native Diasporas: Indigenous Identities and Settler Colonialism in the Americas* (Smithers & Newman, 2014)

raises questions of how those displaced from their homes can ever really "belong" to a land they migrate to when that land has been colonized and stolen. Furthermore, how do any of us "belong" to a land, a country, a nation-state? This gap shows the need for a feminist and interdisciplinary approach to diaspora, displacement, and dispossession. [5] Further than that, it also points to the arbitrary nature of borders, which are not only a colonial construct (as seen in Moreton-Robinson's work) but are also ever-changing in the face of conflict, ethnic tensions, and political turmoil. The homeland that an individual grew up in may shift, change, or completely disintegrate in their lifetime, as was the case in the former Yugoslavia. These questions are necessary in any discourse around diaspora and transnationalism and are particularly salient for regions such as the Balkans or the Middle East where borders, ethnic and national categories, and identity are ever-changing in the face of ongoing conflict.

The last point in Brubaker's (2005) definition is the preservation of a distinct identity while in the host society. However, the literature on transnationalism tends to point more towards fluidity, hybridity, and a creolization of identity more so than a boundary maintenance. Diasporic identity is often discussed as dual, such as "hybrid identities" (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007) or "hyphenated identities" (Rose Ty & Goellnicht, 2004). As Brubaker (2005) himself points out, a tension exists in the scholarship between *boundary-maintenance* and *boundary-erosion*. Brubaker (2005) further points to the intergenerational nature of the boundary-maintenance criterion, in that it is expected that first generation migrants would maintain cultural ties to their homeland. However, the establishment of a diaspora with strong cultural ties also relies on subsequent generations and their maintenance of cultural identity. According to Brubaker (2005), the literature has reflected the rapid globalization and as such, the metaphysics of the nation-state and borders may be less relevant; however, questions of identity, community, and belonging remain at the core of the discourse.

For those born in their homeland and raised in diaspora – the 1.5 generation – there is a unique experience of identity and diaspora. The age-of-arrival has an impact on identity-building. In a fixed family fixed-effects sibling study, Basu (2018) found that without controlling for factors such as citizenship or English proficiency, education outcomes started deteriorating at the age-of-arrival of eight. Furthermore, according to

[5] For more on dispossession, see Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou in conversation in *Dispossession: The performative in the political*

identity formation theory, adolescence is an especially important time for identity building. These theories began with theorists such as Erikson (1968) and Marcia (1980). Ethnic identity is particularly salient during adolescence (Phinney, 1993). Those in the 1.5 generation have an experience of identity and biculturalism that is unique from both their parents' and those of second-generation immigrants. Furthermore, while they may not have been active participants in the migration process, they often serve as "cultural brokers" for their parents and experience the hardships of settlement. For example, a study of post-war Vietnamese-Americans who had emigrated as children, Pham (2012) found that the participants still struggled with identity and family roles into adulthood. Now raising children themselves, the participants struggled to remain "cultural brokers" for older generations while maintaining a cultural balance for their children. While the complexities of diaspora and transnationalism are clear in the literature, looking at the 1.5 generation provides an especially intricate layer to the conversation.

Yugoslav diasporas. The diasporas of those from Yugoslavia and its successor states are expansive and, while there has been significant scholarship on these diasporas, there has been very little (if any) on those growing up in diaspora – and none on those who came during the most recent conflicts. While the largest and most researched wave of migration was during the 1990s, there were several waves of migration that make up the Balkan diaspora. For example, waves of Serbian migration occurred at the beginning of the 20th century for economic reasons, then around the Second World War (and post-WW2, which was largely made up of anti-Communist political migrants), and in the 1960s-1980s for economic reasons (largely made up of labourers) (IOM, 2008). Given these waves of migration, it is difficult to know the exact number of people in diaspora from Yugoslavia and its successor states. It is estimated that there between 2 and 2.2 million people from Bosnia and Herzegovina living outside of its borders, which does not include "Old Emigration" or the older waves of migration (Bosnia and Herzegovina Ministry of Security, 2020). Given that the current population of Bosnia and Herzegovina is just under 3.3 million, this means that almost half of Bosnians live in diaspora (United Nations, 2021). Similarly, Serbia's population is roughly 8.7 million (United Nations, 2021), with an estimated 5 million people living in diaspora (Republic of Serbia, 2015). Meanwhile, Croatia's diasporic population exceeds the population of those living in Croatia. Croatia's population is 4.1 million (United Nations, 2021), with an estimated 4.5 million Croatians living outside of the country (Winland, 2005). In Canada alone, there are almost 380,000 people who list their ethnicity as Yugoslav, Serbian, Croatian,

Macedonian, Bosnian, or Slovenian. Of these, around 30,000 people reside in B.C. (Statistics Canada, 2019). Given the size of this diaspora, there is surprisingly little research on the development of transnational identity. What exists is largely about political identity and/or civic engagement in the homeland (as will be discussed later in this section). There is little to scant research about the experiences of those growing up in diaspora, let alone with a feminist lens that centers marginalized voices – a gap that this research aims to fill.

Those from the former Yugoslavia share many qualities of other diasporic communities. Given the ethnic and religious diversity of the former Yugoslavia and the nature of conflicts that expelled millions of people into internal displacement or international migration, diasporas from Yugoslavia have further complexities and cannot be approached as a homogenous group. There has been migration from the Balkans long before the recent conflicts but a more cohesive and organized diaspora is the result of mass migration during the 1990s (Halilovich, 2012). While many scholars look at transnationalism, Halilovich (2012) theorized the concept of "trans-localism" in relation to Bosnian diaspora and the ways in which they build group identity based on a particular shared background – a certain dialect, region, city, or village, for example. Given the heterogeneity of the former Yugoslavia and its incredible ethnic, regional, and linguistic diversity, this conceptualization provides a unique analysis of diasporic identity. Halilovich (2012) sees this as complementary to transnationalism, arguing that trans-local identities "supersede and give precise and concrete expression to broader identities, and have many 'micro-ethnic' qualities of their own; including a recognizable vernacular dialect, cultural enactments and rituals, a shared history, and a common feeling of belonging to a specific region, town, or village" (p. 170). This is also observed in other Balkan diasporas, such as the earlier waves of Croatian diaspora who were more likely to name the town or region they were from (such as Dalmatia or Istria) rather than the country (Winland, 2005). Indeed, Ahmed (1999) has theorized the concept of home, of "where one usually lives," as the *lived experience of locality,* wherein "the immersion of self is hence not simply about inhabiting an already constituted space (from which one can simply depart and remain the same). Rather the locality intrudes into the senses: it defines what one smells, hears, touches, feels, remembers" (p. 341)[6].

[6] Anecdotally speaking, this has been a significant place of transmission of memory in my family and in other families like mine. For example, the smell of lavender has always intensely connected my father to his childhood in Hvar, Croatia. For my mother, the smell of linden trees

Ní Laoire et al. (2010) echo this when they say that even through transnationalism and migration, everyday life is experienced through people's "concrete territorialized local contexts" (p. 157). This has relevance for those growing up in diaspora who may not have a trans-local connection or the felt experience of their homeland (i.e. through senses); rather, they may only have a vague sense of the "Canadian" versus the "Balkan" parts of the self. The "Balkan" self may be fragmented and made up of stories, foods, summer visits to the homeland, or it may be a vague and uncertain entity.

Similarly, Tomović (2004) explores the diversity of regional dialects in the Serbian language, which is reflected in all of Yugoslavia's successor states. The idea of trans-localism is all the more salient with a nation that changed so rapidly over the course of a decade. As such, a "homeland" for Bosnians (and other former Yugoslavs) may not refer to a nation-state but "more often refers to a quite specific place and local community, a place of departure and imagined return" (Halilovich, 2012; p. 165). While the intricacies of a trans-local identity fit for those who migrated in adolescence or adulthood, those raised in diaspora are more likely to have a vaguer and less cohesive understanding of where they're from. In fact, they may not even know their language. For Serbians in Canada, the degree of language retention in the home is often impacted by economic pressures to succeed and integrate, as well as the degree to which they believe they will stay in Canada; those who believe they will be returning to their homeland are more likely to speak Serbian at home than those who believe they will be staying and integrating (Tomović, 2004). This has implications beyond language retention and points to the tension often found in conflict-generated Balkan diaspora. For many who left early in the conflicts, there was an imagined return that often dissipated as Yugoslavia disintegrated. David Albahari, a Serbian Jewish writer who came to Canada in 1994, wrote what is called his "Canadian trilogy" to express his immigration experience and the loss of homeland (Pantić, 2004). *Snežni čovek (The Man of Snow)* was the first book he wrote in Canada, which he describes as "a short novel about nostalgia, about the desire to return home, but also about feeling that, once you leave, 'you can't go home'…the entity known as Yugoslavia did not exist anymore, and the terrible ethnic war going on in Bosnia and Croatia was the proof that no one could go home again, wherever that home might be" (Albahari, 2004; p.184-85). A similar sentiment is reflected by women who were internally displaced in the former Yugoslavia

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reminds her of the street she grew up in Belgrade, Serbia. These smells place them in a particular place and time.

and ended up in Serbia; many reported feeling uprooted and expressed a desire to emigrate, feeling that they had already lost their homeland during the wars (Mrvić-Petrović, 2000). In fact, even the language used to describe the diasporic experience amongst those who stayed in the Balkans is contested. For example, Halilovich (2012) describes one school of thought in Bosnia that considers those permanently living outside of Bosnia and Herzegovina "unpatriotic" for not returning "back home." There is also a belief that those who left are somehow better off than those who stayed, despite the unique challenges that refugees and immigrants face. This gives those living in diaspora a sense of not belonging anywhere and not knowing what home is. Given the complexities of the Yugoslav diaspora, it is all the more difficult for those growing up in diaspora to build a coherent identity when their language retention and connection to diasporic community may be low.

Politicization and nationalism in diaspora. Nationalism was one of the factors at the heart of the Balkan conflicts and nationalist narratives are often closely tied to identity narratives in the Balkans. This politization and nationalism often extends into diaspora – especially during the conflicts –and takes a unique form. For example, members of the Bosnian diaspora set up societies, organizations, and other groups to promote a Bosnian identity in diaspora. However, there were also many partisan associations that promoted political or national ideas, which many displaced Bosnians saw as "long-distance nationalism" they didn't want to participate in; instead, many chose to maintain familial ties to the homeland by sending regular support to their families and communities in Bosnia (Halilovich, 2012). Similarly, the Croatian diaspora had strong political leanings during the wars, with significant lobbying and fund-raising for political leaders in Croatia done by Croatians in diaspora; the Croatian diaspora in Canada even had a large role in smuggling weapons into Croatia during the war (Winland, 2005). Carter (2005) referred to the Croatian diaspora's involvement in the Balkan conflicts as the "geopolitics of diaspora," wherein mobilization in diaspora became cultural and political and made question of identity, belonging, and loyalty all the more salient. In fact, those in diaspora are more likely to hold nationalist views than those living in Croatia, causing differences and even tensions between different waves of Croatian immigrants (Winland, 2002). Similarly, in interviews with Serbians living abroad, Prelec (2019) found that the "active diaspora" (or those who hold political opinions about Serbian affairs) was actually getting more progressive than earlier – more so than the average person still living in Serbia. Much like the Croatian diaspora,

scholars have linked this trajectory to more recent waves of migration, often made up of younger people who hold higher education and oppose the rampant corruption of their governments (Prelec, 2019). While there is a belief that the Balkan diaspora can be more nationalist than those who stayed during the wars, there is also some evidence that diasporas are not as unwavering in their views as is commonly believed. A study by Hall (2016) of Bosnians who had stayed in Bosnia and those who had migrated to Sweden found that the diaspora group was open to opportunities for reconciliation and were able to adopt fewer nationalist views. This has implications for identity formation and for reconciliation efforts in the region.

Gendered diaspora. Migration and re-settlement change the gender dynamics of a family and women are not only forced to make autonomous decisions and take on new responsibilities as breadwinners but also to build a new identity (Mrvić-Petrović and Stefanović, 2000). In identity narratives, women are often positioned as "place" or as "home" (Gedalof, 2000). According to Brah (1996), diaspora takes "account of a homing desire which is not the same thing as a desire for a 'homeland'" (p. 181). Women's traditional place in the domestic realm positions them as necessarily responsible for recreating home and place even in the context of displacement, dispossession, migration, and violence (Gedalof, 2000). Thus, the very ways in which diaspora is conceptualized in its relation to home is implicitly gendered.

Children of immigrants often have to integrate conflicting cultures and values in their identity. Women, especially from traditional backgrounds, often have to negotiate contradictory ideas of gender roles (Skandrani et al. 2012). In many traditional cultures, the young woman's role is inherently tied to the family and the home. There is a higher expectation of women to serve as "cultural gatekeepers" and to maintain ties to ethnic and cultural practices (Maira, 2002; McDowell, 1999). In other words, while women may grow up in a Canadian society that encourages emancipation from family and gender roles, they may often be met with conflict in the home where parents may maintain traditional values, beliefs, and practices. The intergenerational relationship may be strained or broken and thus the second generation must navigate their own identity-building. Using an intergenerational systems model, Perosa et al. (2002) explored factors in the identity formation process and individuation of young women. The authors argue that familial involvement was more active in young women's identity formation process than their male counterparts. In many traditional, collectivist societies such as the Balkans, individuation does not occur in the same way as it does in a Western

context (Simić, 1977). The nature and function of intergenerational relationships is fundamentally different in the former Yugoslavia than in North America (Simić, 1977). While the North American model stresses independence and individuality, the Yugoslav family is interdependent, collectivist, often even archaic in the patriarchal, traditional ways it operates.

There is extensive scholarship on diaspora and transnationalism, with various opposing views of what constitutes a diaspora. However, diaspora and migration remain gendered, which also holds significance for how women growing up in diaspora may develop a sense of identity. Furthermore, the heterogenous nature of the former Yugoslavia makes Yugoslav diaspora(s) complex and intricate. In diaspora, there remains politization and nationalism that both reflects the political climate in the Balkans and takes a form of its own.

Transgenerational balkanisation of identity

The disintegration of Yugoslavia and, for many, the subsequent migration fragmented identity for an entire generation of people who had been born and raised as Yugoslavs. Transgenerational balkanization of identity refers to the ways in which this fragmentation is passed on intergenerationally and further complicates identity for those growing up in diaspora. Cultural identity is often passed on through family. For example, within the family, intergenerational “memory talk” shapes children’s values, beliefs, and remembering (Wang, 2004). When those memories and identities are already fragmented, what is passed on to the next generation? Our parents’ generation had grown up with the Yugoslav slogan of *bratstvo i jedinstvo* (“brotherhood and unity”) and had never known anything other than socialist Yugoslavia (Calić and Geyer, 2019). This generation not only had to suddenly choose an ethnicity, but they were forced to choose an identity that was in violent opposition to others. The disintegration of Yugoslavia led to a phenomenon called Yugonostalgia in Yugoslavia’s successor states, that is, a nostalgia for Yugoslavia or the way of life before the conflicts. As Maksimović (2017) puts it, “the object of nostalgia [in this case, Yugoslavia] is a past that is often fragmented, idealized, constructed, and re-constructed…Nostalgia commonly concerns past wishes, dreams, expectations, ideals, and life prospects, rather than actual past experiences.” (p.1068) Yugonostalgic narratives are thus fragmented, constructing “not (only) a story about how we were in the past, but one about how we never were" (Velikonja, 2008; 30). While nostalgia is often seen as a sort of misdirected yearning for

something that is lost and can never be found, Tsolidis (2011) reframes nostalgia as a way in which displaced people maintain a connection to a place that they may be unable or unwilling to return to, a way of generational identity building and cultivation in diaspora. In fact, some have seen Yugonostalgia for its hopefulness and have conceptualized it not as a stuckness in the past but a driving force for reconciliation and a brighter future in the region (Maksimović, 2017; Velikonja, 2011). Many growing up in diaspora grew up with narratives of nostalgia, of a country that they can never return to – not only because of language, political instability, or economic reasons, but because the homeland they know about no longer exists and perhaps never really existed. Growing up with narratives of nostalgia for the way things were places the second generation in an impossible position of not only being physically distant from their homeland but also temporally. According to Ahmed et al., (2003), "the concept of 'diaspora' has developed as an emblem of multi-locality, 'post-nationalist' and non-linearity of both movement and time" (p. 7). This sense of existing in a place of no return furthers the intergenerational balkanization of identity; as ex-Yugoslavs feel they can never return to the time and place of their youth, their children feel they belong to a place that they have never known and will never truly know. No matter how many times they visit their homeland, it will always feel unfamiliar and distant.

The disintegration of Yugoslavia already complicated identity, especially for refugees and immigrants (Gemignani, 2011; Timotijević and Breakwell, 2000). Refugees and immigrants from the former Yugoslavia have "two lives and one biography" (Ugrešić, 1996), they brought with them "fragments of past reality, which can never be put back together, and scenes of war horrors" (Ugrešić, 1996; p. 26). What Ugrešić is illustrating is the transnational fragmentation of memory and homeland that refugees and immigrants from Yugoslavia brought with them. Those who came from Yugoslavia had a common narrative of their past snatched away by the disintegration of their country; unable to articulate the past into a collective memory, they themselves had to learn how to construct a national identity and memory (Ugrešić, 1996). Many not only struggled with feeling like outsiders in their new home, but also struggled with where they were "from" after the disintegration of Yugoslavia (Timotijević and Breakwell, 2000). Their children, usually born in the former Yugoslavia and largely raised in diaspora, risk having a particularly fragmented identity. Everything they could possibly use to construct an understanding of where they come from, what they carry, and what their identity is, comes in fragments.

Narratives

This section will look at narratives, their importance in second-generation identity-building, and their historical role in resistance and healing. In the Balkans, narratives have been integral in nation-building, in war mobilization, and in resistance. Narratives have implications for healing and for reconciliation in the region. Narratives not only hold the purpose of retelling a series of events, but also of constructing identity and placing the self within a larger context (Riessman, 1993). This is consistent with the established counselling modality of narrative therapy, wherein an individual's stories become the focal point of therapy and clients are empowered to construct their narratives and identities (White and Epston,1990). Reconstructing one's narrative can be especially therapeutic for women who have historically had little ownership over their stories (Lee, 1997). In diaspora, family narratives may be integral to identity. Intergenerational knowledge via family storytelling sustains cultural identity (Stone et al., 2005; Strekalova-Hughes & Wang, 2019). Stone et al. (2005) interviewed participants from various diasporas and found that the main motifs in transnational family stories, those which are passed down intergenerationally and inform cultural identity in the second generation, including idealization and nostalgia of country of origin and maintenance of home remedies or non-Western medicines. This is to say that family storytelling builds a mythical description and understanding of the homeland for second-generation children, often nostalgic and fragmented, "senseless souvenirs which nobody needs—a line of verse, an image, a scene, a tune, a tone, a word." (Ugrešić, 1996; pg. 26). Feminist scholar Sara Ahmed writes that migration is "a matter of generational acts of story-telling about prior histories of movement and dislocation" (Ahmed, 2000; p. 90). These stories of migration are mediated by broader social contexts and positionality and migrations "involve complex acts of narration through which families imagine a mythic past...The telling of stories is bound up with – touched by – the forming of new communities" (Ahmed, 2000; p. 90-91). That is, migration narratives become an integral part of generational histories and the building of diasporic communities. The second generation, which has few other links to their homeland, may rely entirely on generational histories and family storytelling to build connection to their homeland. Yet, as the literature on intergenerational trauma illustrated, many Yugoslav immigrants may stay silent or pass on fragmented narratives to their children. This may thus not only fragment understanding of migration and homeland but may also be the site of intergenerational and ancestral trauma.

For many in Yugoslav diaspora, not only is migration traumatic, but they come from conflict, poverty, or other circumstances. The second generation in conflict-generated diaspora often hold fragments of trauma that they inherited and try in desperation to construct a coherent narrative of themselves and their place. Stories of trauma appear in the home only in fragments, in "bits and pieces" (Danieli, 1998). The inherited trauma that inhabits the silence are "wounds without memories" (Lijtmaer, 2017). Without the direct experience of trauma, the second generation may have trouble expressing it and constructing narratives of what happened (Lijtmaer, 2017). Second-generation narrative-building is shaped by the child's desire to repair the experience of growing up both near the pain of family members, and yet at the same time distant from them and the entirety of their experiences (Danieli, 1998; Hirsch, 2008). In narrative interviews, Gemignani (2011) found that Yugoslav refugees adopted two narrative positions: "The past is the past" (deliberate neglect) as a way of embracing future-oriented narratives; and "The past is our strength" (active embracing). The former is much like the *conspiracy of silence* that was first noted in Holocaust survivors and their interactions with family and society (Danieli, 2016). On the other hand, some of the refugees that the author spoke to found that linking their personal traumas to a greater trauma (be that a historical trauma or the collective experience of a single event) was, in fact, a self-healing narrative (Gemignani, 2011). Narratives of displacement never exist in isolation or in a vacuum. Rather, they tell a larger collective story, of violence, of suffering, of trauma (Das & Kleinman, 2001). Connolly (2011) argues that trauma fragments the self and narratives, which Braga et al. (2012) found also happened intergenerationally. Fragmented knowledge of their parents' trauma made identity formation and integration of trauma harder for children of survivors. Narratives and the use of metaphor can have useful effects for reintegrating identity and memory (Connolly, 2011). With many of those growing up in diaspora, the language of their ancestors has been lost, and with it, so has a connection to the past, and a mechanism of healing and identity-building. It is clear from the literature that narratives are widely considered integral in building identity, especially in the Balkan context that values oral traditions and intergenerational narrative ways of knowing. Despite this, and the clear intergenerational trauma and fragmentation of narratives, scant research has been done on understanding how the children of Yugoslav immigrants construct narratives or identities in diaspora as adults. This research aimed to not only produce understanding of these experiences, but to co-construct narratives in a relational way to promote healing and identity-building.

Narratives as resistance. As discussed in the introduction, the importance of narratives, particularly collective or national narratives, is well-established in the Balkans. Narratives are political, they are gendered, and are used as a political tool for mobilization. Subotić (2013) used a narrative inquiry model to analyze the hegemonic state narratives in Serbia and Croatia between the 1990s and 2013. She explores Serbia's narratives of historical Serb victimhood and Croatia's narratives of "Europeanness" and national distinction from their "less civilized" Balkan neighbours; by doing so, Subotić is not only looking at what stories are being told, but by whom and for what purpose. Subotić (2015) further expands on this by looking at state narratives as relational, looking at narratives-in-dialogue around competing genocide narratives in the former Yugoslavia and its successor states. With the politicization of identity through ethnic categorization, the lines between the personal and political become blurred. In the collective and relational context of the Balkans, individual, collective, and state narratives overlap.

Not only are narratives in the Balkans political but they are gendered. The act of "re-storying" oral traditions has long been a way of protest and resistance for Yugoslav women (led by feminist movements across the Balkans). For example, the *Zene u Crnom* (Women in Black) are a Serbian Belgrade-based feminist group that turns the woman's traditional role as griever into a political act (Athanasiou, 2017). They gather in protest, mourning those who were killed by Serbian forces. A parliamentary session in Belgrade during the war was interrupted by hundreds of feminist protestors and mothers whose message was: "Men are the controllers of war and of our sons. We do not give them permission to push our sons forward to kill one another." (Zajović, 1996). Through doing so, woman re-appropriated the narrative of "women as mothers" not as Mother Jugović but as anti-war mobilizers and peacemakers. In doing this, women centered themselves and their voices using the very narratives that have historically been used to silence them as one-dimensional.

Another example of this tactic is a Serbian-based project, *Storytelling for Peace, Gender Partnership and Cultural Pluralism,* which was developed in hopes of healing trauma, breaking cycles of violence, and fostering reconciliation (Milojević and Izgarjan, 2014) in the post-conflict Balkans. The authors argue that because oral traditions and myth have traditionally had a crucial role in the construction of cultural identity in the Balkans, they were weaponized as rhetorical tools for nationalist propaganda during war. The students in the project successfully reshaped myths and oral histories, maintaining the aspects that were important to national identity while critically integrating equity

(Milojević and Izgarjan (2014). Senehi (2002) also posits constructive storytelling as a peace and reconciliation process, citing examples including that of post-conflict Mostar where Bosniak and Croatian youth worked on a collaborative photographic project as a way of healing. Another example of narrative reconstruction for equity and healing is found in *Fatherland* (2014). Nina Bunjevac uses the graphic novel format to explore intergenerational trauma, patriarchal violence, and the fragmentation of family, identity, and narrative in Yugoslav diaspora. Through her work, Bunjevac (2014) comes to terms with the violence her father committed, both within the family and against other ethnic groups, and she rebuilds and reclaims her identity as a Yugoslav woman in diaspora.

Oral traditions and patriarchal narratives have long been a tool of oppression in the Balkans, as well as a vehicle for producing ethnic hatred and conflict. The act of "re-storying" those very narratives provides an opportunity to break cycles of victimization, violence, and silence. By coming out of the silence, there is also an opportunity for healing in the very things that brought the pain (Aho, 2014). For the participants in this study, they exist in a crossfire of narratives about who they might be based on their gender, their ethnicity, their country of origin. Their very identities are politicized or erased. And yet, there is a rich history of narratives as resistance and liberation in the Balkans. This study gives the space to these women to shape their own narratives, as Balkan women, as Canadian women, as immigrant women. It gives them space to identify themselves on their terms. Given the history of narratives and oral traditions in the Balkans, this is in and of itself giving space for an act of resistance.

Conclusion

The balkanization of identity occurs through transnational and transgenerational mechanisms of trauma and loss of culture. This is a gap in research, not only because diasporic experiences of transgenerational trauma are rarely addressed in literature, but because the population I am researching has never directly been researched or given a voice. Furthermore, there is little research on intergenerational trauma in the Yugoslav context, with even fewer looking at this in diaspora and none taking a feminist and gendered lens to this experience. This research aims to fill that gap and, harnessing the tradition of narratives as feminist resistance, the use of narrative inquiry and storytelling will provide an opportunity to reconstruct narratives that were fragmented by trauma. In this population, there is also an intergenerational balkanization of identity that their parents experienced with migration and the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Narratives of

diasporic identity – when reclaimed – can have implications for healing, connection, resistance, and reconciliation, especially for those who have historically been silenced and made marginalized.

Chapter 3.

Method

The purpose of this study was to learn about the lived experience of Balkan women growing up in Canada and how they understand their identity and their positionality within conflict-generated diaspora. Narrative inquiry was used as the research method, which is rooted in a social constructionist perspective. This research method was chosen because a) the experiences of participants are deeply entrenched in a greater political and historic context; b) it is congruent with the relational nature of Balkan culture; and c) it subverts Balkan oral tradition to centre the stories and experiences of women. The method included semi-structured qualitative interviews, while transcription was guided by the feminist methodology found in the Listening Guide (Brown & Gilligan, 1992), and data analysis followed the Thematic Content Analysis Method (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This chapter will consider the theoretical framing of the research and detail the procedures for data collection and data analysis, as well as ethical and diversity considerations.

Rationale, epistemology, and ontology

Narratives not only hold the purpose of retelling a series of events, but also of constructing identity and placing the self within a larger context (Riessman, 1993). This is consistent with the established counselling modality of narrative therapy, wherein an individual's stories become the focal point of therapy and clients are empowered to construct their narratives and identities (White and Epston,1990). Reconstructing one's narrative can be especially therapeutic for women who have historically had little ownership over their stories (Lee, 1997). As discussed in the literature review, Yugoslav feminists have long protested by re-appropriating and rebuilding oral traditions and construction of gender and identity. Following their tradition, and the tradition of narrative therapy, storytelling and narrative inquiry was used for this research.

Narratives weave fragments into themes and into a greater story and thereby give them cohesion. The importance of narratives and the implications for identity was discussed in the literature review but as a methodology, narrative becomes "both phenomenon and method" (Connolly and Clandinin, 1986; 2). Thus, a narrative

methodology is not only a tool for data collection, but also a way of constructing new narratives, making sense of identity, and giving voice to people who have been silenced or feel their stories are not worthy. In his work with Yugoslav refugees, Gemignani (2014) makes a case for qualitative interviews as a "situated co-construction of meanings and memories" (p.127). The author argues that the researcher cannot be an objective data collector but rather influences the nature of the narrative. This is especially true as an insider researcher who shares lived experience with the participants. Gemignani describes the qualitative interview as "first and foremost…a relational event" (p. 131). Furthermore, narrative inquiry's foundational epistemology and ontology are relational. That is, it posits that we understand the world through interactions and broader social contexts (Caine et al., 2013) and that truth is multifaceted, nuanced, and often dependent on perspective and social context. The chosen methodology fits with the cultural context of the Balkans and the theory of "balkanization of identity" put forth. The cultural context already holds oral narratives as essential to identity and to knowing one's history and oneself. Thus, narrative inquiry's epistemology inherently creates space for a culturally relevant exploration of identity. Furthermore, the Balkan context holds grand overarching narratives related to history, ethnicity, and identity that are inherently patriarchal, traditional, and often used to uphold violence and nationalism. Narrative inquiry's epistemology allows for women's narratives to be prioritized, thus subverting and reappropriating the traditional hegemonic narratives of the past. Furthermore, this population may have grown up with silences, family secrets, or gaps in knowledge due to migration and intergenerational trauma. In looking at the narrative process with Yugoslav refugees, Gemignani (2014) has argued that we must approach the "silenced data" or the "untold" not as something to solve or investigate, but rather see it for its potential – potential for reinterpretation of past narratives or construction of future narratives. This population may feel lost between countries and generations and has been forgotten and silenced. Thus, the reimagining of silence as a place of power and autonomy over their stories.

Social constructionism. As a relational research method, narrative inquiry falls under a social constructionist framework that sees knowledge as complex with multiple meanings and focuses on the historical and cultural context of participants (Creswell, 2012). According to Burr (1995), the main tenets of social constructionism are: a) that we cannot assume "truth" or accept knowledge as taken-for-granted without taking a critical lens; b) that we cannot look at occurrences or experiences independently from their

historical and cultural context; c) our knowledge is constructed and exists as a result of social interactions and processes and; d) knowledge and social action coexist and rely on one another. Narrative inquiry is thus congruent with the historical trauma transmission and relational cultural theories that inform this research, both of which view the individual in their social and historical context. It also allows for a relational co-creation of narrative with participants rather than a top-down approach that views the researcher as an objective "blank slate."

Procedures

The goal was to recruit between three and five women from former Yugoslav republics, which includes Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Slovenia, Montenegro, and Kosovo. The women who were recruited were born during or slightly before the conflicts of the 1990's and whose parents were immigrants or refugees during the 1990s or early 2000s. Participants would be 10 years old or younger at the time of migration, placing potential participants between the ages of 21 and 37.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria. This study examined a very specific experience of women "1.5 generation" women who were born in the former Yugoslavia but grew up in Canada. The inclusion criteria were:

- Women (inclusive of trans women).
- Who identify ethnically or culturally through at least one parent as Serbian, Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin, Macedonian, Kosovar, Slovenian, and/or Yugoslav.
- Who were born in the region between 1983 and 1999.
- Who were 10 years of age or younger when their family migrated (directly or indirectly) to Canada.

The exclusion criteria were:

- Those who were born in Canada and/or whose parents migrated prior to the conflicts of the 1990s.

The rationale for this was that the 1.5 generation has a unique experience compared to both their parents and those born in Canada. Susan Rubin Suleiman used the term "1.5 generation" in 2002 to describe to experience of those Holocaust survivors who were too young to remember what happened but who nonetheless integrated the traumatic experiences into their identity formation. She used the term to describe the experience between adult Holocaust survivors and the "postmemory" of the second generation that Marianne Hirsch (2008) describes. The term has more widely been used

in the context of migration to describe those who were born elsewhere and migrated young enough to easily acculturate to their host country. As described in the literature review, there is no set age-of-arrival that constitutes a 1.5 generation. Thus, this age range factors in that the respondents will have experienced this significant time in their ethnic identity formation in diaspora. Furthermore, the 1.5 generation has an experience of identity that differs both from that of their parents and the 2nd generation (Pham, 2012). With an age-of-arrival of 10 or younger and with the inclusion category of birth in the former Yugoslavia around the time of the conflicts, that would place potential participant birth years at between 1983 and 1999. This study explores identity fragmentation caused by trauma and violence experienced either intergenerationally or in early childhood, which is another reason for choosing a younger age-of-arrival.

Recruitment methods. The recruitment method used was purposeful snowball sampling. Snowball sampling has often been used for "hard-to-reach" populations. Due to the varying levels of connection to diasporic community spaces in this population, this method was also more likely to grant access to a more diverse group than by contacting formal organizations or posting in ethnically specific locations (e.g. churches, mosques, cultural centres or clubs).

The Yugoslav diasporic community in Greater Vancouver is relatively small but very diverse. Not only is the former Yugoslavia ethnically and religiously diverse, but multi-ethnic marriages were common and even encouraged in Yugoslavia. Many of those mixed families now live in diaspora, making the diasporic community all the more heterogenous and complex. With this in mind, and the researcher's insider status in this diasporic community, a cohesive community engagement plan was developed. While I have access to the population being studied, it was considered by myself and my committee that my insider status in the community may make direct recruitment more difficult as it might inadvertently put potential participants in a position where they would feel coerced into participation. To avoid this, five cultural knowledge holders known to the researcher through community were contacted with a request to assist in recruitment through their social networks. The cultural knowledge holders were individuals with lived experience of being Balkan women in diaspora. Every person approached for this role fit the inclusion criteria of the study, meaning that they had the unique experience of being Balkan women born in the former Yugoslavia and raised in Canada. This not only meant that they were able to contact other individuals in this demographic, but also that they could inform aspects of the study, such as making suggestions for who to contact, what

to include, and what to address in this work. In order to get as much diversity as possible, cultural knowledge holders were chosen from different ethnic backgrounds (e.g. Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian), particularly those of mixed Balkan heritage. Special attention was also given to urban/rural representation as there remain great divides across these groups. Cultural knowledge holders were given a recruitment poster (see Appendix A), social media scripts (see Appendix B), and an information letter on the study to pass on to potential participants (see Appendices C and D).

Baltar and Brunet (2012) used the virtual snowball sampling method to reach immigrant populations through Facebook and found much higher response rates than traditional snowball sampling. Given this and the age range of the demographic, social media played a role in recruitment, and the recruitment materials were created in a way that was compatible with social media. The recruitment poster was available digitally and potential recruiters were given instructions on maintaining privacy of potential participants. Of the five who agreed to help, three requested to themselves participate in the study as well as recruit. One cultural knowledge holder could not participate but recruited a participant, while the fifth cultural knowledge holder was unable to recruit but offered support throughout the process.

Informed consent. Clients were provided with an informed consent form (see Appendices E and F). The researcher went over it with them before beginning any interviewing or recording, and participants were given the opportunity to ask questions and to provide multiple levels of consent, including: using their real names versus a pseudonym, agreeing to being audio recorded, agreeing to being contacted for member verification and further questions, and being contacted with the final product.

Description of the sample. The final sample included four participants, all of whom identified as cisgender women. They were all born between 1992 and 1996 and arrived in Canada between 1993 and 1999, with their age of arrival varying between one and six years old.

	Njanja	Irena	Jelena	Paloma
Ethnicity	Serbian	Croatian-Serbian marriage	Serbian (with some roots in Croatia)	Serbian, Croatian, and Bosniak roots
Place of origin	Bosnia	Croatia	Serbia	Bosnia
Rural/urban	Capital city	Smaller city	Rural	Rural
Status	Immigrant	Immigrant	Immigrant	Refugee
Age of arrival	1 year old	6 years old	4 years old	4 years old

Table 4 – Description of sample

As seen above, two participants – Njanja and Paloma – came from Bosnia, one (Jelena) came from Serbia, and one (Irena) was from Croatia. Njanja is ethnically Serbian from Bosnia, Irena is from a mixed Serbian-Croatian marriage, Jelena is Serbian with some family roots in Croatia, and Paloma comes from mixed Serbian, Croatian, and Bosniak (Bosnian Muslim) roots. Paloma was the only participant who came with refugee status, while the other three participants came with immigrant status. Only Njanja, who is from Sarajevo, was from a major city. One participant was from a smaller city, Vukovar, while the other two participants were from more rural areas in Northern Serbia and Bosnia.

A note on COVID-19 adjustments. The first two interviews occurred in February 2020 and were conducted in person. By March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic had escalated in British Columbia and as of March 27, 2020, all SFU research had to be conducted remotely. By early May 2020, the COVID-19 amendments for the project were approved. Given that recruitment was already reliant on social media, the recruitment method didn't change; however, the remaining two interviews occurred over Zoom.

Data collection. In keeping with the methodology, the data collection occurred in the form of semi-structured individual interviews with a focus on participant storytelling (see Appendix G). Given the varying levels of language ability in diaspora, all interviews were conducted in English.

The interviews began with the collaborative creation of a genogram between researcher and participant. A genogram is a tool that resembles a family tree and emerges from the discipline of family counselling. It was used in this research setting to

situate the research question in intergenerational Balkan identity. The inquiry into family history is guided by cultural relational theory and family systems theory. The latter posits that an individual must be viewed through the emotional unit of their family (Bowen, 1966). This is particularly true in this population, who come from a collectivist background where family is culturally more involved in a young person's life—particularly the lives of young women. The genogram's use is intended to generate research narratives about migration and to initiate a conversation between the researcher and the participant. As an example of genogram use, in semi-structured interviews with 15 Bosnian young women refugees attending school in New York, Mosselson (2007) used a genogram as an ice breaker and as a starting point for the interview. She found it enabled a participant-driven interview that stemmed naturally from the relatively neutral request of drawing a genogram together. Accordingly, for the remote interviews in this study, the participants were sent links with the genogram symbols that would normally be brought in person to the interview. Given that this activity was not used for data generation and was only meant to generate discourse and get the participant thinking about their family history, it was not necessary for the researcher to see or receive a copy. Following this exercise, the researcher asked a series of semi-structured questions about identity and family stories. Connolly and Clandinin (1990) have noted that one way of inviting collaboration is for the researcher to share their story. This was done in two ways: 1) by disclosing a brief story of the researcher and her family in order to state positionality to the participant. This includes using the researcher's own family genogram as an example to guide the collaborative exercise; and 2) by also integrating a personal narrative within the final work.

Time dedicated to participation. The interview itself took up to two hours. Including pre- and post-interview introductions, closing, etc. as well as communication, the entire process took a maximum of five hours of a participant's time. The narrative approach suggests respondent participation in the verification of their narratives. As such, participants were given the opportunity to be a part of the process through email or text message correspondence, which could add several more hours to their participation time.

Data analysis. Reissman (1993) suggests that often in research and data analysis, the participants' stories are fragmented through the process. Narrative analysis pushes back against this fragmentation. In this research, where the very fragmentation

of narratives and identity is being studied, narrative analysis serves to produce data while also mitigating potential for further fragmentation. Furthermore, the relational nature of this method allows for the researcher's own autoethnographic narrative to be included and related to the other data (Riessman, 2002).

The Thematic Content Analysis Method (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used, which is a descriptive qualitative method used for finding and analyzing themes in the data. There are three broad approaches to Thematic Analysis: coding reliability, reflexive, and codebook (Clarke and Clarke, 2019). This thesis uses the reflexive typology, which is largely used when looking at people's experiences or perceptions. This typology allows for the researcher to reflect on how they influence and interact with the data, rather than claiming objectivity – something that would be especially irresponsible to claim as an insider researcher. Possible approaches to Reflexive Thematic Analysis are deductive/inductive, semantic/latent, and critical realist/constructionist (Braun and Clarke, 2019). This research is inductive in that the narratives guide and evolve with the data; that is, the narratives inform the structure, rather than the other way around. It is latent rather than semantic, as the analysis of narratives looks not only at what participants have said but what ideas and assumptions underlie the experiences of participants. Finally, it is constructionist in that it explores the lived experience of the participants and how they have perceived that experience rather than claiming objectivity.

The first step of Thematic Analysis is familiarizing oneself with the data. To accomplish this, transcription was guided by the methodology outlined in the Listening Guide (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). It is a voice-centered relational method informed by feminist methodology and narrative inquiry (Gilligan et al., 2003) involving multiple stages of listening. The first step is listening for plot, followed by listening for the "I" or the Self. Gilligan et. al (2003) have suggested the use of "I Poems," or poems written based on the first-person voice, as a tool for conceptualizing the "I." The third and fourth listening are intended to capture the relational and how the individual reacts to the world around her (Brown and Gilligan, 1992). The third step is listening for contrapuntal voices, either where there may be multiple meanings or even voices of opposition or ambivalence. This is particularly important in this research, where identities, stories, and voices are likely to be multilayered, fragmented, and/or conflicting. The final step was composing an analysis, which includes weaving together different voices within an

interview. After transcribing the data, writing out narratives, and finding themes, participants received a copy of their narrative and emerging themes for member verification, which was one of the ways to establish validity in the research. The researcher continued contact throughout the process whenever anything was unclear and also maintained a journal throughout to refer back to for verification. The journal was important for general impressions, reactions, questions, and observations by the researcher.

Following transcription and individual analysis, the next steps in the Thematic Content Analysis Method include generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, and defining and naming themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The initial coding was done to each individual transcript as I picked up on significant categories and subcategories that came up for each individual participant. For example, in Jelena's transcript, I had the broad code of "Family" under which I had subsections of "Grandparents," "Family stories," "Family Secrets," and "Family Fragmentation." The last subsection would be further divided: "Family" > "Family Fragmentation" > "Due to family violence" OR > "Due to interpersonal conflict". While I picked up on themes as I conducted interviews and transcribed, the overall themes came up across transcripts as I coded for overarching themes. The emerging themes were reviewed by participants. Defining and naming themes also meant that I found stories in the themes; as illustrated in the "Discussion" section, the themes themselves speak to broader conclusions regarding identity. The final step is producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). While the Listening Guide ensures a thorough engagement with each story, the thematic analysis allows for a broader understanding of themes that bridge the stories together. The data analysis methodology not only allows for a centering of women's voices, but it also acknowledges the multiplicity of their voices, and allows for the fragmented identities and voice to unify into a cohesive story through narratives.

Ethical and diversity considerations. The region that makes up the former Yugoslavia is incredibly ethnically diverse and, as such, it was not possible to have representation of all the groups in such a small sample and within the limited scope of an MA thesis. Most participants were from multi-ethnic marriages, which is fairly representative of both the former Yugoslavia and Balkan diaspora. Broadly, the main ethnic groups that exist in the region that were impacted by conflict are Serbian, Croatian, and Bosniak (Bosnian Muslim), all of which were represented in this study.

There was no representation from Macedonia, Montenegro, and Slovenia, who were also part of the former Yugoslavia, but were not significantly impacted by the conflicts.

There are several other major groups that are not represented in this study. First, there were no participants of any ethnic group from Kosovo, which was primarily impacted by conflict throughout 1998-1999. The region of Kosovo is complex. According to the 2011 Kosovo National Census (Republic of Kosovo, 2011), the region was made up of Albanian Kosovars (92.9%) and various ethnic minorities (Bosniak, Serbian, Turkish, Ashkali, Egyptian, Gorani, Romani, and other).[7] Unfortunately, this study also did not include anybody of Romani, Gorani, or other ethnic minority heritages. This is an important and often overlooked perspective in the Balkans that would add to the conversation of the complexity of identity in the Balkans and in Balkan diaspora. That being said, these are distinct ethnic group and may or may not identify with the country they live in (e.g. Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia). Their experiences of displacement and identity would also be unique and much more complex. There has been some work on Egyptian and Romani identity in the Balkans (e.g. Trubeta, 2005; Sula-Raxhimi, 2019) and on Gorani identity in the post-Yugoslav Balkans (Motoki, 2015). However, the Roma are often marginalized and underrepresented group that would require its own research – preferably done by a Romani researcher.

No participants in this study identified as being religious or being connected to a certain religion. Religion is often used as a barometer of ethnic difference in the Balkans (e.g. Croatians are necessarily Catholic, Serbians are necessarily Orthodox Christian, and Bosniaks are necessarily Muslim). While there was Bosniak (Bosnian Muslim) heritage represented in this study, there were no participants who are practicing Muslims or identify with being Muslim. This is a significant limitation, as Bosniaks experienced significant persecution during the wars and continue to experience nationalist Islamophobia in the region.

Lastly, none of the participants spoke to Balkan LGBTQ+ identity. The rise of religious institutions in post-Communist Balkan countries has been linked to traditionalism, patriarchal values, and rampant homophobia and transphobia. LGBTQ+ people in Balkan countries such as Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro, Kosovo, and Bosnia

[7] This census, however, excluded the region of northern Kosovo, which is primarily inhabited by the ethnically Serbian minority population, and many Serbian and Romani communities in southern Kosovo boycotted the census. For that reason, the ethnic makeup of Kosovo cannot be certain.

and Herzegovina have been othered as “foreign” or “Western” by ethno-nationalists (Gould and Moe, 2015). Their sexual orientation and gender identity have thus been painted as existing in opposition to their ethnic, national, and religious identities and complicate Balkan identity – particularly in diaspora.

Possible limitations of procedures. One of the possible limitations of conducting this study with limited resources is that Vancouver has a relatively small community. As an insider in that community, it could have been difficult to get many participants or detailed information from them. In the narrative study, where the researcher is fundamentally a part of the researcher, insider status may serve as a strength. However, there were two potential issues that could have arose with insider researcher status. Both were addressed with the choice of method. The first was trouble getting participants, partly due to the small size of the community, and partly due to personal connections to many potential participants and/or their families. Narrative methods go in depth with very few participants, which mitigated this potential barrier. The second potential issue was bias as an insider research, particularly when it comes to thematic coding and data analysis. While personal bias can never be eradicated, especially as an insider researcher, the researcher also spoke candidly in the interviews about her experience and participants would often speak to similarities or differences. Furthermore, the researcher used a collaborative approach to narrative inquiry and including participants in the “re-storying” (Creswell and Guetterman, 2019). This both gives participants more autonomy and ownership over their story and lessens the impact of researcher bias.

Chapter 4.

Results

Four narrative interviews were conducted (two in person and two remotely), during which participants were asked about their experiences of identity and navigating conflict-generated diaspora. The research question was how Balkan women growing up in Canada experience identity and how they may rebuild identity that has been fragmented through migration and diaspora, family violence, and intergenerational trauma. This section includes the condensed narratives of all four participants and the main themes that emerged, which will be addressed later in the chapter.

Narrative 1: Njanja

Njanja's[8] mother had been born in a small town in Bosnia and was raised in Bosnia. Her father had been born in Croatia and lived his whole life in Bosnia. Both of Njanja's parents are ethnically Serbian. They met in university while they were both studying to become engineers. They were living in Sarajevo when Njanja's mother got pregnant with her. In 1992, as Njanja's mother got closer to her due date, she went to a close-by town in Bosnia to be with her in-laws. Njanja's father was still working in Sarajevo and kept going back and forth between work and visiting his parents and pregnant wife. Her father was in town with them the same weekend that Njanja was born and all of the borders shifted. They had left their passports and any other documents needed for travel in Sarajevo, which they could no longer enter.

At this time, the Bosnian War was beginning in the former Yugoslavia. Less than a month after Njanja was born, the Siege of Sarajevo would begin and that same month, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia would formally break up. With the borders closed and no access to his documents, Njanja's father tried in vain to get a passport. Being born in Croatia, ethnically Serbian, and growing up in Bosnia, he found that none of the republics he went to wanted to grant him documents. With her father being drafted to fight in a war he did not believe in, it became more urgent to leave. They wanted to emigrate to Switzerland because it was the most neutral but soon discovered that Switzerland was not taking any more immigrants from the former Yugoslavia. The only other "neutral" country they had heard of was Canada. Many people from the former Yugoslavia were going to Toronto and it was the only city in Canada they knew. Thinking it would give them a higher chance of getting into Canada, Njanja's mother told her husband to go to a bookstore, find an atlas, and pick any city in Canada that wasn't Toronto. He found the furthest point from Toronto and chose Vancouver. They got sponsored by a friend of a friend they had never met and Njanja's paternal grandfather found a contact on the black market that would forge travel documents for them so that they could leave Bosnia. In 1993, when Njanja was a year old, they left Bosnia for Canada.

In order to get to an airport, they had to go through a number of different zones run by Bosnians, Serbians, and Croatians and they used different forged documents to

[8] The participant asked that her name be changed to protect confidentiality and chose to use a childhood nickname.

get through each respective zone. They had to be very careful of who they gave which documents to so they would not be caught with all of them. If they had been discovered, Njanja says they could have been arrested or killed. Her mother sat in the backseat holding baby Njanja and shielding her with her body. “She had no idea,” says Njanja. “Were there going to be bullets? Where are we passing through? Because the whole country was different…or not country…the area. Is it a country? Is it many? What was it in that period of transition? What was it?” Njanja expresses both the personal uncertainty of their journey and the geopolitical uncertainty of the time, the balkanization of Yugoslavia, and the constantly changing moving borders.

Njanja does not remember where they were trying to get to or where they were flying out from – although based on historical facts, it would have likely been from Zagreb, Croatia or Ljubljana, Slovenia. Not knowing all of the details of their migration story or remembering things in a certain light reflects the experience of being a young child during migration – of being present for the process and having your life defined by a journey that you had no active part in. A story she remembers vividly is of them making it through a final stretch of “no man’s land.” The guard was sympathetic of them and gave them a piece of advice: “If anybody stops you in that zone, press the gas harder, do not stop for anybody. We don’t know what’s going on there.” They were relieved when they crossed through to safety. They came across a farmer who, upon seeing them with a baby, gave them some eggs and said they should have them. “So, I associate their freedom with eggs,” says Njanja.

For a long time, some of the earliest photos they had as a family were on the plane ride to Canada as many of their photos were still in Bosnia. Upon arrival to Canada, they stayed with the friends who had sponsored them. The friends had two boys a little older than Njanja and their families are still friends to this day. When they arrived, Njanja’s father began to work in construction until they got their foot in the door with a property management company. Her parents began to work as building managers – a common job for Yugoslav immigrants in Canada – and they remained there for many years. Njanja’s paternal grandfather and her maternal grandmother (both of whom Njanja’s parents had sponsored to come to Canada) both took on cleaning/janitorial roles in the apartment buildings they lived in in Canada. In fact, Njanja would get her first job with the same company. Three and a half years later after Njanja was born, Njanja’s mother got pregnant with Njanja’s brother and they moved to a more central location. Soon after Njanja’s brother was born, their father went into property management with

the same company and their mother stayed on as one of the building managers of their complex with a small team of Canadian seniors.

Njanja's brother was born in Canada and the family jokes that he is the one "true" Canadian because of this. When he was young, their paternal grandparents lived next door to the family for about five years. Her maternal grandparents arrived around the same time and her aunt moved in with them. They lived in the same neighbourhood, several blocks away. As a result, Njanja grew up relatively close to her grandparents. Even after her grandparents moved back to Belgrade, Njanja describes with fondness how they would visit for six months at a time and her grandparents would stay in bunkbeds in their rooms – her grandmother in a bunkbed with Njanja and her grandfather in a bunkbed with her brother. "My grandpa would have the TV on loud, because he was kind of going deaf, and my grandma would be in the kitchen and they'd be yelling at each other on top of all the other sounds," she laughs. "When they're home, it's loud." Although they eventually went back to Belgrade, they would still continue to visit for about five or six months at a time.

Njanja knows "bits and pieces" of her family's stories but her parents never told exceptionally detailed stories. Of her grandparents, her grandfathers were both quieter and tended to not talk as much. She learned many family stories through her grandmothers. She was the closest with her paternal grandmother and was heartbroken when she was the first to pass away when Njanja was in university. Her other grandmother would tell them everything about her history and their grandfather's history whenever they asked. She had been the youngest of a big family and in order to go to school, she had to follow her brothers to school because their parents wouldn't send her to school. As Njanja grew older, it became more apparent that there were things in her family that were not readily spoken about. Njanja's parents had tried to sponsor Njanja's paternal aunt and her family but were not successful. Njanja's aunt was so discouraged that they never tried again and they stayed in Bosnia. Later in life, Njanja's aunt would divorce her husband, reveal that her eldest daughter was not his daughter (but another dead soldier's), and she passed away shortly after both of her parents. Njanja's cousins still live in Bosnia and her father keeps in touch with them regularly. However, they were successful in sponsoring Njanja's grandparents and her maternal aunt. Njanja's aunt struggled in the first few years in Canada, when she had a number of neurological issues, including moodiness, paranoia, epilepsy, and schizophrenia. She was in and out of care for several years, but Njanja says it was not something that was talked about

much. Njanja only knew her aunt was “different” but never knew why. For a Grade 12 project in biology, Njanja asked about hereditary illnesses and her mother said there weren’t any. After further inquiring about her aunt, Njanja learned that her aunt’s condition was not one she was born with. During the Seige of Sarajevo, her aunt had been shot in the head. She happened to be directly in front of a hospital and they operated on her brain immediately, but it left lasting impacts. Her aunt had been married before the war and Njanja had never spoken to her about her condition nor about her ex-husband. Furthermore, Njanja didn’t feel comfortable asking her parents any further. Most of the information Njanja got was from her parents’ documents that she had found. She wrote a graphic novel of the story for her Grade 12 English class and showed it to her parents. They said little and it wasn’t discussed again. Njanja feels uncertain about asking questions about certain parts of family history:

> I don’t know, do they want to talk about it, when’s a good time to talk about it? And…you think about it so much you don’t do anything about it…However I remember [some stories] – like the eggs—I don’t even know how big of a part of the whole story that is for them. And I don’t know how big of their identity that bit of their narrative is anymore.

There are some gaps in familial communication, both intergenerationally and between those who stayed during the war and those who live in diaspora. While Njanja only occasionally communicates with family still living in Bosnia and Serbia, she has at times felt that being the eldest daughter has put her in a mediating role in her nuclear family communication breakdowns. She also feels protective of her younger brother in a family context. Over time, she found ways to separate herself as an individual from her family by moving out of the family home, setting boundaries, and doing things that made her happy over what her family thought was right. The biggest example of this was Njanja choosing to switch her major from physics to English in her third year of university, despite her parents not understanding why she would do that and wanted her to complete a science.

She feels at 28 years old that she does not have an incomplete identity but that she certainly struggled when she was younger to complete her identity. Njanja’s own cultural identity mirrors that of her parents. Through her father’s stories, Njanja considers identity to be somewhat tied to a passport. Her mother’s identity was always described to her as “being something that doesn’t really exist anymore because she still identifies with this idea of what her country was before it became what it is now.” Her mother identifies as “former Yugoslavian” because that was the country she knew and grew up in. After its breakup, she never felt she could identify as anything else just because of

the country she was born in or the ethnicity she carried. Meanwhile, Njanja's father began to identify as Canadian. Njanja retells her father's experience:

> [He] was born in Croatia, they tell [him he doesn't] belong there. [He goes] to Serbia,they tell [him he hasn't] lived in Serbia. And then, he's in Bosnia and [they say] you're not ethnically ours… and you weren't born here. So when we got out of there, [he] never needed to identify as any one of those again.

Njanja herself identifies as Canadian but maintains a multicultural definition of "Canadian" is inclusive of other cultural identities. She identifies "culturally and food-wise" as being Serbian because of the culture she grew up with in the home and because of how much food is tied to the culture. Her family celebrated both Orthodox Christmas on January 7th and Christmas on December 25th. The *slava* – a family's patron saint celebration – is one of the biggest Serbian celebrations. Njanja's family would celebrate it when her paternal grandparents were visiting, but her father was not allowed to celebrate it in Canada as long as his father was still alive. *Slava* is passed on in a patrilineal way and his father stood by that, despite them living in diaspora. After her paternal grandfather died, Njanja's father did not want to take on *slava* despite the tradition. While she was alive, his sister took it on instead. 2019 was the first year that none of his nuclear family was alive to mark the occasion.

While Njanja's father chose to celebrate it, he opted for a small get together with just the immediate family (as opposed to a larger traditional celebration). While they grew up speaking Serbian and Bosnian in the home, her parents supported her speaking English as much as possible when they immigrated so that she would integrate seamlessly. While Serbian, Bosnian, and Croatian are all similar enough that it is seamless to communicate with one another, the nuances of each language (including accent) can give away a person's ethnicity and are politically loaded to this day. Njanja remembers two occasions where this was made particularly salient to her as a child. First, when they would go back to visit Serbia, Bosnia, and Croatia as children, their parents would tell Njanja and her brother to keep quiet in public so they would not inadvertently give anything away through their accents. "We don't know what we're doing," Njanja describes. "And they didn't know what the area was like because the last time they were there, it was a war zone." The other instance was when Njanja came home one day with a form from the school to update her information. Under "additional languages," the school had written "Croatian" and her parents had crossed that out, exclaimed they don't speak Croatian, and put down Serbian or Bosnian. Njanja describes this as the first time she realized the language they speak is different.

To Njanja, any identity conflict she may have has more to do with reconciling the immigrant experience than a Balkan identity. Nonetheless, there are small ways that Njanja finds to come to her cultural identity. She watches movies in Serbian and Bosnian when she can (for example, attending the Serbian Film Festival) and she has begun to teach herself the accordion because her mother played and it reminds her of some traditional folk music. Now, living with roommates who speak English, having an English-speaking partner, and working in English, Njanja sees language as something that she feels a desire to improve on. When it comes to stories, however, Njanja feels like many of the stories her parents hold the dearest now are “Canadian stories” of the children growing up or things they have done as a family. She has found that she has connected more with other parts of her identity, such as hobbies or work, rather than her cultural identity. She accepts that there is a context that she comes from but is able reconcile that with her definition of what it means to be Canadian.

Narrative Two: Irena

Irena[9] was born in Vukovar, Croatia[10] in 1992 to a Serbian father and a Croatian mother. Her parents had married in 1990, one year before the Battle of Vukovar that devastated the town and area. The mixed marriage had caused tensions within the family, with many family members refusing to speak to them. Another family member on Irena's paternal side had gotten married to a Croatian man prior to the war but they fled Vukovar and moved elsewhere in Croatia. As a result, she lost meaningful contact with everyone except Irena's father.

Irena's maternal grandparents and others fled Croatia just before the war broke out in 1991, while her paternal grandparents stayed in Croatia until the late 1990s, when they moved to Serbia. Her grandparents got separated during the war, which she says had a big impact on them, especially her grandmother. Irena's parents stayed, thinking it would not get to the point of war. "Your neighbours were Serbian, you were Croatian, and it didn't matter," Irena describes pre-war Vukovar. "You shared the same chickens at the end of the day, you shared the eggs. It wasn't an issue and then it all of a sudden was."

Because Vukovar was ethnically segregated in terms of school at the time, Irena inherited her father's nationality and went to Serbian school. She didn't have many problems in school and was a good student, but she recalls having at least one experience where she was called derogatory names by other kids outside of school due to her multi-ethnicity. "I wasn't either," she says. "I wasn't Croatian enough for the Croatians obviously and I'm not Serbian enough for the Serbians." To her, nationality is more tied with where you spend your time than anything else and as such, having grown up in Croatia, she identifies significantly more with that side.

Her younger sister was born in 1997 and her family left Vukovar for Canada in December of 1999. Irena and her family came to Canada with immigrant status under the pretext of her parents' mixed marriage. Irena does not remember the immigration stream, but she does know there was a grant from the Canadian government that helped them get to Vancouver. Her parents applied to go either to Canada or Australia. After not hearing back from Australia, they were called in for an interview for Canadian

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[9] The participant asked for a pseudonym to be chosen for her. I chose a name that means "Peace."

[10] Vukovar was one of the most ethnically divided cities in the former Yugoslavia and the site of incredible bloodshed and significant war crimes.

immigration. Although they thought they would be placed in Toronto – where most Yugoslavs at the time were going and where Irena's mother had a cousin and some family friends – they were placed in Vancouver. From Vukovar, they drove to Zagreb and flew to Vancouver. Once they landed, they went to a welcome house in Vancouver, where they met a number of other newcomers from the region. A community formed around the welcome house and they eventually found an apartment through someone in their community. Growing up in Canada, Irena's family continued to speak their language in the home, visit family in the Balkans when possible, and acknowledge holidays such as *slava* (the Serbian familial patron saint celebration), as well as both Catholic (Croatian) Christmas and Orthodox (Serbian) Christmas and Easter. However, despite having connection to culture, Irena has struggled with finding that identity. She not only struggles with feeling stuck between Balkan ethnic identities that are politically at odds, but also has the immigrant experience of being stuck between Canadian and non-Canadian. As she describes it: "Intrinsically, I am all of them and yet I am none of them."

Irena speaks a lot about grappling with placing herself and her family within the bigger geo-political picture in order to understand where she fits in and how they ended up in Canada. She has watched everything she could find on the former Yugoslavia and the wars, but still struggles to understand because "those big picture things don't remember the people that were involved." When Irena thinks about her family's experience in the big picture of the war, she knows "bits and pieces" but some things are too difficult for her think and talk about publicly. She cannot rely on historical documentation nor on her own memory:

> It's felt like a sense of crisis growing up…I have what I think are memories. When I have something that could be a memory, it's hard for me to figure out if that's a memory I actually have or if it's something I've internalized or created for myself. That's the funny way that memories work, especially when you're that young.

There is intergenerational fragmentation throughout Irena's family history. During the Second World War, her paternal great-grandfather was a concentration camp survivor and the only survivor in his family. Irena's father's side was fragmented not only through the war and conflicts, but also through the cycles of alcoholism and domestic violence that are common in the Balkans. On her mother's side, there is a gap in generational knowledge due to the war in the 1990s. The generational knowledge does not sit with her grandmother but with her mother because Irena's great-grandmother had stayed with them in Vukovar when the war broke out. "The war defined this weird

generation of people of our parents' generation, us, and then our grandparents," as Irena puts it. "[The war] caused major gaps in knowledge."

Due to the context of Vukovar that she experienced, Irena has seen identity and nationality exist in a fluidity that she links to survival. She describes the "non-permanent status of nationality" in her family, with relatives who identified as one nationality or another depending on marriage, location, or who was in power. Irena herself has learned that in some situations, survival and safety become more important than personal identity. She speaks a dialect she describes as a "mishmash" of Croatian and Serbian because she went to Serbian school and lived on the border between the Serbian and Croatian sides. Her last name is not typical for the region and she can't trace the lineage, while her first name places her as Eastern European but not of being a specific ethnic group. This combination of an ambiguous name and a unique dialect allows her vagueness and safety when she travels in the region – parts of which are still tense to this day. She uses her Canadian passport to cross borders and whenever she is asked where she is from, she will either reply "Canadian" to maintain neutrality, or will fit whatever country she needs to fit at the time.

Irena felt that the experience of being the eldest child in her family's conflict-generated migration context caused her to feel older than she was. She took care of her sister and often took on a parental role with her, and she started working early on to contribute to the family. A family story she recalls is when Irena was five years old, she received some pocket money from an aunt. Instead of buying candy or anything else, she gave the money to her mom to buy the family salami to eat. She associates her draw to helping roles with these experiences. The culture is so collectivist and family-oriented, which Irena feels is also an important part of her identity; no matter how fragmented or messy one's family history is, the family unit remains one of the most important components of identity. She struggles to understand the intergenerational hatred that is often passed on in some Balkan families that hold those views – especially those living in diaspora. "To pass that onto a generation of kids that was displaced [as if] we wanted to be a part of it?" she asks. "Most of us want to run far away from it." Now in her late 20s, Irena lives with her Canadian partner and has begun to think about the formation of her own family unit. They have been engaged for a few years, but Irena still struggles with the idea of what marriage means for her identity. She feels she has had to mourn an inevitable loss of culture and the fact that she will not be able to pass on her family name or language to her children. She is uncertain of whether she wants to

change her last name when she gets married. For Irena, her last name holds identity and carries with it the story of her migration. "[The name shows] I came from this place," she explains. "But we had to move and create something here." Even the wedding itself brings with it questions of how much of her family she can have there and how much it will be her own given the immense distance she has with much of her extended family.

While identities in the Balkans have been politicized and people pitted against one another, Irena rejects nationalistic views of identity. Having experienced so much fragmentation due to the ethnic tensions and her parents' mixed marriage, Irena says she cannot allow for ethnic tensions to be an issue for her. The seemingly benign (but actually politically loaded) example of sport illustrates Irena's experience of her multi-ethnicity. She will always cheer for Serbia or Croatia when they're playing in the FIFA World Cup or Olympics, but if the two teams ever played one another, she would cheer for Croatia. Irena's identity cannot rely on nationality because of the geo-political fragility of the region. Her national identity is already fragmented and she – along with many others from the region—knows that even the current borders and categories of nationality can change in an instant. She must find things outside of nationality and culture to use as an identity:

> Where we do place our identities? Because it's fragmented, but where do we find ourselves? For me, I'm a helper and I'm kind of an academic and that's the two things I can really latch onto. Everything else is malleable and these two things are permanent.

And yet, nothing can exist without the impact of war and migration, even the things she holds onto for their permanence and clarity. The things she studies as an academic are linked to these experiences, the media she watches, the helping role she takes in work and relationships – they can all be traced back to the experiences of war and migration for Irena. In a powerful statement, Irena summarizes how her identity has been shaped:

> This interview is supposed to be about identity and how much have we talked about identity and how much have we talked about war? Because that's the identity…our identity is war. What is there past this because the war defined who we were in one way or another.

Narrative Three: Paloma

Paloma[11] was born in Velika Kladuša, Bosnia in 1992. Coming from a family of multi-ethnicities, she always struggled with how to identify ethnically. Her paternal grandfather is a Bosnian Serb and her paternal grandmother was from Croatia. On her mother's side, her grandmother was Serbian from Croatia and her grandfather was Bosniak (Bosnian Muslim). As Paloma puts it: "there's no clear word to say what I am." In 1994 (when Paloma was two years old), the Bosnian civil war pushed her family out of Bosnia. Her hometown had been evenly split between Muslim, Croatian, and Serbian populations prior to the war but during the war, anybody Croatian or Serbian was forced out. Being of mixed heritage, her family had to leave Bosnia as refugees. They made it to Serbia where they lived in a refugee camp for about six months before moving to the Serbian capital, Belgrade. Paloma has few memories of that time or the city, only snapshots of moments, such as sitting at a bus stop with a colouring book. They lived in Belgrade for just over a year, applying for immigration to Canada, the U.S., and Switzerland. They were accepted by Canada and moved to Vancouver in February 1997, when Paloma was four years old. They lived in the Immigrant House on Davie St for the first year that they were in Vancouver before moving to the West End.

When they moved to Canada, Paloma's parents encouraged her to speak English at home, to watch English TV, and to read English books. They hoped to assimilate her as quickly as possible so that she would not be put in ESL when she started school. However, over time, it became easier to speak English and she slowly started losing Serbo-Croatian. She no longer considers herself fluent in her language and she sees it as one of the struggles in her identity. Paloma tries to visit her grandparents in Serbia every few years when she can. She finds that she quickly recalls her language when she is in that setting but can rarely afford to go back. Because many cultural holidays are linked to religion, such as Orthodox Christmas, and Paloma's parents are both atheist, her family rarely celebrated traditional holidays and usually opted for celebrating Canadian holidays.

Having spent most of her life in Canada, she culturally identifies with being Canadian and ethnically identifies more with being Yugoslavian than with a specific ethnic group. When asked where she is from, she will often respond that she is "born in Bosnia" or that she is "from Bosnia" rather than identifying herself as being Bosnian.

[11] Paloma chose to use her name instead of a pseudonym.

Paloma grew up in a community of other immigrants, many from the former Yugoslavia. She recalls kids she went to school with being openly nationalist. Despite going to school with many others from the same region, her mixed background made it difficult for her to find her place. “For me, since childhood, I've known that I wasn't necessarily Serbian and I wasn't necessarily Bosnian so I think I struggled with having a clear identity,” she says. She has also found uncertainty and a lack of cohesion between her Canadian identity and immigrant identity. “I'm not Canadian enough to say I'm Canadian to someone when I first meet them,” she explains. “And I feel like I'm not Serbian or Bosnian enough because I don't speak the language that well so I find it hard to introduce myself as a Bosnian.”

Paloma does not know many family stories and what she does know is mainly from her father’s side. When Paloma’s father was six years old, his mother died due to complications from an abortion, but Paloma’s father would often tell stories of growing up with his father that helped Paloma understand what his life was like. His mother is less likely to talk about her other relatives or what her childhood is like. While hearing stories helps her feel more connected to her family, Paloma still finds that migration has made her ancestor’s stories feel more distant. “It's much easier when you have stories to build that on,” she says. “I can hear stories but it's hard to connect yourself to it when you've grown up here. You don't actually understand what that kind of a life is like at all.” Paloma describes a time that she felt the strongest connection to her history and family. She was learning about energy work from a friend and Paloma recalled stories of her grandfather. He had been the village healer and would be called to cure illness and infertility in his village. There were times in her childhood when she would be ill or have a headache and her father would sit with her, put his hand on her head, be silent for a while, and her headache would disappear. “I always thought that's just something my dad does and then I kind of realized where he learned that and where that comes from,” she say. “I like having that piece of my family that I understand.”

Paloma is now starting her own family and has had to negotiate the identity associated with her family of origin and make decisions about what to pass on. After much deliberation, she chose to take her husband’s last name in order to have the same last name as her husband and their kids. “I love my last name and I love the history and it does mean a lot to me but I just wanted my eventual family to share a last name,” she says. “It wasn't the easiest decision. It's not like I don't have any connection to my last name. That's my family, that's where I'm from.” Paloma was pregnant at the time of our

interview and was actively thinking of how to pass on the language and culture. She does not expect her kids to be fluent in Serbo-Croatian but she hopes they can understand the language, communicate a little bit, and know where their grandparents are from.

Narrative Four: Jelena

Jelena[12]'s paternal grandfather was born in what is now Croatia and her grandmother was born in what is now Bosnia. Both are ethnically Serbian and met in Vojvodina (an autonomous province in Northern Serbia) after they were both relocated during the Second World War. Both of their villages were burnt down during the war and her grandfather then joined the *partizani* (Communist Yugoslav guerillas resisting Nazi occupation). Jelena knows less about her maternal side. Her maternal grandparents passed away when she was quite young and, due to a long-standing family feud, there is distance between other family members. However, she knows that her maternal grandparents are from Serbia: her grandmother from Banat (the village her grandparents and parents met in) and her grandfather from Zlatibor, Serbia. Jelena's mother was born in Novi Sad, Serbia and was young when her parents moved back to their village of Banatsko Veliko Selo after their family feud escalated. Her parents and grandparents all met in that same village. Jelena's parents got married three months after meeting and had Jelena's sister a few years later. In 1994, seven years later, Jelena was born in Kikinda, Serbia. After struggling with post-partum depression, Jelena's mother developed symptoms of schizophrenia. Jelena's parents divorced for about a year during that time. Jelena's parents had begun the process of applying for immigration to Canada while Jelena's mother was pregnant with her and the goal of immigrating to Canada brought the family back together. Along with the conflicts, economic sanctions were pressures that led to Jelena's family migrating to Canada. Jelena recalls how her father would sneak into Romania to buy food for the family because of the hyperinflation in Serbia at the time. With tensions still high between her parents, Jelena remembers violence in the home until she was about ten years old. Although the mental health struggles and violence are not discussed openly in the family, Jelena's parents stayed together and managed to work on themselves enough to maintain a sense of relative normalcy.

Jelena sees her identity as very complex and how she identifies is dynamic. She does not feel confident in her language skills and she feels she does not know as much about her history or culture as she would like. "I feel like most of the things I know about Serbian culture are things from when I visit and things I have found for myself," she says. "With my parents, none of that has really carried on here. My parents just want to

[12] Name has been changed

leave that behind." For many Balkan people, identity is politicized and there is a sense of caution when disclosing where you are from, depending on where you are and who you are talking to. This is an experience that Jelena echoed as she unpacked how she identifies. She used to identify as Yugoslavian because that was the country she had left, but quickly learned that for many people in the West, this was a sort of "buzzword" that they identified with conflict and that would lead to people asking her insensitive questions. When she is in Serbia, she often feels like a foreigner in the place she was born and is often referred to as "the Canadian." When she travels, she often does identify as Canadian for safety and ease. When she is in Canada, she identifies primarily as being Serbian or Serbian-Canadian. Even with this identity, she often finds herself doubting whether she is "Serbian enough" in comparison to her peers in diaspora:

> I always felt really confused about whether or not I was more of a proper Serbian or a fraud… because there are these kids who knew more about the history, could speak the language better than me, listened to all the turbofolk, and I didn't do those things and yet I felt like I had a more accurate representation of where I was from. But at the same time, I couldn't read and write properly, I wasn't really taking in any media… I wonder if I was making up this identity that doesn't exist … So I'm not really sure what the right kind of Serbian looks like.

Because of her grandfather's work as an officer under Tito's government, the majority of her family had Communist beliefs and did not celebrate many Orthodox holidays, including church weddings. Several years ago, they began to celebrate their *slava* (a patron saint day celebrated by Serbian families). "No one in our family knows how to celebrate it because nobody has any memories of it so for me," she says. "It's like my heritage is Orthodox but in no immediate way do I associate being Serbian with being Orthodox." She also sometimes thinks of her identity as "having an expiry date" in that she is not certain she could maintain any sense of cultural identity outside of her family home.

Jelena's parents rarely spoke about the wars or their experiences. "Anytime I ask about history or this or that, my parents either give a short answer or tell me to go read about it myself. I don't really know why, but they're just not very talkative about those things," she says. "I try to pry those things out of them because I feel like I would know more about who I am if they were to talk about those things." In fact, she learned in school that her family had come from a war when a teacher asked her to tell the class about her experience. She also never knew about her father's experiences with the military or whether he had been drafted. She learned his story and how he avoided being drafted many years later from her sister's partner at the time. Her father had been

trained in Morse Code and had been approached by government officials prior to the war. He was told to do a 10-day training, a training that was kept secret at the time, but that years later, family members assumed was preparing him for espionage or surveillance purposes. A government official gave him his business card and told him that when the war started, only he could draft Jelena's father. Similarly, Jelena knows little about her grandparents' experiences of the Second World War. She knew that her grandmother had lost siblings during the war but only later learned that her grandmother had an older sister with paralysis that she carried on her back for the majority of the war. Her sister would eventually succumb to typhus She also recalls learning what being an "officer" means and deducing that her grandfather had likely fought in conflict. She asked him if he ever killed anyone. "He said 'No, of course not, sweetie' … but I wonder how much of the stories I know have to do with my age and how much it has to do with actually being open," says Jelena.

Jelena does not know much beyond her grandparents except that everyone in her family line came from an agricultural background. Because of her family history, she connects deeply to the rural Balkans and hopes to one day do a photography or video series on the topic. The rural/urban divide is significant in the Balkans, with many rural areas still immersed in folk traditions that have long been dismissed in urban areas. "I've always felt like I'd be more connected to my roots that way," she says. "I would want to have those things to talk about when someone asks me where I'm from, not the political side of things." This is one of the ways that Jelena strives to actively connect with her background. She has also gotten tattoos to remind her of her grandparents and has made an active decision to date people who have immigrant backgrounds after feeling misunderstood and disconnected with a Canadian-born partner. In a reclamation of identity, about a month after our interview, Jelena had also started Serbian lessons to relearn and connect more deeply with her language.

The last section outlined the narratives of the participants. This chapter now turns to consider the common themes that resulted from the interviews. The main themes were: 1) the politicization of identity; 2) diasporic identity and belonging (including language); 3) transmission of identity and trauma through family (family secrets and fragmentation of family); 4) ethnic or national identity (including cultural practice and religion); and 5) health (folk remedies and mental health).

The politicization of identity

When this research began, the intention was to hear the voices and stories of a forgotten generation. What was intended was to finally create something about us that wasn't just about wars, trauma, or politics. Instead, the findings show that we could not escape these things when we spoke of identity because we were all so defined by it. Despite all of the participants being less than ten years old at the time of migration – and many not even having a grasp of the political context we came from – all of the participants spoke to ways in which their identity had been politicized. For example, many of the participants have experiences of people assuming they hate another ethnic group or of people having simplistic views of what is a very complex geo-political situation. Jelena speaks of being put on the spot in class to speak about the Yugoslav wars – despite not knowing much about the historical context. She also recalls seeing Balkan characters represented as war criminals on shows such as *Community*. She noticed the trope so frequently that she began keeping a list of every characterization of a war criminal in popular media. This characterization and the politicization of identity can have significant impacts on participants, particularly when they already struggle to build a coherent and cohesive sense of identity and belonging. Irena – who came to Canada at age six from Vukovar – speaks to the struggle of trying to navigate a politicized identity without many (or any) memories of the experiences. "I've been trying to understand what happened as a way to understand kind of where I fit in and how I ended up here in Canada," says Irena. Irena's need to "understand what happened" also speaks to the varying levels of engagement that participants chose to have with the historical context they came from. Most participants mentioned that their parents rarely spoke about the wars or gave bits and pieces of information about the broader historical context. This left participants on their own to decide the extent to which they wanted to learn about the historical events that led to their migration. Participants varied in how they related to the wars. Some participants did not engage much with the topics and even avoided the topic when they could. For example, Jelena felt that being Balkan is

"so much more than the events… it's also about the people and the songs and the stories." She feels that reading too much about the atrocities would make it harder for her to make sense of her identity and heritage. As a result, she kept putting off reading about the history as a way of self-preservation. Other participants, like Irena, were drawn to the topic of war and read everything they could on the Yugoslav wars as a way of making sense of their place in the broader context. The wars of the 1990's are the most salient in how they define our generation. However, the legacy of the Second World War also remains present in family stories and in the fragmentation of memory, knowledge, and even families. Most of the participants also had stories of the Second World War and how it defined their grandparents. Several mentioned grandfathers who fought with the *partizani*[13] or were otherwise involved in the wars. One participant had a grandfather who survived a concentration camp. All the participants also had stories of their fathers and war, be that they had fought in the wars of the 1990s, got drafted, or had been trained and never deployed. This speaks to the gendered nature of war and the intergenerational legacy of fathers who are off fighting wars. Knowing their fathers' and grandparents' involvement in wars also puts a human face on historical conflicts and makes these conflicts all the more personal and salient for participants. As Irena poignantly put it: "Our identity is war…the war defined who we were in one way or another." Perhaps it is the reality of conflict-generated diaspora that one is violently expelled from their place of birth and that we become defined by the very conflicts we left.

National and ethnic identity in the Balkans remains a politically charged topic. The ways in which borders and ethnic or national categories change so frequently through politics and war make personal identity more difficult. Many of the participants struggled to understand where they fit in ethnically or culturally, usually because they were of multi-ethnic background and those categories had changed since their parents' time and since they were born. Most, if not all, of the participants were born in the region when it still existed as Yugoslavia. Several participants have parents who still primarily identified with being Yugoslavs. As a result, participants struggled to choose a way of defining their identity. In fact, several participants found identities for themselves outside of their ethnic and cultural identity. For example, Irena has struggled with the changing

[13] A communist guerilla movement in Yugoslavia that fought the Nazis during their occupation of Yugoslavia. The partisans were led by Marshall Broz Tito.

ethnic boundaries and the fear of future political instability. She worries that the Balkans remain politically unstable and that she cannot rely on ethnic, cultural, or religious categories for a sense of identity, so she finds identities elsewhere:

> Where we do place our identities? Because it's fragmented, but where do we find ourselves? For me, I'm a helper and I'm kind of an academic and that's the two things I can really latch onto. Everything else is malleable and these two things are permanent.

Njanja spoke a lot about the activities and hobbies she chooses as being a stronger focal point in her identity. She found a stronger sense of self when she realized that her identity could be her own and that she had autonomy in how she existed in the world:

> It hasn't really occurred to me that you don't just get defined by stuff around you that, you know, is a part of your culture and your parents and your family and everything. You can exert some control over your identity.

The conflicts were mainly orchestrated by larger political forces and yet participants often feel defined by forces larger than them and events that they have few or no memories of. Yet, in small ways, these participants are building identities outside of the ethnic, political, and national parameters they have been places in. There is a sense of *defining oneself* rather than *being defined.* As Njanja has said, there is autonomy and power in "exert[ing] some control over your identity."

Participants expressed that a prominent feature of how they experienced Balkan identity in diaspora was a politicization of their identity. They often felt defined by the wars and were often met with people's assumptions based off of geopolitical events or were expected to speak on the politics of the region. Participants had few or no memories of the conflicts themselves, leaving them struggling to build a cohesive understanding of their place in the bigger historical or political context.

Diasporic identity and belonging

One large area of discussion was a sense of belonging to their country of birth and belonging to the diasporic community. Naujoks (2010) talks about *diasporic-ethnic* identity (having bonds with the ethnic community in Canada), *diasporic-national* identity (having bonds with country of origin and people there), and *diasporic-civil* (which refers more to civil rights and responsibilities towards the government, political, and state institutions of the country of origin). None of the participants talked about a diasporic-civil identity (i.e. nobody mentioned voting in their country of birth, nor being politically or civilly involved in their country of origin). However, the diasporic-national and diasporic-ethnic identities were significant, as was the tension between the two. Participants often

spoke about not quite belonging in either Canada nor their birth country, and they spoke about having trouble finding a place in their diasporic community or feeling tension with the ethnic communities they were trying to find belonging in. These are being discussed as one section because of the strong overlap between the participants' narratives around a lack of belonging to their birth country, belonging to Canada, and belonging to their diasporic community. While those may be distinct categories, for these participants, it was the overlap that caused a sense of not belonging anywhere and which complicated their identities. For example, many of the participants struggled with the common immigrant experience of not quite fitting into their birth country or the country they grew up in. Paloma says:

> I think I still sort of struggle with that because I don't know what I consider myself. I'm sure a lot of people feel that way. I'm not Canadian enough to say I'm Canadian to someone when I first meet them and I feel like I'm not Serbian or Bosnian enough.

Paloma expresses a feeling of not being "Canadian enough" and, at the same time, not being "Serbian or Bosnian enough". There is a sense of not belonging anywhere and not being truly understood by others. Similarly, Irena speaks to a feeling that there are multiple versions of herself and that no matter who she is with, there are parts of her identity that aren't understood:

> It's the idea that everything is sort of fragmented…they get bits and pieces of my life, but not everything and then there's a cultural piece that I have there that I can't transfer and then there's the whole familial piece…There's the work [Irena], who speaks English and goes to work, goes to school and has a Canadian partner. Then there's the [Irena] in the house with the family that's this amalgamation of things. And then there's the [Irena] that is perceived at home that should be this way. You end up living in three different worlds, where you have to shift. You kind of smush them flat but there are always these crannies and nooks that aren't filled.

What Irena has expressed is a fragmentation of identity, that she exists in different contexts and that there will always be pieces of her identity that do not fit into whatever context she is in. She feels that she has to have different versions of herself and that she lives in different worlds, never finding her place and never feeling whole. Participants largely felt that they struggled to find others who could understand the full breadth of their experiences. One participant even made a conscious decision to only date others from immigrant backgrounds after struggling with cultural differences in her dating life.

All of the participants spoke to experiencing intergroup or interethnic tensions in diaspora. Participants mentioned that many people in our generation in the diasporic

community can carry on blind nationalism as a way of connecting to an identity and all of the participants spoke to wishing to distance themselves from the political implications of their identity. Jelena speaks to the complexities of connecting to others in diaspora and to a diasporic identity:

> I find that there are so many different kinds of having a Serbian identity that I very rarely… have felt like when I meet other Serbian people, we have something to connect on. I remember in high school, I would avoid saying I was Serbian because there were so many kids I felt were propagating this not real thing that I remember as being Serbian. It was a whole look, it was a whole kind of talk, very nationalist. When I go back home, I don't know anyone who is like this, so I feel like, even though my identity I would say is Serbian, it's not Canadian. I do associate myself with being Serbian-Canadian but not the Canadian that call themselves Serbian.

Jelena has identified the struggle of being "not Canadian" but not identifying with those in diaspora who call themselves Serbians. While she sees herself existing in the hyphenated identity of Serbian-Canadian, she cannot find a group of people she identifies with at those crossroads. Paloma, who herself experienced a similar environment growing up, speaks to how the next generation continues to hold nationalist ideas of identity:

> It's totally blind nationalism. I see that now in kids my sister's age and younger too that are so nationalist and so proud and have no idea. They don't know anything about the history of the country at all. They just learn that Croats are bad and that's it and that's what they believe. There's nothing else that goes into it, no deeper level of understanding.

Given the nationalism and the continued ethnic divisions in diaspora –the very reason many families had to leave Yugoslavia – diasporic identity can be especially difficult for people from mixed marriages. For example, Paloma found that she could not fit into a clear identity in diaspora. She speaks to how the people around her had largely identified as Serbian. Paloma – who was born in Bosnia but had Croatian, Serbian, and Bosniak (Muslim) heritage –had a harder time knowing where she fit in.

Not only did participants find their identities were politicized by non-Balkan people, but they also found that interethnic tensions and nationalist ideas were common in their diasporic communities, making it difficult for them to find a sense of belonging even amongst other Balkan people in diaspora. Participants felt a tension between the Canadian identity and their Balkan identity and often felt they did not fully belong in Canada nor in their birth country. Furthermore, several participants were also from families of multi-ethnic backgrounds and participants expressed difficulty navigating how to define their "Balkan-ness" within their mixed heritage.

Language. All the participants had the immigrant experience of living between two worlds, of being neither and both. There were a number of factors that participants considered to either bring them closer to their birth country or to other them from where they are from. However, one of the primary themes that all participants mentioned was their ability to speak their language as a component of identity that often challenged their sense of belonging. While all the participants spoke their language[14] to some degree, most reported that they did not feel confident with their language skills and/or that they often felt embarrassed to speak because their Canadian accent would immediately indicate that they were not "from" there. "When I go there, I'm always so recognizably foreign and I was born there," says Jelena. "It's the worst when I get in a taxi and they say*, odakle si?* [Where are you from?]. I was born here but I don't sound like it." Paloma came to Canada when she was four years old and, in order to assimilate in time for kindergarten, Paloma's parents encouraged her to speak English at home, to watch TV in English, and to read English books. While she understands everything and speaks enough to communicate, Paloma does not feel that she is fluent in Serbo-Croatian anymore, something that is a common experience for many children of immigrants. Paloma is even wary of introducing herself as being from Bosnia because she feels her language skills do not reflect what others might expect:

> I don't speak the language that well so I find it hard to introduce myself as a Bosnian because I feel like that sets up expectations and then people start speaking to me in Serbian.

Paloma and the other participants saw a clear connection between knowing their language and belonging to the Balkans. Jelena directly links language to identity and belonging:

> I sometimes wonder if they are sometimes better Serbians than I am because they can actually speak the language… I definitely think that if I could speak it better and I sounded more Serbian, I would feel more Serbian.

Jelena sees language as being so directly linked to identity and belonging that she sees others who speak the language better as being inherently "better Serbians" and she believes that "sounding more Serbian" would be directly correlated with feeling "more Serbian." One's grasp of the language is associated with deeper connection to a homeland.

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[14] While the languages of the former Yugoslavia have only slight variances, I am not specifying a certain language when speaking broadly because participants may not necessarily identify with that language. As with ethnic or cultural identity, language in the region is complex and, while we can all easily communicate with one another, some participants speak Serbian, some Serbo-Croatian, others Croatian or Bosnian.

Even within the Balkans, language is complicated and dialects can vary vastly according to region. Language can also be politically charged. Njanja remembers the first time the difference became salient. She brought back a form from school and under "first language," the school had written "Croatian." She remembers her parents shaking their heads and changing it. Although the languages are similar, language is tied into identity, nationality, and place in complex ways that are difficult to unravel. For example, Irena spoke about the patrilineal inheritance of her father's Serbian identity. However, being born in Croatia, she identifies as being Croatian. In the same breath, she specifies that she does not speak "full Croatian," explaining the "mishmash" she speaks because of the close proximity to the Serbian border and the fact that she went to Serbian school in the ethnically divided Vukovar. Njanja, whose family is Serbian from Bosnia, also recalls the tense political situation in the region and how she and her brother were told to "keep quiet" when they would go visit lest their accents give away their ethnicity.

Furthermore, language – like many aspects of identity – can have relational and intergenerational significance. It is the language we can use to speak to our parents and grandparents, and it is associated with where we are from. Several of the participants who had mentioned that they were not confident with their language skills had hopes for improving their language skills. For example, Njanja has a partner who speaks English and she only speaks her language with her parents. As she gets older and further from her language, she feels more of a desire to improve her language and reading skills. Jelena, who had spoke extensively about feeling like she was not "Serbian enough" in large part due to her language skills, texted me several months after our interview to let me know she had found a Serbian language tutor and was relearning her language. Other participants are actively thinking about how to pass on parts of the language to future children and to maintain a connection to their culture and past. Paloma, who was pregnant at the time of our interview, had thought extensively about how to pass on some Serbo-Croatian to her future children. "I don't expect my kids to be fluent in Serbian… I'm not even [fluent]," she says. "But just to understand a little and know where their grandparents are from." Irena, whose partner is Canadian, has also thought about the loss of culture that happens with the loss of language. "It's something I've actually had to mourn and realize that my kids will not have that," she says. "My kids won't have the language I do, they won't necessarily understand. I can only do so much to teach them and I have to just be ok with that."

All participants cited language as being an important component of identity and the majority of participants struggled to some degree with their language skills. Several participants spoke about how they felt shame or embarrassment when trying to speak and that their language skills made them “less” Balkan or signaled to people that they did not quite belong. Furthermore, even those participants who spoke their language at home found that as they left their family homes and spoke their language less, they felt more distance from their Balkan identity.

Transmission of identity and trauma through family

Family was a significant theme amongst participants, which is not surprising given the collectivist and familial nature of Balkan culture. Participants found that their identity was significantly tied to their family and how much they engaged in cultural practices or how their parents identify. The family is also significant in fragmentation and transmission of trauma, as is supported by the literature on the multigenerational transmission of trauma. This section will cover how identity and trauma are transmitted through family secrets and silences, and how families are fragmented through migration, conflict, and family violence.

Family secrets and silences. Several of the interview questions addressed family stories and aimed to look at how participants may feel more connected to their ancestors and birth country through those stories. Instead, what was found was that all of the participants either had few family stories or that what they knew was fragmented, selective, and/or shrouded in secrecy. Not only does silence result in difficulty connecting with ancestral knowledge, but it can be a mechanism for the intergenerational transmission of trauma. Danieli (1981a, 82a, 88d) found that in many Holocaust survivors, intergenerational trauma was transmitted through a *conspiracy of silence;* that is, it was not transmitted through stories of horror but by the unexplainable and unmentionable silence that hangs over a traumatized family. For example, Njanja spoke about her aunt, who she had always known to be “different” and had assumed there was a mental illness of some sort present. It was not until her last year of high school when she asked her mom about hereditary illnesses in the family that she found out her aunt had been shot in the head during the Siege of Sarajevo in the 1990s. After not receiving much information from her parents on this disclosure, she dug through their documents to find a file on her aunt. She made a graphic novel on the subject from what information she pieced together. “I showed it to my parents after and we’ve never talked about it,” says Njanja. This illustrates what Holocaust studies and feminist scholar

Marianne Hirsch describes as “the generation after’s” desperation to construct coherent narratives of themselves and their place within the collective experience after growing up simultaneously near their parents’ pain and distant from it (Hirsch, 2008).

This sense of leaving things unaddressed was echoed by other participants as well. Several participants spoke about how significant topics such as domestic violence or family members’ roles in the wars had remained shrouded in silence. For all the participants, many stories were not readily offered and, given the culture of silence in the family, it was often difficult for them to ask. Njanja, for example, knew the “bits and pieces” that were offered occasionally, but never knew how to broach sensitive topics:

> I definitely feel uncertain about asking those questions because I don’t know, do they want to talk about it, when’s a good time to talk about it… I don’t even know how big of a part of the whole story that is for them…I feel like I don’t know how to talk about it and nobody in my family has shown me how to talk about it.

Njanja’s use of the graphic novel to piece together the story of her aunt is reminiscent of Canadian-Yugoslav artist Nina Bunjevac’s graphic novel, *Fatherland*, which echoes many of these themes. Bunjevac writes: “When I was a child my father’s name was rarely mentioned in our household. The semi-complete picture I now have of him took many years and much effort to piece together.” Bunjevac’s father, heavily involved in Serbian nationalism, is killed in an explosion in 1977. In her graphic novel, Bunjevac explores the circumstances around her father’s death and the legacy of family violence, fragmentation, mental health and trauma, and politicization. Through the use of art, there is a sense of reclamation of stories that one might not have the words for. It is a way of building a narrative and making sense of what may have happened. The feeling that many things remained unknown is echoed by several participants. For example, Jelena learned many stories from her grandparents, who she considered a “well of stories.” Jelena still felt that she “really had to pry it out of them” because it was often traumatic for them and they had to be in the right mood. Despite knowing many stories, Jelena still feels that there is so much she never learned. She asks: “I always wonder, what are all the stories I'll never get to know?” Furthermore, even those stories that they do have can feel distant or difficult to connect to as a result of migration and disconnection from culture. For example, Paloma feels she cannot imagine what her ancestors’ lives looked like even if she does know the stories. Thus, for Paloma, stories bring her closer to her family and she can have a deeper understanding of her ancestors and their lives. However, there is also a sense that migration has created too large of a detachment that even stories cannot connect us to the lives of our ancestors in an

embodied way. Rather, these stories and the ancestors in them will always remain somehow distant and abstract for us. Many participants spoke to not knowing many of their extended family and not feeling connected to them because of the distance.

Family fragmentation. For many participants, migration is only one of the mechanisms through which the connections to ancestors are fragmented. Several participants spoke to the ways in which their families had become fragmented through war, violence, ethnic tensions, or other disagreements. In Irena's family, for example, her father' side was fragmented through histories of family violence which led to a disconnection with relatives. The family was further fragmented as a result of her parents' mixed marriage. Her father is Serbian and her mother is Croatian. When the conflicts between Serbia and Croatia broke out, Vukovar was one of the cities hit the hardest in these conflicts. Much of her father's family turned against them, even ignoring them on the street. Other participants also spoke to fragmentation due to family violence or conflict, mental illness, wars, and/or migration.

Several participants also spoke to generational loss, generational gaps, and of the ways knowledge was passed down as a result. Given the familial nature of the Balkan culture, it was common for immigrants living in Canada to then sponsor grandparents to come and live with the family. Grandparents might be tasked with looking after young children and homes would often be multi-generational (as is traditional in the Balkans). Some participants found that they learned many stories from their grandparents that they never heard from their parents. Others, on the other hand, found that their grandparent's generation had in a way been lost or overlooked. Irena speaks to the family fragmentation that occurred as a result of wars and mass migration has had inter-generational impacts, mentioning that the ancestral knowledge skipped her grandmother's generation as a result of the wars. It is not uncommon for grandparents and extended family to be a large part of a child's upbringing. As I listened to Irena, I remember how my own mother – who also shares a name with her grandmother—was largely raised by her two grandmothers. In fact, I have no memories of her telling stories of her grandfathers, only stories of grandmothers. Despite the patriarchal nature of Balkan society, the matrilineal connection remains vibrant. Because of the familial nature of the culture and of how bound in family identity is, participants maintained the importance of family cohesion even in the face of fragmentation. As Irena puts it:

> The identity, the culture, is so family-oriented, we can't deny. It's one thing my partner and I see differently. Family for him is a weird thing, family for me is very important. Even though it's so messy and fragmented, this unit – you do anything

> for your family, doesn't matter what it is. …You can be angry at them and still want to help. Family first.

What Irena has highlighted is not only the emphasis on collectivism and family despite fragmentation, violence, and distance, but also how these views of family may be at odds with participants' partners or friends. It also speaks to the tension that participants have when it comes to family. For many, their families are filled with pain, trauma, and violence. They may feel a disconnection due to migration, cultural and generational differences, language, and/or family secrets and communication issues. Yet family is a constant and an integral part of their identity. Family is intrinsically tied to who they are and where they are from; fragmentation of the family is a fragmentation of identity, belonging, and the self.

Ethnic or national identity

The question of one's ethnic or national category becomes complex in the former Yugoslavia where for many years, ethnicity was not necessarily linked to citizenship, place of birth, or where one lives. For example, Bosnia was one of the most ethnically diverse areas of the former Yugoslavia, with Serbians, Croatians, Bosniaks, and other ethnic minorities living in peace for decades. Many participants remain uncertain about what exactly defines "what" or "who" they are. Paloma's description of her identity perfectly illustrates the complexity:

> Culturally, I would say I definitely identify as Canadian. I've spent most of my life here and I think I grew up in kind of a typical Canadian household really, even though we were refugees. Ethnically, I would say I don't have a clear thing that I identify as. Obviously I'm not ethnically Canadian. I was born in Bosnia and I come from a mixed family. I've always kind of struggled, I've never said that I am Bosnian because just my family background would make me about a quarter Bosnian. I was born there but only one of my grandfathers is actually Bosnian so I don't say I'm Bosnian but if someone will ask me where I'm from, I'll say I was born in Bosnia or I'm from Bosnia but I think I would probably identify as Yugoslavian ethnically.

As seen in Paloma's description, there is a struggle between our citizenship, nationality, heritage and ancestry, and where we are born. As she sums it up: "There's no clear word to say what I am." A number of participants spoke about the place of birth being a significant part of national identity. As Irena explains: "To me, nationality is more tied to where you're born and where you spend time. Even where you're born is a little iffy because it might not be where you grew up." This is something that Jelena also struggles with. While her parents and some of her grandparents are all from Vojvodina (a region in Serbia), another part of her family was from Croatia. "They're ethnically Serbian but to me, we go generations back there so I never really understood where you

draw the line between you're ethnically something and you're just assimilated to that place," she says. "My family is ethnically Serbian."

Njanja tells the story of her father, who was ethnically Serbian, born in Croatia, and lived his whole life in Bosnia. When the wars broke out and borders changed, nobody would give him a passport. He was told by Serbian officials that because he had never lived there, he could not receive a Serbian passport. Croatian officials told him he had only been born there and he had not other connection to Croatia, whereas Bosnian officials told him he was neither born there not ethnically Bosnian. Njanja's parents managed to leave Bosnia with forged papers bought on the black market and when they finally made it to Canada, Njanja's father rejected all the groups that had previously rejected him. Because Canada had accepted them, he decided his identity would be solely Canadian. Njanja's mother, on the other hand, continued to identify with Yugoslavia – a country that was now little more than a memory. These stories are reflected in Njanja's sense of national identity. She considers herself "definitely" Canadian above all and says:

> I do feel like my identity is somewhat tied to my passport. I guess, maybe through my parents' stories …your identity is where your passport is. If they won't give you a passport, screw that.

At the time of our interviews, Jelena – who holds a Serbian passport – was applying for Croatian citizenship in order to be able to study in the EU (since Croatia is a part of the EU but Serbia is not). Her paternal grandfather was born in Croatia and through the same patrilineal tradition that made Irena "Serbian," Jelena's father happened to get a Croatian citizenship card – despite not being born there or ever having lived there. This allows Jelena to apply for Croatian citizenship on a technicality and, while she is applying for practical reasons, she speaks of the experience as a challenge to how she has seen her identity. "Identity-wise, I'm really confused because what entitles me to apply? And if my grandfather were alive today, he would never let this happen," she says. It was further complicated by learning about celebrations by some Croatians of the anniversary of ethnic cleansing of Serbians and of how Serbians are still often rejected for Croatian citizenship (even if they hold a right to that citizenship). Hearing about these events led to a dissonance for Jelena, who had always appreciated the "intricacies and differences" of the Balkans and was not raised with nationalist ideas. "That's something that really hurt to read about," she says. "I have to write a whole biography about why I identify with Croatian identity. Why am I willingly doing this when these people don't want me?" Complex experiences of citizenship are

reflected in the literature. For example, Leitner and Ehrkamp (2006) found that migrants had complex feelings around citizenship, with citizenship being important in a sense of belonging, mobility, and legal protections but not being adequate to ensure protection from discrimination, equal access, or a sense of belonging.

Religion. Perhaps the primary difference between ethnic groups in the Balkans is religion. In the most simplistic terms, Serbians are Orthodox, Croatians are Catholic, and Bosniaks are Muslim. In practice, this becomes more complicated with mixed marriages, intertwined ethnic and national categories, and half a century of communism in the region (which encouraged secularism). Many cultural practices are connected to religion and many diasporic communities congregate around religious institutions such as the church. However, none of the participants in this study were religious and had varying levels of cultural practice. Jelena's family, for example, had been Communist and nobody had practiced religious holidays, gotten baptized, or gotten married in a church. Only recently did they start to celebrate *slava*[15]which they had to relearn how to celebrate. As Jelena puts it: "For me, it's like my heritage is Orthodox but in no immediate way do I associate being Serbian with being Orthodox." Paloma's family is of multi-ethnicities and are atheist. Because so many of the celebrations are based in Orthodox Christianity, her family acknowledge them but never celebrate them – opting instead to celebrate "Canadian holidays." Similarly, Njanja's family has always celebrated both Orthodox holidays and holidays such as Christmas on December 25. Irena also recognizes significant days but does not celebrate them in the traditional way. For her, the mixed marriage of her parents plays a role into her experiences with religion as well. While she says she was "technically" baptized in the Orthodox Church based on her father's Serbian identity, she knows very little about Orthodoxy. Her grandmother was Catholic and so Irena's family tends to celebrate both Catholic and Orthodox holidays.

None of the participants in this study were religious and those who do celebrate religious holidays, such as *slava* or Orthodox Christmas, do so for cultural reasons. Participants did see the celebration of these holidays as significant in the definition of identity and celebrated them to different degrees. While religion was not banned or

[15] The *slava* is a holiday specific to Serbians and is considered one of the most important holidays for Serbian families. No other Orthodox group or Balkan group of other religions celebrates it. It began as a pagan rite which celebrated the family's ancestor-protector but has since been reinterpreted by the Serbian Orthodox Church as a celebration of Christian patron saints.

punished under Communism in the former Yugoslavia, those who were in the Communist Party did not celebrate religious holidays. Several of the participants had parents or grandparents who were Communist or in the Communist Party, which also meant that religious holidays were not necessarily passed down in the lineage as they might otherwise. All of the participants who do celebrate religious holidays expressed that their families did not follow the traditional ways of celebrating and were either re-learning the traditions or were celebrating in modified ways.

Health

Health came up as a significant theme for all participants. Something that every participant had some connection to was the use of common folk remedies and how they associated these with family and identity. Participants also talked about mental health and addiction and the ways in which there are significant generational differences in how these topics are dealt with.

Folk remedies. Health came up in all of the interviews in several ways. First, all the participants spoke about physical health and about common folk remedies. For example, one participant talked about the common practice of putting potatoes in her socks when she had a fever, while another talked about her mother using chamomile for its healing properties. While their parents and grandparents tended to mistrust doctors and Western medicine, participants tended to think of those folk remedies as endearing albeit archaic. These folk remedies are also something that participants tended to connect solely to their Balkan identity and in some cases saw as existing in direct opposition to their "Canadian side." As one participant put it: "You're not Canadian really either…potatoes in your socks and all these things that make you ultra-not Canadian or whatever else that separates you out from all the rest." This was consistent with findings by Stone et al. (2005), which found that transnational family stories across diasporic cultures often had shared motifs, including the maintenance of home remedies or non-Western medicines.

Paloma, who otherwise didn't know many stories of her family, felt more deeply connected to her ancestors upon learning about energy healing. She had heard from her father that her grandfather had been the village healer and had often been called upon to cure illness and infertility. Growing up, she had memories of her father putting his hands on her head and her headaches disappearing or other instances of him healing with touch. The ancestral knowledge of healing with touch is something that connects her to something older than her and helps her understand her family and where they

come from. It allowed her to connect to a felt sense of her family history in a way that she couldn't with stories.

Mental health and addiction. Several participants talked about addiction or substance use in their family history. Even for those who did not talk about addiction, there was a normalization of heavy alcohol use that is almost intrinsically tied to identity. For example, one participant who did not drink listed not drinking as one of the things that made her feel like a "bad Serbian" and that in the eyes of many family members, being Canadian was linked to being "sensitive" – usually connected to qualities such as expressing emotions or not drinking alcohol. Additionally, many participants talked about mental health struggles in their families, usually undiagnosed, and the difficulties that came with that. One participant talked about her paternal grandmother and her bouts of paranoia and what they believe to be mania. As a result of growing up with a mother with mental illness, the participant's father struggles with anger management, emotional regulation and with accepting his childhood. While many participants spoke about family secrets or silence, this participant spoke to her father's habit of speaking about his childhood "in a very desperate to understand it way," with a desperation she and her sister couldn't process or interact with. Another participant spoke about her mother's mental health struggles, whose symptoms developed after her post-partum depression and resembled schizophrenia. Several participants encouraged their parents about seeking mental health supports outside the family. One participant spoke to her family's attempts to get their mother to go to counselling for "really bad periods" of depression or what they suspect is a mood disorder, while another urged their father to speak to a mental health professional because of his anger and lack of emotional regulation. As she put it: "[He] seem[s] to need to talk about this, but none of us are trained to deal with it and [he] unload[s] a lot of stuff. That wasn't even a thought that he could comprehend." Participants mentioned being the first in their family to see a mental health professional due to the stigma surrounding mental health in Balkan culture, and even teaching their parents about mental health. Most never spoke about these mental health issues outside the family or even in the family. One participant spoke about how strange it felt to disclose those experiences outside of the family, but also spoke to the importance of raising awareness about mental health struggles amongst immigrants and refugees.

Conclusion

The primary themes that emerged were the politicization of identity, the experience of belonging to Canada and to their birth country, family transmission of

trauma and identity, ethnic or national identity, and health. Participants reported that language was a significant factor in building a sense of belonging, and some participants strongly connected to formal measures of belonging, such as passports or citizenship. Relational aspects such as family and the diasporic community were significant in building identity but were also places of tension or conflict. Lastly, health in the form of folk remedies and mental health were both significant for participants.

Chapter 5.

Discussion

The last section outlined the themes that emerged from participant's narratives. The research questions examined the experience of building identity in diaspora and the themes indicate that for the participants in this study, identity is relational and transgenerational, rooted in history and politics, and dynamic and uncertain. This is consistent with the familial and collective nature of Balkan culture, as well as the historical and political context in which the participants exist. While the last section concretely engaged with the findings thematically, the discussion focuses on the *qualities* of identity that emerged and what this means for identity building in diaspora. This section will also look at the implications of the findings, study limitations, and possible future research.

Identity is relational

Participants often spoke of identity as relational and intrinsically tied to family and relationships. Major themes arose around family of origin, partners, how others perceived them, and a sense of belonging to others in their community. Not only is Balkan culture familial and collectivist in nature, but for many growing up in diaspora, their family may truly be their main link to the language and culture. All of the participants had the experience of moving away from their family of origin and feeling that they were losing a part of their identity, particularly when they had long-term Canadian partners or spouses. As Jelena puts it:

> I wonder if my identity has an expiry date… I want to remember until the day I die that I have roots somewhere else. Because I feel like now I'm very aware of it but as I get older and further away from my family, that will dissipate.

Her connection to her identity and culture is something that Jelena and other participants associate with family. All of the participants were in relationships or married to non-Balkan partners and many of them spoke about the cultural loss that came with those relationships. Several participants brought up how their names connect them to their heritage and ancestors. One participant had gotten married and taken her husband's last name, while another participant was engaged and still contemplating the

choice. Both of them had to choose between losing that piece of connections to ancestors while also wanting to share a name with their kids. They were both stuck between worlds and generations. As Paloma puts it: “It wasn't the easiest decision. It's not like I don't have any connection to my last name. That's my family, that's where I'm from, but…it's because I was thinking of having kids one day and having the same last name as them.” For Irena, it’s not only about ancestry but about honouring the migration story: “I have a really strong attachment to my last name…for me, that identity, that last name, carries with it the fact that we had to move. I came from this place, but we had to move and create something here.” For other participants, the reality of getting married in diaspora and not having extended family there was a significant loss they had to reconcile. Participants struggled with maintaining connection with their roots in the face of the fragmentation. For participants in this study, identity was co-constructed with others and family is both where the balkanization of identity occurs and where identity is built in diaspora. That is, identity-building is always relational and always dependent on interactions with those around them, whether that is Balkan family or Canadian partners.

Identity is historically and politically rooted

All of the participants came to Canada during the conflicts and, as a result, most of them felt to some degree, that they were defined by war and nationalism – even if they tried to escape it. All of the participants mentioned the external forces and assumptions that shape expectations of what their identity should look like. Based on their belonging to an ethnic or national category, they face expectations that are rooted in historical context. All of the participants spoke at length about expectations of nationalism or hatred towards other ethnic groups and the stereotyping based on historical and political events (e.g. being stereotyped as “war criminals”). As a result of growing up in diaspora, most participants actually know little or nothing about their histories and yet often experienced being put in the role of a “spokesperson” for the complex histories of the Balkans. Furthermore, growing up in Canada, the participants’ understanding of ethnicity, national identity, and Balkan womanhood are influenced by Western understanding of these categories. Feminist scholar Jelena Batinić examined narratives in the 1990s both by Western and Yugoslav feminists, particularly in relation to wartime rape. She found that Western feminist press of that time revealed a “specific type of feminist political subjectivity” that was “characterized by its longstanding and persistent attachment to the radical feminist concepts, this time ethnicized, and its continuing investment in the imperial Western self-definition that necessitates the idea of

the Orientalized Other" (Batinić, 2001; p.18). That is, the conflicts and ethnic categories were largely misunderstood by Western media – including feminist media – and were molded to fit narratives familiar to the West. For example, anti-pornography radical feminist Catharine MacKinnon wrote of pornography as both a by-product and cause of sexual violence in the Yugoslav conflicts, a gross mischaracterization of the conflicts. Thus, Balkan women growing up in diaspora have an identity that exists at the crossroads of both the historical context of Yugoslavia and in the political context of Western understanding of Yugoslavia. On the one hand, participants faced traditionalism and the histories of their country. On the other, they grew up with Western interpretations of their history and ethnicized identities of "not Canadian." Much like participants' identity-building was rooted in families and relationships, so too was it informed and guided by their historical context. Whether or not participants wanted to identify with the politics of the region, they found themselves defined by the collective experiences and histories of the countries they came from. Hence, the geopolitics of balkanization play out in the participants' identity-building efforts as they try to construct coherent identities.

Identity is intergenerational

Many of the participants also spoke about navigating how to pass on a sense of identity to their children or future children. "I wonder, if I do have kids one day, how the hell am I going to pass Serbian onto them if I can't even speak it properly? That is something that's important to me, to be able to hear that when I'm older," Jelena mused. Participants tended to think of their identity as something bigger than just them. Not only do participants yearn to connect with their ancestors and what came before them, but even those participants who didn't have children yet were thinking of future generations when navigating identity. Most of the participants searched for the stories of their families and it was important to them to know the stories of their ancestors and where they were from.

Furthermore, participants were significantly impacted by intergenerational family fragmentation and the intergenerational trauma that arose through family secrets, silences, and gaps. Many participants felt that they had a better understanding of themselves if they knew their families' stories and the gaps, secrets and silences were particularly salient to them. While doing the genogram exercise at the beginning of our interviews, many participants expressed not knowing much about their families past a few generations and wished that they knew more. Several participants expressed feeling

connected to their roots not necessarily through nationality, ethnicity, or place but through their ancestors' location, role, or even vocation. For example, Paloma felt little connection to an ethnic or national group, place, or religion. However, the time she felt the most connected to her roots was through energy work and an understanding of the work her father and grandfather did as healers. While Jelena felt deeper connection to ethnicity and place than Paloma, she specifically feels deep connection to the rural areas of the Balkans and has a hope to someday do a project where she collects oral histories and folk stories:

> I've heard we mostly come from a farming background, like shepherds…I've always had this thing where I'm fascinated by the rural parts of the Balkans...Both my grandfathers when they were kids, they were involved in shepherding and farming and so I've always wanted to visit and almost apprentice shepherd. I've always wanted to experience that because I've always felt like I'd be more connected to my roots that way.

For some participants, *where* they came from was less salient than *who* they came from. Furthermore, participants were often influenced by their parents' experiences of identity. For example, Njanja's identity is primarily Canadian because of her father's stories of being rejected for a passport from different former Yugoslav states. Being accepted by Canada made him adamantly reject any kind of Balkan or Yugoslav identity and wholly take on the Canadian one, which shaped Njanja's version of identity. Other participants echoed that their parents' identities influenced their own understandings of identity. Some participants had parents who didn't want to have much of a connection to their country of birth after leaving during the wars. Those participants were less likely to feel a strong connection and were more likely to label themselves "Canadian" above all else, while other participants might choose hyphenated identities (e.g. Serbian-Canadian) or prioritize their ethnic identity (e.g. Croatian). All participants echoed that sentiment when speaking about nationalism among diasporic young people of our generation. All participants believed that the nationalism was taught and it was intergenerational, just as other aspects of identity might be. This is especially salient in diaspora when children of immigrants may have few other reference points. This conclusion speaks to the further fragmentation of identity that this generation experiences; we learn our identity from parents who themselves had grown up in a different country, both in terms of Yugoslavia and migration. Our parents were the generation who grew up in the height of Tito and Yugoslavia. Not only was the only country they knew thousands of kilometers away, but it no longer existed. Participants were informed by ancestral narratives and by the generations before them. They were

drawn to practices or places that connected them to ancestral knowledge, such as farming or healing. However, they also thought of future generations and the ways that they could rebuild fragmented identities in order to pass something on to their kids.

Identity is dynamic and uncertain

Identity in the Balkans can change based on ethnicity, nationality, borders, and even whether one is in a rural or urban area. The internal identity one might feel may be different than what formal papers say. These categories have shifted so much over the years and have changed even more rapidly with the disintegration of Yugoslavia and conflicts that violently forced people to choose a "side" or identity. As such, identity for participants was not a static category. Participants were born into Yugoslavia and several were impacted by changing borders during the wars. Furthermore, several participants came from marriages of multi-ethnicity, which makes identity unclear and uncertain. The Balkans remain a politically unstable region with ethnic tensions in many areas, so borders and national categories are all the more unreliable for identity. Irena reflects on the uncertainty of the region and why she tries to find identities outside the national or ethnic:

> My family is always saying, when are these countries going in for another war? It's not a matter of if, but of when. My great-grandmother would always say that the Balkans are never stable for more than 20 years at a time

The political instability of the area and the tensions also mean that participants are often cognizant of how to identify based on where they are or who they're talking to. Some participants may say they are Canadian when they are travelling because there is more neutrality or may even say they are Canadian when entering a Balkan country other than their own. When asked how she identifies, Jelena said simply: "It depends where I am." During the wars, it was not uncommon for individuals to have to "choose a side," especially if they were of multi-ethnicity. Often, they would choose not what felt the truest but what felt the safest in that context. The legacy of those wars and of shifting identities for safety remains to this day and is something that even participants who grew up in Canada instinctually know to do.

Several participants spoke about this experience in diaspora when meeting other people of Balkan heritage. Because there is significant nationalism in diasporic communities, participants spoke about being cautious when meeting others of Balkan descent and being wary of identifying with a certain group. Participants of multi-ethnic backgrounds might choose to highlight one part of their identity over another for safety. I have experienced this countless times, particularly in the tension between Serbian and

Croatian ethnic groups. I have had Croatian family members refuse to sit at the table with me until I said I was Croatian and not Serbian. I have had that same experience with people in my generation in diaspora whose entire demeanor towards me would change based on “what” I said I was, even if nothing else in “who” I was or “how” I was changed. With Balkan identities, identity in all of its complexity can become secondary to safety.

With changing borders, there are also seemingly arbitrary indicators of identity that can become definitive. For example, Njanja spoke about how identity is tied to where your passport is and who will give you formal documents. As the story of Njanja’s father showed us, passports and government documents can be arbitrary and bureaucratic – especially during conflict. It is something that Jelena was also grappling with as she applied for a Croatian passport so she could study in the EU; although she has a legal right to the passport and is doing so for practical reasons, it was an emotional experience that made her grapple with identity. Participants found that building a concrete identity or coherent narrative of their identity was often difficult because their identity was ever-changing, either due to geopolitical instability or based on relational factors (e.g. who they are with). Several participants instead found ways other than ethnicity or nationality to build identity in the face of instability.

Potential Significance of the Findings

In speaking to participants and community members during the process of this thesis, many expressed appreciation for the space to speak on this topic. Several people found the process to be healing and the process of reading their own narratives was powerful and emotional. Even community members who had not participated in the research expressed feeling incredibly validated in hearing about the research and to have conversations on the topic. This is the most important impact of the research because this research arose from a community need and ultimately was done with the community in mind.

Furthermore, not only will this research fill gaps in the research by highlighting untold stories, but there are also more practical implications for studying diasporic narratives of homeland, particularly in conflict-generated diaspora. Reconnecting the Yugoslav diaspora to their greater context is the key to rebuilding balkanized identities and possibly to reconciliation efforts (both regionally and globally). Pro-social ties to homeland can result in diaspora-driven initiatives around transitional justice (Karabegović,

2019). That is to say, learning about these narratives may also have an impact on reconciliation and justice. Narratives have implications for healing, connection, and future-building (Milojević & Inayatullah, 2015). The power of narratives has therapeutic applications for working with this population and other similar populations, as well as applications for equity education – especially on an international scale, in diasporic communities, and in building connections in the Balkans. Balkan women have always been carriers of transgenerational knowledge, healing, and protest; empowering them to tell their stories has powerful potential for greater change. Women were largely left out of decision-making in post-war justice efforts, unless they were victims used for political narratives of blame.

There is also a stronger understanding of the long-term impacts of conflict-generated diaspora for the "1.5 generation" and the qualities that make up both the balkanization of their identity and their identity-building efforts. While this study examined the specific context of Yugoslavia, there are a number of regions that have left its people dispersed in diaspora around the world and that, much like the Balkans, continue to be politically unstable and/or have ethnic tensions. While the focus was on the Balkans, scant research was found on this specific topic for other diasporic groups as research tends to focus on the settlement and integration experiences of immigrants and refugees. Little research is done on the generation of children who accompanied their parents through war, migration, poverty, and resettlement and who, due to young age, had no trouble with integration nor many memories of traumatic experiences.

Study Limitations and Possible Future Research

This research examined a very specific demographic and Vancouver has a relatively small diasporic community. Future research could be done to expand the demographics to include a broader representation of the Balkan diaspora (including people from Kosovo or belonging to ethnic minority groups) or to see whether there is a stronger sense of identity and belonging in places with stronger diasporic communities (such as Toronto). With more understanding of how identity is fragmented and rebuilt in diaspora in this demographic, there is space for further research on the subject with a focus on nationalism. Several of the participants felt there was no place for them in diasporic communities because of the rampant nationalism and ethnic tensions that exist today, both in the Balkans and in the Balkan diaspora. Expanding an understanding of how nationalism is bred in diaspora could have implications for reconciliation efforts in the

Balkans and stronger community-building in diaspora. Associated with nationalist ideas are traditional, patriarchal, and homophobic ideas. While this study focused on women's experiences, this study used gendered language around women and none of the participants self-identified as belonging to the LGBTQ+ community. While there is some work on LGBTQ+ people in the Balkans (Gould and Moe, 2015; Randjelovic, 2018), there is little scholarship on the topic and the experiences of queer and trans Balkan people living in diaspora are still not studied. LGBTQ+ newcomers often have complex and intersectional experiences of migration, settlement, and belonging (D'Angelo, 2020; Lee and Brotman, 2013) so research on the topic would further understanding of this population and phenomenon.

Chapter 6.

Conclusion

The specific experience of identity-building in Yugoslav women growing up in conflict-generated diaspora had never been studied prior to this research and yet the findings offer insight that can not only help to understand this population, but can be applied in therapeutic, educational, settlement, and political spheres. This work also contributes to the understanding of multigenerational trauma and impacts of conflict and migration – something that is applicable beyond the context of the former Yugoslavia. In understanding the mechanisms through which identity is balkanized, we can also understand that identity in this population is relational and transgenerational, rooted in history and politics, and dynamic and uncertain.

Balkan women have long been agents of change and resistance in the region and this research is one piece of a framework that can support the healing and empowerment of women from the region. The reappropriation and renewal of oral traditions and narratives has been used as an intervention by Yugoslav feminists in the past and it continues to serve those in diaspora. This work also serves as one step towards learning how to rebuild and heal identities that have been fragmented through conflict, patriarchal violence, intergenerational trauma, and migration.

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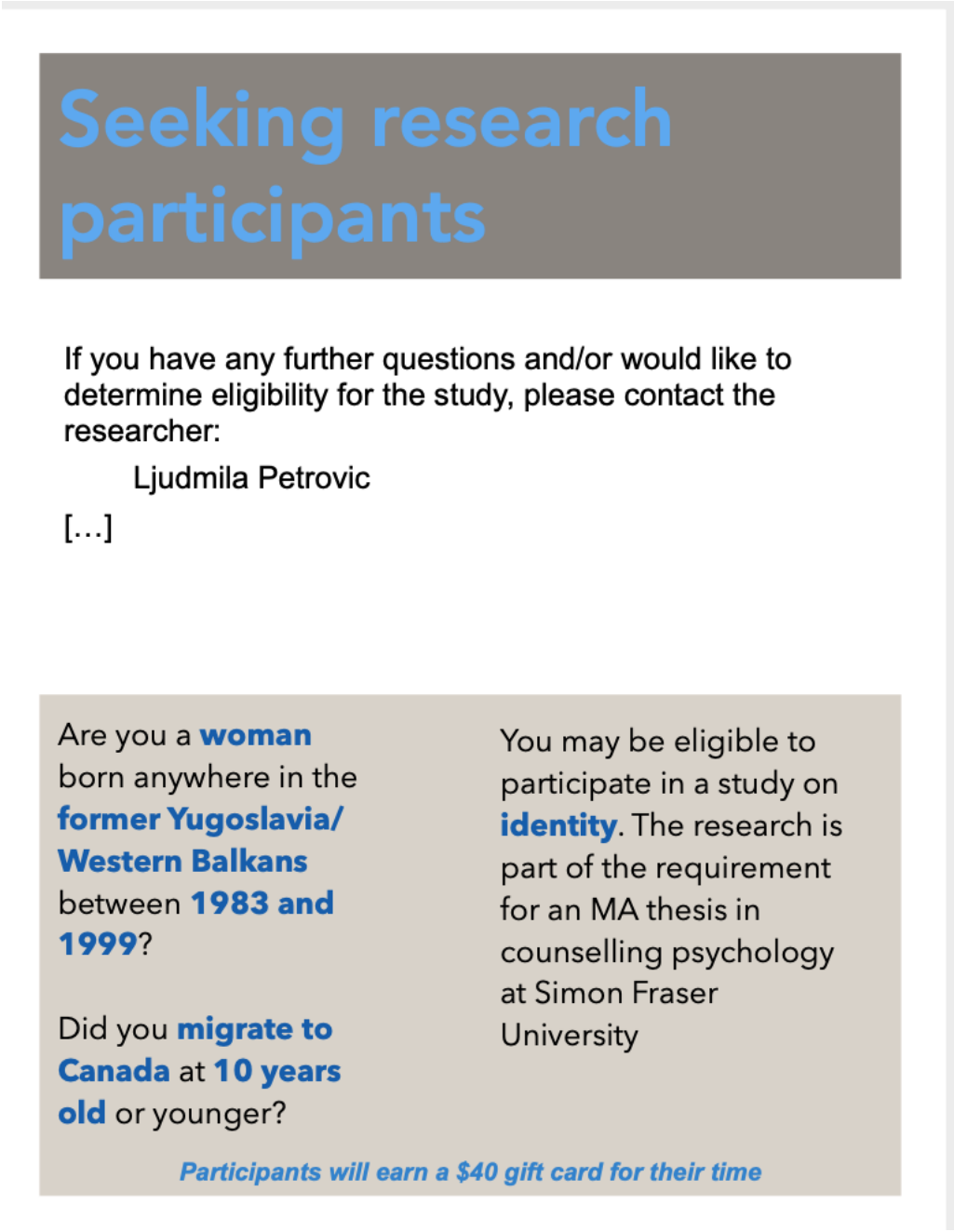
Appendix A.
Recruitment Poster



Seeking research participants

If you have any further questions and/or would like to determine eligibility for the study, please contact the researcher:

Ljudmila Petrovic

[…]

Are you a **woman** born anywhere in the **former Yugoslavia/ Western Balkans** between **1983 and 1999**?

Did you **migrate to Canada** at **10 years old** or younger?

You may be eligible to participate in a study on **identity**. The research is part of the requirement for an MA thesis in counselling psychology at Simon Fraser University

Participants will earn a $40 gift card for their time

Appendix B.

Social Media and Email Scripts

1. **Script for researcher to contact cultural knowledge holders**

Thank you for agreeing to help with recruitment for my study. I have attached a recruitment poster to share with potential participants, as well as a letter with more information. I have also attached a script for you to use when sharing the poster. Please feel free to share this through any **private messaging platform**, including text message, WhatsApp, email, Facebook Messenger, or Instagram direct messaging. Doing this reduces the risk that potential participants may inadvertently compromise confidentiality by commenting publicly on the post. **Potential participants should contact me directly.** In order to maintain confidentiality and autonomy, please do not give me the names, contact information, or any other detail about potential participants without first obtaining permission from those potential participants.

2. **Script for cultural knowledge holders to contact potential participants**

I'm serving as a recruiter for a friend's thesis research. Her thesis is about how women from the former Yugoslavia build identity growing up in Canada. The attached poster has the main information. If you think you might be interested in learning more, the information letter has more details.
Because both Ljudmila and I are part of the same community, it's possible you might feel pressured to participate. That's one of the reasons that Ljudmila is using contacts in the community such as myself to recruit rather than contacting potential participants herself. You should not feel obligated to participate in the study based on having a prior relationship with myself and/or the researcher. If you feel any sense of pressure or obligation, please decline to participate. You may also decline to participate for any other reason without having to provide an explanation and without this negatively impacting your relationship(s).
I will not give the researcher any details about you without your permission. If you are interested in participating or have any further questions that are not answered on the poster or information letter, please **contact the researcher directly** at the email provided on the recruitment poster. Contacting the researcher does **not** mean you are obligated to participate or to follow through with any part of the study.

3. **Email script for researcher to contact participants re: verification of narrative**

(Assuming they consented to being contacted in the initial consent form)
Dear _____,
Thank you again for participating in my study. I have transcribed our interview and put together a narrative and key themes that I have picked out. You had previously consented to being contacted for verification of this narrative to ensure that your story is being told appropriately and accurately. If you no longer wish to do so, you can withdraw your consent for participating in this part of the process. Please respond to this email and let me know.

If you still wish to verify this narrative, I have attached the narrative. It is in a password-protected Word document. I will be sending you the password in a few minutes in a separate email. Please read through it and let me know if anything was misinterpreted or doesn't feel true for you. You can do so by 1) tracking changes; 2) adding comments; or 3) responding in this email.

I am hoping you can return this to me by _____(date to be determined, but will give participants several weeks to respond). If you are unable to do in that time, please let me know!

I am always available to answer any questions that may come up for. Thank you for agreeing to look through this. It is my hope that I can accurately and ethically capture your story.

Kind regards,

Ljudmila

Appendix C.

Information Letter – January 2020 Version

Dear Participant,
Thank you for your interest in my study. I am an MA student in the counselling psychology program at SFU's Faculty of Education. One of the requirements of my degree is to conduct a research study and thesis.
The title of my thesis is *Balkanization of identity: Rebuilding fragmented identities through narratives*, and I am working under the supervision of Dr. Alanaise Goodwill, a professor in the Faculty of Education at SFU.
The purpose of my study is to learn more about how young women from the former Yugoslavia growing up in Canada build narratives of identity and displacement. I am recruiting participants who fall under the following criteria:

- Women (including trans women).
- Who partially or fully identify ethnically or culturally as Serbian, Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin, Macedonian, Kosovar, Slovenian, and/or Yugoslav.
- Who were born in the region between 1983 and 1999.
- Who were 10 years of age or younger when their family migrated (directly or indirectly) to Canada.

Interviews will be conducted in English so there is no requirement for a second language.
Procedures
Should you fit this criteria and be interested in participating in my study, the study would require an interview of up to **2 hours** with the principal investigator (L. Petrovic) and some subsequent email contact if you choose. The interview can occur at a location in the Lower Mainland mutually agreed upon that is convenient for you. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

You will be asked to participate in a **genogram exercise** in collaboration with the researcher. A genogram is a tool that resembles a family tree and emerges from the discipline of family counselling and will be used in this research setting to situate the research question in intergenerational Balkan identity. Its use is intended to generate research narratives about migration and is intended to initiate a conversation between us. **The content of the genogram will remain with you. It will not be copied or stored by me nor will it be included as data.**

Following this exercise, the researcher will ask you a series of **semi-structured questions** about your identity and your family's story. Given the personal matter of the questions, you may at any point decline to answer a certain question.
Your participation is voluntary and your confidentiality is of the utmost importance
Should you choose to continue forward and participate, you could either choose to be identified by your name or you may use a pseudonym of your choice for your narrative inclusion in the final thesis. If you choose to use a pseudonym, measures will be taken to protect your confidentiality. You would be able to decline any part of the interview, and you could withdraw from the study at any point with no explanation or consequences.

Should you participate and then decide to withdraw, all data collected about you would be erased.
With your consent, the interview will be audio recorded on a recorder that does not connect to the internet that only the researcher has access to and that will be uploaded to SFU Vault and on an encrypted USB. Once uploaded, recordings will be deleted off of the device. Recordings are deleted **after transcription**. An additional backup audio recording will be made on an iPhone set on airplane mode. This additional recording will be deleted from the iPhone immediately **after the interview**.

Payment

As compensation for your time, you will receive an honorarium in the form of a **$40 gift card** to a place of your choice. You will receive this honorarium even if you choose to withdraw from the study.

Potential risks of participating in this study

While we do not foresee any risks as a result of participation, some of the topics that we discuss (such as family or identity) may bring up strong emotions in some participants. Should that occur, the researcher has included a list of resources.

Potential benefits of participating in this study

As the discussion is about making sense of identity, some participants may feel that some of the conversation may bring them clarity on these experiences and talking about them may have cathartic effects. Furthermore, this population has never been studied, so your participation in this study may help further understand the issues that this population faces and may have implications for future research.
If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact the principal investigator (contact information below).
Sincerely,
Ljudmila Petrovic, Principal Investigator
MA Student, Faculty of Education
[…]

Appendix D.

Information Letter – Updated for COVID-19 Measures

Dear Participant,
Thank you for your interest in my study. I am an MA student in the counselling psychology program at SFU's Faculty of Education. One of the requirements of my degree is to conduct a research study and thesis.
The title of my thesis is *Balkanization of identity: Rebuilding fragmented identities through narratives*, and I am working under the supervision of Dr. Alanaise Goodwill, a professor in the Faculty of Education at SFU.
The purpose of my study is to learn more about how young women from the former Yugoslavia growing up in Canada build narratives of identity and displacement. I am recruiting participants who fall under the following criteria:

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- Who partially or fully identify ethnically or culturally as Serbian, Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin, Macedonian, Kosovar, Slovenian, and/or Yugoslav.
- Who were born in the region between 1983 and 1999.
- Who were 10 years of age or younger when their family migrated (directly or indirectly) to Canada.

Interviews will be conducted in English so there is no requirement for a second language.
Procedures
Should you fit this criteria and be interested in participating in my study, the study would require an interview of up to **2 hours** with the principal investigator (L. Petrovic) and some subsequent email contact if you choose. The interview will be conducted **virtually using Blue Jeans,** a secure video meeting platform. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following:
You will be asked to participate in a **genogram exercise** in collaboration with the researcher. A genogram is a tool that resembles a family tree and emerges from the discipline of family counselling and will be used in this research setting to situate the research question in intergenerational Balkan identity. Its use is intended to generate research narratives about migration and is intended to initiate a conversation between us. **The content of the genogram will not be copied or stored by me nor will it be included as data.**

Following this exercise, the researcher will ask you a series of **semi-structured questions** about your identity and your family's story. Given the personal matter of the questions, you may at any point decline to answer a certain question.
Your participation is voluntary and your confidentiality is of the utmost importance
Should you choose to continue forward and participate, you could either choose to be identified by your name or you may use a pseudonym of your choice for your narrative inclusion in the final thesis. If you choose to use a pseudonym, measures will be taken to protect your confidentiality. You would be able to decline any part of the interview, and you could withdraw from the study at any point with no explanation or consequences.

Should you participate and then decide to withdraw, all data collected about you would be erased.
With your consent, the interview will be audio recorded on a recorder that does not connect to the internet that only the researcher has access to and that will be uploaded to SFU Vault. Once uploaded, recordings will be deleted off of the device. Recordings are deleted **after transcription**. An additional backup audio recording will be made on an iPhone set on airplane mode. This additional recording will be deleted from the iPhone immediately **after the interview**. While the interview will occur over a video platform, there will be **no video recording** of the interview.

Payment

As compensation for your time, you will receive an honorarium in the form of a **$40 gift card** to a place of your choice. This will be transferred to you via email. You will receive this honorarium even if you choose to withdraw from the study.

Potential risks of participating in this study

While we do not foresee any risks as a result of participation, some of the topics that we discuss (such as family or identity) may bring up strong emotions in some participants. Should that occur, the researcher has included a list of resources.

Potential benefits of participating in this study

As the discussion is about making sense of identity, some participants may feel that some of the conversation may bring them clarity on these experiences and talking about them may have cathartic effects. Furthermore, this population has never been studied, so your participation in this study may help further understand the issues that this population faces and may have implications for future research.

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact the principal investigator (contact information below).

Sincerely,

Ljudmila Petrovic, Principal Investigator
MA Student, Faculty of Education
[…]

Appendix E.

Consent Form – January 2020 Version

Consent Form
[Balkanization of identity: Rebuilding fragmented identities through narratives]
Principal Investigator:
Ljudmila Petrovic, MA Student, Faculty of Education
[…]
Faculty Supervisor:
Dr. Alanaise Goodwill, Faculty of Education

This research is part of the requirement for an MA thesis in the counselling psychology program in the Faculty of Education, which is a public document.

What is the purpose of this study?

You are being invited to take part in this research study because you belong to an understudied population. We want to learn more about how young women from the former Yugoslavia growing up in Canada build narratives of identity and displacement.

Your participation is voluntary

Your participation is voluntary. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. Furthermore, you can choose how much or how little you choose to disclose. You can at any point decline to respond to a certain question. If you decide to take part, you may choose to pull out of the study at any time without giving a reason and without prejudice.

Study procedures

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

You will be asked to participate in a **genogram exercise** in collaboration with the researcher. A genogram is a tool that resembles a family tree and emerges from the discipline of family counselling and will be used in this research setting to situate the research question in intergenerational Balkan identity. Its use is intended to generate research narratives about migration and is intended to initiate a conversation between us. **The content of the genogram will remain with you. It will not be copied or stored by me nor will it be included as data.**

Following this exercise, the researcher will ask you a series of **semi-structured questions** about your identity and your family's story. Given the personal matter of the questions, you may at any point decline to answer a certain question.

The first interview should not exceed **2 hours** and requires only one meeting. Our interview will be transcribed verbatim, by myself, and will be converted into a narrative. With your consent, I will return this narrative to you via email as well as key themes chosen in analysis for verification to ensure that your story has been captured correctly. With your consent, the interview will be audio recorded on a recorder that does not connect to the internet that only the researcher has access to and that will be uploaded to SFU Vault and on an encrypted USB. Once uploaded, recordings will be deleted off of the device. Recordings are deleted **after transcription**. An additional backup audio

recording will be made on an iPhone set on airplane mode. This additional recording will be deleted from the iPhone immediately **after the interview**.

Potential risks of participating in this study

While we do not foresee any risks as a result of participation, some of the topics that we discuss (such as family or identity) may bring up strong emotions in some participants. I have created a list of free and available counselling resources for your review when considering the emotional risks to participation in the study.

Potential benefits of participating in this study

As the discussion is about making sense of identity, some participants may feel that some of the conversation may bring them clarity on these experiences and talking about them may have empowering effects. Furthermore, young women from the former Yugoslavia now living in Canada have never been served by Counselling Psychology research, so your participation in this study will help further understand the issues that this population faces and may have implications for future research.

Payment

As compensation for your time, you will receive an honorarium in the form of a $40 gift card to a place of your choice. Upon providing informed consent and at the conclusion of your interview, you will receive this honorarium. If you choose to withdraw from the study afterwards, you still retain the honorarium and your interview data and researcher interactions will be deleted from the study.

Confidentiality

Your confidentiality will be maintained. Research interview transcripts will be coded with a letter and number to protect your name and identity. The informed consent form with your name will be locked in a file cabinet drawer separate from raw research data (transcripts, field notes, audio recordings). Your name and corresponding letter and number code will be tracked in my field notes and will only be accessible by me.

You may either choose to be identified by your name or you may use a pseudonym of your choice for your narrative inclusion in the final thesis. If you choose to use a pseudonym, measures will be taken to protect your confidentiality. Any information that may be used to identify you or your family will be excluded from the final thesis or changed (such as the city or town your family is from).

Any physical data will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and any data records will be kept on an encrypted USB.

Withdrawal

You may withdraw from this study at any time without giving reasons. If you choose to do so, all data about you that was collected during the course of the study will be destroyed.

Study results

The results of this study will be reported in a graduate thesis and may also be published in journal articles and books. Main study findings may be presented at academic conferences.

Please circle one selection for each below:

A. I, **AGREE DO NOT AGREE** to be contacted in the future to review the narrative for verification purposes.

B. I, **DO DO NOT** want my name acknowledged in the research.

C. I, **DO DO NOT** want to be audio recorded for this research.

D. I, **DO DO NOT** wish to be contacted with the final findings (in the form of a report, thesis, and/or journal article
If you have any questions about the study, you may contact the Principal Investigator.

If you have any concerns about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, you may contact Dr. Jeffrey Toward, Director, Office of Research Ethics […] or […]

Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part, you may choose to pull out of the study at any time without giving a reason and without prejudice.

- Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.
- Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.
- You do not waive any of your legal rights by participating in this study.

_____

Participant Signature Date (yyyy/mm/dd)

Appendix F.

Consent Form – Updated for COVID-19 Measures

Consent Form
[Balkanization of identity: Rebuilding fragmented identities through narratives]
Principal Investigator:
Ljudmila Petrovic, MA Student, Faculty of Education
[…]
Faculty Supervisor:
Dr. Alanaise Goodwill, Faculty of Education

This research is part of the requirement for an MA thesis in the counselling psychology program in the Faculty of Education, which is a public document.

What is the purpose of this study?

You are being invited to take part in this research study because you belong to an understudied population. We want to learn more about how young women from the former Yugoslavia growing up in Canada build narratives of identity and displacement.

Your participation is voluntary

Your participation is voluntary. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. Furthermore, you can choose how much or how little you choose to disclose. You can at any point decline to respond to a certain question. If you decide to take part, you may choose to pull out of the study at any time without giving a reason and without prejudice.

Study procedures

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

You will be asked to participate in a **genogram exercise** in collaboration with the researcher. A genogram is a tool that resembles a family tree and emerges from the discipline of family counselling and will be used in this research setting to situate the research question in intergenerational Balkan identity. Its use is intended to generate research narratives about migration and is intended to initiate a conversation between us. **The content of the genogram will not be copied or stored by me nor will it be included as data.**

Following this exercise, the researcher will ask you a series of **semi-structured questions** about your identity and your family's story. Given the personal matter of the questions, you may at any point decline to answer a certain question.

The first interview should not exceed **2 hours** and requires only one virtual meeting. Our interview will be transcribed verbatim, by myself, and will be converted into a narrative. With your consent, I will return this narrative to you via email as well as key themes chosen in analysis for verification to ensure that your story has been captured correctly. The interview will occur via video using Blue Jeans or Zoom. The privacy policy is available here: https://www.bluejeans.com/privacy-policy. While the interview will take place via video, there will be **no video recording** of the interview. With your consent, the interview will be audio recorded on a recorder that does not connect to the internet that only the researcher has access to and that will be uploaded to SFU Vault and on an

encrypted USB. Once uploaded, recordings will be deleted off of the device. Recordings are deleted **after transcription**. An additional backup audio recording will be made on an iPhone set on airplane mode. This additional recording will be deleted from the iPhone immediately **after the interview**.

Potential risks of participating in this study

While we do not foresee any risks as a result of participation, some of the topics that we discuss (such as family or identity) may bring up strong emotions in some participants. I have created a list of free and available counselling resources for your review when considering the emotional risks to participation in the study.

Potential benefits of participating in this study

As the discussion is about making sense of identity, some participants may feel that some of the conversation may bring them clarity on these experiences and talking about them may have empowering effects. Furthermore, young women from the former Yugoslavia now living in Canada have never been served by Counselling Psychology research, so your participation in this study will help further understand the issues that this population faces and may have implications for future research.

Payment

As compensation for your time, you will receive an honorarium in the form of a $40 gift card to a place of your choice. It will be transferred to you via email. Upon providing informed consent and at the conclusion of your interview, you will receive this honorarium. If you choose to withdraw from the study afterwards, you still retain the honorarium and your interview data and researcher interactions will be deleted from the study.

Confidentiality

Your confidentiality will be maintained. Research interview transcripts will be coded with a letter and number to protect your name and identity. The informed consent form with your name will be uploaded to SFU Vault separate from raw research data (transcripts, field notes, audio recordings). Your name and corresponding letter and number code will be tracked in my field notes and will only be accessible by me.

You may either choose to be identified by your name or you may use a pseudonym of your choice for your narrative inclusion in the final thesis. If you choose to use a pseudonym, measures will be taken to protect your confidentiality. Any information that may be used to identify you or your family will be excluded from the final thesis or changed (such as the city or town your family is from).

Any physical data will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and any electronic records will be uploaded to SFU Vault.

Withdrawal

You may withdraw from this study at any time without giving reasons. If you choose to do so, all data about you that was collected during the course of the study will be destroyed.

Study results

The results of this study will be reported in a graduate thesis and may also be published in journal articles and books. Main study findings may be presented at academic conferences. Please circle one selection for each below:

A. I, **AGREE** **DO NOT AGREE** to be contacted in the future to review the narrative for verification purposes.

B. I, **DO** **DO NOT** want my name acknowledged in the research.

C. I, **DO** **DO NOT** want to be audio recorded for this research.

D. I, **DO** **DO NOT** wish to be contacted with the final findings (in the form of a report, thesis, and/or journal article
If you have any questions about the study, you may contact the Principal Investigator.

If you have any concerns about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, you may contact Dr. Jeffrey Toward, Director, Office of Research [….] or […]

Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part, you may choose to pull out of the study at any time without giving a reason and without prejudice.

- Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.
- Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

You do not waive any of your legal rights by participating in this study.

_____

Participant Signature Date (yyyy/mm/dd)

☐ Participant consented orally Date (yyyy/mm/dd)_____

Reason for oral consent (e.g. technological barriers):
_____

Appendix G.

Interview Questions

1. **How do you identify?**

Possible prompts or follow up questions

- Culturally? Ethnically?
- Why do you identify this way?

2. **Has that identity ever been a struggle for you? Tell me about that.**

Possible prompts or follow up questions

- What are some barriers you've had in building an identity that feels complete?
- How have you tried to reconcile any identity struggles you've had?

3. **Tell me about your family's migration story.**

Possible prompts or follow up questions

- When did they arrive?
- How?
- How old were you?
- Did they migrate directly to Vancouver?

4. **Tell me about your family growing up**

Possible prompts or follow up questions

- Who was in the home growing up? (siblings, parents, grandparents?)
- How much of a part did culture and cultural practices play in the home?

5**. How much do you feel you know about your parents and ancestors?**

Possible prompts or follow up questions:

- Did your parents/grandparents tell many stories of the family history or the homeland?
- Do you feel connected to the stories of your ancestors?