

The Limits of “Ethnic War”: Intra-Group Violence and Resistance during the Bosnian War

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Abstract

The Bosnian war was not a purely “ethnic conflict,” as both in-group members and out-group members were sacrificed for the higher political objective, namely, ethnic homogenization of divided Bosnian territories. In particular, I argue the sacrifice of in-group members, especially those who lived on the out-territory, was integral to the violence directed against out-group members. The process of resettlement of the ethnic kin was just as important as the expulsion of the ethnic “other” for re-creating a new ethnic and political balance in select strategic areas. Furthermore, the practice of the appropriation of existing and the creation of new parallel state structures were the main mechanisms of the process of the sacrifice of in-group members from the out-territory. In turn, nationalist narratives were constructed not only to justify those new structures, but also to portray ethnic minorities as potentially dangerous and threatening.

In order to complete ethnic homogenization, Bosnian nationalists directly targeted the private household, expelling Bosnians from their homes and appropriating and destroying their private property. I argue that violence against the household rendered the private sphere political. In the second part of the thesis, I reflect on actions and words of ordinary Bosnians, both in-group and out-group members, who resisted violence and helped each other during the war. In particular, I argue that although the lack of basic needs brought Bosnians of different ethnicities together, a long-term result of this necessity-driven action was political: the restoration of their citizenship and the preservation of their community at the local level for after the war.

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Dedication

To the memory of my loving parents, Radojka and Cvijetin, and their homeland, Bosnia

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Abbreviations

ABiH: Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina

BiH: Bosnia and Herzegovina

FBiH: Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina

HDZ BiH: Croatian Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina

HVO: Croatian Defence Council

ICTY: International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia

MBO: Muslim Bosniak Organization

RS: Republika Srpska

SDS: Serb Democratic Party

SDA: Party of Democratic Action

VRS: Army of Republika Srpska

Introduction: Reflection on Violence and Resistance in the Context of the Bosnian War

This thesis can be seen as “bicephalous,” as it consists of two distinct yet related parts on political violence and resistance during the Bosnian War of 1992-1995.¹ The first part looks at the behaviour and discourses of nationalist elites and how they used strategies of violence against both in-group and out-group members. This leads me to propose a more encompassing definition of ethnic violence, accounting for the inner and outer dimensions of group violence.

The second part of the thesis focuses on human solidarity and political courage among Bosnians. In particular, it demonstrates how Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks (previously known as ethnic “Muslims”) resisted strategies implemented by political parties that purported to represent their respective ethnic interests. Bosnians, including victims of political violence, exercised agency in the face of danger and took efforts to protect their community (the village) by including targeted neighbours who belonged to a different ethnic group.

The notion of the household, and more specifically its political significance during the Bosnian War, serves as the common theme that links the two parts of the thesis. Drawing on Hannah Arendt’s political theory of action, I analyze how ordinary Bosnians acted (or failed to act) in order to protect and help the persecuted. Political courage, I argue, includes not only grand “heroic” actions, but also “small” gestures, such as kindness and decency, that ordinary Bosnians displayed towards their targeted neighbours. Based on my interviews with Bosnians, I suggest, in the second part of the thesis that in most violent times, those “small” acts, which are often unseen and under-appreciated, do have power to change the position and place in the common

¹ Thanks to my research supervisor, Professor Dominique Arel, for suggesting this term.

community of the persecuted.

Following Arendt's conviction that political theories must be reassessed against real political events, I emphasize the political character of the household against the strategic violence of Bosnian nationalist parties. Bosnian elites appropriated or destroyed the private property of the ethnic "other" as a strategy to construct ethnically defined entities and ensure a sizeable ethnic vote. At the same time, my research respondents, especially those who were victims of political violence, risked their lives in order to remain in their homes and defend their private property. Their deep attachment to and identity with their household and private property were the primary force behind their decision and courage to confront violence. In sum, what links the two sections or "heads" of the thesis is the importance of private property for both nationalist elites, who strategically used violence against both the ethnic "self" and the ethnic "other," and individual Bosnians who defied and resisted those violent strategies by clinging to their property, often with community support.

On Violence: Was the Bosnian War an "Ethnic Conflict"?

Scholars, including those who do not subscribe to a view that ethnicity is the cause of violence, tend to focus on that aspect of violence that is immediately apparent to us, and what is apparent is that Bosnia's major ethnic groups were at war with each other in the 1990s. "Ethnic conflict" is arguably the most common concept used to describe and explain the Bosnian war. In general, it became shorthand for violence involving some sort of collective identity, even when the identity in question is not necessarily an ethnic one (Ferguson 2002, p. 22). Our fascination with "ethnic violence" tends to distract us from identifying and examining other types of violence,

which may occur in parallel to or in connection with “ethnic violence.” *I argue that in the Bosnian context, the sacrifice of in-group members or part of the ethnic “self” was integral to the violence directed against out-group members or the ethnic “other.”* The objective of the latter, namely, the expulsion of a part of the population, would not have been fully achieved without the former. In other words, violence was reflective and constitutive of the interconnectedness between political objectives that the three nationalist parties implemented on their respective territories during and immediately after the Bosnian war. The three nationalist/ethnic parties are the Serb Democratic Party (SDS), the Croat Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereafter HDZ), and the (Muslim/Bosniak) Party of Democratic Action (SDA).²

I would like first to define and clarify some of the key concepts that I will be using in my discussion. All three parties to the Bosnian war called themselves and behaved like a “state,” although none of them were recognized as a state or the legitimate representative of a state. As a result, I will refrain from using a common terminology, namely, state and non-state actors. Instead, I propose two terms that are more neutral, but are more useful for the type of violence I want to discuss: in-territory power and out-territory power. *In-territory power* refers to a political formation which militarily and politically controlled a particular area of Bosnian territory. By the same token, a force that finds itself in a territory under “enemy” control becomes *out-territory power*. For example, the Serb SDS would constitute in-territory power in the Serb Republic of Bosnia (or Republika Srpska), while the Bosniak SDA or Croat HDZ would stand for the out-

² In Socialist Yugoslavia, Bosnian Muslims were recognized as a nationality distinct from Croats and Serbs. In 1993, all-Muslim *sabor* (assembly) adopted Bosniaks as an official name for Bosnian Muslims. I will use “Bosniaks” in the thesis.

territory power and vice versa. Furthermore, each side had co-ethnics or *in-group members* who lived on an *out-territory*, namely, the territory over which they had no control. Thus, I distinguish two categories of *in-group members*:

- 1) Those who lived on the “right” territory (in-territory) controlled by nationalist leaders or political representatives with whom they shared the same ethnicity (for example, Serbs who lived in the Republika Srpska ruled by the SDS); and
- 2) Those who happened to live on the “wrong” territory (out-territory), namely, under the rule of nationalist leaders or political representatives with whom they did not share the same ethnicity (for example, Serbs who lived in Herzeg-Bosnia ruled by the Croat HDZ and in the remaining Bosnian territory controlled by the Bosniak SDA).

Those terms are highly relational and potentially confusing. In-group members for one nationalist party are by default out-group members for the other. Bosniaks are in-group members to the Bosniak SDA, but are out-group members to the Serb SDS. In other words, one must always distinguish the type of violence that one wants to analyze. In this case, I focus on sacrifices by one nationalist party of part of the ethnic “self,” in particular, co-ethnics who lived outside of the territory controlled by that party. Put differently, I do not focus *only* on perpetrators who expelled and killed the ethnic “other,” but *also* closely examine nationalist parties that supposedly saved and protected those expellees through a process of re-settlement. The re-settlement of in-group members to a particular territory was integral to the expulsion of out-group members from the same territory.

Scholars tend to focus on violence against outgroup members. How political authorities treated *both* classes of in-group members during the Bosnian war is equally important to study. There has been some scholarly work that highlights strategic violence by nationalist parties against their “own” people on their “own” territory. As Gagnon (2004) shows, ruling political parties in Serbia and Croatia used violence, including violence against their co-ethnics, in order to silence and de-mobilize the political opposition (pp. 8-9). As I will show in Chapter Five, *in-group members* who inhabited the *in-territory* were targeted and intimidated for their efforts to de-escalate violence and to protect their neighbours (out-group) at the local community level during the Bosnian civil war. What is missing from the existing literature on the Bosnian war is a perspective that also looks at *in-group members* who found themselves on the *out-territory* and who were *sacrificed* by the very nationalist party which purported to protect their interests.

Those in-group members who found themselves on the “wrong” territory were sacrificed not for a narrow political objective, such as to stay in power, but rather in the name of higher “national interests.” They were *doubly targeted*, because in-group members of one group are the other group’s ethnic “other.” Thus, violence directed against out-group members (“ethnic violence”) must always remain part of our discussion. For example, the Bosniak military and police forces carried out systematic violence against Croats in Central Bosnia in 1993, while at the same time the Bosnian Croat HDZ created the conditions to escalate and facilitate their expulsion. Both the Croat HDZ (out-territory power) and the Bosniak SDA (in-territory power) colluded to have Croats, in-group members for HDZ but out-group members for the SDA, expelled from Bosniak-controlled Central Bosnia (in-territory) and to have them resettle in Croat controlled Western Herzegovina (out-territory).

In sum, the key concepts that I will use in the analysis and which will be discussed in details below are *in-territory power* (a political formation controlling a territory based on an ethnic criteria), *out-territory power* (a political formation making claims on ethnic kin living in a territory it does not control), *in-group members* (the ethnic kin), and *out-group members* (the ethnic “other”). I propose that we examine the Bosnian civil war in terms of the heterogeneity of relations involving all those four categories. Each set of relations reflected different political purposes and produced different political outcomes, although the consequences that individuals suffered were more or less the same.

So, what is “ethnic violence”? This is how Brubaker and Laitin (1998) define it:

violence perpetrated across ethnic lines, in which at least one party is not a state (or a representative of a state), and in which the putative ethnic difference is coded—by perpetrators, targets, influential third parties, or analysts—as having been integral rather than incidental to the violence, that is in which the violence is coded as having been meaningfully orientated in some way to the *different ethnicity* of the target (p. 428, emphasis added).

I do not take issue with this or other similar definitions of “ethnic violence.” I myself refer to ethnic objectives and identities of the warring parties and various actors of the Bosnian war, including victims of violence. (To be precise, I alternate between a particular ethnic identity, such as Serbs, Croats, Bosniaks, and a supranational identity, Bosnians.) Neither do I challenge the view that violence was directed against the ethnic “other,” out-group members with whom

the perpetrator shared no ethnic identity. (The war among Bosniaks in Velika Kladuša district was an exception to this).

I argue, however, that violence was only *in part* oriented towards the ethnic “other.” The “ethnic violence” approach tells us only a *partial* account of the Bosnian war. What the notion of “ethnic violence” does, especially if it remains the sole focus of our study, is to simplify and obscure the heterogeneity of relations and forms of violence that characterized the Bosnian war. There was no one single form of violence, whether we call it “ethnic violence” or something else. If there was more than one type of violence, then one must make efforts not only to identify them, but also to put them in relation to each other. Equally important, if not even more important, the focus on “ethnic violence” tends to obscure the existence of multiple forms and sites of *resistance* to violence. In particular, it perpetuates the myth of the “evil neighbour,” the myth that neighbours turned against neighbours overnight in Bosnia. As I will show in both Chapter Five and Chapter Six, but especially in Chapter Five, this was far from the truth. Bosnians of all three ethnicities risked their own lives and safety of their own families in order to protect and to ameliorate sufferings of their neighbours (I will return to the topic of resistance later).

I will first briefly discuss those aspects that the notion of “ethnic violence” reveals about the Bosnian war. Then, I will explore the least conspicuous angle of the conflict. As mentioned earlier, what “ethnic violence” tells us is that there was a single and straightforward line between violence against a part of population, namely, against the ethnic “other” and political objectives of the homogenization of the territory. Its appeal lies in its simplicity and tidiness as it involves only two relevant categories: *out-group* members (victims) and *in-territory* power (perpetrators).

This approach frames the political and ideological goals of the three Bosnian nationalist parties as fixed and mutually incompatible. This understanding of violence is highly informed, and thus further simplified, by politics of territorial control (and attendant military might), namely, it concerns itself only with violence that took place *within* given borders established and controlled by one ethnically-defined party or the other. However, the political objectives and violent means of one party intertwined with the political objectives and violence of the other. It is this dimension that has generally been neglected or understudied in scholarly literature. As a result, following the territorial delineation along ethnic lines on the ground, we also delineate violence on the basis of ethnicity in our analysis.³

The major opposition on which the notion of “ethnic violence” rests is that between objects of violence (targeted ethnic “other”) and subjects of violence (perpetrators). Two related concepts in particular are commonly used, implicitly or explicitly, to construct or reinforce this opposition: *de-humanization* and *superfluity*. Whereas the former did not inform Bosnian violence to any great extent, the latter is highly relevant to my analysis.⁴ In fact, a critical

³ It is interesting to note that scholars tend to study the Bosniak-Croat conflict as a war separate and even in opposition to the war involving the Bosnian Serbs, as if there were two different wars, one more important than the other, as opposed to one civil war going on. This is a key fallacy when it comes to the Bosnian war. In other words, we structure, consciously or unconsciously, our research and analysis in such a way as to reflect rather than to interrogate the nationalist ideologies and territorial division of Bosnia. Furthermore, this bias is so deeply rooted that we do not even notice that the result of the war has not been a division of Bosnia between Serbs and Croats, a policy that clearly dominated the pre-war period and the initial stage of the war, but rather between Serbs and Bosniaks.

⁴ I have reviewed thousands of contemporaneous documents generated by the three warring parties before and during the Bosnian war, and I did not come across language that would attribute animal or non-human characteristics to the “other.” Why is it important to emphasize this? By pointing that there were no dehumanizing discourses, I am not suggesting at all that the Bosnian war was somehow less brutal. On the contrary, I believe it is important to dispel a common assumption that dehumanization is necessary in order to commit crimes against civilians at the scale or even greater than what we witnessed in Bosnia. After the Holocaust, we still struggle to accept a painful truth that humans are perfectly capable of killing and torturing each other while fully accepting and seeing humanity in the victim. For a similar view, see Straus (2006 p. 229). Furthermore, not every instance of scapegoating or a feeling of a threat coming from

approach to the notion of superfluity, to which I will return shortly, is at the centre of my analysis of the Bosnian violence. “Ethnic violence” suggests that the ethnic “other,” always labeled as potentially dangerous and threatening, is sacrificed on the “altar” of the nation-state (Semelin 2007, p. 90). The collective body must be “purified” of that element of the population “represented as incarnations of evil, diabolical powers that threaten the subject from within and have to be eliminated at all costs, up to and including self-destruction” (Balibar 2015, p. 52).

These practices that target the foreign(er) in one’s own body, her integrity, her physical dignity, constitute not simple annihilation of the enemy but *self-annihilation* because the foreignness in question here is that which comes the closest to the self—which is, at the limit, inseparable from the individual and collective self, the representation of one’s identity. Hence, the only way to extirpate it is to endeavour to destroy, in an intensifying spiral of mutilation, not a group or a presence but the humanity in man, the very fact of inclusion in the human race (Ibid. Emphasis original).

If we apply Balibar’s logic to the Bosnian context, then the objective of Bosnian Serb military and police when they targeted Bosniak civilians was not to ethnically homogenize territory by erasing the presence of Bosniaks, but rather to kill the humanity in the victim. According to Woodward (1995), the goal behind attacks on civilians was to secure “national rights to land” (p. 237). Although it is true that the “other” *was* represented as a threat, even as an existential threat, to the collectivity, there is no evidence to suggest that the de-humanization of the ethnic “other”

the “other” is necessarily dehumanization, although it certainly could lead to it. If everything is dehumanization, nothing is dehumanization.

as the ultimate evil or diabolical power, to use Balibar's words, was part of the nationalist discourses put forward by any of the parties involved in the Bosnian civil war.⁵ Denitch (1996) argues that there is little evidence that Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks perceived each other in terms of racial or ethnic inferiority (p. 189). This is not to exclude a possibility that there were among individual perpetrators those who held racist and dehumanizing view of the "other." However, just as we cannot extrapolate opinions and attitudes of ordinary people from the ideological discourses constructed by the nationalist elites, we should not assume that the views expressed by individual perpetrators were necessarily shared by the ruling elites.

As we will see in Chapter Four, Bosnian nationalists representing all three ethnic groups, *including* the Bosniak SDA, held a shared belief that ethnic homogeneity was the condition for political stability and a way to prevent future intergroup conflict. The ethnic "other" was not regarded as "pollutants" of the ethnic "purity" of one group or the other, something that the term "ethnic cleansing" connotes, but rather as a threat to a desirable ethnic voting pattern. Bosnian nationalists with no exception portrayed the ethnic "other" as potentially rebellious and unwilling to submit to the rule by the other group, even if this rule was the result of fair and open elections. As a result, tensions and even conflict would, as the argument went, ensue. Hence the supposed need to ethnically homogenize the territory, that is, to expel the ethnic "other" and to replace

⁵ As highlighted in Chapter Four, I analyze nationalist discourses as articulated by nationalist leaders in a formal context (open or closed meetings) and official documents. I do not analyze discourses presented in media, although I do acknowledge that the analysis of media context is important, especially because they were controlled by the nationalist parties. For example, Žarkov (2007) analyzes the content of Serbian and Croatian media in relation to sexual violence and concludes that during the Yugoslav wars, dehumanization language, such as beasts and monsters, was used to describe rapists (pp. 137-138). However, media propaganda alone cannot make people commit war crimes (Straus 2006, p. 231). For example, while radio broadcast indeed influenced the Hutu elites and the most aggressive killers, it was not, according to Straus, sufficient to drive most Hutus to kill their Tutsi countrymen during the Rwandan genocide (Ibid.).

them by co-ethnics. This narrative is still frightening and morally and politically unacceptable, but it is far from dehumanization of the “other” by perceiving them as the ultimate evil or attributing them animal attributes.

Furthermore, self-sacrifice was indeed part of the Bosnian violence. However, it was not incidental but rather integral to violence against the “ethnic” other. Sacrifices of in-group members were the result of cold political calculation, central to which was naked political utility (ethnic vote and dominance) rather than concerns for ethnic “purity.” The expulsion of the ethnic “other” created empty spaces and a shortage of human resources, which had to be compensated by the resettlement of the co-ethnics, who were expelled from their homes by the other warring party. Equally important, the process of resettlement was crucial for re-creating a new ethnic and political balance in select strategic areas. The resettlement of expellees was neither random nor driven by interests to keep them closer to their homes in order to ensure their return upon first opportunity. As I will show below, mutual interests and utility shared by the three warring parties in Bosnia adds a new dimension to the notion of superfluity.

The idea of superfluity, like dehumanization, reinforces the main opposition on which “ethnic violence” rests, namely, objects of violence and subjects of violence. The ethnic “other” is presented as a “superfluous” element, that is, useless and without any function in society. When something is useless, it is discarded or destroyed. Superfluity is defined by reciprocal “unrepresentability,” experienced by both society and that element of society that is rendered “superfluous.” According to Bertrand Ogilvie,

The logic of civil society inevitably produces a growing class of individuals who are not simply just threatened by poverty, but are simply “superfluous.” This is the height of the unrepresentable, and perfectly reciprocal: society is no longer representable for this class, which can no longer see the source of its existence in it; and this class is no longer representable for society, which literally does not know what to do with it. It must, accordingly, disappear (cited in Balibar 2015, p. 54).

The concept of the perfectly reciprocal “unrepresentable” does not only reinforce the opposition between “us” (society) and “it”/“them” (a “superfluous” element of that society), but also evokes the imagery of society as one *united* whole. Although we may have multiple “superfluous” elements, society is always represented as oneness. As result, (a) “superfluous” part(s) are always placed *outside* of society. It is because of the disconnection from its society and from any other society that the “superfluous” must be destroyed. There is no society or part of a society that would regard it “representable.” But does the idea of reciprocal “unrepresentability” always hold true? Is it possible to identify cases where society is *not* a united whole and has multiple “superfluous” elements? What happens to the “superfluous” under the conditions where the superfluous is in fact fragmented and exists within a fragmented society? During the 1992-95 civil war, Bosnia was such a case. The emphasis is on the fact that none of those “superfluous” fragments found themselves outside of the society *as a whole*. They remained *within* not despite but because society was fragmented. In such a circumstance, reciprocity is no longer part of the definition of the “unrepresentable.”

Let us for a moment consider the term “exchange of population,” a euphemism for the expulsion of the “other,” especially used by Bosnian Serb and Croat nationalists. The Bosnian Croat leadership also referred to these “exchanges” as “humane resettlement,” wrongly suggesting that “exchanges” were voluntary and nonviolent.⁶ Their Bosnian Serb counterparts also called it “reciprocal exchanges” of population. It is this term “*reciprocal* exchanges” that best reflects the process and the scale of demographic engineering that took place in Bosnia, which could not have been possible to complete without some degree of reciprocity and coordination, overt or covert, among the three warring parties. Let us apply a very simple logic of regular commercial exchanges to the market of violence, that is, to “reciprocal exchanges” of population. “Superfluous” individuals or groups were treated as commodities that could be moved back and forth, exchanged, sold, and even destroyed.

Commercial transactions are governed by two key principles: reciprocity and interests. In other words, each side wants what the other has to offer. Foucault (2010) tells us that “interest is the principle of *exchange* and interest is the criterion of *utility*” (p. 44, emphasis added). For “exchanges of population” to take place, both parties, those expelling a part of the civilian population (prisoners of wars are excluded) and those receiving and resettling expelled civilians, must have had *interests* in the process. According to this logic, the term “reciprocal exchanges” of population implies that individuals or groups who were regarded as “superfluous,” useless, and “unrepresentable” for one party were *simultaneously* valued as desirable, useful, and representable for the other. Reciprocity still holds, but it has moved to a different level of

⁶ “*Humane* resettlement” (*humano preseljenje*) is a curious term. It suggests that human beings are treated as commodities to be exchanged in the market of violence, while still recognizing the humanity in the victim.

relations. It no longer defines relationship between society and its “superfluous” elements. Rather, reciprocity now applies to relations between different parties, each representing a part of fragmented society and each treating the targeted differently. Thus, the “superfluous” is never totally excluded, as there is always a part of society that finds it useful and representable.

I propose that this type of violence, namely, the mass expulsion of civilians during the Bosnian civil war, be analyzed both in terms of *superfluity* and *needfulness*. Furthermore, if one party finds useful the expulsion of a group of people by another party and if that party shares a common ethnic identity with the targeted, then a part of the ethnic “self” is being sacrificed. In particular, I will show how all three nationalist parties, instead of taking measures to ensure that their co-ethnics remained in their homes and to help end the violation of their human rights, created conditions that contributed to and escalated violence against the people whose interests they purportedly protected. The appropriation of existing and the creation of new, parallel state structures before and during the war were some of the mechanisms of the process of the sacrifice of the ethnic “self.” As I will show in Chapter Three, patterns of violence that characterized the Bosnian civil war, namely, mutual expulsion and “reciprocal exchanges” of population, had been built in pre-war patterns of structural changes. When the war broke out, those political-territorial structures gave rise to two particular patterns of violence: a) direct violence against the ethnic “other” or out-group members who lived on the claimed territory or in-territory; and b) indirect violence against part of the ethnic “self” who happened to reside outside the claimed territory, i.e., on an out-territory. The final shape and form of the claimed territories or entities depended on the coupling of the two forms of violence.

My proposal that we analyze Bosnian violence in terms of both superfluity and needfulness does not mean that I wish to imply that civilians from different ethnic groups suffered equally in proportion. Nobody can deny today that Bosniak civilians suffered most. Out of the total number of all Bosniaks killed (62,013), 38,239 or 39.9 percent were civilians (or 81.4 percent of all Bosnian civilians killed). By contrast, 29.6 percent of Croats killed were civilians (2,484 of 8,484), a figure even lower (16.7 percent, or 4,178 of 24,953) among Serbs (Tokača 2012, pp. 115-116). Thus, both in absolute numbers (by far) and in relative proportion to all people killed, Bosniak civilians suffered most.

Nor do I wish to equate the political agendas of the three nationalist parties that drove Bosnia into a civil war and prolonged the war for four long bloody years: they were heterogeneous. However, heterogeneity does not mean that they were not compatible and overlapping. They were not always mutually exclusive and contradictory, as the term of “ethnic violence” suggests. Similarly, there was not only one form of violence—targeting the ethnic “other,” — but rather several, such as the self-sacrifice of one’s “own” people. Furthermore, one must distinguish violence against in-group members depending on what territory they lived, i.e., in-territory or out-territory. Those forms of violence are not mutually exclusive either, but are at some level complementary and mutually reinforcing.

In sum, the Bosnian war was characterized by a multiplicity of relations and forms of violence:

- A) *In-territory power* that controls a given territory and its relations to *in-group members* who continue to live on that *in-territory*, whereby both in-group members and in-territory power officials belong to the same ethnic group.

- B) *In-territory power* that controls a given territory and its relations to *out-group members* who live on that territory, whereby in-territory power officials and out-group members do not belong to the same ethnic group.
- C) *Out-territory power* that controls a given territory and its relations to its *in-group members* who live on the territory controlled by the “enemy.”
- D) *In-territory power* and its relations (coordination and reciprocity in particular) to *out-territory power*.

My analysis of the Bosnian war violence examines the dynamics among all those relations, with the emphasis on C and D as two aspects that have been neglected in the existing scholarly work on Bosnia. In particular, my analysis takes into account the relations between violence as a means in the hands of a political force identifying with one ethnic group and political ends implemented by another political force claiming to represent another ethnic group. The self-sacrifice of one’s “own” people, as in-group members living on an out-territory, is a case of *indirect violence*, as *direct*, physical violence against them (expulsion, mistreatment, and killings) was carried out by the “enemy” army and police. The usefulness of in-group members expelled from the out-territory is reflected in the strategy to re-settle those expellees in the places from which the ethnic “other” had been expelled, thereby changing demographics and voting patterns in strategic districts.

Both types of violence, direct and indirect, are mutually reinforcing in the pursuit of the same political goal: the production of ethnic homogeneity in the designated territories. Direct violence is highly visible, because it is carried out against members of the other ethnic group and because

it involves violence on a large scale. Indirect violence is relatively invisible, because it is directed against one's "own" group by a third party, yet in complicity with the political force claiming the group on ethnic grounds. It is for this reason that we tend to focus on direct violence against out-group members, as it is more readily apparent to us. Thus, since each group targeted *both* in-group members and out-group members in order to achieve an ethnically homogenous territory, to categorize the violence as "ethnic" can be misinterpreted.

However, if we apply Brubaker and Laitin's definition of "ethnic violence," namely, that ethnic violence targets a different ethnic group, then sacrificing one's "own" people does not easily fit into the definition. Furthermore, the sacrifice of in-group members who live outside the controlled territory is conceptually different from violence against one's "own" people who live on the in-territory (intra-group conflict). Generally, the latter concerns itself with the preservation of power and is directed against the political opposition on the in-territory. In other words, individuals are targeted for their political views rather than for their ethnicity. The fact that the target belongs to the same ethnic group does not in itself mean that an ethnic criteria holds sway over other factors. This is not the case where in-group members who lived on out-territories were sacrificed—they were targeted by their "own" ethnic representatives exclusively for their ethnicity.

I therefore propose an alternate definition of ethnic violence. First, putative *ethnic difference* is not part of my definition. In order to account for violence directed at both the ethnic "self" and the ethnic "other," I focus on *ethnic identity*. Second, in order to differentiate between different categories of in-group members, in particular those who live on the out-territory and their ethnic

kin who inhabit the in-territory, I propose to replace “state” or “representatives of the state” by “out-territory power” and “in-territory power.” Third, the emphasis on ethnic identity of the target, that is, the recognition that one party is willing to sacrifice both in-group and out-group members, renders the recruitment of combatants and followers secondary, if not irrelevant, for our definition. Thus, I define “ethnic violence” as follows:

Ethnic violence is a type of violence in which out-territory power and in-territory power perpetrate violence directed towards the *ethnic identity* of the target, namely, they sacrifice both the ethnic “other” and the ethnic “self” as part of a higher ethno-political goal.

On Resistance and the Private Realm

The exclusive focus on “ethnic violence” perpetuates a myth that neighbours turned against neighbours overnight in the recent Bosnian civil war. This in turn supports, directly or indirectly, the theory of “ancient hatreds” and reinforces stereotypes about Bosnia (and the Balkans in general), namely, that Bosnians were slaughtering each other because that is what they have done to each other historically.⁷ On the other hand, there are those who speak of pre-war Bosnia as a society with a long tradition of multiculturalism and peaceful coexistence among several ethnic and religious communities, but without making any efforts to share stories of mutual cooperation

⁷ For example, Glenny (1996) describes the Krajina region in Croatia (formerly Military Frontier or Vojna Krajina) as “one of the most active and disruptive historical fault lines in Europe” and Krajina Serbs as people who “developed extraordinary affinity with weaponry” (p.6). Similarly, Gerolymatos (2001) argues that the 1914 report of the Carnegie International Commission on the Balkan Wars, which stated that massive destruction and displacement of people were normal features of all Balkan wars, was similar to the 1994 United Nations Balkan War Crimes Report, suggesting that the region has remained frozen in time (pp. 237-239). Huntington (1996) applies his clash of civilizations theory also to the Bosnian war and to the Balkans in general (pp. 38, 126-127).

and help between Croats, Bosniaks, and Serbs during the Bosnian war.⁸ On the contrary, the myth of “evil neighbour,” generally depicted as the ethnic “other,” often intertwines with the imagery of Bosnia as a society that successfully preserved its multiculturalism for centuries until the 1990s.⁹

My interviews with Bosnians of all three ethnicities and their war experiences tell a completely different story. I will show that the Bosnian tradition of good neighbourliness and mutual help remained unbroken during the 1992-95 war. Bosnians did not blindly follow their nationalist leaders and their projects of ethnic homogenization on divided Bosnian territories. Even though Bosnians fought against each other as members of three different armies, all ethnically defined, they tried to deescalate violence at the local level and often risked their lives to protect their neighbours who were targeted for their ethnicity. Equally important, Bosnians who were subject

⁸ When interethnic solidarity is mentioned, it is typically in the context of collective victimhood and resilience in the face of aggression. For example, in Sarajevo and Tuzla, Bosniaks were joined by Serbs and Croats to condemn and to resist the common enemy, the Serb army (Campbell 1998, pp. 94-96). However, there is hardly any field research into how Bosniaks as the majority group protected their Serb neighbours who were targeted for their ethnicity by Bosniak armed forces during the siege in Sarajevo or in other towns. The research by Broz (2004), who looks at how Bosnians of all ethnicities and from different parts of Bosnia helped their targeted countrymen, is the exception to this trend.

⁹ Udovički and Štikovac (2000) provide examples (anecdotes and rumours) of how neighbours attacked each other during the Bosnian war. According to the authors, balaclavas became a symbol for distrust and suspicions, as Bosnians often covered their faces when they attacked their neighbours. Similarly, Clark (2012) argues that the lack of trust among Croats and Bosniaks in Central Bosnia today is in part due to the fact that Croats concealed their identities by blackening their faces when they attacked their neighbours in Ahmići village. Furthermore, Clark states that Bosniaks from Ahmići hold a common belief that “even if their Croat neighbours did not directly participate in the 1993 attack, they are nevertheless guilty for failing to warn the village’s non-Croat population of the impending military operation” (p. 244). The myth of “evil neighbour” is perhaps best expressed by Campbell’s anecdote about Radovan Karadžić (1998, p. 95). Before the war, the Karadžić family lived in a building with 11 families of different ethnicities in Sarajevo. When the war broke out, the Karadžićs moved out while all other families remained to live together in the same building throughout the war. The residential building here symbolizes multiethnic Sarajevo (and Bosnia in general), while the Karadžić family is a metaphor for that “evil neighbour.”

to violence were not passive victims who obediently followed orders of perpetrators, but were courageous people who stood the ground and fearlessly defended their rights to remain in their homes.

Bosnians with whom I talked all confirmed that indeed *some* men and *some* women had turned against their neighbours during the war. However, they were emphatic that not all perpetrators were local men, but rather soldiers who were deployed to their villages and towns from other parts of Bosnia or even from outside the country (from neighbouring Croatia, Serbia, and Montenegro). It was not uncommon that soldiers and commanders who were not familiar with a particular village or town and did not know the local population ordered and led attacks on civilians and their property, often facing objections and even resistance from the locals. My field research unambiguously shows that Bosnians regardless of their ethnic identities prefer to make a sharp distinction between *naše komšije* (our neighbours) and men *sa strane* (non-locals). It is important to underline that *both* Bosnians who were subject to violence (out-group members) and Bosnians who protected their neighbours (in-group members) equally differentiated between *naše komšije* and men *sa strane*. In other words, the boundaries of ethnic identity were blurred, as the ethnic “others” were included into the community (the village), while some in-group members (*sa strane*) were excluded.¹⁰

Furthermore, this image of Bosnia as a society where neighbours stood for their neighbours in the most violent times is also reflected in contemporaneous military reports of all three sides. If

¹⁰ Brubaker (2002) problematizes the concept of (ethnic) “group” or “groupism” and suggests the term “groupness,” which better reflects the social reality of changing and flexible boundaries of ethnic identities.

we carefully review those reports, we will clearly see that the Bosnian people generally disapproved and were demoralized by crimes committed against their neighbours in the course of the civil war. Bosnians irrespective of what army they fought for often revolted by deserting from the battlefield, sometimes on a mass scale. Military officers responsible for morale of the three armies regularly reported that violence against civilians, including civilians belonging to ethnic minorities, diminished the morale of combatants and threatened to undermine the “national struggle.” Those reports also show that Bosnians resisted a common military practice of deploying soldiers to unfamiliar locales and instead preferred “defending” the “*kućni prag*,” i.e., their home villages and towns. Not only were Bosnians protecting their neighbours, they also did not want to fight their countrymen from other regions. My interviews with Bosnians show that it was not uncommon during the civil war that young conscripts who deserted from the battlefield and found themselves far away from their homes were hidden from the military police and fed by families who belonged to the very ethnic group they were sent to fight against.

Furthermore, and this is very important to highlight, Bosnians also empathize with their neighbours who failed to help them when they needed help most. The field interviews reveal that Bosnians tend to resist attributing collective guilt to their neighbours in particular or to the ethnic “other” in general, with few exceptions. Instead, they prefer to distinguish neighbours who during the war remained passive out of fears from those who purposely excluded them from the community and used violence against them. During the war, Bosnians quickly realized that threats did not only and always come from the “enemy” army, but also from their “own” army and government. Those in power and close to power under the guise of a war for “*kućni prag*” enriched themselves through looting, killings, and the expulsion of the ethnic “other.” As already

mentioned, they also targeted their “own” people, if they dared to voice their opposition to violence against civilians and their property and wanted to protect their neighbours. As a result, many Bosnians tended to withdraw into their homes. So, Bosnians who refuse to blame their neighbours for not having acted on their behalf understand that their neighbours were also victims, rather than “evil neighbours.” This view of ordinary people stands in a striking contrast to mutual recrimination and allocation of collective guilt to the “other” by public figures in present-day Bosnia.

This does not mean that Bosnians do not hold responsible those who discriminated and used violence against them. When Bosnians share their war experiences, they typically start with memories of how some of their neighbours refused to greet them, to talk with them, or how they turned their heads away, pretending not to see them. From my interviews, it is clear that Bosnians were more hurt by having been rendered “invisible” than by having been deprived of basic necessities, the account of which often occurred later in their stories. In civil wars, there is a thin line between ordinary politeness (for example, saying “hello” to or inviting one’s neighbour for coffee) and a political act of seeing and hearing the persecuted. When some Bosnians refused to say that common word “zdravo” (hello) in the circumstances when their neighbours were rounded up, imprisoned, and killed for merely belonging to a “wrong” ethnic group, it had the effect of amplifying isolation, insecurity, and fears of the targeted.

In 1991-1992, political changes in Bosnia occurred at such a fast pace that Bosnians, although witnessing or participating, directly or indirectly, in these developments, still appear to be genuinely surprised about the outbreak of war. Bosnians often articulate this sense of

unexpectedness in the context of the breakdown of relationships with some of their neighbours. The astonishment is often expressed by testimonies of how “one morning, no one wants to say hi to you.” As if this dissolution of personal relationship made Bosnians “forget” their own contribution to and responsibility for the disintegration of their country and the outbreak of the war.

Although distinction along ethnic lines permeated Bosnian institutions and affected the life of ordinary Bosnians, primarily in their work places, as some were replaced, demoted, or dismissed from their jobs due to their ethnic identities, before the war, Bosnian society disintegrated along an “us” and “them” axis only when the armed conflict quickly spread to all corners of the country. However, it is a mistake to equate systematic violence against the ethnic “other” with the absence of cooperation among ordinary people. No matter how violent society became, Bosnians of different ethnicities *continued to live together*, interacting with each other on a daily basis, until the moment the ethnic “other” were expelled.

As long as there was the presence of the ethnic “other” among “us,” there were always individuals who were able to relate to the position of their neighbours and who fought, often risking their safety and lives, against injustices.¹¹ “The presence of others who see what we see and hear what we hear assures us of the reality of the world and ourselves...” (Arendt 1998, p. 50). We tend to neglect this aspect of living together, namely, how the presence of the “ethnic” other can and does create opportunities for resistance to violence and mutual help among

¹¹ Rancière (2014) writes: “When such groups —*and there are always individuals among them that do—* make something of these rights to construct a dissensus against the denial of rights they suffer, they really have those rights” (p.71. Emphasis added.). In other words, as long as people live together, there will always be individuals who would act for the common good.

neighbours. Instead, we tend to focus exclusively on violence aimed to eradicate the presence of the targeted group. Both facets of the Bosnian war, violence and resistance, are equally important to discuss and analyze.

What brought Bosnians of different ethnicities together during the civil war was the lack of basic necessities. Members of the targeted group were unable due to their identity to provide for sheer survival. Their freedom of movement was severely curtailed (they were arbitrarily imprisoned, often on a mass scale). The discrimination they faced meant that they carried on with ordinary daily activities, such as going to the market place or a grocery store to buy food, with difficulties and in a constant fear that they would be arrested, harassed, or even killed. They were dismissed from work. Staying inside their houses did not guarantee safety either, as out-group members were at a risk of being expelled from their homes or having their property looted or occupied by both local and non-local families (non-local families were typically displaced people who were themselves expelled from their homes).

During the war, Bosnians who belonged to the majority group empathized with their excluded neighbours. They shared food, such as flour, meat, and cooking oil, money, and even cigarettes. Bosnians opened their homes to shelter their neighbours from violence or guarded their homes for days in order to prevent looting and attacks. When members of the ethnic minority had to travel to see a doctor or to go to the local market, it was their neighbours who drove them without charging them for the gasoline. When the local authorities cut off the phone lines as a way to isolate them, the persecuted remained connected by using the phones of their neighbours. Those are only some examples of how Bosnians helped their neighbours when they needed help

most. Equally important, it was not only members of the majority group who helped those whose human rights and citizenship were denied. It is less known that the persecuted also helped their neighbours who belonged to the dominant group. Sometimes, Bosnians who belonged to a minority group had access to humanitarian aid not available to the majority group, and they did not hesitate to share food with their neighbours in need, even though the neighbours they helped belonged to the ethnic group that targeted them.¹²

There is no doubt that necessity drove Bosnians of different ethnicities towards each other during the war. It is thus easy not to see a political character in their initiatives. For example, according to Arendt (1998), any activity that relates to the natural process of life, namely, the survival of the individual and the species, is considered non-political. The household has no political significance, because it is driven by necessity and dominated by labour (pp. 29-30). Furthermore, the common image of victims of “ethnic violence” as the epitome of passivity, powerlessness, suffering, and deprivation makes it difficult to attribute a political meaning to action that was directed at or undertaken by victims, even when those activities were only partially related to physical needs. In addition, the common perception of nationalism as an overbearing force that takes away personal and deliberate choice from individuals also obscures the political character of action, since politics demands independent and deliberate action.

I argue that at the heart of necessity-driven initiatives undertaken by Bosnians, both by in-group and out-group members, during the war was their mutual recognition that the lack of basic needs was the product of the systematic denial of citizenship and human rights for a part of the

¹² Typically, religious organizations distributed humanitarian aid to their community members living under the domination of another ethnic or religious group. For example, CARITAS, a Catholic organization, would distribute aid to Croats who lived under Serb or Bosniak control.

population based on their ethnic identities. Since Bosnians who I interviewed do not see themselves the political significance in their own action, which they typically characterize as “mutual peasant help,” it is upon us, scholars, to reflect on this political character. It is true that the satisfaction of basic needs was the immediate and most visible outcome of getting together. However, a long-term and far reaching effect of Bosnians standing for each other was the restoration of their citizenship, as well as the preservation of their community at the local level for after the war. In other words, necessity served as a function of action, namely, to include those whose citizenship was denied. In this sense, it is telling that Bosnians point out how solidarity and mutual help among people were much stronger during the war than today, when violence and exclusion of the type witnessed in the war no longer characterize the lives of Bosnians.

When Bosnians acted together they established multiple relations, some of which cut across ethnic groups, while others were limited within a particular ethnic community. Relations were forged among in-group members who were not excluded, but refused to watch passively how their neighbours were subject to violence. The loss of their citizenship due to their ethnic identity also brought together out-group members who refused to accept without a fight their precarious position. And finally and most importantly, there were relations between neighbours who occupied unequal positions in their little communities, between the excluded and the included. Furthermore, those relationships sometimes involved individuals who independently from others acted to help change situations in which their fellow neighbours found themselves without their will. Other times, ordinary Bosnians self-organized in small, informal groups, sometimes armed,

other times unarmed, and coordinated their action to defend their own rights or the rights of their neighbours.

Arendt (1998) tells us that it takes courage to leave the household for the public realm. For her, courage is the “political virtue by excellence” (p. 36). In the context of the Bosnian civil war, *staying in* the household also demanded courage. This is because Bosnian nationalists, who sought to homogenize claimed territories, purposely conflated boundaries between private property and the boundaries of nation-state, ultimately making the former the object of political violence. For example, the Serb Democratic Party used land ownership rights of individual Serbs to claim and demarcate the territory of the Bosnian Serb state (so-called “historical right”). All three parties to the Bosnian war systematically attacked private property as a way to expel members of the targeted group from the claimed territory.

The private realm was not a place where the persecuted could hide and seek safety. In fact, Bosnians risked their lives the moment they decided to remain in their homes. On a daily basis, they faced the threat of being expelled from their houses and apartments. Upon the expulsion, their houses were either misappropriated by the local political authorities or burnt down and destroyed. Their property was looted, often on their watch. A common form of intimidation aimed to force Bosnians to leave were arbitrary searches of their homes for weapons, in the course of which the owners were beaten, humiliated, and threatened.

When the household becomes the object of political violence, then the private realm becomes political. The persecuted who refused to flee courageously defended their rights to stay in their

homes, and in the process of this struggle they transformed the household into a site of resistance. Because the expulsion from their homes was the height of the denial of their citizenship, Bosnians who fought *for* and *within* the household also fought for their citizenship. It was right in the middle of their homes that the persecuted directly confronted armed perpetrators, refusing to yield to their commands. Sometimes they tried to sensibly argue with violent perpetrators, other times they showed anger and swore at them. Some used violence against violence. Twenty six years after the war broke out, Bosnians with whom I spoke expressed their genuine astonishment about how they found the courage to remain in their homes and to resist those who used violence to expel them. The outcome of their action was not always the prevention of attacks upon them and their homes. However, political action should not be measured up only by the achievement of intended outcomes. What matters is that action was attempted or occurred.

Thus, it is necessary to have a look at the private realm and closely analyze action that concerns itself with the necessities of life, but which in times of civil strife might be politically significant. The household was both the object of fight and a site of political resistance by the persecuted. It is telling that it was precisely a deeply rooted attachment to their hearth (*ognjište*) that made Bosnians refuse to flee and stand their grounds and risked their lives to defend their citizenship and human rights, including the rights to their private property. They often refer to hearth as “*naša zemlja*,” (“our land”), meaning both the private sphere (private land) and the public realm (the state, homeland). It is thus ironic that both citizens who were targeted and the political authority that targeted them conflated the notion of hearth with the notion of community and homeland (state).

Research Methodology

The research methodology consists of field interviews and archival documents. The thesis is structured into two parts. The first section looks at violence, in particular how the interrelation between state structures and nationalist discourses shaped sites and forms of violence once the war broke out. This part of analysis is based largely on archival documents. The second part of the thesis focuses on sites and forms of resistance to violence and is mostly based on field interviews.

Interviews

I identified and visited 10 villages that were not affected by the wholesale expulsion of the ethnic “other” during the war and where Bosnians of different identities acted together to resist and deescalate violence. In other words, I selected multi-ethnic villages which experienced uninterrupted inter-group cooperation during the war. I must make some clarifications regarding the ethnic diversity criteria. First, I also included into the study *mono-ethnic* villages, namely, those villages that were predominantly populated by one ethnic group, but were located in a larger district where another ethnic group took and exercised power. This approach reflects the broader Bosnian concept of *komšiluk* or neighbourliness, whereby obligations to neighbours is not limited to *prve komšije* (next door neighbours), but rather extend to neighbouring villages.

Second, I did *not* include villages where the pre-war ethnic diversity was restored *after* the war, that is, where people had been expelled from their homes but returned after the war. I focused

only on those towns that retained a degree of ethnic diversity *during* and *after* the conflict. This is because there were examples where “population exchanges” occurred in the aftermath of the signing of the peace agreement. I say a degree of ethnic diversity because it is impossible to find places where some residents, especially targeted out-group members, did not flee the war.

And third, I chose to focus on rural areas rather than cities, because I assumed that the former provided less anonymity for both targeted out-group members and in-group members who took risks to save their neighbours (or who perpetrated violence against neighbours). On the one hand, it was much harder for rural residents to escape violence. On the other hand, a lack of anonymity associated with rural settings (“everybody knows everybody”) is assumed to have facilitated inter-group cooperation.

So, how prevalent was inter-ethnic cooperation during the Bosnian War? My research methodology is somewhat misleading, as it suggests that resistance was relatively rare during the war. The focus on a very small number of villages that experienced no massive expulsion of ethnic minorities does suggest that resistance was not that common. Out of 109 municipalities, I was able to identify only 10 villages where the ethnic “other” was not expelled from their homes during the war. Clearly, the research sample is not representative. However, it is important to analytically distinguish two concepts, namely, the wholesale expulsion of a part of the population, and resistance. The presence of the former does not imply the absence of the latter. Furthermore, although urban areas were not part of my research, there is no reason to believe that Bosnians who lived in Sarajevo, Mostar, Banja Luka, or Tuzla displayed less humanity and courage than their rural countrymen from my research sample. Equally important, if I had

focused on places where expelled Bosnians returned after the war, I am convinced that I would have collected more stories of Bosnians helping each other during and after the war. In sum, the focus on “small” acts of courage and mutual recognition does not rule out the possibility that resistance may have been more prevalent than commonly believed.

The ten villages were under the control of different armies: the Army of Republika Srpska (VRS), the army of the Croatian Defence Council (HVO), and the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ABiH). In particular, I visited three villages where Bosniaks and Croats continued to live together with and were protected by their Serb neighbours in the territory controlled by VRS; three villages in the municipalities controlled by the HVO, where Bosniaks remained in predominately Croat villages during and after the Bosniak-Croat war in 1993; and four villages where Bosniaks helped their Croat neighbours when they were attacked by the ABiH. Furthermore, the villages are located in four different geographic regions of Bosnia: Western Herzegovina, Western Bosnia (Krajina), Central Bosnia, and North-Eastern Bosnia (Posavina).

The common Manichean view of the Bosnian war—that the Serbs were the “aggressor” and the Bosniaks and Croats were victims and “bare-handed people” who resisted aggression— suggests that it would be relatively easy to locate towns that were during the war controlled by the Bosniak and Croat armies and where Serbs remained in their homes throughout the war. Contrary to those expectations, I was unable to locate any villages that were under the Bosniak or Croat control with a continuous Serb presence. By drawing the attention to this research surprise, I do not wish to suggest that there are absolutely no villages where Serbs as a minority were able to remain in their homes during the war. Just because I was unsuccessful in identifying

them, it does not mean that they do not exist at all. It is possible to explain this observation in probabilistic terms, namely, that we are more likely to find multi-ethnic villages in the Serb controlled territory, simply because the Serb authorities claimed more territories populated with Bosniaks and Croats.¹³ In other words, I am not suggesting that violence was somehow less intense in the Serb controlled territory, because it was not. I am making this observation simply to emphasize the discrepancy between my expectations and the research results.

Gender Balance

In terms of gender balance, out of 42 Bosnians whom I interviewed, 24 were women. Sometimes, women participated in the interview together with their husbands; other times, they were interviewed alone. When the wife and the husband were interviewed together, women equally and freely participated in sharing their war time experiences and views. This is in contrast to a commonly held belief that women in the countryside are less likely to hold and express their own views independently from their husbands than their urban, more educated counterparts.¹⁴ Only in one household, the wife, although present during the interview, remained silent and let the husband do the talking (however, her mother-in-law joined the interview whenever she felt she had something to share). Since my focus was on sites and forms of resistance to violence, women's narratives will offer insights into women's agency thus,

¹³ I am grateful to my research supervisor, Dominique Arel, for making this point.

¹⁴ For example, Bringa (1995) portrays the Bosnian woman from the country side, especially the Muslim woman, in stereotypical terms, namely, as a traditional woman who structures her entire life around the husband, children, and in-laws. According to Bringa, Muslim girls from the young age internalize moral norms of the Muslim household, namely, to work hard, speak when spoken to, and to be "honorable" and loyal to her husbands and the household (p.107). Bringa also perpetrates a nationalist imagery of women as the guardians and reproducers of ethno-religious community. For a critique of such a stereotypical description of Bosnian women, especially in the context of sexual control and violence, see Žarkov (2007).

challenging the common belief that women were merely passive victims of violence. Some of interview respondents are anonymous, and for those individuals I used pseudonyms.

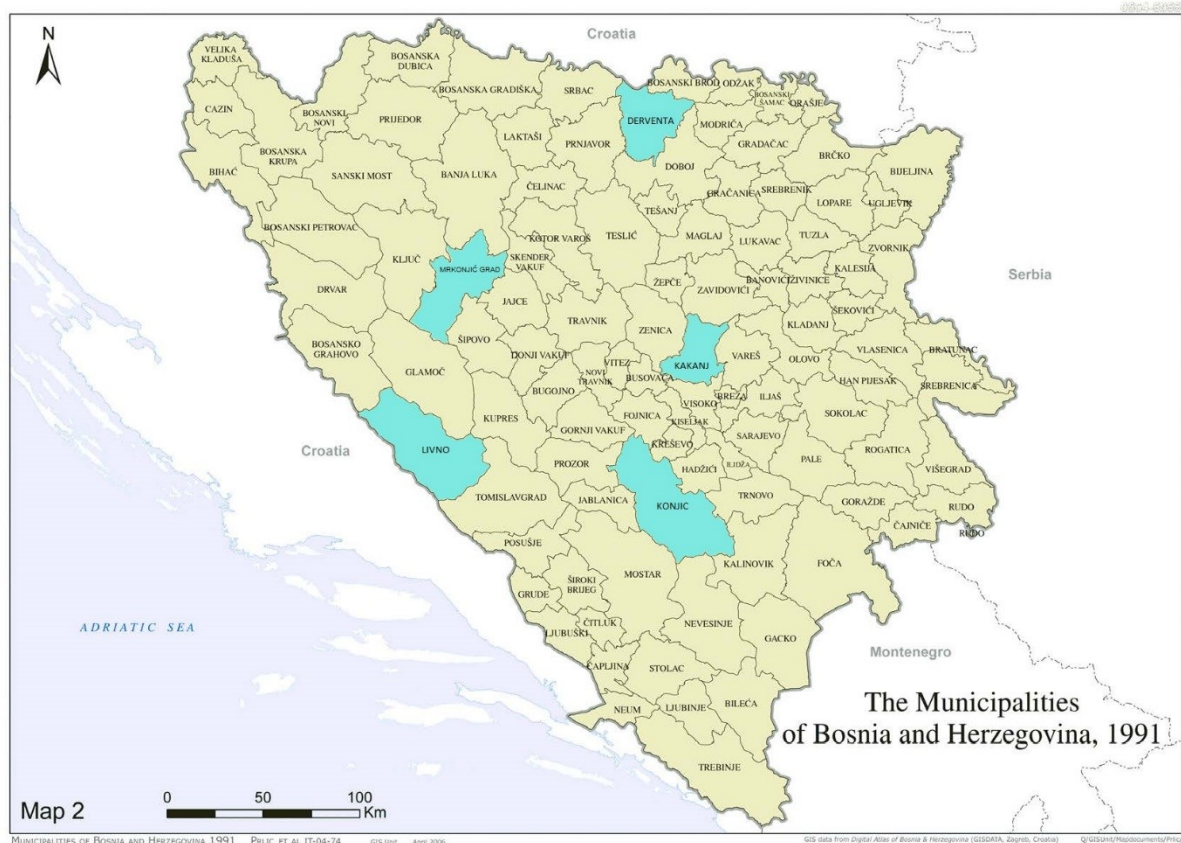
Background to the Villages

Serb-Controlled Areas

Kalenderovci and Baljvine are two villages that preserved their multi-ethnic character until today. Kalenderovci is a village located in Derventa municipality (*opština*) in Northeastern Bosnia (also known as Posavina), while Baljvine is situated in Mrkonjić Grad district in Northwestern Bosnia (also known as Krajina).¹⁵ Turski Lužani is a village predominately populated by Bosniaks, but located in the predominately Serb municipality of Derventa. If before the war Bosnia was known as “Yugoslavia in miniature” (*Jugoslavija u malom*), due to its ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity, then the village of Kalenderovci can be easily depicted as “Bosnia in miniature” (*Bosna u malom*). During the war, the three major ethnic groups all lived together and cooperated. In Baljvine, Serbs protected their Bosniak neighbours throughout the war. In 1995, when the Croat armed forces (HVO) attacked the Mrkonjić Grad municipality, both Serb and Bosniak villagers fled Baljvine, while their houses were burnt down. After the war, they returned to their village and continued to live together. Unlike other villages that I visited, Baljvine has received media attention both in Bosnia and in the region for its interethnic cooperation during the war. In contrast to Kalenderovci and Turski Lužani, Baljvine is relatively

¹⁵ *Opština* is a lowest level of local government and centres around a town, the administration of which extends to a number of surrounding villages (*mjesne zajednice*). Before the war, Bosnia was organized into 109 *opština*. In English literature, *opština* is typically translated as a municipality. For a stylistic reason, I use both municipality and district for *opština*.

isolated from any major roads and not easily accessible.



Map 1: The vilalges. The highlighted areas are the municipalities where the ten villages are located.¹⁶

Croat-Controlled Areas

Golinjevo and Podhum are two neighbouring villages where Croats, the dominant ethnic group, helped Bosniaks during the war. The two villages are located near Livno, a predominately Croat district in Western Herzegovina. In 1992, Bosniaks from Golinjevo and Podhum joined the HVO in a common fight against the VRS. However, in 1993, when the conflict between Bosniaks and

¹⁶ All maps used in the thesis are taken from ICTY public records database.

Croats broke out, many local Bosniaks were disarmed and subject to the same type of violence that Serbs had suffered a year earlier. It is interesting to note that in Livno municipality, Serbs and Croats were before the war more likely, according to some Croat interviewees, to marry among each other than to marry Bosniaks. And yet, at least some presence of Bosniaks was preserved in Golinjevo and Podhum throughout the war, while all Serbs who lived in Livno municipality were expelled from their homes. Both Golinjevo and Podhum are easily accessible, as they are situated in a close proximity to the town of Livno.

Bosniak-Controlled Areas

I visited five villages that were under Bosniak military and political authorities and where some Croats, although targeted, refused to flee their homes during the war. The villages are located in Central Bosnia, namely, in Kakanj and Konjic municipalities. The three villages in Kakanj municipality are Krč-Tršće, Čatići, and Vukanovići. Whereas Vukanovići and Čatići have always been predominately ethnically Croat, Tršće is a predominately Bosniak village, of which Krč is a small hamlet populated by Croats. Although Čatići and Vukanovići are mono-ethnic (Croat), they are surrounded by Bosniak villages and are located in the predominately Bosniak municipality of Kakanj. Whereas Čatići is located on the main road of Kakanj-Kraljeva Sutjeska, Vukanovići and Tršće are remote villages that are not easily accessible. Seonica and Višnjevica are two other villages with a Croat minority situated in the predominately Bosniak municipality of Konjic. Both villages were remote and isolated from the town.

Positionality Statement

I regarded myself both as an “insider” and “outsider” to Bosnian culture. I was born and grew up in Socialist Yugoslavia, more precisely in present-day Croatia. My mother tongue is Serbo-Croatian. I had prior knowledge of and previously identified with Yugoslavia, of which Bosnia was one of six Socialist Republics. Although I am not a Bosnian citizen, I am personally and emotionally attached to the country. Both my parents were Bosnians, and as I child, I spent my summer and winter holidays with my Bosnian grandmother. All of this made me self-identify as an “insider.”

But I also viewed myself as an “outsider.” I have lived in Canada for almost 20 years, and I have obtained my post-secondary education in Canadian universities. Furthermore, my ethnic identity—I am Serbian—is secondary to my gender identity, which greatly influenced my research design (more than half of the respondents were women) and interpretation of research findings. In particular, my thesis highlights the experience and agency of women during the war. I never subscribed to a common view that Bosnian women were merely passive and powerless victims of political violence.

In the course of my field research my positionality changed, in particular my self-identification as an “outsider.” My research respondents did not accept my “outsiderness,” as they expressed more interest in my Balkan origin than in my Canadian identity. When I introduced myself as a PhD student from Canada, many would comment “*ti si naša*” (“you are one of us”) and wanted to know where in the former Yugoslavia I came from. In other words, my respondents clearly viewed me as an “insider” only.

Of course, things got a bit complicated when it came to my position of “insider” in relation to three Bosnian ethnic groups. There was an asymmetry in information: I always knew the ethnicity of my respondents,

while they did not know mine. Some respondents asked me directly whether I was a Croat or a Serb, others made assumptions about my ethnic identity. I found it interesting that my respondents almost always erred on the side of treating me as an “insider,” that is, as belonging to their respective ethnic group. For example, when I interviewed Croats, some of them assumed that I was one of them, meaning, a Croat, a Catholic. (Of course, my Serbo-Croatian name was a cue to the Bosniak respondents that I was not “one of them.”)

When I reflected on my positionality, I concluded that I unintentionally created a situation that made my research respondents assume that I was “one of them.” For example, I made efforts to use the Croatian dialect whenever I spoke to Bosnian Croats in order to show my respect for their culture. Furthermore, my contacts with Croat respondents were Catholic priests, in particular Bosnian Franciscans from Kraljeva Sutjeska, and sisters from a Livno monastery. I think it is fair to assume that because I was introduced to them by their religious figures (who were never present during the interview but introduced me in person), my Croat respondents thought I was “one of them.”

When it was clear to me that they made a wrong assumption in regard to my ethnic identity (it was often very subtle), I always found an appropriate moment to disclose my ethnic identity. It is my impression that the tone and nature of conversations with and attitudes of research respondents never changed as a result of my disclosure. They remained just as friendly, patient, and open as at the beginning, when they thought I was a member of their ethnic community.

Archival Documents

The first part of the thesis is largely based on the analysis of documents, such as reports and

transcripts of assembly sessions and meetings, created by Bosnian Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks before and during the war. All documents cited in the thesis are *public* exhibits used in judicial proceedings before the International Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Generally, public records are available on the ICTY online archive: <http://icr.icty.org/default.aspx>. However, there are some exhibits/documents that are public but not available online. I obtained such documents from the Crimes against Humanity and War Crimes Section of Department of Justice in Canada. I am an employee of the Section and authorities gave me the permission to use ICTY *public records* in possession of the Section, but which are not available in the ICTY online database.

The majority of documents cited in the thesis are in Serbo-Croatian, and I used the title as they appear in the original. In other words, I did not use English translation in the bibliography or for in-text citation. The only exception is dates. In Serbo-Croatian, dates are written differently from English, with a period placed behind day, month, and year (for example, 10 August, 2018 is written as 10.8.2018. godine or, alternatively, 10. avgusta/kolovoza 2018. godine). Since this may create confusion, I used only English version. The reader will notice that some documents bear the same headings (for example, “zapisnik” or minutes): they can, however, be differentiated by dates.

Structure of the Thesis

The thesis has six chapters, including this introduction.

In Chapter Two, I review the scholarly literature on nation and nationalism and civil war, broadly relating it to select theories on the dissolution of Yugoslavia. I identify the major shortcomings in the scholarly work on the Yugoslav crisis and highlight those aspects of my study that help close those gaps.

The first pair of substantive chapters focuses on changes in state structures in 1991-1992 and how they inscribed in advance particular forms of violence against civilians. In particular, in Chapter Three, *How Political-Structural Changes Influenced Patterns of Violence*, I argue that the early political-structural changes gave rise to two particular patterns of violence: a) direct violence against the ethnic “other” or out-group members who lived on the claimed territory or in-territory and b) indirect violence against part of the ethnic “self” who happened to reside outside the claimed territory (lived on the out-territory).

In Chapter Four, *Violence and Nationalist Discourses*, I analyze nationalist narratives as articulated by leading Bosnian nationalist figures in formal, open and closed, settings before and during the war. Specifically, Croat, Bosniak and Serb nationalist narratives both reflected and constituted violence on the ground, in particular the process of the mutual expulsion and corresponding strategic resettlement of the population. All three narratives labeled ethnic minorities as potentially rebellious and as a threat to future political stability and order.

The second part of the thesis focuses on forms and sites of violence. In Chapter Five, *In-Group Members and Resistance to Violence*, I look at how Bosnians, who belonged to the dominant group and were not targeted for their ethnic identity, went against the prevalent atmosphere of violence and intimidation and risked their lives to protect and help their neighbours who were excluded and subject to violence by virtue of their ethnic identity.

In Chapter Six, *Out-Group Members and Resistance to Violence*, I look at how the targeted communities exercised their agency and acted to defend their citizenship and human rights. The targeted communities sometimes independently from and sometimes with the help from their neighbours confronted with words or violence perpetrators who attacked them in their homes. This chapter shows that resistance (agency) and victimhood are not two opposites or mutually exclusive.

Chapter Two

Literature Review: Re-thinking Ethnic Violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina

I will first review the scholarly literature on nation and nationalism and civil war. I limit my literature review on nation and nationalism to three paradigms: modernism, ethno-symbolism, and post-modernism, as most scholarly explanations of the violent dissolution of former Yugoslavia can be broadly related to the first two paradigms. Then I will present select theories on the dissolution of Yugoslavia and relate them to my study, which problematizes the notion of ethnic violence in the context of the Bosnian war. As for post-modernism, I include this approach because it speaks to my field research findings: resistance to violence is facilitated by but also facilitates the continuous fragmentation of national identity into various social and cultural “fragments,” such as women, peasants, and ethnic groups. In particular, Bosnian women, men, and peasants of different ethnic backgrounds harnessed their multi-layered identities, including their ethnic identities, in order to challenge the dominant nationalist discourse and resist violence during the 1992-95 civil war.

Nations and Nationalism

Modernist Paradigm

Nationalism is a theory of political legitimacy, which requires that ethnic boundaries should not cut across political ones. Nations can be defined only in terms of nationalism. Only when

general social conditions make for standardized, homogenous, centrally sustained high cultures, pervading the whole population and not just the elites, only then a shared culture can be said to constitute a nation (Gellner 1983).

Nations and nationalism are modern, contingent phenomena. According to modernists, only socio-economic developments of the modern era—industrialization, capitalism, large bureaucracy, urbanization, and widespread literacy—could create and indeed benefit from nationalism. Although modernists acknowledge that ethnic myths, symbols, folklore, and language represent “raw material” for the mobilization of people by nationalist elites (Gellner 1983, p. 48), they nevertheless relegate ethnic identification and relations to a secondary place. There are varieties of modernism, and I will only briefly review the scholarly works representative of the major theories.

According to Gellner, driven by the idea of progress, emerging industrial societies required social mobility and cultural homogeneity in order to support their continuous growth. It is this particular imperative inherent in industrial societies that created the conditions for nationalism. Mass public education, run and supervised by the state, was central to this homogenization project, bringing people of different social and cultural backgrounds together in a common effort to learn a standardized language, acquire general knowledge and specialized technical skills, and internalize the desirable values of modernity. It is these “high cultures,” in which the whole population participate, which “constitute very nearly the only kind of unit with which men willingly and often ardently identify. The cultures now seem to be the natural repositories of political legitimacy” (Gellner 1983, p. 54). The effect of this homogenization process was not

only the imposition of “high cultures,” but also the near total destruction or profound alternation of existing self-sustainable “low cultures” that characterized agrarian society. Only few “low cultures” successfully resisted state encroachment. The combination of persisting cultural differences and social inequality that pervaded industrialized societies and which sometimes followed cultural lines produced tensions between ethno-cultural groups (Ibid., p. 73). In some circumstances, ethnic tensions translated into political demands for a separate polity with its own “high culture.” It is this transformation of “low cultures” into “high cultures” that renders nationalism ambiguous. While nationalism promotes the imagery of nation as a large family, whose members display warm attitudes and affections towards one another, it simultaneously creates an anonymous and detached society.

It is the establishment of an anonymous, impersonal society, with mutually substitutable atomized individuals, held together above all by a shared culture of this kind, in place of a previous complex structure of local groups, sustained by folk cultures reproduced locally and idiosyncratically by the micro-groups themselves. That is what *really* happens (Ibid., p. 56, italic in original).

Drawing on Gellner’s idea of social inequality, Nairn traces the origin of nationalism to an “uneven development of history,” rooted in the rapid and uneven spread of European capitalism and violent imperialism (Nairn 1977, p. 335). European experiences (capitalism) created the conditions for nationalism, while the experiences of “peripheric” peoples (exploitation and violence) breathed life into it. Faced with a lack of modern political and economic institutions and pressed with the urgency to achieve development, nationalist elites of “peripheric” peoples

turned to what was available, namely, ethnic identity, myths, skin colour, and so on (Ibid., p. 340). In other words, nationalism is the result of the *lack of choices*, rather than a *deliberate choice* of romantic culture over Enlightenment rationalism. As Nairn declares, “[t]he new middle class intelligentsia had to invite the masses into history: and the invitation card had to be written in a language they understood” (Ibid.). Nairn (pp. 348-349) also sees nationalism as an ambiguous ideology, as it involves both progress and regress, looking forward and looking backward (Jayawardena 1986, pp. 3-5). Unlike Gellner, who locates a potential conflict between cultural groups with different social positions in society, Nairn ascribes power to nationalism to unite, if only temporary, all social classes against the common enemy.

Their rulers—or at least the newly-awakened élites who now came to power—had to mobilize their societies for this historical short-cut. This meant the conscious formation of a militant, inter-class community rendered strongly (if mythically) aware of its own separate identity vis-à-vis the outside forces of domination.

There was no other way of doing it. Mobilization had to be in terms of what was there: and the whole point of the dilemma was that there was nothing there—none of the economic and political institutions of modernity now so needed (Ibid., p. 340).

For Hobsbawm, the author who added a post-modernist touch to the modernist paradigm, nations are modern social constructs, the outcome of “exercises in social engineering” or “inventing of traditions” (1983, Chapter 1, p.13). “Invented traditions” help elites in power inculcate desirable values and norms into citizens by using the past as a “legitimater of action and cement of group

cohesion” (12). The historic past offers a sense of continuity in times of rapid socio-economic changes. Thus, “invented traditions” are the function of a modern, industrialized world, as they help people adjust to and internalize new social organizations and institutions (4-5). Although the memory of belonging to a historic state can “act directly upon the consciousness of the common people to produce proto-nationalism” (Hobsbawm 1992, p. 76), generally, it is nationalism that creates nations and not the other way around. Modern mass media, radio, and sports contribute to the socialization and cohesion of nations or ethnic groups. This group cohesion increases, as new national symbols (flags and anthems) and references to the past blur the boundary between the private sphere and the public realm (142).

Hobsbawm distinguishes two concepts of the modern nation: “revolutionary-democratic” nations that define people in terms of citizenship, and “nationalist” nations that use ethnic and linguistic criteria for inclusion (or exclusion). Furthermore, nationalism evolved in two historic periods: the period of classical liberal nationalism (1830-1880), with strict criteria for the recognition of new nation-states, such as the “threshold principle,” historical links to the modern state, and the capability to conquer; and the period of radical and xenophobic political movements (1870-1914) that relied on violence to homogenize the state. Although all nationalisms are morally ambiguous (Nairn 1977, p. 348), today, the term nationalism is often understood in relation to its links with extreme violence, especially with Nazism and fascism (Hobsbawm 1992, p.121).

For Anderson, it is the subjective and highly abstract imagination of individuals, rather than the invention of traditions, that accounts for the emergence of nations. The nation is an “imagined political community,” imagined both as territorially limited and sovereign (Anderson 2006, p. 6).

Modernity, in particular print capitalism, created the conditions for this particular kind of imagining (46). Print capitalism, which thrived in a linguistic plurality that replaced the “sacred true languages” of universal religions, engendered a universal readership community, “the embryo of nationally imagined community” (44). The mass production of books, novels, and newspapers brought together anonymous citizens with different social and cultural backgrounds and with no history of social interaction with each other into a national community subjectively experienced as an extended family. It is print languages, and not any language, that are invested with the capacity to create nations (134). Elites in European societies imposed one dialect as the print language, eliminating or marginalizing other dialects in the process. The standardization of print languages increased homogeneity and national consciousness not only among the dominant group, but also among members of marginalized linguist communities that resisted homogenization. As Anderson illustrates, the imposition of “official nationalism” is like “stretching the short, tight skin of the nation over the gigantic body of the empire” (86).

By the end of World War I, the European idea of a nation-state rapidly diffused and became the international norm. For some, Anderson’s argument that elites in Asia and Africa “pirated” forms of nationalism developed in Europe and the Americas amounts to a denial of the creative and imaginative powers of non-European peoples, as well as of the fact that resistance to rather than identity with the “modular” Western nationalism was a driving force behind colonial nationalisms (Chatterjee 1993, p. 5). There was a dialectic relationship between Western and non-Western nationalisms (Jayawarden 1986, pp. 7-8). However, Lemarchand argues that the concept of “imagined community” does not prejudice against African communities: “To see them [Hutu and Tutsi] as imagined identities does point to the changing perceptions of one group

by another, as well as to the processes involved in the emergence of a new ‘tribe’ in eastern Congo, the Banyamulenge” (2009, p. 52).

Ethnonational Symbolism and Criticism of the Modernist Perspective

The nation is a named and self-defining human community whose members cultivate shared memories, symbols, myths, traditions and values, inhabit and are attached to historic territories or ‘homelands’, create and disseminate a distinctive public culture, and observe shared custom and standardized laws (Smith 2009).

Ethno-symbolism, developed in response to the modernist paradigm, is described by Smith (1999, p. 100) as a myth that creates an artificial gap between tradition and modernism. By focusing only on structure while neglecting the content of nationalist ideologies, modernists cannot explain why certain ethnic groups become nations while others do not. Smith argues that it is nationalist elites in power who promote public culture and “eco-socialization” through mass public education and not the other way around (Smith 1998, p. 40). Similarly, it is not the material reality that makes the nationalist intelligentsia manipulate the past with ethnic symbols and myths, but rather the leaders of *existing* ethnic communities who politicize socio-economic disparities in order to achieve political goals (54). Furthermore, the focus on “invention” of traditions fails to recognize that constructing nations is constrained by the very cultural elements and traditions that elites selectively employ, while invented traditions, to be effective, must be connected with historical events and experiences of people (Peel 1989, p. 200). Those significant historical events and figures have often been preserved through oral history, music, and poetry

(epic poetry) rather than through novels, a modern mode of cultural representation. Furthermore, although vernacular languages are certainly crucial for forging nations, other ethno-symbolic elements are just as important in the constitution of nations (Smith 2009, p. 25).

Ethno-symbolists argue that it is “on the basis of an ethnic model and around a dominant ethnic core population that political actors and institutions helped to forge the nation” (Ibid., p.28). As a result, it is necessary to analyze nations and nationalism over a longer period of time, namely, in relation to earlier forms of “ethnic ties” (ethnic categories and ethnic communities) (27). Ethno-symbolists reject the perennial approach, according to which nations have existed in all historical periods, and instead put the accent on “the recurrence of certain ethnic dimensions and elements such as myths of common ancestry, convictions of ethnic elections, the ubiquity of ethnoscapas and memories of golden age” (38). Furthermore, the *longue durée* perspective does not suggest that ethno-cultural groups are defined by fixed and “essential” characteristics, as the primordialists argue. On the contrary, it shows us that symbolic boundaries between various social groups are perpetually shifting and adjusting. As Armstrong states, ethnic identity is “a bundle of shifting interactions” (1982, p. 6). The awareness of one’s own ethnic identity arises out of interactions with others, that is, through exclusion. It is the contrast between the durability and recurrence of ethnic groups, on the one hand, and the fluidity of symbolic boundaries between them, on the other hand, that fascinates ethno-symbolists.

Ethno-symbolists acknowledge that social and political institutions are important for the development of nations. In fact, they insist that ethno-symbolism complements rather than discredit the modernist approach. Modernists and ethno-symbolists also agree that the need to

ensure continuity in times of crisis and changes plays a crucial role in forging the nation. It is precisely when societies go through difficult transitions that ethnic groups and nations “re-appropriate” the historical past and the myth of the “golden ages” as a way to make a sense of the present. As Smith points out, although such nationalist narratives are ideologically driven, “[w]e should interpret these narratives not as inventions or fabrications, but as selective political understandings of aspects of ethnic past that may be supported by documentary or other evidence” (2009, p. 36). Equally important, ethno-symbolists do not paint in negative terms impassionate debates over national identity, the character of the ethnic community, the interpretation of the past, and visions of the future of the nation. They believe that these debates “help to raise the level of national consciousness among all participants,” both members of the dominant ethnic group and marginalized communities (35). In other words, ethno-symbolists acknowledge the essentially heterogeneous character of human communities, as well as inevitable tensions and in some but not all instances violent conflicts due to divergent narratives of what and who constitutes the nation. “Most nationalisms are riven by conflict” (34).

Post-modernist Turn

Globalization and migration tend to fragment national identities and increase the ethnic heterogeneity of societies. Furthermore, feminism problematizes the impact of nationalism on women and women’s role in furthering nationalist projects. Ongoing debates about the consequences of nationalism, especially ethnic nationalism, for liberal democracy also belong to post-modernism.

Fragmented Nations and National Identity

Nationalism is ambiguous, and it is precisely this quality that shatters the myth of cultural homogeneity created and imposed both by nationalism and its enabler, modernism. National identity can be temporarily unified but never unitary, let alone having “essentialist” qualities, because it is constructed out of various socio-cultural scraps. As different communities bring their respective “fragments” into the public domain, they produce alternative discourses regarding nationhood, national identity, the historical past, the myth of origin and so on (Chatterjee 1993, p. 13). Bhabha (1990, p. 4) argues that national identity is a form of narrative anchored in a continuous “process of hybridity,” in which new sites of meaning and political antagonism emerge as a result of interactions between the body politic and marginal social and cultural groups. For example, Indian nationalists challenged the dominant colonial discourse by constructing an alternative narrative of “inner” or “spiritual” world, in which ethnic and religious groups, women, peasants, and outcasts all found a place and a meaningful role in a common struggle against the British (Chatterjee 1993, p. 293). This common struggle, however, did not only fail to erase the existing differentiation within and among those social groups, but in fact created new or deepened old divisions: women as a social group, for example, continued to be fragmented along poor, “westernized,” or bourgeois women.

By assigning a larger role to national fragments, post-modernists do not deny the social reality of ethnic identities, but rather highlight that the inherent “fuzziness” of ethnic boundaries allow for a new, “in-between space,” where cultural and national meanings are continuously negotiated and reframed (Bhabha 1990, p. 4; Chatterjee 1993, p. 223). Nor does it have to mean, although it

is always a possibility, that alternative discourses necessarily destroy the common identity in multicultural societies. For example, Peel underlines that challenges to the dominant Oyo version of history did not destroy the common Yoruba identity, but rather complemented it with new claims of the origin of marginal communities (Peel 1989, p. 209). Yet national fragments or cultural differences should not be reduced to an empty concept of plurality and must be seen as politically contested markers that interrupts the existing socio-political order:

Cultural difference, as a form of intervention, participates in a supplementary logic of secondariness similar to the strategies of minority discourse. The aim of cultural difference is to re-articulate the sum of knowledge from the perspective of the signifying *singularity* of the “other” that resists totalization – the repetition that will not return as the same, the minus-in-origin that results in political and discursive strategies where adding-to does not add-up but serves to disturb the calculation of power and knowledge, producing other spaces of subaltern signification (Bhabha 1990, p. 312).

Women and Nation

Feminists point to the dialectic relationship between the nation and women (Yuval Davis and Anthias, 1989, Introduction, p.1). Women across different societies and time periods have been active and willing actors in nationalist movements, sometimes challenging and other times adopting for their own political agendas the terms of male discourses (Landes 1988, pp.106, 125-126; Kandiyoti 1989, “Women and the Turkish State,” p.132). There are five typical modes in which women participate, actively or passively, in nationalist projects: 1) as biological

reproducers of members of the nation; 2) as reproducers of ethnic boundaries; 3) as reproducers and transmitters of ethnic ideologies and traditional values; 4) as signifiers of ethnic differences as a symbol of ideological discourses; and 5) as active participants in economic, political, nationalist, and armed struggles (Anthias and Davis 1989, p. 7). In particular, the control of women and their sexual behaviour played a key role, especially prominent in times of war, in constructing nationalist discourses and ideologies (Anthias 1989, "Women and Nationalism," p.158).

The influence women exerted over society, as well as the ambiguous effects of changes of modernity upon women were always within the boundaries established by male elites (Jayawardena 1986, p. 258; Kandiyoti 1989, p.126; Landes 1988, pp. 146-147). The place of women in nationalist projects and movements especially highlights the ambiguous nature of nationalism, as nationalists were promoting the emancipation of women, while at the same time also used the tradition imagery of women as the guardian of the nation, culture, and family. As both Kandiyoti and Chatterjee point out, in Turkey and India, there was no real difference in regard to the status of women between nationalists who embraced modernization and traditionalists who rejected it (Kandiyoti 1989, p. 131; Chatterjee 1993, pp. 9, 117). In post-colonial settings, such as independent India, women's position and role in the political realm tended to diminish after the achievement of political objectives and were reduced to social activities (Jayawardena 1986, p. 259).

Theories of Civil Wars

Scholars differ in their views on the role that ethnicity plays in civil wars. According to Laitin (2007, p. 15), the relationship between ethnic demography and violence is tenuous. Neither ethnic diversity nor ethnic polarization makes societies particularly vulnerable to civil war (Fearon and Laitin 2003, pp. 83-84; Ferguson 2002, p. 22). However, Laitin warns that diversity does weaken social solidarity that is so crucial for the maintenance of a vibrant public life (2007, p.107). Other research establishes a link between cultural heterogeneity and risks of violence (Elbadawi and Sambanis 2002; Ellingsen 2000, pp. 232-233). In his comparative study on Catalonia and the Basque country, Conversi (1997, p. 5) argues that when an ethnic group lacks a common culture or its culture is weak, it is likely that violence will act as means to generate or strengthen group cohesion.

In between those two opposites lies the most common view, namely, that there is an indirect link between ethnicity and violence. Ethno-national elites use ethnicity to advance their agenda, namely, to obtain or to stay in power. Although one must not equate ethnic identity with violence, “ethnicity has a capacity to be manipulated for the pursuit of pre-eminently immoral goals, to profoundly alter collective perceptions the “other” (Lemarchand 2009, p. 50). If there is a conflict, it is caused by a power struggle and not by ethnicity per se (Mertus 2000, p. 236; Cederman, Wimmer and Min 2010, pp. 113-114; Gagnon 2004, pp. 7-8). Furthermore, violence has a capacity to generate “ethnic hatred” and inter-group mistrust, which presumably strengthens old ethnic identities or forms new ones (Denitch 1996, p. 61, 63; Petrovic 2000, pp. 173-175; Hayden 2000, p. 121; Ramet 2006, p. 600). Costalli and Moro (2011, p. 810) maintain

that the more ethnically polarized the society is, the more severe war violence will be (see also Weidmann 2011, p. 1184). Although Lacina (2006, p. 287) refutes the link between culture and the severity of civil wars, she does make a link between ethnic heterogeneity and the scale of the war.

Greed, Grievance and Civil Wars

Grievance theory holds that substantial, consistent, and increasing horizontal inequalities expose societies to risks of violence (Stewart 2011, p. 343). However, not all countries with significant socio-economic inequalities experience violent conflicts (Collier and Hoeffler 2004, p. 588; Fearon and Laitin 2003, pp. 75, 85; Keen 2012, p. 760). One of its premises is that the access to political power by marginalized groups can prevent conflicts (Stewart 2011, p. 542; Keen 2012, p. 761). However, this view neglects instances where power sharing in fact facilitates or even causes the onset of civil war (Wimmer, Cederman, and Min 2009, p.96). Others point out that oppressed and discriminated groups are less likely to seek secession (Ayres and Saideman 2000, p. 107).

Greed theory, which is rooted in rational choice economy, explains civil wars in terms of (economic) opportunity offered by armed conflicts. Collier, Hoeffler and Rohner (2009, p. 588) argue that the extraction of natural resources, trade in primary commodities, and a low foregone income are three key factors that increase the risk of civil war. Greed theory has been dismissed as “empirically unsustainable, highly impressionist and, in some cases, downright suspect” (Berdal, 2005, p. 688). Ratsimbaharison (2011, pp. 275-276) points out that on the one hand,

some of the most violent conflicts occur in countries poor in primary commodities, while, on the other hand, there is no civil wars in many African countries that export at least one primary commodity. In addition, greed theory appears one-sided, as it focuses exclusively on rebels and their motivations to fight, while it ignores the state and its actions and motivation (Keen 2012, p. 773; Regan and Norton 2005, p. 325). It also depoliticizes conflicts that are instigated and waged for political and ideological reasons. However, others are not ready to dismiss the greed and grievances theory, arguing for its modification by considering the temporal dimension: whereas grievances are important for mobilization at the initial stage of conflicts, greed plays a key role in sustaining rebel support at the later stages of civil war (Regan and Norton 2005, p. 325; Ratsimbaharison 2011, p. 274).

Opportunity Structure/State Capacity and Civil Wars

Challengers must consider available political opportunity structures, as well as threats they confront before they embark on a rebellion: the openness to new actors, the instability of the existing political alignment, a degree of dispersion of power centres, the availability of allies, and the willingness of the regime to use violence against challengers (Tilly and Tarrow 2007, p. 57). Fearon and Laitin argue that conditions that favour insurgencies, such as mountainous terrain, rural areas, and the weak state, determine the onset of civil war (Fearon and Laitin 2003, pp. 85, 88). Straus argues that the present of state structure, population density, and hilly topography were the factors that increased mobilization among Hutus and ultimately led to genocidal violence in Rwanda (2006, p. 2015). In addition, rebellion is cheaper in poor countries with large population and high unemployment, which makes it easier to recruit young and

unemployed men into a rebel army (Collier, Hoeffler and Rohner 2009, p. 588; Fearon and Laitin 2003, pp. 81, 88). Both the onset of civil war and severity of violence appear to be correlated with access to external assistance (Lacina 2006, p. 287; Fearon and Laitin 2003, p. 86; Collier Hoeffler and Rohner 2009, p. 588). However, Fearon and Laitin's analysis is limited to guerrilla wars and does not consider the relationship between structural and geo-strategic factors and conventional civil war.

Regime Types/Constitution and Civil Wars

Whereas regime type arguments address the causes of civil wars, constitution and institutional landscapes theories focus on the prevention of civil wars. There is mixed evidence concerning the relationship between regime types and civil wars. Civil wars are likely to erupt in situations where the state represses non-violent protests, suggesting that authoritarian regimes are more likely to experience civil wars (Keen 2012, p.773). Horowitz reverses the correlation and suggests that ethnic conflicts reinforce authoritarian tendencies and prevent democratization in divided societies (Horowitz 1993, pp. 18, 20). However, Fearon and Laitin argue that "civil war onsets are no less frequent in democracies after controlling for income" than in authoritarian regimes (Fearon and Laitin 2003, p. 85). Others hold that democracies are more prone to violence, because costs of rebellion are lower and rebellions are easier to organize in democratic than in authoritarian societies (Saideman et al. 2002, p. 118). Ayres and Saidemen (2000, p. 109) argue that "democratization may not be harmful by itself."

Studies of the prevention of civil wars do not so much focus on regime type as on to the constitution of the country. Lijphart singles out consociational democracy as the most appropriate form of democracy for diverse societies. Institutions, such as grand coalitions, proportional representation, veto power, and territorial self-government increase the participation of minority groups and thus diminish the risks of inter-group conflicts in the long run (Lijphart 1999, Chapter 3). In addition, federalism can also reduce the probability of civil war in ethnically heterogeneous societies (Varshney 1998, p. 44). However, Christian points out that federalism can be both conflict reducing and conflict enabling, depending on the number of sub-state units in which a minority forms a majority. When the share of minority controlled federal units is either larger or about one-half of that of the majority controlled areas, conflicts are more likely to erupt (Christian 2012, p. 96).

Other institutions, such as the electoral system and the party system are also analyzed in relation to ethnic conflicts and their prevention. State-wide disciplined parties and the congruence of national and regional elections consolidate democracy and reduce the risk of violence. Reilly (2007) shows how the existence of state-wide and cohesive parties in combination with the plurality electoral system has the effect of reducing minority representation in the political system, thus diminishing the risk of secessionism. Wolff (2011) emphasizes the importance of the leadership of regional parties for conflict management. Saideman et al. (2002, p. 122) conclude that the type of governments (presidentialism vs parliamentarism) is irrelevant for conflict management. However, Mainwaring and Shugart argue that presidentialism, characterized by “dual legitimacy,” low party fragmentation, and high party discipline, creates a

condition for coalition building in the Congress, suggesting that presidentialism is likely to prevent violence (Mainwaring and Shugart 1997, p. 462).

An Overview of Theories of Yugoslav Dissolution

(Failure of) Modernisation Theory

Allcock argues that Yugoslavia disintegrated not despite but because of its socialist system, which many observers erroneously assessed as having being conducive to transition to a democratic system and market economy. However, it turned out that the Yugoslav socialist system offered no “alternative to the route to modernity presented by capitalism” (Allcock 2000, p. 419). Inherent to the Yugoslav economic and political system was a narrow framework of legitimacy, which made Yugoslavia vulnerable to the “hazards of re-legitimation” (421). The communist elites drew their legitimization exclusively from the particular wartime experiences of the People’s Liberation Struggle (NOB) led by Tito’s Partisans, the appeal of which weakened as the generational gap widened.

In this respect, Yugoslavia epitomized Max Weber’s observations about the necessary crisis which attends succession to charismatic authority. The problem arises not simply because of the need to replace Tito, but because the transition from charismatic to legal-rational (or even traditional) authority was required of the entire élite stratum, which was unable to grasp, let alone to address, this problem (Ibid).

Woodward (1995, p.15) locates the immediate cause of the Yugoslav disintegration in the conflict over the question of sovereignty and new borders. However, the fundamental cause lies in “the disintegration of governmental authority and the breakdown of a political and civil order” (15). This breakdown was the result of the liberalization processes, which were shaped by the international environment. The crisis only worsened after the first democratic multi-party elections in 1990, when nationalists took power in their semi-autonomous home republics and moved aggressively towards full independence and nation-building (253). In other words, federalism and a multi-party system created the conditions for ethnic conflicts. International actors (states and international organizations) only escalated the crisis by their controversial and contradictory policies. As Yugoslavs saw their rights and social welfare progressively disappear, they sought to make sense of their everyday experiences by turning to the pre-modern mechanisms of solidarity: family, kinship, and ethnic community (237).

Allcock (2000, p. 42) points out that “[i]n this situation, people were prone to political mobilization in a variety of directions, should movements and leaders arise offering the prospect of a way forward.” So why did then Yugoslavs opt to rally around discourses and programmes of nationalists rather than other political options? Nationalists did not enjoy a particular advantage over liberals, for example, as the Communist Party established the parameters within which all opposition parties participated in the liberalization process. The major flaw of the modernization approach is that it emphasizes Yugoslavia’s modern character and its place in the wider modernization processes, while at the same time presents Yugoslav society in terms of Nairn’s postulates: it suggests that there was nothing there but ethnicity, ethnic myths, language, and

collective memory for Yugoslavs and their leaders to move forward. Even though modernization was incomplete, Yugoslavs nevertheless had at their disposal relatively modern socio-economic institutions and values in order to complete the transition.

Although the modernist approach to the Yugoslav dissolution in general, and the Bosnian conflict in particular, focuses on structure, it tends to privilege a macro-level perspective, that is, state structure at the Federal and Republic levels. Pre-war changes in state structures at both central and local levels (municipal and regional) have not been studied in detail in relation to patterns of violence. I address this gap in Chapter Three, where I show that patterns of structural changes at the municipal levels in advance inscribed violence against one's "own" people who happened to live on the out-territory. In particular, those local structures contributed to and enabled the conditions for "reciprocal exchanges" of population. Of course, those structures also played a key role in the expulsion of out-group members from the claimed in-territory. In other words, violence against civilians, both in-group and out-group members, was justified as a "natural" consequence of re-organization of state structures at all levels.

Ethnic Nationalism Theory

In *The Yugoslav Drama*, Crnobrnja (1996, p. 3) tells "the story of national awakening and the victory of aggressive nationalism." The Yugoslav Communist Party with its integrative ideology of "brotherhood and unity" did not only fail to eliminate "national consciousness," but in fact strengthened it with its ambiguous policies and approaches. The idea of Yugoslavism was increasingly viewed in negative terms as a symbol of federal bureaucracy that threatened direct

democracy and the autonomy of republics (Djilas 1991, p. 177). Even youth, that social group that was widely believed to replace Tito as the guardian of the idea of “brotherhood and unity,” succumbed to ethnic nationalism (Božić 2007, pp. 749, 752-753). For Petrovic (2000, p. 165), nationalism was “activated” with Tito’s death, while Denitch (1996, p. 54) argues that the political changes of the 1980s only brought down the boundaries established by the Communist Party within which nationalism cohabited, not so uncomfortably, with communism.

The persistence and power of national or ethnic identity is evident no so much in the failed efforts to suppress nationalism by the Communist Party, but rather in the Party’s own reliance on nationalist discourse to discredit its critics, including, paradoxically, nationalists themselves, and to broaden its political support in republics (Djilas 1991, p. 157; Denitch 1996, p. 55; Crnobrnja 1996, p. 91). National unity in diversity turned into a “dilemma of difference,” whereby ethnic differences and separation became synonymous (Petrovic 2000, p. 168). During and after the multi-party elections in 1991, nationalists in the republics “re-appropriated” ethnic symbols, myths, traditions, and collective memory, including past violence, with the purpose of mobilizing their respective ethnic groups into political action. Although the proponents of ethnic nationalism theory underline that ordinary Yugoslavs did not display “ancient hatred” or ethnic intolerance, they, nevertheless, point out that nationalist discourses resonated with the masses. This explains why nationalist elites were successful in mobilizing members of their respective ethnic groups.

Gagnon (2004), however, shows that the elites in Croatia and Serbia used ethnic violence for the purpose of *de-mobilizing* challenger elites and their followers. Violence did force people to take a side in the Yugoslav war, in effect homogenizing ethnic communities. However, the act of

“taking side” should not be interpreted as ethnic animosity toward the “other” or ethnic solidarity with one’s “own” group in terms of sharing interests and ideological views. As Woodward (1995, p. 237) underlines, in war, it was “a natural tendency to rely on older (pre-state) mechanisms of solidarity and insurance adapted to survival—family, kinship, ethnicity.” Most men were not volunteers, but rather were forced by the mobilization law to participate in the conflict. In addition, those ethnically defined armies fighting each other were faced with draft resistance and desertion of men and even whole units from the frontlines. Gagnon (2004, p. 2) calls this reaction to military call-ups as possibly “one of the most massive campaigns of draft resistance in modern history”.

Much has been made of the manipulation of ethnic myths and collective memory of past violence by nationalist elites, especially by Serb nationalists. However, my analysis of nationalist discourses constructed by all three nationalist parties in Bosnia shows that ethnic myths and collective memory were secondary. I argue that past violence was not so much important for fear mongering and mobilization as for establishing the ground on which two particular types of “rights” were claimed: the “historical right” and the right to (private) property of the land. Those two types of rights jointly served as the basis for territorial claims to ethnically mixed territories and ultimately for the creation of the Serb state in Bosnia. As I show in Chapter Four, violence in Bosnia was couched in the language of *future* inter-ethnic (and regional) stability and order. The condition for a stable society rested, according to *all* three nationalist narratives, in the alignment between ethnicity and rule over a given territory.

System Legitimacy Theory

According to a different school, Yugoslavia fell apart because its system as a whole was illegitimate. This approach overlaps with both modernization theory and ethnic nationalism theory. Although Ramet acknowledges that other factors, such as the economic crisis, contributed to the dissolution of Yugoslavia, she singles out the legitimacy crisis as the most important factor. Attempted liberalization notwithstanding, the country was neither liberal nor democratic. According to the system legitimacy theory, Yugoslavs decided that they had enough and withdrew their consent to the regime that for so long disregarded the rule of law, violated their basic rights and freedoms, and failed to establish the “rules of the game.” This generated a political crisis and led to popular discontent, including ethnic protests, demanding a change (Ramet 2006, p. 32). The communist elites responded to this legitimacy crisis by substituting decentralization for liberalization, which created ethnic “lines of fraction along which the system could fall apart” (603). Nationalists stepped onto the political scene, offering to angry and disillusioned citizens alternative legitimacy symbols. A change came in the form of and was limited to democratic multi-party elections that brought nationalist authoritarian regimes in power. The new regimes, however, continued to disregard the rule of law and violate basic human rights, especially the rights of ethnic minorities. According to Ramet, nationalist elites, especially Serb nationalists, used their firm control over the state media to promote ethnic myths, values, and collective memory in order to create the condition for violence (420).

There are several problems with the system legitimacy theory. First, it portrays legitimacy as consensual and voluntary. As Skocpol points out, what matters is not so much how the majority of citizens perceive their government, but rather the position and interests of politically relevant

groups, including regime elites (Skocpol 2008, p. 32). In addition, authoritarian regimes can be both stable and illegitimate. Second, Ramet cannot explain why Yugoslavs, who challenged an illegitimate Communist system, believed in legitimacy symbols offered by nationalists, many of whom were former Communists or beneficiaries of the regime. Third, this approach identifies nationalism as the most serious threat to the liberal project and thus to system legitimacy. At the same time, Ramet presents ethnic nationalism in positive terms, namely, as a force that applied necessary pressure on the illegitimate Yugoslav one-party system to transform it into a liberal system.

De-mobilization Theory

Gagnon puts to the test the common belief that ethnicity is the motor behind popular mobilization. In contrast to most scholars of the Yugoslav war, he focuses on the opposition between *political* homogeneity and political heterogeneity rather than on the antagonism between *cultural (ethnic)* homogeneity and cultural heterogeneity. Gagnon argues that violence was an effective instrument in the hands of elites to *de-mobilize* the political opposition, including and especially the in-group political opposition, in order to remain in power. The strategy of de-mobilization required the re-conceptualization of political space through the re-construction of social identities and solidarities (Gagnon 2004, pp. 7-8). Thus, the elites who strived to preserve their power did not turn to the existing, old identities in order to engage people in politics and violence. On the contrary, nationalists quickly realized that playing the “ethnic card” would be ineffective in a Yugoslav heterogeneous society. As a result, they turned to violence in order re-construct new social identities that would put in question the Yugoslav

experience of mutual trust and cooperation. Violence and the attendant sense of threat to survival of the collectivity helped re-construct ethnicity in primordial terms, namely, as fixed and clearly bounded monolithic units whose members are connected through bonds of blood and common history (8). Although ethnic homogeneity was the ultimate outcome of this strategy, its goal was the imposition of political homogeneity.

Gagnon draws our attention to the fact that both in-group and out-group members were victims of violence in Yugoslav wars: the “strategies of violence do not end with the ethnic cleansing, but rather are an integrated part of the very process of thinking about political space in homogenous ways” (9). Building on Gagnon’s work, I focus on in-group members who protected their persecuted neighbours and were themselves targeted for those efforts during the Bosnian war (Chapter Five). In contrast to Gagnon, who does not distinguish between different categories of in-group members, I analytically differentiate between 1) violence directed against in-group members who inhabit the “right” territory (in-territory) controlled by political representatives with whom they shared the same ethnicity (Gagnon’s approach) and 2) violence against in-group members who happened to live on the “wrong” territory (out-territory), namely, under the rule of the ethnic “other.” This distinction ultimately determines whether we define violence as “ethnic violence” or not. If “ethnic violence” is always orientated to the *different ethnicity* of the victim, then the Bosnian war, in which both in-group and out-group members were targeted, was not purely “ethnic violence.” However, the ethnic criterium still predominates, as Bosnian nationalist parties were complicit in the expulsion of their “own” people by the “enemy” forces and resettled them in strategic areas in order to alter ethnic demographics there.

Conclusion

What all those theories on Yugoslav dissolution have in common is an almost exclusive focus on violence. They neglect mutual trust and cooperation among Bosnians (Yugoslavs) *during* the war. As my field research shows (Chapter Five), Bosnians of all three ethnicities made efforts to protect and shelter their neighbours who were targeted for their ethnic identities. Laitin rightly points out that “[t]h real challenge for understanding communal relations, given the vast potential for violence, is the near ubiquity of ethnic cooperation” (Laitin 2007, p. 11). Equally important, the existing literature does not critically study the role of victims of political violence. My interviews with Bosnians show that the persecuted were never passive objects of violence, but were brave people who stood the ground and fearlessly defended their human rights and citizenship. In the second part of the thesis, I reflect on the political character of actions and words undertaken and uttered by Bosnians during the war, as well as the role and place of the household in the course of their fight for their right to remain in their homes. In particular, Bosnian women and men from the countryside harnessed their multi-layered identities, including their ethnic identities, in order to challenge the dominant nationalist discourse and resist violence directed against their neighbours.

Chapter Three

How Political-Structural Changes Influenced Patterns of Violence

Introduction

This chapter explores patterns of changes in the state structure before the war and how they influenced patterns of violence during the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereafter Bosnia). Although those political-structural changes, such as ethnically defined autonomous regions and municipalities, in themselves did not cause the onset of the war, they certainly facilitated the organization and coordination of war efforts. The appropriation of existing structures, both at the centre and at the local, municipal level, and consequential partition into “parallel” ones, such as the police and the territorial defence (TO), led to the feverish arming of civilians along ethnic lines. The question that I am interested to examine, however, is how those pre-war changes in the state structure determined patterns of violence against civilians during the war. I argue that patterns of violence that characterized the Bosnian civil war, namely, mutual expulsion and “exchanges” of population, were built in the pre-war patterns of structural changes. In particular, the pre-war political-structural changes signalled what groups would be targeted in times of violence, who would be expelled, and whose property would be appropriated or destroyed. And it was not only the ethnic “other” who were pre-ordained victims. The significance of the early territorial demands embodied in “ethnic” structures is that when the war broke out they gave rise to two particular patterns of violence: a) direct violence against the ethnic “other” or out-group members who lived on the claimed territory or in-territory and b) indirect violence against part of

the ethnic “self” who happened to reside outside the claimed territory (lived on the out-territory). The ultimate shape and form, including the demographic composition of the claimed territories, were contingent on the conjunction of the two forms of violence.

I propose that in addition to making territorial demands, it was equally important to make claims on one’s “own” people, namely, to bring them together within the same borders. The two dimensions are often conflated as one and the same process. Although they are compatible and happened in the same process, they are nevertheless different. First, claims over ethnically homogenous and mixed territories involved both *gathering of in-group members* and *expelling of out-group members*: members of both groups found themselves on the claimed in-territory. Secondly, the process of bringing together one’s “own” people transcended the notion of territorial claims, as it also affected *in-group members who lived outside of the claimed territory (on the out-territory)*. Bringing those people into one’s state through territorial conquest was not feasible, simply because those territories were never claimed. The only option was collective resettlement. The pre-war political-structural changes in part created the conditions for collective resettlement of “desirable” people.

Whereas I focus on violence against the ethnic “other” in the next chapter, this chapter centers on targeted in-group members. Furthermore, although the Bosniak leadership in the Party of Democratic Action (SDA) also took an active part in those political-structural processes, albeit at a much smaller scale, in 1991 and 1992, the chapter focuses mainly on initiatives and policies by the Serb Democratic Party (SDS) and the Croat Democratic Community of BiH (HDZ). However, practices and structural changes promoted and implemented by the Bosniak SDA

neatly fit into SDS and HDZ structural patterns. In the conclusion, I will look at how the international community contributed to those political-structural changes in Bosnia.

Resettlements as “Natural Things Brought by a Dangerous Process of Reorganization of the State:” Serb Political-Structural Changes and Violence

Many scholars argue that the main drive behind the armed conflict among Bosnians was nationalism in general and the idea of “Greater Serbia” (or “Greater Croatia”) in particular (Denich, 1996; Donia and Fine, 1994; Ramet, 2006). The idea of “Greater Serbia,” as it was used in the context of the breakup of Yugoslavia, meant that all Serbs who previously lived in various Yugoslav republics should continue living in a common state. In the early 90s, rump Yugoslavia was identified as that common state. However, those who use the theory of “Greater Serbia” to explain the civil war in Bosnia fail to identify and analyze the particular processes by which Serbs were supposed to be brought together in one state. The common view is that the idea was limited to the acquisition of territories and their homogenization by way of expelling the ethnic “other.” It is very important but not sufficient to point to the expulsion of Croat and Bosniak civilians from what was regarded as the “Serb lands” during the war.

I set out to propose that to assemble the Bosnian Serb people in one state, whatever state that may be, and to bring the claimed territories under Serb control were two distinct, but closely connected, processes. These processes in turn were part of a larger, state-wide action of “exchanging” and resettling the population carried out by the three warring sides in Bosnia. The idea of assembling the Bosnian Serb people was divorced from territorial claims and singled out

in-group members (Serbs) as pre-destined targets. In particular, Serbs who happened to live on the out-territory, that is, outside the areas claimed by the Serb Democratic Party (SDS), were deemed “desirable” and “useful” in the “Serb lands.” By extension, they were regarded as “undesirable” in the Bosniak and Croat territories that they fled.¹⁷ The targeting of out-group members (Croats and Bosniaks), who were regarded “superfluous” and “dangerous” in the “Serb lands,” and territorial conquest happened largely in the same process.

The object of creating a Serb homogenous space was possible by completing those two heterogeneous processes involving different victim groups, the ethnic “other” and the ethnic “self.” In particular, those Serbs who happened to live outside the “Serb lands,” namely, in the areas with a Bosniak or Croat majority, had to be resettled in the in-territory from which Bosniaks and Croats were expelled. Since mass resettlement could only be realized by violent means, violence against Serb civilians by the Bosniak and Croat armed forces complemented, indeed were integral to, the Serb political objective of bringing together all Serbs in one state. Furthering one particular aspect of the same process inevitably means furthering the larger process, including the expulsion of Croats and Bosniaks.

The early territorial claims and corresponding changes in the state structure began in April 1991, when the Serb SDS formed an association (*udruživanje*) of 20 municipalities in the Krajina region (northwestern Bosnia), the “Community of Municipalities of the Bosnian Krajina”

¹⁷In the sense that those Serbs were regarded as “desirable” in the already claimed territories, it is possible to argue that the process of bringing people together is not after all completely divorced from territorial claims. However, for analytical purposes, I believe it is useful to regard the two processes—control of territory and people—as related but nevertheless distinct. In particular, it helps us distinguish violence against in-group and out-group members.

(“Dogovor,” 1991).¹⁸ A number of municipalities in other regions of Bosnia followed suit and formed their own associations. The associations of municipalities soon morphed into completely new structures, namely, five regional self-governments called Serb Autonomous Oblast (SAOs): the Autonomous Region of Krajina (ARK), the SAO Northern Bosnia, the SAO Semberija, the SAO Romania and Birač and the SAO Herzegovina (“Odluku”, November, 1991, p. 8). The *oblast* largely included municipalities or parts of municipalities with a Serb majority or plurality. None of those regions were territorially linked. Jurisdictions that were previously within the purview of the republican centre — until 1992, Bosnia had the status of a “socialist republic” within Yugoslavia— and municipalities were now claimed by the new regional bodies. According to the Bosnian Constitution, the only recognized administrative boundaries within the Bosnian republic were at the level of municipalities. No larger administrative units existed.

¹⁸According to the Bosnian Constitution (Amendment XLII), municipalities that are territorially and economically connected could form an association for the purpose of the “rational and effective realization of common interests and needs of working people and citizens...” (“Službeni,” 1989).



Map 2: Bosnian Serb Autonomous Areas

The Bosnian Serb leadership presented the creation of new autonomous regions as a way to “safeguard the *unity* of the Serb people in [Bosnia],” to “guarantee the *sovereignty* of the Serb people,” and to “separate the interests of the Serb people from the interests of the other peoples in [Bosnia]” (“Stenografske,” 21 November 1991, p.10. Emphasis added). The first objective—the unity of the Serb people—implies that the SAOs constituted only the building blocks of a future “Serb state,” but did not necessarily represent its final shape and form.¹⁹ There were many

¹⁹ If the Cutileiro Plan of March 1992 was accepted by all three parties, those newly created state structures might have represented the final shape of “Serb lands” in Bosnia. Cutileiro Plan more or less allocated the SAOs to Serbs, excluding those municipalities where Serbs were in minority. However, since the Cutileiro Plan, including maps, was not considered a final document, territorial allocations might have changed if the negotiations had continued. At first, all three sides accepted the plan. However,

Serbs who were left out of the “Serb lands” and who would have to be “united” with their ethnic kin in the *oblasts*, if the objective of uniting “the Serb people in Bosnia” were to be fully implemented. For this reason, the general process of regionalization was not only limited to the ethnically defined SAOs, but it also affected districts where Serbs were in a minority. In particular, the Serb Democratic Party (SDS) issued instructions to its municipal boards to create parallel “Serb municipalities,” with municipal government and administrative bodies, from existing municipalities where Bosniaks or Croats were in a majority (the so-called “Variant B”).²⁰

In particular, “Serb municipalities” were carved out of settlements and local communes with a Serb majority that territorially and administratively belonged to predominately Bosniak or Croat municipalities. This model applied to “all municipalities where the Serb people lived,” irrespective of their size and with no regard to the feasibility and effectiveness of those new administrative and political structures (“Upustvo,” 19 December 1991, p.1). Some of those municipalities would join neighbouring predominately Serb municipalities, others would remain separate administrative units. The decision to include areas where Serbs were in a minority would turn out to be highly consequential for them. From the very beginning, it was evident that this “regionalization” process would harm the very people whose interests those new structures and organizations purported to protect. The third session of the Bosnian Serb Assembly²¹ was a

Croats were the first to repudiate the plan, followed by Muslims/Bosniaks. The SDA then changed its position again and accepted the Cutileiro general agreement. Reportedly, Ambassador Zimmerman encouraged Alija Izetbegović to withdraw its support for the Cutileiro plan. See Burg & Shoup, 2000. pp. 108-113). Others argue that it was Muslims/Bosniaks who first rejected the plan (Trifunovska 1999).

²⁰ “Variant A” referred to the declaration of “Serb municipalities” in districts where Serbs already enjoyed absolute majority or plurality.

²¹ Serbs established the Assembly of the Serb People in Bosnia on 24 October 1991. This was in a direct response to the adoption by Bosnian Parliament (SDA and HDZ in particular) of documents that called

rare, if not the only, instance where the SDS policy of “regionalization” was openly criticized. As we will see in detail below, it was challenged on several key issues. First, the inclusion of municipalities where Bosniaks or Croats were in a majority was questioned. Secondly, the potential negative consequences of regionalization for Serbs outside of the Serb autonomous regions were also raised. And thirdly, the feasibility and functionality of those structures were in doubt.

Those specific issues could be subsumed under two general questions regarding territorial rule: 1) how to rule over municipalities included in their entirety into Serb autonomous regions but where another group had a plurality or majority, which was neither consulted nor agreed to the “regionalization” project; and 2) how to establish an effective “Serb rule” (*vlast*) over areas where Serbs were in a majority but territorially belonged to predominantly Bosniak or Croat municipalities. It is telling that the first question was hardly debated in 1991 and early 1992. However, the second issue was discussed at the very beginning of the regionalization process.

As to the application of the so-called “ethnic principle,” one of the delegates with the Bosnian Serb Assembly questioned the rationale behind the creation of the SAO Romanija-Birač and SAO Northern Bosnia, two most ethnically diverse regions. “...We speak of the Northern Bosnia (Doboj) region. What kind of region is that? We enumerated 18 municipalities, out of which we [Serbs] are in a majority only in two. What kind of regionalization is that?” (“Stenogram”, 11 December 1991, p. 34). Similarly, the delegate pointed out that the SAO Romanija-Birač consisted of eight municipalities, but only two had a Serb majority. He argued that

for sovereignty of Bosnia, (“Platform of Presidency” and the “SDA Memorandum”) on 15 October 1991. The SDS called this act a “parliamentary coup” (“parlamentarni puč”).

regionalization must take into consideration “not only territorial, but also economic and *cultural* [ethnic] and other aspects” (Ibid., p. 35. Emphasis added). In other words, only districts with a Serb majority or plurality should have been included into the SAOs.

Furthermore, from the very beginning, there were fears that the creation of “Serb municipalities” could only lead to catastrophic consequences for the Serb minority in those districts. At best, it would lead to the isolation and “ghettoization” of Serbs and only worsen the discrimination (largely in employment) and intimidation (armed groups and checkpoints and attendant restrictions on the freedom of movement) that they already experienced in Croat and Bosniak dominated municipalities. For critics, such as Professor Milivoje Nadaždin, a delegate in the Bosnian Serb Assembly, the formation of parallel “Serb municipalities” in particular amounted to both “economic self-punishment” and “political self-punishment” (p. 22). Agreement and negotiations with their fellow countrymen, Croats and Bosniaks, rather than regionalization were, according to Nadaždin, in the best interests of Serbs outside the Serb dominated regions:

What is practical? Please answer me. Well, we must employ the most common and known means of struggle from within [namely], the power of knowledge, arguments, the power of intellect, persistence, and ultimately agreement, and agreement, and agreement. Because in this way [i.e., regionalization], we only create one harmful ghetto [for Serbs]. Believe me. Well, give me an example... where we will be able to carry out anything concrete on the ground (p. 21).

Another delegate openly accused the SDS of misleading the Serb people who already felt powerless in Bosniak and Croat dominated municipalities:

Even those areas that joined certain municipalities do not know how they will realize their rights. I am telling you that this [regionalization] generates the feeling of powerlessness in people. Those people [Serb minorities] cannot achieve anything in this way [by the formation of the “Serb municipalities”], and now, we throw dust into their eyes, [making them believe] that they will in this way do and achieve something. I do not see that [will happen] (p. 24).

Those delegates who criticized the SDS urged that the best way to protect the human rights of the Serb minority outside of the predominately Serb regions was through rational arguments and agreements with Bosniaks and Croats. In other words, the SDS should do everything in its power to ensure that the Serb minority in those municipalities remained in their homes and thus respected the local *vlast* even though they were predominately Bosniak or Croat. Otherwise, Serbs were at risk of becoming the object of violence. Slobodanka Hrvačani, a delegate from Central Bosnia, directly linked the current SDS policy to the potential mass relocation of Serbs from Bosniak and Croat territories. She asked the Bosnian Serb Assembly whether the objective behind “regionalization” was in fact to create the conditions for Serbs who were left out of the “Serb lands” to leave their homes and be resettled in those territories claimed by the SDS.

Do not believe that all Serbs are courageous...because there are many [Serbs in Central Bosnia] who voted in the plebiscite [to stay in Yugoslavia], but they voted

through their friends in order to conceal it. So, if we formed such a Serb municipality, I am interested to know what we will gain by it, and what we will lose. It is true that we are outvoted. *If we need to be resettled, then all of this discussion is in vein.* But if we were to remain here to live, I would recommend that we form a commission which will give a model how to act in Central Bosnia, that is, [to analyze] what we will gain, and what we will lose (p. 25. Emphasis added.).

In fact, Radovan Karadžić, the President of SDS and later the President of Serb Republic in Bosnia, later unapologetically informed the Bosnian Serb Assembly that the resettlement of population is a “natural” consequence of restructuring the state:

Most likely there will be various resettlements [*razna preseljenja*], but nothing must be done under pressure. We see that Serbs are leaving Livno, etc. And all of these are natural things brought by a dangerous process, a harsh process of restructuring the state (“Stenogram”, 18 March 1992, p. 64).

In other words, the SDS was from the very beginning aware of risks that new political-territorial structures would lead to the sacrifice of a part of the Serb people in Bosnia. Furthermore, the party was also aware that those new structures had little chance to become operational and effective in delivering services to and protecting Serbs. In municipalities, such as Bosanski Brod, Croat and Bosniak authorities simply dismantled the newly created “Serb municipality”:

We should not rush with the formation of Serb municipalities, as it was a case in Bosanski Brod, where we formed a Serb municipality and the HOS [a Croatian Armed Forces, a paramilitary unit] and “Green Berets” [a Muslim paramilitary] came and said you cannot do that (“Stenogram”, 18 March 1992, p. 21).

Other municipalities that were formed were simply ineffective or non-operational. For example, a delegate from Srebrenica insisted on the formation of a “Serb municipality” of Srebrenica, while at the same time admitting that such a structure would be useless for the Serb minority in Srebrenica district:

I completely understand that this political measure will not have any concrete effects in the current situation. This is the way how we will protect ourselves... However, it is true that we will not be able to achieve anything now, but we have to do it. I think that the major problem is that we cannot now have any effectual power nor could we achieve it (“Stenogram”, 11 December 1991, p. 37).

Another delegate echoed his colleague from Srebrenica:

One will assess on the terrain where to form such municipality and where not to form it, but with the consultation [with the Main Board of the SDS]... I think that [the creation of Serb municipalities] will not hurt, but the question is whether it will be efficient everywhere... The issue of executive organs is another question. We did not solve it here either (p.36).

What this delegate meant by saying that “we did not solve it here either” is that those new structures were pretty ineffective even in territories with a Serb majority, let alone areas where Serbs were in a minority. In particular, there were municipalities with a Serb majority or plurality that continued to apply laws and acts legislated in Sarajevo, including those that were adopted without the SDS vote:

I have to disappoint you and to tell you that we in Krajina have nothing. The state of Bosnian-Herzegovina better functions, I am sure, in Banjaluka than in Zenica [predominately Muslim]. We, together with experts and ministers, can analyze each region separately and to show that laws of BiH function better in Banjaluka than in Zenica... We got dispersed municipalities where the presidents are strongly loyal to the BiH state. We have several laws adopted without us in the Assembly of BiH (“Stenogram”, 18 March 1992, pp. 57-58).

Another delegate also confirmed that the regional government in Krajina (Banjaluka) is either non-existent or ineffective: “In Krajina, practically we don’t even have the government (of the Autonomous Region), and even if it functions, its influence over the municipal executive organs is nil” (p. 38).

If the SDS really wanted Serbs to remain and live with Bosniaks and Croats who formed the overwhelming majority in those municipalities, then they should not have lightly adopted the decision to form “Serb municipalities.” In other words, the policy of “parallel municipalities”

made sense, only if its objective was to facilitate the expulsion of Serbs by Bosniak and Croat authorities. The war violence proved Hrvačanin and other delegates who opposed the SDS policy right. What was “gained” was an ethnically homogenous entity established in one part of Bosnia; what was “lost” were ancestral homes of Serbs and their collective presence in other parts of the country.

Furthermore, the regionalization and the creation of Serb municipalities had the potential to generate chaos and confusion in the country. The Serb SDS may have initiated it, but two other parties, the Croat Democratic Community (HDZ) and, to lesser extent, the Bosniak Party of Democratic Action (SDA), quickly jumped on the bandwagon. Here is a warning voiced by one of the delegates during the third session of the Bosnian Serb Assembly:

We are witnessing that the Muslim people in Bijeljina are forming their Muslim municipality, [an initiative] that was also attempted in Banja Luka...I think that chaos will ensue, mildly said...In my opinion, all of these [the SDS regionalization] are political initiatives that now Muslims copy. Most likely Croats will start [with their own regionalization]. This [process] is not particular to Serbs. Others do the same (Stenogram”, 11 December 1991, pp. 18-19).

For example, Ključ municipality in Krajina region had 49.5 percent of Serbs and 47.6 percent of Bosniaks. In response to the Serb regionalization project, which incorporated Ključ municipality in the Serb Autonomous Region of Krajina, the Muslim leadership at the municipal level (the Democratic Party of Action [SDA] and the Muslim Bosniak Organization [MBO]) declared and

formed a “parallel” municipality called “Bosnian Ključ” in January 1992. Only areas where Muslims were in a majority were included in this new “Muslim municipality.” In other municipalities similar steps were attempted or taken: Gacko (Kula), Bijeljina, Nevesinje (Gornje Polje), and Banja Luka. It is interesting to note the rationale for the creation of the “Muslim municipality of Bosnian Ključ.” There was no difference between Serb and Bosniak narratives and justification for the creation of new political-territorial units:

Muslims should, as the four speakers underlined, respond in kind to the SDS measures and form their own Muslim municipality of Ključ. The effective response to the regionalization [by SDS] and the creation of new political-territorial units is this *reciprocity*...It is the question of equal representation of the Muslim population in our municipality that is threatened and of humiliation [of Muslims] as a political people (“Tribina”, 16 January 1992. Emphasis added.).

When the war broke out in April in 1992, this “reciprocity” in political-territorial structures mirrored “reciprocity” in violence, such as “reciprocal exchanges” of population. When in November 1991, Karadžić made his speech in which he called for the creation of a Serb state, he warned that *reciprocity in the (mis)treatment of the minority would be the rule in the new Bosnia*: “Everything will be based on the principle of reciprocity. How they treat Serbs, we will treat them [Croats and Bosniaks]. It won’t be only us who will be displaced...” (“Plebiscit”, November 1991). But in the same breath, Karadžić also promised Serbs that “we will not flee into mountains, into woods and hills...” But Serbs did flee, many of whom never returned to their homes again. When Bosniak and Bosnian Croat forces expelled them, they moved into

homes of Bosniaks and Croats who were, in turn, expelled by the Bosnian Serb forces. Indeed, the Bosnian war was so bloody and brutal precisely because violence was based on “the principle of reciprocity.” For the homogenization by way of expulsion of an ethnic minority by one group to be effective, it also had to be carried out by the other group (for the asymmetry in numbers of the expelled and killed, see the first chapter). As we will see in the next chapter, there was a degree of collusion between the Bosnian Serb, Croat, and Bosniak nationalists, none of whom really wanted that the expelled population return to their pre-war homes.

“We should not return people who fled the areas with a Serb or Muslim majority”:

Bosnian Croat Political-Structural Changes and Violence

In January 1992, the Bosnian government commenced preparations for a referendum on independence, scheduled to take place on February 29 and March 1. On February 9, the Central Board of the Bosnian Croat HDZ (Croatian Democratic Community), the nationalist party that won the most votes among the Croatian community in Bosnia and thus participated in the governing coalition after the 1990 election, met in a Herzegovina town, Livno. On the agenda was the referendum question, which the Bosnian National Assembly adopted, without the SDS vote, on January 25: “Are you for a sovereign and independent Bosnia and Herzegovina, a *state of equal citizens*, peoples—Muslims, Serbs, and Croats—and other peoples who live in it?” (Emphasis added). The Bosnian Croat HDZ concluded that the political decision to hold the referendum on independence was made in “a rushed and forced way without the harmonization of the positions of the three peoples” (“Izvod iz zapisnika”, 29 January 1992). This is a puzzling statement. The Serb SDS rejected the idea of referendum on the grounds that talks on

restructuring of Bosnia should be finalized first. Without the support of the Croat HDZ party, the Bosnian National Assembly could not have adopted the referendum question in the first place. Clearly, the Bosnian Croat HDZ leadership had a change of heart about support for Bosnian independence.

They warned that the referendum question, as it was formulated, heralded the loss of the status of “constituent people” for Serbs and Croats, who would become ethnic minorities in independent Bosnia. Furthermore, the referendum signalled, in the view of the Croat HDZ, the disappearance of the “historical sovereignty” (*povjesni suverenitet*) of Croats in Bosnia. As a result, the HDZ Central Board adopted an alternative referendum question (hence the “Livno question”): “Are you for a sovereign and independent Bosnia and Herzegovina, *the state union of constitutive and sovereign peoples*, Croat, Muslim, and Serb, *in their ethnic territory* (cantons)?” (“Sjednica”, 9 February 1992. Emphasis added.). Out of 147 delegates, an overwhelming majority, 140 members, voted in favour of the Croatian version of the referendum question.

What the Bosnia Croat leadership sought to achieve with the “Livno question” was the recognition of a regional entity, the Croatian Community Herzeg-Bosnia, which emerged in November 1991 and was modeled on the Serb Autonomous Regions. The so-called “historical sovereignty,” which the Croat HDZ evoked in relation to the Bosnian referendum on independence, called for the re-creation of “Croatian Banovina,” a Croat self-governing territory within interwar Yugoslavia, also known as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, which included present-day Croatia and a significant portion of Bosnia. In other words, Herzeg-Bosnia was a political and territorial expression of the idea of “Greater Croatia,” namely, that Bosnian

Croats and the territories they inhabited were an inalienable part of the larger Croat corpus and the Croat state.²² For the Croatian President, Franjo Tuđman, the existing borders of Croatia, and, by implication the borders of Bosnia, were “unnatural” (“Zapisnik”, 17 September 1992, p. 1, tape 13).

The Bosnian Croat HDZ (Travnik and Herzegovina branches in particular) also contemplated a referendum as to whether Bosnian Croats wanted to join Croatia. At this early political stage, the declaration of “Croatian Banovina” in Bosnia and the referendum on the annexation of parts of Bosnia to Croatia were regarded as “the first phase towards the definitive resolution of the [Croatian] question and the creation of a sovereign Croatia in its ethnic [*etničkim*] and historical (now possible) borders... This people [Bosnian Croats] will not accept under any circumstance any other option but [to be within] the borders of free Croatia.” (“Zaključci”, 12 November 1991). In other words, the Bosnian Croat HDZ, like its Serb counterpart, advocated for the idea of bringing all Croats in a common state. Although the referendum never happened, it is remarkable that the debate took place only three days after the Serb party SDS organized a plebiscite among the Bosnian Serb population on the question on whether they wanted to remain in Yugoslavia. The Serbs overwhelming voted in favour of Yugoslavia.²³

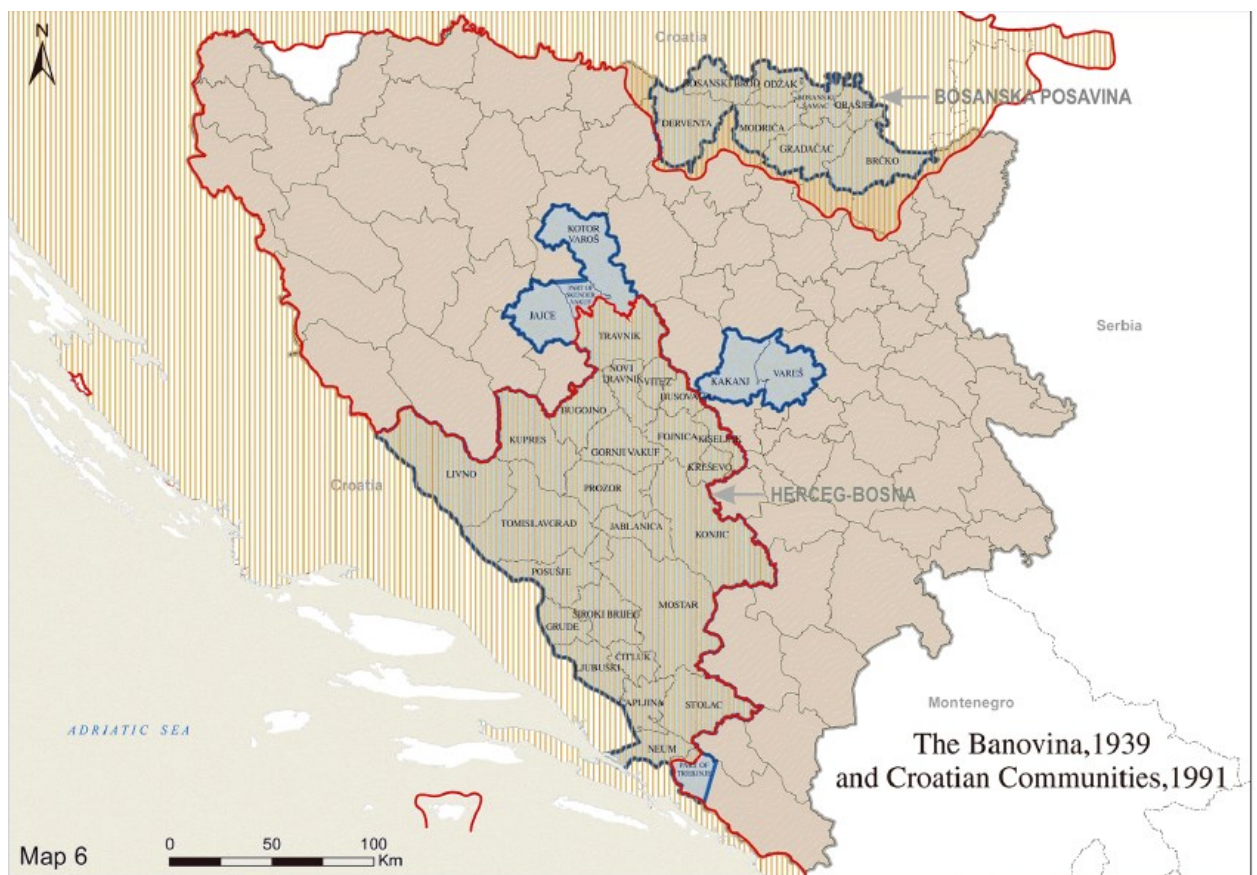
²² In the Preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, “Banovina Croatia” was named as part of Croatian statehood (*Hrvatska državnost*). The incorporation of “Croatian Banovina” into Croatian statehood was also part of the political program of the party (HDZ) of Franjo Tuđman. See “Zapisnik”, 17 September 1992, p. 1, tape 13.

²³ As we saw earlier, the Bosnian Serb SDS leadership did not frame its demands in terms of reuniting with Serbia, but rather of remaining within Yugoslavia. However, there were politicians, especially those from the Krajina region, who openly called for the creation of “Greater Serbia,” in which Krajina would represent the “western borders of Serbia.”

Although the Bosnian Croat HDZ participated in the coalition government with the Bosnian Serb and Bosniak nationalist parties, it expressed a profound dissatisfaction with the political status of Bosnian Croats after the elections. Whereas the Bosnian Serb SDS complained about its marginalization and exclusion from the decision making process at the state level, mostly by being outvoted by Bosniak and Bosnian Croat nationalist parties, the Bosnian Croat HDZ focused on its position and status at the municipal level. It lamented that the elections did not result in the “factual power” (*faktičku vlast*) of the party, despite having won the most votes among the Bosnian Croat community: “Thus, it is essential to speed up the process of taking over of power [*preuzimanje vlasti*] starting from municipalities up to the Republic” (“Izvod iz zapisnika”, 4 April 1991). Only state restructuring could, according to the Bosnian Croat nationalists, enable the Bosnian Croat HDZ to exercise “factual power.”

The Bosnian Croat party insisted that the future of Bosnia depended on its internal structural and territorial reorganization, i.e., on the creation and separation of the “Croat regions” from Serb and Bosniak regions: “We believe that without clearly demarcated Croat, Serb, and Muslim regions... there is no possibility for the future for [Bosnia]” (“U razgovoru”, January 1992). The Bosnian Croat HDZ was organized into regional branches, two of which were particularly influential in this political-structural processes: the Herzegovina Regional Community HDZ BiH and the Travnik Regional Community HDZ BiH. The two regional branches “jointly and unanimously decide that the Croat people in Bosnia and Herzegovina must finally adopt a decisive and active policy that should lead to the realization of our centuries-old dream, a

common Croatian state (“Zaključci”, 12 November 1991).²⁴ The Bosnian Croat leadership used the newly established Serb Autonomous Regions (SAOs) as a pretext to start its own “regionalization” project, in effect denying Bosnian sovereignty: “...we will [support Bosnia’s sovereignty] as long as others do not start dividing Bosnia” (“Odluku o uspostavi”, 18 November 1991). If the Bosnian Serb party (SDS) took steps towards the disintegration of Bosnia, the Bosnian Croat party (HDZ) would simply join them.



Map 3: The Croatian Banovina (1939) and Herzeg-Bosnia (1991)

²⁴ In order to implement those political objectives, the Bosnian Croat HDZ regarded as necessary to “better prepare *militarily* for conflicts with all forces that will try to stop this inevitable process of the formation of a free Croatian state” (“Obrazloženje”, emphasis added.).

In November 1991, the Bosnian Croat leadership established a “political, cultural, economic, and regional entity (*područna cijelina*),” Herzeg-Bosnia (“Odluku o uspostavi”, 18 November 1991). It was justified in terms of “protection from all possible attacks on the Croatian people and from existing plans according to which everything that is Croat and Catholic was destroyed and continues to be destroyed” (“Obrazloženje”). The Bosnian Croat leadership did not see any contradiction between this political action and their recent condemnation of the same political processes initiated by the Serb leadership in Croatia (the so-called “Republic of Serb Krajina”). In the course of the “regionalization” process, the Bosnian Croat HDZ resorted to the same mechanisms that the Bosnian Serb SDS employed, namely, using the municipality as the foundation block for the building of the “Croat state.”²⁵ Herzeg-Bosnia consisted of 30 municipalities in Western Herzegovina and Central Bosnia. Unlike the Serb Autonomous Regions whose borders were not entirely defined in 1991, Herzeg-Bosnia represented the final shape and form of the “Croat lands.”²⁶ Furthermore, the incorporation of Central Bosnia and the fact that the Croat HDZ included entire municipalities in which Bosniaks enjoyed either an absolute majority or a plurality rendered the newly created Croat “state” ethnically diverse.²⁷

²⁵ However, there were some differences between the Serb and Croat approaches. Perhaps because the Croat regionalization took off at the moment when the SDS was transforming the “communities of municipalities” into Serb Autonomous Regions (SAOs), the Bosnian Croat HDZ established the regional self-governments directly, skipping formal agreements among municipalities to enter into an association. The fact that the 30 municipalities, which were claimed as “Croat lands” or Herzeg-Bosnia, were territorially linked probably also influenced the pace of the process. (In contrast, the SAOs were not territorially connected.)

²⁶ The status and position of the so-called Croatian Community of Bosnian Posavina, which was territorially disconnected from Herzeg-Bosnia, were uncertain and in doubt from the very beginning. Zagreb offered the Posavina Croats a dual, Croatian-Bosnian, citizenship as consolation for their territorial isolation and disconnection from Herzeg-Bosnia.

²⁷ Only two municipalities, Trebinje (Ravno) and Skender Vakuf (Dobradići), both with a Serb majority, were partially included in Herzeg-Bosnia. Kupres, another Serb dominated municipality, was also

In terms of ethnic composition, Western Herzegovina was mostly ethnically homogenous, while Central Bosnia was ethnically mixed. Specifically, Western Herzegovina region consisted of 11 municipalities, nine of which had an absolute Croat majority. In Mostar, the “capital” of Herzeg-Bosnia, no ethnic group enjoyed an absolute majority.²⁸ It is mainly due to the ethnic heterogeneity of Central Bosnia that the Bosnian Croat HDZ rejected the so-called “ethnic principle,” namely, that the ethnic composition of districts served as a major criterion for the restructuring of Bosnia. According to this principle, only Western Herzegovina would meet the requirements for self-government: not even the Bosniak SDA leader, Alija Izetbegović, challenged the HDZ claim to this region (nationalist narratives, including the so-called “ethnic principle,” are discussed in the next chapter). However, Izetbegović objected and obstructed the formation and work of Herzeg-Bosnia, including its municipal political and administrative bodies. Political struggles to establish rule (*vlast*) over ethnically mixed municipalities heralded a full blown war between Croat and Bosniak armed forces in Central Bosnia.

Although the Bosnian Croat HDZ declared Herzeg-Bosnia in November 1991, they formally established “Croat municipalities” with executive and administrative bodies across Herzeg-Bosnia in May 1992 (“Statutarnu odluku”, 15 May 1992). “Croat municipalities” were also introduced in the territory outside Herzeg-Bosnia, such as Zenica, Zavidovići and Usora. Prior to the formal declaration of “Croat municipalities,” the Bosnian Croat HDZ took “factual power” by positioning the “Croatian Armed Forces” (HOS), a paramilitary unit armed by Zagreb, on the

claimed by both Serbs and Croats. In other words, there was little territorial overlap between Serbs and Croats, as both groups in their struggle for the territory targeted predominately Bosniak municipalities.

²⁸ In 1991, Croats made up 33.8 %, Bosniaks 34.8 %, and Serbs 19 % of Mostar municipality (Burg & Shoup 2000, p. 31).

territories claimed as the “Croat lands.” For example, when Karadžić called for a speedy take-over of power, he turned to the “Croatian model:” “Here [power take-over], Croats went further. They don’t wait for [things] to be finalized, but they have occupied with their army [HOS] the territories of [Bosnia] that they considered theirs...Now, we will have to completely establish our *vlast* on the ground” (“Stenogram”, 18 March 1992, pp.19-20).

The Bosniak SDA leadership did not have problems accepting the military structure of Herzeg-Bosnia, the HVO (or the HOS) in 1992. Indeed, the two armies established cooperation, albeit a fragile one, in order to halt and reverse the advances of the Bosnian Serb armed forces. This cooperation was possible despite the fact that each side regarded the army of the other as “illegal.”²⁹ However, it was the establishment of Croat civilian authorities and not military structures that ultimately defined relations between Bosnian Croats and Bosniaks in Central Bosnia:

The key political question in regard to relations with Muslims is how to maintain mutual peace and how to avoid an armed conflict, which is looming, and finally how to ensure the legal and factual implementation of our decisions on the

²⁹ On 8 April 1992, the SDA-led War Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina issued a decree by which it appropriated the existing Republican Territorial Defence, which was later, in June, transformed into the “Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina” (“Odluku o ukidanju”, 8 April 1992). The Bosnian Presidency quickly declared illegal all existing armed forces on Bosnian territory and demanded their subordination to the Bosnian army (“Odluku o objedinjavanju”, 9 April 1992). The Assembly of the Croatian Community of Herzeg-Bosnia, called “Presidency,” created the Croatian Defence Council (HVO) as “the supreme defence body of the Croat people in the Croat Community of Herzeg-Bosnia” (“Odluku o formiranju,” 8 April 1992). The Bosnian Croat party HDZ also treated all military units not subordinated to the HVO as “illegal or enemy” forces (“Zapovjed,” 10 April 1992; “Zapovjed,” 8 May 1992).

formation and functioning of organs of executive power in the territory of HZ [Herzeg-Bosnia]. Because without effective power [*vlast*] of the HVO, a situation of a chaos will ensue. We must do everything to avoid the conflict with Muslims, but also [to ensure] that the executive power of HVO is established based on decision by this presidency (“Izvješće”, 14 August 1992, p.4).

The Croatian President, Franjo Tuđman, demanded from Alija Izetbegović, the President of the Muslim Party of Democratic Action (SDA) and the President of Bosnian Presidency, to recognize “the practical situation of the Croat people in [Bosnia]” (“Zapisnik”, 21 July 1992, p. 4, Tape 7). What “the practical situation” entailed was the recognition of Croat structures, both civilian and military, established on the territory claimed as Herzeg-Bosnia. It is interesting, but not surprising considering his Communist past, to note that Tuđman compared HVO troops in Central Bosnia with Tito’s partisan brigades. Specifically, he pointed out that Tito routinely replaced civilian authorities in those territories where his Partisans militarily defeated the enemy (p. 7, Tape 21). The Bosniak SDA reacted to the formation of “Croat municipalities” in the same way that they responded to “Serb municipalities,” namely, they boycotted Croat structures and created their “own” “Muslim municipalities.” They too used force to establish their own *vlast*:

While accepting in principle the HVO as the organ of provisional executive power on the territory of HZ HB [Croatian Community Herzeg-Bosnia], at the same time the SDA demands from its members and Muslims in general not to participate in such power [*vlast*]. As a result of such policy, we have instability in many municipalities and attempts to establish a parallel power [*paralelne vlasti*], a

Muslim *vlast* beside the Croatian one, especially in Central Bosnia. Tensions that arise from this have reached a climax in some of our municipalities, such as Travnik, [Novi] Travnik, Bugojno, [Gornji] Vakuf, etc. A possibility that Muslim extremists would take an extreme measure and use force in order to obstruct our organs of power and [army] units is not excluded, which could have consequences of greater proportions (“Izvješće”, 14 August 1992, pp. 2-3).

In January 1993, when the political conflict was transferred to the battlefields, Mate Boban, the President of Herzeg-Bosnia, accused the top SDA leadership of escalating already heightened interethnic tensions in Mostar by ordering SDA party members to boycott the Croat local governments. SDA elected delegates, as well as teachers, policemen, judges, and professors refused, on orders from Sarajevo, to participate in institutions of Herzeg-Bosnia. In retaliation, the HDZ leadership in Mostar replaced SDA members who boycotted the Croat Mostar administration with Bosniaks from other political parties:³⁰

Through their own party, Muslims participated with 50 percent in *vlast* in Mostar. In such provisional government, three [Muslims] left, two stayed, and three [Muslims] joined, but they are not from the SDA party. So, in Mostar, there is a presidency with 50:50 [ratio], that is, a provisional executive body that directs civilian life in the city of Mostar. It is like this everywhere where Muslims want [to participate], but the SDA party forbid Muslims to take part in such *vlast* (“Zapisnik,” 15 January 1993, p. 2, Tape 10).

³⁰ In fact, the HDZ Mostar went further and outlawed the SDA political party as a “terrorist” organization (“Odluka”, 14 September 1993).

The SDA fiercely protested. For SDA members sitting in Sarajevo, only SDA members elected in the 1990 elections had the moral and political authority to represent the Bosniak people.

“[Muslims in Mostar] are not represented in *vlast*. It is a potentially dangerous situation. Legal *vlasti* that were elected in free elections are simply dissolved in many places” (Ibid., p. 4, Tape 9).³¹ Izetbegović made a direct link between the existence of Bosnian Croat structures and the outbreak of armed conflict between Bosniak and Croat armed forces:

After that [the Vance-Owen plan] Herzeg-Bosnia started even more to affirm itself and impose itself by force. The provinces of Mostar and Travnik are declared Croat provinces. The [armed] conflict in Travnik began when one morning the whole Travnik woke up to Croatian flags... Instead of [equality] exclusion from power [*razvlašćivanje*] of the Muslim people continues across the territory of Herzeg-Bosnia, *razvlašćivanje*... *Since the exclusively Croat rule was established in the provinces of Mostar and Travnik, of course an [armed] conflict ensued*” (“Zapisnik,” 24 April 1993, pp. 3-4, Tape 4. Emphasis added.).

Equally, if not even more, important, the Bosniak SDA leadership maintained that Herzeg-Bosnia would never be functional and stable after the war, as Bosniaks would continue

³¹ When the Serb SDS withdrew from the republican institutions in 1992, the SDA replaced them with Serbs from other political parties, without being much concerned about the 1990 elections results. Later in 1994, the Bosnian Croat HDZ complained about the Muslim SDA practice of placing “Alija’s Croats,” i.e., Croats who were not HDZ members, in the newly formed entity, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH). Ever since the 1990 elections, anybody who did not belong to or disagreed with the policies of the nationalist parties SDA, SDS or HDZ, automatically lost legitimacy to represent Bosnian citizens.

boycotting Croat institutions in peacetime. In particular, in those municipalities where Bosniaks had the majority, the elections would always result in a “Muslim *vlast*” at the municipal level, an outcome that would generate instability in post-war Herzeg-Bosnia. (“Zapisnik”, 21 July 1992, p. 3, Tape 8). Indeed, the Muslim/Bosniak leadership insisted that only post-war democratic elections could legitimize any political and territorial structures in Bosnia, a position that made the Croat HDZ (and Serb SDS) highly suspicious:

Muslim offers that we address all essential questions after the war, after the victory over our common enemy [Serbs], are fine in principle, if behind those offers do not lie intentions to dictate, also from the position of force and ethnic dominance, the constitution [*državnopravni odnos*] and structures that could not be acceptable to the Croat people in [Bosnia] (“Izvješće”, 14 August 1992, p. 2).

In other words, both the Bosniak SDA and the Bosnian Croat HDZ evoked fair and open elections as the only legitimate basis for the exercise of power, but only in areas where their respective ethnic groups were in the majority or plurality. However, both parties ignored the very notion of majority rule in the areas dominated by the other. The Serb SDS behaved the same. Woodward (1995) makes a link between the territorial war in Bosnia, the expulsion of population, and a post-war vote:

And the EU’s insistence on referendum to legitimize those [national] rights, while accepting the validity of only some, provided the impetus—whatever the spontaneous reasons (envy, hatred, competition)—to expel people from their

homes and jobs on the basis of their ethnicity and to create ethnically pure areas through *population transfers and expulsions as a prelude to a vote*. The goal was not territorial acquisition but statehood. For that, only international recognition would complete the task (p. 271. Emphasis added.)

I argue that political-territorial structures, the contours of which emerged before the war, produced war victims. Changes in state-structures (SAOs and Herzeg-Bosnia) and the building of parallel ethnic structures at the municipal level by all three sides did not only play a key role in the expulsion of the out-group members, but also victimized in-group members who found themselves in the “wrong” territory. In the previous section where I discussed the Serb SDS policy, I focused on Serb structures before the war in order to show that the expulsion and exchanges of population was foreseen already in 1991. Now, I want to put those structure-violence relations in the context of the war, namely, a conflict between Bosniaks and Croats.

Although until the very end of the war (and after the war) the Bosnian Croat HDZ remained committed to the idea of Herzeg-Bosnia, it, as a result of the war with the Bosniak army in 1993-1994, adjusted and reframed its territorial claims in terms of “defended” municipalities (predominately Croat municipalities in Western Herzegovina) and “undefended” municipalities in Central Bosnia (lost to the Bosniak army). What is not enough acknowledged is that the processes of both disintegration and expansion of “ethnic spaces” shed light on two interdependent forms of violence that characterized the Bosnian civil war: a) indirect violence against in-group members in, what Bosnia Croat HDZ called, “undefended” municipalities: and b) direct violence against out-group members on “defended” territory. Indeed, the sacrifice of

part of the ethnic “self” becomes prominent under the condition of disintegration and the surrender, through military defeats or diplomatic negotiations, of territories.

But military defeats and the loss of territories did not represent an obstacle for the implementation of the ultimate political end, namely, bringing all Croats into one state. As the Bosniak armed forces soundly defeated the Bosnian Croat army (HVO), supported by regular Croatian troops, the Bosnian Croat HDZ embarked on the implementation of one last measure: the *en masse* “evacuation” of the Croatian people from the “lost” territory. If the Bosnian Croat leadership had to give up the “ethnic space” (Central Bosnia), it would happen under particular conditions and under their own terms: paradoxically, “Croat lands” had to be emptied of the Croat population. The Bosnian Croat party insisted that the surrender must be complete and total.

When the Bosniak SDA and Bosnian Croat HDZ signed the Washington agreement in March 1994, establishing a Croat-Muslim/Bosniak federation (FBiH),³² both nationalist parties engaged in a “demographic race,” manipulating the civilian population—both in-group and out-group members— in order to affect the demographic picture in strategic municipalities. The notion of “strategic municipalities” went beyond a geographic location and an access to resources and

³² Zagreb pressured the Bosnian Croat HDZ to accept the Washington Agreement, arguing that the agreement allowed for the division of Bosnia, something that Tudman always advocated for and now was accepted by the international community, and made Bosnia fall under the “Croatian sphere.” Furthermore, Tudman accepted the Washington Agreement, because he was promised by the West that Zagreb would enjoy “absolute support” to re-integrate, by military or diplomatic means, the Croatian territories that were under Croatian Serb control and monitored by the United Nations. See “Zapisnik,” 4 March 1994, tape two, pp. 1-2, tape three, pp.1-2. In August 1995, the Croatian armed and police forces launched an offensive, “Oluja,” expelling over 200,000 Krajina Serbs, killing over 700 hundred civilians who could not or did not want to flee, mostly the elderly, and burning down thousands of Serb houses. In contrast, the region of Eastern Slavonia, Baranja, and Western Srijem, also under the Serb control but with smaller Serb population compared to Krajina, was peacefully reintegrated into the Croatian state.

infrastructure. “Strategic municipalities” were defined first and foremost in terms of ethnic demography. In particular, areas in which one group or the other was in a plurality but fell short of an absolute majority, were deemed “strategic.” Just as the Bosniak SDA had hoped that the Vance-Owen plan would allow for Bosniak proportional representation based on the pre-war census in certain municipalities controlled by the Croat HVO, now the Bosnian Croat leadership entertained, at least briefly, the possibility that the Washington agreement would reverse some of the military losses (for example in Bugojno and Vareš).

It put hopes in future democratic elections and the political gains resulting from the pre-war size of the Croat community (if restored) in “strategic” municipalities.

Mr. President [Tuđman]...municipal bodies of *vlast* are being reconstructed based on the elections from 1990. Nowhere where we now hold factual *vlast* we will lose based on those election results, because everywhere the HDZ, that is, Croats, are in a majority in the municipal assembly and in those municipal bodies. And we can gain areas that we factually lost, such as Bugojno, because the HDZ won there. In such a way, we can get Vareš, where the HDZ did not win, but the SDP [Socialist Democratic Party], in which there are Croats, won (“Zapisnik,” 2 September 1994, p.6, Tape 1).

This scenario was possible only under the condition of the “reciprocal return” of expelled people, which the Bosnian Croat HDZ promoted in the aftermath of their defeat on the front. However, the Bosniak SDA, now embolden with a series of military victories and territorial conquests, had

a different plan and held a different vision of how its “own” territory should look like in the future. By this time, the Bosniak leadership gave up the idea of a centralized and unitary Bosnia and instead focused on conquest and homogenization of their own “Muslim” state within Bosnia (Woodward 1995, p. 310). In fact, the Bosniak SDA had no intention of implementing the Washington agreement and instead undertook measures to ensure that Croats could not count on demographic strength to restore their political power after the war.

In 1994 and early 1995, the period when the Bosnian Croat and Bosniak armies went back into a cooperation mode and started to prepare for a joint, and final, assault on Serb territory, the Bosniak party SDA rejected a HDZ proposal for the “reciprocal return” of Bosniak and Croat civilians to their home municipalities. The Bosnian Croat leadership argued that behind this rejection lied an intention to change the pre-war ethnic composition of the “Croat” municipalities. The Bosniak leadership resorted to the manipulation of its own people in order to achieve this political goal. In particular, when the Bosnian Serb army expelled Bosniaks from the Republika Srpska, the Bosniak SDA strategically resettled them in those municipalities where Croats were in a large number before the war but now were under control of the Bosniak armed forces (“Zapisnik”, 27 March 1995, p. 2, Tape 2; “Zapisnik”, 2 September 1994, p. 7, Tape 4; “Zapisnik”, 17 September 1992, pp. 1-2, Tape 10).

While protesting the resettlement of Bosniak displaced people in “strategic” municipalities, the Bosnian HDZ leaders simultaneously took measures that in fact complemented the Bosniak objectives of rendering those areas predominately Bosniak. The HDZ party was not at all interested in “reciprocal return” as their initial demands on the Bosniak SDA seemed to suggest.

The Bosnian Croat party instead advocated for “humane resettlement,” as the HDZ euphemistically called the process of mutual expulsion and resettlement of the population. The HDZ party did not only sacrifice Croats from municipalities where they made up less than 10 percent of the total population, but also Croats from those municipalities where they constituted up to 40 percent had to be resettled. *The political-administrative structures that were established before the war now served a particular purpose, namely, to organize and facilitate the movement of the Croat population from Central Bosnia to Western Herzegovina.* For example, during a session of Croatian Community Herzeg Bosnia held on 29 April 1993, the emphasis was on efforts to resettle Croats from Central Bosnia. It was recognized that to achieve that goal it was necessary to establish better coordination and communication between municipal HVOs (political and administrative bodies) and the central government of Herzeg-Bosnia (“Sjednica HZ HB,” 1993, p.5). The following are select excerpts from that session that underlined the HDZ policy of “humane resettlement” of population:

I believe that RBiH [Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina] cannot exist. A common army and police command cannot exist. It is necessary to establish our own [structures]. *It is necessary to plan and organize resettlement of population.* What we can defend militarily will remain ours (p. 3, emphasis added).

...Crimes [against Muslim civilians by HVO] in Ahmići nobody can justify. A huge damage was done [to the HVO]. The reaction of the UNPROFOR (the English) is devastating for us. I believe that Mr. Boban and Mr. Izetbegović must

visit Central Bosnia. *It is necessary to work on planned resettlement* (p. 4, emphasis added).

... We must concretely work on a planned *usmjeravanje* [“directing,” i.e. resettlement] of the Croat population from Zenica, but also from other areas towards Travnik and Vitez (the areas of Croatian provinces) (p.5).

In June and July 1993, when the Bosniak armed forces were turning the table on the battlefield, the President of Herzeg-Bosnia, Jadranko Prlić, recommended to the President of Herzeg-Bosnia, Mate Boban, to issue a decision to “withdraw all military units together with the *Croatian population* from the territory outside of the defined Croatian provinces” (“Zaključci,” 13 July 1993, emphasis added). At the end of July 1993, it was decided to organize logistics among municipal HVOs and to ask Croatia to help with the “evacuation” of the Croatian people from Central Bosnia. At the same time, “considering the situation on the ground in relations to *migration trends of the Muslim population*, it was unanimously decided to expand the Services for Exchanges of Detainees and other Persons [in cooperation] with representatives of Mostar, Čapljina, Livno, and Stolac...” (“Zapisnik”, 29 July 1993, p.5. Emphasis added.). In other words, municipal HVO structures were coordinating with the central Herzeg-Bosnia to simultaneously expel Bosniaks from “defended” municipalities and to “evacuate” the Croat population from “undefended” municipalities, the areas that were previously claimed as “Croat lands” but were lost to the Bosniak army.

Structural changes, both new regional government, such as Herzeg-Bosnia, and parallel municipal structures that were created along ethnic lines (“Croat municipalities” and “Muslim municipalities”) were introduced before the war to ostensibly protect so-called national interests. However, they instead generated victims, both in-group and out-group members. Patterns of political-territorial structures defined patterns of violence, namely, the mutual expulsion and exchanges of population and their re-settlement in the “right” territory. In the next chapter, I will continue to discuss in the context of nationalist narratives the topic of “reciprocal exchanges” of population carried out by the three parties, with the focus on the ethnic “other.”

Concluding Remarks: Structural Changes in Bosnia and International Legitimacy

In 1991, the Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina was undergoing dramatic changes in its structure, most of which were introduced without agreement or compromises between politically relevant actors. Outvoting in state and local legislatures was a common practice. The appropriation of existing and building new structures, be it at the local, regional, or state levels, has not been studied in detail in relation to patterns of violence. Even when the role of those new structures are analyzed, scholarly work tends to foreground violence against the ethnic “other,” leaving out violence against in-group members from the analysis. I tried to show in this chapter that the pre-war structural changes greatly influenced patterns of violence once the war broke out. In particular, patterns of structural changes, such as ethnically defined municipalities (“Serb municipality,” “Muslim municipality,” “HVO municipality”) singled out in-group members as predestined victims. Already in 1991 and early 1992, it was possible to foresee, as some critics of SDS policy did, that those structures would create or facilitate conditions for the expulsion of

in-group members who happened to live outside of the claimed territory. Of course, those structures also played a key role in the expulsion of out-group members from the claimed in-territory (more on this in the next chapter).

Thus, instead of delimiting possibilities for violence, those political-territorial structures created more victims. The creation and interaction with those structures suggest a readiness on the part of all three warring parties to accept violence, in particular exchanges of population, as something “natural,” an inevitable outcome of state restructuring. As part of my concluding remarks, I would like to briefly focus on the role of the international community in the recognition and legitimization of some of those structures. By legitimizing them, the international community also accepted possibilities for violence that were in advanced inscribed in those structures.

Some of the new structures that emerged in the second half of 1991 survived the war (Republika Srpska), while another (Herzeg-Bosnia) was dissolved and its territory transformed into a new entity towards the end of the conflict (Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina). Many argue that the war consolidated the new structures, while the ultimate recognition of those institutions (the Republika Srpska, in particular) in turn legitimized the outcomes of violence, namely, demographic changes. However, the consolidation of the emergent institutional landscape was achieved as much by *diplomatic efforts aimed at preventing* the outbreak of armed hostilities as by war violence. Specifically, the European Community’s Peace Conference on Yugoslavia, the first diplomatic initiative to prevent the escalation of armed conflict in Yugoslavia, engaged from the very beginning certain, but not all, institutions that emerged in Bosnia in 1991.

The Badinter Arbitration Committee, named after its President Robert Badinter, was part of the Peace Conference. The Conference was formed in September 1991 in order to halt armed hostilities in Yugoslavia, at that time in Slovenia and Croatia, and was later replaced by the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia. The mandate of the Badinter Committee was to assist the Peace Conference by providing opinions on outstanding legal issues related to the Yugoslav crisis. It directly involved the recently established Bosnian Serb Assembly, called the “Assembly of the Serb People in Bosnia and Herzegovina,” in discussions addressing the dissolution of Yugoslavia. In this way, the Badinter Committee legitimized a completely new institution that would eventually give rise to the Republika Srpska, one of two entities (provinces) in present-day Bosnia. In contrast, Herzeg-Bosnia did not take a direct part in discussions that concerned Croatia, Bosnia, and the status of the Bosnian Croats. In hindsight, the former continues to exist, while the latter did not survive the war.

On November 20, 1991, the Badinter Committee analyzed three legal issues submitted by the President of the Peace Conference, Lord Carrington. Without going into an analysis of the responses issued by the Committee, I will only mention what the important issues were. The first question that the Badinter Committee addressed was whether the political processes that Yugoslavia was undergoing should be qualified as a secession by some republics from the common state or a dissolution of the state as a result of “the concurring will of a number of Republics” (“Opinion No. 1”).³³ The committee determined that Yugoslavia was in the process of disintegration. The second opinion was on the question of whether Serbs in Croatia and

³³ For all three “Opinions”, see Trifunovska (1994).

Bosnia had a right to self-determination. The Badinter Committee confirmed that the Serb community was entitled to “all the rights concerned to minorities and ethnic groups under international law” (“Opinion No. 2”). In particular, the Badinter Committee invoked the *1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* that recognizes the principle of self-determination, including the right of peoples to determine their political status, as a safeguard of human rights (Article 1). Furthermore, the Badinter Committee pointed out that secession may be a form of self-determination, as long as no force is used to change the existing borders. And finally, the third opinion concerned the borders between three Yugoslav republics: Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia. The opinion was that those borders were “protected by international law,” namely, they were regarded as international borders (“Opinion No. 3”).³⁴

There is one aspect of the Badinter Committee that has remained under the radar: Who exactly were the actors that were deemed *legitimate* to submit their respective positions to the Committee? From the three opinions briefly outlined above, it is clear that the European Community considered *six Republics*, which would eventually become independent countries (the two Autonomous Provinces, Kosovo and Metohija and Vojvodina were excluded), and *the Federal State*, which would eventually cease to exist, as relevant and legitimate authorities to submit their questions and positions to the Badinter Committee. One of the six Republics that actively took part in the Badinter Committee was Bosnia. However, Opinion No. 2 and Opinion No. 3 show that a new political actor appeared on the international political and diplomatic

³⁴ For a summary of legal questions and opinions addressed and issued by the Badinter Committee, see Trifunovska (1999) p. 53.

scene: the “Assembly of the Serb People of Bosnia and Herzegovina” (the Republika Srpska was formally created only in January 1992).³⁵

First, the Bosnian Serb Assembly did not participate in the discussion of the question of the dissolution of Yugoslavia (Opinion No.1): only the Federal Government and the Republics made their submissions. This seems to be logical, since the Bosnian Serb Assembly was not a constituent part of Yugoslavia. This did not prevent it, however, to participate on an *equal footing* with other Republics, *including Bosnia*, in the debates concerning the status of Serbs in Bosnia (and Croatia), as well as the recognition of Bosnian borders.

Second, Opinion No. 2 concerned the right to self-determination of both Croatian Serbs and Bosnian Serbs, and yet only the Bosnian Serb Assembly made a submission. In other words, although the Serb leadership in Croatia had also established its own institutions separate from those centrally organized and coordinated by Zagreb (one may argue that the Bosnian Serb leaders in part modeled their autonomous regions on those established by the Serb leadership in Croatia), it did not directly engage the Badinter Committee. As we know, the Republika Srpska Krajina no longer exists, while the Republika Srpska is a constituent part of Bosnia today.

Third, the Bosnian Croat leadership also established its own self-government, the Croatian Community of Herzeg-Bosnia. However, in contrast with the Bosnian Serb Assembly, the Herzeg-Bosnia “Presidency” (Assembly) did not submit its positions on the three questions to the Badinter Committee. Since Opinion No. 2 concerned the right to self-determination of the

³⁵ Each “Opinion” lists the authorities that submitted their positions to the Badinter Committee.

Serb community in both *Croatia* and Bosnia, one could see how the participation of Bosnian Croats would be controversial. Although the creation of Herzeg-Bosnia was a de facto assertion of the right to self-determination, the leadership of Bosnian Croats would not have felt comfortable affirming the same rights for Croatia's Serbs that would threaten Croatia's territorial integrity. Moreover, Opinion No. 3 concerned the borders of both Croatia and Bosnia, and yet, Herzeg-Bosnia, unlike the Bosnian Serb Assembly, did not submit its views. The same trend obtains: the Croat Community of Herzeg-Bosnia was abolished at the end of the Bosnia war and continues to exist today only in war memory and nationalist Bosnian Croat discourse.

Put differently, the international community in general and the European Community in particular had conferred legitimacy onto the new structures established by the Bosnian Serb leadership from the very beginning, long before the Serb entity was expanded, consolidated, and ultimately rendered ethnically homogenous by violence. In contrast, the Badinter Committee did not legitimize similar structures formed by Croatian Serbs and Bosnian Croats. In other words, violence was not *sufficient* to strengthen and preserve either Herzeg-Bosnia or the Republika Srpska Krajina (in Croatia), just as violence was not *necessary* to have recognized Bosnian Serb institutions. Violence was both necessary and sufficient to render a territory ethnically homogenous.

What is even more puzzling is how willing the Bosnian government was to allow the Bosnian Serb Assembly to participate in the Bandinter Committee as an equal participant. In other words, the Bosnian government itself gave the Serb institution full legitimacy at the international stage, while denying it constitutionality at home. Although this may come as a surprise, it was,

however, consistent with Izetbegović's extraordinary readiness to accept the division of Bosnia from the start. For example, after accepting the Cutileiro Plan in March 1992, Karadžić bragged in front of the Bosnian Serb Assembly that the Serb delegation participating in constitutional talks did not even have to discuss Serb maps (apparently, the Serb delegation forgot to bring them). The Serb delegation simply accepted as Serb territories those areas that the Bosniak delegation regarded as belonging to Serbs: "We achieved one thing [namely] that Muslims gave [to Serbs] all that they thought was undisputed, and it [the territory] is quite large" ("Stenografske", 18 March 1992, p.14).³⁶

If the international community from the very beginning saw it appropriate or necessary to legitimize the new Serb institutions, why did it not then condition its recognition of Bosnia's independence upon Sarajevo's recognition of those new institutions at home? Furthermore, the European Community insisted on the referendum for independence without first dealing with the emergent institutional landscape in Bosnia. By early 1992, the priority for both the Bosnian Serb party SDS and the Bosnian Croat party HDZ was to first re-organize the country into three sub-state units and only then to hold the referendum on independence (even the Bosnian Serb leadership were not against the referendum under this condition).

³⁶ For Karadžić, who was puzzled by Izetbegović's acceptance of the Cutileiro Plan, the biggest success of those talks was to make the Bosniak delegation bring their own maps and make ethnic maps part of negotiations: "All essence lies in the fact that the principle of undivided Bosnia is broken... [that Bosnia cannot be divided] based on the ethnic principle. That is not true. What is true is that it is divisible based on the ethnic principle" ("Stenografske", 18 March 1992, p.10).



Map 4: The Cutiliero Plan

And yet, the European Community applied via Croatia pressure on the Bosnian Croat HDZ (but not on the Bosnian Serb SDS) to support the referendum on independence without first completing in an orderly fashion a decentralization process. A month after the referendum, Bosnia plunged into a bloody civil war. Equally important is the question concerning the position of the Bosnian Serb leadership. If the Serb leadership and its new structures in Bosnia were legitimized by the European Community from the start, why did they not then show more patience and exercise diplomacy in order to obtain its objective while avoiding the war? We know today that every single peace plan for Bosnia, from the Cutiliero to the Dayton Peace Agreement, acknowledged the need to de-centralize Bosnia, while preserving the territorial

integrity of the country (Burg and Shoup 1999, p. 60; Trifunovska 1999). Instead, the Bosnian Serb leadership used the Bosniak rejection of the Cutileiro Plan as a pretext for war. It appears that all politically relevant Bosnian actors believed that they would gain more by waging a war. War was not necessary for territorial division, but rather for territorial homogenization. No Western democracy would allow “exchanges of population” the way Turkey and Greece did it in 1921. But they did allow it under cover of violence.

Preparation for war (arming of civilians by all three sides), the building of new regional structures (by the HDZ and SDS), the appropriation of the republican institutions (by the SDA), and the appropriation and building of new structures at the municipal level (by all three parties) were complementary processes. The pre-war institutional changes facilitated war preparations, especially the arming of civilians along ethnic lines. Even more importantly, those pre-war structures shaped patterns of violence during the civil war. Although those institutions did not cause the war, they created during the war the conditions for the emergence of two particular forms of violence: a) violence against the ethnic “other” or out-group members who lived on the claimed territory or in-territory and b) violence against part of the ethnic “self” who happened to reside outside the claimed territory or out-territory. Any ultimate territorial claims were contingent on the interdependency of the two forms of violence.

Demographic changes of the scale seen in Bosnia were possible only by violence against both in-group and out-group members. For the expulsion of civilians to be effective and thorough on one territory, it also had to be implemented in other territories. The three nationalist parties developed similar nationalist discourses, as we will see in the next chapter, labeling ethnic

minorities as potentially dangerous for Bosnian stability. By targeting out-group members on their respective territories, each nationalist party enabled, openly or covertly, the other party to achieve its ultimate political goal—ethnic homogenization—as those expellees were strategically re-settled on the “right” territory, a practice whose only purpose was to change the demographic picture so that the stability of the territory could be cemented by the (ethnic) vote.

Chapter Four

Violence and Nationalist Discourses

Introduction

An in-depth analysis of the three nationalist narratives will reveal that there was a link between the discursive domain and violence on the ground. Specifically, the theme of demographics that dominated the three Bosnian—Croat, Bosniak and Serb— nationalist narratives both reflected and constituted the process of the mutual expulsion and corresponding strategic resettlement of the population on the ground. In particular, the structure and content of the narratives illustrate how the political agendas of the three nationalist parties were heterogeneous but mutually compatible and overlapping.³⁷ Furthermore, it is precisely at the point where the discursive domain and violence intersects that we can establish a relation between violence as a *means* employed by one political party and the ultimate political objective established by another political party. In other words, the analysis of nationalist narratives will show that violence against the ethnic “other” or out-group members who lived on the claimed in-territory and the sacrifice of ethnic kin, or in-group members, who lived on the out-territory (outside of the claimed territory) in fact went hand in hand.

³⁷ As indicated in the previous chapters, the three nationalist parties are the Croat Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina (HDZ), the (Bosniak) Party of Democratic Action (SDA), and the Serb Democratic Party (SDS).

The regulation of population and land was at the centre of both nationalist discourses and violent campaigns to expel and resettle population within Bosnia. In order to ideologically and politically support or justify the expulsion and resettlement of innocent civilians, it was necessary to construct a narrative that focused on the future stability of Bosnian society. The condition for a stable society rested, according to *all* three nationalist narratives, in the alignment between ethnicity and rule over a given territory. In other words, nationalist took for granted the instability of a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural Bosnian state, labeling the ethnic “other” as potentially disloyal and rebellious.

It is from discursive analysis, especially the focus on the intertwined themes of land and demographics, that we can obtain insights into a collusion between Croat, Bosniak, and Serb nationalist parties to mutually expel and exchange population. Interestingly, whereas scholars have consistently studied the patterns of violence, that is, the expulsion of population, very little has been written on the patterns and objectives of the re-settlement of expellees. Violence against civilians in Bosnia could not have been so thorough, far-reaching in its consequences, and near-irreversible had it not been for a collusion and some degree of coordination between the three nationalist parties to reconfigure the Bosnian demographic map.³⁸

In the previous chapter, I described the processes and mechanisms that produced changes in the institutional landscape in Bosnia. In this chapter, I will analyze narratives constructed by the three nationalist parties in

³⁸ This thesis does not suggest that the expulsion of and violence against civilians were carried out on the same scale by all three warring parties. The Serb armed forces committed more crimes, both in terms of mass killings and the expulsion of civilians, and the Bosniaks were by far the biggest victim group. For statistics of casualties of the Bosnian war, see Tokača (2012).

order to justify and legitimize political decisions to capture existing institutions, create new ones, or de-legitimize those institutions built by the other. I outline nationalist discourses as they were told, exchanged, and discussed by contemporary actors themselves in various formal meetings, both public and closed. In other words, I do not focus on the representation and construction of nationalist narratives in and by the media.³⁹

The three Bosnian nationalist narratives were structured around both real and imaginary parts (themes), some of which mutually reinforcing, others in conflict with each other. There was also a great deal of discursive overlap, as the three narratives shared the same themes. For example, the Croat and Serb narratives had in common the concept of “historical right,” which clashed head on with the Bosniak “ethnic principle.” Similarly, the Croat and Bosniak discourses overlapped on the theme of “spontaneous resistance,” singling out Serbs as the “aggressor.” Interestingly, when the Croat and Serb nationalist narratives coincided, there was no inconsistency between the two interpretations of the shared theme. However, this was not the case with Croat and Bosniak relations. When the Croat and Bosniak narratives shared a common theme, there was always tension and conflictual understanding of the meaning of the theme they shared. It is those discursive dynamics that help us gain some new insights into both the meaning and purpose of the political-institutional landscape that emerged in 1991 and 1992, as well as forces that affected behaviour and changes on the battlefields.

³⁹ Following the approach of Anthony D. Smith (1999), who defines the nation based on the images and ideas of the nation held by nationalists themselves, I similarly use the images and concepts used by Bosnian nationalists to portray Bosnian society and historical relations among the three ethnic groups as the basis for my explanation of violence. Although the media was under the control of the nationalist parties and fueled interethnic tensions and the conflict, it is necessary, in my opinion, to make a sharp distinction between nationalist propaganda in the media (the selective presentation of ideas and images) and nationalist discourses as articulated in formal meetings, often in intimate and confidential settings.

It is possible to identify one single idea as a thread that ran through and linked the three Bosnian nationalist narratives. Their common basis was the concept of ethnic homogeneity as manifested in the theme of demographics. All three nationalist narratives, including the Bosniak one, unambiguously shared the same negative view of the role of ethnic minorities in a reconstituted Bosnian state. The structure of the three nationalist narratives itself illustrates this shared view of Bosnia's ethnic diversity, as all three discourses prioritized ethnically mixed areas, demographics of which were ultimately altered, over ethnically homogenous territories. This is despite the fact that the latter were the driving force behind the political and structural changes introduced in 1991-92, as discussed in the previous chapter.

I divide this chapter in three sections, each dealing with the nationalist narrative of one nationalist party. In contrast to the previous chapter, where I outlined major insights in the Bosniak political and ideological position as part of my discussion on Croat and Serb political designs, in this chapter, I devote a separate section to the Bosniak nationalist narrative. Unlike the Croat and Serb nationalist discourses, the Bosniak one has been either neglected altogether or superficially studied. In addition, it is the analysis of the Bosniak nationalist narrative that reveals the most surprising and unexpected results. In the conclusion, I will, as in the previous chapter, bring in the discussion the role of the international community involved in the Bosnian war and politics.

The Serb Nationalist Narrative: “Historical Right” and Territorial Claims

In this section, I will analyze the nationalist narrative put forward by the ruling Serb Democratic Party (SDS) in order to justify and support the structural changes and corresponding territorial claims made in

1991 and 1992. Although the overarching theme was certainly the self-government or a “Serb state,” the discourse consisted of relationships between a number of themes: “historical right,” demographics, private property of the land, and past violence (World War II). For the discourse analysis, I use chiefly archival documents, such as transcripts of political speeches of Radovan Karadžić, the President of the SDS and later the President of the Republika Srpska, as well as select sessions of the Assembly of the Serb People in Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereafter the Bosnian Serb Assembly). I also use other government documents, such as orders, dispatches, and reports. As mentioned earlier, print and broadcast media, a common source of discourse analysis, are not used.

As we saw in the previous chapter, Northern Bosnia notwithstanding, the Serb Autonomous Regions (SAOs), unilaterally created in 1991, incorporated mostly municipalities with an absolute Serb majority (over 50 percent in many areas). Some of them, however, had a Serb minority. Of course, this was true only for 1991 and early 1992, the time period preceding the war. During the war, territorial claims rapidly expanded, affecting many municipalities with Croat and Bosniak majorities. Both types of territories, ethnically homogenous and mixed, were equally important for establishing a “Serb state” in Bosnia. Although ethnically homogenous areas were without doubt the driving force behind the political-structural changes in 1991, nationalist discourse tended, however, to focus on ethnically mixed territories. In particular, the Serb narrative was structured around three key themes that placed mixed municipalities in the foreground: past violence, demographic changes resulting from past violence, and private property of the land.

To support the political decision to incorporate mixed municipalities in the “Serb space,” the SDS leaders used the theme of past violence, namely, the mass killings of Serbs orchestrated by the fascist Independent State of Croatia (NDH) on the territory of both present-day Croatia and Bosnia during World War II.⁴⁰ For example, at the fifth session of the Bosnian Serb Assembly, SDS delegates voiced their preference to include “the areas where Serbs remained a minority due to the genocide committed against them in World War II” into the Serb state (“Stenografske”, 9 January 1992, p.7)⁴¹ The SDS referred to those areas where Serbs were previously the majority, but were now reduced to a minority as a result of violence, as Serb “historic territories” and invented the concept of “historical right” as a basis to lay claim to those “historical territories.”

When the Bosnian Serb leadership formed the Bosnian Serb Assembly, it made reference to two particular concepts: the “ethnic principle” and “historical right.” At the constitutive session of the Bosnian Serb Assembly, Momčilo Krajišnik, the President of both the National Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina (the Republic’s parliament) and the newly formed Bosnian Serb Assembly, justified the creation of a separate Serb assembly by the “will of the Serb people to remain in its *historic* and *ethnic territories* within the common state of Yugoslavia” (“Stenografske”, 24 October 1991, p. 6. Emphasis added). Similarly, *The Declaration of*

⁴⁰ The NDH was a fascist state established by the Ustaše regime, under Nazi auspices, in April 1941. Bosnia and Herzegovina was part of NDH. The Ustaše were a far right and fascist Croatian movement established in 1929. The NDH regime carried out mass killings of Serbs, Jews, and Gypsies. Many Bosnian Muslims joined the Ustaše regime in murdering Serbs. There were several concentration camps, of which Jasenovac was the most notorious (approximately 100,000 people killed). The regime proclaimed that one third of Serbs must be killed, one third converted to Catholicism, and one third expelled. Ethnic Croats were also targeted for their political views and opposition to the murderous regime.

⁴¹ Woodward (1995) points out that Serbs became a minority in municipalities where they used to be a majority due to the combination of the genocide of World War II and economic emigration from 1971 to 1991. Out of 108 municipalities, 67 communes, the majority of which had a Serb majority (mostly in Krajina and Herzegovina), were affected by population decline between 1963 and 1981 (p. 486, footnote 53).

Proclamation of the Republic of the Serb People of Bosnia and Herzegovina, adopted at the fifth session of the Bosnian Serb Assembly, called for a territorial demarcation between the three Bosnian peoples, taking into consideration, inter alia, *ethnic* and *historical* criteria (“Stenografske”, 9 January 1992, p. 10). The “historical” criterion applied to the mixed municipalities, while the “ethnic principle” pertained to ethnically homogenous areas.⁴² In the section on the Bosniak nationalist discourse, I will discuss in detail the significance of the “ethnic principle.” Here, I will focus predominately on “historical right.”

It is true that Bosnian Serb nationalists instrumentalized past violence and collective trauma, in particular World War II, to generate fear and distrust towards other ethnic groups among Bosnian Serbs as a way to mobilize them to support the SDS political objectives and later the war effort (Semelin, 2007, pp. 43, 71). For example, Karadžić made a direct link between the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 1990s and violence in the 1940s, pointing to “the traditional enemies, [namely,] greater Germanic expansionism and domestic fascism as its ally.” He then warned of “the same plans, the same crimes, and the same victims. But the Serb people stand better today than in 1941” (“Stenografske”, 24 October 1992, p. 47).⁴³ In other words, Serbs could expect another “genocide” in 1991, if they did not take their “destiny into their own

⁴² Woodward (1995) identifies four types of “rights” to territory in Bosnia: the historicist principle (historical lands/states), the democratic principle (or “ethnic principle”), the realist principle (control through military force), and “a modern (or smallholder’s) version of the feudal principle based on land ownership.” Different principles were applied in different territories and by different parties and more than one principle could be invoked by one party (p. 212).

⁴³ Denich (1996) singles out Germany and Austria as “prime movers of the formal destructions of both Yugoslavias” (p. 51). Germany was aggressive in its campaign to have both Croatia and Slovenia unconditionally recognized as independent states. German political elites were not concerned about how their support for Croatia would be perceived by Serbs, who were the victims of Germany and its puppet state, NDH, during World War II. Denich accuses Germany and its media of having carried out a “racist” campaign against the Serbian people, culture and history (p. 52).

hands.” However, I argue that past violence was used not so much for fear mongering as for building a framework for the conceptual binding of two particular types of “rights:” the “historical right” and the right to (private) property of the land. Those two types of rights jointly served as the basis for territorial claims to ethnically mixed territories and ultimately for the creation of a self-governing Serb state, the overarching theme of the Serb nationalist narrative.

Paradoxically, past violence gave rise to the idea of “historical right,” but at the same time rendered this principle fragile and unreliable. Although the Serb leadership heavily drew on “historical right” in order to incorporate the areas with a Serb minority, they were fully aware that focusing exclusively on violence-driven demographic changes was not sufficient to make territorial claims feasible. (This statement may appear puzzling in the light of violence and consequential demographic shifts produced during the 1992-95 war). As a result, the Serb political party (SDS) bound the notion of “historical right” to the right to private property of the land.

Particular patterns of settlements of Bosniaks and Serbs throughout Bosnian history inspired and made it possible for the Serb SDS to intertwine the “historical right” and the right to land ownership. Specifically, Serbs tended to settle in rural areas, while Bosniaks historically gravitated towards urban settlements (Crnobrnja, 1996, p. 187; Burg and Shoup, 2000, p. 27). As a result, the Serbs individually owned more land than Bosniaks and Croats combined. According to the 1991 census, the share of the Serb community in the total population of Bosnia was 31.4 percent, but Serbs owned around 64 percent of all the land in Bosnia (Trbovich, 2008, p. 218).⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Burg and Shoup (2000) distinguish between the claims by the Bosnian Serbs that they individually, privately owned 64 percent of land (“even if true”) and the fact that 56 percent of the Bosnian territory

For example, during the sixth session of the Bosnian Serb Assembly, delegates raised the question of Bosnian independence, directly linking it to private land ownership: “How can one control the territory of [Bosnia] when it is known that Serbs possess 64 percent of that territory, and the Serbs do not want an independent [Bosnia]” (“Magnetofonski”, 26 January 1992, p. 5, Tape 4).

The Serb Democratic Party (SDS) used this general pattern of ethnic settlement to initiate the “regionalization” project, namely, the creation of Serb Autonomous Regions. In particular, municipalities where Serbs were in a minority or where two groups were equal in size were claimed on the grounds that Serb residents owned more land than Bosniaks and Croats. In his speech on the “plebiscite of the Serb people,” Karadžić declared that “municipalities are not God-given,” i.e., their boundaries were changeable and their territories and institutions divisible. As a result, Karadžić further instructed “municipalities where Serbs are numerically in minority but have lots of territory [land]” to merge with the nearest municipality with a Serb majority (“Pebiscit”, November 1991). But the SDS also instructed the creation of separate “Serb municipalities” in areas that were arguably never part of the “Serb space,” leaving those Serb communities isolated and vulnerable to attacks by the Bosniak and Croat armed forces during the war.

was inhabited by Serbs before the war (p. 28). Similarly, Crnobrnja (1996) states that the Serbs populated well over 50 percent of Bosnian territory and thus the claims that they conquered 70 percent of the territory during the war is misleading and inaccurate (p. 187). Ramet (2006) challenges the Serb claims (and Trbovich’s) and argues that Bosnian Serbs owned 42.6 percent of the land, while Bosniaks owned 44.8 percent (p. 420). Some Bosniak and Bosnian politicians and intellectuals cite the same figures. For example, Jovan Divjak (2001) argues that Serbs before the war owned 42.6 percent of the land: “The traditional landowners in Bosnia-Herzegovina during the four centuries of Ottoman rule were the Muslims, and it can be seen from the last census carried out during the Austro-Hungarian period, in 1910, that Serbs owned only 10 percent of the land” (p. 170).

During the third session of the Bosnian Serb Assembly, when the regionalization process and corresponding territorial claims were discussed, Vojo Kuprešanin, a senior SDS official and the Speaker of the Bosnian Serb Krajina Assembly, evoked private land ownership in order to justify the inclusion into the Autonomous Region of Krajina of municipalities where Serbs were in the minority and where Bosniak and Serb communities were almost equal in size. He emphasized that although Bosniaks enjoyed a plurality or an absolute majority in those municipalities, Serbs, nevertheless, owned, in his view, 70-80 percent of the land: “When we separate those municipalities, we will indeed get the contours and the size of the Autonomous Regions of Krajina” (“Stenogram”, 11 December 1991, p. 40).

Furthermore, Kuprešanin claimed that the Serb “living space” was in fact threatened and that only the regulation of population could address this threat. In particular, he called for restrictions on Muslim immigration: “Our living space and territory on which we live and work is threatened, so we have to prevent it. In fact, we have to prevent immigration of Muslims onto *our territory and space*” (Ibid. Emphasis added.). The Serb nationalist narrative focused on Muslim immigration to Bosnia, in particular to what was claimed as “Serb lands,” from neighbouring Serbia and Montenegro (the area also known as Sandžak) and Turkey. For example, Bosnian Serb politicians expressed suspicion when their Muslim/Bosniak counterparts advocated for the creation of the Ministry for Diaspora (*Ministarstvo za iseljenike*). The political agenda behind the proposal to create this ministry was, according to the narrative, to resettle Turkish citizens of Bosnian origin to Bosnia (Turks whose ancestors were Bosnian Muslims who left their homeland when the Ottoman Empire collapsed). The leader of the Serb Democratic

Party and later the President of the Republika Srpska, Radovan Karadžić, warned that “it is all about their [Muslims’] plan to *conquer* Bosnia, to keep the whole Bosnia for themselves...to turn us into *raja*” (“Plebiscit”, 1991. Emphasis added).⁴⁵

This discourse, which centred on threats of potential political domination and oppression by Muslims, was reinforced by the weak rule of law in Bosnia. In particular, the narrative powerfully resonated at the local municipal level, where pre-war illegal construction was a growing problem. For example, during the third session of the Serb Assembly, the President of the municipal government in Novi Grad, one of 10 Sarajevo municipalities, pointed out that in the course of the 1980s, Muslims from Sandžak were immigrating to Bosnia and settling down on mostly Serb land, presumably by purchasing those lands, and building houses without a construction licence (*bezpravna izgradnja*) (“Stenogram”, 11 December 1991, pp. 29-31).⁴⁶ In other words, restrictions on Muslim immigration would have to be combined with state control over the sale of private land, if the “threatened living space” was to be protected.⁴⁷ This is what Karadžić stated in his speech on the plebiscite: “Regardless of whether you bring Turks in or not, we will give direction to Serbs that they must not sell their land to Muslims. The first

⁴⁵ During the Ottoman occupation of Bosnia, Catholic and Orthodox Christians were second class citizens, often referred as *raja* (serfs).

⁴⁶ It was not only in Bosnia where the regulation of land and population was politicized. After the civil war in Kosovo, Kosovo Serb politicians pointed to the increase sale of land by Serbs to Albanians and interpreted it as an Albanian ploy to change the demographic picture in favour of Albanians in certain districts (Božić, 2009, p. 50).

⁴⁷ Land and population regulations as two complementary “nationalizing” policies were by no means particular to the Bosnian context. For example, in the 1920s, the Polish government used ethnonational criteria in carrying out the agrarian reforms, expropriating land from German landowners and distributing it to Polish peasants, excluding Ukrainian and Belorussian peasants (Brubaker, 1996, p. 92). Indeed, the term to “cleanse” a territory of ethnic minorities (and repopulate it by the “right” nationality) was already in use in Poland in the 1920s (footnote 29, p. 92) and was therefore not invented, as some scholars claimed, by the Bosnian Serbs. It is true though that in the Bosnian parlance, ethnically homogenous territory has been commonly referred by all three ethnic groups as “ethnically clean” (*etnički čist*), but this terminology was in use even before the war.

foundations that are built will be blown up. And every single foundation built will be blown up” (“Plebiscit”, 1991). Here, Karadžić hinted that violence would play a major role in the regulation of the population and land, when a war broke out.

Balkan scholars merely acknowledge the use of private land ownership as the basis for the Bosnian Serb claim of national sovereignty over a given territory (Woodward, 1995, p. 212) or simply dismiss it as irrelevant and archaic (Ramet, 2006, p. 420). First, it is necessary to relate it to other principles, such as “historical right.” Second, it is important to analyze the principle of land ownership in relation to both pre-war institution building and, more importantly, war time violence, when all three sides targeted both the interior and exterior of the private household. Compared to “historical right,” which is more abstract and fragile, the right to private property as a basis to secure the “Serb space” was more tangible, personal (private, individual), and linked to the present but rooted in the past. Furthermore, the close association of the two types of “rights” juxtaposed population *changes* with *permanency* and *stability* inherent in land ownership: the former was a symbol of experiences of individuals (suffering, death, and displacement), while the latter signified the endurance of the collective.

Thus, the right to private property of the land was a supplementary principle invented to reinforce the notion of “historical right,” which focused on the collective. In other words, the conjunction of the two types of rights symbolized for the Bosnian Serb leadership the deep *rootedness* of the Serb community in Bosnia. As Brubaker (1996) underlines, land ownership reflects and constitutes the existence of both a given individual and the collective in a given territory:

Duration of residence obviously contributes to rootedness—not only how long a given individual or family has resided in the territory, but also *how long the community has existed. Past and present ties to the land contribute to rootedness: peasant communities, and to a lesser extent even the urban descendants of such peasant settlers, are ordinarily more deeply rooted than historically purely urban settlements* (p. 173. Emphasis added).⁴⁸

By intertwining the two, apparently opposite concepts - “historical right” and the right to private property of the land - the Serb nationalist discourse effortlessly blurred the collective with the individual and the public with the private. It is as a result of the conflation of the private with the public, the boundary of which was completely erased by violence, that the principle of the right to private property ceased to be a mere supplement to the “historical right.” It became a main principle used to *homogenize* the claimed territory during the war. In other words, whereas “historical right” was evoked to make territorial claims, the notion of the right to private property (or more to the point the violation of that right) was employed to regulate population on that territory. Violence was integrated into this relation between the right to private property and control of population. If property supports relations of exchanges between individuals, it could also, in the view of nationalists, support relations of exchanges between collectivities. In the latter case, individuals were no longer the subjects but rather the objects of exchanges.

⁴⁸ Although Brubaker clearly links past and present ties to the land to potential political actions of an ethnic minority (Russians in newly independent former Soviet republics), he also considers the size and concentration of that community on a territory in question. In other words, a numerically small and weakly rooted Russian minority would, according to Brubaker, most likely chose emigration to the “motherland” (Russia) over political action to confront the rising nationalism by the ethnic majority.

Woodward (1995) is one of few Balkan scholars who understood well the political significance for Bosnians of the concept of “hearth” or *ognjište* as a “metaphor for property, community, citizenship, and patriotism, all in one” (p. 237). This complex relationship is best illustrated by a statement given in the course of the sixth session of the Bosnian Serb Assembly:

I say to *gospodi* Serbs who live in high-rises: *Gospodo* Serbs living in Sarajevo high-rises, they [high-rises] are not your hearth [*ognjište*], and most likely you are not ready to defend it; because it is not yours, somebody gave it to you. We who have our own *ognjišta*, we who did not flee to cities, we will defend our *ognjišta*. And those *ognjišta* will be called as they have always been called [i.e., Serb *ognjište*] (“Magnetofonski”, 26 January 1992, p. 3, Tape 7).

In other words, private property, especially of land, was not only identified with the family who owned it, but also with the community with whom the family identified. If the location of the property of a given family happened to be on the territory claimed by the other ethnic group, their citizenship rights were revoked by the expulsion of the whole family and appropriation, exchange, or total destruction of the private property. Arendt (1998) notes that in ancient times all civilizations treated private property as sacred precisely because it enabled individuals to participate in the body politic: “if he happened to lose his location [his property, household], he almost automatically lost his citizenship and the protection of the law as well” (62). Woodward (1995) calls it, in the context of the Bosnian war, “the physicalizing of citizenship rights” (p. 237).

Regardless of ethnic differences, the process of justifying a nation's sovereignty over territory became embodied *in persons and their rights to live on that land*. It was this association, of this link between particular persons and land with past wars, that made historical memories relevant to the conflict and opened thoughts of revenge (p. 271. Emphasis added.).

It is the combination of the two types of rights—the “historical right” and the right to property (land)—that allow us to make a direct and tangible link between the Serb nationalist discourse and the type of violence that dominated the Bosnian war, namely, the expulsion of Bosniaks and Croats from the “Serb lands,” many of whom were exchanged for Serbs, who were in turn driven out from their homes by the Bosniak and Croat armed forces. Those Serb expellees were strategically resettled in territories where the Serbs were short of an absolute majority before the war. The original narrative of control of Muslim immigration (from Turkey and Sandžak) and attendant restrictions on the sale of Serb land to Muslims quickly became blurred with war restrictions imposed on and violence against the Bosnian Muslims. During the war, the expulsion of civilians was accompanied by various forms of property acquisition: 1) state appropriation of “abandoned” property; 2) “voluntary” transfers to the state of the right to use property; and 3) private exchanges of property. The first two forms of regulation were in use during the war, while private transactions already began before the conflict.

Private exchanges of property among owners of different ethnicity had started before and continued during and after the war. (For example, a Bosniak from, say, Prijedor would arrange a

transaction with a Serb from, say, Novi Travnik, with the two agreeing to exchange their property.) It was carried out not only among citizens within Bosnia, but also across republican borders (Croatia, Bosnia, and Serbia). However, the *sale* of land and immovable property was *forbidden* during the war. Property could be only *exchanged*. Furthermore, state's permission was needed to exchange socially owned apartments ("Odluku o kriterijima," 30 July 1992).⁴⁹ During the war, an "agency to aid with resettlement of population and exchange material goods" existed in Banja Luka and facilitated exchanges of private property across the frontlines.

When Bosniaks and Croats made the ultimate decision to leave their homes and flee to the territory controlled by Bosniak and Croat armed forces, they could not simply pack up their belongings and just leave. There were formal conditions attached to the passage to the "other" side. Specifically, the Serb political authority (SDS) at the municipal and regional levels made laws that required Bosniaks and Croats who "wanted" to leave the Serb territory to first transfer their property to the municipal government. Fleeing residents had to fill out a form with the information on the type of property they were leaving behind and that they were surrendering the property "voluntarily" ("Odluku o kriterijima", 30 July 1992).⁵⁰ In some instances, people were asked to even formally declare that they had no intention of *ever* returning to the municipality (so-called "permanent departure").

When residents fled without giving "consent" to transfer the title of property to the government, all "abandoned" property and property of residents who participated in "armed rebellion" were

⁴⁹ When leaving their homes, residents were allowed to take their mobile property and up to 300 German Marks in cash. Any cash in excess of 300 German Marks were, if found, confiscated.

⁵⁰ For a sample of the form that Bosniaks and Croats were required to sign, see "Zapisnik" 3 August, 1992.

by law temporarily declared state ownership (*državna svojina*). The right to use such property belonged to the municipal government. In particular, the government allocated Croat and Bosniak houses and apartments to Serb refugees and displaced people who were expelled from their homes by Bosniak and Croat armed and police forces. Family members of killed or wounded Serb soldiers were also a priority category in assigning “abandoned” property (“Odluku” undated). However, property of higher value, especially businesses that belonged to Bosniaks and Croats, were given, irrespective of a real need for shelter, to Serbs who were connected to and associated with local SDS politicians.

It is from the nationalist discourses and corresponding procedures that simultaneously regulated the transfer of property (appropriation) and population (expulsion) that we can obtain insights into the collusion between Croat, Bosniak, and Serb nationalist parties to reciprocally exchange population. For example, the Crisis Staff of the Autonomous Region of Krajina adopted “conclusions,” *Zaključci no. 03-329/92* (1992), in order to “ensure the reciprocity for the resettlement of the population on the whole territory of the Serb Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina.” Another set of “conclusions,” *Zaključke no. 03-361/92* (1992), illustrates the policy of the so-called “reciprocal exchanges” of population:

The [Bosniak party] SDA and [Bosnian Croat party] HDZ, together with the representatives of the Autonomous Region Krajina, must enable to the endangered Serb people, against whom genocide is being orchestrated, collective resettlement in their places, that is, to enable an exchange [of population] based on the principle of reciprocity.

According to an article published in the Banja Luka newspaper *Glas*, the Croat HDZ from Novi Travnik reportedly agreed with the Serb SDS in Krajina to exchange 6,000 Serbs from Novi Travnik for 6,000 Croats from Banja Luka (“Preseljenje stanovništva”, 1992). In other words, the Serb SDS instrumentalized the sufferings of and violence against Serbs for its higher political goals—the creation of an ethnically homogenous Serb state.

It is only against this explicit call for “reciprocal exchanges” of population that the political decision to encourage the exchange rather than the sale of private property makes sense. Similarly, the creation of “parallel institutions” for municipalities that were outside the claimed “Serb lands” instead of encouraging their “own” people to remain at home and of applying pressure on Bosniak and Croat authorities to respect Serbs’ rights appears “logical” in the context of this “reciprocal exchanges” of population. Those “parallel institutions” contributed to the creation of the condition for the expulsion of Serbs, who were needed to populate the “Serb space” in the wake of the expulsion of Bosniaks and Croats.

The arbitrary detention of civilians was also a function of the population exchanges, introduced and implemented under the cover of war campaigns. The majority of Bosniaks and Croats, mostly men of military age, were detained on no valid legal or security grounds in numerous detention facilities. Those detainees were then exchanged for Serbs who were detained by Bosniak and Croat armed forces. Perhaps there is no better illustration of “reciprocal exchanges” of population than the practices by all three Commissions for the Exchange of Prisoners of War that routinely exchanged detained civilians, including the elderly, women and children. Most

detention facilities on Serb territory holding civilians were run by the civilian police. To carry out the near-total expulsion of population, the coordination of activities of the police, military, and civilian authorities was necessary.

For example, the arbitrary detention of civilians by the police was complemented by activities of municipal administrations. During the war, many municipalities in the Serb territory established an organization tasked only to deal with the resettlement of population (*služba za preseljenje*). Representatives of those organizations visited local communities (*mjesne zajednice*) where Bosniaks and Croats lived in order to inform and to register them for resettlement. Those tours were organized amid violence and terror against the targeted groups carried out by the police, military, and paramilitary groups. The municipality was also responsible for ensuring available buses for the transportation of residents who “wanted” to leave. (Of course, transportation was possible only to the frontlines; people had to cross over to the other side on foot.)

In his speech on the plebiscite, Karadžić (in)famously told the Serbs that “our territories are ours. Let us be hungry, but we will remain on them.” He also declared that the principle of reciprocity would be applied in the practice of violence in Bosnia: “Everything will be on the principle of reciprocity. The way they treat Serbs, the same way we will treat them [Muslims and Croats]. It won’t be only us [Serbs] who will be leaving [homes] and they to stay in our areas, to settle and create their colonies there [in Serb territories]” (“Plebiscit”, 1991). This statement can be examined only by critically analyzing the Croat and Bosniak nationalist discourses and how they related to violence on the ground. In other words, the important question to ask is whether there

was a collusion between the three nationalist parties to reciprocally expel and resettle populations.

The Croat Nationalist Narrative: “Historical Sovereignty” and Territorial Claims

In this section, I will analyze the nationalist narrative advanced by the Bosnian Croat Democratic Union (HDZ) in order to justify the creation and the existence of the Croatian Community of Herzeg-Bosnia (thereafter Herzeg-Bosnia), an entity that emerged in November 1991. As in the previous section, I use mainly archival documents, such as transcripts of select meetings of the Bosnian Croat leadership with the President of Croatia, Franjo Tuđman, as well as minutes of HDZ sessions and Herzeg-Bosnian government orders, decisions, and reports. Here, as in the previous section, I look at the narrative that Croat nationalists themselves articulated in official settings, including both public and closed meetings. There were striking similarities, as well as some differences between the Serb and Croat narratives. While these narratives overlapped, there were no major differences in the interpretation of the shared themes. This was not, however, the case with the relation between Croat and Bosniak discourses. Although these narratives also overlapped, they offered different, even opposite, interpretations of the common themes.

The Croat nationalist narrative was also complex and consisted of several closely interconnected themes: “spontaneous resistance,” “historical sovereignty,” demographics, and past marginalization and resultant out-migration of Bosnian Croats. Herzeg-Bosnia was comprised of two territorially linked regions, the largely ethnically homogenous Western Herzegovina and Central Bosnia, which was ethnically mixed. Although the HDZ leadership of Central Bosnia played a crucial role, the HDZ of Western Herzegovina was arguably the driving force behind

political, ideological, institutional, and territorial changes in 1991-1995.⁵¹ And yet, it was, like in the Serb case, the ethnically mixed municipalities that took a central position in the narrative structure.

Specifically, the structure of the Croat narrative reflected the HDZ rejection of the so-called “ethnic principle” as the *sole* criterion for the re-organization of Bosnia. On the basis of the “ethnic principle,” the HDZ could lay claims only to Western Herzegovina. Mostar, a city declared to be the “capital” of Herzeg-Bosnia, would be excluded. Most of Central Bosnia would also be excluded. The Croat HDZ insisted that Bosnia be re-constituted into “three national [ethnic] units, but that the national composition of the population *is not* the exclusive criterion” (“Zapisnik sa razgovora”, 17 September 1992, p. 3, Tape 5. Emphasis added.). In other words, sub-state units should not be defined by the absolute majority of one group and would thus, by definition, be ethnically diverse. In the next section, where I analyze the Bosniak nationalist discourse, which advocated the application of the “ethnic principle,” I will unpack this paradox, whereby “ethnic” (sub) state units were promoted, while at the same time the “ethnic principle” was downright rejected as the exclusive criterion by both Croat and Serb leaderships.

⁵¹ Tuđman was frustrated by domestic and international perceptions that he was under the strong influence of the Herzegovina leadership, who in turn was influenced by the Croatian diaspora (Gojko Šušak, who was a close associate of Tuđman and the Minister of Defence in the Croatian government during the Bosnian war, was a Canadian citizen). Tuđman insisted that Bosnian Croats from other regions also shared his vision of Bosnia. The role of the Central Bosnia branch of the HDZ in the creation of Herzeg-Bosnia supports his position. It was the HDZ in Posavina, a predominately Croat region in north-eastern Bosnia, which was sharply divided in regard to Zagreb’s policies, especially after the Bosnian Croat armed forces lost to the Bosnian Serb army vast swaths of territory in that region. Those Bosnian Croat politicians, intellectuals, and religious leaders who opposed the HDZ policy to divide Bosnia would have probably supported the idea of Herzeg-Bosnia, had it been feasible to territorially integrate Posavina into the Bosnian Croat entity.

The focus of the Croat nationalist narrative was on Central Bosnia, which was, despite its ethnic heterogeneity, considered to be, along with Western Herzegovina, the “historical land of the Croat people” (*povjesna zemlja hrvatskog naroda*) (“Zapisnik sa razgovora”, p. 1, Tape 10). According to the Croat nationalist narrative, on this “historical land” the Croat people had the right to exercise its so-called “historical sovereignty” (*povjesni suverenitet*). Specifically, “historical sovereignty” refers to a “golden age” when all Croats were brought together in one, self-governed entity, the Croatian Banovina, in 1939. However, the Bosnian Croat leadership, just like its Serb counterpart, was not confident that the principle of “historical right” was sufficient to claim national sovereignty over territories where Bosniaks were a majority. As a result, they invented and attached to it another concept: “spontaneous resistance” (or “self-organization”).

For example, Franjo Tuđman, underlined that “if the *Croat people* in those *Croat territories* that previously belonged to *the Croatian Banovina*...had not *self-organized* with the help of Croatia...Bosnia would have probably fallen” (“Zapisnik sa sastanka”, 21 July 1992, p. 4, Tape 7. Emphasis added.). On another occasion, Tuđman reminded the Bosnian Croat leadership that had it not been for the “*spontaneous resistance*” of Bosnian Croats and Croatia’s intervention in Herzegovina and Bosnian Posavina (north-eastern Bosnia), “all of you would have already been citizens of Greater Serbia or Yugoslavia. You have to be conscious of that” (“Zapisnik sa razgovora,” 17 September, p. 3, Tape 13). Here, the notion of “historical sovereignty” (Croatian Banovina) is automatically linked with, and thus fortified, the concept of “self-organization” or “spontaneous resistance,” a theme that was common to both Croat and Bosniak nationalist narratives. Whereas “historical sovereignty” was rooted in the past (pre-World War II),

“spontaneous resistance” was grounded in the present and thus directly linked to the ongoing violence (the 1992-95 war).

According to the Croat (and also the Bosniak) nationalist narrative, the “spontaneous resistance” of Croats emerged first in the “ethnically clean” (*etnički čist*) territory of Western Herzegovina and from there spread to the rest of Bosnia. Tuđman was adamant that “[i]f both the military and civilian rule had not been organized, Herzegovina would have been no more, and Bosnia would have silently fallen” (“Zapisnik sa sastanka”, 21 July 1992, p. 2, Tape 22).⁵² Here, Croatia’s president put the accent on *both* military and civilian institutions. And one of the first Croatian institutions, the Assembly (“Presidency”) of Herzeg-Bosnia, followed by the executive branch and the army — both called by the same name, the Croatian Defence Council (HVO) — emerged in part of the territory of the former Croatian Banovina.⁵³

In other words, the Croat nationalist narrative underlined the complementary relations between the principle of “historical sovereignty,” institutional structure (Herzeg-Bosnia entity), and violence (“spontaneous resistance”). “Historical sovereignty” justified and indeed provided the map for the structural and territorial changes before and during the war. However, when it came

⁵² The phrase “Bosna je šapatom pala” or “Bosnia silently fell” also refers to the occupation of Bosnia by the Ottomans in the 14th century without much resistance from the locals.

⁵³ Herzeg-Bosnia was not a faithful duplicate of the Croatian Banovina. North-eastern Bosnia or Bosnian Posavina was not included in Herzeg Bosnia. Tuđman admitted that he “traded” Posavina, a strategic region for Serbs, for Jajce, Kupres and Donji Vakuf that were under Serb control but of strategic importance for Croats. Indeed, Serbs ultimately “lost” Jajce, Donji Vakuf, and Kupres and Drvar (both with a Serb majority). It is astonishing that Tuđman not only “gave” Posavina, a predominately Croat region, to Serbs, but he in fact engaged in heated discussion and negotiation with Izetbegović in order to persuade him to agree to the Vance-Owen Peace Plan, according to which Serbs should control the “Posavina Corridor.” For details see “Zapisnik sa razgovora” 10 November 1993; and “Zapisnik sa razgovora”, 15 January 1993.

to the governing of mixed municipalities, Bosnian Croat leaders were faced first with the boycott of their institutions and then with fierce military resistance by the Bosniak majority. As a result, the “spontaneous resistance,” i.e., violence, was necessary, in the view of Bosnian Croat nationalists, to establish the Croat “factual power” in order to consolidate the pre-war institutional changes and the territorial reconfiguration of Bosnia.

The significance of the notion of “spontaneous resistance in relation to “historical sovereignty” is best illustrated by opposite interpretations of its meaning held by the Bosnian Croat and Bosniak nationalists. From the very beginning of the war, (ethnic) group power dynamics solely expressed in terms of access to instruments of violence or a lack thereof was used to advance the dichotomy between “spontaneous resistance” and “aggression.” According to this discourse, the well-equipped Yugoslav/Bosnian Serb Army was the “aggressor” against whom the “bare-handed people” (*goloruki narod*) raised up and organized a “spontaneous resistance” in order to defend their homeland and freedom.⁵⁴

Two elements of the theme of “spontaneous resistance” are particularly revealing. First, ironically, the Bosnian Croat and Muslim/Bosniak nationalists, sworn anti-communists, borrowed it directly from the communist experiences of the National Liberation Struggle (NOB) of 1941-45.⁵⁵ Secondly, at face value, and it is important to emphasize *only at face value*, the

⁵⁴ According to Woodward (1995), the US government adopted and promoted this view of the cause and nature of the conflict. In contrast, Europeans saw the Bosnian war as a civil war (p. 7).

⁵⁵ The National Liberation Struggle was led by Tito’s Partisans against both German and Italian occupiers and domestic collaborators. Tito, the leader of the Yugoslav Communist Party, temporarily relegated the “Socialist Revolution” to a secondary position, prioritizing the liberation of Yugoslavia and the unity of all Yugoslavs whose trust was broken by the bloody fratricidal war. Not all Partisans were or needed to be Communists to join the NOB.

concept is stripped of an ethnic label. The “aggressor” is in fact always identified by its ethnicity (the Serbs), while the notion of the people (*narod*), who engaged in “spontaneous resistance,” is non-ethnic and universal. Christia (2012) emphasizes this selective ethnic labeling of the groups, showing how each warring side in Bosnia changed identity narratives according to the ever-shifting power dynamics on the ground. In other words, ethnic labeling was employed strategically. However, the analysis of the notion of “spontaneous resistance” (of the “bare-handed people”) in relation to the theme of “historical sovereignty” also cautions us not to take *non-ethnic* concepts uncritically.

Although both the Bosniak and Croat nationalist elites deliberately removed an ethnic label from the commonly shared theme of “spontaneous resistance,” their different interpretations of its meaning and origins point to its apparent association with ethnic groups and ethnic objectives. The Bosniak nationalists around Alija Izetbegović reduced the “spontaneous resistance” of Croats to a negative role, ultimately harmful for both the Croatian community and Bosnia. The “spontaneous resistance” among the Croat people was, according to Izetbegović, both the cause and consequence of the division within both the HDZ leadership and the Croat people in Bosnia. Although it was initially necessary as it prepared Croats to confront Serb “aggression,” the “spontaneous resistance” bore the seeds of self-destruction and disunity among the Bosnian Croat community. This is how Izetbegović delegitimized the Croat “spontaneous resistance” in one of his meetings with Tuđman:

I think that the HVO itself, as a front, is not at all united politically. It all varies sometimes from place to place, from case to case. It is not surprising that the

resistance was *spontaneous*, and it is not surprising that various views were formed in that sense [how to organize Bosnia]. It is not surprising. Because it [the HVO] is *not centralized*, it was *not coordinated*. It [resistance] was spontaneous, and some local leaders emerged with their own views concerning some questions; they bring into it, let me say, their ideology [Herzeg- Bosnian and “Greater Croatia”] (“Zapisnik sa sastanka”, 21 July 1992, pp. 5-6, Tape 6. Emphasis added.).

First, just like the Bosnian Croat leadership, Izetbegović also linked the concept of “spontaneous resistance” with the creation of Herzeg-Bosnia (but not to the “historical right/sovereignty”). Second, in this interpretation, the attribute “spontaneous” is equated with “local,” “provincial,” nationalist, and even outright anarchist.⁵⁶ Thus, Croat “spontaneous resistance” was represented as a problem to be solved, and the solution was to subordinate the Bosnian Croat army (HVO) to the predominately Bosniak Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ABiH). In other words, the “spontaneous resistance” that emerged in Bosniak “ethnically clean” territories was ultimately a superior and the only legitimate form of resistance. Paradoxically, the principle of “spontaneous resistance” was used by the Bosnian Croat HDZ to strengthen its territorial claims based on “historical right,” but was also manipulated by the Bosniak nationalist party SDA to deny that “right” to the Bosnian Croat leadership.

⁵⁶ This narrative also generated a division between “loyal” and “disloyal” citizens (or traitors) of Bosnia. When the Bosniak and Bosnian Croat armies were cooperating against a common enemy, the Bosnian Serb army, the Bosniak leadership embraced Croats as “loyal” citizens of Bosnia (for example, in the municipalities of Doboј and Orašje in May 1992). However, in the areas where the relationship between the two armed forces were affected by mutual distrust and fighting, Croats were portrayed in negative terms, in particular as “radicals” and “provincials” and, by extension, “disloyal” citizens (for example, in Derventa, Busovača, and Kiseljak in the early summer of 1992).

In the Croat nationalist narrative, “spontaneous resistance” was represented completely differently. As we already saw, “spontaneous resistance” and “historical sovereignty” were interconnected. According to the Croat nationalist narrative, it was not a coincidence that Croat “spontaneous resistance” occurred precisely in the “Croat space” that previously belonged to the Croatian Banovina. It was acknowledged that there were internal disagreements, infighting, and confusion within the Bosnian HDZ party: there was a “feeling [among the party membership, within the Catholic Church, and the Croat population in general] that the head does not know what it is doing. And it is clear that, when it comes to the Croats in [Bosnia], the head is the HDZ” (“Zapisnik sa razgovora”, 17 September, 1992, p. 1, Tape 2). Those Croat politicians who did not embrace “spontaneous resistance” as the expression of “historical sovereignty” were dismissed as “disloyal” Croats with no legitimacy to represent Croat interests. Tuđman reiterated on several occasions that “all those who had different views, the people who stick to their views, have no place among the representatives of the Croat people in [Bosnia]” (“Zapisnik sa razgovora, p. 2, Tape 13). This authoritarian mentality was not particular to the HDZ, but was also present in the Bosniak party SDA and the Bosnian Serb party SDS. (For example, the Serb leadership called those Serbs who supported the Bosnian government “traitors” or “*soliterski Srbi*.”⁵⁷

According to the Croat nationalist narrative, the Croat leadership might be divided, but the “Croat people” were solidly united around the Bosnian Croat army (HVO). Tuđman insisted that the HVO was “*one whole* that acted and self-organized in the military sense” (“Zapisnik sa

⁵⁷ “*Soliterski Srbi*” literally means Serbs who live in high-rises. Figuratively, it means Serbs who remained in Sarajevo and supported the Bosnian government.

sastanka”, 21 July 1992, p. 5, Tape 7). In other words, it did not lack centralization and coordination, as Izetbegović suggested. Furthermore, the HVO was not confined only to an ethnically homogenous area (Western Herzegovina), as the Bosniak leadership claimed, but rather encompassed the whole territory of Bosnia: this view gave the birth to the myth that *only* Croats “defended” Bosnia. Put simply, the “Croat people” were united and “self-organized, with the help of Croatia” around a common objective—to defend the “sovereignty of the Croatian people” and the “sovereignty of the Croatian space” (*suverenitet hrvatskog naroda i suverenitet hrvatskog prostora*) (“Zapisnik sa razgovora”, 17 September 1992, p. 3, Tape 7).

The binding of “historical sovereignty” to “spontaneous resistance” strengthened the Bosnian Croat HDZ political demands, and in some instances even blackmail, towards the Bosniak leadership⁵⁸. Whereas the Bosniak Party of Democratic Action (SDA) was willing to tolerate, at least temporarily, the Bosnian Croat armed forces, including the regular Croatian Army on Bosnian territory, they outright rejected Bosnian Croat civil governments (HVO) at the local and regional level. Whereas the Bosniak SDA sharply distinguished between civil and military structures, for the Bosnian Croat HDZ the two were interdependent. According to the narrative, the Croat civil government (HVO) was established in order to successfully wage a war, and Zagreb, not Sarajevo, supported that administration (“Zapisnik sa sastanka”, 21 July 1992, pp. 4-5, Tape 21). In other words, the Bosnian Croat party HDZ insisted that Sarajevo should recognize as legal and legitimate Herzeg-Bosnia, *both* in its civilian and military structures.

⁵⁸ Both the Bosnian Croat leadership and Tudman openly conditioned the supply and transport of arms to the Bosniak army through Croatian territory on the solution of political questions.

Just as the existing institutions enabled Bosnian Croats to go to war, violence was, in turn, necessary, as the narrative goes, to create conditions for Croat civilian rule to take root.⁵⁹ When Izetbegović harshly protested the use of violence to establish a Croat civil administration (HVO) in municipalities where Croats did not have an absolute majority, Tuđman compared the HVO to Tito's partisans, who routinely removed the existing civilian governments and replaced them with Communist rule in liberated territories during World War II (p. 7). As Jadranko Prlić, the Prime Minister of Herzeg-Bosnia, stated, "our opinion is that we will not have what we do not hold with a [combat] boot. We will defend our space" ("Zapisnik sa razgovora", 17 September 1992, p. 4, Tape 5). Only the combination of force and the legalization of establishing civil rule could "protect the Croat people from [further] marginalization [*majorizacija*]" ("Zapisnik sa sastanka", 21 July 1992, p. 4, Tape 23). "If we agreed to [Bosnia as] a civic state, we would experience *what the municipalities of middle[Central] Bosnia experienced in the last 30-40 years*" ("Zapisnik sa razgovora", 17 September 1992, p.1, Tape 6. Emphasis added.). What those municipalities in Central Bosnia underwent was, according to the nationalist narrative, a demographic shift unfavourable to the Croat community.⁶⁰

If the Croat and Bosniak narratives shared, albeit differently interpreted, the theme of "spontaneous resistance," the Croat and Serb narratives have in common yet another theme, namely, demographic changes caused by past marginalization, migration, and violence. (To be sure, the Bosniak narrative also centred on demographics, but it was, as we will see below,

⁵⁹ This is known as the "realist principle," i.e., territorial claims are based on successful military campaigns.

⁶⁰ Patterns of migration in Bosnia did follow ethnic lines, as it affected mostly Serbs and Croats. Furthermore, economic migration was greatest in ethnically mixed areas; this produced a pattern whereby mono-ethnic villages existed within mixed municipalities (Woodward, 1995, p. 248).

distinct from Serb and Croat narratives.) The theme of demographics had the function not only to highlight the alleged marginalization of Bosnian Croats that occurred *after* World War II, but also to warn against potential consequences for Croats if Herzeg-Bosnia was to be abolished. In other words, it justified the creation and consolidation of the entity.

According to the nationalist narrative, Croats became a minority in Central Bosnia as a result of a combination of out-migration of Croats and a high birthrate among Bosniaks. Furthermore, the Croat discourse mirrored the Serb narrative, underlining a threat coming from Muslim immigration, in particular from Kosovo, Sandžak, and Turkey: “four million Turks of Bosnian origin from Turkey are ready to *return* to [Bosnia],” warned Tuđman (“Zapisnik sa razgovora”, 17 September 1992, p. 2, Tape 14. Emphasis added.). Interestingly, Tuđman chose the verb “to return,” suggesting potential claims to land by those would-be Turkish returnees.

The instruments to regulate (to increase) the Muslim population—high birth rates and the immigration of Muslims— was then directly linked with the Bosnian constitution. The Bosniak leadership advocated for a “civic state” or a “state of citizens” (*građanska država*), whereby individuals rather than ethnic groups would be bearers of rights. In the Croat (and Serb) narrative, the political dominance of Bosniaks, which would be possible only under the “one man, one vote” system, was equated with the *Islamization* of Bosnia: Tuđman declared that a “civic [Bosnia] is an Islamic [Bosnia]” (*građanska BiH je islamska BiH*) (“Zapisnik sa razgovora”, 17 September 1992). Furthermore, the symbiosis between the politics of Muslim demography (immigration and resettlement) and the politics of *Islamization* was transported from the abstract realm of potentiality to reality, namely, the ongoing war. The Croat leadership

pointed to the heavy presence of foreign mujahedeen fighters on Bosnia's battlefields, especially in *Central Bosnia*, where Croats had already been, according to the narrative, pushed out.

Tuđman estimated that by September 1992 approximately 1,100-1,300 Mujahedeen soldiers from various Islamic states arrived in Bosnia in order to fight a "jihad" ("Zapisnik sa razgovora", 17 September 1992).⁶¹ This was presented as evidence of the ongoing *Islamization* of Bosnia.⁶²

As the war continued, the initial question of immigration of Muslims from abroad (Turkey) and from Serbia (Sandžak) became increasingly blurred with the theme of the strategic resettlement of Bosnian Muslims who were expelled by the Serb and Croat armies. It is at this point that the discursive realm intersected with violence on the ground. For example, a HDZ member from Zenica, a predominately Bosniak town in Central Bosnia, described the SDA policy of expelling Serbs and Croats from Zenica district and resettling in their stead internally displaced Bosniaks as "a fait accompli" (*politika svršenog čina*) ("Zapisnik sa razgovora", 17 September 1992, p. 2, Tape 10).

⁶¹Muslims from Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and Arab states, such as Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Algeria, and Saudi Arabia, arrived in Bosnia at the beginning of the war and remained until the end. Furthermore, nationals of Western countries of Arabic background also came to Bosnia to fight on behalf of Bosnian Muslims. The Staff of High Command of the Bosniak Army ordered the formation of a detachment composed of foreign mujahedeen fighters, "El Mujahedin," as a part of the 306th Brigade within the 3rd Corps. See the documents *Formiranje odreda "El Mudžahidin," Naređenje za pretpočinjavanje jedinica*. The Command of the 3rd Corps ordered the dismantlement of the "El Muhajedin" in December 1995. See document *Rasformiranje Odreda "El Mudzahidin."* Local Bosnian Muslims also joined those jihadists, often for religious reasons, but also for money and better weaponry. According to the daily of the "El Mudžahedin" Detachment, *Poziv Džihada* (1995), foreign mujahedeen soldiers did not come to Bosnia only to assist Bosnian Muslims to fight against Serbs and Croats, but also to spread "true" Islam and to "form and to raise generations who will spread this faith and sacrifice on its path." All of this only confirmed Croat and Serb narratives. Interestingly, Tuđman believed that Western Europe and the United States allowed the Serbs "to do what they are doing in [Bosnia]," because "Serbs and Serbhood play a role in preventing the Muslims from creating their Islamic state in Europe." ("Zapisnik sa razgovora", 17 September 1992, p.3, Tape 14).

⁶² However, neither Serb nor Croat politicians who protested against the presence of Jihadists in Bosnia saw as problematic the presence of foreign fighters from Western and Eastern Europe, North America, and Russia, fighting for the Bosnian Croat and Bosnian Serb armies.

That displaced people were merely a weapon in the hands of both Bosniak and Croat nationalists best illustrates the implementation of the Washington Agreement, signed in March 1994, which ended the Bosniak-Croat war and established the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH). The FBiH consisted of cantons, some of which had a Croat majority, while others were predominately Bosniak. It was those cantons where neither group had an absolute majority before the war that became the battlefield for the “demographic race.” The Bosnian Croat HDZ protested against the Bosniak SDA strategy of resettling hundreds of thousands of Bosniaks who had been expelled from the Republika Srpska to Central Bosnia and Northern Herzegovina where the Bosniaks, upsetting the demographic balance between the Croat and Bosniak communities. The Bosnian Croat leadership insisted that those displaced people be moved and resettled in those municipalities where Bosniaks already enjoyed an absolute majority, “so that we could built power and structure according to the elections results and the 1991 census” (“Zapisnik sa sastanka”, 27 March 1995, p. 5, Tape 6).

As a result of the Bosniak-Croat war, Bosnian Croat nationalists started to distinguish two types of municipalities. There were municipalities that were “undefended,” namely, municipalities that were originally part of Herzeg-Bosnia but were taken by force by the Bosniak army (Bugojno, Travnik, Fojnica, and Vareš). And then there were “defended” municipalities that remained firmly under the control of the Bosnian Croat Armed Forces. The Croat leadership displayed a different attitude towards Croats in those two types of districts, illustrating that the question of demography continued to dominate the nationalist agenda in relation to those territories over

which they no longer had control. In other words, control over territory and control over population were two different although related aspects of the Bosnian war.

The Croat leadership complained that in the wake of the signing of the Washington Agreement, the “undefended” municipalities witnessed the exodus of approximately 40,000 Croats (“Zapisnik sa sastanka”, 27 March 1995, p. 2, Tape 2).⁶³ The flight of Croats from “undefended” municipalities, especially Travnik and Vareš, serves as an illustration of how the three sides colluded to affect ethnic demography. In June 1993, the Bosniak army in Travnik municipality attacked Croat villages, imprisoned civilians in various detention facilities, and massacred 25 civilians and prisoners of war in the village of Bikosi/Maline and five civilians in Miletići village.⁶⁴ This is a typical example of what we call “ethnic violence”: the perpetrator targets the victims based solely on their ethnic identity. What is not immediately evident is to what extent Croat nationalists facilitated the Bosniak expulsion of Croats. Specifically, the Bosnian Croat army (HVO) in Travnik ordered and organized the so-called “evacuation” of approximately 3,000 Croats from the Bila Valley. There was only one way for Croats to leave Bosniak territory—through Serb-controlled territory. Serb and Croat nationalists coordinated the movement of Croat civilians (and soldiers dressed in civilian clothes), as a result of which Croat expellees freely walked across the Serb-Croat separation line and were, once on Serb territory,

⁶³The HDZ cited fear of “Mujahedeen” and forced mobilization into the Bosniak Army as two major reasons that the Croat population fled. Other factors were the lack of Croat media, schools, and political participation.

⁶⁴ In Travnik municipality, Bosnian Croat armed forces massacred 18 Muslim civilians in the villages of Bukovica and in Radojčići and placed the village of Krušcia under siege. Those Muslims who survived the attack were detained and imprisoned in various detention facilities in Travnik (Skradno and Kaonik) and in Busovača. See PWO June 1993.

transported by the Serb authorities to another separation line near Vareš municipality, an area still controlled by the Bosnian Croat army.

A Bosniak Army report, *Informacija*, dated 23 October 1993, indicates that the Bosniak leaders were aware of the purpose and the nature of the “evacuation” of Croats by the HVO, namely, to establish “ethnically clean territories” and to divide Bosnia along ethnic lines.⁶⁵ Had the policies of the Bosniak SDA and Bosnian Croat HDZ not overlapped—to achieve ethnic homogeneity of their respective territories—the HDZ “evacuation” of Croats would have ultimately failed.

Although the Bosniak military and political authorities were fully aware of the ideological objective behind the resettlement of Croats, they did nothing to protect Croats and to ensure conditions for them to remain at home. On the contrary, the Bosniak army covered up and dismissed the mass killings of innocent Croats as collateral damage (“Centar veze”, 21 October 1993). The HDZ in Travnik also pushed for the evacuation of approximately 10,000 Croats from the town of Travnik, using terror and violence by Bosniak army units, including Mujahedeen soldiers, as a justification (PWO, 6 June 1993). After Travnik, the town of Vareš became the next object of the experiment called “humane resettlement:” using violence by the Bosniak army and police as a pretext, the Bosnian Croat army arranged the “evacuation” of Croats from Vareš, again through Serb territory, resettling them in “defended” municipalities of Western Herzegovina.

The Bosnian Croat governments (HVO) in “defended” municipalities in Central Bosnia (Novi Travnik, Busovača, Vitez, Kreševo, Kiseljak, and Žepča), as well as those located in Western

⁶⁵ The UN peacekeeping troops on the ground were also aware of the political nature of the “evacuation” of Croats. See PWO 7 June 1993.

Herzegovina, were not in favour of the Washington Agreement. The Bosnian Croat party HDZ representing those municipalities saw the agreement as an instrument to dismantle Herzegovina and to enable the Bosniaks to dominate over Croats.⁶⁶ It is those municipalities where the HVO stood unchallenged that rejected the return of expelled Bosniaks and Serbs, while simultaneously creating the conditions for the resettlement, instead of for the return home, of expelled Croats.

For example, the Minister of Defence of Croatia, Gojko Šušak, harshly criticized Bosnian Croat leaders for their ineffectiveness regarding the process of the resettlement of Croats in Kupres municipality, which had a Serb majority before the war. Šušak was particularly concerned that while the Croat leaders were passive, their Bosniak counterparts were advancing the resettlement of Bosniaks in Vukovsko, Ravno, and Kupreško. Why didn't anybody return there?"—asked Šušak. "And Muslims settled all the villages up to Vukovski. Every [Muslim] house is full, and you know that. And here, there is not a single settlement [of Croats]" ("Zapisnik sa sastanka", 27 March 1995, pp. 2-3, Tape 9). As an example of the effective implementation of the resettlement policy, Šušak praised the Mostar HDZ leadership, who successfully resettled, with Šušak's assistance, displaced Croats in the areas of northern and southern Mostar. This is how the President of the Municipal Council in Mostar, Mijo Brajković, explained his "success:"

This [policy of] resettlement, we don't ask anybody whether we want to resettle
[or not]. We already resettled 120 families in southern and northern Mostar... We

⁶⁶ The HDZ preferred divided "administrations" for those mixed cantons, one for Croats and another for Bosniaks. They also refused to agree to joint Croat-Bosniak-EU police patrols; the HDZ insisted that EU police officers should be embedded separately with Croats and Bosniaks. This idea of separate or divided administrations lives on in the present-day city of Mostar.

have requests for 450 more families, which we should resettle so that we will round up the whole territory of Žitomislići [and] up there, the northern part of Mostar (Zapisnik sa sastanka”, 27 March 1995, p.3, Tape 4).

Hand in hand with this practice of resettling Croats expelled by Bosniak and Serb armed forces went efforts to obstruct the return of expelled Bosniaks and Serbs to those municipalities that the Bosnian Croat army “defended” and where Bosniaks were in large numbers before the war (for example, Stolac and Čapljina). The Bosnian Croat HDZ resisted pressure coming from both Croat political representatives from “undefended” municipalities and the Bosniak leadership in Sarajevo to have expelled Bosniaks return homes. For example, the HDZ determined in advance that “one third [of Bosniaks] cannot return” to Stolac at all (“Zapisnik sa sastanka”, 27 March 1995, pp. 5-6, Tape 6).

The regulation of the population in Croat-claimed territory was not possible without the regulation of both private and socially owned property. The arbitrary detention of Serbs and Bosniaks was a function of the Croat “demographic renaissance.”⁶⁷ In particular, civilians, including women and children, were held in various detention facilities or confined to select villages. According to the minutes of working groups tasked to dismantle all detention facilities in Herzeg-Bosnia, prisoners were released on condition that they agreed to be transferred either to Serb or Bosniak territory or to leave the country altogether (the International Committee of the

⁶⁷ Between early September and mid November 1993, there were as many as 2,600 detainees, mostly Bosniaks, in the Heliodrom camp (Mostar) and 1,100 detainees in Gabela camp (Čapljina). Detention facilities were also located in Tomislavgrad, Livno, Prozor, Gornji Vakuf, Jablanica, and Ljubuški (“Analiza smještajnih”, 17 November 1993). Orders to close down all detention facilities in Bosnia were issued in December 1993 (“Odluku” 10 December 1993).

Red Cross gave priority to detainees in resettling displaced Bosnians in Western Europe and North America) (“Zapisnik sa sastanka”, 11 December 1993, p. 3).

It was not acceptable for the Herzeg-Bosnia government to release detainees and simply allow them to go home: “Detainees cannot be released just like that... Also one must ensure their departure to third countries. I am against that [Bosniaks] walk freely around the urban centres...” (“Zapisnik sa sastanka”, 11 December 1993, p. 3). Three HVO offices in particular—the Staff for Organization and Coordination of Refugees and Displaced Persons, the Office for Displaced Persons and Refugees, and the Defence Department—worked in concert to ensure the “unrestricted departure of civilians to a third country of their choice” (“Zaključak”, 19 July 1993). For example, out of 4,000-4,500 Bosniak detainees scheduled to be released in December 1993, the Herzeg-Bosnia government planned to move approximately 1,600 to Bosniak territory (the left bank of Mostar, Jablanica, Zenica, and Žepče), while as many as 1,000 Bosniaks would be transferred, via Croatia, to a third country (“Zapisnik sa sastanka”, 13 December 1993, 6; “Zaključak”, 19 July 1993).

The private property of expelled Serbs and Bosniaks was looted or confiscated and allocated to Croats, who had been expelled from the territories controlled by the Serb and Bosniak armed forces (“Zapisnik sa sastanka”, 11 December 1993, p. 3). In addition, socially-owned apartments previously occupied by Serbs and Bosniaks were “bought off” (*otkupljeni*) as a means to obstruct the return of expelled owners. This is how the President of HVO Mostar, Mijo Brajković, reacted to Šušak’s demand to resettle Croats: “To buy off apartments. I would go with buying off apartments, at least those apartments that we hold in Mostar” (“Zapisnik sa sastanka”, 23 March

1995, p. 4, Tape 4). In addition to private property, social and state enterprises were also in the service of the Croatian “demographic renaissance.”

Companies from Croatia were expected to invest in Herzeg-Bosnia. The objective was to use those companies as an instrument to either attract displaced Croats to resettle or to keep those who have already been resettled in particular areas. For example, it was deemed strategic to bring a British investor to invest into a Mostar aluminium company as a way to pre-empt a Bosniak commercial presence and activities and, by extension, the presence of the Bosniak community in the city (“Zapisnik sa sastanka”, 23 March 1995, p. 4, Tape 4). Another company, the “Bilokalnik,” was to invest into Kupres municipality, while benefiting from looted machinery and raw material (“Zapisnik sa sastanka”, 23 March 1995, p.6, Tape 8). “Podravka” invested in Čapljina, Ljubuški, Grude, and Široki Brijeg. It was unacceptable to the Croat leadership that the Croatian industry remained indifferent to the higher Croatian national goals: “It is unacceptable...that nobody from the INA [the Oil Company] to the “Regenracije Zabok” has interest to keep Croats in those spaces, at least to stop further departures [of Croats]” (Zapisnik sa sastanka”, 23 March 1995, p. 2, Tape 8).

From the very beginning of the war, Croatian President Tuđman advocated for the idea of “population exchanges” between Serbs and Croats as a way to establish good relations between Serbia and Croatia and to prevent future conflicts in the region:

Our politics must enable us to establish with Serbia some kind of relationship, namely, that certain *planned resettlement of the population is in both their and*

our interests, so that for once a normal relationship is established, if not friendly then bearable neighbourly relationship with Serbs (“Zapisnik sa razgovora” 17 September 1992, p. 1, Tape 15. Emphasis added.).

When the Bosnian Croat leadership raised the question of the return of Croats who were expelled from North-eastern Bosnia/Posavina, this is what Tuđman replied:

That problem of return to Posavina, clearly, it would be in our interests that Croats return there. But now, when we are talking among ourselves, *it would not be in [our] interest that Croats return there*. But now, when we are talking among ourselves, it would not be in [our] interests that, if it is true that 30,000 Serbs from Croatia resettled in Posavina, those Serbs return to us in Croatia, in Zagreb, etc. (“Zapisnik sa sastanka”, 27 March 1995, p. 4, Tape 12. Emphasis added).

In other words, both the Bosnian and Croatian HDZ promoted the politics of “Croatian demographic renaissance” (*demografskog preporoda Hrvatske*), which entailed strategic thinking as to “what is in the interest of the *Croat people as a whole*, [namely], where they [Croats] should return, and where they should not return” (p. 4, Tape 12). Emphasis added). Put differently, there was nothing random or non-political about the return and resettlement process. Tuđman’s policy of “demographic renaissance” meant that many Croats who were expelled from the territory controlled by Serb and Bosniak forces should never return home. Instead, they should be resettled in the “territory that must remain and which will remain Croatian” (p. 3, Tape

11). Some of those Croats were resettled in Croatia, in particular in areas from which Croatian Serbs were expelled.

The Bosniak Nationalist Narrative and the “Ethnic Principle”

In this section, I will discuss the Bosniak nationalist narrative, namely, how it differed from and where it overlapped with the Serb and Croat discourses. At the end of this discussion, it will be possible to identify a common basis for all three nationalist discourses that defined and, in return, were shaped by war violence. For the analysis of the Bosniak nationalist narrative, I draw on meetings between the President of the Bosniak nationalist party, Alija Izetbegović, and Croatian President Tuđman, where the war, the Bosnian constitution, and ethnic minorities were discussed. I also use Bosnian government and military documents, especially those that reported on violence against the civilian population. Of the three nationalist narratives, the Bosniak discourse is the one most filled with tensions and contradictions.

In the previous sections, we saw that Serb and Croat leaders in Bosnia rejected the so-called “ethnic principle” as the *only* factor to be taken into account when re-organizing the country. Simply defined, the “ethnic principle” is the alignment of territorial self-government with the ethnic composition of a given territory. In other words, the (majority) population in ethnically homogenous territory, exercises its “right” to self-determination (for this reason, the “ethnic principle” is also called the “democratic principle”). As we saw earlier, however, to make claims to ethnically mixed territory dominated by another ethnic group, it was necessary to invent other concepts that justified rule over those territories: “historical right” (SDS) and “historical

sovereignty” (HDZ). However, the weight of numerical preponderance of the Bosniaks in certain territories compelled Serb and Croat nationalists to supplement “historical right/sovereignty” with the right to private property of land and the concept of “spontaneous resistance.”

It was the Bosniak nationalist narrative that advanced the “ethnic principle” as the *sole* determinant of re-mapping Bosnia. That the “ethnic principle” was advocated by the Bosniak leadership may come as a huge surprise considering that the Bosniak Party of Democratic Action (SDA) embraced the notion of a multi-ethnic and above all sovereign Bosnia. The fact that Bosniaks suffered most from violence driven by ethnic distinctions has greatly obscured the Bosniak nationalist narrative, which was in part structured around the “ethnic principle.”

Furthermore, in contrast to the Serb and Croat nationalist narratives that consistently and openly raised doubts about a workable multi-ethnic Bosnia and indeed called for the “separation” of the three communities, Bosniak nationalists officially and publicly celebrated Bosnian diversity.

Bosniak officials relatively successfully presented themselves to and were in turn perceived by the international community as the only true guardian of Bosnian multiculturalism.⁶⁸ This is

⁶⁸For example, in February 1993, Haris Silajdzic, a Bosniak member of the War Presidency of Bosnia, appeared before the Subcommittee on European Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations of the US Senate and lobbied for the lifting of an arms embargo imposed by the UN on Bosnia (on all three sides). This is how he presented Bosnia: “The truth is that these three peoples are actually one people, used to be, but because of cultural and religious differences they are now three different national entities, but they speak the same language. We call it three different ways because Bosnia is a meeting place of civilizations of different influences. We are obviously paying the price for our pluralism now, and our riddle, persistence if you like, to preserve a pluralist society in Bosnia-Herzegovina is a reflection of what the democratic majority want. It is not the position of the Government of Bosnia-Herzegovina.” Senator Biden replied: “It amazes me that you have been able to sit before this committee and in as even-handed and almost dispassionate way, describe what has happened to your country, and still desire to maintain your pluralist society, and to reconstruct your Nation, including all elements of the country” (American Policy in Bosnia, 1993). However, foreign diplomats and politicians who participated in peace talks, especially Americans, had a difficult time to distinguish the position of the Bosnian government from the position of the Bosniak SDA. Indeed, they tended to interchangeably refer to representatives of the Bosniak people and the Bosnian government officials. This reflected the inability of the international community, the Europeans and Americans in particular, to agree on the cause and nature of the Bosnian

probably another reason that the Bosniak nationalist narrative has been less subject to critical analysis.

And yet, it was the Bosniak party SDA that openly promoted the so-called “ethnic principle.” Although the “ethnic principle” is certainly a most interesting and revealing theme of the Bosniak nationalist narrative, it cannot stand on its own and thus must be studied in relation to other thematic pillars of the narrative. The key components or themes of the Bosniak narrative were “ethnic principle,” multiculturalism, demography, and democracy (elections). Some of the elements were in apparent conflict with each other (“ethnic principle” vs multiculturalism; diversity vs demography), while others were mutually reinforcing (demography and fair and open elections). What linked all those themes in one cohesive and complex narrative structure was the notion of violence by way of references to ethnic minorities as a source of public disorder and interethnic conflict.

As a result, the Bosniak narrative also prioritized ethnically mixed territory. In particular, the analysis of the Bosniak narrative with its focus on ethnically diverse regions will shed light on the SDA *negative* attitude towards ethnic minorities. What is interesting and important to underline is that this pessimist view of the role and position of ethnic groups did *not* exclude Bosniaks who inhabited territories claimed by Serb and Croat nationalists: *all three* ethnic

conflict. The Europeans, who had UN peacekeeping troops in Bosnia, saw the conflict as a civil war, while the Americans, with no troops on the ground, viewed it as Serbia’s “aggression” against the legitimate government in Sarajevo and a sovereign country. Nevertheless, Washington quickly adjusted its position and by mid-1993 started to advocate for a fair territorial settlement for Bosniaks, ultimately conceding the view that the Bosnian war was an ethnic civil conflict (Woodward 1995, pp. 7-12). However, Donia and Fine Jr. (1994) argue that it was Serb and Croat nationalists who were successful in persuading the world public opinion that the Bosnian government was the expression of particular Muslim interests (p. 245).

communities when in minority were, according to the Bosniak narrative, equally potentially dangerous and subversive.

As we saw in the previous sections, both the Serb SDS and Croat HDZ used ethnic homogenous areas as the foundation upon which to construct the Republika Srpska and Herzeg-Bosnia, respectively. So, how did the Bosniak leadership respond to this association between territoriality and ethnic homogeneity? Surprisingly, the Bosniak leader, Alija Izetbegović, explicitly endorsed ethnic homogeneity as the exclusive determinant of territorial self-government. In fact, Izetbegović unambiguously supported, at least in principle, even the outright secession of “ethnically clean” regions. For example, he did not question the regional drive to self-determination of predominately Croat Western Herzegovina: “As far as Western Herzegovina is concerned, nobody would ever question that [its autonomy].” One would not question it even in Central Bosnia, if it was the same case” (“Zapisnik sa sastanka”, 21 July 1992, p. 2, Tape 10). By extension, the Serb Autonomous Region of Krajina, which was also ethnically homogenous, was also, in principle, acceptable to the Bosnian party SDA.

Izetbegović argued that if Bosnia had been neatly configured along three ethnically homogenous regions, the disintegration of the country would have been a matter of course. Indeed, the SDA would have, according to Izetbegović, joined the SDS and HDZ in dismantling Bosnia: “If the peoples did not mix... there would be no problem. We ourselves [the SDA] would do it [divide the country]. We need nothing. Why would we create some kind of united Bosnia and Herzegovina?” (p. 1, Tape 13). By stating this, Izetbegović did not only endorse the “ethnic principle,” but also reinforced the idea that homogenization of territory by way of expelling and

“exchanging” population was a way to secure claims to stable and unquestioned self-government.

A year later, Izetbegović continued to support the “ethnic principle” as the *sole* determinant for the reconstitution of Bosnia. He directly linked the process of decentralization with ethnic homogeneity: “Certainly, if you want a confederation...then we will make the *ethnic map* of [Bosnia]. Then, Croats will get that part where they are *in the majority* [Western Herzegovina]. Let them confederate that part, and, if they want, *let them secede*” (“Zapisnik sa razgovora”, 24 April 1993, p. 4, Tape 5. Emphasis added). Again here, Izetbegović does not only allow for the autonomy of Western Herzegovina within Bosnia, but in fact endorses its secession.

This position that calls for congruence between ethnic homogeneity and territorial self-government is puzzling in light of public endorsement by the Bosniak party SDA of Bosnia’s ethnic diversity and, above all, the defence of its territorial integrity. But what is even more surprising, and more important to study, is the stance the Bosniak leadership took in relation to ethnically mixed regions. While it supported the separation of ethnically homogenous regions, such as Western Herzegovina, the Bosniak leadership at the same time rejected the idea of decentralizing the country into *ethnically diverse* sub-state units. What underlined this rejectionist stance was the belief that the presence of ethnic minorities was a potential cause of instability and conflict. Before we discuss in detail this perception of the threat coming from ethnic minorities, it is important to briefly outline one particular aspect of the decentralization process.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, from the Carrington-Cutileiro (Sarajevo) Agreement (March 1992) to the Dayton Peace Agreement (November 1995), decentralization was always on the negotiation table, a mean to deescalate ethnic tensions before the war broke out and to stop the war once the conflict erupted.⁶⁹ With the exception of the Cutileiro Agreement, sub-states units were never meant to be ethnically homogenous (Woodward, 1995, p. 244).⁷⁰ This has never been enough emphasized. For example, the Vance-Owen Peace Plan and subsequent Stoltenberg-Owen Peace Plan proposed three “titular” cantons or provinces. The “titular” sub-state units, like former Yugoslav Republics, would have been “Serb,” “Croat,” and “Muslim” only in the “titular” sense.⁷¹ Although one ethnic group would be in the majority in the canton—and the naming would denote who was that majority—the canton would nevertheless contain members of the other two ethnic groups. In other words, one must distinguish between naming a territory after one nationality, which is, of course, the reflection of national rights to form self-government on certain territory, and its ethnic demography. As Brubaker (1996) rightly points out, “[t]he reconfiguration of political space along national lines did not automatically entail a corresponding redistribution of population” (p. 167). It is against this background that we need to

⁶⁹ The following peace plans were discussed in the 1992-1995 period: the Carrington-Cutileiro Plan (March 1992); the Vance-Owen Plan (January 1993); the Stoltenberg-Owen Plan (September 1993); the Washington Agreement (March 1994), and the Dayton Peace Accord (November, 1995). For more information on the political process and peace negotiations see Trifunovska (1999). For peace talks and corresponding maps of territorial division, see Burg and Shoup (2000).

⁷⁰ The Cutileiro Agreement called for ethnically homogenous cantons (however, territories assigned to each group were not territorially linked in one compact entity). Dona and Fine Jr. (1994) argue that this agreement “put Bosnia in the peculiar position of being a newly emerging independent state whose leaders had already agreed to divide it” (p. 235).

⁷¹ A comparison with the Former Yugoslavia is in order. With the exception of Bosnia, all five socialist republics were defined in national terms despite the fact that many of them were ethnically diverse. For example, the Socialist Republic of Serbia was named after Serbs who were the largest group in the republic, but was one of most ethnically diverse republics in the former Yugoslavia. Similarly, the Socialist Republic of Macedonia was the republic of Macedonians only in the titular sense, while other minorities, of whom Albanians were the largest one, constituted the republic.

analyze the Bosniak narrative in which ethnic minorities, including Bosniaks themselves, were perceived as a threat at the cantonal level.⁷²

It is not only that the Bosniak nationalist narrative linked territoriality with ethnic homogeneity by not questioning the right to self-determination of the *existing* ethnic homogenous regions, such as Western Herzegovina. It also reproduced the idea and practices of the violent homogenization of ethnically mixed areas that were carried out in a full force by Bosnian Serb officials in 1992. As we saw in the previous sections, the process of homogenization was completed through “reciprocal exchanges” of minorities, which, according to Woodward (1995) became systematic after the Washington agreement created a Muslim-Croat federation (p. 243). First, in the Bosniak nationalist narrative, ethnic homogeneity was conceived as a function of political order. Second, violence, namely, the expulsion of the ethnic “other,” was understood as an effective means to achieve long-term stability. Specifically, Izetbegović did not mince his words when he suggested that ethnic minorities as a source of instability and disorder must be expelled from ethnically mixed “titular” cantons.

The Bosniak leader, replying to Tuđman’s remark that the only way to stop the Bosnian war was to decentralize Bosnia into three “constituent units,” implied that this would be feasible only under the conditions of the *mutual expulsion* of peoples from those cantons. In particular, he argued that decentralization was *not* possible because “we cannot simply resettle a million people to the other side. That happened only twice in the world” (“Zapisnik sa sastanka”, 21 July

⁷² Just because Serb and Croat nationalists consistently advocated for decentralization into “titular” cantons and rejected the “ethnic principle” as the only criterion for the Bosnian Constitution, it does not mean that they, by default, embraced the notion of multi-ethnic sub-state units. The expulsion of members belonging to other ethnic groups from their respective territories is evidence that they did not.

1992, p. 2, Tape 13). Furthermore, speaking specifically of Central Bosnia where the Bosnian Croat government (HVO) was in place, Izetbegović warned that *Croat rule* in ethnically mixed municipalities, which would constitute a Croat canton, “would be sustainable only under the conditions that the [Bosniak] population is expelled.” To support his view, Izetbegović used as an example the mass expulsion of Bosniaks and Croats from Republika Srpska: “Karadžić realized what he needed to do. One must kill and expel people. Only then, he would be able to [*maintain power*]” (p. 3, Tape 8. Emphasis added). In other words, Izetbegović explicitly conceded that “ethnic cleansing” was not a consequence of reconstituting Bosnia into three cantons, but rather a necessary condition to achieve long term stability for those sub-state units.

The Bosniak party SDA limited decentralization to existing ethnically homogenous regions on the one hand, but also linked it to the mutual expulsion of population on the other hand. While Bosnian ethnic diversity and multi-culturalism was officially celebrated, the Bosniak nationalist narrative portrayed ethnic minorities as non-democratic and violent and thus a threat to state’s stability. To fully grasp the significance of this negative attitude towards ethnic minorities, it is now necessary to turn to two other, closely intertwined, themes of the Bosniak nationalist narrative, namely, demography and democracy or, to be more precise, democratic elections. As mentioned earlier, the theme of demography was the common thread that ran through all three narratives.

When Tuđman argued in favour of a decentralized Constitution for Bosnia, Izetbegović reminded him that only 200,000 Croats lived in “ethnically clean” territories, while two-thirds would become a *minority* in the “Serb” and “Muslim” cantons. “I will tell you that it

[confederation] is not possible. It would be possible, if there were compact [“ethnically clean”] Croat, Muslim, and Serb territories, more or less compact. That would have been a normal state... Confederation is not possible without putting one of the peoples *in the position of a minority*” (“Zapisnik sa razgovora”, 24 April 1993, p. 4, Tape 5. Emphasis added). In the context of the Yugoslav crisis in general and in the Bosnian context in particular, a reference to a constituent people becoming an ethnic minority always implied (the fear of) domination and oppression by the other group. Izetbegović went further and argued that Bosnians of the three ethnicities would react to their position of “ethnic minority” by generating instability and disorder. Here, the Bosniak nationalist narrative linked violence to democratic elections.

After the war, it was expected that Bosnia would organize free and fair elections. However, the end of the war would not, according to the Bosniak narrative, necessarily bring political stability, unless the mutual expulsion and exchanges of population were completed in the course of the war (or alternately, the country became a unitary state). According to this narrative, although the Bosniaks would be in a minority at the cantonal level (“Serb” or “Croat” cantons), they would constitute a majority in certain municipalities and, as a result of democratic elections, establish “Muslim rule” (unless Bosniaks were expelled). By this logic, having “Muslim rule” at the municipal level and “Croat rule” at the cantonal level would inevitably lead to instability and potentially to an armed conflict. Izetbegović warned the Croatian President: “Then there will be *instability* in those areas [with a Muslim majority], because simply you will have *Muslim rule* [government] in, say, a *Croatian canton*” (“Zapisnik sa sastanka”, 21 July 1992, p. 3, Tape 10. Emphasis added). This negative view of ethnic minorities was not expressed towards the end, but rather at the very beginning of the war.

What counted, according to Izetbegović, was demography, i.e., plurality: “in democracies, *demographic statistics* are only what matters. Nothing else matters” (p. 3, Tape 12). (This narrative directly fed the Serb and Croat discourses that highlighted the issue of Muslim immigration and high birthrate as a tool to dominate them.) According to the SDA leader, “there will be outvoting, there will be elections, and you will have Muslim rule [at the municipal level] in a Croat canton” (p. 3). What Izetbegović implied here was that Bosnia would return to the pre-war conditions that had facilitated the outbreak of the armed conflict in the first place. Outvoting in assemblies (both at the local level and at the centre), violation of procedures, and boycotting the institutions dominated by the other group were common pre-war practices. As we saw in the previous chapter, each side took steps to capture the existing local or/and central institutions and created their “own” new institutions, while at the same time denying the legitimacy to the captured or created by the other.

In fact, the Bosniak nationalist narrative was ambiguous in terms of the source of instability. Sometimes it pointed to ethnic minorities as a threat (as in the previous examples), while in other times, it identified the cantonal government as a cause of conflict. “Now, listen, from the aspect of *democracy*, the principle of plurality is important. There will be elections tomorrow, and *you [Croats] will simply not allow* for the government that does not correspond to the structure there [the cantonal structure]” (p. 2, Tape 10. Emphasis added). Here, it is the cantonal government, i.e., the majority group rather than the ethnic minority that would create a conflict. Whatever the source of instability, the narrative inscribed that ethnic heterogeneity would open the floodgates of violence (in decentralized Bosnia).

In other words, the only way to ensure an effective and sustainable government in decentralized Bosnia was, according to the nationalist narrative, to use violence in order to remove those potentially rebellious minorities. For example, Izetbegović warned Croats: “we [sic] can terrorize it [Mostar] for years, but *you will never rule Mostar*” (“Zapisnik sa razgovora”, 24 April 1993, p.1, Tape 5). In other words, if Croats wanted a stable Mostar or any other municipality with a Bosniak majority, they “should expel that [Bosniak] population... *So, you will have to undertake ethnic cleansing*” (p.1, Tape 5. Emphasis added). This statement echoes Karadžić’s stance expressed in his speech on the plebiscite:

Izetbegović cannot introduce his rule in 70% of the territory. [He] cannot introduce his rule in any Serb village. He does not have power in any Serb municipality. The police will have to listen to you [local SDS] in a decisive moment, [the police] will have to listen to you and to establish order based on the SFRJ [Yugoslav] Constitution and not on the Constitution of [Bosnia] on which they are rapidly working (“Prebiscit”, 1991).

Here is another paradox at the heart of the Bosniak nationalist narrative (the first one was the endorsement of the “ethnic principle”): it draws on both democracy and violence. Although the narrative rests on the theme of democracy (free and fair elections), the portrayal of ethnic minorities as subversive and non-democratic represents Bosnian society as a land of intolerance and incapable of solving its conflicts through parliamentary means, the essence of a democratic

system.⁷³ Furthermore, the Bosniak nationalist narrative remained largely salient on the issue of the unconditional implementation of human rights, including the right to return home for all, as a way to ensure peaceful coexistence among Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks in sub-state units. Instead of focusing on the right of the expelled Bosniaks to *return home*, the narrative placed the emphasis on the *return of territory*.

For example, in the context of the Vance-Owen Peace Plan, Izetbegović stated that “one cannot allow that ethnically cleansed territories remain, even temporarily, under the control of the army that carried out the ethnic cleansing” (“Zapisnik sa ragovora”, 15 January 1993, p. 4, Tape 2). Lord Owen unsuccessfully tried to shift the topic of the return of territory to the right of displaced people to return home. He admitted to Izetbegović that some “ethnically cleansed” areas were indeed allocated to Serb provinces, but that the emphasis should be on the draft Constitution that called for human rights instruments, such as a Public Legal Officer, to protect Bosniak and Croat rights in the Serb provinces/cantons (Ibid., p. 1, Tape 7). Nothing prevented Izetbegović to demand both a fairer distribution of territories, which was a legitimate demand considering that most of the territories were controlled by the Serb and Croat authorities, *and* the right of Bosniaks to return home. The two questions were not mutually incompatible.

Despite the fact that internationally brokered and sponsored peace talks and agreements reinforced the hybrid model of a multi-national Bosnia (at the state level) and the minority rights

⁷³ Donia and Fine Jr. (1994) disregard (or were at the time of writing unaware of) this attitude towards Bosnian ethnic minorities by Izetbegović and put the blame solely on Serb and Croat nationalists for having undermined the Bosnian tradition of multiculturalism and mutual tolerance. However, the authors do acknowledge that Bosniaks too carried out “ethnic cleansing,” thereby themselves undermining the idea of a multi-ethnic Bosnia (pp. 241, 245).

model (at the cantonal/entity level), the Bosniak leadership, in an attempt to prevent decentralization and in pursuit of the “civic” state model, promoted the “ethnic principle” and portrayed ethnic minorities, including Bosniaks, as politically disloyal and even potentially violent in the context of decentralization.⁷⁴ However, once the Bosniak SDA realized that its dream of a unitary Bosnia would not be realized, it engaged in the expulsion and exchanges of population in order to homogenize conquered territory. In other words, Bosniak nationalists made common cause with their Serb and Croat counterparts, using violence to expel Serbs and Croats and resettling expelled Bosniaks in strategic municipalities. The return of Bosniaks to Republika Srpska and Herzeg-Bosnia should be weighed against overall Bosniak interests.

As we saw in the section on the Croat nationalist narrative, the Bosniak Party of Democratic Action (SDA) deliberately resettled Bosniaks who were expelled from the Republika Srpska in those municipalities where Bosniaks were more numerous than Croats but fell short of an absolute majority, shifting the demographic balance in favour of the Bosniaks. According to Woodward (1995), “[m]ilitary control of territory was not sufficient for recognition: it had to be supplemented eventually by a vote” (p. 242).

After the cease-fire in Croatia and in towns of Bosnia-Herzegovina where fighting had ceased, local authorities continued this process by negotiating population exchanges on an ethnic basis between towns. These exchanges were hardly more

⁷⁴ Brubaker (1996) argues that “it is hard to imagine a civic self-understanding coming to prevail given the pervasively institutionalized understandings of nationality as fundamentally ethnocultural rather than political, as sharply distinct from citizenship, and as grounding claims to “ownership” of politics (which, after all, were expressly constructed as the politics of and for their eponymous ethnocultural nations)” (p. 105).

voluntary because they were peaceable, but their objective—to consolidate ethnically pure territories that would vote correctly in a referendum on sovereignty and in future elections and to justify government administration by their national group—had not been fully obtained by warfare (p. 242).

The Bosniak army and police also employed the same method as Serb and Croat armies to restructure the population. Arbitrary detention of Serb and Croat civilians in various detention facilities, where detainees were routinely tortured, sexually assaulted, raped and killed, and their ultimate expulsion, often through formal exchanges of detainees, had the function of rendering claimed territories predominately Bosniak. When discussing the release of Serb prisoners from four prisons, two in Sarajevo (Visoko and Tarčin) and two in Central Bosnia (Zenica and Konjic), Izetbegović argued that those detainees, once released, could not be allowed to go home. Instead they should be moved out of the Bosniak territory:

The Red Cross will escort prisoners to Karlovac... or we will ask them if they had any relatives here. I said that under no circumstance they should release them and let them go home, because then nothing will change [*onda nema ništa*], the old state will prevail (“Magnetofonski”, 26 December 1992, p. 7, Tape 3).

This statement is almost identical to the position voiced by the Bosnian Croat leadership in relation to the release of Bosniak detainees in 1993, as cited in the previous section.

Concluding Remarks: “Exchanges of Population” and the Complicity of International Organizations

Two days after Christmas in 1992, a member of the Bosnian government suggested that a number of imprisoned Serbs should be released and that the government should present the release as “a unilateral, good act of the Presidency in light of the upcoming holidays” (“Magnetofonski”, 26 December 1992, p. 5, Tape 3). Izetbegović agreed: “Let us do it. It is not an amnesty, but rather a pardon. Let us define it. It is an act of good will to release a number of prisoners” (p. 6).⁷⁵ That the release of prisoners should not be an outcome of due process, but rather of the “good will” of an individual or a group of individuals, who got in the holiday spirit, speaks to the arbitrariness of detention of people during the war: the only reason they were detained was their ethnicity. But those discussions that took place at the Bosnian Presidency also illustrate another aspect of illegal detention and the corresponding reciprocal “exchanges of population:” people were treated merely as commodities. Serbs should be “exchanged” during Christmas holidays as presents are exchanged between individuals.⁷⁶

As shown by the war time systematic practices of “reciprocal exchanges” of ethnic minorities, which continued after the peace agreement was signed, targeted people were not only regarded as superfluous for the in-territory power that expelled them. They were at the same time useful

⁷⁵When the inadequate conditions of two prisons located in Sarajevo were brought to Izetbegović’s attention, he replied: “Mister, I also sleep and live in cold rooms. So, what can one do?” (“Magnetofonski”, 26 December 1992, Tape 3, p. 5).

⁷⁶ The Bosniak authorities were under pressure to release their prisoners in the wake of a mass release of prisoners from Omarska and Manjača by Bosnian Serb authorities. Serb officials refused to release prisoners from the Batkovići camp unless their Bosniak counterparts freed Serbs from Zenica, Visoko, Tarčin, and Konjic. It was in this context that the discussion at the Bosnian Presidency took place.

and desirable for the out-territory power that resettled them. Those in-group members who happened to live outside of the claimed territory were sacrificed by their “own” party that purported to protect their interests. The crime of the expulsion of civilians was doubly meditated: by the government that carried out expulsion, but also by the government that integrated that violence into its political designs as evident in strategic resettlement of expellees. In saying this, I do not wish, however, to diminish the responsibility of the side that committed crimes.

The analysis of the nationalist narratives shows that all three Bosnian nationalist parties strived to achieve the same political goal—the ethnic homogenization of the claimed and conquered territory—and applied the same method—the expulsion and exchanges of population. The three nationalist narratives had structural similarities and used similar language. They have one crucial element in common: violence on the ground was the physical extension of discursive violence. As we saw, violence was an integral part of all three nationalist narratives. The notion of violence linked various concepts into one coherent narrative. The right to private property of the land, “spontaneous resistance,” and “dangerous ethnic minorities” were concepts that were linked through the notion of violence with the main principle of territorial claims— “historical right” to Bosnia or parts of it.

I argue that the international community was complicit in this process of “reciprocal exchanges” or “humane resettlement” during the war. Without their participation, the shifts in demography would not have occurred on such a large scale and become irreversible. I do not argue, however, that organizations, such as the International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), shared the objective of the Bosnian

nationalists who purposefully engaged in the mutual expulsion of the population. However, their noble intentions—the protection of the civilian population—do not erase their complicity in the process. We are all familiar with the expression “the road to hell is paved with good intentions.”

“Humane resettlement” or “reciprocal exchanges” were always part of the peace negotiation process led by the international community, especially the segment that addressed the political and humanitarian issue of the displacement of people. For example, the Joint Declaration issued in Geneva on September 30, 1992, by President Ćosić of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and President Tuđman of the Republic of Croatia states the following: “An agreement was reached with regard to more resolute action concerning the return of displaced persons to their homes, and to allowing for a *voluntary and humane resettlement* of those persons wishing to do so between the two States” (“United Nations. Security Council”, 30 September 1992, p. 37. Emphasis added).

Moreover, the ICRC and the UNHCR were fully aware that the three sides engaged in the mutual expulsion and “exchanges of the population”: the “practice of exchanging prisoners encourages all sides to engage in the arbitrary and unlawful rounding-up of civilians” (“United Nations, Economic and Social Council”, 1993, p. 12). Whereas the transfers of population within Bosnia were conducted both with and without the assistance of humanitarian organizations, the resettlement abroad was always facilitated by the ICRC and UNHCR: “The cooperation of third states in temporarily receiving the detainees has regrettably become a *crucial factor in implementing their release*” (“United Nations Security Council”, 11 November 1992, p. 25. Emphasis added.). Furthermore, the release of detainees was rarely unconditional, but rather

conditioned on reciprocity (“we will release our detainees only if you release yours”). Although the international community demanded that “the closure of all the above places of detention can no longer be contingent on considerations of reciprocity” (“United Nations Security Council”, 6 January 1993, pp. 14-15), the principle of reciprocity continued to govern exchange operations throughout the war.

According to the ICRC, as of the end of December 1992, Bosniak authorities released only 137 detainees and continued to hold in detention 887 more Serbs. Croat rulers released 357 prisoners and continued to hold 537, the majority of whom were also Serbs.⁷⁷ Serb officials released as many as 5,040 prisoners and continued to hold 1,333 Bosniaks and Croats (pp. 14-15). By May 1994, there were at least 715 camps: 237 on the territory of Republika Srpska and the Republic of Yugoslavia; 89 on the territory controlled by the Bosniak Army; 77 in Herzeg-Bosnia and Croatia; and four jointly operated by the Croat and Bosniak armed forces in Bosnia.

Furthermore, over 300 more camps were in operation but without clear evidence as to who operated them (“United Nations Security Council”, 27 May 1994, p. 51). The existence of over a thousand prisons in Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia speaks volume of the scale of “population exchanges.” In Bosnia, the typical spaces for imprisonment were not large industrial and military complexes, such as Omarska and Heliodrom, but local schools. It is hardly possible to find a

⁷⁷ It is little known that a method of turning a whole village into a prison was also used in the Bosnian war. For example, the Bosnian Croat armed and police forces turned the Rašćni village, Duvno/Tomislavgrad municipality, into a prison, detaining 247 Serbs, mostly women, children, and the elderly for over a year. In Livno municipality, 120 Serb civilians were detained in this way. In 1993, the Bosnian Croat army also confined Bosniaks, also mostly women, children, and elderly, to the village of Skradno, Travnik municipality. Similarly, the Bosnian Serb army closed off the village of Ripac, turning it into a prison for 60 Bosniak civilians. The Serb Trnoplje camp in Prijedor municipality was of this kind as well. All three sides tried to present that those people were detained for their own security and used the euphemism, “collection centres,” or “investigative centres” for prisons where civilians were unlawfully detained. The Bosnian Croat authority even referred to detainees as *štićenici* (protégés).

Bosnian school that was not turned into a prison for civilians: space where today children learn and play were not too long ago prisons for children and their parents.

Chapter Five

In-Group Members and Resistance to Violence

Uvijek svi znaju za nesreću i zlo, samo dobro ostaje skriveno.

Always everybody knows about the misfortune and evil, only the goodness remains hidden.

(Selimović 2011, p.77)

This chapter aims at revealing the goodness that marked the Bosnian war but largely remains hidden from us. In the first part of the thesis, I used a perspective from above in order to explain the conditions that made war possible, but not inevitable, and the dynamics of what we mistakenly call “ethnic violence,” making a link between structure, discourse, and violence on the ground. This macro approach is necessary but not sufficient, because one cannot simply assume that nationalist leaders were in full control over the actions of ordinary citizens and successfully shaped their thinking and attitudes (Hobsbawm 1990, p. 10). Whereas the wartime nationalist leaders believed that they played “historical roles,” there is no evidence to suggest that ordinary Bosnians, irrespective of their ethnic identities, saw their participation in the war in terms of “historical destiny.” Attributing to nationalist leaders and their ideologies overpowering influence over the actions, opinions, and attitudes of citizens would not only accord greater power to those leaders than they possessed in the reality, but would also take away the power and agency of ordinary citizens in challenging times, such as civil wars. This is not to say, however, that the ideas, policies, and actions of political leaders were insignificant and inconsequential for the Bosnian people and their common country.

I believe that combining micro and macro approaches would give us a better understanding of violence during the Bosnian war. In this chapter, I will tell the stories of ordinary Bosnians that offer us a glimpse into what kinds of thoughts, opinions, attitudes, needs, and interests they had during the war.

Secondly, in Chapter Three and Chapter Four, I showed how violence, both against in-group and out group members, was an integrated part of both structures and discourses. In particular, Bosnian citizens were sacrificed for the high political objective, namely, the division of Bosnia and the ethnic homogenization of claimed territories. Bosnians were attacked in their homes, denied the right to private property, and ultimately expelled from their homes that happened to be on the “wrong” territory. As I proposed in the Introduction, when the Bosnian household became the object of violence, it also became political. For Bosnians who found courage to stay in their homes were unable due to discrimination they faced to provide for basic necessities. Their freedom of movement was severely curtailed. They were able to remain in their homes and survive only thanks to their neighbours.

This chapter focuses on resistance by ordinary men and women who belonged to the dominant, in-group, that is, the group that was not the object of violence, exclusion, and expulsion. Ordinary Bosnians, as I will show below, openly and actively, often risking their own lives and safety, rejected the nationalist principle according to which stability and public order somehow depended on the expulsion of their neighbours who happened to be of a different ethnicity.

Although their actions were concerned with matters that typically belong to the private realm,

namely, bare survival, these actions were, I argue, political. They disrupted or tried to disrupt the ongoing re-distribution and “exchanges” of bodies in the country (and across the borders) based on ethnic markers. It comes as no surprise to us that the people I talked to regarded their actions as quite ordinary and attributed to them no political significance. In this chapter, I reflect on the political character of their actions and words, which had far reaching consequences for those who were victims of state violence. It is precisely the stories of those who directly took part in protecting the persecuted without being conscious of the political nature of their action that we must tell.

Those stories are not about the glorification of multi-ethnic Bosnia. As I will show, they are complicated, as the division between “us” and “them” persisted. Those stories powerfully show that mistrusts and prejudices towards the “other” often co-exist with, but not necessarily threaten, one’s capacity and will to empathize with the “other.” After all, mixed marriages, a common indicator of intergroup trust and tolerance, between Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks have traditionally been rare in Bosnian villages before the war, allowing Bosnians to preserve and pass group prejudices from one generation to another. And yet, the respondents, all rural dwellers— even if emphasizing that intermixing was the exception in their villages—did not only tell me their own stories of mutual help from the recent 1992-95 civil war, but also the stories of togetherness and humanity from World War II that they heard from their older relatives. In other words, the mutual help and harmonious coexistence between ethnic communities may not be a marker of the absence of prejudices and mistrust. Nor should we take the presence of biases as the predictor of future violence.

The Complicated Business of Empathy

Many Bosnians did not harm their countrymen. Instead, they tended to withdraw into their private lives and were preoccupied with day-to-day activities directed at managing scarcity and avoiding dangers that come with war. Furthermore, early into the war, people became aware that dangers did not come only from the “enemy,” as their nationalists wanted them to believe, but also from political and administrative officials who purported to protect them from that “enemy.” Often under the pretext of preserving public peace and order, officials and their associates enriched themselves by plundering both private and state (social) property. For example, curfews and checkpoints were nominally introduced to prevent looting, but in reality were there to enable plunder by those close to power.

The most enthusiastic and boastful “warriors” and “patriots” were those soldiers and police for whom going to the front did not mean to “defend” the people, but rather to carry out looting and commit other types of crimes.⁷⁸ All three armies frequently warned in their reporting that widespread looting by combatants threatened the morale and the integrity of the army, as well as endangered the “goals of the struggle.” Many Bosnian towns were controlled by more than one army in the course of the war. The side that first “took power” would plunder the town and surrounding villages; when the other side took control of the area, it continued with looting and destruction. Below are some excerpts from reports by the Army of Republika Srpska (ARS), the Croatian Defence Council (HVO), and the Bosniak Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ABiH) that illustrate dangers to the civilian population coming from combatants.

⁷⁸ It is interesting to note that there was more criticism directed at those military and paramilitary groups involved in looting and destruction during the war than after the war.

This is what Bosniak military officers were reporting:

I must especially emphasize it, because of the fact that in the area of responsibility of the 306th bbr [mountain brigade] almost all Croat houses are looted, [and] many more are burnt. Today, the 306th [brigade] has many problems, as the [Bosniak] civilian population are demanding to be protected from members of other units of the Army RBiH. When it concerns the plunder, which was on a mass scale, then all [army] units and civilians were united into one. With the exception of a part of the 306th [brigade], which had to hold the [front]line, the other units and their neighbours [units on the flanks] were looting... What was taken by the 314th, the 17th, the 312th [brigades] and numerous other unregistered and informal groups from Zenica, Mehurići and other [places] will never be possible to determine... Beside the property left behind by the Croats who fled, increasingly and frequently the property of the local [Bosniak] population is [also] targeted... ("Informacija o stanju", 28 July 1993).

This morning, units of ABiH (7th [motorized mountain brigade]) entered the town of Vareš. As they entered the town, general chaos ensued. Everything is looted and burnt down. Other combatants joined in looting and burning ("Vanredni borbeni izvjesstaj", 4 April 1993).

This is what Croat military officers were reporting:

Great problems in the municipality of Vitez are created by groups and individuals

who, in uniforms and markers of HVO, loot social and often private property... Their main objective is plunder... [however] their crimes worsen already tensed interethnic relations. Recently, local looters work together with soldiers from Herzegovina... ("Izvješće," 25 January 1993).

A cause of these phenomena [looting and destruction] need deeper analysis. In my earlier reports, I spoke about some negative phenomena that contribute to a low level of morale, so I would not repeat. Only I want to add that leaders in the HVO [government] and the brigade in Bugojno failed. There is evidence that they made an assessment wrongly, and that they were selling gasoline and other [goods] to the MOS [Muslim Armed Forces] just 3 days before the conflict. Throughout the war, the richest men from Bugojno and owners of cafés and similar [shops] are spending [their time] along the Adriatic [coast], in Zagreb, and other [places]... The situation on the ground, when it concerns civilians of the Muslim nationality, is sickening. There are abuses by individuals and groups, especially in Prozor's [Bosniak] villages. Not only did the police fail to prevent it, but there are indications that they also commit various ugly acts ("Zapovjedništvo", 21 August 1993).

This is what Serb military authorities were reporting:

Through fighting activities new territories are liberated, so, in addition to earlier crimes committed by the enemy, crimes, especially robbery of all kinds, are committed by individual Serbs, sometimes including soldiers and reserve police.

There were cases that a commander drives looted goods or... of forming a column [of cars] with looted goods. When they are stopped at the checkpoints or when they are challenged by authorized officials [police], even weapons are drawn in order to prevent the organs of internal affairs to carry out they official duty—to prevent looting (“Kraći osvrt,” July 1992, p. 7).

Some Serbs, who are dressed in military uniforms and armed, enter in the night houses of Muslims and Croats, who in a way expressed their loyalty towards the authority of the Republika Srpska. Presenting themselves as members of the Army of Republika Srpska, they take from those individuals their property, especially money and electronics. Beside robbery, these persons commit murders and rapes, as well as intimidate the civilian population. Even the property of Serbs is not spared, especially those who work abroad (“Procjena bezbjednosne”, 15 January, 1993).

In this context, most of the Bosnians, realizing that dangers came both from the enemy army and their own army and government, withdrew into their homes and tried to avoid being harmed and doing harms to others. This “inner immigration” is especially common in turbulent times, leaving long-term consequences both for the persecuted and those who are not targeted (Arendt 1968, pp. 19-20). The tendency to hide behind four walls when an action is most needed is not a modern phenomenon. Plato (1992) points out that in times of lawlessness and violence, even philosophers, the guardians of the public sphere par excellence, are likely to abandon public affairs, fearing that “they’d perish before they could profit either their city or their friends and be

useless both to themselves and to others” (170).

The belief that it is best to withdraw into the private life as the civil war raged was expressed more than once in my interviews with Bosnians. When I asked Marija, a Croat woman from Podhum, whether she visited her Bosniak neighbours for coffee during the war when the HVO and ABiH clashed in 1993, she simply said “no.” Marija spent the whole war hardly leaving her home. One of her two sons was mobilized into the Croatian Defence Council (HVO) and sent to the frontlines. The other son had been in Zagreb and out of danger, but soon he too was mobilized and sent to the front. Her husband worked in Germany (Interview, 10 October 2014). So, Marija was practically the head of the family and responsible for managing and maintaining the household all by herself, a work that is difficult for a single woman in peacetime, let alone during a civil war. What preoccupied her mind were not her neighbours, since she never went for coffee with them before the war, but rather the real possibility that either or both of her sons could be killed at the front.⁷⁹

Marija’s words illustrate a typical war experience of an ordinary Bosnian woman, a life filled with a daily struggle with scarcity, uncertainty of all kinds, violence coming from various

⁷⁹ Other respondents also said that women of different ethnicities did not necessarily visit each other for coffee *before* the war. Thus, one must be careful not to always suggest that neighbours did not visit each other during the war because of the ethnic division and distrust that characterized the civil war. For example, Džemal, a Bosniak from Golinjevo, explained: “[Muslim] women did not go for coffee before the war, so they did not [go] during the war either”. Similarly, Gordana and Mira from Čatići explained that the relationship between Croats and Bosniaks in the village was not “close before the war,” that they were not particularly “close with the neighbouring [Bosniak] village.” Mara and Anita from Vukanovići said that Bosniak men from Zlokuće visited Croats, while Bosniak women did not: before the war, Bosniaks and Croats did not establish close friendships, did not pay home visits to each other. In fact, all respondents, except those from Kalenderovci village, say that there were no ethnic marriages before the war in their villages and that ethnic mixing, when occurring, was more common between Croats and Serbs than between those two groups and Bosniaks.

sources, and, above all, fears that her children might be lying dead or wounded somewhere in trenches. Men like to believe that they fought the war in order to protect the *kućni prag*, namely, their homes and families, but we only need to hear stories told by women to realize that wives, mothers, and daughters were practically left to their own devices to protect themselves, their children, and elderly family members. Many of those women went out of their ways and faced dangers not only to protect their loved ones, but also their neighbours who were, as it was evident to them, excluded on the grounds of their ethnic identity.

Responding to my question as to whether she paid coffee visits to her Bosniak neighbours, Marija added that “[o]ne cannot visit everybody, and not everybody will visit you. The first part of her statement— “one cannot visit everybody”—illustrates how unsure and suspicious about people Marija was during the war. She emphasized that “I did not go anywhere,” meaning she socialized neither with Croats nor with Bosniaks. The second part— “not everybody will visit you”—speaks about the mistrust of her neighbours towards her. It is noticeable that she did not attach ethnic labels to the neighbours who did not visit her or she did not want to visit. How I read Marija’s remark is that wartime mistrust among people crossed ethnic lines, and when it followed ethnic boundaries, mistrust was mutual. It is not only Croats, who were the majority in the village, who would not visit Bosniaks (“one cannot visit anybody”), but Bosniaks would not visit Croats either (“not everybody will visit you”).⁸⁰ The first casualty of war is mutual trust among people, and Bosnia is still struggling to restore it.

⁸⁰ In fact, Marija displayed her distrust not only towards Bosniaks, but also towards Serbs. Although Serbs were rounded up and placed in detention facilities and ultimately expelled from Livno municipality, Marija believes that “if Serbs had taken control over town of Livno, Livno would have become another Vukovar.’ She believes this because Serbs reportedly called Livno the “stronghold of Ustashas.”

I detected in Marija's story not only mistrust, but also a degree of bitterness towards her Bosniak neighbours, even though it was the Bosniaks who were targeted in the village of Podhum. "There was fighting a little bit further from us. Our men [*naši*] were afraid of them [Bosniaks] and disarmed them. Many Croats were killed [fighting] against Muslims in Bugojno and Gornji Vakuf. Nothing happened [to Bosniaks]." Here, her statement centres on the "us-them" tensions. What Marija meant by "nothing happened" is that her Bosniak neighbours were not *killed*, while Croats were. It did not matter to Marija that "our men" were killed fighting in other municipalities away from her village (Bugojno and Gornji Vakuf). Then she continued, "some of them [Bosniaks] went to Germany and earned [their] pension and salary, [while] ours were killed."⁸¹ Similarly, Jadranka, also a Croat woman from neighbouring Golinjevo, suggested that "nothing happened" to Bosniaks and spoke of arbitrary arrests of her neighbours as a matter of course: "[the HVO] disarmed Muslims. [Muslims] spent two nights in detention" (Interview, 9 October 2014). In fact, Bosniaks spent more than two nights in the prison, where many detainees were severely beaten and tortured.

Marija's and Jadranka's views of arbitrary detention as somehow a benign form of violence are today commonly held by Bosnians regardless of their ethnicity. This is somewhat surprising considering that arbitrary detention was not only the most common form of violence practiced by all three parties to the war, but also the enabler of other forms of violence (rape, torture, beatings, and killings were typically carried out in prisons). As stated in the previous chapter, the fact that

⁸¹ It is tempting to dismiss Marija's remark as downright cynicism. However, it is possible that differences, perceived or real, in the material reality across ethnic groups is one of the sources of inter-group mistrust. Refugees who during the war fled violence and found safety in Western Europe, where they were earn and possibly save some money, tend to be perceived as having economic advantages over those who never fled their homes.

few school buildings were not transformed into prisons during the war illustrates how prevalent arbitrary detention was.

This feeling of bitterness and mistrust towards Bosniaks among Serbs and Croats has to do not only with war experiences (“our people were killed”), but also with the perception of post-war political, economic, and demographic developments. Although Marija was “angry” when her fellow Croats blew up the mosque in Podhum during the war, she added: “Now, they have a better mosque than before [the war]. Turkey gave them that [money to build the mosque].” Jadranka shares Marija’s view. She explained to me that although Croats from Golinjevo welcomed the reopening of the local mosque (the mosque in Golinjevo was not destroyed, but was closed down during the war), “Croats are not satisfied that a new mosque opened in Livno.” This resentment seems to be a response, at least in part, to the fact that the building of mosques after the war has been largely financed by foreign Islamic countries.

Demography is another issue that seems to contribute to post war inter-group resentment and mistrust. Jadranka underlined that “today, there are more Muslims in the village [than Croats]. There are more Muslim children in the school [than Croat children].” In another part of Bosnia, Baljvine village in Mrkonjić Grad municipality, Sena, a Serb woman, echoed Jadranka’s lamentation. She explained to me how Bosniak and Serb children went to school and played together during the war, adding that “today, there are only three Serb children [in the school]. There are more Muslims [children]” (Interview, 12 October 2014). As we saw in Chapter Four, the theme of demography and threats from Muslim immigration in particular dominated Croat and Serb narratives before and during the war.

Interestingly, all of my respondents who appear to harbour a degree of distrust and bitterness towards their countrymen *after the war* belonged to the few who actually helped their neighbours *during the war*. What is important to underline here is that positive common war experiences, especially mutual help, are not a guarantee to eliminate biases against the “other” that are alive and well almost 20 years after the end of the war. Equally important, intergroup prejudices are not necessarily unsurmountable obstacles to mutual help and solidarity between ethnic groups in conflict. Even if the respondents were receptive to nationalist discourses *during* the war, and appear to be influenced by those narratives today, a threat of domination by the “other” was never relevant to the extent that such fears would have affected their human feelings towards suffering and injustice done to their neighbours. The real violence that they faced, let alone some abstract threats, did not prevent Bosnians from helping their neighbours. Perhaps, we tend to exaggerate and reproduce emotions, such as resentment towards and fears of the “other,” when we identify them as “strategic resources” for generating violence (Petersen 2011, Chapter 3). Indeed, fears coming from in-group members may be more difficult to overcome, as will be illustrated shortly, than fears believed to emanate from out-group members.

As we saw earlier, Marija did not pay coffee visits to her Bosniak neighbours not because she wanted to exclude them from the community, but because she opted for self-exile into private life. She did not go to Bosniaks, but when Bosniaks came to her, she opened her home to them. For example, her neighbours asked her if they could use her phone to call their relatives in Germany, and she never rejected them. She empathized with her neighbours: “One cannot tell them I won’t give you [access to the phone]. How would I feel, if I were in such situations?”

(Interview, Podhum, 10 October 2014). Thanks to Marija, her Bosniak neighbours were able to stay in touch with their relatives from abroad, whose financial assistance was often the only means to survive or to flee violence. Furthermore, Marija refused to take money for those not so inexpensive long-distance phone calls. (Taking large amounts of money, typically paid in Deutsche Marks, in return for help, especially providing transportation, was common during the war.)

Marija told me how her son, who was fighting against the Bosniak army, also helped their neighbours. When some Croats—who were displaced from other parts of Bosnia—burst into the home of a Bosniak family and stole a television set and a radio, it was Marija’s son who went to the police to report the crime. When the property was successfully returned to the Bosniak neighbour, the neighbour invited Marija’s son to watch TV with him (*hajmo ga sad gledati*). A television set, which was the main vehicle to propagate nationalist propaganda, including the daily transmission of images of destruction and killings by the “other,” stands here as a potent symbol not only for violence (looting), but also for camaraderie among members of two ethnic groups at war with each other. The statement “let us watch it together” conveys not so much a gratitude for the return of the stolen commodity, but rather for humanity unbroken by violence.

Sena, who emphatically stated that there are today more Bosniak children than Serb children in her village, socialized with her Bosniak neighbours throughout the war. “Muslims and Serbs together defended the village. Muslim women visited me for coffee. When I had food, I gave [them] food.” Many Bosniak families had their relatives working in Germany, and the only way to send the money back home was through their Serb countrymen: “The son was in Germany and

sent money through Serb neighbours, who had to hide [the money] at the border,” explained Muharem, a Bosniak from Baljvine. Sena’s husband, Vlado, was one of those neighbours who smuggled large amounts of foreign currency across several borders for his Bosniak neighbours who remained in the village. As Sena explained,

Vlado was in Germany, and he carried money for Muslims, for their family members. It was risky. He had to hide [from the custom officers] both the money and the list with Muslim names [of the recipients] (Interview, Baljvine, 12 October 2014).

As if to wish to underline how violence did not only fail to break down bonds between the two communities, but in fact brought them together, Sena told of the danger that both communities faced at the end of the war, when the Croat armed forces broke through the Serb lines. “In 1995, both Muslims and Serbs fled before the HVO. Houses, both Muslim and Serb, were burnt down and looted. When I returned [home], I came to a site of fire [*garište*].” Even at this difficult moment of imminent dangers and panic and when the only thing on her mind was to get her children out of the village, she thought of her Bosniak neighbours, sharing food with them. “When Mrkonjić [Grad] fell, nobody helped us. Who had a tractor [or] a car, they fled. Shells were falling on the village. When we were fleeing, I gave some bread to Muslims as well.”

Like Marija from Podhum and numerous other Bosnian women, Sena displayed self-sufficiency and independence. She lived through the war without men’s protection, taking care alone of her household and her daughters (her husband worked in Germany and her son-in-law was mobilized

to the front). While she almost took for granted her independence and resilience, which pre-dated war years, she could never adjust to the fact that her children were exposed to constant violence: “I am used to live alone [i.e., without a husband at her side]. I am only afraid for my children.” The burden to get her children out of the village to safety in a mere five minutes and under a rain of shells is a heavy one that no mother ever wants to carry. But when Sena underlined that she was left to her own devices and that nobody helped her with the evacuation of her children, she alluded not only to the absence of men but also of the state, both being the primary movers of political developments and violence.

Whereas the reference to unavailable men points to her position as a woman in war, the absence of the state in relation to her suffering serves as framework within which she places her view of the “other.” Her perception that her Muslim neighbours enjoyed an advantage on account of their identity suggests ethnic bias in relation to claims of state protection. While there was no organized evacuation of Serbs, “the [Serb] army escorted Muslims” for their protection. “Our police protected Muslims, until buses arrived [to evacuate them to the Muslim-controlled territory].” In other words, Sena’s language—“us” (“our police”) versus “them” (Muslims)—suggests that Muslims were somehow privileged and enjoyed the protection that she, as a Serb living in a Serb dominated area, did not but should have had.⁸² But again, this ethnic bias and a

⁸² At the same time, she acknowledged that just before the HVO took control over the village, the Serb police failed to protect Muslim property which was looted by Serbs. When Serbs and Muslims fled an attack by the Croat armed forces, Muslims were taken to the separation line and further to Bugojno, a town controlled by the Bosniak army. Neither Bosniak nor Serb respondents explained or even hinted as to why Bosniaks did not find refuge on the Serb territory in 1995, especially considering that the two communities spent the whole war living and working together. I too forgot to ask this follow-up question. Many Serbs from Baljvine found refuge in Banja Luka or went abroad. As for “protection” by the Serb police and army, there is another, less romanticized, version of the story. According to Muharem, “the Serb army came with trucks and plundered all [Muslim houses]. When our Serb neighbours came to save [our property], they found nothing [to save].” The [Serb] army simply told Bosniaks “to go through the

form of distrust was not an obstacle for mutual help and cooperation among the two communities, which were present immediately after the war when both Serb and Bosniak villagers returned to Baljvine and continue to date.

Some Bosniaks from Golinjevo, who were afraid that their property would be destroyed or looted by Croat soldiers, brought their valuables to Jadranka for protection. Guarding property and valuable things for their neighbours was a common form of help during the war. Jadranka believed that this meant only one thing: “Muslims had trust in Croats” (Interview, 9 October 2014). Furthermore, when her neighbours, a large Bosniak family, went to Zagreb in order to apply for a visa to Germany, as immigration was one of the few ways to escape violence, Jadranka arranged that they stayed with her son, who lived in Zagreb. And yet, after the war, Jadranka felt uncomfortable about the new mosque in Livno and Bosniak children outnumbering Croat children in her village. In fact, she pointed out that “because of the number of people killed,” Croats and Bosniaks from Golinjevo see each other less today than before the war. She added that mixed marriages between Croats and Muslims were always rare in her village (however, *kumstvo*, serving as godfather/godmother, was common), but that these existing ethnic and religious prejudices were not an obstacle to mutual help before or during the war.

For example, before the war Muslim and Croat women came together at the village’s spring, where they did laundry and jointly kept the spring clean from pollution. The memory of this form of community was so important to Jadranka that she took me to the spring as if the water

woods to the bridge.” The Bosniaks spent four days and five nights under this bridge, sleeping on the ground. “Two Serbs from Bošće with weapons came to protect them during the night and gave them food.” (Interview, Baljvine, 11 October 2014). Thus, it was two Serb men, their neighbours, and not the army or the police, who tried to protect those fleeing Bosniaks.

would confirm and vouch for her story. The spring appeared to me as an insignificant stream of water hidden among tree branches. It takes story-telling to see the human dimension of nature, as well as significance in human actions that occurs in contact with nature. For Jadranka, the spring does not only symbolize interethnic cooperation, but also female reliance on each other in order to alleviate the effects of harsh living in the undeveloped countryside, such as the lack of indoor plumbing and running water. There is no reason to believe that this mental attitude changed with the onset of the war.

*The Boundlessness of “Small” Acts and Words*⁸³

What is interesting is that research respondents made no efforts to distinguish between “small” and “grand” actions taken by their neighbours in order to save them. There are times when action resists categorization and qualification. Furthermore, they, including those who were the object of violence, were not quick in assigning guilt to their neighbours who passively witnessed the sufferings of others. I expected to find little to no empathy for men and women who withdrew into their private life and consequentially rendered invisible members of the targeted community.

Those who needed help but received none in fact justified the inaction of their neighbours by the general conditions of scarcity, terror, and fear. For example, Anita, a Croat woman from Vukanovići, did not blame her Bosniak neighbours for not having shared food with her during the war: “They themselves did not have [food]. The Muslims were surrounded” (Interview, Vukanovići, 6 October 2014). Similarly, Mara, a Croat woman from Krč-Tršće, illustrated how

⁸³ The subheading is an adapted sentence taken from Arendt’s *The Human Condition* (1998).

both material and psychological factors jointly affected the ability of her Bosniak neighbours to help the targeted Croat community: “Muslims went to Kakanj in order to buy for Croats what they needed. There was no transportation. And there was fear too. Muslims who protected [Croats] were exposed to pressure from their own.” Those Bosniaks who intervene to help their Croat neighbours were stigmatized for helping “Ustaše.” “How can you protect Ustaše?” (Interview, Ćatići, 5 October 2014).

Radojka, a Croat woman from Seonica, shared with me the wartime experience of her son-in-law, who was a medical doctor and worked in a nearby Butrović Polje village. His Bosniak colleague, also a doctor, told Radojka’s son-in-law that the Bosniak doctor was “ordered” not to speak with Croats, including Radojka’s son-in-law (Interview, 7 October 2014). Džemal, a Bosniak man from Golinjevo, remembered how many Croats from his village were afraid to help and even to be seen in the company of Bosniaks, because they were threatened by members of their own community: “Some told me that they were afraid to meet [with Bosniaks] or to drive them, because they were afraid that [Croats] would burn their houses” (Interview, 9 October 2014). Jusuf, a Bosniak from Podhum, echoed Džemal’s words: “They threatened Croats who wanted to help. They threatened to burn their houses. One Croat house was burnt down. One man could not do [a lot] alone. Croats hated and threatened those [Croats] who helped us” (Interview, 10 October 2014). In Kalenderovci, a bomb was thrown at a grocery store, which was run by a Serb who handed bread and flour to Muslims for free. After this act of violence, the store closed, depriving both Serb and Muslim villagers of a source of basic food.

People did not stand up for their neighbours because they were afraid for their lives. The pressure and threats upon the majority, in-group, often, but not exclusively, came from non-local

soldiers who came from other parts of the country, *sa strane*. The respondents were at pains not to demonize their neighbours, underlining that it was not (only) their neighbours who committed violence. When Ilija told me about violence by Bosniak soldiers, he distinguished the locals from those Bosniaks who came from other parts of Bosnia to fight in Kakanj municipality: “There were soldiers *sa strane*. It was not only local residents [*mještani*]” (Interview, Krč-Tršće, 4 October 2014). Similarly, Meliha, a Bosniak woman who helped her Croat neighbours from Krč-Tršće despite pressure coming from her own people, agreed with Ilija: “There were soldiers *sa strane*, from other municipalities. [It was] not only the locals” (Interview, Kakanj, 6 October 2014).

When the Serb military police from Krajina region arrived to Kalenderovci village in Derventa municipality (Posavina region), they began to search for Bosniak and Croat families. Local Serbs hid their neighbours from the police, receiving threats from and getting into a direct confrontation with the non-local soldiers. Darko, a Serb who married a Croat woman during the war and was harassed for it (he was called “Tuđman” after the Croat nationalist President of Croatia), explained how local men had been overpowered by those who came from Krajina:

Domaći men were like a poppy seed [*kao makovo zrno*, i.e., scared]. [The Krajina military police] searched for [Bosniak] families. The *domaći* hid them. It came to a conflict between the *domaći* and *sa strane* men. They [non-locals] even threatened our families. [Serb] neighbours had to hide their own families for protection (Interview, Kalenderovci, 14 October 2014).

Miroslav, Darko’s neighbour, hid a Croat family from Derventa in his house for two months. The

Croat family managed to escape Derventa and to reach a Serb checkpoint, where Miroslav waited and took them to his home. During those two months of sheltering his Croat friends, Miroslav received anonymous phone calls in the night. Those calls were generally directed at members of the ethnic minority, a method to intimidate them into fleeing and abandoning their property and belongings. At first, Miroslav ignored the threats. However, one particular phone call scared Miroslav: “I received telephone calls. I got scared once, when somebody threatened to kill and burn [his family]. Serbs threatened me by phone, because I was holding [protecting] Croats.” Miroslav, armed with his weapons, spent that night awake, guarding his house, his family, and his Croat friends (*dežurao*). When the Croat Defence Council (HVO) bombarded the “Dom” (probably a cultural house) in Kalenderovci, Miroslav was particularly stigmatized for helping the “enemy” (Interview, Kalenderovci, 14 October 2014).

Men and women who resisted violence and discrimination against their neighbours were themselves threatened and targeted. Thus, it was not only terror among out-group members, but also fears among in-group members that stimulated perpetrators to commit more violence. Perhaps it was even more important to instil fears into in-group members, precisely because political and military authorities rightly suspected that most ordinary men and women, when free of fears for their own lives and the lives of their loved ones, would stand up for those who were unjustly targeted. In other words, those Bosnians who resisted violence did not only *defend* their fellow men who belonged to a different ethnic group, but also simultaneously *attacked* a part of their own ethnic community. Violence and threats of violence were a tool to exclude and silent both in-group and out-group members of the community. The important difference is that the isolation of in-group members was directed at *the individual* and was *a means* to crush any

resistance to the war in general and injustice against the minority in particular, while the exclusion of out-group members targeted *the community* as a whole and was *an end* in itself. The objective was to deny members of both in-group and out-group the power to fight back, to render them both silent and invisible.

The respondents who experienced discrimination on account of their ethnicity were not, however, so forgiving towards those neighbours who intentionally denied them mere appearance by “turning away their heads” or passing by “without saying hello.” My respondents appeared to be able to make a distinction between those who ignored them out of fear and those who purposefully excluded them. In times of violence, there is a thin line between ordinary civility and the political act of seeing and hearing the injured. Not uttering that simple and common word “zdravo” in the circumstances when people were deprived of their fundamental human rights had the effect of expanding and deepening the space of fear, uncertainty, and seclusion. It is because the absence of speech drove people further away from each other that the people I talked to could not and did not want to justify their neighbours who pretended not to see them in the street. In his *Dervish and Death (Derviš i smrt)*, Selimović recognizes this power of speech to bring people together and calls it a “secret” and “splendid foolishness” that makes a miracle.

Some secret was being weaved between us; a splendid foolishness, which is called speech, was making a miracle. Two dead logs that lied next to each other suddenly sprang to life and were no longer completely separated... *People became close to me because of speech* (Selimović 2011, 292, emphasis added.).

In the case when neighbours remained passive out of fear, what is remembered are the *reasons for not acting*. In the cases where neighbours intentionally excluded the persecuted, what remains unforgotten is *not acting and not seeing*. In the former case, the responsibility is transferred, justly or unjustly, onto perpetrators who threatened and attacked both out-group and in-group members. In the latter instance, the responsibility lies squarely onto those who purposely rendered the victims invisible.

In contrast to their efforts to offer specific factors that prevented people to help their neighbours, respondents explained in abstract terms the reasons behind actions and words to include and to protect the targeted. In other words, they remembered action, not the reasons behind it. To Miroslav, a Serb from Kalenderovci, it was all about “peasant mutual help” (*seljačka uzajamna pomoć*) (Interview, 14 October 2014). Darko, a Serb from Kalenderovci, could not explain why his village was the exception in a sense that all three ethnic communities continued to cooperate during the war. For him, a wartime sense of community was a continuation of the village’s pre-war outlook. “Before the war, when somebody died, we all participated. When somebody got married, we all participated. We worked together in the field (Interview with Darko, 14 October 2014). Vera, Darko’s wife, shared a story of how these practices of getting together continued during the war:

When one Serb [neighbour] died, it was Muslims who organized his funeral. His wife was a Croat, and she had gone with the children to Croatia [so, there was no family left to arrange the funeral]. The Muslims helped to bury him according to Orthodox customs. One Muslim man carried the crucifix in front of the car, and

others [Muslim neighbours] walked behind the car with the coffin.⁸⁴

A similar story was told by a Bosniak woman, Habiba, also from Kalenderovci.

During the war, when people got killed, we [Muslims and Serbs] visited one another. When one Muslim got killed on the Vlasenica [battlefield], there were more Serbs than Muslims at the funeral (Interview with Habiba, 14 October, 2014).

Habiba shared another story that speaks of close neighbourly relationship between Serbs and Bosniaks in tragic moments during the war.

When a young Serb man thought [received, what turned to be false, information] that his father got killed on the Vlasenica [battlefield], he approached and hugged me, crying ‘my dad was killed at Vlasenica.’ I consoled him [with words] ‘no, your father did not get killed.’

Just as “little things,” such as not greeting a neighbour, could lead to the isolation of members of the targeted community, “little things” could also increase confidence among the excluded and create a sense that exclusion was not total. As Arendt puts it beautifully, “the smallest act in the most limited circumstances bears the seed of the same boundlessness, because one deed, and sometimes one word, suffices to change every constellation” (Arendt 1998, p. 190). Those “small” acts could range from efforts to continue with neighbourly civility, such as ordinary

⁸⁴ Serb male villagers were most likely on the frontline. Hence the reliance on Muslim men to organize the funeral for this Serb man.

greetings and coffee visits to expressing concerns for and giving friendly advice on safety. Two identical stories that come from two different regions—Krajina and Central Bosnia—illustrate how “small” acts were consequential for the life of the excluded. Twenty-three years after the war started, people still remembered a “small” but boundless gesture of their neighbours who always remained in touch with reality. The reality was the atmosphere of fear in part created by soldiers, often drunken men, milling through the streets, shooting in the air and at the houses, shouting and intimidating civilians.

A Bosniak from Baljvine drew my attention to the act of thoughtfulness of his Serb neighbours. He told me a beautiful story about two young Serbs—he calls them “the Konjević’s sons”— and how they went against the prevalent atmosphere of intimidation targeting Bosniaks. The young men were mobilized into the war and wore military uniforms and carried weapons on their way to and from the frontline. Although the village is mixed, the two ethnic communities have always lived in two different parts of the village, a common configuration of a Bosnian “mixed” village. In order to reach the frontline, the Konjević’s sons had to go through the Bosniak part of Baljvine. Every time the young Serbs passed by Bosniak houses, they concealed the rifles under their jacket.

The Konjević’s sons, when they pass[ed] through the village, they hid the rifles from their neighbours in order not to intimidate them. They fire[ed] only one bullet at the end of the village in order to attract the attention of their mother [to let her know] that they [were] coming” (Interview, Baljvine, 11 October 2014).

Muharem pointed to me that there was another Serb neighbour, who would, in contrast to the Konjević's sons, shoot in the air whenever he was in the Bosniak neighbourhood. This man intentionally intimidated the Bosniaks. An identical story could be heard in another region of Bosnia, Vukanovići village in Kakanj municipality. A Bosniak from the village Zlokuće took deliberate efforts to conceal his rifle under his jacket in order not to intimidate his Croat neighbours in Vukanovići.

It is fascinating that Muharem from Baljvine compared his war experience with memories of mutual help during World War II, in fact involving the earlier generations of the same Konjević family. Local Muslims then helped the grandfather of the Konjević's sons, the two young men who fought in the 1992-95 war. When Ustašes, Ustaše occupied Baljvine village in the 1940s, they persecuted Serbs. Afraid that he would be caught and killed if he left the house, the Konjević grandfather asked his Muslim neighbours to take his wheat to the local mill and grind it for him. When "Četniks", Serb extremists, pushed "Ustaše" out of Baljvine and the surrounding areas, they in turn persecuted the local Muslims. This time around, it was Baljvine's Serbs who took wheat for their Muslim neighbours to grind it at the mill. Just as Muslims and Serbs "rotated" their role to go down to the village mill in World War II, Serb villagers did the same thing during the recent Bosnian war. According to Muharem, "Serbs grinded wheat and gave the flour to Muslims. One Serb, Nedo, Nedeljko, gave all flour that he had to a Muslim family with 11 children." This act of sharing was accompanied by words that reinforced the spirit of togetherness, inclusion, and compassion: "As long as we [Serbs] have [flour], you [Muslims] will not go hungry." (Interview, Baljvine, 11 October 2014).

When I asked Vukica, a Serb woman also from Baljvine, why she helped her Bosniak neighbours despite the fact that she was threatened and even physically assaulted by some Serbs (see below for an account of her resistance to violence), she said that stories of mutual help between Serbs and Muslims during World War II were passed on in her family from one generation to the next (Interview, 12 October 2014). Telling stories is of no little consequence.

Coming to one's neighbour's door with a gun not to hurt him but instead to lend it to him so that he, a member of the targeted community with no legal rights to possess weapons, could defend his family was another example of resistance. When the war between Croats and Bosniaks erupted in the early summer of 1993, Ana-Marija and her family were briefly displaced in the neighbouring town of Vareš that was still under Croat control. They decided to return home. The Bosniak armed forces attacked and harassed the Croats who decided to return and remain in their homes. In fact, Ana-Marija's father, a civilian, was murdered in cold blood. The killings of civilians were an instrument to intimidate those who belonged to the "wrong" ethnicity into leaving their homes, as well as to prevent those who already fled from returning to their homes.

Upon hearing about the murder of Ana-Marija's father, her Bosniak neighbour from Zlokuće promptly visited them, giving her husband Davor a gun for self-protection (Interview, Vukanovići, 6 October 2014). In the Bosnian civil war, members of an ethnic minority with weapons were considered a security threat. Before the war, a great number of civilians were armed through various, mostly clandestine, channels, including through the reserve police. After the "take-over" of claimed territories, the police and army of each side issued calls to the minority group to surrender their weapons. Even citizens who legally possessed a gun or a

hunting rifle were obligated to hand them over to the police. Authorities routinely searched houses of those belonging to different ethnicity looking for weapons, in the course of which civilians were beaten, humiliated, sexually assaulted, and intimidated.

Some chose to keep their weapons and resist. Others surrendered whatever types of weapons they possessed, thus expressing their will to be governed by the local authorities. However, handing over their weapons was not always the end of their harassment, as house searches continued, with the aim of intimidating civilians to flee their homes. Thus, when this Bosniak man supplied his Croat neighbour with a rifle, his action went beyond concerns for the family's safety. When the prevailing political mood demanded of this man to treat his vulnerable neighbours with suspicion and mistrust, he went against it. It is his going against the prevalent mood, and not the act itself, that invested his act with political meaning.

Sharing information that concerned the targeted community was not less consequential than sharing weapons or food with the excluded. Words can also save lives. For example, Božo, a Croat from Seonica, told me how his Bosniak neighbour had advised him to protect his house by reinforcing the entrance gate and to stay in-doors: "Be careful, Božo, do not walk around a lot. I heard everything. They will come after you" (Interview, 7 October 2014). Similarly, some Croat neighbours from Podhum came to warn Bosniaks who lived next to the village's mosque to move out of their houses, because they had learned that the mosque was going to be blown up and thus could damage their homes too. That night when the mosque was dynamited, the Bosniaks who lived in its vicinity slept in the houses of their Bosniak neighbours (Interview with Jusuf, Podhum, 10 October 2014).

A Croat woman from Podhum advised her Bosniak neighbour, Alma, to keep her young daughters indoors for safety (Interview with Alma, Podhum, 10 October 2014). The presence of armed soldiers, some of whom were locals, was overwhelming and intimidating. The Croat woman's concern was that if young women were not kept indoors, they risked being sexually assaulted. Similarly, in Baljvine, Serbs advised their Bosniak neighbours not to spend too much time in the street in order to avoid injuries due to shelling. Another story of inclusion comes from Kalenderovci village in north-eastern Bosnia. At one point, there was a threat that the Croat armed forces would breach the Serb front line and take control of Derventa town and surrounding villages. Habiba, a Bosniak woman, lived alone with her old mother-in-law and a small child. When the threat appeared imminent, a Serb neighbour knocked on her door and told her to pack up her basic belongings and be ready for emergency evacuation: "The Serb neighbour told [me], in case Derventa falls, [in case] the [front]line gets broken, to prepare to leave for safety together with the Serbs" (Interview with Habiba, Kalenderovci, 14 October 2014). The Serb neighbour was not just helping a vulnerable woman who had no vehicle to take her mother-in-law and child to safety. It was a political act of inclusion—Habiba was told that she would flee "*together* with the Serbs." It was an act with a political message that the community was not only for her, but, above all, was *with* her.

Those members of the majority group who tried to resist violence and injustice distinguished themselves from their own ethnic community and often were themselves targeted and excluded. Their action, no matter how "small" or "ordinary" they may appear to us who live in peaceful times, were consequential for those who suffered on account of their collective identity. Because

the targeted minority depended on their neighbours, it was important that the latter made the excluded comfortable and trustful in their interaction with the community. Even when only one community member greeted, visited, and talked to her neighbours, it created a space for those who were discriminated against to endure and resist injustices. According to Arendt (1998), whenever those who hold a different position in the community acknowledge and include those who were persecuted, they in effect “establish relations and create new realities” (p. 200).

Violence, Necessity, and Resistance

Political action is never only about empowering the persecuted through acts of inclusion. When members of the dominant community come to the aid of the excluded, they at the same time empower themselves too. This self-assertion in face of violence starts with shifting the responsibility from the collective to oneself and assuming risks that come with that responsibility (Bosnians who helped their neighbours became the object of violence and threats). Respondents, both in-group and out-group members, decided to act rather than to passively wait for others, for the community to act in their names. The essence of courage lies in acting, namely, in rejecting the role of the passive and powerless victim.

Courage has returned to me, as well as cheerful mood, because I have shifted the centre of gravity, transferring the decision [making] onto myself. This confrontation with the threat appears small and looks like an illusion, but everything is in it. *One acts and does not wait. One is the actor and not the victim. Perhaps that is the essence of courage?...* If man is not stupid or a coward, he is

not powerless (Selimović 2011, pp. 337-338. Emphasis added).

When I asked Meliha, a young Bosniak woman who had defied military warnings in regard to her socialization with her Croat neighbours in Krč-Tršće, how she now, almost 25 years after the war broke out in her country, explained her decision to act against exclusion of her Croat neighbours, she simply said: “[who is] humane will remain humane” (*čovjek ostaje čovjek*). In other words, for Meliha it is in humans to act, and acting in turn preserves humanity in man. She was the only Bosniak woman from her village who continued to visit and socialize with her fellow Croat women in the hamlet of Krč during the war: “There were no other women, girlfriends who visited Croats. I felt sorry for Croats. I practice my religion, but I [also] respect [the religion of] others. That’s how we also lived before the war. Croats were coming to Muslims for coffee during the war” (Interview with Meliha, Kakanj, 6 October 2014). In other words, Meliha did not believe that belonging to a different religion or ethnicity was a reason to stop interacting with her neighbours. Furthermore, she directly likened her attitude towards her Croat neighbours to the pre-war good ethnic relations. Here, Meliha went beyond the empty glorification of Bosnian cultural mosaic: the idea of multi-culturalism that goes beyond references to formal census is realized and best preserved through action.⁸⁵

While Meliha continued her daily visits to her Croat neighbours, some Bosniak soldiers, especially those who were *sa strane*, i.e., none-locals, openly called for their expulsion: “What

⁸⁵ As I mentioned earlier, one should be careful not to reduce to intolerance or prejudices instances where Bosnian women did not pay each other coffee visits. As many respondents pointed out, some Bosnian women did not practice this even before the war. Coffee visits are only one of many indicators of good intergroup relations in Bosnia. From my interviews, it is clear that people who rarely had coffee together were nonetheless helping each other during the war.

are [the Croats] looking for here? Why are they not leaving yet?”⁸⁶ Meliha was under pressure and had to report to the local military command in order to explain why she was still spending time with Croats in Krč and Vukanovići. “I told them that I would continue going to the Croats. I was not afraid [of the military officers].” And continue she did. Here are some examples of ordinary activities Meliha did together with her Croat girlfriends in an extraordinary time:

We did everything together. We sowed the field together. Now [after the war], people don’t help each other. We did sheep shearing. We made candles out of beeswax and *eurokrem* [chocolate spread] out of powdered milk. We ate white bread and salami. We roasted [meat] on a spit (*okretali ražanj*). Even in that war, [life] was beautiful. *Scarcity brings people together* (Emphasis added).

“Scarcity brings people together!” Necessity—including necessity created by violence, as is the case of the Bosnian civil war—can be the midwife of human solidarity pregnant with political acts, to paraphrase the famous Marx’s phrase. Vukica’s story best exemplifies how the world of necessity intersected with that of resistance to violence. During the war, Vukica, a Serb woman from Baljvine, ran a grocery store in her little village. This is how her Bosniak neighbour, Muharem, spoke about Vukica:

She hid food from Serbs in order to give them to Muslims. For seven days, she went to Banja Luka to get flour for both Muslims and Serbs. And in Prijedor,

⁸⁶ Meliha emphasized that those who targeted the minority community and who even threatened her because of her relationship with her Croat neighbours were mostly soldiers who came to Tršće from other municipalities, a point underlined by virtually all respondents. “The local people did not forbid me [to socialize with Croats], nor stigmatized me for socializing with Croats.”

there was one store with a note ‘There is no flour for Muslims and Croats’

(Interview with Muharem, Baljvine, 11 October 2014).

To supply her store with goods that was in demand in her villager, Vukica would maintain a list of articles ordered by individual villagers. During the war, flour and cooking oil were particularly in shortage. Her Bosniak neighbours were on the list too. Indeed, when she distributed food, Vukica often gave priority to Bosniaks over Serbs. She also gave both to Bosniaks and Serbs food for free or on credit. She lent money to those in need regardless of their ethnicity.

Both Muslims and Serbs were equal to me. Before the war, we were together, worked together, and socialized with each other. Let everybody practice own [religion]. I served Muslims before Serbs. There was a shortage of flour. I had names [of customers] in my notebook, and I served the Muslims first. Once a [Serb] neighbour told me “Supply us [Serbs] first and then them.” (Interview with Vukica, Baljvine, 12 October 2014).

Vukica’s narrative echoes the story by Meliha. She refused to exclude her neighbours based on their ethnicity and religion and also put her action in the context of prewar good relations between Serbs and Muslims, thus making multi-culturalism real through her actions. She too was threatened and, in fact, attacked by members of her own ethnic group. One of her Serb neighbour accused her of “feeding Ustaše,” a derogatory name for Croats. Vukica asked him to leave the store. On another occasion, another soldier entered her store at the moment she was serving and talking with a Bosniak woman. The soldier, who was drunk, fired from his gun, missing both

Vukica and her Bosniak neighbour but wounding another Serb soldier. Vukica was pregnant at the time of the attack. Like Meliha, she refused to back down in the face of violence and continued to treat Bosniaks as her most valuable customers: “Muslims were more regular customers both in peace and in war. Serbs did not always come to my store.”

Vukica did not only expose herself to violence on account of her interaction with Bosniaks: she lived in constant fear and was faced with all kinds of uncertainty related to war. Baljvine was close to the front line and thus was constantly at a risk of being attacked. The villagers knew that they would have only five minutes to flee, if the frontline was breached: “We were always ready to flee. We had a bag of clothes and shoes ready. We kept a bag of basic clothes and shoes. We were never free.” In addition, proximity to the frontline also meant the increased presence of armed men, many of whom were intoxicated. Soldiers would come to her store to drink. Sometimes they would demand that she serve them beer and snacks for free. On one occasion when she was in her store, a drunken soldier slapped her face, just because she asked soldiers, who were drinking and quarrelling in her store, to leave and “go to the frontline, if they wanted to fight.” Vukica told me how it did not matter that she was a Serb or that her husband was on the frontline risking his life—her ethnic identity was not of great help, when the violent soldier attacked her. She also feared non-local soldiers (those who arrived from Banja Luka), especially during the night when they were on street patrol. Vukica concluded: “The husband [was] on the battlefield. [I was with] three children. I alone worked. It wasn’t easy, but what could we do?”

In another part of Bosnia, in Croat-dominated Podhum in Livno municipality, Marija, a Croat woman came to her Bosniak neighbours, crying and pleading with them to come and stay with

her for their own safety. Bosniaks had to board up their windows, because Croat soldiers would bang on the windows and door: “We could not sleep out of fear” (Interview with Alma, Podhum, 10 October 2014). When the Croat armed forces disarmed and imprisoned Bosniak men, Alma and several other Bosniaks stayed with Marija. One night, a Croat soldier came to supposedly check on Marija, asking her if she felt safe with *Balijas* (derogatory name for Bosniaks) in her house. Marija expelled the soldier (*otjerala ga*). When Alma decided to return home, her young daughters continued to stay with Marija for safety. Alma also kept money and jewellery with Marija, as her house was searched several times by Croat soldiers who came to Podhum from other villages. When Alma’s children managed to flee to Germany, Alma would speak to them by phone from Marija’s house. Here is how Alma emotionally described her experience of talking to her children, that is, how a great difference Marija made in her life simply by allowing her to use her phone:

The children went to Germany. They [Croats] cut our phone off. The children called at Marija’s number. I would go to Marija to talk to my children. By the time I reached home, I was so afraid and I would forget the whole conversation with the children. I could not tell Zaid [her husband] what I spoke to the children about. I could not remember (Ibid).⁸⁷

⁸⁷ It is not clear from my interview notes what it was that made Alma afraid. Her children were in a safe place, and she trusted Marija, who helped her stay in touch with her children. It is possible that Alma tried to tell me that the separation from her children was so painful that she would completely forget the conversation by the time she got home. Bosniaks freely walked around the village during the day. However, during the night, they lived in fear, and sometimes gathered together in one of two Bosniak houses for safety. If Alma talked to her children in the night, it is also possible that she was afraid for her safety on her way home. Whatever interpretation, it is clear that those phone calls were at the same time precious and traumatizing for Alma.

When a Croat neighbour came to Alma's husband, Zaid, and demanded that he hands him over his tractor, it was another Croat neighbour who prevented the looting and guarded Zaid's property for the rest of the war.

The Croat neighbour came to take away our tractor. Another Croat [neighbour] drove the tractor to his home and said: 'Let him [the man who wanted to steal the tractor] come and see me.' He guarded my truck and tractor. Later, other Croats accused him for looting... If only there were three men like that man, we would not have left (Interview with Zaid, Podhum, 10 October 2014).

Zaid and Alma also told me about another Croat woman, Janja, who stood up to her own son caught in looting a Bosniak vehicle. When this Croat woman heard that her son stole a vehicle from a Bosniak neighbour, she went out and prostrated herself on the road, preventing her son to drive away the stolen car: "Her mother, Janja, lied on the road and told to her son that he could drive away the car only over her dead body."

The Croat armed forces set up checkpoints in Golinjevo village towards Tomislavgrad and further to Croatia, preventing Bosniaks from leaving and escaping violence. If the Bosniaks wanted to travel to Split, a coastal town in Croatia, they depended on their Croat neighbours. However, many Croats did not dare transport Muslims through checkpoints and across the Bosnian-Croatian border: "Croats were afraid to drive Muslims across the border. One Croat from the village but who lived in Split drove Muslims to Split. He charged them nothing."

Transporting to safety and even providing false identity cards for victims of violence was one of

the ways that Bosnians help one another during the war. Those who empathized with the victims, like the Croat man who drove many Muslims to safety, charged nothing for the transportation. However, there were those who charged exuberate prices for driving desperate men and women to safety.

Džemal from Golinjevo was suspended from his work for three months. However, his supervisor called him back to work and offered him money and flour. Since he did not have a car, and there was no public transportation, it was his Croat neighbour who drove him to work. This man was among the few who risked his safety helping him, while some others told him that they were afraid to drive him. Džemal and his father, together with other Bosniak men, were disarmed and detained in Orguz, Livno municipality. It was his Croat neighbour who intervened and freed his father. Avdo, another Bosniak from Golinjevo, shared a similar story:

There were army *sa strane*, but we trusted only our neighbours. Muslims were detained in the camp at the Central School in Livno, [some] for one day [others] for six months. There were beatings and interrogation. Nobody was killed. The neighbours came to [the prison] for their imprisoned neighbours and returned them home... When we left the village, our neighbour drove us. He did not charge us anything... Some neighbours refused to drive [Muslims] out of fear. The few resisted that fear and drove us (Interview with Avdo, Golinjevo, 9 October 2014).

Avdo credited a Catholic priest, Fra Mirko, who “calmed the situation down [that is] protected Bosniaks from being mistreated in the Upper Town of Livno.” He also singled his next door

neighbour for helping not just him, but the whole Bosniak community in Golinjevo: “My first [next door] neighbour was not afraid. He helped the whole village. He drove *narod* (people), especially the elderly, to the doctor. He was the first one who organized [armed Croat villagers] in order to expel armed groups who entered and looted [Bosniak] houses.”

Ivan, a Croat from Višnjevica, believed that thanks to his Bosniak neighbour, who was a local commander, he and his family (he lived with his wife and mother) were not attacked and expelled. “The commander said that nobody must touch the [Croat] neighbours.” The commander warned Ivan, who would go into the forest with his tractor, not to walk around, because there were soldiers *sa strane* (non-locals). In fact, he offered Ivan escort to protect him (but Ivan still went to his forest alone). Ivan also pointed that the Bosniak villagers organized themselves and confronted a group of Bosniak soldiers who were looting and beating Croat elderly women. His neighbours told him “if you need anything, just let us know” (Interview with Ivan, Višnjevica, 7 October 2014).

When Anto, a Croat from Kalenderovci, was in need, his Serb neighbours shared with him everything from chocolate to flour to cigarettes.

I was on the frontline. When I needed to harvest the corn, I did not have the fuel. One Serb brought me the fuel. He came by himself and offered me his help. One policeman came and asked us ‘What is it that you don’t have? Do you have flour? Shall we buy it for you? Do you need money?’ He gave us 100 Deutsche Marks. We all lived miserably. I did not have [cigarettes] to light up. But when the Serb

receives cigarettes, he brings them to me too. The [Orthodox] priest visited us and brought chocolate and candies for the children (Interview with Anto, Kalenderovic, 14 October 2014).

Habiba, a Bosniak neighbour of Anto, started to cry when she began to share her war experience with me. It was difficult to bear the separation from her family, who lived in the Bosniak controlled area. But her Serb neighbours came to her aid, offering her food, fuel, and a ride to Derventa town. Habiba also brought up the previous war: “In World War II, Muslims ran to Serbs [for protection].”

I could not visit my family. There were examples when the [Serb] neighbours were afraid to even say hello. The frontline was just in front of the village. There was no electricity; we cooled the meat in the well. Serbs who ran a grocery store gave me flour and bread. They did not sell it to me [i.e., they gave it to her for free]. The store got closed, because they threw a bomb at it... We [Bosniaks] were afraid to leave the village. One could not leave before the fall of Derventa. For the first time, I went to Derventa with a Serb, to visit a dentist. My family could not believe [after the war] that nothing happened to us... The neighbours helped us to till the land. They requested fuel, they order it for us too (Interview with Habiba, Kalenderovic, 14 October 2014).

Emin, a Bosniak from Turski Lužani, began to start crying when he remembered his suffering during the war. Because he did not want to fight, he was forced to dig trenches and collect the

dead, decaying bodies (of killed Croats) on the frontline near Bosanski Brod for 50 days. (The stink of decaying bodies was so sickening that Emin could not eat.) Only when some of his Serb friends recognized him (Emin used to play soccer before the war), he was sent home. Here is how Emin describes the attitude of some of his Serb neighbours:

One Serb asked us ‘Do you need flour, bread, money?’ He came by himself to offer us help... During the night, he drove our wheat in his truck to the mill and told them that it was his wheat. He grinded wheat and brought us flour. Another Serb slaughtered his cow and gave us the meat to survive. When one Serb from Derventa, a former colleague of mine, saw us in the village, he began to cry. He brought us food. We did not have problems from our neighbours. (Interview with Emin, 14 October 2014, Turski Lužani).

Emin then contrasted this action of his Serb neighbours with behaviour of other soldiers, especially those who came from Serbia to fight in the Bosnian war: “One Muslim man ran a grocery store, and soldiers from Serbia demanded money from him, and they relieved themselves in his bedroom.”

Sometimes, an individual alone would take steps to include their neighbours. Other times, an individual needed to rely on other members of his ethnic group to resist violence. An individual needed the protection of the collective in order to help their neighbours, just as some people often hide behind others or behind the collective in order not to take responsibility for harm done to their fellow men and women. In the next chapter, we will see how members of the targeted

community made use of ethnic solidarity to resist the world which excluded them. Similarly, members of the dominant community drew on ethnic solidarity when they gathered together to confront attacks on their neighbours. When a Serb soldier attempted to take away a cow from Emin and Ćerima from Turski Lužani, it was their Serb neighbour who aimed his rifle at the soldier, stopping him from stealing the cow. But this Serb would not have been able to protect his neighbours, if he had confronted an armed group. In the words of Zaid, a Bosniak from Podhum, one individual was powerless and “could not do it alone” (Interview with Zaid, 10 October 2014). When a group of armed Bosniak soldiers came to Višnjevice village and started beating and looting elderly Croat women, Ivan went to see his neighbours. The neighbours got together, took their weapons, and went directly to confront the violent soldiers, threatening them “not to return [to the village] with that intention,” namely, never to return if their intention was to attack their Croat neighbours (Interview with Ivan, Višnjevice, 7 October 2014).

When the Bosniak army rounded up and detained Croat men from Krč-Tršće, the wives of the detainees, who were also detained for one night at the local school, were afraid for their safety and gathered together in one Croat house during the night for several days until the security situation in the village somewhat improved. It was a couple of Bosniak neighbours who took their arms and held sentry (*straže*) around the house in which the local Croat women gathered, comforting them with the words: “Sleep peacefully. We are here. Nobody will touch you” (Interview with Jaga, Krč-Tršće, 4 October 2014). The Croat women then fed the men and gave them blankets to keep them warm during cold nights. Those *straže* lasted for about a week. Similarly, several Bosniak men from Zlokuće watched over Croat houses in Vukanovići for a week. On several occasions, they fired on their co-ethnics in order to protect their Croat

neighbours.

When Stjepan, a Croat from Krč-Tršće, decided to stay in his home despite the fact that he himself and his neighbours were the object of violence carried out by the Bosniak army, his decision was influenced by the actions of a few of his Bosniak neighbours. Stjepan concluded that “the [Bosniaks] were not so much against us [Croats]” (Interview with Stjepan, Krc-Trsce, 4 October 2014). When a group of Bosniak soldiers took away Stjepan’s sheep at gun point, his neighbours organized themselves into a group and went after the soldiers. They successfully retrieved and returned the sheep to Stjepan.

Conclusion

The scholarly literature on the Bosnian war tends to focus on “ethnic violence,” namely, how the war destroyed the Bosnian long tradition of interethnic cooperation and mutual help. Contrary to this common view, in this Chapter I showed that this tradition was unbroken and that Bosnians did not blindly follow nationalists and their ideologies. In particular, I presented stories of Bosnians who resisted the prevalent atmosphere of fear and intimidation and helped in various ways their neighbours who were targeted for their ethnicity. As I mentioned in the Introduction, the presence of the ethnic “other” among “us” created opportunities for political action. It is, however, true that those who were able to relate to sufferings and exclusion of their neighbours were in a minority. Many more Bosnians were afraid for their own safety, as they were threatened by their “own” people, and thus did not dare help their neighbours.

As I argued in Chapter Three and Chapter Four, nationalists employed discourses, structures, and violence in order to re-organize the state into ethnically homogenized entities. The expulsion of the “ethnic” other and the sacrifice of a part of the ethnic “self” were regarded as a “natural” consequence of this state-restructuring. Both Chapter Three and Chapter Four illustrated how nationalists blurred the line between the public realm and the household, targeting the latter in the name of the former. Starting from the premise that when the household is attacked for political reasons, the private realm becomes political, in this Chapter I tried to show how in-group members transformed the private realm into a site of resistance and solidarity with the persecuted.

I acknowledged that the meeting of basic needs of the excluded out-group members was the immediate result of action by in-group members. However, a long-term result was preservation of the multi-ethnic fabric of the ten villages and the restoration of the lost rights and citizenship of a part of the community. Furthermore, the political nature of actions by the respondents is reflected in relations established among neighbours who occupied unequal positions in their little communities, between the excluded and the included. In addition, Bosnians acted alone, independently from others, or they called upon their ethnic kin and organized in small, informal groups in order to defend the rights of their neighbours. In the next Chapter, I will share stories told by Bosnians who belonged to the targeted out-group.

Chapter Six

Out-Group Members and Resistance to Violence

Teže je nešto braniti nego napadati...

It is more difficult to defend something than to attack...

(Meša Selimović, 2011, p. 218)

When examining the Bosnian civil war, we always need to beware of either demonizing or idealizing “the neighbour.” In other words, if we want to obtain insights into Bosnian communities that succeeded in maintaining their diversity relatively intact despite the war’s objective to re-distribute ethnic groups within and across the borders, we must then look at the role and contribution of members of *both* ethnic minority and majority groups. Since ethnic minorities in any given place were subject to violence, it is tempting to focus on the role of the ethnic majority in relation to the protection of the community. Indeed, when my respondents spoke of “good neighbours,” they typically referred to their neighbours who belonged to the dominant group. However, the co-existence of two or more communities in violent times cannot solely be attributed to only one group. Limiting our study only to the role played by the majority in the protection of the community reduces violence to simplistic, ethnic terms.

In this chapter, I will focus on the position and role of members of ethnic minorities in the local community during the war, especially their resistance to violence. Furthermore, examining the role of targeted out-group members during the war will enable us to correct the common image

of victims of political violence. Typically, the victim is perceived as passive, powerless, and deprived of agency. Our knowledge of war experiences of victims has remained limited to a narrow timeframe and to a particular space of extreme violence, typically, sites of arbitrary detention, where rape, torture, and killings were committed. As a result, we know little about how the victim lived her day-to-day life against the background of violence. It is those quotidian experiences filled with violent events and interactions that illuminate the courage and endurance of victims of violence.

The acknowledgment that the victim is not *only* the object of violence, but is *also* a subject of her own independent action is my starting point in studying resistance to political violence during the Bosnian war. Resistance and victimhood are not two opposites. Nor are they mutually exclusive. And yet, we do not hear enough stories of victims about their active and direct resistance to violence. Furthermore, since the household, both its interior and exterior, was a primary object of political violence and since the public realm shrank and became a function of the war, resistance to violence is more likely than not to emerge within and spread from the private sphere. During the civil war, the Bosnian household became a site where violence intersected with resistance. It was the object of both violence and resistance—the fight for the right to stay in one’s home also meant the fight for one’s citizenship.

“I acted like that because I did not have a choice”

According to Arendt, action can occur only in the public realm. To leave the household requires courage, which is absent from the private sphere (Arendt, 1998, p. 36). I argue that during the

Bosnian war, when political authorities targeted the household, *remaining in* rather than *leaving* the private realm required courage. In particular, Bosnians who were object of violence did not have to leave the private realm in order to demonstrate their capacity to fight for the civic rights and citizenship they lost due to their ethnic identities. The objective of the three Bosnian nationalist parties to expel the ethnic “other” from the territories they claimed meant that Bosnians lost their basic right to private property, which in turn meant the outright denial of their citizenship. Losing a house was never only about physical objects that could be easily destroyed, but also easily rebuilt. Above all, it meant losing a place of belonging. It is much easier to rebuild a house that was destroyed in a war than to restore a lost citizenship. The mere fact that political authorities targeted the household for political purposes rendered the private realm political.⁸⁸ The Bosnian war erased the boundary between the public realm and the private sphere. To properly understand the character of action that occurred within and in relation to the private realm, I will first show how and for what political purposes the household became the object of violence. Then, I will focus on various types of resistance by the persecuted during the war.

One of the most common violent practices that directly targeted the household during the Bosnian war was house searches for weapons. Although Bosnian society was heavily militarized by the time war broke out in April, 1992, only out-group members were subject to those house

⁸⁸ Similarly, Rancière points out that in the French Revolution, Olympe de Gouges defended women’s citizenship rights by arguing that if women could be executed by the state as enemies of the Revolution, they could actively participate in the public sphere (the Assembly). “The universality of the death sentence undermined the ‘self-evident’ distinction between political life and domestic life” and ultimately rendered the “bare life” political (Rancière 2010, pp. 56-57).

searches.⁸⁹ The real objective of this practice, which was justified on security grounds, was two-fold. First, the ethnic minority was labeled as a suspicious element of the community and thus as a potential “enemy” of the state that fought a “defensive/liberation” war. This deepened an already weak trust among Bosnians of different ethnicities. Second, house searches for weapons were an effective instrument to intimidate the ethnic minority into fleeing their homes in order to render the claimed territory ethnically homogenous.

By virtue of their dominant position and as a consequence of orders for general war mobilization, in-group members, mainly able bodied males, enjoyed the “right” to possess and carry weapons in public. There were hardly any sanctions for displaying and discharging weapons in public, that is, outside combat zones. General insecurities related to disturbances of public peace and order characterized daily life of the Bosnian citizen during the war. As we saw in Chapter Five, upon their return from the front, soldiers, often drunk, would shoot indiscriminately in the air and used weapons for settling private disputes. Most importantly, they would shoot in the air or at houses when passing through places where the ethnic minority lived. Armed soldiers could freely enter any homes belonging to the ethnic minority and rob, intimidate, and even kill the owners with impunity. Anyone could enter into any home and demand services, such as food, coffee, cigarettes, and drinks. Members of the ethnic minority could be expelled on the street or have their homes occupied by strangers. Perpetrators often justified this violence by a supposed necessity to look for illegal weapons.

⁸⁹ It is true that civilians of all ethnic identities were armed by various political parties, especially by the three governing nationalist parties, the civilian reserve police, the Territorial Defence, and the Yugoslav National Army (armed only Serbs) before the war broke out. Between 250,000 and 300,000 Bosnians were armed by the time the war broke out (Burg and Shoup, 2000, p. 75).

As out-group members were attacked and enjoyed no protection from the local authorities (the police and military), they were simultaneously disarmed. In contrast to the treatment of in-group members, police and military authorities targeted outgroup members, routinely confiscating even weapons for which they had obtained a license before the war (for example, hunting rifles and pistols). Typically, owners of confiscated weapons received no receipts confirming confiscation, which meant that that they could never claim the seized weapons back. The fact that formal authorities, civilian police and the army, carried out those house searches did not guarantee safety for the ethnic minority. In the course of searches for weapons, civilians were beaten, intimidated, and humiliated, while their property was looted and destroyed. Furthermore, the fact that the practice of house searches continued even after members of the ethnic minority had surrendered their weapons to local authorities shows that the household in itself was the primary object of violence.

When homes were subjected to random and multiple searches accompanied by violence both inside and outside of the household, its members often decided to flee. Left abandoned, their houses were looted, burnt down, destroyed, or simply occupied by members of the ethnic majority.⁹⁰ Bosnians who stayed behind had two choices: to quietly endure the violence or resist. Telling their stories of resistance is especially important, because it is commonly accepted that “there is little room for personal choice” in civil wars, when individuals had to choose between their “own” people and their countrymen of different ethnicities (Interview with Fra Stjepan Duvnjak, Kraljeva Sutjeska, 4 October 2014). Fra Stjepan, a Bosnian Franciscan priest and the head of Kraljeva Sutjeska monastery, believes that “behind ordinary man, no one stood.” This

⁹⁰ Calls to surrender weapons typically preceded attacks on villages, in which civilians got killed and injured and captured and taken to various detention sites, while their houses were destroyed and looted.

common statement depicts ordinary men as totally powerless when deserted or, worse, targeted by the state. There is no doubt that during the Bosnian war, no political authority stood behind ordinary men. However, ordinary men and women were not powerless. Power follows men, not the other way around. Ordinary men stood behind ordinary men.

Mira, a Croat woman from Čatići, a predominately Croat village surrounded by Bosniak villages in Kakanj municipality, explained to me how Bosniak soldiers and policemen came to her house and searched for weapons on three different occasions. She and her husband possessed no weapons. During one of those searches, the armed soldiers threatened to kill her and her husband, if they found any weapons (Interview, 5 October 2014). Mira still remembers threats uttered by one of the Bosniak soldiers: “You all should be killed! If I find any weapons, each of you will receive a bullet.” Not all police and soldiers were violent. In contrast to the soldiers, a policeman who came to search their homes was kind to Mira and her husband. In fact, this man helped them bring home their daughter, who, due to the war, was separated from her parents and lived in Kakanj (the Bosniak army placed Čatići village under siege for almost a year, preventing Croats from leaving). While Mira and her husband were present during those house searches, many Bosnians were removed from their homes prior to house searches. The detention of civilians was commonly justified by a necessity to carry out those searches.

Muharem, a Bosniak from Baljvine, a village in predominantly Serb Mrkonjić Grad municipality, told me how the Bosnian Serb army demanded that all Bosniaks leave Baljvine (*da se selo iseli*) so that they could search their houses for weapons. Only thanks to the intervention by their Serb neighbours, Bosniaks were not removed from the village. It was agreed that those

who possessed weapons leave them anonymously in front of the village mosque during the night. However, this was not enough. The Serb civilian police issued yet another call to Bosniaks to surrender their weapons. Muharem and another 26 Bosniak men from Baljvine were briefly detained and interrogated regarding weapons. According to Muharem, after their neighbours intervened, the police did not beat them during the interrogation (Interview, 11 October 2014).

Ćerima and Emin are a Bosniak couple from Turski Lužani, a predominately Bosniak village in Serb-controlled Derventa municipality. With tears in their eyes, they shared with me their war experiences. On one occasion, the Serb military police banged on their door at 1:30 in the morning. A military truck was waiting for them on the road. Ćerima was told to get into the truck, while her husband was ordered to go door to door and wake up his neighbours, who were also put on the truck and taken to Derventa town. The villagers were told not to lock their houses, because they would be searched for weapons. Ćerima and Emin were detained for one night in the military barrack in Derventa. Although they themselves were not mistreated, they knew of detainees who were beaten. The Serb army brought them back home the next day. When they returned home, they noticed that their home had been searched (*pretrešena*). Although nothing was stolen, Ćerima is convinced that the issue of illegal weapons served as a mere pretext, while the real purpose was to look for gold and money (Interview, 14 October 2014).⁹¹

⁹¹ It appears that not all Bosniak houses were subject to searches in Turski Lužani. Amra claims that her house was never searched. Unlike Emin, who never joined the Army of Republika Srpska (VRS), Amra's husband was a member of the VRS. In general, it appears from the interviews that members of the ethnic communities who refused to join the army of the majority group tended to be subject to harsher treatment than their ethnic kin who were mobilized to the front. However, joining the army did not always guarantee protection for the minority group.

In another part of the country, Bosniak soldiers rounded up Croat civilians from Krč, a Croat hamlet of predominately Bosniak Tršće village in Kakanj district. Croat men and women were put on a tractor and driven to a local school, which was, like so many other school buildings, turned into a detention facility. According to interview respondents, the detention of Croat civilians appeared to be an act of retaliation. A few days prior, the Bosnian Croat army (HVO), which was stationed in the neighbouring village of Vukanovići, had arrested and detained three Bosniak men from Tršće (Interview with Stjepan, Krč-Tršće, 4 October, 2014; Interview with Meliha, Kakanj, 6 October 2014). This type of reciprocal violence, including “reciprocal exchanges” of population, was a common feature of the Bosnian civil war. As Đemal, a Bosniak from Golinjevo, who was detained for ten days in two different prisons ran by the Bosnian Croat authorities, put it: “The way the Croats are treated [by Bosniaks] in Bugojno, the Muslims here will be treated in the same way” (Interview, 9 October 2014). This is eerie echo of Radovan Karadžić’s statement uttered in late 1991: “Everything will be based on the principle of reciprocity. How they treat Serbs, we will treat them [Croats and Bosniaks]” (“Plebiscit”, 1991).

The Croat women from Krč-Tršće were detained for one night and released the following day, while the men remained and were mistreated in the prison. During the night of detention, Croat houses were searched for weapons and looted. As Kata explained, “our neighbours detained [us], our neighbours looted us” (Interview, 4 October 2014). Sandra believed that their detention was an attempt to expel Croats from Krč-Tršće, as well as to loot their homes. She pointed out that Bosniak neighbours eventually “returned some of [the looted stuff] and distributed it among the

Croats” (Interview, 4 October 2014). Sandra also underlined that Croats were invisible to the Bosniak police, who failed to protect them: “The police did not *see* us.”⁹²

In Golinjevo, a mixed village situated in predominately Croat Livno municipality, the Bosnian Croat police and army disarmed and arrested Bosniak men, searched their houses for weapons, and looted their property: “There was no difference between the armed policeman and the soldier. They both have power. Normal policemen were expelled from the police, while extremists remained” (Interview with Avdo, 9 October 2014). The Bosnian Croat army also looted Bosniak houses when the owners visited their neighbours for coffee (*dok odu na sijelo*) (Interview with Đemal, 9 October 2014). However, Miroslav, a Serb from ethnically mixed Kalenderovci village in Derventa district, pointed out that looting did not always follow the logic of ethnic division, as both Serbs and Bosniaks looted vacant Bosniak houses: “They [looters] were armed, and nobody dared to stop them” (Interview, 14 October 2014).

Although the above examples inform us about the general context, they do not tell us anything about the attitudes and choices of the targeted. Were people passive, unquestioningly obeying commands of perpetrators? Or did they courageously challenge them by words and actions? Were they silent or did they show anger and returned blows? Arendt (1986) identifies anger and rage as positive emotions with a potential to “reveal the world” (p. 6). Furthermore, many respondents who actively defended their equality in the face of violence were women from the countryside, who are more often than not depicted as apolitical, passive, and powerless victims

⁹² If members of the ethnic minority reported a crime to the local police, they either risked being mistreated and insulted by the police or the police would not act upon the reports. All three nationalist parties in power during the war adopted a policy of not arresting and sanctioning criminals coming from their own ethnic group, thus creating an atmosphere of impunity.

of violence. One of those women is Ruža from Čatići.

Ruža and her husband, Ivo, unsuccessfully tried to flee from their village Čatići when the war between the Bosnian Croat army, known as Croatian Defence Council (HVO), and Bosniak armed forces, known as the Army of BiH (ABiH), erupted in Kakanj municipality in June 1993. Armed Croat men who failed to retreat to Vareš surrendered and were taken to prisons, first to Motel “Sretno” in Kakanj and then to the “Music School” in Zenica. The Bosniak army laid siege to Čatići village for eight months, depriving Croat villagers of the basic necessities, such as food and medicine, and subjecting them to daily violence and intimidation.⁹³

The suffering of Croat civilians from Čatići, however, was not only the result of policy put in place by Bosniak political and military authorities. The Bosnian Croat political authorities (HVO) in Mostar and Kiseljak refused to allow humanitarian aid to reach Croats who remained in Bosniak-controlled Kakanj and other towns (humanitarian aid, as well as weapons, reached Bosniak territory through Croat-controlled parts of Bosnia). According to Ruža, the objective of this HVO policy was to force Croats through starvation to leave their homes in order to resettle

⁹³ Suffering and violence experienced by members of the majority group during the war are commonly ignored (I partially touched on this topic in the previous chapter). However, whereas members of the ethnic majority also suffered from severe shortages of food, medicine, and basic services during the war and were also subject to violence, their suffering was not the result of persecution based on ethnic identity. It must be also noted that freedom of movement was less restricted for members of the ethnic majority, as a result of which they were more able, although not without obstacles, to travel in order to obtain basic necessities. In addition, in our almost exclusive focus on ethnicity, we tend to forget social status differences and how they too shaped war experiences for both the ethnic minority and majority. Those who were better off were able to pay their way out of prison (out-group members) or were exempted from mobilization to the front (in-group members). There is a saying in Serbo-Croatian which well reflects this social dimension of war: “Kad dođe rat, bogati daju volove, a siromašni sinove” (“When there is war, the rich give oxen, and the poor their sons”).

them in Western Herzegovina (Interview 5 October 2014).⁹⁴ In other words, from the perspective of Croat civilians from Ćatići, there was no difference between direct violence (expulsion) by Bosniak political and military authorities and indirect violence (resettlement) by the Bosnian Croat authorities. As Fra Stjepan eloquently puts it, “ethnic cleansing” is about “opposite [political] objectives that supplement each other” (*suprotni ciljevi koji se nadopunjuju*) (Interview, 4 October 2014).

Armed Bosniak soldiers came to Ruža and Ivo’s home and searched their house for weapons. When they failed to locate any arms in the house, the soldiers then ordered Ivo to dig out a hole in his backyard, where he had presumably buried his rifle.⁹⁵ Ruža explained that sometime before the soldiers searched their home, a shell had exploded in the garden, and the crater made the soldiers suspicious. In fact, it is more correct to say that the crater gave a pretext to the soldiers to harass and intimidate Ruža and Ivo, to display their strength to defenceless civilians. Had it not been for the crater, they would have found something else as an excuse. Whereas her husband did as he was told, Ruža decided to resist the armed soldiers.

She first tried to use reason and arguments with them, explaining that there were no weapons in the house and that the hole in the garden was a shell crater. When her rational arguments failed to persuade the soldiers, she started to curse and yell at them. Ruža’s words did not stop the

⁹⁴ Ruža and other respondents from Ćatići firmly believe that Croat soldiers from Ćatići were “betrayed” by the Bosnian Croat HDZ, as soldiers received orders to retreat without giving any resistance. It appears that this order did not reach all men on the front on time: “When HVO retreated, the children remained behind in the trenches and were killed.”

⁹⁵ Ruža proudly explained to me that during the war she kept on the doorsteps a basket full of stones in case she was attacked and needed to defend herself. Not surprisingly, the Bosniak soldiers failed to notice this “weapon.” Gathering and keeping stones in a basket is a form of resistance!

Bosniak soldiers from using a threat of violence to intimidate her and her husband. Changes in power relations between social groups or individuals do not necessarily and always have to be the measure of what constitutes political action. What matters is the mere occurrence of action regardless of the type of space—private or public—in which it occurs and irrespective of the outcome it produces. What matters is that Ruža resisted violence by angry words in her own household that was attacked. Words are also acts (Selimović 2011, p. 190). By challenging soldiers' intentions and behaviour, she disputed her own position reserved for her due to her Croat identity and which required of her to stay quiet and passive, to simply obey the Bosniak soldiers' orders.

Ruža told me that “she was also courageous” when she received threatening phone calls in the night. Anonymous phone calls were a common means to intimidate mainly members of ethnic minorities, but also members of the ethnic majority who protected their targeted neighbours. On one occasion, an anonymous male called Ruža at 2 o'clock in the morning. “Is that a slaughter house?”—asked the male caller, suggesting that all Croats, including her, were blood-thirsty. Ruža challenged him by adopting the same language he used to intimidate her. She threatened him: “Yes, come over-here so that I slit your throat” (Interview, 5 October 2014). Again, she refused to accept humiliation and silence and instead took upon herself the responsibility to challenge her tormentor's assumption that she belonged to a narrow ethnic compartment, excluded from the rest of the community.

Interestingly, Ruža's spirit of defiance is literally written on her body. Her hands and fingers are conspicuously covered in indigo-blue tattoos, depicting a cross. Ruža explained to me that this

was an old tradition called *sicanje*, practiced mainly by Bosnian Croats, aimed at preserving a five century old collective memory of the exclusion of Christians during the Ottoman rule in Bosnia, when Ottomans forcibly took Catholic and Orthodox male children away from their parents and raised them to become elite soldiers called *janičari*. Bosnian Catholic mothers tattooed a cross on their children's hands and arms, symbolically engraving into their young bodies a permanent reminder of their Christian origin.

When I asked Ruža how she explained the behaviour of the Bosniak soldiers who violated her household, she figuratively compared human beings to the five fingers of her hand: “[There are] five fingers, but they are all different. The same is with people.” In other words, she refused to generalize and identify all Bosniaks with those soldiers who attacked her home. The unintended symbolism of her analogy between Bosnians in the recent war and the five fingers of her hand, the same hand that through the art of *sicanje* preserves the collective memory of the remote Bosnia's violent past, is both striking and telling.

Radojka, a Croat from Seonica, gives us another example of how the household was attacked during the war, throwing light on the capacity of ordinary women to resist violence. Croats were also the ethnic minority in the village, which is located in the municipality of Konjic that was during the war controlled by the Bosniak armed forces. The Bosniak army, according to Radojka, attacked the Bosnian Croat troops based in the local military barracks and completely blocked the village by establishing checkpoints around it. Ultimately, the Bosnian Croat army retreated to Prozor, while Croat men who remained in Konjic town and surrounding villages were arrested and taken to various detention sites. Radojka pointed out that Serbs were also

detained in Konjic area (Interview 7 October 2014). In fact, in 1992, the then still joint Bosnian Croat and Bosniak army and police attacked Serb villages and imprisoned Serb civilians in the infamous Čelebići camp and other prisons, where they were mistreated, raped, and murdered, and ultimately expelled from Konjic municipality. In 1993, Bosnian Croats and Bosniaks imprisoned each other in the same prisons that they previously established for their Serb countrymen.

When the war broke out, Radojka's husband worked in Germany, so she lived alone, taking care of her elderly mother-in-law and a son. Her husband returned home when their son, who was an ambulance driver, was killed by a Bosniak sniper in the summer of 1993. Radojka did not talk much about her late son. However, she did describe her day-to-day life amid violence. Living in Seonica during the war was not easy, and she lived in constant fear. Radojka powerlessly watched how Bosniak soldiers looted houses of Croats who managed to flee Seonica. Soldiers sang, shouted, and fired their rifles in the air and at Croat houses when passing through the village. In the nearby village of Trusina, Bosniak armed forces massacred 15 Croat civilians and seven prisoners of war. But she did not allow her fear to overwhelm her.

An armed soldier came to her door, nonchalantly informing Radojka that he from now on would live in her house. She explained to me that such behaviour was encouraged by the Bosniak municipal leadership. The logic that governed this thinking and behaviour was a logic of strength. This is how Fr Stjepan compared the attitude of Bosnians towards private property before and during the war:

[Before the war], if somebody lost his cap or coat, one would put it in some common place, [for example] a tree, so that the owner could find it. But in the war, somebody else's house is my house. The one who is stronger will take the biggest house. Those who are strongest take over (*zauzeti*) many houses (Interview, 04 October 2014).⁹⁶

The occupation and appropriation of private property belonging to the ethnic minority was, as already mentioned, a common practice aimed at intimidating the “other” into fleeing. Any soldier could with impunity expel owners and appropriate the apartment or the house for himself. If the minority lived in urban areas, they would, under a threat of force, abandon their homes and moved in with their friends and family who lived in the countryside. But Radojka stood her ground.

Although based on her subordinate position as the ethnic minority she was expected to obey the soldier, Radojka chose instead to challenge him. “You will not live here”—she simply told him, risking being hit, sexually assaulted, and even killed. The soldier left to bring reinforcement. Accompanied with a couple of other armed men, the soldier tried for the second time to intimidate her into submission. Radojka stubbornly challenged them all: “You can do nothing to me”—she declared. When I asked her whether she, a woman, alone, and unarmed, was not afraid to confront armed soldiers, she gave me a simple but profound answer: “I acted like that because I did not have a choice.” In other words, the only choice available to her was resistance and fight

⁹⁶ The verb *zauzeti* can translate either as to take-over or to occupy. Interestingly, the same term was used for taking control of territories by force during the war. Thus, this verb reflects how the household was identified with the territory over which the war was fought.

for her rights. Some people, like Radojka, see in the unjust position in which they found themselves opportunities to act and resist.

Unlike the case of Ruža from Čatići, whose words did not stop the soldiers from their intention to intimidate her and her husband, Radojka's action produced the intended results. The soldiers left, never to return again. Furthermore, Radojka's actions had nothing to do with necessity or material values. She was not defending anything material, but rather her rights to be treated as an equal member of the community. If she had been concerned with the protection of material things that filled her household, she would have probably been better off allowing the Bosniak soldier to live in her house as a way to deter other soldiers from looting it. Indeed, her property, everything from food, livestock (a cow), and a tractor was looted, while her garage was set on fire.

Similarly to Ruža from Čatići, Radojka did not allow this particular incident to make her hate or generalize about Bosniaks. Later, she opened her home to young Bosniak soldiers originally from Foča, a town in Eastern Bosnia from where Bosniaks were expelled by the Bosnian Serb army. The soldiers deserted from the battlefield and were in hiding from the Bosniak military police. It was Radojka, a member of the ethnic minority who was targeted by the same army, who offered those soldiers food and let them into her home to rest and refresh. Radojka also helped Bosniak refugees by giving them food and clothes.⁹⁷ She helped her fellow countrymen in need, despite the fact that earlier, when her son was killed, she "had sworn that she would never again allow a Muslim to enter her house."

⁹⁷ Technically, they were displaced people, but Bosnians commonly referred to displaced people as refugees.

In another part of Bosnia, Ćerima, a Bosniak woman from Turski Lužani, told me a story similar to Radojka's. One day, the Bosnian Serb Military Police came to her house. The soldiers were accompanied by a Serb family who had been expelled by the Bosniak armed forces from Bosanski Petrovca in Western Bosnia. The military policemen simply told Ćerima to accommodate the family in her house. During the three months they spent in Ćerima's home, the Serb refugees slept in the bedroom, the most intimate and, usually, most comfortable room in the house, while Ćerima and her husband, Emin, slept in the kitchen (Interview 14 October 2014).⁹⁸ Even the allocation of rooms among the new occupants and the owners signified the inferior position of the latter in their own household. This hierarchy in the private sphere was the reflection of the power dynamics in the community, where Bosniaks were subjected to violence and exclusion.

Although Ćerima followed without resistance the orders issued by the Serb Military Police, she chose to control the situation imposed upon her. In particular, Ćerima proactively engaged the refugee family and developed a friendly relationship with the uninvited "guests." This choice to develop a new relationship in a very constrained situation was also a form of resistance, especially because warm friendships were not expected to be developed and nurtured between supposed "enemies," between Bosnians of different ethnicities who could, according to the nationalist ideologies, no longer live together. A son of the refugee family was of military age

⁹⁸ Similarly, Avdo, a Bosniak from Golinjevo, Livno municipality, told me that he too had no choice but to accommodate a Croat family displaced from Bugojno. But he also spoke of Croats, who were displaced from Jajce, who refused to move into Bosniak houses, especially if still occupied by the owners. Instead, those displaced people preferred to move into vacant Croat houses. Not all refugees and displaced people had empathy for the minority group of their new community—often refugees, bitter and angry for the loss of their homes and everything they owned, were more violent and hateful than the local population.

and was subject to mobilization into the Bosnian Serb army. The young man refused to go to war. Every time the military police appeared in the village, Ćerima “locked him up” in one of her rooms, hiding him away from the sight of the military police. Although neither the Serb family nor Ćerima sought out each other and chose each other’s company, their living together, even when forced, resulted in a meaningful relationship with no conflicts. Thanks to this new relationship, the refugee family and Ćerima conspired together against the Serb army and defied war mobilization orders. Violence brought them together, and they together resisted violence. Ćerima’s household stands for a symbol of the Bosnian tradition of community and neighbourliness.

Another example that questions the common image of the victim as a passive individual capable of only receiving blows comes from Krč, a predominately Croat hamlet of the Bosniak village Tršće. Freedom of movement for Croats was limited, especially at the beginning of the conflict between the Bosnian Croat and Bosniak armies. When they wanted to visit their relatives and friends in the neighbouring village Vukanovići, Croats had to go through checkpoints manned by armed Bosniak soldiers. One day, when Sandra was returning home from her visits to Vukanovići, she passed through a checkpoint manned by Sandra’s neighbour and a non-local (*sa strane*) soldier. The neighbour, kindly greeted Sandra and let her pass through the checkpoint with friendly words: “*ajde, ajde, Sandra!*” (“Go, go Sandra!”). But the non-local soldier responded with hostility to this friendly interaction by slapping Sandra in the face. The neighbour quickly reacted with rage: “Did I not tell you that women must not be touched!” (Interview 4 October 2014). With his words, Sandra’s neighbour at once defended her and all other women who were targeted in the war: “women must not be touched!”

Ignoring the words of the neighbour, the soldier was about to hit Sandra for a second time. However, this time she resisted. Using violence herself, Sandra caught his hand in mid-air. The neighbour let her pass through the barricade. What her resistance demonstrates is that she was *both* a victim of violence and the agent of her own action. Interestingly, Sandra used violence when defending her freedom to move around, while her neighbour, although armed, opted for words. The pre-existing relationship between the two neighbours begot their joint resistance to violence.

“Either we were crazy or it was love”

Bosnian nationalists justified the war by framing it as defence for “*kućni prag*” (“home doorstep”), successfully tapping into people’s iconic attachment to their land and home. At first, nationalist ideologies pitted one ethnic group against the other, presenting a supposed threat to the nation as a threat to “*kućni prag*.” As Fr Stjepan from Kraljeva Sutjeska described, Bosnians “ran to where [their] people were in the majority” and were trapped in “the jaw [of nationalism], between own people and the other people” (Interview 4 October, 2014). A reference to “*kućni prag*,” which both symbolically and literally separates the household from the public realm, was not random. It enabled nationalists to blur the private and the public, ultimately targeting the household in the name of the nation and in defence of “homeland.” The term *homeland* itself erases the separation line between the private and public (Božić 2017, p. 4).

Yet nationalist leaders demanded of Bosnians not only to side with their “own” people, but also

ultimately to choose between “my people” and “my home.” What the nationalist trope “defence for *kućni prag*” obscured was that choosing “my people” meant losing “my home” for good. If in 1992 nationalists had presented their ideologies in terms of this dilemma—my people versus my home—there would have been no Bosnian war. When this choice became obvious to Bosnians, it was too late. It took courage to stay at home, as remaining at one’s “*kućni prag*” typically meant risking one’s own life and enduring fear and hardship or both. In other words, Bosnians for whom the drive to stay in their own home was stronger than fears of violence risked dying not *for* but rather *on* the piece of land on which they and their ancestors were born.

Habiba, a Bosniak woman from Kalenderovci, a mixed village in Serb-controlled Derventa municipality, explained that she and her family remained at home throughout the war and that nothing happened to them “thanks to the neighbours and to our family, [namely to] mutual respect” (Interview 14 October 2014). Interestingly, after the war, Habiba’s relatives, who live in the Bosniak dominated entity, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, asked her to move to the Federation and live with them. She declined: “I want and can live in my own village.” Clearly, Habiba chose her home over her “own” people.

Anita and Željko, a Croat couple from Vukanovići, credited a local Catholic priest, Fr Branko, for having encouraged them and other Croats *to return home* from Vareš, where they fled when the war between the Bosnian Croats and Bosniaks broke out. However, the decision to *remain* in their home was only hers and her husband’s. She exclaimed: “It is my land!” (*To je moja zemlja!*) (Interview, 6 October 2014). Her identity with *zemlja*, a synonym in Serbo-Croatian for the household, community (*zavičaj*), and homeland/country, all at once, was stronger than her

fears for her life. Anita admitted that she and her husband seriously considered the option of abandoning their home for a second time, when Bosniak soldiers killed her neighbour's father and attacked another returnee family: "When [the neighbour] was killed, we wanted to flee through the woods and asked hunters to take us to the Serb territory." (The only way for Croats to flee was through Serb-controlled areas). However, they persevered and stayed on their *zemlja*. This is how Anita explained her decision to remain in her home despite the prevalent climate of intimidation and violence targeting Croats: "Either we were crazy, or it was love [for our *zemlja*]. "Being crazy" signifies both courage and conscious defiance of common expectations: the purpose of violence was to make them flee, and they *were* expected to flee.

Anita also evoked memories of her ancestors (*djedovi i pradjedovi*). She compared her decision to remain on her land to her ancestors' defiant attitude towards Ottoman rulers. Legend has it that Croats from Vukanovići refused to convert to Islam during the Ottoman rule and instead chose to flee into local woods and live with wolves (*vuk, vukovi*). Hence the name *Vukanovići*. Although her ancestors were forced to leave their households, they never abandoned their *zemlja*, which also included the nearby woods to which they fled. In times of violence, Bosnians like to evoke memories and tell stories of past struggles, including stories of mutual help among Bosnians.

Anita's neighbour, Anna-Maria, whose father was murdered by Bosniak soldiers upon their return from Vareš, also identified the local priest, Fr Branko, as a chief reason why some, but not all, Croats decided to return to Vukanovići. However, she too is emphatic that it was her and her husband who ultimately made a decision to remain in her home. "Fr Branko called us to return. It

was safer, because Fr Branko, who was on good terms with the [Bosniak] army, was here.”

However, she was quick to add that she decided to stay in her village, because of her attachment to her community: “It is difficult to leave your home and to go into uncertainty. *People are stubborn*” (*narod je tvrdoglav*) (Interview, 6 October 2014. Emphasis added.). Sandra from neighbouring Krč-Tršće also made a reference to this “stubbornness of people:” “We stayed [home] a little bit out of spite” (*ostali malo iz inata*) (Interview, 4 October 2014). The Serbo-Croatian word *inat* means stubborn resistance and conscious acceptance of risks inherent in rebellion. Staying home in the face of violence was a form of resistance.

When I asked Alma, a Bosniak woman from Podhum, a mixed village in predominately Croat Livno municipality, why she was willing to risk her life to stay in her home, she simply said: “It pains you to abandon [what is] yours” (Interview, 10 October 2014). For Stjepan, a Croat man from Krč-Tršće, his need to stay in his own home was stronger than his fear of violence, and in turn his home made him stronger to endure violence: “It was [what is] ours that made us endure. [The need to] remain home is stronger than fear” (Interview, 4 October 2014). When Stjepan referred to “ours” (*naše*), he did not imply “our people,” but rather his hearth. Similarly, the destruction of the mosque in Turski Lužani by Bosnian Serb soldiers did not scare Amra into leaving her house: “We decided to stay in our own house. That [i.e., destruction of the mosque] did not scare us into abandoning our house” (Interview, 14 October 2014).

In predominately Croat Golinjevo village, the mosque continued to stand, albeit damaged, throughout the war, while the Bosnian Croat soldiers blew up the mosque in neighbouring Podhum. Zaid, a Bosniak from Podhum, described to me how local Bosniaks were briefly

released from the prison, where they were arbitrarily detained, and forced to mop up debris after the mosque had been destroyed. They watched on as the Croat soldiers “were stepping on the religious symbols” (Interview, 9 October 2014).⁹⁹ The imam from Golinjevo fled fearing for his life, while the imam from Podhum conducted religious services for both villages despite the fact that the Croat soldiers harassed and humiliated him by making him eat pork. Religious services, such as *ramazan*, were conducted in private homes and not a mosque. For Đemal, a Bosniak from Golinjevo, the presence of the imam was certainly welcomed, but it did not influence his decision against fleeing his home village. “One feels freer, when the imam is here. But even if the imam had not been here, I would not have left” (Interview, 9 October 2014).

Đemal, a Bosniak from Kalenderovci, credited his Serb neighbours for the fact that the local mosque remained intact: “It was not destroyed thanks to the neighbours” (Interview, 14 October 2014). However, there was no local imam in the village. When there was a need for religious services, such as funerals, the imam from nearby Prnjavor town would visit Kalenderovci. In Baljvine village, the mosque was not destroyed either, and the local imam remained in the village throughout the war. However, Bosniaks had to adjust some of their religious practices during the war in Baljvine, suggesting that religious tradition was not paramount to their decision to remain home.¹⁰⁰ A Serb military commander came to their village and requested from them to

⁹⁹ Prior to its destruction, the mosque served as a shelter for Croat displaced people who fled violence in Serb controlled Šipovo. Even though the undamaged mosque clearly served the interests of Croats, nationalists still went ahead and destroyed it.

¹⁰⁰ This is not to suggest that Bosnians were not religious and that their religious identity was not important to them. Rather, belonging to their *zemlja* could not be destroyed by blowing up religious buildings or banning religious symbols and practices. This is what perpetrators of violence, in particular those who destroyed religious symbols, such as churches and mosques, failed to understand. By the same token, re-building churches and mosques after the war did not generate mass return of displaced people to their homes.

halt the religious practice of *ezan*, the call of the muezzin. This is how Muharem, a Bosniak, described relations between local Bosniaks and the Serb military commander regarding the question of *ezan*:

The mosque was not destroyed. We had an imam too. *Ezan was not allowed. We [Bosniaks] ourselves decided [to stop the ezan]*. But the army told us, in a kind manner, that there cannot be *ezan*. We had freedom to go to mosque and attend funerals (Interview, 11 October, 2014. Emphasis added).

The way Muharem chose to frame this event is revealing and powerful. There is no doubt that the Serb military *ordered* the villagers to cease practicing *ezan*. However, to Muharem, this was not an order by the army, but rather a *collective decision* made by local Bosniaks. He did not see any contradiction between the fact that “*ezan was not allowed*” and his claim that “*we ourselves decided*” not to practice it. What this statement reveals is that Muharem refused to perceive himself and his fellow Bosniaks in terms of passive victims who simply followed the orders (to halt the *ezan*). Rather, he attached agency to Bosniaks, who actively took part in the decision making related to their community. By framing the military order in terms of a collective decision by the targeted group, Muharem inserted Bosniaks back into the community from which they were excluded. He shifted the responsibility from the military to the villagers themselves. The fact that the religious practice in question, if not halted, would have drawn attention to and consequentially exposed the Bosniak community to violence speaks volume about their precarious position in the village. Since the call to prayer signified and literally announced to the community the presence of the Bosniaks in Baljvine, silencing *ezan* meant silencing Bosniaks.

However, by transferring upon themselves the responsibility for the silence of the mosque, Bosniaks achieved the opposite effect. They demonstrated that they did exist as a community. An identical story that comes from Vukanovići shows that it is not always easy to adopt such an attitude.

Similarly to the Serb army's request to temporarily halt the *ezan* in Baljvine, the Bosniak army ordered Croats in Vukanovići to stop tolling church bells. It is reasonable to believe that the purpose of this order was to protect Croats, since church bells, like Muslim *ezan*, would indicate their presence and thus expose them to more violence in times when Croats were the target. But Ana-Maria's attitude towards this event was so different, in fact diametrically opposite, from Muharem's. To her, this order was aimed not to protect but rather to discriminate against Croats. The Bosniak army forbid the local Catholic Church to toll the bells, because the army suspected that the Croats were sending secret signals and messages to the Bosnian Croat army (Interviews with Ana-Maria and Anita, 6 October 2014).¹⁰¹ Anita pointed out that the Bosniak soldiers also forbade Croats to produce *rakija*, home-made fruit brandy, and to keep pigs, suggesting that the restriction on tolling of church bells was also religiously motivated.¹⁰² In this instance, Croats from Vukanovići saw themselves exclusively as victims, leaving the responsibility for the

¹⁰¹ Croats did not only blame Bosniaks for their precarious situation. They also praised their neighbours for protecting Catholic religious symbols. For example, Ana-Maria expressed her gratitude to her neighbours, because they did not damage the village's Catholic cemetery: "Muslims from Tršće are the best people ever."

¹⁰² The interview respondents made frequent references to the "MOS," "Muslim Armed Forces." It is unclear whether they meant the Bosniak army or a particular unit called "MOS" within the army. This brigade recruited exclusively practicing Muslims and was distinctly religious in terms of soldiers' outfits and attitude. Although this unit was part of the regular army, it acted more like a paramilitary unit and committed numerous crimes against civilians. Restrictions concerning *rakija* and pigs likely came from this MOS unit, while the order regarding church bells was probably made by central command since similar orders, as we saw, were issued by different armies and in different places with the intention to deescalate violence against the minority community.

decision making concerning the tolling of church bells to the Bosniak military and political authority.

However, the attitudes of the targeted Croats from Vukanovići (and Bosnians in general) were far more complex and cannot be reduced to one particular event. What the above example of Vukanovići illustrates is that in violent times, members of the targeted community are more likely to take control over *some* aspects of their situations, while shifting responsibility onto the majority community in other matters. And it is very important to highlight both dimensions when analyzing the role of the persecuted. It is neither reasonable nor realistic to expect someone who is excluded and discriminated against to act in *every* circumstance. The majority of interview respondents appear to have found a fine balance when it comes to sharing the responsibility between “us” and “them.” As Anto, a Croat from Kalenderovci, pointed out, the responsibility for the community lied with both the ethnic majority (Serbs) and the ethnic minorities (Croats and Bosniaks).

Anto credited not only his “good neighbours,” but also Croats and Bosniaks for the war-time co-existence of the three groups in the village. In particular, “[Serb] neighbours were good, and we [Croats] did not cause any incidents. I was not a nationalist. [A nationalist] could not stay anywhere” (Interview, 14 October 2014). By “incidents” he meant boycotting the local political and administrative institutions, erecting barricades, and taking up arms against the Serb authority. Anto’s Serb neighbour, Miroslav, concurred. “Barricades were the main [form] of provocations. Muslims and Croats were reasonable. Muslims and Croats were not extreme. They came to the Crisis Staff and said ‘Don’t expect barricades from us, and you don’t touch us’

(Interview, 14 October 2014).¹⁰³ Anto emphasized that it was paramount to respect the local authority irrespective of which ethnic group dominated that government: “You had to respect [the authority] where you are.” This type of thinking went against instructions by their ethnic representatives, that is, out-territory powers making claims on ethnic kin living in a territory it did not control. As we saw in Chapter Three, all three nationalist parties instructed their members to boycott local institutions ran by the other party and to create their “own” parallel institutions.

Anto was mobilized as a combatant into the Army of Republika Srpska (VRS). His participation was not voluntary, as he, like his Serb neighbours, was subject to mandatory mobilization during the war: “We all had to [go to the frontline]. Both Serbs and Croats had to go. It was the same [for everyone].” Similarly, Đemal, Anto’s Bosniak neighbour, was also mobilized to the front. “I went to the [front] line, as a member of the Army of Republika Srpska. I did not have a choice. But who would like to go [to war]?” (Interview, 14 October 2014). In other words, their decisions to respect the local laws, including the mobilization orders, were not the expression of loyalty to any particular army, nation, state, or ideology. It simply represented their choice between “my people” and “my home.” They rejected all nationalist ideologies regardless of where it came from. As I already underlined, this type of thinking demanded courage, as remaining in their own homes meant risking their lives. Joining the local army did not always guarantee safety for the targeted minority community.

¹⁰³ When a state of imminent threat of war was declared, legislative and executive powers were transferred to the Crisis Staff, a local institution consisting of the presidents of the municipal assembly and the executive board (government), local military commander, and the chief of municipal police. It was expected that when war dangers subsided, the municipal assembly would meet and review decisions adopted by the Crisis Staff.

Ilija, a Croat from Krč-Tršće, echoed the same view: “We [Croats] were born here and did not cause any problems” (Interview, 4 October 2014). In other words, Ilija was willing to respect Bosniak authority and refused to take up arms against his Bosniak neighbours. However, unlike some Bosniaks and Croats in Baljvine, Kalenderovici, and Turski Lužani, who joined the Bosnian Serb army either as active combatants or in a non-combatant role, Croats from Krč-Tršće, Vukanovići, Ćatići, Seonica, Višnjevice refused to join the Bosniak army.¹⁰⁴ However, as already mentioned, rejecting or joining a particular army should not be interpreted exclusively in terms of loyalty for one nation or state. For example, some respondents cited the fact that they did not fight against Serbs in 1992 as a reason why they refused to join the Bosniak army in 1993, when that army engaged the Bosnian Croat army. In other words, they refused to fight against any ethnic group. Furthermore, even if Bosnians did not want to fight against their ethnic kin, they did not blindly reject *all* local institutions on the grounds that they were dominated and ran by the majority group. The acceptance of a local school is a case in point.

Education was highly politicized and the curricula contained explicit prejudices against the ethnic “other” during the war. In fact, education continues to be politicised and remains a source of division in post-war Bosnia. For example, in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, schools are either segregated into “Bosniak” and “Croat” schools (so-called “two schools under

¹⁰⁴ Men of non-military age and women, including both in-group and out-group members, were by law subject to *radna obaveza* or “work obligation” during the war. Members of the ethnic minority who did not want to join the army were also mobilized into *radna obaveza*. Although the institution of *radna obaveza* may sound benign, it was used to mistreat and intimidate members of an ethnic minority. They were often beaten, humiliated, starved, and killed in the course of *radna obaveza*. Members of an ethnic minority who were assigned to work detail were often sent to the front, where they collected dead bodies and dug trenches.

one roof”) or children are bused to a nearby school that follows the “correct” curriculum. In the Republika Srpska, enrollment is mixed, but Bosniaks follow a different curriculum for “national subjects” (mother tongue, history, and geography) (Božić 2006). During the Bosniak-Croat war, Bosniaks sent their children to “Croat” schools in Golinjevo and Podhum, while Croat children from Vukanovići and Krč went to “Bosniak” schools in Tršće. According to Đemal, during the war, Bosniak children from Golinjevo went to school according to the Croatian plan and program and in the Croatian language (Interview, 9 October 2014). Likewise, Bosniak and Croat parents from Baljvine, Kalenderovci, and Turski Lužani sent their children to schools with Serb curricula and Serb teachers. Ago, who was only 12 years old when the war broke out, also went to the “Serb” school in his village of Kalenderovci.

Ago did not belittle the challenges he faced as a Bosniak in a Serb school during the war. Schools were not spared of violence, as Serb students, especially high school students, would bring weapons to school and verbally insult Bosniak children. Bosniak children were also insulted on the bus they shared with their Serb peers.

It was not nice when I went to school. When someone’s father got killed on the front, there were insults in the classroom. But there was no physical mistreatment. Teachers were with Muslim and Croat children, protecting them (Interview 14 October 2014).

When Ago’s father decided to withdraw his children from the school for safety reasons, the local Serb Orthodox priest came to their home to support them and to try to persuade them to send the

children back to school so that they would not be deprived of their education. Ago successfully finished his high school during the war: “Children, both Serbs and Bosniaks, played soccer all day long. [Bosniak children] were swimming in the river together with Serb children.”

“If they see you running away, they will come back and sing again [Allah Akbar]. We didn’t run, they did not sing it anymore”

In the previous chapter I discussed in detail inter-group cooperation, with the focus on members of the ethnic majority and their efforts to deescalate violence and protect and help their neighbours. However, ethnic solidarity among the minority group was just as important for the protection of the community and its members. Ethnic solidarity or *grupisanje* (groupness), was a way to protect the household, while at the same time homes provided a space for getting together in difficult times. The examples in the previous section focused on the individual and her capacity to fight for her freedom and human rights. Now, I will give several examples of how the targeted resorted to ethnic solidarity in order to resist violence.

Since the expulsion of Bosnian citizens from their local community was complete only when their household was destroyed, then protecting private property meant preserving the chance for those who fled violence to reclaim their citizenship after the war. It was not only members of the ethnic majority who protected neighbours and their homes, as illustrated in the previous chapter, but also members of the targeted minority who took on the role of the guardian of their community. Significantly, the physical absence of their neighbours, their ethnic kin who fled violence and whose houses were looted, also symbolized their own invisibility in the community.

Thus, risky efforts by members of ethnic minorities to protect their neighbours' homes were also efforts to restore their own position in the community. For this reason, it is important to hear their stories.

How did the excluded ethnic minority respond to attacks on their private property and that of their neighbours? We know by now that they were not armed—either they never possessed guns or they surrendered their weapons. A common practice was self-organization around “night sentries” (*noćne straže*), and those night guards were held in secret. During the civil war, accusations of aiding and collaborating with the enemy forces, let alone taking part in “night sentries,” could land an ethnic minority member in prison or at the police station for interrogation. For example, Sandra, a Croat woman from Krč, was interrogated by the Bosniak police on allegations that she possessed a radio-transmitter and was communicating with the Bosnian Croat army in the nearby village of Vukanovići. Although she “does not even know how a radio-transmitter looks like,” Sandra was suspected of being a “spy” because some of her neighbours confused a “children’s walky-talky” with a radio-transmitter and reported her to the police (Interview, 4 October 2014).

As Miro, a Serb from Kalenderovci, pointed out, although many Bosniak and Croat men from Kalenderovci fought together with their Serb neighbours during the war, they, nevertheless, “could not sleep peacefully” (Interview, 14 October 2014). Bosniak men often got together and organized “night sentries” in order to protect their homes from looting by Serb soldiers. One night when Miroslav was returning from the frontline, he came across one of those “night sentries” and overheard his neighbours whispering, hidden in the darkness.

When I was returning home from the [front]line, I announced my presence to them. The Muslim must keep guard [*dežurat*] in his own house. I hear them how they say ‘It’s Miro!’ I announce my presence to them. They did not sleep peacefully (Interview, 14 October 2014).

Miro did not go to the police and report his neighbours. By pretending *not to see* their action, Miro in effect *saw* his neighbours as a targeted community in need of protection. By announcing his presence to his neighbours hidden in darkness, Miro also acknowledged their presence in the community. By remaining silent about their actions, Miro not only empathized with the precarious position of his Bosniak neighbours (“they did not sleep peacefully”), but also encouraged them to continue to trust him—his neighbours’ trust, and relief, is evident in their reaction: “It’s Miro!” By instilling trust in them, Miro also encouraged his neighbours to continue with their initiative.

In other parts of Bosnia, Ćatići and Vukanovići, Croat men took the same type of action in order to protect Croat houses from looting by Bosniak soldiers. Ruža and her husband Ivo described how during the day Croats from Ćatići “watched Mujahedeens in the street, shooting at, and looting abandoned [Croat] houses” (Interview, 5 October 2014). Hidden in corners and protected by a veil of darkness in the night (*u prikrajcima, u mraku*), Croat men, “armed” with stones, organized themselves into three groups and watched over their homes. Similarly, Željko from Vukanovići pointed out that there was strong solidarity among Croats who remained in the village: “people were getting into groups” (*grupisali se*). They too organized “night sentries” in

order to protect the vacant houses of their fellow Croats who fled violence. “We were united. We shared food and defended, watched over vacant [Croat] houses” (Interview, 6 October 2014).

Bosniaks from Croat-controlled Golinjevo and Podhum did not “sleep peacefully” either. Instead of organizing themselves into “night sentries,” they adopted a different way of protecting themselves. Zaid from Podhum remembered how Bosniaks had to lock themselves in the house and board up the windows, because Croat soldiers would randomly come, bang on their windows and gates and shoot at their houses. Bosniaks decided that it was safer if several families slept under one roof (Interview, 10 October 2014). Those Bosniaks who gathered together in one house would often find their houses looted when they returned home in the morning. For example, Đemal from Golinjevo welcomed several Bosniak neighbours into his house, despite the fact that he himself had a large family, including elderly parents and small children. He was conscious of how this ethnic solidarity was important for the Bosniak community in Golinjevo: his neighbours told Đemal on several occasions that they would follow him, if he decided to flee.

Women too resorted to “groupness.” Sandra from Krč-Tršće remarked that when Bosniaks arrested their husbands, “women got together until the husbands returned” home (Interview, 4 October 2014). Similar to Bosniaks from Podhum and Golinjevo, the Croat women self-organized and got together during the night in a Croat house, “Mara’s house.” In the morning, each woman would go back to her own home and do her regular daily activities and return again to “Mara’s house” before the end of daylight. This strategy to confront and avoid violence through ethnic *grupisanje* continued for about a week, when the security situation in Krč-Tršće somewhat improved.

This ethnic solidarity or *grupisanje* among the targeted ethnic minority went beyond concerns for physical safety. When they were excluded from the community and their freedom of movement was highly restricted, the household became the only site of social companionship. Social gathering in part helped the excluded minority resist and endure violence and discrimination. Ana-Maria, a Croat woman from Vukanovići, believed that mutual help and unity among Croat women were stronger during the war than after the war. “Women got along better [during the war] than today. They shared coffee and sugar, which were in shortage. They helped each other in the field [tilling the land]” (Interview, 6 October 2014). Coffee visits were a common social ritual in the Bosnian village before the war, so men and women, especially women, made efforts to continue with this practice amid violence. In fact, some Croat women, such as Jaga from Krč-Tršće, were arrested by Bosniak soldiers together with their neighbours during one of those coffee visits (Interview, 4 October 2014). Jaga explained how coffee and sugar were scarce and precious commodities during the war. Because there was no coffee to buy or because it was extremely expensive, Jaga and her neighbours got together over *ječam*, a coffee-like beverage made of barely.

Similarly, Mara from Ćatići told me how Croat women gathered for *Ivandan* (24 June), a religious holiday, all dressed in Croat folklore costumes. They walked to Kraljeva Sutjeska monastery, singing Croat folklore songs. Although folklore costumes and songs could easily be interpreted as “provocations” during the war, the local Bosniaks were not offended by this display of national pride and identity: “Nobody did anything to us,” said Mara. Local Bosniaks fully understood the need of their Croat neighbours to publicly express and display ethnic

symbolism, while they were simultaneously isolated and confined to their private homes and discriminated on grounds of their ethnic identity. In this example, ethnic identity, which was the main factor for discrimination and exclusion, became a means to render the excluded visible. This self-exposure, both physically and symbolically, to the majority community and to potential violence is in fact political in nature.

Bosniak men and women also got together for *sijelo* in evenings. *Sijelo* is an old Yugoslav tradition, especially popular in the countryside, whereby people gather at each other's houses for discussions, chats, food, coffee, and *rakija* (fruit brandy, typically homemade). Sometimes, especially in long and cold winter nights, people would play cards or board games and play music and sing at *sijelo*. The *sijelo* was so important to Bosniaks from Golinjevo that they practiced it at the price of having their houses looted by Croat soldiers during *sijelo* visits. Meliha, a Bosniak woman from Tršće, almost with nostalgia remembered the war time she spent with her Croat neighbours. She and her Croat girlfriends socialized on a daily basis, making beeswax candles and preparing *eurokrem*, chocolate spread, out of powdered milk. As she put it, "even during the war, we had a nice time" (Interview, Kakanj, 6 October 2014). Meliha and her neighbours re-created through their friendship a sense of normalcy. Before the war, mothers often prepared for their children home-made *eurokrem*. So in times of war, Meliha and her Croat girlfriends tried to continue with their pre-war habits, despite the fact that milk and sugar were in shortage and, when available, very expensive.

Similarly, when Mira, a Croat woman from Čatići, cried inconsolably when she burnt the sugar as she was making *eurokrem* for her child, she was crying in frustration because her hard efforts

to re-create normalcy were destroyed together with the sugar (Interview, 5 October 2014). Mira and her Croat female neighbours had to walk for eight hours to Vareš town, still under Bosnian Croat control, where they would buy sugar, coffee, and cigarettes for their husbands, who were in hiding because they did not want to be mobilized into the Bosniak army. Often, Bosniak soldiers at barricades would search them and confiscate all the goods they bought in Vareš. “When we gather under the same flag, we will talk”—one of the soldiers on the checkpoint told Mira, taking away all she bought in Vareš (Interview, 5 October 2014). In order to avoid those checkpoints, Croat women would take tracks in the woods.

For the excluded minority, getting together with their ethnic kin was important not only to secure basic necessities, but also to fight against isolation and exclusion. Jaga from Krč-Tršće remembered how only two Bosniak women continued paying her those coffee visits, while others avoided contacts with Croats (Interview, 4 October 2014). Indeed, when Bosnians talk about social and political changes in their community at the beginning of the war, they often start with accounts of how their neighbours averted their eyes and stopped greeting and visiting them for coffee. Jasmin, a Bosniak man from Podhum, noticed how some of his Croat neighbours stopped greeting and talking to him when the war broke out: “The next day, nobody wants to talk to you. Croats do not want to speak with Muslims” (Interview, 10 October 2014).

In Seonica, where Croats were in the minority, some Bosniaks also stopped greeting their neighbours, openly calling them *Ustaša* and telling them that their proper place was in Croatia and not in Bosnia. Radojaka explained that even children were not spared of the poisoned atmosphere, as some of them threw stones on Croats and spat on a Catholic priest (Interview

Seonica, 7 October 2014). In another part of Bosnia, a Croat, a displaced person, beat his daughter just because she was playing with her little Bosniak friends, warning her “Did I tell you not to play with *Balijas*? ”¹⁰⁵ (Interview with Alma and Zaid, Podhum, 10 October 2014).

Unlike the common image of women as passive and innocent victims, many contributed to the exclusion and isolation of their fellow women during the war. Ćerima, a Bosniak woman from Turski Lužani, supported her family by selling her cheese in the market in Derventa. She explained to me how she produced quality cheese and had regular customers. Since there was no transportation during the war, she had to walk five kilometers each way, carrying the weight of her produce in her hands. However, when one of her customers, a Serb woman displaced from Petrovac, found out that Ćerima was Muslim, she stopped buying her produce, despite the fact that previously she praised her cheese for quality (Interview, 14 October 2014). Similarly, a Bosniak woman from Tršće approached her Croat neighbour, Sandra, with provocative words: “What is it? Is that a radio transmitter that you are carrying?” (Interview, 4 October 2014). As we saw, this was an allusion that Sandra was spying on her Bosniak neighbours for the Bosnian Croat army based in neighbouring Vukanovići. In times of violence, even an ordinary but ambiguous question such as “You are still here?” could generate a feeling of exclusion, fear, and being unwelcome. That is how Radojka, a Croat from Seonica, felt, when her Bosniak neighbour addressed her with a question: “So, you are [still] here?” (*Pa, zar si ti tu?*). (Interview, 7 October 2014).

Solidarity among members of the minority ethnic group, as illustrated in this section, was about

¹⁰⁵ “Balija” is a derogatory name for Bosniaks.

making one's exclusion more bearable. It was both a site and a form of resistance. As Ruža from Ćatići explained, getting and staying together was a way for Croats to show "them," namely, Bosniak soldiers, that they (Croats) were not afraid and that they meant to remain in their homes. When a Bosniak army unit known as the "Muslim Armed Forces" arrived at the local school, they sang out loud "Allahu Akbar" in order to intimidate them. The Croat villagers were terrified, but nevertheless went about their daily activities, pretending they were indifferent to the song. I will end with Ruža's profound words: "If they see you running away, they will come back to sing it again. We didn't run [and] they did not sing any more" (Interview 5 October, 2014). This ethnic solidarity and inter-ethnic cooperation, as discussed in the previous Chapter, are not mutually exclusive. In fact, in the context of resistance to violence, they are interdependent and mutually reinforcing.

Conclusion

In this Chapter, I focused on the positions and roles of targeted ethnic minorities in the local community during the war, especially their resistance to violence. Victims of violence did not see themselves only as victims, but also as actors in their own right. The respondents eloquently expressed that it was their attachment to the hearth (*ognjište*) that influence their decision to stay in their homes. Because the household, both its interior and exterior, was a primary target of political violence during the struggle to ethnically homogenize territories, Bosnians could not find safety in their own homes. By mere decision to go against the common expectations, namely, to flee violence, Bosnians demonstrated their capacity for political action. In their fight to protect their right to remain in their homes, Bosnians transformed the private realm into both the object of the fight and the main site of resistance. The household also stood for a symbol of

the Bosnian tradition of community and neighbourliness (*kmošiluk*) in times when that tradition was also targeted. For many Bosnians, the choice of staying home in the face of violence was a form of rebellion.

Bosnians who stayed home and resisted violence defied common expectations established by nationalist projects and violence. As we saw in Chapter Three and Chapter Four, the purpose of violence was to make Bosnians abandon their homes so that they could be resettled in strategic areas. But the respondents stubbornly stayed on their *zemlja*. Furthermore, the targeted also defied nationalist projects when they decided to respect the local institutions ran by the dominant group. As we saw in Chapter Three, the appropriation of existing and creation of parallel “ethnic” structures were aimed to sacrifice the ethnic kin who lived outside he controlled territory. By choosing to stay at home and to participate in the local institutions, the respondents directly challenged the nationalist portrayal of ethnic minorities as rebellious and a threat to stability.

In the course of their struggle, the respondents used both rational arguments and violence. Pretence and the re-creation of normalcy were also strategies of resistance. Sometimes, Bosnians acted alone, independently from their friends and neighbours. Other times, they self-organized among the ethnic kin. As we saw in this Chapter and in the previous one, solidarity among neighbours both transcended and conformed ethnic distinctions. In some circumstances, pre-existing neighbourly relationships enabled the targeted to act. In other instances, action created new relationships. Establishing new relationships between Bosnians of different ethnicities was also a form of resistance, because warm friendships were not expected to be developed and nurtured between supposed “enemies.”

There are several insights that I highlighted in this Chapter. First victims of violence took the responsibility for their own situations during the war. Second, the respondents differentiated between *naše komšije* and men *sa strane*, underlying that not all perpetrators were “our neighbours.” And third, Bosnians who were victims of violence showed their empathy for their neighbours who did *not* help them during the war due to fear.

Conclusion

The thesis is divided into two themes: violence and resistance during the Bosnian civil war.

Whereas the scholarly literature on the Bosnian war tends to focus on “ethnic violence,” I looked at other types of violence that occurred in connection with “ethnic violence.” In particular, I argued the sacrifice of in-group members, especially those who lived on the out-territory, was integral to the violence directed against out-group members. In Chapter Three and Chapter Four, I focused on a variety of relations and forms of violence that characterized the Bosnian war:

- A) *In-territory power* that controls a given territory and its relations to *in-group members* who continue to live on that *in-territory*, whereby both in-group members and in-territory power officials belong to the same ethnic group.
- B) *In-territory power* that controls a given territory and its relations to *out-group members* who live on that territory, whereby in-territory power officials and out-group members do not belong to the same ethnic group.
- C) *Out-territory power* that controls a given territory and its relations to its *in-group members* who live on the territory controlled by the “enemy.”
- D) *In-territory power* and its relations to *out-territory power*.

The existing scholarly work largely focuses on B and, in most recent research, on A. I addressed those particular dynamics as well. For example, in Chapter Five and Chapter Six, I showed how in-group members who inhabited the in-territory became the object of violence whenever they tried to de-escalate violence and to protect their neighbours. However, my emphasis is on C and

as two aspects that have been neglected or understudied in the scholarly literature. All those forms of violence are complementary in the pursuit of one political goal, namely, the production of ethnic homogeneity.

The ethnic principle was still present, as out-territory powers were complicit in the expulsion of their “own” people by the “enemy” forces and resettled them in strategic territories, changing local ethnic demographics. The process of resettlement of ethnic kin was just as important as the expulsion of the ethnic “other” for re-creating a new ethnic and political balance in select strategic areas. As we saw in Chapter Three and Chapter Four, the resettlement of expellees was not random. By examining the process of “reciprocal exchanges of population” and the attendant resettlement strategy, I argued that in the Bosnian context, the “superfluous” was fragmented. The process of “reciprocal exchanges” of population illustrated that individuals or groups who were regarded as “superfluous,” useless, and “unrepresentable” for one party were simultaneously valued as useful and representable for the other. The “superfluous” was never totally excluded from the society as a whole.

In Chapter Three, I showed how all three nationalist parties created the conditions that contributed to and facilitated the expulsion of their “own” people who lived on out-territory, that is, the territory outside their control. That the sacrifice of in-group members would be the integral part of violence against the ethnic “other” was evident already in 1991, when the three nationalist parties, especially the Serb SDS and Croat HDZ, unilaterally started reorganizing state structures. In particular, the practice of the appropriation of existing and the creation of new parallel state structures were the main mechanisms of the process of the sacrifice of in-group

members from the out-territory. Those newly created structures, especially at the local level, were also crucial in expulsion of the ethnic “other” from the in-territory.

Those pre-war and war time structural changes had to be justified by nationalist narratives. In Chapter Four, I argued that violence on the ground was the physical extension of discursive violence. In particular, the notion of violence linked concepts, such as the right to private property, “spontaneous resistance,” and “dangerous ethnic minorities” that were crucial for territorial claims. Furthermore, all three Bosnian narratives shared the same negative view of the role of ethnic minorities in the Bosnian state. They consistently portrayed the “ethnic” other as potentially rebellious, namely, as a part of the population that would reject the government, especially at the local level, dominated by other ethnic group. This negative representation of Bosnia’s multiculturalism was necessary in order to justify the ethnic division and homogenization of the country. The nationalist narratives promoted the alignment between ethnicity and rule over a given territory as a supposed guaranty for order and stability in post-war Bosnia.

The second part of the thesis focused on resistance to violence and the role of the household. As we saw in Chapter Three and Chapter Four, Bosnian leaders consciously conflated boundaries between the household realm (private property) and the public realm (nation-state), ultimately making the former the object of political violence. I argued that violence against the household rendered the private sphere political. The private sphere became both the object of fight and a site of political resistance by the persecuted. The expulsion of the ethnic “other” from their homes and the appropriation of their property represented the height of denial of civil and human rights. Thus, when Bosnians fought *for* and *within* the household, they ultimately fought for their

citizenship. Furthermore, I closely analyzed action that typically belongs to the household. Specifically, I tell stories of Bosnians, dominated by experiences related to the necessities of life, such as sharing food and shelter. I reflected on the political nature of those action and words.

Although the lack of basic necessities brought Bosnians of different ethnicities together during the civil war, a long-term result of this necessity-driven action was political: *the restoration of their citizenship and the preservation of their community at the local level for after the war*. In other words, necessity was a function of action, namely, to include those whose citizenship was denied. This political nature of action is reflected in multiple relations that the respondents established in the process of resistance to violence. In Chapter Five, I focused on relations that were forged between neighbours who occupied unequal positions in the villages, between the excluded and the included. In particular, I looked at how Bosnians who belonged to the dominant group went against the prevalent atmosphere of violence and intimidation and risked their lives to protect and help their neighbours who were excluded by virtue of their ethnic identity.

In Chapter Six, I analyzed the role and the place of the persecuted. Contrary to common belief, Bosnians who were subject to violence were not passive victims who obediently followed orders of perpetrators. They were brave people who decided to go against the common expectation, namely, to abandon their homes—the purpose of violence was to make them flee—and instead fearlessly defended their rights to remain in their homes. I argued that agency was an integral part of experiences of victims of political violence. When they exercised their rights, Bosnians who were excluded also established a multiplicity of relations. Sometimes they related to their neighbours who belonged to the ethnic group that targeted them, other times they intimately connected with their fellow members of the excluded community (ethnic kin).

Furthermore, those relationships among Bosnians sometimes involved individuals who independently from others acted to protect their fellow neighbours. At times, ordinary Bosnians self-organized in small, informal groups in order to defend their own rights or the rights of their neighbours. There are several insights that I gained from my interviews.

First, interviews with respondents, both in-group and out-group members, showed that Bosnians took the responsibility for their own situations and the situations of their neighbours during the war. In particular, victims of violence did not only rely on their neighbours for help, but also took steps to change or to improve the situations in which they found themselves without their will. For example, they went against nationalist demands to boycott local institutions dominated by the other group and instead accepted and actively participated in those structures (for example, school and the army). As we saw in Chapter Three, the appropriation of existing institutions and the building of new “ethnic” structures were a main instrument to sacrifice one’s “own” people who lived on the out-territory. Those Bosnians directly challenged the nationalist narratives that portrayed the “ethnic” other as rebellious and a threat to stability. They chose “my home” over “my people” and avoided being sacrificed by their “own” people.

Second, the respondents confirmed that *some but not all* neighbours used violence against them. They all consistently pointed out that many perpetrators were non-locals, i.e., men *sa strane* who were deployed to their villages from other parts of Bosnia. Both Bosnians who were targeted and Bosnians who protected their neighbours made the point in distinguishing between *naše komšije* and men *sa strane*.

Third, Bosnians who were victims of violence showed their empathy for their neighbours who did *not* help them during the war due to fear. Respondents made a clear distinction between those who remained passive out of fear that they would be attacked by their “own” people and those who refused to even talk to them and used violence against them. In other words, respondents tended to resist attributing collective guilt to their neighbours.

In sum, the second part of the thesis challenges the belief that the practices of good neighbourliness and mutual help were broken during the 1992-95 war. Bosnians did not blindly follow their nationalist leaders and did not endorse projects of ethnic homogenization. On the contrary, they tried to deescalate violence at the local level and often risked their lives to protect their neighbours who were targeted for their ethnicity. They were not always successful, but what matters are their attempts to address injustices. Their actions and words, although occurring within and in relation to the private realm, were political.

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