

Zones of Violence:
Serb Women inside the Siege of Sarajevo

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Abstract

This dissertation explores a silenced history of violence that took place inside the 1992 to 1995 siege of Sarajevo, when the city was held under attack by Bosnian Serb forces (the Army of Republika Srpska, or VRS, *Vojska Republike Srpske*). Inside the siege, Serbs came to be associated with the ethnic aggressor, and faced violent retribution. I conceptualize the retributive violence inside the siege as an internal “zone of violence” that was made possible by the much larger external zone of VRS aggression. Today, the siege’s internal zone of violence remains a well-kept public secret, too contentious to commemorate.

This research is based on one year of fieldwork in Sarajevo and over 60 interviews with 23 Bosnian Serb women who lived through the siege. It is divided into two parts. Part one offers an oral history of the siege’s internal zone of violence from the perspective of Bosnian Serb women. I describe their social decline from “neighbours” to “aggressors” inside the siege, a moral shift that made retributive violence thinkable, and permissible. Part two offers an ethnographic account of the afterlife of this silenced history of violence, as Bosnian Serb women navigate a fraught post-war ethno-moral landscape.

This research makes two interventions. First, it unsettles the victim-perpetrator dichotomy, focusing attention onto a segment of post-war society about whom we know very little: victims on the side of the perpetrator. Second, it provides empirical data about an often overlooked dimension of war: the complicity of civilian women, describing how a minority of Bosnian Serb women supported the besieging army, even as they suffered its violence. I make a case for “opening up” the victim-perpetrator dichotomy in order to recognize complex subject positions that blur the line between “pure” victims or “pure” perpetrators. Asking what is at stake for post-conflict societies when recognition is withheld from such “impure victims,” I argue for the importance of recognizing suffering on the side of the perpetrator.

Keywords: complicity; conflict studies; ethnicity; nationalism; retribution; Sarajevo; victimhood; war.

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

ARBiH	Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
DSS	Democratic Socialist Alliance
EC	European Community
EU	European Union
Federation	Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina
HDZ	Croat Democratic Union
ICTY	International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia
JNA	Yugoslav People's Army
NDH	Independent State of Croatia
RS	Republika Srpska
SDA	Party for Democratic Action
SDS	Serb Democratic Party
SK-SDP	League of Communists – Social Democratic Party
SRSJ	Alliance of Reformist Forces of Yugoslavia
TO	Territorial Defence Forces
UN	United Nations
VRS	Army of Republika Srpska (Bosnian Serb Army)

Introduction

The very last week I spent in Sarajevo, I fell extremely ill. I had to cancel all my plans, all my last goodbyes with the Serb women who had been my interlocutors for the past year of fieldwork (2017 to 2018). I had planned to have a fourth and final interview with a woman in her seventies, who, last time we parted ways, told me she had more she wanted to tell me. I called her to say it would be impossible to meet, and we spoke on the phone for a few minutes, her wishing me better health and safe travels. A few moments after we hung up, my phone rang. It was her.

I've given you dosed stories. (*Dala sam ti dosirane priče*).

Dosed stories?

I only told you the light parts, and I'm worried I gave you the wrong impression. Nothing really bad happened to me, and I didn't want to tell you other people's stories. Yes, I had some trouble getting humanitarian assistance. And when everyone at my firm was given soap and flour, I didn't get any. But no one in my family dug trenches; my daughters weren't raped. But I have heard all kinds of stories from other women. And I don't know who else you talked to, I don't know what else you heard, but I don't want you to leave without knowing about those things.

She paused, then continued.

You are a foreigner, and a researcher, so I don't know whether you've sensed it — the feeling that others are listening.

I was so transfixed by her words I barely remember my own. I think I said something to the effect of: "Yes, thanks for calling. I have heard all kinds of stories from other women. And I've noticed that you can't talk about these matters openly, that you have to be very discreet."

Hmm.

Another pause.

So you did feel it. (*Znači jesi to osetila*).



Figure 1: Map of Bosnia and Herzegovina
 Source United Nations. Map no. 3729, Rev. 6, March 2007. Reprinted with permission.

Zones of Violence

For nearly four years, from 1992 to 1995, the city of Sarajevo, a historical city on the banks of a river, in a picturesque valley surrounded by mountains, was held under siege by Bosnian Serb forces. The tragedy of the siege of Sarajevo is well documented, but like any history, it has been assembled by prioritizing certain voices, and excluding others. Most

accounts of any war and its aftermath are formed without the perspective of an important but overlooked segment of post-war society: victims on the side of the perpetrator. In this dissertation, I re-approach the siege of Sarajevo from the perspective of Serb women who lived through it, women who spent the war encircled by an army that claimed to act “in their name.” Part oral history, part ethnography, I move between Serb women’s narratives of life inside the siege, and their strategies for renegotiating social life in its aftermath.

Sarajevo was a cosmopolitan city before the war, with a population of 50 percent Bosnian Muslims (182,000 people), 25 percent Serbs (92,000 people), and 6 percent Croats (24,000 people), as well as 13 percent who declared as Yugoslavs (47,000 people). The number of Serbs who stayed in the city throughout the war is unknown, ranging from an estimated 70,000 in late 1992 (Pejanović 2004), to only 10,000 by the end of the war. Their experiences inside the siege have become one of its “most controversial aspects” (Donia 2006, 322).

Living through the siege as a Serb often meant navigating what I conceptualize as two *zones of violence*: external and internal. The external zone was the violence inflicted by the besieging Army of Republika Srpska (*Vojska Republike Srpske*, or VRS) and Bosnian Serb paramilitaries, with military and paramilitary support from Serbia: the mortar shells, grenades, bombs, and sniper fire that targeted Sarajevans indiscriminately, and claimed nearly 5,000 civilian lives, as well as the lives of over 4,500 soldiers. This is the violence that is today commemorated and remembered, the deaths that are memorialized in plaques and monuments across the city.

But this external zone of violence made possible another zone: a smaller internal zone of retributive violence which formed within the space of the siege itself. When the war began, there was not yet a Bosnian army (Army of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, or ARBiH), so in the meantime, the Sarajevo police force teamed up with armed criminal gangs, informal citizen-led defense units (see Clayton and Thomson 2016), and Bosniak and Croat militias which would eventually come to operate under the command of the ARBiH (Kaldor 2010; Shrader 2003). The siege created an environment of lawlessness in which power was easily abused. The militarized criminal gangs became

notorious for robbing, abusing, raping, and murdering civilians with impunity, ultimately creating “a siege within a siege” (Andreas 2008, 103). In this context of impunity, rogue elements of both the ARBiH and the police force also committed violence against civilians, and some civilians themselves became complicit in enabling or commissioning these crimes, or turning a blind eye to them. Serbs were not the only victims of the siege’s internal zone of violence, but unlike its other victims, they were uniquely targeted for retribution on ethnic grounds, due to their ethnic association with the besieging VRS.

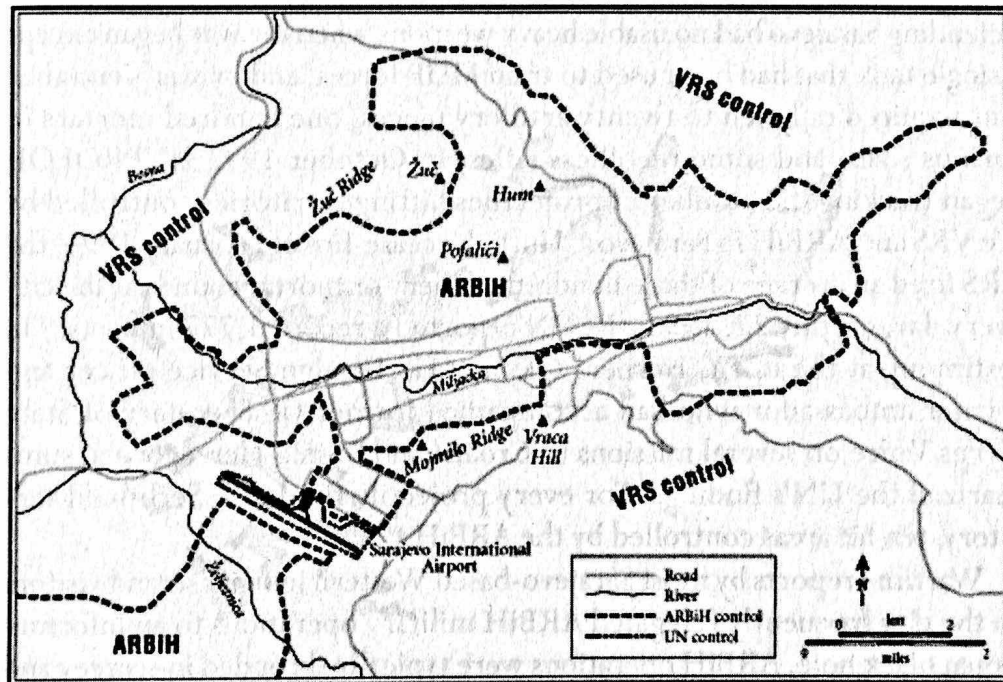


Figure 2: Map of siege front lines showing zones of VRS and ARBiH control
 Source: Originally published in Donia (2006). Reprinted with permission.

Most scholarly accounts of the siege of Sarajevo have ignored or glossed over the internal zone of violence, which is why, in this dissertation, I give it a name. Attending to this violence means writing against the victim-perpetrator “paradigm” (Jankowitz 2018b) that structures most research on violent conflict, and thus also on the Bosnian war. It means

acknowledging both instances of suffering on the side deemed perpetrator, and instances of complicity on the side deemed victim.

For this research, I conducted one year of fieldwork (2017 to 2018) in Sarajevo, as well as over 60 interviews with 23 Serb women who lived through the war. The experiences of Serb women inside the siege were not homogeneous, and the narratives of my interlocutors do not blend together easily into a definitive account of the war (Sugiman 2004). Not every woman I interviewed felt the internal zone of violence, which is to say that for some women, being Serb in particular did not worsen their experience of the siege. Over the course of my fieldwork, some women shared heart-warming stories of neighbourly solidarity and care. These were among the “dosed” stories of the woman quoted in the opening vignette. She chose to recall the more beautiful things: how neighbours shared what little they had, and refused to let themselves be divided into ethnic camps. Sometimes she referred to discrimination or hostility against Serbs inside the siege, as in her difficulty accessing humanitarian aid as a Serb, or the frequent police searches (really robberies) of her apartment. But these stories were usually relayed in an assertive, often humorous key: what shone through was her resourcefulness and wit, whether through a sharp verbal comeback to an aid worker, or a quick-thinking strategy as the police arrived at her door, and she stuffed a stack of bills into her bra. (Eyeing me up and down, she laughed loudly and warned me that I’d never survive in a war). Many other women I interviewed, however, told me of their experiences in a more serious, even somber key. In different ways, they described a violence that has been written out of the script of the war, a violence that has been too contentious to commemorate, even 25 years later. To varying degrees of intensity, they articulated a post-war moral landscape where they often feel stigmatized and scorned as ethnic aggressors, instead of being recognized as victims.

The crimes committed against Serbs and other civilians inside the siege are well known by both locals and public officials, but they are shrouded in silence. Or, as the woman in the opening vignette put it, “the feeling that others are listening,” as if quietly policing which narratives of the war are permissible to articulate in public. This was evident in my research from the initial difficulty of finding Serb women willing to tell their stories. It remained evident in their reticence during early interviews, in the way certain women

would lower their voices or quickly glance behind their backs before telling me certain things. It remained evident in the locations they often chose to be interviewed: in their homes, in open parks, on long walks — spaces where others could not easily listen in (see also Kadich 2019 on interview locations).

This is a case where recognition of suffering has been largely denied. But this research is not a simple matter of extending victim status to a group that has been overlooked. Because in the narratives of Serb women, I found a desire for acknowledgement, but sometimes, I also found something more nefarious: anger, ethno-nationalism, the slow but accumulating resentment of feeling miscast as an aggressor. I met many Serb women who believed in a multi-ethnic Sarajevo. And some others who spent the whole war under siege quietly hoping for a VRS victory. This research thus emerges at the intersection of two blind spots in conflict research: it reveals both suffering on the side of the perpetrator, and the war-time complicity of civilian women.

By attending to Serb women's suffering, but also to their indignation, my dissertation captures how silences ferment into tensions beneath the surface of post-conflict social life. Researchers have largely overlooked suffering on the side of the perpetrator, but my dissertation attests that such instances should not be ignored: they can alert us to fault lines that run deep yet are hard to decipher from the surface, to tensions that are smoothed over in public yet nurtured fiercely in private. This research thus makes a case for the important work performed by recognition (Fraser 2001; M. Mookherjee 2011; Taylor 1997), not only in restoring a measure of dignity to those who have been violated (Méndez 2016), but also in alleviating the sense of indignation (Niezen 2013) and the potential for political radicalization that come as by-products of misrecognition.

Recognizing Impure Victims

The victim-perpetrator dichotomy is the hegemonic framework that structures how we think about violent conflict. Numerous scholars have critiqued this framework (Borer 2003; Donà 2018; Hourmat 2016; Jaji 2017; Jankowitz 2018a; Rothberg 2019), noting that

these two subject positions are neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive: people may find themselves caught outside of this framework (as bystanders, martyrs, survivors, traitors, witnesses, or beneficiaries — all complex categories full of internal differentiation), or they may find themselves simultaneously in the position of victim *and* perpetrator. Those who were victimized in one instance may carry out brutal acts of revenge that turn them into victimizers (Bergholz 2016; Das 2007; Mamdani 2001), or they may be complicit in the very same violence that harms them (Baines 2017; Bouris 2007; Jessee 2019; Utas 2005).

But the victim-perpetrator dichotomy is stubborn; it persists despite these mounting critiques. Jankowitz (2018a) argues that it amounts to a *paradigm* that shapes the way we do research, constraining what kinds of questions we think to ask, and predetermining the forms our knowledge takes. The vast majority of research on violent conflict focuses on the side of the victim, often with the important aim of bearing witness to atrocity. Some scholars focus instead on perpetrators (Kjell Anderson 2017; Brown 2018; Giesen 2004; Straus 2017). But there remains a reluctance to blur this line: to research cases where those deemed perpetrators have also endured violence (cf. Bergholz 2016; Douglas 2012; Gebhardt 2017; Krimmer 2018); or where those deemed victims have been complicit in the suffering of others (cf. Bouris 2007; Enns 2012; Mamdani 2001; Rever 2018). The result is that we know very little about how war and post-war social life are experienced by a crucial but often invisible segment of society — victims on the perpetrator side — from the thousands of Hutu killed in the Hutu-led genocide against Tutsi in Rwanda (where Hutu *génocidaires* also targeted moderate Hutu), to the mass rape of German women by Soviet forces at the end of World War II.

Writing about the experiences of Serb women inside the siege calls for an *opening up* of the victim-perpetrator dichotomy, an accounting of the diverse experiences, subject positions, and relationships that exist between these two poles, and that call their very polarity into question. The language for describing such experiences is still evolving, but, like Levi's (1989) concept of the "grey zone" of overlap between victim and perpetrator, the various terms in circulation today all speak to the unsettling of categories, the muddying of waters: impure victims (Meyers 2011); guilty victims (Moffett 2016); implicated victims (Fein 2000); troublesome victims (McEvoy and McConnachie 2013); complex political

victims (Baines 2017; Bouris 2007), complex political perpetrators (Baines 2009), or complex political actors (Jessee 2017, 2019). One recent articulation is Rothberg's (2019) notion of the "implicated subject," which departs from the vocabulary of victimhood and perpetration altogether. Taken together, this emerging language has sprouted out of a widespread dissatisfaction with the terms of the victim-perpetrator dichotomy for capturing the experience of war and the multi-faceted social identities it engenders (Ferguson, Burgess, and Hollywood 2010; Govier and Verwoerd 2004; Shaw and Waldorf 2010; Theidon 2010; Williams 2018a).

The victim-perpetrator dichotomy is part of a wider *moral economy* that demands a purity of categories. In this moral economy, the prerequisite for victimhood is not merely to have suffered violence, but to be innocent, un-implicated, and unambiguously pure (Helms 2013; Ticktin 2017; Turner 2010). To be worthy of the moral status of victim, one must be a *pure victim*.

The moral dimension of victimhood places the victim in a paradoxical position of power and powerlessness. Although the label of victim denotes helplessness and suffering, it also invests victims with significant moral capital or "moral currency" (Enns 2012, 28), affording those who are recognized as victims the resources to pursue various political goals, whether to gain refugee status, demand compensation, or simply seek recognition of their suffering (Fassin and Rechtman 2009; de Waardt 2016).

The idea that victimhood could be a resource, a source of moral capital, is somewhat disquieting, for it seems to go against the deeply ingrained notion of victimhood or trauma as a wound that never heals. We understand wounds to be a burden, not an asset. As a result, victimhood has often been placed beyond judgment or reproach, even within critical traditions (Enns 2012). But, in the absence of other political and economic capital, the moral capital of victimhood may be the *only* resource available to those who have lost so much (Helms 2013; Hronešová 2016).

The moral economy of victimhood creates a landscape where actors are divided into two dichotomous categories, with no overlap between them. Contaminating the pure categories of victim and perpetrator threatens to reverse them. Thus acknowledging

complicity on the part of the victim threatens to render the victim illegitimate and undeserving of compassion (Enns 2012; Helms 2013). And, acknowledging suffering among perpetrators seems to absolve them of their crimes by classifying them as victims *instead*.

This dichotomy may offer clean lines, but it cannot account for complexity and ambiguity in the experience of violence and its aftermath. It does not help explain how a person may inhabit multiple and contradictory subject positions all at once: how they may be victims without being “pure” or innocent, how they may even be complicit in violence while *still* experiencing a devastation that deserves some form, however complicated, of recognition.

In its demand for pure categories, the moral economy of victimhood obscures the suffering of those who are deemed too “impure” for the status of victim. Similar to Butler’s (2009) concept of grievability, in which the frames we use allow us to recognize some lives as more valuable, and thus more grievable when lost or injured, than others, the moral economy of victimhood renders only certain violences visible, only certain losses grievable.

Adhering to the construct of the pure victim thus problematically suggests that there can be two violences: one violence that is committed by those designated perpetrators, and that results in victims, and another violence, perhaps of a different register, that produces deaths, but not victims. In these stark terms, it becomes clear that the decision to recognize, or to refuse to recognize, the suffering of others, is a political one (Morris 1996). It is a process by which certain people, and not others, are designated to be “worthy of compassion” (Ticktin 2011, 13; see also Baines 2016; Enns 2012; Fassin and Rechtman 2009). Extending recognition to impure victims requires us to recalibrate our received notions of victim and perpetrator, innocence and guilt. It requires us, as Kelly (2013b) puts it in the context of torture, “to see, name, and take responsibility for what is in front of us” (4), but has been made invisible or unspeakable through our frameworks.

The moral economy of victimhood is visible in the anthropological literature on the Bosnian war. The literature has tended to focus on Bosniak (Bosnian Muslim) victims of

the war, which has been valuable in creating space to hear their stories and give due respect to their painful experiences. But it has also resulted in several problematic effects. Helms (2013) argues that the narrow focus on Bosniak victimhood has had the effect of flattening multi-dimensional people into the one-dimensional figure of the victim, reducing their identities to their suffering, reducing their lived experience to an event. In other words, Bosniak victims have often been “given voice” only in cases where they speak as victims.

And implicitly, the focus on Bosniak victimhood casts Serbs collectively as perpetrators, which has resulted in a lack of will among both scholars and journalists to seek out their stories (Kempner, Perlis, and Merz 2005; Nikolic-Ristanovic 2003). The ethnic bias in the literature thus speaks to a more fundamental *moral* bias, reflecting an anthropological predisposition towards the marginalized and the oppressed (Armakolas 2001, 2007; Blee 2015; Bougarel, Helms, and Duijzings 2007).

I thus bring the moral economy of victimhood into focus to ask: What is at stake for post-war societies when recognition is withheld from certain classes of victims? How does the presence of unacknowledged injuries affect the micro-dynamics of co-existence? What are the long-term consequences of bearing a violent past in silence? As these questions imply, wars do not simply end when peace accords are signed. They are “porous” (Hermez 2017, 4), and they carry over into the present in subtle and unexpected ways (Bryant 2010; Das 2007; Thiranagama 2011).

Moreover, these questions about the implications of withholding recognition must be asked in this “age of transitional justice” (Adler 2018; see also Bernath 2016; Moffett 2016), where the right of victims to have their experiences recognized is considered vital not only for personal healing, but also for the achievement of sustainable peace in divided societies (Govier 2003; Govier and Verwoerd 2002; Haldemann 2008). The acknowledgement of suffering is considered an “intangible need” (Molloy et al. 2015) that can result in an “emotional shift” on the part of those who suffered and allow them to move forward (Govier and Verwoerd 2002, 141, 2004). But insofar as we accept that recognition can contribute to personal or social repair, we also need to assess how a lack of recognition can undermine it.

Women and War

Women's voices have frequently been excluded from historical and political accounts of war and conflict, reflecting their relative absence from high-ranking political positions and peace negotiations (Harel-Shalev 2017; Menon and Bhasin 1998; Sjoberg 2013). While Serb voices in general have often been overlooked in the scholarship on the siege of Sarajevo, there are a few political memoirs by Serb men who stayed in the city, and who held high-ranking political or military positions during the siege: for example, the political memoir of Mirko Pejanović (2004), the Serb member of the Bosnian presidency in the war-time Sarajevo government, and of Jovan Divjak (2004), a Deputy Commander in the ARBiH during the war. These accounts are illuminating, offering an insight into the complicated human relationships behind political legislation and military strategy. But bringing in women's narratives is important to further challenge official histories, and to reveal the everyday as a site of political engagement in its own right (Ring 2006). For this reason, the inclusion of women's narratives in general, and the creation of feminist historiographies in particular, "have challenged 'war stories' as we know them" (Altnay and Petó 2016, 5), centering the voices of "small actors and bit-part players" (Butalia 2000, 71).

However, the representation of women in conflict studies has often been problematic. The literature has tended to turn a blind eye to the ways that women may ideologically support or even physically perpetrate violence, instead preferring to document women either as victims, or, increasingly, as community-level peacemakers (this tendency is evident in Berry 2018; Deiana 2018; Hunt 2011; for a mounting critique of this tendency, see Annan et al. 2011; Batinić 2015; Brown 2018, 2020; Darden, Henshaw, and Szekely 2019; Das 2008; Goscilo and Hashamova 2012; Henshaw 2017; Joshi 2003; Krimmer 2018; Saikia 2011; Schiavo 2016). The representation of women as peacebuilders is important for making visible the labour of women who, often excluded from formal peace processes, work to rebuild social life within informal political spaces, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and their own communities. But it often results in an essentialist portrayal of women as inherently more peaceful, nurturing, inclusive, and forgiving than men (for critiques, see Cohn 2013; Gámez Fuentes, Núñez Puente, and

Gómez Nicolau 2020; Helms 2003, 2013; Kouvo and Levine 2008; Ní Aoláin, Haynes, and Cahn 2011; Todeschini 2001; Žarkov 2007). As Krimmer (2018, 2) puts it, when it comes to women and war, “we are dealing with two different kinds of invisibility” — both the invisibility of female suffering in male-dominated accounts of war, *and* the invisibility of female complicity and contribution to war efforts.

The women in this study rarely appear as peacebuilders. My research participants were, with very few exceptions, not involved in any organized peacebuilding work. They were not associated with any humanitarian NGOs or civil society associations, whether as members, volunteers, or participants. And I as a researcher was not associated with any such organizations, nor did I seek participants through them, as I sought to document a history of violence that has been submerged below most public channels.

These factors distinguish my work from much other scholarship on women in post-war Bosnia, where researchers have tended to study activists, or to recruit participants through activist organizations (Berry 2018; Deiana 2018; Helms 2013). These research decisions inevitably influence the data that is gathered, since women who are recruited from or through activist networks may tend to speak about their peacebuilding work, and may be more inclined to apply this lens to their own lives and relationships.

My research took place outside of these established channels, and thus offers a different perspective on women’s experience of war and its aftermath. One effect of not studying activists is the near-total displacement of reconciliation as a framework. Reconciliation has become an international “master narrative” for understanding and intervening in post-war societies (Eastmond 2010, 4; see also Govier and Prager 2003; James 2012; Krondorfer 2018; Rigby 2001; Scheper-Hughes 1998, 126), with women-as-peacemakers often situated at the forefront of localized reconciliation initiatives (Helms 2003). As a concept, reconciliation is complex, contested, and notoriously difficult to measure empirically. But it is most often critiqued for its moralistic and even religious focus on forgiveness (for critiques, see Brudholm and Rosoux 2009; M. Evans 2018; Inazu

2009; Reynaud 2014; Rosoux 2015; Theidon 2010).¹ As a result, it is often divided (following Crocker 2003) into “thick” and “thin” versions, where thick reconciliation involves forgiveness, healing, and mercy, while thin reconciliation is akin to re-establishing mere co-existence (see Skaar 2012; Theidon 2006).

Researchers who study Bosnian activists have aptly demonstrated the ways that activists critically engage with or even reject reconciliation as an internationally imposed, religious, overused, or diluted concept (Helms 2013; Touquet and Milošević 2018). Additionally, ethnographic work in in Bosnia reveals how pragmatic local conceptions of living in proximity to difference, such as *suživot* (“life together”), tend to stand in for reconciliation — even if *suživot* is often mapped by scholars onto a reconciliation framework as a “thin” version (Eastmond 2010; Helms 2010).

Perhaps because my own research participants were not involved in activism or in the “global reconciliation industry” (Wilson 2003, 383), they did not invoke the concept even enough to critique it. When they referred to reconciliation, it was in passing reference to the international community or the NGO sector in Sarajevo, and not in relation to their own lives. This near-total displacement is important for building on and moving beyond existing critiques of reconciliation. The absence of reconciliation language in the narratives of women in this study opens up space to consider women’s postwar lives and social practices as genuinely outside of (and not in a relationship of critique to) dominant reconciliation frameworks.

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¹ For an early and enduring critique of what it means to demand forgiveness from those who have been victimized, see Minow (1998). See also Chakravarti (2014) for a reorientation towards, and appreciation of, anger and rage.

Like other nationalisms (Thomson 2020), the ethno-nationalisms that ravaged Bosnia in the 1990s are often mistaken to be exclusively masculine enterprises. As Enloe (2014, 87) argues, “women have had distinctly uneasy relationships with nationalism,” at once finding access to new forms of political membership and participation, yet also finding themselves reduced from genuine political participants to mere symbols of the nation (and thus of national suffering, and national violation).

The sentiment that ethno-nationalism is an exclusively masculine enterprise was conveyed most succinctly in the title of Hunt’s 2011 book on Bosnian women: *This Was Not Our War*. On the ground, many victims’ associations and NGOs have mobilized around gendered terms such as “mothers” or “women” in order to position themselves as morally respectable, apolitical actors (Helms 2013; Wagner 2008). This positioning reflects not only the moral cachet of femininity after conflict, but also reflects changes in the broader socio-political context. While the emergence of Yugoslav socialism after World War II had created unprecedented (if still unequal) opportunities for women’s participation in the political sphere (Simic 2018), women’s engagement in Yugoslav politics had dramatically decreased by the start of the 1990s (Bracewell 1996). By the end of the war, *politics* had become a dirty word, signifying a male realm of corruption, war-profiteering, greed, and public lies (Hromadžić 2013; Jansen 2016; Kolind 2008; Kurtović 2011). In mobilizing around gendered terms, Helms argues that women enable themselves to engage in politics precisely by positioning themselves as apolitical actors. In doing so, she notes, they rely on the same “affirmative essentialisms” (2013, 7, citing R. G. Fox 1996) that characterize much of the literature on women in conflict.²

In the course of my fieldwork, I found that very few of the Serb women I met invoked the script strategically employed by activist organizations, of women as more peaceful and thus less responsible for the war than men. This was likely because they were

² In a different context, see Schiavo (2016) on how, in their memoirs, female veterans of the fascist Italian army tend to frame their participation in World War II as apolitical, and as not motivated by fascist ideology. Instead, they tend to emphasize patriotism and loyalty to one’s country. Schiavo argues that this tendency can be explained not only by gender, but by the taboo nature of fascist views in post-war democratic Italy. In the memoirs of female partisans, in contrast, ideological opposition to fascism is foregrounded as a major reason for participating in armed resistance.

not involved with activist organizations and thus had not internalized this script, but it may also have resulted from the tense post-war intersection of gender and ethnicity for Serb women in particular. Helms (2013) discusses how the script of female innocence faced challenges even within activist organizations; the premise that “all women” were passive victims of male ethno-nationalist violence became broken up by implicit qualifications that *Serb women* were less peaceful. The implication was that Serb women “had clearly failed in their gendered roles” (138). In their roles as mothers, they had raised violent sons. In their roles as wives, they had encouraged violent husbands.

The uneasy intersection of ethnicity and femininity for Serb women in this context speaks to the relative success of the ethno-nationalist project in making ethnicity the most salient and fundamental social category, one that could eclipse all other distinctions such as gender, class, urbanity, and so on. Since ethno-nationalist politicians claimed to represent the will of the people, the crimes they committed were committed “in the name of” those people as an ethnic whole. Žarkov (2007) writes that “both Serb men and Serb women [were] defined as enemies, and essentially violent” (185).

The Serb women I interviewed often discussed how they felt unfairly marked as aggressors instead of recognized as victims, but they almost never leveraged their gender to contest this. The aggressor is a traditionally masculine figure, and in the local language, women used the masculine term *agresor*. (The feminine form of the word exists — *agresorka* — but it is not widely used, particularly because *agresor* refers less readily to an individual than to a collective, as in the English word “occupier.”) As a fluent but imperfect speaker of the local language, I stumbled over this gender discrepancy when it first came up in an interview. A woman in her sixties was describing her sensation that others in the city viewed her as an aggressor and asked, rhetorically, “How can *I* be an aggressor?” Interrupting her, I asked, “You mean, instead of an... *agresorka*?” She stared at me, confused. I tried again: “You mean, because you are a woman?” She responded, “No! Because I spent the whole war in Sarajevo!”

Serb women in Sarajevo thus viewed the aggressor as an ethnic rather than gendered label: they felt that Serbs as a collective had been deemed aggressors, and that

being women did nothing to soften this ascription. They contested it by pointing out their war-time locations inside the siege (see chapter 4), rather than leveraging their gender to tap into the activist discourse of women-as-victims.

But the marking of Serb women as aggressors can also be understood as a unique product of civil war in general, and siege warfare in particular.³ Giles and Hyndman (2004) point out that the rise of civil wars must be understood as a gendered phenomenon. Interstate warfare tends to produce a demarcation between (masculine) conflict zones and (feminine) civilian zones, but this form of warfare has been on the decline since the mid-twentieth century (Lacina and Gleditsch 2005). In civil wars, by contrast — which now make up the majority of contemporary wars (Collier et al. 2003) — the civilian zone *is* the conflict zone. One of my research participants described it this way: “I must have been so naïve before. I thought a war was something that happened between two armies, on a battlefield. I didn’t know that it could be... like this.”

Civil wars bring civilians directly into the zone of conflict, but no form of warfare “erode[s] the distinction between civilian and military worlds” more than the siege (Dowdall and Horne 2018, 4). When the siege of Sarajevo broke out in 1992, siege warfare was already considered anachronistic. But today, it is seeing a “reemergence” (M. A. C. Fox 2018). But the gendered implications of this form of “war at home” remain under-explored (Kirschenbaum 2006, 42).

Sieges create conditions of scarcity where domestic skills such as finding and preparing food become exponentially valuable (Kirschenbaum 2006; Yarov 2017), and

³ There is much debate over whether the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina was a civil war or an interstate conflict (Gray 1997), even though, in practice, these lines are often blurred (Kalyvas and Balcells 2010, Sambanis 2004, Toukan 2019). During my fieldwork, I found that people in Sarajevo had polarized opinions about how to classify the war. While my Serb respondents spoke of civil war, numerous non-Serb acquaintances stressed that the war was not a civil war, and indeed, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia “declared that the war had an international character; in other words, that it was not a civil war” (Nettelfield 2010a, 28). The contest over how to define the conflict is to be expected. As Kalyvas (2006, 17) points out, “the very use of the term is part of the conflict itself, conferring or denying legitimacy (or status equality) to the parties in the conflict.” I find the literature on civil war useful for analyzing the *intimacy* of the conflict in Bosnia, and in particular its effect on social relationships, but I think the conflict itself cannot be considered “purely” a civil war *nor* an inter-state conflict, but as a hybrid of both.

where neighbourly relations, so often nurtured and sustained by women, can become a matter of life or death (see chapter 3). In this dissertation, I include the gendered strategies by which some Serb women worked to sustain social relations during the siege, as in the sharing of precious, scarce food items among neighbours (apricots received as a gift, an entire dozen eggs), or the exchanging of food preservation ideas (an egg will keep longer if buried in sand?) and war-time recipes with minimal and makeshift ingredients (see also Aretxaga 1997; Demick 1996; Maček 2009; Ring 2006).

But sieges also produce opportunities for complicity and betrayal that bring women into conflict as potential perpetrators. In Sarajevo, Pejanović (2004, 135) describes an atmosphere of “paranoia in which more or less every Serb was seen as a potential traitor.” Regardless of the fact women generally did not occupy war-time roles gendered as male (soldiers, snipers, politicians), women inside the siege could be accused of being fifth columnists: sending signals to snipers about when to shoot; feeding the VRS information about ARBiH positions; spying. In this dissertation, I include the voices of Serb women who were wrongfully accused of being fifth columnists, as well as the voices of Serb women who *did* support the VRS ideologically, or who rejected the role of the “natural” peacemaker, refusing to mend broken ties with neighbours, refusing to normalize ruptured relationships.

However, it is important to note that the women in this study who supported the VRS from inside the siege would not consider themselves “complicit,” partly because they were not directly involved in VRS violence, and partly because complicity is generally a term reserved to describe those who support or enable the *other* side’s violence, while justifying the violence committed by one’s own side (Lepora and Goodin 2013). But while none of the women in this study claimed any direct involvement in VRS violence, other, more subtle forms of complicity available to women were also possible from inside the siege. After returning from fieldwork, I learned, anecdotally, about certain war-time practices by which Serb women in besieged Sarajevo could covertly signal their ethnicity to VRS snipers, in the hope of not being killed by them. Wearing the strap of a cross-body purse over a particular shoulder, or hanging one’s laundry to dry with red, blue, and white clothespins, in that order, in the colours of the Serbian flag (see Dauphinée 2013). The

implication of these anecdotes, as I heard them, is that Serb women who adopted these protective measures did not share them with their own friends or neighbours, but walked with their friends through exposed streets with their bags crossed over different shoulders. None of the women in this study, nor anybody else I spoke to during my fieldwork in Sarajevo, mentioned these kinds of practices, so I have no sense of how prevalent or rare they were. But they do point to quiet, gendered forms of complicity that escape most accounts of women in conflict.

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In the discussion on gender and conflict, one significant silence bears mentioning. In much of the academic literature on women's experiences of war, the phenomena of wartime rape and sexual violence are prominent (N. Mookherjee 2015; Saikia 2011). Indeed, in transitional justice mechanisms and international media, there is often a conflation of sexual violence and women's experiences of war, as though sexual violence is *the* gendered experience of war (see Ross 2003).

In the 1990s, feminist scholars were instrumental in achieving the institutional recognition of rape as a weapon of war (Buss 2009). One major success was that the 1993 statute for the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) specifically included rape as a crime against humanity. There was disagreement among feminist scholars, though, as to whether the rape of Bosnian Muslim women by Bosnian Serb men should be considered a distinct form of violence (Engle 2005). Some scholars argued that the systematic nature of sexual crimes committed by Serb forces (such as the mass rapes of Bosnian Muslim women in detention camps) constituted a genocidal strategy that was not evident in the more sporadic rapes of Bosnian Serb women, for example (MacKinnon 1994; Stiglmayer 1994). Other scholars countered that the rhetorical collapsing of rape and genocide threatened to normalize less sensational or less systematic cases of rape, ultimately making it harder for victims to access justice.

In particular, Serb women victims of wartime rape have been made largely invisible by this framing. Even though rape has been the most visible representation of women's suffering in international media coverage of the Bosnian war (Žarkov 2007; Deiana 2018), this recognition has not often been extended to Serb women (Simić 2016, 2018; Žarkov 2003). Simić (2018) argues that as victims on the side of the perpetrator, Serb women rape victims have been minimized, ignored, or even framed as deserving of sexual violence. Beyond being overlooked by scholars, they have been excluded by local activist organizations, government compensation programs, and international transitional justice initiatives.

In this study, the topic of rape is notably absent. It sometimes filtered into interviews in fragments, or in allusions to other people's experiences ("no one in my family dug trenches; my daughters weren't raped"), but I made no attempt to hold it down and examine it. I have had to consider why.

Perhaps, because of the sensitivity of the topic, I did not want to ask for information when it was not offered (for a similar approach, see Das 2007 and Fujii 2010). But I certainly felt more comfortable asking difficult questions about other sensitive topics. I think my willingness to keep this topic elusive reflected an unexamined unease that I would not do it justice if I grouped it together with other forms of wartime violence, and did not give it the space it seemed to deserve. But this kind of position has been rightly challenged by critical feminist scholars who have drawn attention to the potential pitfalls of isolating rape from other forms of wartime violence, or of asserting rape as the worst imaginable fate that can befall a woman, eclipsing any other suffering she may experience, and eclipsing even her own understanding of the event (Baaz and Stern 2013; Helms 2013; Ross 2003). Such framings set confining parameters around how and when women can talk about violence that has been committed against them, obscuring experiences that fail to fit the script. The allusions to rape in my interview data suggest that sexual violence was an important dimension of the siege's internal zone of violence, one that I hope other researchers may attend to in the future.

The End of Yugoslavia in Bosnia

In the next sections, I offer a historical overview of the end of Yugoslavia and the siege of Sarajevo, integrating Serb women’s voices, and making space for “their quiet historical role” (Kirschenbaum 2000, 554).

From the end of World War II, until war broke out in 1992, Bosnia-Herzegovina was a constituent republic of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), a multi-national country that included the republics of Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, Macedonia, and Montenegro (see figure 3). Yugoslavia as a country had first come into being after World War I, as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (a kingdom which included the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina), which was renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929.



Figure 3: Map of the former Yugoslavia
Source: United Nations. Map no. 3689, Rev. 12, June 2007. Reprinted with permission.

During World War II, Bosnia-Herzegovina was conquered by Axis forces, and was entirely incorporated into the Independent State of Croatia, a fascist puppet state controlled by the Croatian fascist Ustasha government, led by Ante Pavelić, which persecuted Jews, Serbs, Roma, homosexuals, communists, and other perceived enemies of the state. Ustasha brutalities gave rise to two other movements that would fight for control of Yugoslavia during World War II: the Chetniks, a monarchist Serb nationalist movement initially comprised of officers from the Yugoslav royal army, who increasingly collaborated with Axis forces (see Donia 2006); and the Partisans, led by Marshal Josip Broz (referred to by his nickname, Tito), an anti-fascist communist movement that, while initially recruiting predominantly Serbs, included all ethnic groups in its ranks. With the Partisan victory in 1945, the second Yugoslavia was officially created: the SFRY.

Bosnia's position in socialist Yugoslavia was unique. While all other republics corresponded with a nominal ethnic group that made up the demographic majority within the borders of that republic (Serbs in Serbia; Croats in Croatia, etc.), Bosnia-Herzegovina was deemed in its constitution to be a shared home to Bosnian Muslims, Serbs, and Croats, who, according to the last Yugoslav census, published in 1991, constituted 43.4 (Muslims), 31.2 (Serbs), and 17.38 (Croats) percent of the population, respectively.

SFRY was ruled by Tito from its establishment in 1945 until his death in 1980. His policy of "brotherhood and unity" aimed to downplay ethnic rivalry in favour of a shared Yugoslav (South Slav) identity. Ethno-nationalist political organizations were outlawed, and ethnic composition was taken into consideration in matters of political appointments, staffing, and housing, to ensure fair distributions across ethnic groups.

The violent unravelling of Yugoslavia after 1991 is often narrated in terms of rising ethno-nationalisms after Tito's death in 1980. There is truth to this, but especially since this dissertation is concerned with post-war ethnic relations, it is important to point out that the overwhelming focus on ethno-nationalism in most analyses of the war risks painting people as multi-dimensional actors motivated only by goals of ethnic self-determination. It clouds the various economic and geopolitical factors that coalesced to bring about the breakup of Yugoslavia (Jovic 2001; Woodward 1995a).

The 1980s in Yugoslavia were marked by foreign debt and economic austerity measures. It was a time of inflation, product shortages, and rising unemployment (Lampe 2003; Woodward 1995b). At the same time, there was increasing conflict over constitutional reform, with disagreement over how much power should be granted to constituent republics relative to the federal government (Woodward 1995a). And geopolitically, Yugoslavia's position as a leader of the Non-Aligned Movement was compromised by the end of the Cold War and the collapse of communism across Eastern Europe.

The rhetoric of ethno-nationalism played on and profited from this rising popular discontent. One of my research participants, a woman in her sixties, put it this way:

They [politicians] distracted us with nationalist parties, filled people with fear. So that we wouldn't notice that they were robbing the country, pocketing all of its wealth. They covered up the end of socialism with a war. We were cheated.

The November 1990 elections in Bosnia were decisive. Socialist leaders had agreed to hold multi-party elections for the first time, and these elections occurred shortly after the ban on ethno-nationalist political organizations had been lifted (Stojanović 2014). The three major ethno-nationalist parties that participated in the elections were the SDA (Party for Democratic Action, or *Strana Demokratske Akcije*), which represented Bosnian Muslims; the SDS (Serb Democratic Party, or *Srpska Demokratska Stranka*, or) which represented Serbs; and the Croat HDZ (Croat Democratic Union, or *Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica*), which represented Croats.⁴ Both the HDZ and the SDS were local “offshoots” of political parties that had been established in Croatia, and that opened branches in Bosnia after the SDA was established in May 1990 (Bulutgil 2016; Halilovich 2013).

Although a combination of ethno-nationalist, liberal, and reformist socialist political parties participated in the elections, as Hayden (1996, 787) points out, the results effectively “resembled an ethnic census,” as ethno-nationalist parties received 98 of 130

⁴ The appearance of the word “Democratic” in each of these party names should not be taken too literally; it was the vocabulary used to signal a break with the socialist past, even by socialist parties themselves (see footnote 3). As Halilovich (2013) writes, “Democracy become a prominent and popular word, with almost every major political party incorporating it in its name” (65).

seats in the chamber of citizens, and 104 of 110 seats in the chamber of municipalities. Bulutgil (2016, 138) argues that the ethno-nationalist parties were overwhelmingly successful in the 1990 elections not because ethnicity was extremely salient for Bosnians, but because other divisions (such as class or religion) were “even less so” after 45 years of socialist rule which had achieved high degrees of income equality and secularization. Additionally, urban Bosnians, and especially urban Serbs and urban Croats, were somewhat less likely to vote for ethno-nationalist parties (Bulutgil 2016).

Given the war that soon followed, it is easy to forget that these three parties were not always rivals; they needed each other in order to secure their hold on power (Maksić 2017). Early campaign polls show that the socialist opposition was actually in the lead. And, given the demographic composition of Bosnia, and the fact that each of the ethno-nationalist parties could logically appeal only to a voter base restricted by ethnicity, it would have been extremely unlikely for a single ethno-nationalist party to come into power in isolation. They needed to work together. The three parties formed a grand coalition and agreed to a power-sharing structure in order to defeat the socialist opposition. In their joint campaigns, they encouraged citizens to vote for their own ethno-national representatives. In the end, the three parties were supported by 75 percent of voters, a percentage significantly higher than ethnic party support in any other post-Yugoslav republic, and any other post-socialist country (Stojanović 2014).⁵

Some of the women I interviewed were shocked by the victory of the ethno-nationalist parties, as these women personally moved in anti-nationalist circles, and it seemed them that no one they knew supported those parties. Milka, a woman now in her seventies, offered the following perspective:

⁵ The success of this strategy suggests a missed opportunity for the socialists, whose separate parties ultimately divided the non-nationalist vote. Two of the socialist parties actually did work together: the former League of Communists, which campaigned under its new name, League of Communists – Social Democratic Party (SK-SDP), and the former Socialist Alliance, which campaigned under its new name, Democratic Socialist Alliance (DSS). These parties even proposed an alliance with the third socialist party, the Alliance of Reformist Forces of Yugoslavia (SRSJ), known as “the Reformists” for short. The Reformists were led by then-Yugoslav Federal Prime Minister Ante Marković, but he fatefully declined the proposition for an alliance due to differences in the other socialist parties’ platforms (Donia 2004).

It was rigged. People were paid to vote a certain way, and poor people took the money. As the votes were being counted, the preliminary results suggested that the Progressive Party was going to win. Then suddenly –and I know this because I know people who were there — suddenly people came in with huge bags of uncounted votes, and the election results turned. It was a shock for everyone.

I suggested to her there may be a discrepancy between what people say and what they do, that is, between who they say they will vote for and who they really vote for. “I thought of that too,” she replied, a little sadly. “But could it really be possible that they’re all lying?”

Many of the women I interviewed referred to the elections as the pivotal moment when things began to change in Sarajevo. This was the case even if they themselves had voted for an ethno-nationalist party. Dunja, a woman now in her sixties who gave her vote to the SDS, recalled her feeling of fear when she saw SDA supporters celebrating their victory (which was, remember, the victory of a tripartite coalition that included the SDS). “Everything was set up like a derby, with flags. [Whispers] Green flags. Turkish flags. They wanted to scare the Serbs a bit. You know Serbs were under the Turks for 500 years” (her narrative continues in chapter 4). She added,

The West always thinks that one-party systems are bad, but I always thought that for this kind of area, where people are so mixed, it’s good to have a one-party system. Because we evidently aren’t able to create parties based on humanist, democratic principles. Our parties aren’t really *for* anyone, instead we make parties *against* one another, against other religions and ethnicities. So when the SDA came into power, I got scared. Really scared all of a sudden. What was happening to my Sarajevo?

Her words may seem contradictory given that she voted for the SDS, but as Maksić (2017) points out, the SDS employed contradictory rhetoric in order to appeal *both* to Serbs who supported the ethno-nationalist project of a “Greater Serbia,” *and* to Serbs who supported federal Yugoslavia.

The three ethnic parties thus rose to power together, but their visions for the future were irreconcilable. Around them, Yugoslavia was already coming undone. In Serbia, Slobodan Milošević had been voted in as president in 1989. By installing supporters in key political positions (in Montenegro and in Serbia’s two autonomous provinces, Vojvodina

and Kosovo), he had gained significant control of both the SFRY presidency and the Yugoslav People's Army (*Jugoslovenska Narodna Armija*, or JNA).

In 1991, Slovenia, Croatia, and Macedonia all declared their independence, in that order, and a war erupted in Croatia between separation forces (Croatian police and a newly assembled Croatian army) and the increasingly Serbianized JNA. The shifting position of the JNA, and the transformation it underwent by the outbreak of war in Croatia in 1991, are particularly important to understand its actions in Bosnia the following year. The role of the Yugoslav People's Army, according to Yugoslavia's 1974 constitution, was to "protect the independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and social system of the SFRY" (see Kolarić 2018, 7). The constitutional crises of the 1980s in Yugoslavia had opened up the question of whether individual republics had a right to secede from Yugoslavia, and thus whether the JNA could be deployed to protect Yugoslavia's sovereignty and territorial integrity in the case of a republic's own secession (as opposed to an external attack). But regardless of divergent interpretations over the constitutional legality of secession, Kolarić (2018) shows that according to the JNA's own military documents and statements, by 1991, it saw its mission to be the protection of Serbs and Serb-inhabited areas, rather than the protection of Yugoslav sovereignty or territorial integrity as such (see also Donia 2015). In other words, the JNA had transformed from a Yugoslav people's army to a Serb army.

In Bosnia, the question of independence was particularly thorny because of its ethnically mixed population. As Bulutgil (2016, 129) explains, "only 38 percent of all Bosnian municipalities had an ethnic majority that exceeded 70 percent and a mere 8 percent had an ethnic majority that constituted 90 percent or more of the population." The SDS position was that Bosnia must remain in federal Yugoslavia. In the Serb ethno-nationalist imaginary of the SDS, an independent Bosnia was unacceptable because it would "sever" the body of the Serb people by carving an international border between Serbs in Bosnia, and Serbs in Serbia (Maksić 2017). But the option for Bosnia to simply *remain* in Yugoslavia was becoming increasingly impossible. With Croatia, Slovenia, and Macedonia all gone, Bosnia would be left in a rump Yugoslavia dominated by Serb political power, and by politicians who held violent ethno-nationalist aspirations for a

“Greater Serbia” (see Toal and Maksić 2014; Vuković 1993). Already in 1991, the presidents of Serbia and Croatia, Slobodan Milošević and Franjo Tuđman, were holding meetings to discuss how to best divide Bosnia between themselves, incorporating it into a Greater Serbia on one side, and a Greater Croatia on the other (Bowker 1998).

Neither Serb nor Croat ethno-nationalists considered Bosnia-Herzegovina to be a potential nation-state in its own right; they saw it as “little more than an administrative area of Yugoslavia created by Tito for his own political purposes” (Bowker 1998, 1249). While they considered Bosnian Serbs to be part of the Serb nation; and Bosnian Croats to be part of the Croat nation, they held the view that Bosnian Muslims were not a nation in their own right, but were really Serbs or Croats who had converted to Islam during Ottoman rule. Unlike Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats, Bosnian Muslims did not have an “external” homeland outside of Bosnia itself (Halilovich 2013). Between these two ethno-nationalist forces, Bosnian Muslim nationalism was nascent and underdeveloped; the term *Bosniak* was officially introduced only in 1993 to describe Bosnian Muslims in ethno-national, rather than religious, terms (on par with the ethno-national terms Serb as distinct from the religious designation of Serbian Orthodox, and Croat as distinct from the religious designation of Catholic).

With the possibility of conflict or crisis looming on the horizon, each of the three ruling ethno-nationalist parties in Bosnia had begun covertly developing their own militias or paramilitary formations as early as 1991 (Andreas 2008; Baker 2015b; Halilović 1997; Shrader 2003). The SDA formed the Muslim Defence Council in June 1991, and in September 1991, former JNA officer Sefer Halilović created the Patriotic League, a “secret armed force” to “defend Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Muslim people” (Shrader 2003, 34; Halilović 1997).

To arm themselves, each of the new paramilitaries exploited the republic’s Territorial Defence structure, but Serb paramilitaries accumulated the most weaponry through the support of the JNA (Baker 2015; Donia 2006). In Yugoslavia, the military defense was structured around the expectation that the country could be invaded by an *external* aggressor. To supplement the JNA in the case of an invasion, civilians were

trained in Territorial Defence Forces (*teritorijalne odbrane*, or TO), which had access to caches of weapons throughout the country. Many of these caches were kept in Bosnia specifically due to its rugged and mountainous terrain (King 2003). The TO forces were organized locally through various avenues such as factories and universities (Donia 2006). The idea was that in the event of an external attack, civilians could quickly be mobilized into a lightly armed resistance force, and could stave off the attack until the JNA arrived.

The TO system meant that ordinary civilians sometimes had weapons or military equipment lying around their homes. One woman I interviewed had failed to return a gasmask because her child loved to play with it as a toy. In 1990 and early 1991, the JNA ordered for the demobilization of TO caches, instructing units to turn in their weapons. At the same time, it started covertly arming SDS units (Shrader 2003).

Although each of the three ethno-nationalist paramilitaries armed themselves with TO caches, the vast majority of this weaponry went to the Serbs. Alija Izetbegović, the president of the SDA (the Muslim party), largely cooperated with the JNA's order of TO disarmament (Gow 2003; Shrader 2003). This decision seems fatal now, but at the time, the JNA was not overtly a Serbianized institution, and Izetbegović may have believed the JNA would protect Bosnia-Herzegovina in a war. He also faced a security dilemma whereby refusing to handover TO weapons would have encouraged further militarization in the other ethno-nationalist paramilitaries. But with a steady flow of arms from the JNA, SDS paramilitary units began declaring swaths of land in Bosnia to be "Serb Autonomous Regions," and establishing a parallel government structure for Bosnian Serbs (Maksić 2017).

Following orders from Serbia, the JNA began transforming itself demographically to prepare for Bosnia's anticipated declaration of independence. Once Bosnia received international recognition, the JNA's status on its territory would become that of a foreign army (Haskin 2006).⁶ In anticipation, it began bringing in soldiers and officers born in

⁶ Interestingly though, the JNA was also thrust into the role of foreign occupier by Yugoslav authorities, who put forward a new constitution on 27 April 1992 which reconstituted Yugoslavia as including only the two remaining republics of Montenegro and Serbia (see Donia 2006, 293).

Bosnia (mostly ethnic Serbs) and expelling soldiers and officers born outside of Bosnia (mostly from Serbia and Montenegro), thus giving itself the character of a local army, and facilitating its transformation into a Bosnian Serb army (CIA 2002; Kolarić 2018). One of my research participants, a woman in her seventies, recalled how this change of JNA character almost got her in trouble during a police search of her apartment at the start of the siege of Sarajevo. The police found a box of letters written to her daughter from a “very handsome” JNA soldier:

They waved the letters at me, and said “Ah ha! Your daughter is with one of them! She is a traitor!” I said to them, “Read the date on the letter.” It was an old letter my daughter had saved from the late eighties, when the JNA *really was* the Yugoslav People’s Army.

In the context of escalating but covert preparations for war, the tenuous tripartite coalition of ethno-nationalist parties unraveled completely. The decisive moment came in a Parliamentary session on 14 to 15 October 1991. For twenty hours, Parliament debated the issue of Bosnian independence, and in particular a “memorandum” on sovereignty advanced by the SDA (Muslim party) and supported by the HDZ (Croat party).⁷ Reflecting the political context of Yugoslavia’s ongoing dissolution, and in particular the secessions of Slovenia, Croatia, and Macedonia, the memorandum stated that representatives from Bosnia and Herzegovina would only participate in the federal (Yugoslav) parliament and presidency if all other federal units also participated. The memorandum further stated that “it was the right of the parliamentary majority to decide on the fate of the republic” (Hayden 2000, 93).

With no consensus on the memorandum in sight, the session was adjourned for the night by the President of the Parliament, a Serb, and all of the SDS members then left the building intending to return the next day. However, SDA and HDZ members stayed behind and, in the twilight hours of the morning, proclaimed the Parliament to be in session. With

⁷ This jam-packed session included both the inflammatory and now infamous speech by SDS president Radovan Karadžić, in which he threatened that if a war over independence were to break out, the Muslim nation would be annihilated (see Donia 2015), and Izetbegović’s much-cited assurance that war could not take place since “it takes two to tango” (Burg and Shoup 1999, 78).

the Serb members out of the room, they were able to obtain consent from those present to advance the memorandum of sovereignty (Burg and Shoup 1999).

Hayden (2000, 94) has argued that the actions of the SDA and HDZ members of parliament on that night were “contrary to both the letter and spirit of the Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was then valid.” When the tripartite coalition of the SDA, HDZ, and SDS took power in 1990, the Constitution was amended in various ways to protect the equality of Bosnia’s constituent nations, and to preclude “outvoting” (94), in other words to prevent two constituent nations from voting “against” the third. However, the mechanism that was intended to preclude outvoting (the Council for Questions of the Establishment and Equality of Nations and Nationalities of Bosnia and Herzegovina) only existed on paper, and had not actually been formed by October 1991.

The European Community (EC) requested an independence referendum to be held to assess the “will of the Bosnia-Herzegovina populations to constitute [Bosnia and Herzegovina] as a sovereign and independent state.” The referendum, which again ran contrary to the provisions against “outvoting,” was scheduled for 29 February and 1 March 1992. In the meantime, the Bosnian Serb para-government quickly held its own referendum, in November 1991, in which 98 percent of voters opted for Bosnia to remain part of Yugoslavia. This referendum was not recognized by the EC or by the Bosnian government (now an SDA-HDZ coalition) in Sarajevo. In January 1992, the Bosnian Serb para-government then declared its own breakaway state out of the Serb Autonomous Regions, and declared it to be part of federal Yugoslavia. This claim was not recognized by any other state. Finally, Bosnian Serb leaders rolled out a constitution for their new state the day before the scheduled referendum on Bosnian independence.

The majority of Bosnian Serbs boycotted the referendum. It passed with 62.68 percent of registered voters voting in favour of independence (Burg and Shoup 1999; Christia 2012). Put differently, 99.7 percent of those who *did* vote (largely Muslims and Croats), voted in favour of independence. Many of my research participants referred to the results

of this referendum as a moment of political exclusion. Dunja, the woman in her sixties quoted earlier, said:

Why are the Serbs the aggressors? Because they didn't want to betray Yugoslavia when the referendum happened? We were asked, "Do you want to remain in Yugoslavia?"⁸ The Serbs wanted to remain, and the Muslim wanted to separate. Alija Izetbegović wanted to have his own state. He wanted to be some kind of ruler. And I really resent him, because he was a very educated man, and he remembered World War II; he must have known that something like this would happen. But he wanted to sacrifice a large number of his people for something that he thought was good.

Aspects of her narrative are problematic (as in her framing of Serb aggression as inevitable and justified following Muslim provocation), but her words effectively capture the tension at the heart of *both* SDS and SDA politics. Just as SDS rhetoric moved ambiguously between pro-Serb and pro-Yugoslav positions in an attempt to appeal to as great a number of Serbs as possible, SDA rhetoric performed a discursive balancing act between advocating for an emergent Muslim/Bosniak ethno-nationalism, and advocating for a sovereign, multi-ethnic Bosnian state. Dunja describes the Serb position as wanting to "remain" in Yugoslavia, obscuring the campaign already in motion (but perhaps unknown to her in 1992) of creating a "Greater Serbia." And she describes Izetbegović as wanting to "have his own state," thus rejecting the SDA's more inclusive platform of a multi-ethnic Bosnian state on the grounds that his government never had the support of a third of the population (see Hayden 2000).

The EC declared it would recognize Bosnia as an independent state as of 6 April 1992. This day is marked in Sarajevo as both the first day of independence, and the first day of the war.⁹

⁸ The referendum actually asked voters if they were *for* a sovereign, multi-ethnic Bosnia. Another research participant stated that if the question *had* been framed in terms of a loss of Yugoslavia, people would not have voted for it so readily.

⁹ April 6 was marked before the war too. On April 6, 1941, German forces attacked Sarajevo, and exactly four years later, on April 6, 1945, Sarajevo was liberated from Nazi occupation by Tito's Partisans.

Inside the Siege

Sarajevo is located in a river valley surrounded by mountains, with few roads leading in or out. The landscape is breathtaking, but it made the city extremely vulnerable to attack. Hours after the referendum voting finished on 1 March 1992, SDS supporters erected barricades, blocking off several streets. SDS leaders claimed that the barricades were put up in order to protect Serbs, citing a shooting at a Serb wedding that same day in Sarajevo's Baščaršija neighbourhood, where the father of the bridegroom was killed and a Serbian Orthodox priest was wounded (Judah 2000). The next day, 2 March, SDA supporters put up barricades of their own (Donia 2006). Tens of thousands of Sarajevans amassed to protest the barricades, and although they were taken down soon after, the next two months were full of rumours and (para-)military preparations on all sides. Minja, a woman in her sixties, described it this way: "You could feel something in the air, but we didn't imagine yet that it would be war. There was just an atmosphere in the city. You had a feeling that everything was being divided" (her narrative continues in chapter 4).

On 5 and 6 April, tens of thousands of Sarajevans were again in the streets protesting, calling for the resignation of ethno-nationalist leaders, and creating an "embryonic" new Government of National Salvation (Donia 2006, 284). On 5 April, Serb forces fired on the protestors, killing one. On 6 April, Serb forces again opened fire on the protestors, killing six. As the protests were taking place, Serb paramilitaries were already attacking the city, and being held back by Sarajevo police.

In the weeks that followed, Serb forces intensified their attack, claiming certain strategic neighbourhoods and settling into position in the mountains and hillsides that circled the city. The JNA, by then a thoroughly Serbianized force, began the assault on Sarajevo. It officially withdrew from Sarajevo one month later, but only on paper. In practice, the JNA transferred most of its weapons, munitions, and personnel into the Bosnian Serb Army (Kaldor 2010). In addition, the war that soon spread across Bosnia would be fought with significant support from irregular and paramilitary forces from both Bosnia and Serbia. As Ron (2000) explains, sub-contracting the violence to non-state actors

allowed the Serbian government to engage in the Bosnian war while maintaining “plausible deniability” (see also Vukušić 2019).



Figure 4: View of Sarajevo from Trebević mountain, or, from the point of view of VRS snipers

Source: Photo by author.

The siege closed slowly and would last for almost four years. Many of the city’s Serbs left quietly on the eve of the war, without saying goodbye to their neighbours. These silent departures were, and still are, a wellspring of suspicion and betrayal. Remaining Sarajevans felt that the Serbs had left because they had received prior warning of the coming siege, and that they had committed a grave moral crime by leaving without warning their neighbours (see chapter 4).

With no official army when the war started, the Sarajevo government quickly created the Army of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina (ARBiH). It actually began as a relatively multi-ethnic force, as Serbs who had defected from the JNA joined its ranks. But a mistrust of ethnic Serbs pervaded the army throughout the war; they were increasingly treated as expendable soldiers, and were sent to sure deaths on dangerous frontlines (Divjak 2004).

In the early days before the ARBiH consolidated, the Sarajevo government had to scramble to arrange a defense out of various elements — and to do so in the middle of a United Nations arms embargo on the entire former Yugoslavia, which disadvantaged it greatly against the well-armed VRS (see Sokol 2019). The Sarajevo government turned to the police force, local civilian defenses, paramilitary units including the Patriotic League, and various other militias, including the Green Berets, the Muslim Armed Forces, and the Croatian Armed Forces (Shrader 2003). And, perhaps most controversially, it turned to the criminal underworld (Andreas 2008; Kaldor 2010). Tamara, a woman in her sixties recalled:

There were criminal gangs in the city. That Juka Prazina, he was a scary person. He had a criminal's face. They all walked around like cowboys, covered in weapons, in black uniforms reminiscent of the Ustashas¹⁰ in World War II. And now all of a sudden, they're *defenders*? They're *defending* Sarajevo? And the Serbs are the aggressors? Those criminals very quickly put on uniforms, and then they could do whatever they wanted.

One woman in her seventies recalled how her walk to work was interrupted by a barricade, including a tank, that gangsters had erected in order to “claim” several blocks of the city as their territory, including the main television building:

I remembered thinking to myself, ‘If only those [Serb] snipers could see this! Instead of using the tank to defend the city, these criminals are robbing us. They

¹⁰ The Ustashas were an ultra-nationalist Croatian fascist organization, whose members were Croat and to a lesser extent Bosnian Muslim (see Tomasevich 2001). During World War II, from 1941 to 1945, Bosnia was part of the Independent State of Croatia (*Nezavisna Država Hrvatske*, or NDH), a puppet state of fascist Germany with an Ustasha-led government. During this time, the Ustasha regime killed and deported hundreds of thousands of Serbs, along with Jews, Roma, and others.

robbed every grocery store at the beginning of the war, and now they're robbing us of our infrastructure.

The first months of the siege were the deadliest, as the VRS sought to control and terrorize the population. Of all war-time deaths in Sarajevo, 75 percent occurred in 1992 alone (Donia 2006). Meanwhile inside the siege, the first year and a half was the time when militarized criminal gangs were at their worst. The Sarajevo government did not officially endorse the gangsters' continued criminal activity, but, in return for defense, it espoused a "policy of compromise" (Pejanović 2004, 141).

For Serbs inside the siege, the lawlessness of the gangs became a source of existential fear in an atmosphere of increasing anti-Serb paranoia and hostility, where crimes were going unpunished. In August 1992, four months into the siege, a television program was broadcast where a Sarajevo gangster, Ramiz "Ćelo" Delalić, stated that on the day of the referendum, he had shot and killed Nikola Gardović, the Serb father of the bridegroom (Gjelten 1995; Vuković 1993). Even with this confession, Sarajevo police made no attempts to arrest him.

My research participants expressed their mounting fears that they or their family members could be detained, beaten, or disappeared, and that such acts could occur with impunity. The threats seem to come from all sides. Paramilitary gangs captured Serb men on the streets and forced them to dig trenches on the exposed front lines (Lupis 1994; Moll 2015). Bands of Bosniak refugees who had come to Sarajevo after having their towns and villages destroyed by Serb forces retaliated by targeting Serb civilians (Pejanović 2004) – mimicking, in smaller form, the VRS pattern of increasing its intensity of the shelling Sarajevo in response to military setbacks. Neighbours could make phone calls to Sarajevo police to put a Serb on a "list" of suspected fifth columnists, or have them detained. A local gang leader who became an ARBiH military commander, Mušan "Caco" Topalović, became particularly notorious for killing civilians, especially Serbs, and dumping their bodies in the Kazani caves on the outskirts of the city.

One of my research participants who was in her twenties during the siege aptly described the atmosphere of lawlessness: "There were so many paramilitary organizations.

So many people had power. The official Bosnian army had the least power of them all.” Pejanović describes the relationship between the Sarajevo government and the militarized gangs this way:

There was too much of a tendency to compromise with these men, too much fear of the bloodshed and chaos that would result from any organized action against them. President Izetbegović in particular seemed to feel this fear, and in my view he was responsible for the policy of compromise and waiting. (2004, 141)

The number of Serb civilian deaths in the city is unknown, and much contested. No records were kept. The Sarajevo government places the number at 150. Estimates by local Serb organizations place it at 700 (Divjak 2004, 189). More dubious claims set the number at least ten times higher (Ivanišević and Grčić-Gavriločić 2016).

As the Sarajevo government consolidated its power, it began to take some measures against gang activity. In October 1993, in response to increasingly dangerous and erratic behaviour on the part of Caco, Sarajevo police disbanded his unit, and arrested 16 soldiers. A newly formed military court held secret trials, in which 14 of the 16 soldiers were convicted. However, 10 of those 14 were released from jail immediately because the sentences they received were shorter than the time they had spent waiting for trial, and of the remaining 4 soldiers, none received sentences of longer than 6 years (Hedges 1997). Some of those released were then allotted into powerful positions in the SDA (Andreas 2008). In 1997, the local newspaper *Dani* covered this story. For this, they received threats from Bosniak leadership, and had a bomb thrown into their office (Orentlicher 2018).

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There are several theories as to how and why the siege wore on for nearly four years. Conditions on the ground certainly contributed to the duration of the siege, as a “siege stalemate” (Andreas 2008, 32) cemented between the VRS (well-armed but poorly manned, with equipment that allowed them to lay siege on the city, but not to enter it

directly), and the ARBiH (well-manned, but inadequately armed, with a relative advantage on street-to-street fighting). However, the fact that the two warring sides actually cooperated on numerous occasions to *sustain* the siege — as in, for example, the Bosniak side purchasing arms from the Serb side to get around a United Nation arms embargo (see Andreas 2008) — suggests the siege was sustained because it was, for a small number of people, incredibly profitable. Under siege conditions, a black market economy flourished, and those who took advantage of it sprouted up as a new elite, amassing incredible wealth and political power while ordinary Sarajevans felt the deprivations and degradations of war (Andreas 2008).

On a strategic level, sustaining the siege in Sarajevo was an effective means for the Serb side to keep the media spotlight focused on the urban centre, and thus to distract the media from the Serbs' broader and more brutal campaign of ethnic cleansing and genocide in eastern Bosnia (Kalyvas 2006; Loyd 2001). Bosnian Serb leaders used the besieged city as a “hostage” to manipulate humanitarian aid, and secure military and territorial gains in other parts of Bosnia (Conley-Zilkic 2015; Donia 2006, 290). And from the SDA's perspective, keeping civilians inside the siege was strategic to encourage humanitarian aid and international intervention, and this aid in turn sustained the siege by keeping a minimum level of food and supplies available for civilians, while the rest was pilfered by the warring factions (Andreas 2008). This is to say that, all in all, the siege was a dirty affair. One woman in her sixties summed it up this way: “For a long time, I believed Sarajevo was only attacked from the outside. Then I came to realize: Sarajevo is being attacked from the inside, too.”

After the Siege

The war officially ended in 1995 with the signing of the United States-brokered Dayton Peace Accords. The Dayton Peace Accords are controversial on numerous fronts. While they ended the armed conflict, they also institutionalized the ethnic partition of the country into two semi-autonomous entities (see figure 5): The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (an uneasy Bosniak-Croat federation, the territory of which is further

subdivided into ten cantons: five are Bosniak-majority, three are Croat-majority, and two are “mixed”), and Republika Srpska.¹¹ Additionally, the Brčko district, in the northeast of the country, does not technically belong to either entity.



Figure 5: Map of post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina showing the Dayton Peace Agreement’s partition of territory into the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (“Bosniak-Croat Federation”) and Republika Srpska

Source: United Nations. Map 4126. November 1999. Reprinted with permission.

¹¹ Which could reasonably be translated to “Serb Republic,” but isn’t. The chosen English name is Republic of Srpska. The formulation is awkward even in the local language.

The Dayton Peace accords effectively “froze” the conflict, instead of resolving it (Kartsonaki 2016). The boundary line between the two entities runs through the outskirts of Sarajevo. Most of the city falls under the Federation, while some suburban and peripheral districts fall under Republika Srpska. After the war, Bosnian Serb authorities constructed what they hoped would be a parallel Serb capital on Republika Srpska side of the partition, calling it “Serb Sarajevo” until the Bosnian Constitutional Court deemed this name unconstitutional in 2004, and the city was re-named East Sarajevo (Istočno Sarajevo) (see Bădescu 2015; D. Feldman 2005).

The signatories to the Dayton Peace Accords were Alija Izetbegović (president of the Bosniak political party, SDA, and de-facto president of Bosnia and Herzegovina), Franjo Tuđman (the president of Croatia), and Slobodan Milošević (the president of Serbia). Bosnian Serb leaders were not directly at the negotiating table. As Republika Srpska president Radovan Karadžić and VRS General Ratko Mladić had been indicted for war crimes by the ICTY in July 1995 (thus legally barring their participation in the peace accords), Bosnian Serb delegates reluctantly signed a document (the “Patriarch Papers”) in August 1995 that allowed Milošević to negotiate on their behalf, and to have the final say (Chollet 2005).

Bosnia and Herzegovina’s constitution is an annex of the Dayton Peace Accords. It is a document that was never meant to serve as a constitution in the long-term. The government structure includes both entity-level governments and a rotating tripartite presidency, again defined in ethnic terms: one Bosniak, one Croat, and one Serb. At the top sits the reigning international High Commissioner, appointed by the UN, complete with veto powers. With all these layers, Bosnia has one of the most bureaucratic and complicated systems of government in the entire world. The extent of international involvement in the government of Bosnia and Herzegovina has been described as dictatorial (Pehar 2019), or as a form of “humanitarian occupation” (G. H. Fox 2008).

The war changed the demographic picture of Sarajevo dramatically, as many people, especially Serbs, left, and many Bosniak refugees moved in from towns and villages that had been attacked, and “ethnically cleansed” by Bosnian Serb forces (Ramet

2006; Stefansson 2007). From a pre-war population of 25 percent, Serbs now constitute less than four percent of the population of central Sarajevo. From a pre-war population of 50 percent, Bosniaks now constitute 80 percent of the population.

Two distinct narratives of the siege circulate freely in Sarajevo, and both of them obscure the siege's internal zone of violence. The first narrative, which, based on the language of my research participants I refer to as the "dominant narrative," is a narrative of collective, ethnicized innocence and guilt, where Serb has become shorthand for aggressor, and Bosniak for victim. The second narrative, which I refer to as the "preferred narrative," tells the story of a cosmopolitan city banding together against external ethno-nationalist forces. This was the image actively portrayed by the Sarajevo government throughout the war, an image that it cultivated in order to seek support for a sovereign, multi-ethnic Bosnian state. As Gjelten (1995, 16) argues, Sarajevo's reputation of tolerance and multiculturalism "was one of the few things working in Bosnia's favor in the outside world. If it were sullied, Western governments would be even less likely to come to Bosnia's assistance." The "preferred" version of the siege is not untrue; there are countless stories that attest to it (Bakaršić 1994; Berman 2001; Karahasan 1994). But this experience of the siege unfolded alongside other, less preferable, versions. The space given to this narrative speaks to the moral taboo of revealing the darker side of "siege ethics" (Wachter 2018; Yarov 2017, 31).

Against both of these narratives, the internal violence of the siege is rendered "ungrievable" in Sarajevo. There is precious little public space to mourn or acknowledge it. The following two scenarios are telling. First, a government commission formed in 2006 to investigate crimes that took place inside the siege managed to spend 340,000 Bosnian marks (approximately 170,000 euros) and produce zero reports by the end of its year-long mandate (Dnevni Avaz 2007). Second, in 2015, activists from the organization *Jer me se tiče* (Because I Care / Because It Concerns Me) erected a small plaque for civilian victims of war crimes committed in besieged Sarajevo by Caco's unit, the 10th mountain brigade

of ARBiH. The commemorative plaque was destroyed two days after it was erected.¹² Meanwhile, Caco's (real) name has been installed for years on the outside wall of a local elementary school: part of a memorial for fallen soldiers (see figure 6).

Although Caco was killed by Sarajevo police in 1993 and placed in an unmarked grave, his body was exhumed in 1996 after the war, and reburied in a ceremony reserved for war heroes. Thousands of people attended his funeral, which was also televised, and which included a procession through downtown Sarajevo (Andreas 2008, 95; Mann 2005). This funeral is part of a larger phenomenon whereby the criminals from the underbelly of the siege are considered by public audiences to be heroes (Čolović 2016).



Figure 6: A plaque commemorating Mušan “Caco” Topalović, installed on the wall of a Sarajevo elementary school as part of a memorial for fallen soldiers.

Source: Photo by author.

¹² See Touquet and Milošević (2018) on difficulties faced by other multi-ethnic or private monuments and memorials.

It is important to note that an even more provocative glorification of war criminals occurs in East Sarajevo, the Serb-dominated district on the outskirts of the city, in Republika Srpska territory, as seen for instance in the open display of photos of Ratko Mladić (see figure 7), who, in November 2017 was convicted by the ICTY on ten charges including genocide, and was deemed to hold significant responsibility for both the siege of Sarajevo and the genocide at Srebrenica. The photo below was taken in the spring of 2018.



Figure 7: Photos of Ratko Mladić in Istočno Sarajevo, Republika Srpska.
Source: Photo by author.

While the plaque commemorating Caco's victims was quickly destroyed, more ephemeral commemorations have successfully taken place, and have revealed the importance of creating public forums for mourning and remembrance (McAllister 2010). In 2014, the first public commemoration of Kazani, a 30-minute vigil, was organized by UDIK (*Udruženje za društvena istraživanja i komunikacije*, or Association for Social Research and Communication) (Moll 2015). And in 2016, Bakir Izetbegović, then-Chairman of the

Presidency of Bosnia-Herzegovina (and son of Alija Izetbegović), visited Kazani and laid flowers in tribute to the victims. While this visit has not been followed with plans for either a concrete memorialization or an investigation (Gavrankapetanović-Redžić 2018), the symbolic power of this gesture is still vital (see Boesten 2019).

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Beyond competing narratives of the war, Sarajevo faces wider economic and political problems, which affect the likelihood of renewed violence. With the end of the war came a contentious internationally brokered privatization and economic reconstruction process that further institutionalized the rampant corruption, organized crime, and ethnic divisions of the siege (Donais 2002; 2003; Griffiths 1999). The privatization and economic reconstruction plan depended on an influx of foreign investment, but it failed to take into account the instability and corruption that characterized the situation on the ground: war-ravaged Bosnia proved utterly uninviting to international investors (Donais 2002; 2003). Without the anticipated international investors, and with a population mostly impoverished by four years of war, nationalist leaders and other war-time elites were able to take possession of state-owned and worker-owned assets “for a song” (Donais 2002, 1). Many formerly lucrative enterprises quickly folded into bankruptcy.¹³ One woman in her sixties explained it this way,

The process of privatization was very murky. Companies were purposefully worn down to nothing through war, and then afterwards through policies that made it very hard for them to function. Since they were worker-owned, the money from their sale should have gone to the workers. But the companies were worn down to a fraction of their worth. The result was that a few individuals got very rich. Not society: individuals. It's tragic because Yugoslavia's wealth should have been a social wealth, but instead it went into the pockets of a few corrupt individuals.

¹³ For a microeconomic analysis on the negative effects of civil war on firms, see Collier and Duponchel (2013)

Another woman, also in her sixties, put it this way,

In Yugoslavia, we produced everything ourselves. Everything from chocolates to airplanes. There were so many factories. And now –have you noticed the posters in the trams telling us to buy local products? They are advertising Bosnian toilet paper. *Toilet paper*. It's a disgrace.

The pressing economic problems in Bosnia affect citizens regardless of ethnic affiliation: unemployment, crumbling infrastructure, a lack of social security, inadequate pensions, brain drain. Although these issues are often ethnicized by nationalist politicians, they are ultimately shared by Bosnians as citizens (Jansen 2015; Kurtović and Hromadžić 2017; Touquet 2015).

The Time to Tell?

The narratives of the Serb women who make up this study are not part of the public record, the accepted version of events. As the opening vignette suggests, Serb women's accounts of the war and its aftermath are sometimes silenced, sometimes-self-censored, sometimes "dosed." But they still circulate quietly within families, and within networks of trusted acquaintances.

My research shows that many Serb women in Sarajevo grapple with feeling either *unrecognized* or *mis-recognized*, or both. Unrecognition occurs at two levels. Some women felt that their experiences inside the siege's *internal* zone of violence were not acknowledged, that the violence they endured as Serbs inside the siege had been written out of the script of the war. Other women felt that even their experiences in the siege's *external* zone of violence were unrecognized on account of their ethnicity and the atmosphere of suspicion towards Serbs inside the siege. They insisted that the siege's external zone of VRS aggression was a condition they shared with all other Sarajevans, and they expressed frustration and disbelief that living through the siege was not enough to ensure their membership in the "moral community" of siege survivors: "We went through the same war as everyone else!" In addition to feeling unrecognized, many women

also felt *misrecognized*, or miscast, as aggressors, an ascription that they felt brought them stigma and scorn.

The siege years were, for several reasons, not the time to tell the story of the siege's internal zone of violence. Both the media (see Gjelten 1995) and high-ranking Serb political figures inside Sarajevo (see Pejanović 2004), felt that bringing awareness to the issue would only make matters worse. Emphasizing Serb suffering during a context of asymmetrical violence committed by Serb forces would give fuel to Serb ethno-nationalist leaders who were committing extreme violence across Bosnia under the pretense that Serbs were in grave danger. The biggest threat to Sarajevo's "common life" (*zajednički život*), was not the siege's internal zone of violence, but the siege itself (Gjelten 1995).

Nearly three decades later, the silence that continues to cover this history attests to how fraught, and delicate, the task of articulating it still is, particularly in a context where there is a perversely close relationship between victimhood and ethno-nationalism. Numerous scholars have analyzed the phenomenon of competing victimhood between Serb, Bosniak, and Croat ethno-nationalisms that plays itself out on the local level (Halilovich 2011; Selimovic 2010), in media (Janíčko 2015), and in commemorative practices (Bougarel 2007; Sokol 2014; Wagner 2008). But researching Bosnian Serbs requires particular care and caution. While each side in Bosnia suffered losses and committed atrocities, the war was not symmetrical. Bosnian Serb forces committed the majority of war crimes and caused the most deaths. And Bosniaks were undoubtedly the biggest victims of the war.¹⁴

Bosnian Serb leaders have routinely exaggerated the number of Serb victims while minimizing or denying their responsibility for the suffering of others. The built-in danger

¹⁴ According to the 2010 International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) estimate, there were 25,609 Bosniak civilian casualties and 42,492 military deaths. These numbers include the 7,000 to 8,000 men and boys killed in the space of only five days in July 1995 at Srebrenica, an act of genocide by the VRS and paramilitary groups. By comparison, there were 7,480 Serb civilian casualties (and 14,298 military deaths); 1,675 Croat civilian casualties (and 7,182 military deaths); and 4,995 other deaths (Zwierchowski and Tabeau 2010). On the politics of numbers in armed conflict, see Andreas and Greenhill (2010), and on Bosnia in particular, see Nettelfield (2010b).

of researching Bosnian Serb experiences of victimization, then, is that doing so can “offer propaganda material to the Serbian side” (Stigmayer 1994, 138). It is not enough to say that these experiences need to be vocalized simply because they occurred; just because an experience of victimization is true does not mean that it cannot also be framed in such a way that blurs the line between personal experience and political rhetoric. It is therefore important not only *that* these stories are told, but *how* they are told. Or, as Alcoff puts it, “where the speech goes and what it does there” (1991, 26).

In February 2019, after I had completed my twelve months of fieldwork and was writing this dissertation, Milorad Dodik, a leading political figure in Republika Srpska and Bosnia-Herzegovina,¹⁵ announced plans for a controversial new commission: the “Independent International Commission for Investigating the Suffering of Serbs in Sarajevo in the Period from 1991 to 1995.” He also annulled the report of a 2004 fact-finding commission into the genocide at Srebrenica, where Bosnian Serb forces killed 8,000 Bosniak men and boys in a matter of days. In its place, he created an “Independent Commission for Investigating the Suffering of All Peoples in the Srebrenica Region from 1992 to 1995,” a commission that would look not only at the Bosnian Serb forces’ crime of genocide, but also at much smaller attacks by Bosniak forces against Serbs in the Srebrenica region earlier in the war.

These new commissions are deeply troubling. Not because they aim to uncover facts about the experiences of Serb civilians in the war, but because they seek to sanitize and re-write the past in the process. Coming from an ethno-nationalist government that thrives on denial, these commissions are pre-programmed to showcase the suffering of Serbs while relativizing the responsibility of Bosnian Serb forces. The commissions have thus been heavily criticized by numerous international scholars as a blatant manipulation of the language of transitional justice for the purpose of fueling ethnicized grievances and fomenting divisions in an already-fragile state (Rudic 2019). These commissions are

¹⁵ Since 1998 (with a small gap between 2001 and 2006), Dodik has moved between numerous positions of power in the governance structure of Republika Srpska (RS) and Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH), including Prime Minister of RS (1998 to 2001, and 2006 to 2010) President of RS (2010 to 2018), Chairman of the Presidency of BiH (2018 to 2019), and Serb Member of the Presidency of BiH (since 2018).

symptomatic of a wider moral economy where the “moral currency” is victimhood (Enns 2012, 28), and where different sides in a conflict will inevitably emphasize their own victims over others

The creation of these commissions makes it more difficult to write about Serb women’s experiences of suffering in and after the siege without ceding data to the ethno-nationalists. But it also makes it all the more crucial to begin to dismantle the moral economy of victimhood and the ideology of the pure victim that sustains it. My strategy is to write about Serb women’s experiences of suffering without ever dis-embedding them from the broader context of the war, and its undeniable asymmetry of violence. Through the analytic device “zones of violence,” I keep the internal zone folded inside the larger external zone of VRS aggression. The hope is to arrive at an “ethical memory” (Nguyen 2016) of the siege of Sarajevo: one that can be honest to the experiences of the city’s Serbs without thereby denying or relativizing the role of Bosnian Serb forces in the suffering of others.

Nguyen (2016) contends that even in asymmetrical wars, it is never enough to remember only “our own” victims, nor is it ever enough to remember only others. Especially where accounts of the past are competing and conflicting, an “ethical memory” insists on remembering both, since each side contains what the other has chosen to forget. I see ethical memory as a kind of layered memory, where each layer adds onto, complicates, or corrects the layers that were laid before, as opposed to contradicting them absolutely. States are generally reluctant to change their narratives about their “dark pasts,” but when they do change, it is often through gradual and multivalent processes of layering (Dixon 2018). As Dixon (2018) argues, layering makes the renewed, cumulative narrative more acceptable to those who had supported the old narrative, since some aspects of the old narrative remain intact, and other aspects are modified rather than rejected.

The narratives presented here are thus not the “true” and definitive version of the siege and its aftermath, but they do provide access to a partial truth about an aspect of the siege that has consistently been overlooked. In interviews, these narratives were often relayed to me in the spirit of contributing an additional layer to the existing knowledge of

the siege. But, it is also true that in certain cases, these narratives were infused with a nationalist rhetoric that asserted itself as the *only* truth, not merely a layer on top of others.

So while I write with the stinging awareness that my words could, despite my best efforts, potentially be misconstrued to further revisionist ethno-nationalist agendas (for scholars' reflections on how their work was misused, see Altınay and Petó 2016 and Becirevic 2020), I also write with the more pressing conviction that the silencing of certain classes of victims, and the crystallization of ethno-collectivist narratives of innocence and guilt, can have effects that are even more damaging for post-war social life.

When folded into a critique of the moral economy of victimhood, acknowledging the suffering of one's enemies does not mean justifying their political cause, absolving them of guilt for the violence they also inflicted, or declaring the suffering of both sides to be equal. It means recognizing their lives as grievable. This dissertation thus aims to contribute to an ethical memory of the siege and its aftermath by filling in some voices that had been left silent; it asks, where is the overlap and where are the contradictions, what becomes solidified and what becomes contested, when these voices are taken into account?

Outline of Chapters

Following a chapter on methodology (chapter 2) this dissertation is divided into two parts. Part One, *The Siege Years*, bends towards oral history, with an account of the experiences of Serb women inside the siege's internal zone of violence. Part Two, *Aftermaths*, bends towards ethnography, with an account of how Serb women navigate the terrain of post-war social life.

Part One contains two chapters. In "Becoming Aggressors," I explore the force of ethnicization in war time, tracing the social decline of Sarajevo Serb women from "neighbours" to "aggressors" inside the siege. I show how their increasing social marginalization inside the siege made them vulnerable to the internal zone of violence, as retribution against those deemed enemy became justifiable, and went largely unpunished. This chapter sheds light on how boundaries are drawn in the process of ethnicization, and

how violence enters into and disfigures intimate spaces. It also shines a light on instances of cooperation and care among neighbours who refused to let themselves be divided along ethnic lines, and who in their cooperation made the siege more bearable for one another.

The next chapter disaggregates Sarajevo Serbs into “Those Who Stayed and Those Who Left.” I turn to the question of why some Serbs remained in besieged Sarajevo while the majority left, a question that has so far been explained without adequately taking into account the voices of Sarajevo Serbs themselves. I track how Serb women made decisions to leave or stay in an atmosphere of escalating rumour, hostility, and fear, where a decision in either direction bore direct moral consequences.

Part Two moves out of the siege and into the post-war years. Given the “porous” boundaries between pre-war and post-war life (Hermez 2017, 4), and the artificiality of this division, it was often difficult to know where to put certain events and encounters — moments that may have taken place during the siege, but were narrated to me through the prism of twenty-five intervening years; moments that took place long after the siege, but are impossible to dissociate from it. I have attempted to impose a chronology on this dissertation, but its two parts are interconnected.¹⁶

Part Two contains two chapters. In “Anxiety,” I describe the cumulative sense of anxiety that many Serb women feel about their belonging in the post-war city, as they continue to feel burdened with an ascription of “aggressor” with which they are unwilling to relate. Through an analysis of how Serb women conceal their ethnicity through subtle bodily gestures, I draw a line of continuity between the explicit violence of the siege, and the sometimes-latent, sometimes-intuited hostility that keeps a sense of anxiety accumulating in the present.

¹⁶ Scholars have attempted to convey this porousness in varied ways. Sjoberg (2014) uses the term “war and conflict” instead of “war” in order to draw attention to the forms of violence that occur both before and after the events more neatly associated with “war.” She argues that a gendered lens on conflict helps make visible other forms of violence beyond political violence (structural, economic, domestic), and exposes how they are normalized in everyday life, or what might be called “peacetime.”

Chapter 6, “Silences and Transcripts,” describes the experience and effects of silencing. I differentiate between two “hidden transcripts” (Scott 1990) that emerged in the course of my fieldwork: one that tells a silenced history from inside the siege, and another that moves into revisionism. I show how, in a post-war context where their suffering is neither acknowledged nor commemorated, some Serb women find solace in ethno-nationalist ideology that affirms and gives expression to their victimhood. Describing how the second transcript emerged in my research, I critique some unexplored assumptions about victimhood and voice that are embedded in the tenets and methods of anthropological research.

Finally, in the conclusion, I return to the idea of recognition, and to the danger of withholding it from “impure” victims. This failure of recognition makes impure victims all the more vulnerable, insofar as it is easier to justify violence against those whom we feel are morally distant, to legitimize it as defensive or even deserved (see Bouris 2007; Douglas 2012; Mamdani 2001). Furthermore, the silencing of impure victims can fuel a potent sense of grievance, hardening the boundaries between ethnic groups, and laying a dangerous groundwork for renewed cycles of violence (Chakravarty 2014; Kuradusenge-McLeod 2018).

The task ahead is twofold: to extend recognition to this excluded class of impure victims, and in doing so, to arrive at a new understanding of victimhood that makes room for victims like these, that makes room for complexity and complicity. Because impure victims are part of every war and every aftermath, whether we choose to recognize them or not.

Methodology



Figure 8: The front door to an apartment building in the neighbourhood of Čengić Vila. The writing above the arrow to the left of the door reads “shelter” (*sklonište*)

Source: Photo by author.

Sarajevo is a city that visibly bears the marks of war. Walking around the city, you come across metal plaques listing the names of fallen soldiers, or subtle white ceramic plaques commemorating sites where civilians were killed by “Serb criminals” (*srpski zločinci*, a phrase that also translates to “Serb evildoers”). On the sidewalk, some of the scars from mortar shell explosions have been filled in with red resin, at one repairing the damage and leaving it visible as a form of commemoration (called “Sarajevo roses”). An arrow with the word “shelter” (*sklonište*) is stenciled onto so many buildings (see figure 8), often alongside spray-painted warnings such as “Watch out – Sniper” (*Pazi snajperi*). Many building facades are so severely punctured by shellfire that they are painful just to look at, until over time your eyes adjust, and you stop actively noticing. One of my research participants, a retired editor in her seventies, showed me a wall cabinet in her living room

with a bullet hole through the door. “That’s from 1992. I haven’t gotten around to getting it fixed.”

In this chapter, I discuss the experience of conducting fieldwork and qualitative interviews in a post-war city. I first explain the methodological implications of my decision to focus on Serb women, before turning to the issue of my own positionality and how it affected the research process. I then discuss recruitment and interviewing, arguing for the vital place of repeat interviews and long-term ethnographic engagement.

Why Serb Women

My choice to focus exclusively on Serb women was the most critical research decision I made, one that affected how my project was perceived by my research participants, and what kind of data I was able to gather.

My decision to focus exclusively on one ethnic group runs against the current of recent anthropological research on Bosnia-Herzegovina. Given the highly ethnicized portrayals of the Bosnian war that have dominated in both academia and journalism, critical anthropologists have sought to move away from ethnicized accounts of suffering. Instead of representing Bosnians as members of static ethnic “sides,” anthropologists have highlighted instances of ethnic fluidity or hybridity (Baker 2015a; Markowitz 2010). They have brought attention to numerous local-level cases where ethno-national identity has been far less important for defining in-group boundaries than other factors of social or cultural similarity (see also Čapo Žmegač 2011; Hromadžić 2013; Kolind 2008). It is of course true that ethnic divisions are not the only divisions in Sarajevo society: boundaries are drawn every day between “authentic” pre-war urbanites (*Sarajlije*) and rural newcomers (*došljaci*), between returnees and those who stayed throughout the siege, between religious and secular people, between the economic elite and the so-called ordinary class (Stefansson 2007).

In the context of rich anthropological research that aims to displace ethnic frameworks, taking a single ethnic group as the focus of study may seem to build walls where others have been tearing them down. And, a project on Bosnian Serbs in particular seems to commit a double faux pas, given the moral bias in anthropology towards the side of the victim (Armakolas 2001; 2007; Bougarel, Helms, and Duijzings 2007).

Several academics have responded skeptically to my decision to focus exclusively on Serbs (during peer review of articles, and at conferences). Given my own ethnic legibility¹⁷ as a Serb, some have assumed (prior to reading) that my project must have ethno-nationalist leanings, that it must problematically showcase Serb victimhood while minimizing Serb responsibility for the suffering of others. This assumption bears a family resemblance to the wartime assumption, in Belgrade feminist circles, that Serb feminists who did not outright reject their ethnicity must therefore be ethno-nationalists (see Žarkov 2003). I have also received feedback that a more expansive focus on Sarajevans in general would be better than a focus on Serbs, on the grounds that it would be more holistic, and less biased.

But my decision to focus exclusively on Serbs was purposeful, and was founded on three conceptual and methodological considerations. First, the social and moral location of Serbs inside the siege of Sarajevo was unique, as they alone shared ethnic heritage with the army that was besieging the city “in the name of” all Serbs. This ethnic association made them uniquely vulnerable to *retributive* violence inside the siege. The experiences of Sarajevo Serbs during the siege years thus provide a unique perspective into how boundaries are drawn in times of war, as ethnic and moral ascriptions become fused together. And in the context of post-war Sarajevo, the everyday experiences of Serbs offer a privileged insight into the structure and maintenance of the post-war ethno-moral landscape, and in particular the silencing of divergent narratives of violence.

Second, research on Bosnian Serbs specifically is important to begin to fill out a body of literature that has so far largely neglected them. Suggestions that Serb voices could

¹⁷ I use the word “legibility” here to flag that those who are read and compartmentalized as belonging to one ethnic category often span multiple categories, as do I.

be easily included within research on “all Sarajevans” often misread the highly sensitive situation on the ground, and the decades-long silence that covers the siege’s internal zone of violence. In her ethnography of wartime and immediate post-war Sarajevo, Maček (2009, 18) states that she would have like to interview more Serbs, but that they were reluctant to participate in her research because they were “scared to stick out.” Two women I interviewed told me directly (without my asking) that they would not have agreed to participate in my research had I been “talking to everyone.” For them, my exclusive focus on Serbs provided a sense of assurance that their stories would be heard and taken seriously, that their experiences would not become subsumed under a dominating narrative.

These two women almost certainly would not have agreed to participate in my research if I myself was not a Serb. Therefore the third consideration that prompted me to focus exclusively on Serbs was that I could make methodological use of my own ethnic legibility. Sharing a common ethnic heritage with participants helped relieve me of the position of “judging westerner” often faced by other researchers in the region (J. Greenberg 2010, 44), who have found Serbs to be distrustful or weary of them. However, this commonality sometimes presented me with an opposite problem, as certain participants expected me to write a *flattering* account that would combat the negative stereotypes and “demonization” of Serbs in Western media. Ultimately, ethnicity is a double-edged sword. As Subotić (2010, 119) writes:

Try as I might to de-ethnify myself, to cloak myself in the robes of an academic scholar, ethnicity comes back to define both me and my work. While I may assume that scholarship provides the neutrality, objectivity, and standing that would overcome ethnicity — it does not. Using your ethnicity as an analytical tool has its advantages, but it is also a powerful weapon that can be used against you.

The point she makes is that our ethnicity will affect how others read our work, no matter what it is we write. My ethnicity makes it the case that certain academics will judge my work before reading it, and will assume me to be an ethno-nationalist until proven otherwise. But this project presented an opportunity for me to use my ethnicity as a methodological tool: to access narratives that would have remained inaccessible to non-Serb researchers, and to recruit participants whose voices simply have not been heard in the existing literature, and who would otherwise not have engaged.

This trade off did prevent me, however, from investigating the full breadth of the siege's internal zone of violence, as a violence to which both Serb and non-Serb civilians were subject, even if for different reasons. This is a project that I hope other researchers take up in the future.

As for my decision to focus on Serb *women* specifically, this decision was motivated by two factors. The first was the relative ease of access and rapport that would come as a result of a common gender identity. Since home coffee visits are both a form of socializing gendered as feminine (Bringa 1995; Helms 2010) *and* a perfect setting for qualitative interviews, focusing my research on women afforded me multiple opportunities to meet women at their homes, and to reach a level of intimacy and rapport that would have been unlikely with men.

My second motivation for focusing on women was flawed. I understood that a project that investigated a silenced history of suffering on the side of the perpetrator was contentious, and, in the early days of research design, I felt that focusing on Serb *women* would help soften the edges. This premature assumption reflected my own internalization of the women-as-victims trope, and it remained unarticulated and therefore unexamined throughout the early stages of research design. But it was ultimately fortuitous. When I began to gather narratives that exposed varying degrees of complicity on the part of my interlocutors (as in Serb women who stayed in Sarajevo throughout the entire siege, but silently supported the VRS and hoped for its victory), the stark divergence of these narratives from what I had expected to hear led me directly into a blind spot of conflict studies: the complicity of women in war.

My project actually invited narratives of complicity through of its exclusive focus on Serbs, and through my own ethnic legibility as a Serb. Just as some academics have assumed I must be an ethno-nationalist, so too did some research participants. In contrast to some Western ethnographers who have observed that Bosnians tend to conceal their ethno-nationalist sentiments in the presence of (judgmental) researchers (see Jansen 2016), I found that participants who held ethno-nationalist views ultimately assumed that I *must* share their views, and therefore spoke about them more openly. When they began this

clandestine “private talk,” I did not correct them, because I did not want them to revert back into “public talk” (Blee 1993). I did not say anything that would misrepresent my views, but I did not say anything to clarify them either. Smiling and nodding seemed to be enough. Almost none of my research participants ever asked for my opinion. Most understood the interview as a space for them to be heard, and for me to listen (see also Blee 2002).

Positionality

I was born in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, and left as a child in 1992 with part of my family. I visited Belgrade frequently, as well as the Croatian coast, but I had never been to Sarajevo until I arrived to conduct fieldwork. In contrast to researchers who lived through the Bosnian war and now study its effects (see Jeftić 2020), I felt relatively distant from it.

Only after beginning to conduct fieldwork did I find out that I actually had family members who had experienced the siege first-hand. During my fieldwork, I visited relatives in northern Bosnia, in the place where my maternal grandfather was born, but found no one who was willing to speak on the record. The many illuminating conversations I had off the record helped inform my analysis, as did the wall of silence I sometimes met.

*

Being read as Serb in Sarajevo provided me with valuable insight into how ethnic identity is negotiated in everyday social life, and how it influenced my research. The most obvious clues that gave me away as a Serb were my quintessentially Serb name, as well as the Ekavian accent with which I spoke the local language, an accent which is often associated with Serbs from Serbia in particular. Bosnian Serbs, on the other hand, generally speak in the regional Ijekavian accent spoken in Sarajevo. The difference in the two accents is

mainly located in the “e” or “ije” vowel sound: the word “white” would be pronounced *belo* in Ekavian, and *bijelo* in Ijekavian. The difference is slight enough that many Sarajevans expect newcomers to adopt Ijekavian after some time. One participant boasted that her husband, a Serb from Serbia, spoke in perfect Ijekavian, citing his willingness to alter his accent as testament to his cosmopolitanism and tolerance. Another participant expressed disapproval of an acquaintance who “still” spoke in the Ekavian accent even though she had been living in Sarajevo for a number of years, suggesting that this refusal signaled her unwillingness to embrace local customs. Since my fluency in the local language is already plagued by a very questionable grasp of grammar rules, I made no attempts to add to my burden by altering my natural accent.

Issues of positionality became apparent in the early days of fieldwork, on my many walks through the city with Rade. Allow me to introduce Rade, my quasi-gatekeeper, cheerleader, and unofficial tour guide. A youthful seventy-one when I met him, Rade is a much-beloved stage actor who had spent the siege in Sarajevo, turning down an offer that would have evacuated him to Scandinavia, and opting to stay in the city he so cherished, and perform in the underground wartime theatre. Originally from Montenegro, he loved to play with the ethno-religious categories on offer in the Bosnian state (where one must declare themselves on the census as Bosniak, Serb, Croat, or “Other”). He often declared himself loudly as “an Orthodox atheist, and by nationality — a Partisan!” (*Pravoslavni ateista, a po nacionalnosti — Partizan!*). Rade quite literally cannot walk three paces through Sarajevo without saying hello to someone, or someone running up to say hello to him. For a full year, he made it his job to introduce me to the city and the people inhabiting it, meeting me for coffee once a week, and adamantly refusing to let me pay on the grounds that I was “still a student.”

How was I so lucky to know Rade? He had dutifully accepted his role upon receiving a phone call from my paternal grandmother’s sister, who was terrified on my behalf that I had no contacts in Sarajevo. Their two families had grown up side by side in Pljevlja, Montenegro, and so I can only think of Rade’s generosity towards me as Balkan neighbourliness of mythical proportions. I promised him a paragraph in this dissertation “even though it is about women” (his words).



Figure 9: About to enjoy a glass of rose juice in a café under a quince tree
Source: Photo by Rade.

Introducing me to his endless friends and acquaintances, Rade would almost invariably tell them that I was from Montenegro, or more specifically, that I was “originally” from his hometown of Pljevlja. This was the closest town to both of my paternal grandparents’ respective villages, but it was a place I had, at that point, never even visited. Rade would then boast about my “strong Partisan family,” praising my grandparents and even my great-grandparents. It is likely that Rade only emphasized these aspects because this Montenegrin connection was indeed how we came to know one another. But I found it curious how often he would fail to mention more direct facts about me, such as that I, and both of my parents, were born in Belgrade. He often opted for vague descriptions, like, “she was born here but left as a child,” a statement in which *here* could be taken to mean Yugoslavia, Montenegro, or even Sarajevo, depending on the preceding conversation — but never Belgrade. I was left with the impression that Rade was generously fine-tuning my biography in order to present me in the best possible light: as a Montenegrin from a strong Partisan family, and not as a Belgrade-born Serb.

His interventions also extended to my research project, as he took care to present it in different ways to different interlocutors. On our many walks, when stopped on the street by someone he knew, Rade would proudly gush and introduce me, “Jelena is going to be a doctor!” He would then say one of two things. Either, “she is studying the experiences of Serb women here in Sarajevo during the war.” Or, more infrequently, “she is studying the experiences of *minorities* here in Sarajevo during the war.”

I quietly wondered about this distinction until one day, responding to a follow-up question from Rade’s acquaintance, I used the term “Serb women.” Rade quickly cut me off and practically yelled, “Minorities! She’s studying *minorities!*” I learned then that Rade had consciously and carefully been selecting between these two options to cater to different interlocutors. When he assessed that someone he knew might not be sympathetic to a project that focused exclusively on Serbs, he employed the more euphemistic term *minority*, which implied that I was researching all non-Bosniak minorities, and thus made my research seem less controversial.

Rade’s interventions pointed to ways that I might negotiate between my Serb identity and other more ambiguous ethnic positions that were available to me (such as Montenegrin) in order to advance my research. But when Rade was not there to steer the conversation, I presented my biography more directly, stating that I was born in Belgrade, grew up in Canada, and was in Sarajevo researching Serb women’s experiences of the war and its aftermath. I chose to be direct because it allowed me to see how others would respond to me and my project, and to treat my own experiences as “primary data” (Jackson 1989, 4).

Another aspect of my positionality that affected the research was my relative youth. Since it is typical for people my age in Sarajevo (28 to 29 at the time of fieldwork) to live with their parents, and because my manner of speaking the local language was almost completely devoid of slang, many participants considered me to be child-like, unassuming, and sweet. On more than one occasion, when I would join research participants in a social setting, an elderly participant would quite literally stroke my cheek, or pet my hair, and say

to her friends, “Isn’t she dear?” or “Aww, look how sweetly she speaks” (*Jao, vidi kako slatko priča*).

In a minority of frustrating cases, this perception of me was accompanied by assumptions that I was not well educated about my research topic, or possibly any topic. One woman asked me if I knew about the war, meaning, if I knew that a war had even taken place. Another began to explain to me the most basic facts about Yugoslavia, the country of my birth, for example listing each of the Yugoslav republics and telling me the country was ruled by Tito. In cases where participants doubted my understanding, it is possible that they may have censored parts of their narratives, as they would when speaking to an actual child. But in most cases, I felt that not being taken as an “authentic researcher” (DeLuca and Maddox 2016, 290) actually enhanced the data, insofar as it allowed interviews to feel less formal, and participants to feel less guarded. But this inevitably involved a degree of deception, insofar as I recognized that participants would likely have had a different, and more accurate, impression of me, had the interviews taken place in English.



Figure 10: Downtown Sarajevo
Source: Photo by author.

Recruitment

It was not an easy task to actually find Serb women who were willing to talk about their experiences during the war, and their everyday lives in the post-war city. However, the obstacles I initially faced in locating and recruiting participants turned out to be a significant source of data, alerting me to the social politics and moral boundaries that invisibly structure everyday life in Sarajevo.

The first obstacle I faced was that there was no bounded and visible “Serb community” that I could enter. Serbs, who make up less than four percent of the post-war population, live scattered throughout the city, and many of them choose to keep a low profile in public, opting for a more ambiguous “Sarajevan” or “Bosnian” identification (see chapter 5). I discovered quickly that asking someone whether or not they were Serb could be a loaded question, whether it was intended that way or not. I would often hear from contacts that they had a neighbour or colleague with a Serb name, but that they felt uncomfortable asking this person whether they indeed identified as Serb. One acquaintance said of her colleagues: “I feel too uncomfortable to ask if they’re Serbs. I mean, their names are Serb, but they would certainly call themselves Sarajevan.” Another acquaintance said, “I have one person in mind, but she doesn’t declare herself as a Serb; actually one of her parents is a Croat.” Their hesitation signaled that calling somebody a Serb was not a neutral ethnic descriptor, but a moral category associated with violence.

After nearly two slow months, the first woman who officially agreed to participate in the research was a textbook example of patient snowball sampling at work: she was the neighbour of the mother of the boyfriend of a friend of my friend. After her, more participants filtered in through circuitous connections and contacts (see N. Cohen and Arieli 2011 on snowball sampling in conflict environments). But even as I began to find more and more willing participants, a sense of anxiety and reticence remained apparent in many (but not all) interviews. I noticed that if we met at their homes, participants would generally speak openly about their experiences during and after the siege. But if we met in public places (such as cafes or parks), participants often embodied their anxiety in various

ways: a cautionary glance behind one's back, leaning in closely to speak, or whispering (see also Burnet 2012).

A major concern for prospective participants was anonymity. Despite assurances that I would alter identifying markers in my research output, one contact reported back that two of her acquaintances would not agree to an interview because they felt too afraid. After a while, one participant pointed out to me that the standard anthropological practice of changing identifying markers and assigning pseudonyms was not enough to provide a sense of security (see Ellis 1995). She was concerned that a future reader would be able to identify her through mundane but contextual clues in her life history, or even through the particularities of her speech patterns. "What if I say something and someone reads it and just knows it was me? You will leave at the end of this, but I have to keep living here."

I am grateful for her intervention because it points to an important debate in contemporary ethnography about the extent to which we can assure anonymity, especially in a digital world (Saunders, Kitzinger, and Kitzinger 2015; Tilley and Woodthorpe 2011; Walford 2018; Willis 2018). Concerns over anonymity are heightened in politically sensitive research contexts, where revealing a person's identity could potentially endanger them or their families (Jessee 2011). While not all participants shared the above woman's concerns with anonymity, and a few even wanted their full names published, I found it important to err on the side of caution. The relatively small number of Serbs in Sarajevo means that the potential for identification is increased. Even though I personally prefer ethnographies where participants are described in such idiosyncratic detail that they feel real and familiar (Dossa 2014; D. M. Goldstein 2013; Scheper-Hughes 1992), I felt it was necessary to prioritize anonymity over thick description (see also Jessee 2011). I liberally alter context life history information, or withhold it, even in places where it could be analytically useful. I liberally translate the local language into English, and let my own translation cover up unique turns of phrase.

In terms of recruitment, I found that my research topic and my ethnicity combined to attract participants who had experienced ethnically targeted violence, and who *wanted* this story told. This latter element is important to underline because numerous women

declined to participate because they did not want to talk about the past, telling me they simply found it too painful. But those who did participate generally seemed content to have a sympathetic listener to whom they could talk about aspects of the war that they felt were impermissible in public.

I tried to emphasize to prospective participants that I was interested in all kinds of experiences, not only experiences of violence. I told prospective participants that I was interested in hearing about their everyday lives and everyday experiences, and that we could only talk about the present if they did not want to delve into the past. But most women remained unconvinced. This was partly due to a general unfamiliarity with the themes of anthropology (as one woman in her seventies aptly exclaimed, “But everyday life isn’t interesting!”). But more broadly, the thematic framework of war/post-war influenced their expectations, such that some women opted not to participate on the grounds that “nothing bad enough” had happened to them (see Sheftel 2018; Niezen 2013). Two women offered to refer me to other women who had “suffered much worse.”

Because of this expectation and my inability to effectively mitigate it, I presume that my data is swayed towards negative depictions, as Serb women who did *not* experience violence and hostility likely did not see themselves as appropriate interlocutors. However, I was fortunate to interview a minority of women whose narratives helped balance my overall impression. They emphasized to me that their ethnicity did not worsen their experience of the siege, and that their social relations remained intact as their neighbours, friends, and colleagues continued to relate to them “as people,” and not as representatives of ethnic sides.

Based on how they presented their narratives, I felt that two women in this category chose to participate in the research precisely because they assumed that most other participants would be sharing stories of ethnic violence and stigmatization, and they wanted to ensure that I maintained a broader perspective of the varied experiences of Serbs in besieged Sarajevo. Snežana, a retired woman in her seventies, invited me to her home for an interview. After extensive informal conversation, coffee, and cake, she finally began her narrative with, “Nobody bothered us during the war. Not once did anyone come and

rob our apartment or search through our things. That is what I want to tell you” (see chapter 3, narrative 4). Her choice of words implied that I had already heard numerous stories about Sarajevan Serbs being robbed or “bothered,” and that she was constructing her narratives against those stories in order to provide a balanced view. *That is what I want to tell you.*

I was also lucky that four women I interviewed agreed to participate in my research despite not self-identifying in ethnic terms. They understood that others in the city nevertheless identified them as Serb via clues such as their names, and they thus felt they could offer perspective on the experience of being *perceived* as Serb in Sarajevo. A fifth woman in this category thoroughly surprised me when we sat down for an interview, and the first words from her mouth were, “Well, first of all, I am a Croat.” Because her name could read as either Croat or Serb, she had several stories she wanted to share with me about occasions when she was certain that others had read her as Serb.

Interviews

After the initial difficulty of recruiting participants, I found that the research generally benefitted from a strategy of slowness and patience. The sensitive nature of the research topic made long-term ethnographic engagement indispensable. I realized I could not barge in asking questions and expecting answers; I had to give participants time to gauge me, and to decide whether to trust me. I had to respect their “subtle admonishments” that certain topics, or certain aspects of their lives, would remain off limits (Fujii 2009, 43). As Malkki (Malkki 1995, 51) put it, the success of the research depended on “a willingness to leave some stones unturned” (see also A. Feldman 1991).

Some participants preferred to participate in only one interview, but overall I aimed to conduct multiple, repeat interviews (Fujii 2009; Greenspan 2010). This strategy meant that I would not try to get the “whole story” during the first meeting, but would purposefully leave room for elaboration, allowing participants to save information for later, when they would, presumably, trust me more (Chakravarty 2012; Parvez 2018).

In certain cases, it was the participants themselves who enforced this slow methodology. Several women wanted to meet me for an informal coffee date before officially agreeing to participate in the research. Over coffee, they would interview me, sometimes asking questions about my personal life, other times seeking more information about the research project and my vision for it. Occasionally, these coffee dates would turn into interviews on the spot, if the participant initiated this. But mostly they were an opportunity for prospective participants to assess whether or not they wanted to confide in me.

My general strategy in both walking and sitting interviews was to avoid asking prying questions, favouring indirect, open-ended questions that would allow participants to discuss what they felt was the most important, and allow me to see when and how certain themes entered into the conversation (see Das 2007; Fujii 2010). Such open interview strategies, in which the narrator, not the researcher, sets the pace and often the agenda, are increasingly the norm in anthropology and oral history. However, I found that some participants did not like this strategy at all, and wanted me to be more direct and specific (see also Jessee 2017).

In the early months of fieldwork, before the winter set in, several participants suggested we take a walk while conducting the interview. Mobile interview methods have proven to be well-suited for addressing questions of emplaced memory, allowing the city to evoke moods, experiences, and memories that might not otherwise enter into a standard interview (Chatterji and Mehta 2007; J. Evans and Jones 2011; High 2016; Irving 2007). Researchers have found what people say in a walking interview differs from what they say in a sitting interview (Evans and Jones 2011), and walking has the additional effect of dispersing the focus away from talking and onto the physical and social environment, thus contributing to a more relaxed atmosphere (Kusenbach 2003). For example, while walking, natural breaks in the conversation can occur without necessarily signaling the end of the interview, thus allowing silences to become a constitutive part of the conversation (Freund 2016).

On our walks (or more rarely drives), some participants took me to sites that were meaningful to them, or that could help illustrate a story they wished to share about the war. They would point out particular buildings (“a sniper’s nest was up on that roof”; “they used this building as a make-shift prison”) or structures (“I had to take cover behind that [concrete planter] for *hours* until they [VRS snipers] stopped shooting”). These “unintentional memorials” (Grossman 2019) were illuminating for me. I had recognized the war in the shell marks on the buildings, in the mortar scars on the sidewalks. I had not thought to look for it on the roofs or in sidewalk planters overflowing with flowers.

Walking interviews were also helpful for bringing “actual social encounters” into relief (Kusenbach 2003, 475). For example, I was able to see how certain women interacted with their neighbours when we met them on the street. Lively and pleasant chats with neighbours were sometimes followed by gossip whispered into my ear once the neighbour had left. Since several participants did not want their neighbours to know they were participating in the research, I would often be introduced as a visiting family friend, rather than a researcher.

I welcomed these moments of social encounter because the majority of my data came from interviews rather than ethnographic observation. The sensitive nature of my research topic, combined with the lack of community affiliation between participants, meant that I generally met participants one-on-one for interviews, and that I did not become embedded in their social lives. I attempted to offset this by “tagging along” for chores and activities before or after an interview, such as grocery shopping, visiting a pharmacy, or picking up clothes from the dry cleaners. On a number of occasions, I joined participants at cultural events such as art exhibitions or plays, but ultimately, the majority of my data came from interviews.

Shifting Narratives

In analyzing qualitative interviews, it is important to remember three dimensions of narrative: narratives are *social*, in that they are both communicated to others and shaped

by their audience; they are *selective*, in that they are created through the omission of other possible versions; and they are *rhetorical*, in that they serve not only to describe the world but to convince (oneself and others) to see the world in a particular way (Mattingly 1998; Tonkin 1992). These three features of narratives also come together to describe what narratives are not. They are not simply after-the-fact accounts of experiences. They do not provide unmediated access to the past (A. Feldman 1991; Frisch 2016; Thompson 1988). On the contrary, narratives are mediations in and of themselves. Their relationship to the past (or, more concretely, to a past “event”) is tenuous, and can shift and change over time (Allison 2004; Browning 1998; Freund 2016; Portelli 1991).

Repeat interviews were thus crucial in this research. By meeting with the same women over and over again, I was able to slowly get past the “scripts” I was sometimes presented with initially, and to see how some participants actually changed their narratives over time (see Fujii 2009; 2010).

The examples of two women can illustrate this. One woman, Milka, whom I interviewed many times over the course of nearly eleven months had from the beginning positioned herself as a reluctant Serb. She was in her seventies, and was married to a Bosniak man with whom she had three children. Both she and her husband preferred to identify themselves as Sarajevan, Bosnian, or Yugoslavian. She often recounted how the logic of the war forced people into ethnic categories, but how she herself refused to partake in this compartmentalization. Her “mixed” name (she had taken her husband’s surname, which read as Bosniak, while her first name read as Serb) put her in a good position to push back against ethnic categorizations, and she often did. Consider for example the exchange she narrated below, recalling how during the war, a local humanitarian worker insisted on writing down her ethnicity before giving her an aid package:

“What are you?”

“What am I? Don’t you mean *who*?”

“Bosniak, Croat, or Serb?”

“Put down Yugoslav.”

“There’s no more of that.”

“Fine, put down Bosnian.”

“It’s not on the list.”

“Put down Sarajevan. Put down human.”

“Come on, I need to fill out the form. Bosniak, Croat or Serb?”

“Look at my name. What do *you* think?”

“Well, what are your parents, then?”

“What are my *children*?”

The questions and responses in this short exchange contain a subtext that displays a deep cultural knowledge on both sides. In saying “Look at my name,” Milka effectively tells the aid worker that since she could be classified as both Serb (based on her first name) and Bosniak (based on her surname), she therefore should not be confined to either category. The aid worker responds by asking, “What are you parents, then?” In asking this question, the aid worker opens up two possibilities: either Milka’s mixed name comes from her own mixed ethnic heritage (a Bosniak father whose surname she bears, and Serb mother); *or* Milka’s mixed name is the result of her marriage to a Bosniak, while she herself is a Serb. Milka refuses to respond to this line of inquiry, and instead asks, “What are my children?” Through this question, she signals her refusal to accept a system that would divide her and her children into separate categories.

The smoothness of this exchange leads me to suspect it may be a composite of numerous similar exchanges she had over the course of the war. Through stories like this, Milka often critiqued the ethnicization of Sarajevan society. Whenever she spoke about the war (she had stayed in Sarajevo throughout the siege), it was in the language of “we, the Sarajevans” against “them, the [Serb] aggressor.”

It was not until nearly ten months into our interviews and informal conversations that she suddenly began to speak about the war differently. “We the Sarajevans” became

“we the Serbs,” and her usual narratives about neighbourly solidarity during the siege gave way to new narratives that exonerated the VRS from blame. She began to share some doubts she had about the dominant narrative of the siege, suggesting that the VRS was not really responsible for all of the atrocities for which they were blamed, such as the Markale massacre (see chapter 6).

Her narrative shift revealed a “hidden transcript” (Scott 1990) of Serb ethno-nationalism (see chapter 6). Some women revealed their ethno-nationalist views to me immediately, on the first interview. Other women did not let me in on their ethno-nationalist views until months into our research relationship, months they spent taking care to either avoid certain topics, or to speak about them ambiguously. Milka’s narrative shift felt particularly unsettling because of the strength of her cosmopolitan convictions. The shift seemed to contradict everything she had told me until then. And it certainly sat uneasily when, in later conversations, she again situated herself among “we the Sarajevans,” and again criticized the ethnicization of political and social life.

I spent a long time reflecting on her change of tune. I had immediately recognized her new narrative as part of a Serb ethno-nationalist template, but I began to wonder how much of her previous narrative had been part of a *liberal*¹⁸ template, one that emphasized ethnic hybridity and solidarity, one that I did not recognize was actually a template. I struggled to assess which of her two narratives was the “authentic” one. Was the first version more honest because it was more unprepared (Fassin, Le Marcis, and Lethata 2008)? Or was later narrative more honest since over time she had decided to trust me more and thus to reveal more of herself?

Crapanzano (2014, 269) argues that as anthropologists, we are caught in an “epistemology of suspicion in which what lies under the surface — what has to be mined — is somehow more real, truer, more authentic than what lies on the surface.” Even though we may intellectually understand that we cannot ever truly know the inner-most thoughts and feelings of our interlocutors, the discipline is built around the possibility that we might,

¹⁸ In local terms, liberal and ethno-nationalist are often understood as opposing political positions.

and this possibility pervades our research methods (Fassin 2014). It is difficult to shake the idea that, as Nordstrom (1995, 139) puts it, the “silenced stories at war’s epicenters are generally the most authentic” (139). But what would it mean, ask Das et al. (2014, 21), for anthropology to acknowledge that “even if the other were made of glass through and through, we could not, or ought not, be able to see into her?”

While I was struggling with how to interpret Milka’s narrative shift, another unexpected shift occurred with another participant, Jasna. I had conducted only two interviews with Jasna, and we had scheduled to meet for a third and final interview a few weeks before my departure. Already in the first two interviews, Jasna had revealed herself to hold strong ethno-nationalist views. In addition to denials and justifications of VRS crimes, she maintained that she could not possibly have a true friendship with a Bosniak (although she thought it was possible for Bosniaks and Serbs to live “side by side”).

During the first two interviews, I found myself silently criticizing her views in my head, even as I smiled and nodded so that she would continue. I expected more of the same in our third and final interview. To my surprise, our final interview instead contained a “revelatory moment,” a moment where a detail was finally revealed that allowed me to better understand where her views came from, and why she held them so tightly (Parvez 2018, 460). She told me she had been betrayed by her own neighbours during the war, people whom she had lived alongside for years, people who knew her and her family. The betrayal, which I outline only in sparse detail in this dissertation, involved a phone call to the police, accusing her close relative of being a spy. This relative was arrested and detained in a make-shift prison for several weeks, where they were beaten. For years after the war, this woman continued to live in the same building as her neighbours, their relationship reduced to exchanging pleasantries in the foyer (see chapter 3, narrative 3).

This story had been vaguely alluded to in previous interviews, but without any details. When she finally told me the full story in the third interview, I was able to understand her in a way that I had not allowed myself to before. I was able to see her ethno-nationalist views as coming from a place of pain and betrayal, as festering and growing during all the years she had to continue living alongside her neighbours.

I do not claim to know her inner-most world, nor those of any of the women that I interviewed; these worlds are “largely inaccessible to ethnographic investigation” (Fassin 2008, 554). Making assumptions about unarticulated private thoughts and feelings is tempting, but it “trespass[es] the limits of anthropological understanding” (Crapanzano 2014, 30). However, this “revelatory moment” enabled me to examine my *own* defenses as a researcher, defenses which are shared by other ethnographers who conduct research with people with whom they morally disagree (Crapanzano 1986; Hochschild 2016). As Blee (1993, 604-605) writes regarding her research with female Ku Klux Klan members,

I was prepared to hate and fear my informants, to find them repellent and, more important, strange. I expected no rapport, no shared assumptions, no commonality of thought or experience. [...] But this was not the case. [...] Although it might be comforting if we could find no commonality of thought or experience with those who are drawn into far-right politics, my interviews suggest a more complicated and a more disturbing reality. It was fairly ordinary people — people with considered opinions, people who loved their families and could be generous to neighbors and friends — who were the mainstay of the 1920s Klan.

Jasna’s narrative shift prompted me to reassess my defensive posture and to become a better listener (if not in the course of our first two interviews, then at least in my later analysis of them). Both her and Milka’s narrative shifts occurred towards the end of my fieldwork, pointing to the slow but steady capacity for long-term ethnographic research to unearth perspectives that would be impossible to reach through short-term methods such as surveys. If I had left Sarajevo even two months earlier, before these narrative shifts occurred, I would not even have realized how much of my data was still superficial. I would have returned home and written about two women, the liberal and the ethno-nationalist, two “stock characters” (Blee 1993, 604) with little depth or complexity.

Conclusion



Figure 11: Old Town, Sarajevo
Source: Photo by author.

A post-war environment is defined by events that are ostensibly over. The “starting premise,” as Stoler (2013, 12) puts it, is often that which is intangible, hard to see and harder still to document. In this chapter, I discussed the slow beginnings of this research, and the importance of repeat interviews and long-term ethnographic engagement. These incremental and patient methods of approach were critical in a research context where the aftermath of the siege’s internal zone of violence is felt more often than it is articulated. I also discussed how my positionality affected the research process, attracting certain types of narratives, and discouraging others. Finally, I explained the methodological and conceptual reasons for focusing my research on Serb women, at the expense of gathering a broader history of the siege’s internal zone of violence. It was this research decision that fundamentally enabled me to access *both* a silenced history of wartime violence, *and* a clandestine “hidden transcript” (Scott 1990) of ethno-nationalist revisionism.

Part One: The Siege Years

Becoming Aggressors

Violence is transformative; it profoundly alters social norms, practices, relationships, and identities (Bergholz 2016; Kalyvas 2006; Wood 2008). The violence of war reconfigured social life in Sarajevo, and the city's Serb population felt this in a unique way. Although Serbs who remained in the city lived through the siege and endured its deprivations, their ethnic association with the besieging army often compromised the way other Sarajevans could relate to them, or to what extent they felt they could trust them (see also Ingelaere and Verpoorten 2020; Maček 2009; Sorabji 2006). In this chapter, I analyze the social transformation of Sarajevan Serbs from “neighbours” to “aggressors” inside the siege, focusing on how this decline was experienced by Serb women, and how they negotiated a sense of belonging under the sign of the aggressor.

I use the term “aggressor” in this chapter as this was the term employed most frequently by participants as they described and contested their position in the moral landscape of the city. In employing this term, I am not suggesting that Serb women literally took up arms and committed acts of violence. Rather, I am describing the shift in social relations by which some Serb women came to feel that others perceived them as aggressors (as suspects, ethno-nationalists, enemies) on account of their ethnicity.

The association of Serbs with aggressors put Sarajevan Serbs in a contradictory and dangerous position: while other Sarajevans scorned them, or even feared them as potential threats, they themselves feared retribution because of this. The majority of my research participants shared stories of ethnically-targeted violence or hostility, ranging from smaller injustices such as being denied humanitarian aid, to much larger injustices, such as being falsely accused of spying by one's neighbours, or having a family member detained in a make-shift prison.

It is important to note that not only Serbs, but ethnic minorities in general who found themselves on the “wrong” side of newly ethnically delineated territories, often faced violence and discrimination that would have been unimaginable in peacetime. Across the siege lines, in neighbourhoods occupied by the Army of Republika Srpska (VRS), non-

Serbs were threatened and terrorized in a much more systematic way by the VRS, Serb and Serbian paramilitaries, and the SDS (see Antić 2011), as were “disobedient Serbs” who did not want to join the army (Vuksanović 1996, 23, my translation).¹⁹ In the VRS-held neighbourhood of Grbavica, for example, Veselin “Batko” Vlahović, a Montenegrin Serb paramilitary fighter, led a campaign of murder, rape, torture, and detention against Bosniaks and Croats (see Antić 2013). His crimes were part of a broader pattern in which the Serbian and Bosnian Serb officials sub-contracted violence out to paramilitary actors in order to maintain “plausible deniability” (Ron 2000; Vukušić 2019). In 2013, Batko was convicted of more than 60 crimes, and was sentenced to 45 years in prison by the Bosnian war crimes court.

The violence and discrimination against Serbs inside besieged Sarajevo were not as systematic. Donia (2004, 9) writes that the “pogroms” against Sarajevo Serbs were enacted by Bosniak and Croat paramilitaries that were “tolerated, although probably not directed” by the government in Sarajevo. Nevertheless, Serbs in besieged Sarajevo often found themselves marked as aggressors even by their own neighbours, having to answer for the crimes of an army that purported to act in their name.

I argue that for many Serb women, the war-time ascription of aggressor constituted the originary moment of their misrecognition, a feeling that has resonated well into the post-war period. This misrecognition is twofold. First, Serbs inside the siege found that their experiences of suffering and devastation in the external zone of VRS aggression, experiences they held in common with other Sarajevans under siege, were not always enough to maintain their position within the “moral community” of siege survivors (Morris 1996). Instead they found themselves suspected or scorned as VRS sympathizers or aggressors, a role in which they felt severely miscast. Second, their increasing social exclusion inside the siege made them vulnerable to the siege’s internal zone of violence, as retributive violence against the “enemy” became justifiable, and went largely

¹⁹ Even where direct violence did not occur, buses were organized to send Bosniak families across the newly-established front lines *into* besieged Sarajevo, where they would be attacked for nearly four years while living in displacement (Vuksanović 1996, 23), their houses meanwhile occupied by Serb families who had been evacuated *out* of the besieged zones.

unpunished. The harms they suffered in this internal zone have become impermissible against the accepted narrative of the siege, again contributing to a feeling that their lived experiences are not recognized.

I structure this chapter through the narratives of five women, narratives I “dwell on” slowly and in detail, taking care to draw out the wealth of information they contain (Dossa 2014, 140). Each of the narratives presented capture, in different ways, how social relations bent under the weight of the siege, and sometimes, how they were sustained. After a section discussing the process of ethnicization in war-time, I present narrative 1 (Milka), which describes the sense of anxiety that many Serb women felt during the siege, a growing fear their ethnicity could turn them into targets for retribution. This anxiety drove women to conceal their ethnicity in public spaces, to avoid drawing attention to themselves as Serbs — a practice that has continued into the post-war period (see chapter 4).

The next four narratives move off of the street and into the more intimate space of neighbourly relations. A central premise of this chapter is that, as participants repeatedly emphasized in interviews, “it mattered who your neighbours were.” In the best cases, neighbours could insulate you, vouch for you, protect you. On the other extreme, they could betray you, accuse you, endanger you. Beyond assuring or compromising physical security, neighbourly relations constituted a space where one’s personhood could be affirmed or negated (see Baines 2019), a space where one could be accepted into a moral community, or excluded from it. Narratives 2 and 3 (Vesna, Jasna) describe the micropolitical encounters through which some Serb women saw themselves fall from “neighbours” to “aggressors,” and the violence they were exposed to because of this.

The narratives of violence presented in this chapter are not intended to discredit other accounts of the siege that have emphasized how Sarajevans worked to preserve their city’s cosmopolitanism, and to sustain their values of tolerance and respect for difference (Demick 2012; Dizdarević 1994; Donia 2006; Kurspahić 1997). Rather, these narratives reveal another reality that existed at the same time, but that has too often been left out of accounts of the siege, or only briefly acknowledged. In an effort to draw these histories together, narratives 3 and 4 (Snežana, Dunja) recount more uplifting moments in which

neighbourly solidarity was actively forged, renewed, or sustained, as neighbours refused to turn one another into mere ethnicities, but collaborated to help keep each other safe inside the siege.

Ethnicization in War

The transition in status from neighbour to aggressor reveals how violence enters into the intimate spaces of daily life, altering how social relationships are practiced and felt. Scholars have examined how it becomes possible that people who have lived their lives alongside one another could come to commit acts of violence against each other (Bryant 2010; Butalia 2000; Dragojević 2019; Fujii 2009; Straus 2006; Theidon 2013). They have also increasingly considered negative cases where violence did not break out, and examined the conditions of possibility for sustaining peace in times of turmoil (Bergholz 2016; Kopstein and Wittenberg 2018; Ring 2006; Straus 2015).

In the process of *ethnicization*, a person is reduced from their multi-dimensional composition (their emotions, their politics, their sense of humour, their hobbies, their passions) and flattened into a one-dimensional figure characterized predominantly by their ethnicity. Their ethnicity comes to be seen as determining their political views, determining whose “side” they are on, a conflation that Dragojević (2019) refers to as the creation of *political ethnicities*.

Ethnicization is an important “mechanism” that enables collective violence by collapsing the distinction between civilian and (potential) combatant (Straus 2006, 162). However, as numerous researchers have pointed out, ethnicization is not just a cause, but also a consequence, of violence (Bergholz 2016; Dragojević 2019; Gagnon Jr. 2004; Kalyvas 2006). This is to say that the experience of violence has a polarizing effect that compels people to “pick a side,” and to see others as belonging to a side, and thus it helps *produce* the sides in a conflict. Once this process is initiated, ethnicization enables further violence to take place — which is not to say that the violence that follows necessarily occurs as a result of ethnic hatred. Numerous factors, such as fear, revenge, social pressure,

political opportunity, and economic benefit, can be involved in the escalation from ethnicization to physical violence (Straus 2006). And cyclically, the violence committed then results in further ethnic polarization.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, and across Yugoslavia, the 1990s were a time of extreme social and political ethnicization. The transformation of ethno-national groups into homogeneous *political* groups was one of the major goals of ethno-nationalist elites in the former Yugoslavia (Gagnon Jr. 2004). The 1991 elections in Bosnia showed the early success of this project, as Bosnians overwhelmingly voted for ethno-nationalist political parties that corresponded to their own ethnicities, instead of communist or reformist alternatives.

The social transformation of Sarajevan Serbs from neighbours to aggressor is a product of ethnicization, occurring in a war-time context where ethnic and moral categories became fastened, such that “Serb” often became interchangeable with “aggressor.” Bergholz’s (2016) concept of *sudden nationhood* is helpful for understanding this transformation. Based on research on a small Bosnian community in World War Two, he describes sudden nationhood as a triggered shift towards an ethnicized and antagonistic way of interpreting the world, such that neighbours lose their individuality and become conflated with the Serbs or the Muslims, Us or Them.

Defined or suspected as enemies, Serbs inside the siege increasingly came to be excluded from the “moral community.” Regan (1991, 20) defines moral community in terms of consideration: those within the community “are entitled to a kind of consideration denied those outside.” Morris (1996) employs the concept in terms of suffering and visibility: we acknowledge the suffering of those that fall within our moral community; we justify the suffering of those who do not. The exclusion of Serbs from the moral community made violence against them permissible. The fact that it went largely unpunished reflects a “state of exception” (Agamben 2005) inside the siege that broke with pre-war moral codes.

The permissibility of retributive violence inside the siege resembles Dragojević’s (2019) concept of *amoral community*. She defines amoral communities as communities

where the norms that governed pre-war life no longer apply, where people no longer have the freedom to act in accordance with their own moral codes but most follow a war-time moral order that is imposed on them, in which violence against civilians defined as enemies becomes acceptable (see also Theidon 2013; Halilovich 2013).²⁰

The besieged city of Sarajevo was, in reaction to the violence it was daily enduring, beginning to exhibit the attributes of an amoral community, in that it was beginning to divide the us from the them. One of the most prominent themes in my interviews was the mounting anxiety of the siege years, the fear of what the repercussions would be if one was read as Serb. The transformation into an amoral community did not happen uniformly, and in some cases it was actively resisted as people insisted on continuing to relate to one another “as people,” in the words of one participant, and not as representatives of ethnic collectives. Moments of retributive violence and ethnic hostility thus occurred alongside moments of compassion and solidarity. To capture both of these angles, Bergholz’s (2016) concept of sudden nationhood is useful for its dynamism, allowing for nationhood to suddenly flare up, and then decrease or disappear in response to local conditions. This dynamism is useful for understanding how one might become antagonistic towards an entire ethnic group even while enjoying positive relationships with particular individuals from that same group, in other words, feeling that one’s own friends and neighbours are the exception. Bergholz’s account shares in common with Dragojević’s (2019) the notion that deep ethnic divisions do not first appear and then lead to violence (as if this were inevitable); rather incidents of violence *produce* ethnicity as a salient category of extreme social division. Violence becomes ethnicized, and it polarizes people into ethnicities.

Narrative 1, Milka: “It was no time for customs.”

During the war, I ran into a friend of mine, a Serb woman, and she was dressed all in black mourning clothes. Someone in her family had died in a shelling, I think. I ran up to her and asked, “What are you doing? Do you want everyone on the street to know you’re a Serb?” And she said, “I know, I know, but this is the custom.” I was worried she might run into the wrong person, someone who had recently lost

²⁰ Dragojević (2019) argues that after the process of ethnicization takes root, amoral communities are created through the exclusion of moderates and the production of borders.

someone and might be driven to take it out on her. You never know! It was no time for customs.

*

The above words come from a long interview over coffee with Milka, a seamstress now in her sixties who spent the whole war in Sarajevo with her Bosniak husband and their young children. In the space of only a few sentences, she paints a remarkably rich picture of how the war suspended established social norms, and altered social relations.

She begins by telling me that she ran into her friend *dressed all in black mourning clothes*. In peacetime, such an encounter would elicit a response of condolences (*saučešće*). But instead of expressing her condolences, she expresses her concern that the custom of wearing black mourning clothes, common to both the Serbian Orthodox and Catholic traditions, but not the Islamic tradition, could mark her friend as a Serb. She asks her friend, “*What are you doing? Do you want everyone on the street to know you’re a Serb?*” By these words, we see that “Serb” is not a neutral ethnic descriptor, but a moral category associated with violence and aggression.

Milka’s friend replies, “*I know, I know, but this is the custom.*” Her words echo Maček’s (2009) finding that Sarajevans dealt with the siege through an “imitation of life,” an insistence on performing pre-war quotidian rituals as closely as was possible, rather than letting the siege reduce them to a bare existence. Maček describes for example how some Sarajevans continued to plant flowers in their flowerpots during the siege, instead of succumbing to the pragmatic reality that they should plant edible foods instead. The act of planting something frivolous and beautiful was a kind of resistance, a stand against the humiliating deprivations of war. During one interview I conducted with a charismatic visual artist, the story she told me reminded me so much of Maček’s “imitation of life” that I wondered whether she was in fact one of Maček’s own research participants. She recalled how she and her husband survived the siege by hosting imaginative dinner parties, inviting

their friends over and pretending to eat fancy meals. They would ask each other to pass the invisible wine, or comment on the juiciness of the invisible steak, anything to transport themselves away from the reality in which all they were eating was stale bread. When Milka's friend responds, *I know, I know, but this is the custom*, she exhibits a similar refusal to be reduced to a bare existence. She acknowledges her spiritual need to mourn her family member in a way that is acceptable to her, even if it means putting her physical safety at risk by openly signaling her Serb ethnicity.

Milka continues by explaining the reasoning behind her caution: *I was worried she might run into the wrong person, someone who had recently lost someone and might be driven to take it out on her*. There is a strong sense of compassion in her words. She recognizes that someone who *might be driven* to harm her friend would do so from a place of grief, having lost someone themselves. The *wrong person* to run into is thus not necessarily a criminal or paramilitary gang member, but a fellow Sarajevan, someone who is living through the siege and losing their moral footing because of it.

The concern she describes fits well into Bergholz's (2016) concept of sudden nationhood, in that one instance of violence (the hypothetical stranger losing someone to VRS aggression) triggers a mental shift that causes them to interpret the world in ethnic terms, resulting in the possibility that any Serb, even an unassociated civilian, could be punished in return. Milka's concern also echoes Dragojević's (2019) concept of amoral community, in that Milka is aware that retributive acts of violence against Serbs have become permissible, and will go unpunished. Having already stated her friend's response (*I know, I know, but this is the custom*), she closes the narrative by re-affirming to me that *it was no time for customs*. Perhaps with these words she justifies her own decision not to wear black when her own loved ones died.

Other women I interviewed faced the same dilemma: how to mourn their dead without making themselves visible as Serbs. One woman limited herself to only one black article of clothing, sometimes opting for something as small as a black ribbon in her hair. Another woman took a cue from the Greek Orthodox tradition, which she believed allowed

for dark purple instead of black, and adopted this custom temporarily, thus keeping the tradition in a way that was inconspicuous (see chapter 3).

It bears stating that the constant attacks from the VRS made burial and grieving practices dangerous for everyone. With much of the city, including its cemeteries, visible to VRS snipers, Sarajevans were forced to wait for foggy days to bury their dead or to visit the graves of their loved ones (Demick 2012). When space ran out in the cemeteries, then parks, soccer fields, and other green spaces were used as burial sites (Lacan and McBride 2009). Often buried without coffins for lack of wood, the interred bodies posed a health risk when situated too close to the city's water supply.

The concealment of Serb women's mourning practices, however, were specific to the internal retributive violence of the siege, reflecting their social transformation into suspects and enemies. When I first began to hear narratives about women altering their mourning practices, I thought it was contradictory and even unfair that a custom of *mourning* could mark a person as an aggressor. Milka's narrative points to this contradiction, as she points out that her friend's relative had died in a shelling inflicted by the VRS –as opposed to dying at the hands of a Bosniak paramilitary group, for example. It was this sort of contradiction that left many interviewees feeling excluded from the moral community of siege survivors. Even as they lost friends and family members to VRS violence, their ethnicity still seemed to bind them to the aggressor in the eyes of others.

Later in my fieldwork, I gained access to narratives that complicated this easy sense of injustice. I heard from women who had spent the whole war in besieged Sarajevo, who had lost family members to VRS violence, but who nevertheless hoped for a VRS victory. They were *complex* victims, implicated in the very same violence to which they were also subject (Baines 2016, Bouris 2007). I explore their narratives in more depth in chapter 6, but I flag them here now to begin to complicate the idea that loss alone could unproblematically bind Sarajevans together as siege survivors.

Neighbours Inside the Siege

Intuitively, we expect that social ties should preclude or deter violence. This assumption is what makes the phenomenon of “intimate violence” between neighbours a central puzzle in research on political violence (Bryant 2010; Kalyvas 2006; Kopstein and Wittenberg 2018; Straus 2006; Theidon 2013). When violence occurs at the “neighbour-level,” it is more than a mere physical act; as Fujii (2009) points out, “it is an act of social violation” (21, 3).

Recently, however, some scholars have challenged the assumption that violence is necessary a violation, and not a perverse expression, of social life (Das 2007; Kalyvas 2006; Nguyen 2016; Zani 2019). Kalyvas (2006) argues that intimacy is an essential feature of violence in civil war. Rather than precluding violence, the intimacy of social relations enables particular forms of violence to take place, as in the widespread phenomenon of denunciation, in which neighbours, friends, or relatives effectively commission violence against each other. He thus concludes that violence is not a transgression or aberration of neighbourliness, but a perverse reflection of it. This conclusion calls for a reconsideration of neighbourliness, conventionally evoking a sense of *good* and of moral obligation, toward an understanding of neighbourliness as a potential site of both protection and betrayal. Similarly, Das (2007) describes the way that violence is already folded into everyday social life as a possibility. She writes that even events that appear shocking and absolutely contingent can be shown to be “continuous with everyday life” (149). By this, she does not mean a violent event is the *same* as everyday life, but rather that the everyday “provide[s] the grounds from which the event could be grown.” (149). She posits that while our social relations may appear durable, or resistant to violence, they are devastatingly fragile, and everyday social life is made possible by the concealment of this fragility.

The cultural concept of neighbourhood/neighbourliness (*komšiluk*) in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been explored by numerous anthropologists, and often in a positive light, in connection to the Bosnian historical experience of living in proximity to difference, of tolerance, and of “common life” (*zajednički život*). For these associations, *komšiluk* is often

understood as a positive force against ethno-nationalism, binding people across ethnic categories into a shared moral contract (Henig 2012; Kolind 2008; Markowitz 2010).

However, Sorabji (Sorabji 2008) points out that the depiction of *komšiluk* as a form of intercommunal relation is largely metaphorical, and that in practice, one's closest neighbours most often belonged to the same ethno-national group, not a different one. However, this does not mean that the institution of *komšiluk* necessarily defines and maintains boundaries between ethnic groups. Rather, as Sorabji shows, *komšiluk* involves a moral understanding of what it means together that necessarily extends beyond the members of one's own ethnic group. As Henig (2012, 16) puts it, *komšiluk* can fundamentally be understood as “an ethnically indifferent regime of morality and sociality, binding people of close proximity, and expressing a rather non-ethnic form of belonging and relatedness.”

In pre-war Sarajevo, certain neighbourhoods, such as the mahalas of the Old Town where Sorabji conducted her fieldwork, indeed contained a strong ethnic majority. However in central Sarajevo, many apartment buildings were intentionally “mixed,” as companies assigning apartments to their workers took into account the “ethnic key” so that buildings would contain a given blend of Muslims, Serbs, and Croats.

However, the role of *komšiluk* in fostering inter-ethnic sociality is not always clear in the post-war context. Sorabji (2008) points out that while the category of “neighbour” (*komšija*, plural *komšije*) provides a way of defining others without referring to their ethnicity, in practice, the moral obligations towards one's neighbours may paradoxically explain why Serbs (especially those returning to Sarajevo after the siege) have *not* been welcomed back — in the words of one of her participants: “if they come back we will be obliged to be their *komšije*” (109).

Maček (2009) explains that the hustle of modern pre-war life had dimmed the role of the neighbourhood as a social institution, but that its importance re-emerged as the siege constricted Sarajevo's freedom of movement. Sorabji (2008, 105) also affirms that during the siege, the majority of one's time was spent in one's own neighbourhood, and

neighbours were often forced to share space with one another in bomb shelters, altogether making *komšilik* “more important and more challenging.”

I found that among Serb women, neighbourly relations proved critical during war-time, as it was through the interventions of neighbours that Serb women and their families either found protection from, or became targets for, retributive violence. The importance of the neighbourhood as an institution carried over into the post-war period, and proved to be a meaningful marker of Serb women’s senses of belonging, or of their failure to belong, in Sarajevo. As Dossa (2014, 9) writes, “it is through the mundane details of everyday life that the breadth and depth of harm and suffering caused by violence are revealed.” In many cases, the smallest of interactions between neighbours, a greeting given or refused in a stairwell, contained a complicated history of affection or betrayal.

Narrative 2, Vesna: “How can I prove that I don’t have a son?”

The police came to our door to search our apartment. They knew which ones were Serb apartments. It was all robbery; they were there to rob you. Oh, people hid money in such creative ways, but the police learned them all. I put one bill in each record [LP] in my collection, but they took my records and shook them out one by one. So I guess I wasn’t the first person to do that. [...] Another woman I know hid money in a box of chamomile tea — she opened each tea packet, spilled out the tea, and folded a bill inside. You had to be careful not to drink that tea!

[...] They came in one time, saying they were searching for weapons. I had a gasmask in the closet from before the war, when my firm had sent us for defence training. I learned how to shoot a gun and everything on those trainings! That was all so that we could defend Yugoslavia from a foreign aggressor. Everybody did that training; you would go through your firm or your school. Everybody had these things in their apartment; gasmasks, army jackets, guns even. I was supposed to return the gasmask but I didn’t, and they started accusing me of stashing weapons. They accused me of having a son, saying I had sent him off to fight for the Serbs.

[...] There was no glass in my windows, it had all been shot out. Our window looks right at the mountains, see? We spent the whole war in the bedroom at the back of the apartment. When we had to cross the apartment to get to the front door, we ran. There was no glass on the windows! When it snowed, snow fell into the apartment, right onto the floor. The UN eventually gave us some plastic covers for the windows. And they thought I had sent my son off to shoot at me. How can anyone look at that apartment and think I am an accomplice?

[...] How can I prove that I don't have a son? I tell them I don't, and they don't believe me. I say there are no photos in my house of a son, only photos of my three daughters, and they tell me I've hidden all the photos of my son. It's easy enough to prove that a person exists, but how can I prove that somebody doesn't exist?

[...] Eventually they left. One of the officers was a boy I knew; his mother had been my colleague years ago. He knew I didn't have a son.

*

This long excerpt is patched together from different moments in an interview that spanned several hours and numerous cups of coffee, slices of cake, and glasses of rakija. The woman speaking, Vesna, is now in her seventies, a retired editor. She spent the entire siege in Sarajevo with her Croat husband. Through her details about surviving the war in her apartment (darting across the living room, watching snow fall onto her floor), she positions herself as a survivor of the siege, describing an experience held in common with many Sarajevans. But in her details about the police searches of her apartment, she describes the internal zone of violence that she felt was particular to Serbs in besieged Sarajevo: *They knew which ones were Serb apartments.*

Some scholars have described the gendered dimensions of apartment searches (see Aretxaga 1997 on Northern Ireland), insofar a domestic space, gendered as female, is intruded upon and violated by males on behalf of a state power, gendered as male. In my own research, however, women who described apartment searches never emphasized gendered dimensions. By referring to "Serb apartments," Vesna automatically ethnicizes what might otherwise be referred to as a gendered space, a move that is revealing of the extent of ethnicization in besieged Sarajevo.

On a follow up interview, several weeks later, I asked her how the police knew which ones were Serb apartments. She replied that in some cases, they had been given a list of residents by the apartment council (*kućni savez*). In other cases, they knew because the family name was written right on the door. At least this was the case before the war;

during the siege, many non-Muslims removed their family names from their doors (Maček 2009).

But she said what alarmed her when she realized — and she did not realize until the searches started — was that her apartment had been *physically marked* with a dot of red ink beside the doorframe. The dot appeared on the wall several weeks before the war started. At the time, she did not think anything of it, but after the searches began, she started to feel that “it was somehow all planned.” She does not know who marked her door, or whether it was a neighbour, although she suspects it was. But the red dot signaled her drop in status, from a neighbour to an enemy.²¹

Apartment searches were most intense during the first two years of the war, before the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ARBiH) “consolidated” (Pejanović 2004, 132). Pejanović writes that as time passed, the paranoia around potential fifth columnists began to ease. However, this softening was not apparent in any of my interviews, as participants generally referred to “the war years” as a single unit of time. If the paranoia of potential fifth columnists lessened, perhaps the fear accusation did not. Additionally, while 1992 was the deadliest year for Sarajevo under siege, as 75 percent of all war-time deaths in the city occurred in 1992 (Donia 2006), this distinction was rarely apparent in interview narratives, as participants again tended to speak of “the war years” as an undifferentiated whole.

Police searching Serb apartments in Sarajevo were, in addition to robbing people, sometimes genuinely searching for weapons. As mentioned in chapter 1, weapons from Territorial Defence Force caches (*teritorijalne odbrane*, or TO) were used by ethno-nationalist parties to arm local militias starting in 1991. Rumours thus spread that Serbs who had stayed in besieged Sarajevo had been armed by the SDS, and would use the weapons against their neighbours, or serve as snipers from inside their own apartments.

²¹ Halilovich (2013) describes how the ethnicity of civilians was distinguished much more visibly and violently in the Serb occupation of Prijedor, as Serb forces enforced an ultimatum that all Muslims and Croats must put white flags (bedsheets) on their balconies to signal their loyalty to the new Serb ‘government.’ Civilians complied with this order. Serb militias then unleashed bullet fire on many of the apartments with white flags, killing the occupants.

Indeed, the SDS had distributed weapons to Serbs in the suburbs of Sarajevo to “defend” themselves. For the under-armed ARBiH, which was asymmetrically disadvantaged by the European Union (EU) arms embargo on the former Yugoslavia, the weapons confiscated during apartment searches made a critical difference (Pejanović 2004).

In Vesna’s narrative, she refers to her pre-war role in the TOs, pointing out that its purpose was to train civilians as a first line of defence in the event of an external attack on Yugoslavia. In recalling TO training as a common experience (*everybody did that training; everybody had these things in their apartments*), she asserts her belonging in the pre-war moral community, and challenges the idea that her experience in the TOs could make her a threat to her neighbours.

Vesna lays out the contradiction of her situation. On the one hand, she is daily escaping bullets aimed at her apartment by VRS snipers stationed in the hills. On the other hand, she is accused by police inside the siege of supporting the supporting the VRS, and even sending her own (nonexistent) son to fight for them. In her question, “*How can anyone look at that apartment and think I am an accomplice?*” she seamlessly ties together the internal and external zones of violence of the siege: an apartment ravaged by VRS shellfire, and turned inside out by Sarajevo police searches.

At one point in her narrative, I interrupted her to ask whether one of her neighbours could not have vouched for her, affirming to the police officers that she indeed did not have a son. Presumably the entire building did not collude to put a red mark on her door. She pointed out that while a neighbour did not intervene, it was indeed a pre-war social connection (a colleague’s son) that ended the encounter. She also clarified that by the time this event took place, the makeup of the building residents had changed dramatically. Many of her long-time neighbours had left, and their apartments had been inhabited by displaced Bosniaks who had come to Sarajevo from other parts of Bosnia. These new neighbours did not know her or her family. And, because they had been displaced from their homes by the VRS, she initially worried how they would accept her as a Serb.

Refugees moved into the apartment across the hall. They were from Ilijaš [a suburb of Sarajevo that was under VRS control during the war]. Serbs had come to their house and thrown them out. Some of them were killed and others thrown out.

Twelve of them were in that apartment [...]. I was so afraid of them because Serbs had chased them out of their home, and killed them, and I thought, “I’m done for.” But they were gentle...Once, they brought me a zucchini, a huge zucchini. I was so happy.

Vesna’s anxiety about retribution (*I was so afraid of them because Serbs had chased them out of their home, and killed them*) echoes Milka’s concern for her grieving friend (*I was worried she might run into the wrong person, someone who had recently lost someone and might be driven to take it out on her*). It testifies to the rising fears of being read as Serb inside the siege, in a context where Serb forces were directly responsible for the city’s suffering, and in a context where pre-war morals are slipping into a “state of exception” (Agamben 2005). But through the gesture of sharing food in times of scarcity, her new neighbours established a positive relationship and quelled her anxieties.

Narrative 3, Jasna: “We’d greet each other in the stairwell.”

Save for the above line, I refrain from quoting Jasna here, in part because the subject matter is particularly sensitive, and in part because she was particularly concerned about anonymity. Instead I relay her narrative in my own words, as I already introduced it in the methodology chapter.

Several months into the siege, Jasna managed to flee across the siege lines into one of the neighbourhoods that the VRS had seized, and from which they were waging their attacks. A close relative moved into her apartment soon afterwards, deeming it safer than her own, as its location was better concealed from snipers. Jasna’s neighbours, who both knew her and knew her family, called the police and reported on her relative. That she was a spy, or that she was working for the VRS, the actual accusation remains unclear.

Jasna is certain that her relative was punished for what her neighbours considered to be Jasna’s crimes — leaving besieged Sarajevo, and crossing over into VRS-held territory. Trips in that direction were made available to Serbs in the early months of the war, organized by the SDS and the VRS in a mission to ethnically divide Sarajevo into Serb and Muslim sides. The following chapter explores in more depth how Serbs who left besieged Sarajevo came to be seen by remaining Sarajevans as morally compromised. For

the purpose of this chapter, I focus on how the act of leaving the besieged neighbourhoods transformed Jasna's social standing from neighbour to aggressor, and put her relative at risk of retributive violence.

After the phone call was made, Jasna's relative was taken and detained in a make-shift prison in a building not far from the apartment itself, where she was beaten. She remained there for several weeks until she was released through a prisoner exchange: one Serb detained in besieged Sarajevo for one Muslim detained in VRS-held Sarajevo.

Jasna eventually returned to her apartment after the war, and continued to live alongside her same neighbours. *I lived there for years afterwards. We'd greet each other in the stairwell.* Nobody ever spoke about what had happened, and to this day she does not know which neighbour actually made the phone call.

In the methodology chapter, I introduced Jasna's narrative as a "revelatory moment" (Parvez 2018, 460) in our research relationship, turning a key that allowed me to better understand her current ethno-nationalist views as coming from a place of pain. Based on her narrative about leaving besieged Sarajevo, it seems that Jasna did not cross over into VRS-held territory in order to *join* the Serb side. Her motivation was primarily existential, not political: she wanted to flee the war, and the besiegers themselves offered her a way out. But she came back with different views, and in our interviews, she would often justify VRS violence as defensive rather than aggressive. From the other side of the siege lines, where she spent the rest of the war, it was the Bosnian Army (ARBiH) in Sarajevo that posed a direct threat to her existence.

Before telling me about her neighbours' betrayal, she often made small comments about not feeling a sense of neighbourliness in Sarajevo. Since she also made comments about the impossibility of friendship between Serbs and Muslims, I initially assumed the lack of neighbourliness she felt was a result of her own social views, and the boundaries she was imposing on her relationships. But just as her neighbours had reduced her to her ethnicity when they interpreted her departure as her "joining" the other side, and just as they had reduced her relative to her ethnicity by punishing her in Jasna's place, Jasna

herself came to see Muslims/Bosniaks as an undifferentiated whole, with whom there was no possibility of friendship.

Narrative 4, Snežana: “Nobody bothered us during the war.”

Nobody bothered us during the war. Not once did anybody come and rob our apartment, or search through our things. That is what I want to tell you. But for my cousin in the Old Town, it was a different story. Five times they went to my cousin’s house. But here, we were lucky [...]. We spent the war in the basement.

My husband was old, so I went out and got supplies, I walked around, I picked up packets, I brought them home, I picked up mail from our children when it arrived through one of the foreign journalists. I joked that I was in charge of external affairs! And no one bothered me or asked for my documents, not even once.

Mind you, I never went to the Old Town. I heard stories about what was happening over there. I didn’t want to go, to have them ask me, “What are you doing here?” So all in all, it was fine for me (*tako da sam fino prošla*). That is what I am trying to say.

*

The above narrative comes from Snežana, a retired academic who was in her early sixties when the war started. As discussed in the previous chapter, my project tended to attract interview participants who had experienced what they felt was ethnically-targeted violence, hostility, or discrimination. However, I also interviewed four women who seemed to have gauged, correctly, that my project would attract such narratives, and who seemed motivated to provide me with a more balanced perspective on the varied experiences of Serbs in besieged Sarajevo. She was one of them.

Beginning with the assertion, ‘*nobody bothered us during the war,*’ her experience stands as a counter-example to the kinds of narratives I heard more often, of apartment searches, or the looming threat of violence. Instead, she describes moving relatively freely through Sarajevo: *I walked around, I picked up packets, I brought them home, I picked up*

mail from our children when it arrived through one of the foreign journalists.... And no one bothered me or asked for my documents, not even once. In her depiction of daily life during the siege, she omits the sniper fire, grenades, and bombs launched by the VRS — the external zone of violence that made it impossible for Sarajevans to move freely. For the purpose of the interview, this external zone of violence is taken as a given. Instead, she focuses on clarifying her experience in the *internal* zone of violence: the zone of check points and paramilitaries asking for documents, the zone where people *come and rob [y]our apartment*, or ask *What are you doing here?*

She suggests that her relatively positive experience in the war was due, at least in part, to the location of her apartment in central Sarajevo. She recognizes that *in the Old Town, it was a different story*. The Old Town of Sarajevo refers to the urban municipality of *Stari Grad*, or often simply to neighbourhood of Baščaršija, built in 1462, one year after Sarajevo was founded as an Ottoman city.²² From her apartment in central Sarajevo to the Old Town is a fifteen or twenty minute walk, although much longer in siege conditions. While the danger of moving through the siege often confined Sarajevans to their own neighbourhoods (Maček 2009; Sorabji 2008), Snežana explains that she avoided the Old Town purposefully. Although Snežana does not name him, the Old Town was Caco's turf (see Introduction), and was thus particularly dangerous (Pejanović 2004). *I heard stories about what was happening over there.*

Reflecting its origin as the heart of the Ottoman city, the municipality of Old Town (*Stari Grad*) had the sharpest demographic asymmetry (in terms of ethno-national composition) even before the war, as compared to the three other municipalities of central Sarajevo. According to the 1991 census, 77.6 percent of the population of *Stari Grad* declared as Bosnian Muslim (in central Sarajevo's three other municipalities, this number ranged from 35.5 to 50.8 percent); and 10.1 percent of the population declared as Serb (in the other three municipalities, this number ranged from 20.9 to 34.5 percent).²³ By the time

²² Ottoman rule of Bosnia-Herzegovina lasted for over 400 years, *de facto* until 1878, and *de jure* until 1908, when Bosnia-Herzegovina was annexed by Austria.

²³ The remainder was comprised of 6.6 percent who declared as Yugoslavs, 2.2 percent who declared as Croats, and 3.3 percent who declared as members of other ethnic or national groups.

of the first post-war census in 2013, 88.6 percent of the population of *Stari Grad* declared as Bosniak / Bosnian Muslim (in the three other municipalities, this number ranged from 74.3 to 84.1), and the Serb population had fallen to 1.3 percent (in the three other municipalities, this number ranged from 3.6 to 5.2 percent).²⁴

This demographic asymmetry likely contributed to sharper feelings of mistrust against Serbs in the Old Town compared to other districts (Sorabji 2008), as rumours spread about neighbours killing neighbours, or Serbs staying in the city only to attack it from the inside (Maček 2009). However, location alone did not determine how a person experienced the war. Later in the conversation with Snežana, I asked her why she thinks she fared so well compared to others. She explained that her husband was well-respected both in the community and in the apartment building. Pre-war social ties and good neighbourly relations thus helped safeguard them against possible violence — a sharp contrast to Vesna’s experience of having her door marked, presumably by a neighbour, or Jasna’s experience of betrayal. Snežana’s neighbours continued to include her and her husband within the moral community throughout the siege, never relegating them to the status of suspects or aggressors.

Narrative 5, Dunja: “Everything we had, we shared.”

It’s important to have good neighbours, and I had wonderful neighbours. Everything we had, we shared. One day at work, I was gifted five kilos of apricots. Can you imagine that? Apricots! In the middle of the siege. I was so delighted. I took them home and shared them with my neighbours.

[...] Another time, at the start of the war, I got my hands on an entire carton of eggs. I counted them up and divided them among my neighbours. Everybody got two. I cooked one up right away, and the other one I buried in sand. Don’t laugh, I read that somewhere, that you can preserve an egg by burying it sand. My son’s birthday was coming up in a couple of months. I wanted to bake a cake for him and I didn’t know if I’d ever see another egg after that one.

²⁴ The 2013 census shows 1.8 percent Croats and 8.1 percent “Others.”

[...] At one point, all the phone lines were cut, except mine. Isn't that curious? Only the Serb apartment has a working phone. I guess they wanted to listen in on my calls, you know, make sure I wasn't a spy. Since my phone was the only one that worked, everybody came to my apartment to make their phone calls, to check on their families, to tell them they were okay. Honestly, I wanted nothing more than to unplug that phone. Someone in your apartment every minute, talking on your phone. I couldn't even get my own phone calls in! But of course I didn't unplug it.

[...] Some issues came up. A good neighbour, one I had known for a very long time, took me aside once and said, "Dunja, when you weren't in the bomb shelter (*sklonište*) last night, some people started talking." But it was light fire. I didn't run down to the *sklonište* every minute, every time I heard a sound. But after that I made sure I went down, just so they could see me. [...] It was very good of him to tell me that.

*

Dunja, a retired woman in her sixties, often praised the quality of her neighbourly relations. Through practices such as the sharing of food (apricots, eggs), she helped to sustain a sense of cooperation and care within her building. This was also a matter of survival, as she could count on her neighbours to share food with her when she did not have enough.

I asked Dunja whether she felt obligated to do such things in order to maintain good relationships in the building. She immediately dismissed the ethnic subtext of my question, which suggested she was obliged to prove herself as a good neighbour *because* she was a Serb, so that her neighbours would continue to consider her as one of them. She stated that the cooperation in her building came naturally to both her and her neighbours, the product of long-term proximity and good relations well before the war. However, Maček (2009) writes that enacting norms of mutual aid allowed Serbs inside the siege to prove to their neighbours that they were still part of the same moral community: "a Serb who did not act 'like a Serb,' who in some way proved to be a good person, became a good Serb — and still a Sarajevan" (124).

Ironically, even an act that seemed motivated by ethnic suspicion towards Serbs (*all the phone lines were cut, except mine. Isn't that curious?*) provided an avenue for strengthening neighbourly bonds, as it put her in a position where she could provide a service to her neighbours. Even though the pragmatics of offering this service were tiresome (*I wanted nothing more than to unplug that phone*), Dunja recognizes that failing to provide it would have been a breach of her moral duty towards her neighbours (*But of course I didn't unplug it*).

Her account of the cutting of the phone lines actually goes against Maček's (2009) observation that the Sarajevo government cut all phone lines (not just Serb phones) because of a concern that enemy elements inside the siege (read: Serbs) would inform the VRS of ARBiH positions. Perhaps Dunja's narrative represents a different moment of the siege, when the preferred tactic was to listen in on Serb telephone calls, rather than block them. But whether or not this narrative is accurate, what came across clearly in the interview was Dunja's joy and satisfaction that if "they" would listen in on her phone calls out of suspicion, what they would hear instead would be a progression of her (predominantly Bosniak's) neighbour's voices, as they used her phone to call their families. In this small way, she resisted the ascription of aggressor that "they" would impose on her, and affirmed her moral position as neighbour.

At other moments during the siege, however, she describes having to reaffirm this among her own neighbours, to assure them she was still part of their moral community. Later in the same interview, she described how her failure to go into the building's bomb shelter (*sklonište*) during what she described as *light fire* aroused suspicion among some of her neighbours: *People started talking*.

A good neighbour informed Dunja that a conversation had ensued in the bomb shelter, questioning whether Dunja was somehow colluding with the VRS from her apartment window, sending signals about when to shoot. Or whether she had received a prior warning and evacuated the building altogether. Dunja dealt with this by going down to the sklonište even when she felt it was unnecessary, in order to curtail rumours about her whereabouts or her intentions. This combined intervention between Dunja and the

“good neighbour” worked against a budding ethnicization that threatened to demote her from neighbour to aggressor.

While Dunja spoke with great pride about her relations with her neighbours, Part Two (chapters 4 and 5) will show that outside of the protective confines of her apartment building, she was often preoccupied with the conviction that others in Sarajevo viewed her as an aggressor, that they blamed her for the war. She recounted her fear of crossing checkpoints inside the siege, and of what Bosniak paramilitary gang leaders might do when they saw she was a Serb. She described her mounting sense that she was unwelcome in the city, and her helplessness when a Serb friend “disappeared” in the night, and there was no recourse she could take to find him. Her anxieties accumulated further in the post-war period, as both she and her husband faced discrimination at their workplaces, and dealt with harassment on the street from former acquaintances.

Dunja’s views of the war, as she told them to me, were contentious. She saw the siege as an unfortunate but necessary response to Bosniak separatism, and while she did not outright justify VRS crimes, she sometimes questioned whether they were responsible for the worst of the massacres, implying that the Bosniak army had brutally attacked civilians inside the siege in order to create a media spectacle that would incriminate the VRS (see chapter 6). Although she scoffed at the idea that the Sarajevo government would find anything of interest in her private phone calls, she would certainly have incriminated herself if she described the war then the way she did to me years later.

From interviews with her, I got the strong impression that her sympathy towards Serb ethno-nationalism grew in tandem with her own feelings of stigmatization and misrecognition in the post-war period, in tandem with the discrepancy between the siege as she knew it, and the narrative of the siege that cemented itself after the war. She often defined the siege as a state of “lawlessness” in which violence was made permissible, akin to Dragojević’s (2019) concept of amoral community. Perhaps she hoped that when the siege ended, all the stories of what had happened would “float to the surface,” to borrow the words of another participant.

The co-existence of Dunja's contentious political views and her feeling that she maintains wonderful relationships with her neighbours should give a sense of pause to researchers who associate *komšilik* directly with anti-nationalism. It is possible to have *wonderful neighbours* because one feels that their own neighbours, people they know and trust, are the exception, while the ethnic group they belong to are the rule.

Conclusion

This chapter has described the social decline of Sarajevan Serbs from neighbours to aggressors inside the siege. Through the narratives of Serb women, it shows how boundaries are drawn in the process of ethnicization, and how violence enters into and disfigures intimate spaces. It also shines a light on instances of cooperation and care among neighbours who refused to let themselves be divided along ethnic lines, and who in their cooperation made the siege more bearable for one another.

Some scholars of Bosnia have differentiated between the meaning of violence committed by militaries or militias against civilians, and the violence committed by neighbours against neighbours. Oberschall (2000) and Halilovich (2013) point to the fact that the majority of violence against civilians in Bosnia was committed by militaries and militias as evidence against the primordialist theory of ancient ethnic hatreds between Bosnia's ethnic groups, which posits that long-standing hatreds were triggered into violence in a context of fear and political uncertainty.

What some of the above narratives show, however, particularly Vesna's and Jasna's narratives, is that the boundary between these two forms of violence is blurred in practice. Neighbours are able to engage actors who specialize in violence to commit crimes they would not otherwise commit themselves. This is what Kalyvas (2006, 14) refers to as the "dark face of social capital." Instead of precluding violence, the very intimacy of social relations can create new avenues and opportunities for betrayal (Fujii 2009; Thiranagama and Kelly 2010).

The violence described in these narratives corresponds to the siege's *internal* zone of violence, a violence nested inside the front lines, occurring simultaneously with much more extreme and more deadly VRS aggression. Narratives like these (of apartment searches, of arrests and beatings in make-shift prisons, of the fear of mourning in black clothing) remain contentious in Sarajevo, because they provide evidence of a violence that does not fit into place. They go against not only the dominant narrative of collective ethnicized innocence and guilt, but also against the preferred narrative of the siege, of a multi-cultural city banding together against an external ethnic aggressor. They document a degree of complicity with corrupt police and paramilitary forces inside the siege, as ordinary Sarajevans made accusations, or silently marked their neighbours' doors.

Participants who lived through the siege of Sarajevo generally felt that the shared experience of wartime suffering should be enough to assure their place in the moral community of siege survivors. As one woman put it, "we went through the same war as everyone else." It was the sense of not being recognized as a legitimate siege survivor, or worse of being misrecognized as an aggressor, that left them with the feeling that their suffering was invisible and unvalidated.

Morris asks, "To what extent is all suffering alike, or to what extent is it inescapably heterogeneous?" (1996, 42). The existence of Serb women who endured the violence of the siege while silently hoping for a VRS victory complicates the easy conclusion that a common experience of suffering should constitute the basis for inclusion in a moral community. The path forward, it seems, is how to acknowledge suffering that falls *outside* of one's moral community. How to acknowledge these women as victims of the siege's *internal* zone of violence, while acknowledging the simultaneity of their suffering and complicity in the siege's external zone.

The social transformation of Serbs from neighbours to aggressors formed one boundary line inside the siege. The next chapter describes a different division, between those Serbs who stayed, and those who left. Dunja's narrative begins to describe how the departure of Serbs from Sarajevo in the early months of war was often seen as a deep betrayal by their neighbours. Even more contentious are the departures that took place

immediately before the onset of war, leaving remaining Sarajevans to conclude that those who left had prior knowledge of the coming siege. As I show in the next chapter, even while Serb women who stayed often felt scorned as aggressors, staying also allowed them to assert a sense of moral superiority relative to Serbs who had left, and thus to tentatively reinsert themselves into the moral community of siege survivors.

Those Who Stayed and Those Who Left

War forces people to confront choices that previously seemed unimaginable to them. These moments involve complex moral calculations, gambles, bargains, and negotiations. Telling the history of war through the victim-perpetrator paradigm obscures this complexity, in favour of an easy categorization of actors into the unambiguous moral roles of victim and perpetrator. It is necessary to step out of this paradigm in order to properly understand the multiple ways that people respond to violence, both to the threat of facing violence, and to the possibility of committing it. And to understand the shifting and ambiguous moral positions into which their actions place them.

One of the most critical deliberations for Sarajevans was whether to stay in or leave the city. People asked themselves this question at numerous points throughout the war, which can be grouped, crudely, into three periods: (1) in days and weeks immediately before the war, when political tensions were escalating; (2) in the days and weeks after violence broke out, in what was, in hindsight, a window of opportunity to escape before the siege “sealed”; and (3) in the nearly four years that followed, when the logistics of leaving the city became much more complicated, more dangerous, and more costly. How they answered this question has held enduring social and moral consequences for Sarajevans across ethnic groups, and for Bosnians more generally. By centering in on this decision in this chapter, I demonstrate the productive effects of “opening up” the victim perpetrator dichotomy, and creating space for other, more morally ambiguous subject positions.

Across Bosnia, the division between those who stayed and those who left constitutes a major post-war socio-moral division. Those who left are often scorned for abandoning their cities and villages when times were hard (Wagner 2008, 65). In Sarajevo in particular, refugees returning from abroad have found that in the moral hierarchy of suffering, their refugee experience is subordinated to the experience of having stayed and survived the siege (Čengić 2016; Stefansson 2004a, 2004b)

But while the decision to leave the city weighed heavily on Sarajevans across ethnic groups, it carried a different sort of weight for Sarajevo Serbs. Non-Serb Sarajevans could be accused of abandoning their city at a difficult moment, but Serbs who left were uniquely suspected of *betraying* it.

I use the language of “staying” and “leaving” in this chapter because these are the terms that Sarajevans use locally, but this language is somewhat misleading. It does not capture the fact that the city was not only besieged, but divided. After Serb forces failed to capture the city swiftly (see introduction), their plan became to partition Sarajevo into two ethnic parts, divided by frontlines. By seizing a key urban neighbourhood close to downtown (Grbavica) and several peripheral municipalities (such as Ilidža, Ilijaš, and Vogošća), they divided the city into what the Bosnian Serb leadership came to refer to as “Serb Sarajevo” and “Muslim Sarajevo.” From their positions in “Serb Sarajevo,” and in the mountains around the city, Serb ethno-nationalist forces besieged “Muslim Sarajevo.” As Radovan Karadžić, the president of the Serb Democratic Party (SDS) stated, “Our vision of Sarajevo is like Berlin when the wall was still standing” (cited in Andreas 2008, 27). In certain parts of the city, the front line between the two Sarajevos was the Miljacka river, in other parts it was a street (see figure 12).²⁵

²⁵ The space of “Serb Sarajevo” is what I generally refer to as VRS-held territory, or VRS-held neighbourhoods (VRS, *Vojska Republike Srpske*). The space of “Muslim Sarajevo” is what I generally refer to as besieged Sarajevo. In the broader literature, it is also commonly referred to as “Bosnian government-controlled Sarajevo,” where the Bosnian government refers to the coalition government of the Muslim and Croat ethno-nationalist parties, the SDA and HDZ. (To recall chapter 1, the Serb SDS had initially been part of the Bosnian government coalition, but officially declared its own breakaway Serb state in January 1992 after the Bosnian Parliament, minus Serb representatives, advanced plans to declare Bosnia’s sovereignty).

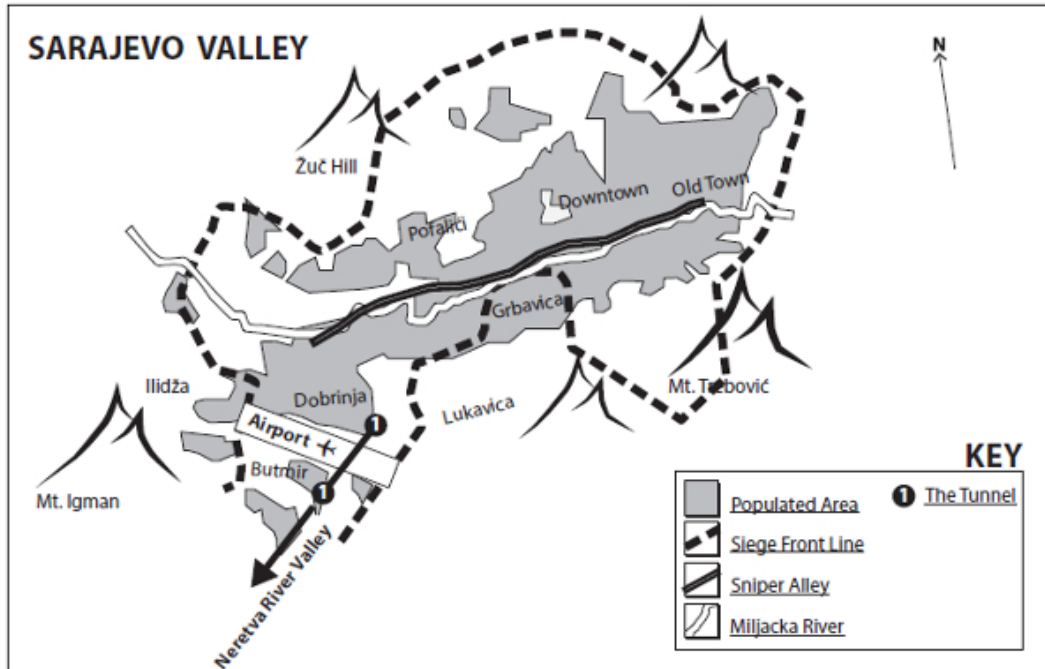


Figure 12: Map of besieged Sarajevo by Dubravka Sekulić
 Source: Originally published in Lucić (2016). Reprinted with permission.

The ethnicization of city territory is important to understand because Serbs who left besieged Sarajevo were, generally speaking, suspected of crossing the front line into “Serb Sarajevo.” The act of crossing over differentiates Serb departures on a moral level. Instead of escaping to safety, departing Serbs are suspected of siding with the SDS and the Army of Republika Srpska (VRS), and even joining the attack on the city.

In contrast to the popular depiction of Serbs who left as ethno-nationalists and traitors, Serbs who remained in Sarajevo are often depicted as liberal, cosmopolitan, tolerant, anti-nationalist, and altruistic. Such a portrait is prevalent in the academic literature, where Serbs who stayed are often presented as defenders of Sarajevo’s multicultural way of life, “refusing to leave” despite the danger of staying (Donia 2006, 322).

This Manichean portrait of traitors and altruists forms part of what I call the “preferred narrative” of the siege of Sarajevo, as distinct from the dominant narrative. While the dominant narrative emphasizes collective, ethnicized Serb guilt and Bosniak

innocence, the preferred narrative instead describes a multi-ethnic city banding together against external (Serb) ethno-nationalist forces.

This was the narrative publicly promoted by the Sarajevo government throughout the siege, as it sought legitimacy for a sovereign, multi-ethnic Bosnian state. And while there is certainly some truth to this depiction, it only tells part of the story. The continuing endorsement of this narrative in the academic literature is troubling given its proximity to the Sarajevo government. It is also troubling given the distinct lack of academic research on Sarajevan Serbs that would allow them to corroborate it, or to contest it.

In the sections that follows, I give a more in-depth account of the “preferred narrative” of the siege of Sarajevo, and the case for re-considering it. I argue that despite the seeming liberalism in the depiction of Sarajevans banding together against ethno-nationalism, the narrative of traitors and altruists is in fact deeply essentialist and ethnicizing, in that it ascribes political motivations to actors on the basis of little more than ethnicity. In the logic of pure ethnicization, a person is reduced to their ethnicity. This factor becomes all-important, determining a person’s beliefs and social attitudes (see Dragojević 2019). The preferred narrative is governed by the same basic logic, with the addition of one more mediating factor: the decision to stay or go. Thus, knowing a person’s ethnicity (Serb) plus their decision (stay/go) is enough, in this framework, to determine their social and political views. Leaving is conflated with support for Serb ethno-nationalism, while staying is conflated with support for an independent, multi-ethnic Bosnian state.

By pre-determining the political worlds of those who stayed and those who left, this framework tells us remarkably little about the reasons that civilians choose to stay in, flee, or attempt to flee conflict zones (see Adhikari 2013; Lubkemann 2008; Mironova, Mrie, and Whitt 2019). It reduces this complex decision into a matter of ethnic politics. It thus reflects the *outcome* of political violence (the hardening of ethnic categories, and the movement of people across and into ethnically-designated territories), but it does not tell us how communities actually *become* divided in conflict.

In my interviews with Sarajevo Serb women, an alternative portrait emerged around the decision to stay or go. I found that this decision did not necessarily reflect a person's political or moral views. Instead of interpreting Serb departures as evidence of complicity, most participants emphasized fear as a driving factor, reflecting the fact that Serb ethno-nationalist media systematically spread misinformation and stoked fears that Serbs would be victims of genocidal attacks by Muslims and Croats. The point here is thus not to dismiss Serb women's fear as the product of ethno-nationalist propaganda, but to consider how political rhetoric comes to resonate on the level of everyday life (Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper 2000), and how political agendas come to influence actions, emotions, and behaviour on the ground. Serb women who stayed in the city felt this fear, too, even though they did not act on it. They listed numerous reasons for choosing to stay. These reasons were various (family ties, property, lack of information, lack of alternatives, hope), but all of them were markedly more mundane or pragmatic than declaring political or ideological allegiance, or taking a moral stand.

The preferred narrative needs to be reconsidered not only because it is partial and inadequate, but because it is a product of the moral economy of victimhood that prevents us from accurately understanding the civilian experience of war. In this narrative, Serbs who left are reconfigured from displaced persons, from people fleeing war, from refugees, into traitors who were "in on it," who are complicit and thus unworthy of compassion. By the same token, this narrative suggests that Serbs who stayed in the city are worthy of compassion not because they are civilian victims of war, but because they are *good*. The decision to stay — a decision that was often made for pragmatic or mundane reasons, a decision that was inevitably made without adequate information, a decision that was sometimes regretted, a decision that was for some, in the chaos of the moment, not really a *decision* at all — becomes elevated into a form of moral redemption. Finally, analyzing the preferred narrative through the moral economy of victimhood, I show that it functions to obscure the siege's internal zone of retributive violence. It obscures the fact that many Serbs left Sarajevo only after violence against them escalated within the besieged city.

A Caveat on Numbers

It is not known precisely how many Serbs stayed in besieged Sarajevo, or for how long, although various numbers are in circulation. Many academic and journalistic accounts of the war focus, usually anecdotally, on the significant but unknown number of Serbs that left quietly before the siege closed (Čengić 2016; Demick 2012; Gjelten 1995; Maček 2007, 2009; Sorabji 2006; Weine 1999).²⁶ In contrast to “Serbs who knew,” Sarajevans are popularly depicted as having been unprepared for the war to the point of naivety (Donia and Fine 1995), living in denial and disbelief until the final moment. These assertions of naivety are closely tied to claims of innocence and a lack of responsibility (Helms 2013; P. B. Miller 2006), but also shame for a failure to recognize the warning signs (Sheftel 2012).

Given the relative lack of research on Sarajevan Serbs, the sources of these accounts are generally not Serbs who left, but other Sarajevans who remained, and who recognized the departures as nefarious only after the siege began. At the time, they seemed innocuous: a Serb classmate who failed to show up to school for several days, or a Serb colleague who took a sudden vacation. These accounts are further supported by logistical information, such as the fact that the Serb Democratic Party (SDS) organized secret evacuations of Serbs prior to the war.

But how many Serbs left in this way is not actually known because the data is lacking. The last pre-war census, published in 1991, reports the following demographic information for the city of Sarajevo (as opposed to the wider Sarajevo Canton, which includes additional municipalities: a total population of 361,735 people, of whom 50.45 percent (182,503 people) declared as Muslim, 25.5 percent (92,271 people) declared as Serb, 13 percent (47,083 people) declared as Yugoslavs, 6.7 percent (24,241 people) declared as Croats, and 4.3 percent (15,637) declared in other terms.

²⁶ The suspicion that Serbs knew about the SDS’ preparations for war, and left without warning their neighbours, is also found across Bosnia more generally (see Jansen 2007 on Tuzla; and Kolind 2008 on Stolac).

The next state-wise census was not conducted until 2013, and was not published until 2016 due to disputes between the two entities over methodology. While it shows significant demographic changes in the city, it does not show precisely when, in the 22 intervening years, these changes occurred. The nation-wide 2013 census shows a smaller overall population in the city of Sarajevo (275,524), and a change in ethnic distribution, with 80.7 percent (222,457 people) of the population declaring as Bosniak (previously Muslims), 3.7 percent (10,422 people) declaring as Serb, 4.9 percent (13,604 people) declaring as Croat, and 10.5 percent (29,041) declaring as “Other” (see table 1).

The category “Yugoslav” does not appear. Nor is there a national category such as “Bosnian-Herzegovinian,” or even a regional category such as “Bosnian” or “Herzegovinian,” nor any other category which might accommodate those who do not identify in ethno-national terms, or who identify as belonging to more than one ethno-national category (see Markowitz 2007).

Table 1: Ethnic composition of Sarajevo, 1991 and 2013

Ethnic composition of Sarajevo (city), 1991 Yugoslav census <i>Municipalities included: Centar, Novi Grad, Novo Sarajevo, Stari Grad</i>					
Total	Muslims	Serbs	Croats	Yugoslavs	Others
361,735	182,503 (50%)	92,271 (25.5%)	24,241 (6.7%)	47,083 (13.01%)	15,637 (4.32%)
Ethnic composition of Sarajevo (city), 2013 BiH census <i>Municipalities included: Centar, Novi Grad, Novo Sarajevo, Stari Grad</i>					
Total	Bosniaks	Serbs	Croats	—	Others
275,534	222,457 (80.74%)	10,422 (3.78%)	13,604 (4.94%)	—	29,041 (10.54%)

Census data thus show a marked decrease in the Serb population, but they do not tell us when Serbs actually left: was it at the start of the war, during the war, or after it? Various estimates have been put forward concerning the number of Serbs who stayed in Sarajevo during the siege. Mirko Pejanović, the Serb member of the Bosnian presidency who stayed

and served in besieged Sarajevo throughout the war, estimates that 70,000 Serbs remained by October 1992 (six months into the siege), and that most of them stayed until mid-1993 (Pejanović 2004). Loyd (2001) writes that 60,000 Serbs were still in besieged Sarajevo by 1993. Sell (2000) writes that 50,000 remained throughout the war. Jansen (2015) writes that 10,000 did.

Given the lack of demographic data, the amount of narrative attention given to Serbs who left at the start of the war can be misleading, making it appear as if all but a small minority of Serbs evacuated secretly on the eve of the war. Another source of confusion is the occasional slippage between Sarajevo proper and besieged Sarajevo. For instance, Čengić (2016) writes that two-thirds of the Serb population of Sarajevo left the city at the beginning of the war and moved to VRS-held territory — a confusing statistic, given that the VRS occupied city territory that was included in the population census. She cites Sell (2000), who writes with more specificity that two-thirds of Serbs in government-controlled areas of Sarajevo left for VRS-controlled areas at the beginning of the war. The figure of two-thirds seems to be in accordance with narrative data that describes a significant and secretive Serb exodus at the start of the war. But if Pejanović's estimate is correct, that 70,000 Serbs remained in the city by October 1992, then the scenario in which two-thirds of the Serb population of besieged Sarajevo left on the eve of the war is implausible, since 70,000 people accounts for 75 percent of the total Serb population of the city (not only the government-controlled parts).

I have no number to add to the conversation, only the note none of them can be trusted blindly. And the note, as well, that while academic accounts tend to report on Serbs leaving the city in secret evacuations at the start of the war, they are largely silent on the thousands (but who knows how many thousands?) of Serbs who left besieged Sarajevo months and years after the siege closed, after they found themselves to be targets of the siege's internal zone of retributive violence.

Traitors

Most of the Serb women I interviewed rejected the idea that Serbs who left the city on the eve of the war had prior warning of the coming siege. Some rejected it wholly — “*That’s an ugly story. That is not why people left.*” Others rejected in it part — “*Some [Serbs] did. But people left for all kinds of reasons.*” Others contested it on the basis of their own experiences — “*If I knew, I would have left. Everybody would have left.*” Milka, a woman in her sixties who stayed in Sarajevo throughout the war, at first seemed to endorse the idea that Serbs who left, knew:

The Serbs got word from the SDS and the [Serbian Orthodox] churches that they should just leave for five days, let everything get worked out, and then come back. Basically, that the army would take the city in five days. So they left everything they owned — gold, artwork, pianos. They left everything intending to come back in five days. *That’s* how they left.

In the above passage, she speaks of Serbs as “they,” distinguishing herself from those who left. Their complicity is evident in her words, and she describes their intention to return once the army had “taken the city.” But later in our conversation, I asked her: “Your ethnic background is Serb. Did *you* receive word from the SDS or the church that you should leave town?” There is a marked difference in tone:

Well, it wasn’t a secret. It was being talked about everywhere. There was only confusion about which side was going to attack. But, the Serbs were deceived. Because what happened after the Serbs left? The SDA (the Bosniak ethno-nationalist party) and the Bosniak army ransacked the empty apartments. They took all the valuables, the gold. People lost everything. They had left without even their toothbrushes.

This sudden narrative shift is noteworthy.²⁷ In the scant literature that exists on Sarajevan Serbs, it is difficult to find admissions that they received prior warning. In Armakolas’ (2007) study of Sarajevan Serbs who relocated to Pale (a town 30 kilometres from Sarajevo that became the wartime base of the SDS), none of his participants cite being warned about the siege as the reason for their departure. Of course, Serbs participating in academic research may have reason to be dishonest about how much they knew. Those who indeed

²⁷ This was not Milka’s only narrative shift. See chapter 2 and 6.

received prior warning of the coming siege may not want to share such compromising details with a researcher (Drexler 2013; Fujii 2010).

It is undeniable that at least some of those who left, knew. There are documented cases where Serbs who left Sarajevo settled in VRS-held areas to actually join the attack on the city (Gjelten 1995; Pejanović 2004; Vuksanović 1996). The question is thus not whether this is true, but to what extent it is true, and how foregrounding these departure stories at the expense of others shapes our understanding of those who left.

It may comfort us to imagine perpetrators and collaborators as positioned outside of humanity, as morally remote, as evil. As able to turn on their neighbours suddenly and with no remorse. But as is increasingly becoming the consensus in the field of perpetrator studies, such constructions only take us further away from understanding and explaining violence (Browning 1998; Clark 2009; Fujii 2009; Hinton 2016; Lewy 2017; Loyle and Davenport 2020; Rauschenbach 2019).

Altruists

The other side of the traitor narrative is what I call the altruist narrative, in which Serbs who remained in besieged Sarajevo appear as conscientious defenders of the city's historic cosmopolitanism, putting their own lives at risk to defend their humanist values of tolerance. This is often phrased in terms of support for "common life" (*zajednički život*), a local term that refers to the Bosnian historical experience of living in proximity to difference (Mahmutćehajić 2000).

The altruist narrative is more insidious, proceeding quietly but effectively, appearing not in large bursts but in one or two sentences at a time. This is because, given the relative absence of research on Sarajevan Serbs (and Bosnian Serbs more generally), academic accounts that focus on other aspects of the war usually mention in only one or two passing sentences how a minority of Serbs remained in besieged Sarajevo. But even in these dispersed and passing references, scholars have often purported to know the political motivations of Serbs who stayed. For instance, it is commonly assumed that they stayed

out of support for the Sarajevo government, or that they stayed in order to purposefully deny Serb ethno-nationalists their agenda of separating multi-ethnic communities (Donia 2006; Fine 1994).²⁸ Consider the following passage from Jansen (2015, 26):

Yet it is also true that many of those [Serbs] who left did so in evacuations coordinated secretly by the SDS before it closed its siege — a siege, let us reiterate, that was organized explicitly under the sign of the Serbian nationalist cause. Others stayed: an estimated ten thousand persons with Serbian national background shared the bomb shelters, the hunger and cold of besieged Sarajevo (ICG 1998, 3), and some occupied positions of responsibility in the wartime government structures and in ARBiH.

In this framing, the act of staying or leaving becomes connected with political allegiance. Those who left are associated with the SDS, while those who stayed are depicted as supporting the Sarajevo government and the Bosnian Army (ARBiH). It is not that this framing is entirely untrue — some Serbs who left did support the SDS; some Serbs who stayed did support the Sarajevo government — it is that there are more kinds of stories than this.

To be sure, the fact that tens of thousands of Serbs remained in the city after the siege closed, and even after the SDS began openly calling for Serbs to evacuate, was deflating for the Serb ethno-nationalist leadership. It compromised their claim that the SDS spoke on behalf of all Serbs, and especially their claim that co-existence between Bosnia's nations was impossible (Donia 2006). But analysts need to be more careful not to presume to know the political opinions or motivations of those who stayed, and especially not to assume that they did so in support of the Sarajevo government (Fine 1994; cf. Smajlovic 1995).²⁹ This framing obscures the fact that thousands of Serbs who initially disregarded the SDS' calls to evacuate ended up leaving besieged Sarajevo months and years later,

²⁸ The same came be said for Rwanda where Hutu who were killed by Hutu génocidaires are often collectively presented as political moderates.

²⁹ Of course, some Serbs did publicly support the Sarajevo government. In June 1992, a group Serbs who had remained in the city founded the Forum of Citizens of Serb Nationality of the City of Sarajevo, through which they expressed their condemnation of the war and their support for the Sarajevo government and for an independent, multi-ethnic Bosnian state (Pejanović 2004).

when the Sarajevo government proved unwilling and unable to protect them from the siege's internal zone of retributive violence.

The concealing properties of this narrative are evident in the following vignette that Pejanović (2004) describes in his memoir. In 1994, two years into the siege, a rally was held in downtown Sarajevo on Tito street. The rally was organized to show solidarity with Goražde, a town in eastern Bosnia that was also being held under siege by the Army of Republika Srpska (VRS). Alija Izetbegović, the de-facto President of Bosnia-Herzegovina, made a statement at the rally: "Those Serbs who live with us and fight alongside us are our fellow citizens. They too seek to protect us from the monster which kills civilians and is destroying all that lies before it" (quoted in Pejanović 2004, 140). Pejanović explains that behind the scenes, he had appealed to Izetbegović to make a statement that would help ease the violence and hostility towards Serbs in the besieged city, "who were by then living in fear, often staying away from their own homes in the evening hours" (140). Izetbegović's statement thus appears to describe a multi-ethnic city banding together against ethno-nationalism, but his words were actually not descriptive but *prescriptive*. He was compelling Sarajevans to stop turning on one another.

Reconsidering the Preferred Narrative

It is important to note that Serb ethno-nationalist accounts *also* presume to know the political views of Serbs who stayed, but that they ascribe opposite views to them. In these accounts, sometimes based on testimony from Serbs who were imprisoned or beaten in Sarajevo, Serbs who remained in Sarajevo are collectively commonly depicted as hostages of the Bosniak army who have been forced to stay in the city against their wills (Ivanišević 2000; Ivanišević and Grčić-Gavrilović 2016; Ribar 1995; Zurovac 2011).

That both liberal academic and Serb ethno-nationalist accounts presume to know the political motivations of those who stayed should give us pause. The ascription of political motivation is an essentializing move that reduces people to "political ethnicities" (Dragojević 2019). As discussed in the previous chapter, in the process of ethnicization, a

person is reduced from their multi-dimensional composition and flattened into a one-dimensional figure, where their ethnicity is the determining factor. Their ethnicity is seen as determining their political views, or whose “side” they are on. While the narrative of traitors and altruists seems to allow Serbs two political options (or a choice between whose “side” they are on), a closer look reveals that it is only one step removed from a pure ethnicizing logic. Instead of the logic of “if Serb then Serb ethno-nationalist,” the decision to stay or go becomes the mediating factor.

Beyond the problems of essentialism and ethnicization, the narrative of traitors and altruists needs to be re-examined as a product of the moral economy of victimhood. Serbs who left are immediately associated with traitors, or marked as complicit. Meanwhile, Serbs who stayed are rendered worthy of compassion not because they are civilians who experienced violence, but because they are good. Staying in the city endows them with moral currency for the crimes committed in their name, and renders them worthy of compassion. Consider the echoes of this moral economy in the political memoir of Pejanović (2004, 145):

The situation of Serbs in the cities, and their fate, deserves special attention, since considerable numbers of Serbs remained in the cities from the outbreak of war until mid-1993, refusing to accept the SDS policy of destroying urban centres. During the hardest times, therefore, they stood for the historic traditions in Bosnia of mutual respect and common life.

Through the narratives of Serb women who remained in the city for decidedly less noble motivations, but whose lives deserve special attention nonetheless, this chapter critiques the received narrative of traitors and altruists.

The problem with any binary, dichotomous framework is that it only allows you to tell only two kinds of stories: stories about victims and perpetrators, about women and men, about the working class and the bourgeoisie, about white people and people of colour, about the East and the West. Stories about traitors and altruists. Binary frameworks by design obscure the experiences of those who occupy more ambiguous positions between any two poles. When we move past this framework, and re-consider the important decision to stay or go, what other understandings, experiences, and subjectivities become visible?

Minja's Narrative

You could feel something in the air, but we didn't imagine yet that it would be war. There was just an atmosphere in the city. We could tell that something was happening. You had a feeling that everything was being divided.

After the 1990 elections, when the nationalist parties won, we all began to tremble. The SDS was not looked on with approval in my intellectual circles. And the other parties? You have to understand, our grandparents already had experience with the NDH.³⁰ Every Serb family in Sarajevo had someone who had died in World War II. There is no family who did not lose someone. Generations live with that. And they know through the past what can happen in the future.

[...] I had an apartment in the Old Town that I used as an office. The name on the door was Serb. One day my neighbours tell me that the apartment had been visited by a group of armed men, dressed in black. Their uniforms said "za dom spremni."³¹ This was the beginning of March, a month before the war. Already people were walking around with weapons and uniforms. In a children's park nearby, more armed men gathering, *Zelene Beretke*.³² I never went to that apartment again. I locked it up and stayed out. That was my first encounter with militants.

One day I saw kids skipping through the neighbourhood, heading home from school early. They were singing "Tomorrow is war, tomorrow is war." They're kids, they don't know what it means. I asked my own kids what was happening, and they said their teacher had sent them home early, telling them there would be war tomorrow. What did she know [that I didn't know]? At that point it was so unclear who would attack.

That night, there were robberies in the neighbourhood stores. I went to buy something in the morning, and I was in total disbelief. There was nothing in the stores. A shopkeeper told me all she had left was soap. But what do I need soap for?

"Take it," she said, "you will need it."

³⁰ The NDH is the Independent State of Croatia (*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*), a puppet state of fascist Germany from 1941 to 1945 that included the territory of Bosnia. She is drawing a line of connection between ethno-nationalist violence in World War II and the rise of ethno-nationalist parties in 1990.

³¹ *Za dom spremni* (For the homeland, ready) was the salute of the fascist Croatian Ustaša movement during World War II.

³² *Zelene Beretke* (Green Berets) was a paramilitary organization that became incorporated in the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ARBiH)

I can see that my neighbours and friends are preparing to go to Belgrade. It's an exodus. People are leaving en masse. You can see it happening. I see it, but I don't do anything. I tell my husband, "Let's send the kids away," and he agrees. At the airport, we see whole families leaving together. They were smart, but I was a fool and only sent the kids. On the way home from the airport: barricades. It already feels like war.

People keep talking about leaving, except you can't talk about it. It's all kept quiet. You just notice that someone is gone. And the ones you see heading for the airport, you know who they are. You know they're Serbs. You see that Muslims and Croats aren't leaving. [...] No one else is running, just us. It was known that the other sides had armies. I'm not the only one who saw the Green Berets, the black uniforms. But when did it become our-army-their-army?

It became hell for Serbs who stayed. They [the Sarajevo police] started to arrest people. Prisons cropped up in the neighbourhood buildings. Those who lived nearby heard everything. There was a prison in my neighbourhood. They took girls there. I asked a neighbour, "Who are those girls?" and he just said, "Those are Chetnik girls (*četnikuše*)." I heard them raping the girls every night.

They took my husband, but I was able to save him. They accused him of being a sniper. He was arrested when he went to the basement with a hammer to fix something. They said the hammer was a weapon, and accused him of shooting. A sniper shooting from a basement? I got him out with the help of my neighbours. I was lucky because there was someone at the prison that knew him, that knew he wasn't a sniper. I was lucky that I found some compassion and understanding.

He didn't want to leave before. He always said: "Where would I go? I am a Sarajevan. Who would do anything to me?" (*Gdje ću ja da idem? Sarajlija sam. Ko će meni šta?*) "See now who would do what to you, my Sarajevan" (*Vidi sad ko će ti šta, Sarajlija moje*).

After his arrest, I wanted to leave. But by then, there were barricades everywhere. They'd arrest you if you tried to leave. The children's embassy had its own convoy, but it only took women who were pregnant, or who were leaving with small children. A Serb colleague said her doctor would sign a note that said I was pregnant.

I am lucky I left, otherwise I don't know how I would have fared. My husband stayed, and a year later they forced him to dig trenches on the front lines. I have the letters he sent through the Red Cross. Every letter felt like it could be the last, but thankfully a new one always arrived. He escaped finally before the siege ended.

The Reign of Rumour

Minja is an academic in her seventies. Her narrative stands in contrast to more dominant accounts of the lead-up to the war. For instance, Donia (2006, 279) describes March 1992, the month before the siege began, as “the month of Valter,” reflecting the fact that thousands of Sarajevans gathered in protests and rallies to call for the dismantling of barricades and the achievement of a peaceful solution. The image of Valter (Vladimir Perić), a WWII Partisan commander who came to represent the collective resistance of Sarajevans to fascism (Greble 2011), was enthusiastically invoked by the communist opposition to describe the growing peace movement (Donia 2006). Indeed, many Sarajevans remember this month of protests as producing a feeling of collective euphoria, a feeling that war was impossible in their city. Yet Minja’s narrative, and the narratives of many of my research participants, describe the month leading up to the siege in very different terms. Underneath the euphoria of the demonstrations was an escalating atmosphere of fear and insecurity that made an outbreak of violent conflict seem not only possible, but imminent.

As Minja’s narrative describes, the lead-up to the siege was a time of misinformation, rumour, and escalating hostility. Preparations for conflict were taking place on all sides. Although the SDS profited asymmetrically from the support of the Yugoslav People’s Army — which was quickly transforming into a Serb-dominated institution (Lampe 2003) — each of Bosnia’s three ethno-nationalist parties began developing their own paramilitary organizations as early as 1991, while still formally engaged in a political coalition (Andreas 2008; Baker 2015; Halilović 1997).

Throughout March 1992 (the war would begin in early April), Sarajevans encountered barricades and checkpoints put up alternately by the SDS and the SDA (the Muslim party, the Party of Democratic Action). Dragojević (2019) describes barricades as a physical mapping of macro-level political cleavages onto physical terrain. Through the creation of barricades, even ones that are quickly dismantled, the political rhetoric of an ethnicized “us” versus “them” becomes tangible, and thus believable: *You had a feeling*

that everything was being divided. As paramilitary activity became increasingly visible, rumours intensified that the city would be attacked by armed groups from various sides.

Anthropologists have explored the force of rumour and panic in escalating conflict (Das 2007; Finnström 2009; Kirsch 2002; Spencer 2000; Yezer 2008). Das (2007) describes the panic rumour as a voice with no assigned speaker. She writes that rumours are conceived to spread like a contagion, and in this spreading create an atmosphere of paranoia in which violence becomes thinkable. The sense of inability to reach a verifiable source, to connect the voice of the rumour to a trusted speaker, is present throughout Minja's narrative. The news of impending war comes to her in the form of an overheard song sung by schoolchildren. *'Tomorrow is war, tomorrow is war.'* *They're kids, they don't know what it means.* She describes the feeling that others (the schoolteacher, the shopkeeper) know more than she does about what will happen, but the information seems impossible to verify or trust. *What did she know? At that point it was so unclear who would attack.*

Anthropologists have advanced knowledge on the gendered dimensions of rumour and gossip, observing how the rumours and gossip circulated by women through localized social networks can often be as destructive as (male-led) physical violence (see Helms 2010 on Bosnia; Aretxaga 1997 on Northern Ireland). Although in Minja's case, the rumours she cites come from women and children, my interview data overall does not support such an analysis. In my participants' descriptions of this period, the rumours they cite were spread by both men and women. In fact, rumours that were spread by men seemed to be more potent, particularly concerning impending attacks on the city, because of men's presumed privileged access to information on military and paramilitary activity.

Minja's narrative shares features with the narratives of numerous other women I interviewed. However, her experience is distinct from the others in that when she finally left Sarajevo, she never returned to the city to live, only to visit her family. But like Minja, several women described a mounting atmosphere of insecurity, increasingly visible paramilitary activity, and a feeling that other groups and political parties had a hidden

agenda for war. Bojana, a woman who was in her teens when the war started, described it this way:

In 1992, we were all talking [about leaving]. At the beginning, nobody knew what was going on, or what was going to happen. But there was looting of empty apartments. Neighbours would take shifts, being on the lookout at the building entrances. Yet those who left before the siege, they were marked. Traitors.

[...] Two weeks before the roads closed, people were just leaving and leaving. Every flight to Belgrade was full. Every bus, every convoy. And then, the siege.

Bojana's account is similar to Minja's in that it describes an atmosphere where the increasing insecurity is visible to everyone (neighbours taking shifts at building entrances), yet where those actually leaving the city are predominantly Serb. As Minja put it, "*The ones you see heading for the airport, you know who they are. You know they're Serbs. You see that Muslims and Croats aren't leaving. [...] No one else is running, just us.*" As Bojana put it, "*every flight to Belgrade was full.*" Together, these narratives provide an alternative account. Contrary to the depiction that departing Serbs had received prior warning of the coming siege, these narratives suggest that fear and rumour played a significant role in the asymmetrical flight of Serbs prior to the war.

SDS activists spread rumours of imminent anti-Serb violence in order to induce Serbs to flee the city (Armakolas 2007; Maksić 2017). In his study on the role of the media in Serbia, Bosnia, and Croatia, Kurpsahić (2003) explains that this campaign was part of a broader and systematic strategy by Serb ethno-nationalist elites in both Serbia and Bosnia. The political goal of these rumours was to justify a campaign of violence against non-Serbs, making this aggression appear defensive, or pre-emptive (see Krulišová 2020).

The manipulation of the media is indisputable from the privileged position of hindsight. But, as the respondents in Dragojević's (2019) study on war-time Croatia note, it is much easier to be critical later, when one is not gripped by fear. During the reign of rumour, politicians were able to capitalize on a context of insecurity, a context in which fear or other intense emotions could "act like a switch" (Petersen 2002, 3), making people do things they would not normally do, making violence against others seem permissible (see also Balcells 2017).

In order to portray Serbs as endangered, Serb ethno-nationalist elites framed Muslim and Croat ethno-nationalism as a mortal threat (on affective nationalism, see Antonsich and Skey 2017; Merriman and Jones 2017; Militz 2019). Media portrayals frequently drew on lived memories of anti-Serb violence committed in World War II by the Ustasha, an ultra-nationalist Croatian fascist organization, whose members were Croat and to a lesser extent Bosnian Muslim (Tomasevich 2001). As Bulutgil (2016) points, out World War II comprises a “substantial chapter of Bosnian and Yugoslav history” that goes against an otherwise ‘shared’ experience of inter-ethnic tolerance, mixing, and sociality. By invoking this past, Serb ethno-nationalists effectively created “informational shortcuts” (Butulgil 2016, 131) for assessing new security threats, reminding Serbs that they could again be made victims (Oberschall 2000; on the continued uses and abuses of Holocaust memory in Eastern Europe, see Subotić 2019).³³

Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper (2000) argue that political “templates” are not effective unless they find “resonance” on the local level. Although Minja was an academic who was critical of the SDS (*the SDS was not looked upon with approval in my intellectual circles*), the party’s rhetoric finds a resonance in her family history, and the passing down of histories of violence across generations: *There is no family who did not lose someone. Generations live with that.* Several other women drew a connection between the Ustasha and Bosniak or Croat paramilitaries. Tamara, a woman in her sixties quoted in the introduction of this dissertation, described the militarized gangs in Sarajevo this way: “They all walked around like cowboys, covered in weapons, in black uniforms reminiscent of the Ustashes in World War II.”

The SDS also invoked much longer histories to construct the perception of a threat, drawing not only on lived memories of violence in World War II, but on the historical

³³ This was, of course, a selective history of World War II, one that stood in contrast to the communist oppositions’ invocation of Valter (Vladimir Perić), and the Partisan victory over fascism. Yugoslav Partisans were a multi-ethnic force, and included Serbs, Croats, and Bosnian Muslims.

legacy of Serb subordination to Muslims under Ottoman rule.³⁴ Concretely, Serb ethno-nationalist media emphasized that Alija Izetbegović, the leader of the SDA and the president of Bosnia, had been, during his student days in World War II, a member of the Young Muslims (*Mladi muslimani*), a youth movement with links to the fascist Ustasha youth movement (Burg and Shoup 1999).

In 1970, Izetbegović published *The Islamic Declaration (Islamska Deklaracija)*, a moral-philosophical text that considered the possibility of establishing a modern Islamic state. In 1983, he was sentenced by Yugoslav authorities to twelve years in jail for this text, but the sentence was later reduced to 5 years. While the official platform of the SDA was secular and separate from the tenets of the Islamic Declaration (cf. Berend 2020; Malcolm 1996) (Malcolm 1994; cf. Berend 2020) — as Casperson (2010) notes, the SDA used Islamic symbols with more nationalist rather than religious intent, as a way of distinguishing Bosnian Muslims from Serbs and Croats — it is notable that the Declaration was reprinted in 1990 (Gjeltén 1995; Pavković 2000). The recirculation of this text in tandem with the electoral victory of the first openly Muslim political party in Yugoslav history was used to stoke fear that Bosnia would be returned to its Ottoman past, a period marked by Muslim dominance. Serb ethno-nationalist media thus warned of the imposition of Shar'ia law, wherein Serbs would not be permitted to drink alcohol or eat pork, and where Serb women would be forced to cover their hair.

This imagery of fear is evident in the following excerpt from Dunja, who was in her forties when the war started, and who stayed in Sarajevo throughout the siege (see chapter 3, narrative 5). Like Minja, she refers to the 1990 elections as the moment when things began to change, even if in an intangible way (as Minja put it, *something in the air; an atmosphere in the city*). She described walking through the city centre after the elections, when the SDA was celebrating its victory:

Everything was set up like a derby, with flags. [Whispers] Green flags. Turkish flags. They wanted to scare the Serbs a bit. You know Serbs were under the Turks

³⁴ Sarajevo was founded as an Ottoman city in 1461. Ottoman rule of Bosnia-Herzegovina lasted for over 400 years, *de facto* until 1878, and *de jure* until 1908, when Bosnia-Herzegovina was annexed by Austria.

for 500 years, and they have a fear that comes from that. Then also there were green flags with the crescent moon and star, the kinds that were always hung in the courtyards of the mosques, but never outside on the street. Massive ones, six metres, hung onto huge trucks. I don't even know how they made flags so big. They were driving in circles from city hall (Vječnica) to Marjin Dvor and back again, and honking the whole time. Such a cacophony. I went home and covered my head, and said to my husband, "This is no good at all (*Ovo ništa ne valja*)."

Her feelings of insecurity found "resonance" (Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper 2000) in SDS political rhetoric of SDA Islamization, which became tangible for her through the flying of religious flags outside on the street, instead of in the courtyards of the mosques.

On the level of everyday life, other women noted the "emboldened" religious behaviour of their Muslim neighbours and acquaintances following the 1990 elections. For example, several women noted that their Muslim neighbours began to greet them with Islamic greetings derived from Turkish or Arabic (such as *selam alejkum*) instead of the secular hello (*dobar dan*) (see also Armakolas 2007; Maček 2009).³⁵ For the women who dwelled on these interactions, these shifts in behaviour seemed to give weight to the rumours of Islamization, and thus to the rumours that an attack against Serbs was being prepared.

Anthropologists generally consider rumours, even if untrue, as expressions of fear that accurately "verbalize" contexts of stress and insecurity (Finnström 2009, 68). They are a way of coping with stress, a way of imposing a degree of control onto a world that feels out of control (Finnström 2009; see also Jackson 2002 on storytelling). Authorless, unverifiable, they can provide a way of saying what feels impermissible or unsafe to say (Yezer 2008).

But even as rumours express feelings of fear and insecurity, they also exacerbate and amplify conditions of insecurity (Kirsch 2002). In Minja's narrative, the hushed departure of Serbs is interpreted as an affirmation that they left in fear. This same mode of

³⁵ Maček (2009) notes: "Before the war, these religious phrases were used privately, within the family, when greeting an elderly person or someone who was a practicing believer. When meeting people on the street or paying a visit during the holidays, however, politeness meant using a greeting appropriate with the other person's religious group (142-143).

departure has frequently been interpreted by other Sarajevans and by scholars as an affirmation that they left in complicity. Rumours thus shoot in multiple directions, and they make possible a reversal of categories (Das 2007). They can transform people fleeing violence into accomplices or aggressors (see also Bryant 2010; Spencer 2000). They can also transform aggressors into blameless victims, whose violence is justified as defensive and necessary.

In Sarajevo, this kind of reversal happened on multiple scales, fueling both the external and internal zones of violence. By framing Serbs as a vulnerable minority threatened by genocidal Muslim separatism, the SDS justified its own aggression as a pre-emptive act of defense. Meanwhile, the rumours (and partial truths) that departing Serbs were complicit in turn fueled new rumours that those Serbs who had remained were fifth columnists, that they had stayed in the city only to attack it from the inside. These rumours transformed civilians into accomplices, and made violence against them permissible. Minja's husband is arrested in this climate of rumour and fear, despite wielding a hammer and not a sniper rifle.

On Leaving

When the first attacks on the city began in early April, Bosnian Serb ethno-nationalists began openly calling for Serbs to evacuate. But Serbs were not the only ones fleeing in the early weeks before the siege closed. Until early May, Sarajevans could leave the city on public buses. Many families sent their children away to what they hoped would be safer places, anywhere they had relatives who could take their children in. Many young people left. Men who did not want to fight left.³⁶ The Jewish population of Sarajevo evacuated

³⁶ Where they went to avoid conscription depended on their ethnicity. Serb men often faced the double threat of being conscripted by the Bosnian Army (in Bosnia) and the Yugoslav People's Army (in other parts of the former Yugoslavia) and soon later the Army of Republika Srpska (in Bosnia). There are numerous reports of men hiding within Sarajevo, and neighbours helping to prevent them from being discovered.

almost entirely.³⁷ The Roma community too. One woman in her fifties described the early departures this way:

In 1992, a lot of people left. My relatives left, anyone who had money left, anyone who had a connection somewhere else, a possibility to work somewhere else, those people got up and left. Mostly it was young people leaving. Old people stayed, kept the apartments. Because they couldn't get conscripted into the army. A lot of those who left wanted to avoid the army, avoid being sent to war. Especially people in "mixed" families. Of course we didn't call them "mixed" at the time. But the front lines cut through families. If you were forced to fight on either side, you would end up shooting at your own relatives.

As the VRS tightened the siege externally, restrictions on leaving also came to be imposed from the *inside*. The Sarajevo government promoted staying in the city as a form of patriotism (Čengić 2016), and made it illegal to leave without official permission (Andreas 2008; Sell 2000; Vuković 1993). Serbs in particular who were caught attempting to escape faced prison terms (Burg and Shoup 1999). Additionally, displaced Bosniaks from areas ethnically cleansed by Serb or Croat forces were relocated into besieged Sarajevo.

Maintaining civilians inside the siege was strategic for the SDA. In part, this kept international attention on Sarajevo and encouraged the humanitarian aid and international intervention that Izetbegović counted on to end the war (Andreas 2008). Additionally, maintaining an urban population was also strategic to preserve Sarajevo as an urban centre that would outlast the war (Arzalier 2017).

The role of the Sarajevo government in keeping civilians inside the siege was but one instance of a perverse cooperation between the two warring sides in *sustaining* the siege.³⁸ Andreas (2008) analyzes this cooperation extensively, describing how a black market economy flourished under wartime conditions, and those with the power to enable

³⁷ Those in the Jewish community who remained were instrumental in organizing evacuations for others, and in providing humanitarian assistance to fellow Sarajevans in the form of "medical care, pharmacies, a short-wave radio communication station, hot lunches, and more" (Markowitz 2010, 113). While several of my research participants recalled being denied humanitarian aid from Muslim or Croat organizations (Preporod, Merhamet, and Caritas), the Jewish organization (La Benevolencia) was warmly remembered as an organization that did not discriminate. For more on the Jews of Sarajevo, see Markowitz (2010).

³⁸ See Andreas (2008) on how humanitarianism also became a form of containment.

the transportation of commodities, weapons, ammunition, and people into and out of the siege profited immensely (that is, government officials, military officials, paramilitaries, criminals and humanitarian personnel). In 1993, an 800-metre tunnel was completed in secret under the Sarajevo airport (an area exposed to VRS snipers but controlled by the United Nations). The tunnel led from the cellar of a private house in the besieged (ARBiH-held) neighbourhood of Dobrinja to the ARBiH-held neighbourhood of Butmir, located on the other side of the airport, outside of the siege lines. The fact that this tunnel served less to permit civilians to *escape* the siege, than to allow arms, ammunition, medical supplies, food, and other commodities to pass through (as well as electrical cables and an oil pipeline), attests to the perverse role of the SDA in sustaining the siege, and keeping civilians inside.³⁹

But with the siege imposed externally and reinforced internally, Sarajevans had extremely limited options for leaving — even as politicians, journalists, and Western celebrities were permitted in and out (Andreas 2008). Apart from paying prohibitively expensive fees to be smuggled out of the city (a dangerous feat which also involved cooperation across front-lines), Sarajevans who wanted to leave often relied on evacuations organized by various private groups and international organizations, such as the United Nations, the Red Cross, the Children’s Embassy, and the Sarajevo Jewish Association.

These “civilian” evacuations were often highly gendered, prioritizing women and children in the gendered logic of humanitarianism (see Carpenter 2003; Softić 1995).⁴⁰ Čengić (2016) also notes the gendered dynamics of staying or leaving besieged Sarajevo. In her fieldwork, male participants often presented their remaining in the city “as self-evident, as if it was never under question” (62). Given the gender politics of the evacuations, however, leaving after the siege closed may never have been a viable option for many men. Unless they were wounded: the UNHCR and several European governments

³⁹ Andreas (2008) writes that the tunnel was rented out for shipments for over 10,000 German marks per hour, allowing a small number of people to profit immensely

⁴⁰ Even when the VRS “permitted” the departure of women and children, those leaving risked their lives. Softić (1995) writes that a convoy of 5,000 women and children leaving Sarajevo were taken as hostages by the VRS.

organized humanitarian airlifts of wounded civilians, as the hospital in Sarajevo was both stressed beyond capacity, and the target of frequent attacks by VRS snipers (Donia 2006).

Ironically, with the Sarajevo government praising remaining in the city as patriotic, and with Sarajevans feeling guilty about abandoning their friends and neighbours by leaving, many of the departures that took place after the siege closed, including humanitarian evacuations, were done in secret, with the person leaving not telling their plans to their friends or neighbours (Maček 2009, 93). The ethnic factor made a difference in how these departures were perceived, though. Non-Serb departures carried out in secret signaled shame, and could be condemned on those grounds, but Serb departures carried out in secret signaled complicity.

Inside the siege, violence against Serbs and other civilians escalated, particularly during the first year and a half of the siege before the Bosnian Army (ARBiH) consolidated. During this time, paramilitary and criminal gangs gained significant power, and received support from the Sarajevo government and the nascent ARBiH. Thousands of Serbs who had remained in Sarajevo despite SDS calls for evacuation ended up fleeing in the summer of 1992 due to violence and harassment (Donia 2006).

Such departures find no expression in the narrative that equates leaving with complicity. Even Serbs who left in the midst of the war, and who left only after they or their families experienced what they felt was ethnically-targeted violence or harassment, were not spared the suspicion that they had *prior* knowledge of the siege, or that they had left to join the other side.⁴¹ From their perspectives, they left as refugees, but upon their return they found themselves scorned as aggressors.

Bojana, who was a teenager when the war started, described how her family's decision to leave the city several months into the siege permanently ruptured her

⁴¹ Such attitudes towards departing Serbs were sometimes evident in the evacuations themselves. Vuković (1993) describes how thousands of passengers waiting for a bus to Belgrade were forced to wait for days in a location open to attack from VRS snipers, and were humiliated by officials by being forced to assemble and re-assemble in random formations.

relationship with her neighbour. A few years after the war ended, Bojana returned to live in her family home:

It's been years, and she still refuses to greet me. But she makes a point of greeting my daughter. I suppose that because my daughter was born after the war, she [my neighbour] doesn't see her as responsible. But what about me? I was only a teenager. I couldn't even vote.

For Jasna, whose story was introduced in the previous chapter, the decision to leave Sarajevo during the siege bore violent consequences, as her neighbours had her family member arrested. Jasna believes that they intended to punish her for what they considered to be a betrayal.

In contrast to Bojana and Jasna's experiences, another woman shared a more uplifting story. Like Bojana, she was a teenager when the war broke out, and she left along with her family. When they returned after the war, they found that their Bosniak neighbour had gone into their apartment to take their family photo albums for safekeeping. He predicted, correctly, that the empty apartment would soon be looted and ransacked. "Because of him," she said, "I have photos of my life before the war." His gesture ensured that the neighbourly bond between the two families remained intact after the war.

On Staying

When I asked participants about their reasons for staying, I initially expected to hear narratives of solidarity, neighbourly bonds, and the preservation of Sarajevo's "common life" (*zajednički život*). In other words, I expected to hear what I would later come to recognize as the preferred narrative of the siege. I was surprised when none of my research participants explained their decisions to stay in terms of political allegiance or moral conviction.

I did hear accounts of neighbourly solidarity inside the siege, as Sarajevans sustained a sense of community and cosmopolitanism despite ethno-nationalist aggression. One woman told me that during the siege, a Muslim woman from her neighbourhood took

her hand, and said, “So long as you are here, it gives us strength.” She was deeply touched by this encounter, and she cherished it, sharing it with me with great pride. Another woman recounted how a Muslim colleague whom she was not particularly close with ran up to her and embraced her when she saw her on the street. “She was just so happy that I was still there.” Such interactions often affirmed to these Serb women that their decisions to stay had been worth it, and that they belonged. But the closeness and sense of shared fate with one’s neighbours was not among the reasons they had stayed in the first place.

The reasons they gave were less altruistic. They described their decision to stay in terms very similar to what Maček (2009) heard from her research participants in Sarajevo during the siege (very few of whom were Serb). People stayed because they wanted to keep their apartments, or their jobs. Or because they wanted to finish their studies (some 22 Sarajevans received their PhDs in the first four months of war, see Vuković 1993). Some stayed out of concern for family members. Some stayed because they did not want to begin a new life in a new country, or did not believe they could at their age.

Others explained that in the chaos of wartime, the decision to stay was not really a decision at all. Consistent with the depiction that Serbs who left prior to the siege did so out of fear, numerous participants described feeling scared and confused, and simply not making a decision in time. By the time they knew they wanted to leave, it was too late. The excerpt below comes from Milka, who spent the entire war in Sarajevo:

Some people sent their children away. I spent the whole war here with two children. That should tell you how much I didn’t understand what was happening. I kept thinking it would be over.

[...] It was so hard to pretend for them that everything was fine. All those days with no electricity, no food, no anything, and then the shelling outside. It sounds awful but you have to understand, we were also dying of boredom! There was nothing to do. When the shelling was bad, I couldn’t let them play outside. In the winters, there was no heat, so we’d wake up freezing, and I made up games so that they’d stay under the covers as long as possible. Now they’re grown and I tell them, if you ever see a war coming — even just a glimmer of a war, an idea of a war — run. Just run. Don’t look back, don’t think about it, just go as far, far, far away as possible.

The act of remaining in Sarajevo is not narrated as a decision that she made intentionally, but one that was made for her as the borders of the siege closed around her. *I didn't understand what was happening. I kept thinking it would be over.* Rather than invoking the narrative that Serbs who stayed did so to defend the city's multiculturalism, binding their fate to their neighbours', she instead tells me what she tells her children: *to run away from war, as far away as possible.*

Her choice of words (*even just a glimmer of a war, an idea of a war*) recalls the atmosphere of uncertainty and misinformation that compelled many Serbs to flee prior to the siege, when the war had not yet taken shape, and rumours of an attack came from all sides. However, a clue for why she stayed when so many others fled can be found in the following excerpt:

At the beginning I had four bags packed and ready to go, but Alija [Izetbegović] told everyone, "Of course there will be no war. It takes two sides to fight, and we are not fighting. My whole family is here. Stay." Then when it was already too late for us, we find out he'd sent his family away before the war even started. None of the politicians lost anyone. Only we, the people (*narod*), suffered in this war... The whole thing was so dirty.

Just as unsubstantiated rumours of anti-Serb violence compelled some Serbs to flee, Milka notes that empty promises led her to stay. She felt the fear and insecurity that so many other participants described (she had four bags packed and ready to go) but she ultimately gave more weight to Izetbegovic's assurances that there would be no war, and that his own family would stay in the city.⁴² Her bitterness towards the politicians who profited from the war is palpable, as is her sense that there is blame on all sides (*the whole thing was so dirty*).

⁴² Vuković (1993) writes (my translation): "Izetbegović's family, both near and distant, fled abroad before the war even started. My friend's daughter went to school with one of Alija's granddaughters, and so her daughter got an assignment from her mother, to inform her immediately when the granddaughter does not show up to school for three days in a row. That's how they would know the war is starting. On the first of April, she got notice" (68).

Older participants in particular narrated their decision to stay in terms of age and life cycle. When I asked Snežana, who was in her sixties when the war started if she and her husband thought about leaving, she replied:

We were too old! What were we going to do, get new apartments and new jobs somewhere else? Start new lives somewhere else? No, we sent our children away and we stayed and we just hoped it would end soon.

As many families in Sarajevo sent their children away to safer places, the division between those who stayed and those who left was not only gendered, but also divided in terms of age, as more elderly people stayed in the city. However, family obligations could also keep younger generations inside, as in the following narrative from a woman who was in her twenties when the war started:

Me: Did you think about leaving?

Her: No. I never thought about leaving. I was an only child, and I didn't want to leave my parents. I knew that if I left, they would be in danger. I had lots of friends in the Muslim and Croat armies, and I knew they'd take care of my dad. And they really did. He was in his early fifties, young enough to be conscripted. But he had a medical condition, so he got papers that excused him. Then a few years into the war, the military police came and took him. I went with him down to their office, and there was his name, on a list to be conscripted. I had a friend who worked in that office, and thankfully he had the authority to cross him off the list.

Me: What about the papers that excused him? They didn't care about his papers?

Her: There were so many paramilitary organizations. So many people had power. The official Bosnian army had the least power of all of them.

Me: Why didn't your parents want to leave in the beginning?

Her: At the beginning they just didn't realize how long it would be, or even what was happening. Then, when they wanted to, it was too late.

In the above excerpt, she describes how her social enabled her to protect her father, and thus compelled her to stay. In this sense, her narrative recalls Vesna's from the previous chapter, in which a colleague's son is among the police officers searching her apartment for weapons. (Although he allows the search to take place, he does intervene to vouch for

her when the other officers refuse to believe that she does not have a son, and thus could not have sent him to fight for the VRS).

On one of my walks with Dunja (chapter 3, narrative 5), I asked her about her decision to stay. She interwove her initial pragmatic reasons for staying (to keep her apartment, and not be forced to start a new life somewhere else), with knowledge she gained during the course of the siege. Similar to Milka, who told her children to run if they see a war coming, Dunja reformulated my questions about the past (“Why did you choose to stay”/“Why didn’t you leave?”) into a question about the future: What would I do if I had to make the decision again?

Today when I think about what I would do if, God forbid, it happened again... Now I am older. But even back then, when the war started... I remember sending my son away and feeling so angry that my child, who was in the middle of completing a university degree, was being shipped off abroad, where he would probably have to work as a dishwasher, a waiter, do that kind of work. I didn’t want that for him, or for myself. I asked my husband, “What do you think?” And he said, “You know, I am a little too old for the army (*ja sam već malo prestario za pušku*).” He told me to leave with our child, and save ourselves. But I told him, “We are a family, either we go together or not at all.”

And I think it’s good that the two of us stayed together, because people who lived alone in the war... the darkness swallowed them (*pojeo im je mrak*). When people see that you have a nice apartment, that you have nice things... you know? And if you are a single person, it’s much easier for you to just ‘disappear.’ There are fewer people who will look for you. So I’m glad that we stayed. I can’t even imagine what we would have done if we had left. I know people who left, and who did not fare well abroad.

[...] But truly, it was not a good experience. And today, if I could do it over... My husband used to say, “If I knew in 1992 what I knew in 1996, or in 1995, I would have been among the first to leave Sarajevo.” But you don’t know. You stay, you protect your apartment, you protect whatever. You have good neighbours, and so you think, “However it is for my neighbours, it will be for me too. (*Kako bude mojim komšijama, biće i meni.*)” But it wasn’t the same.

[...] But still, I’m glad that I was here during the war, even if it was very hard. Because I saw it. Maybe it would be harder for me now if I had gone away to

Belgrade or something, and now people here could tell me how it was just great [for Serbs] here. No, I saw from the inside. Nobody can tell me stories.⁴³

Her initial reasons to stay are tied to her family's class status (as evidenced through her son's university degree, her revulsion that he *might have to work as a dishwasher, a waiter, do that kind of work*, and her family's *nice apartment, nice things*), and her desire to remain with her husband, who thought the fact he was too old for the army would keep him relatively safe. She recognized that remaining in the city allowed her to keep her apartment and her possessions, as she witnessed the looting and robbery of empty apartments.

As she reflected further on the decision to stay or go, she offers two different responses: one in her husband's voice, the other in her own. She points out that while her husband's desire to stay initially kept them in the city, the experience of the war changed his mind. "*If I knew in 1992 what I knew in 1996, or in 1995, I would be among the first to leave Sarajevo.*" Then she invoked, for the first time in the interview, the trope of staying to share a fate with one's neighbours: *However it is for my neighbours, it will be for me too*. Yet this trope twists in her narrative. Instead of the notion of Serbs intentionally staying to share the suffering of the siege with their neighbours, she speaks from a place of post-war knowledge about the siege's internal zone of violence, attesting that the war *wasn't the same* for her and her neighbours.

In chapter 6, I analyse some of Dunja's narratives as a kind of "hidden transcript" (Scott 1990) of Serb ethno-nationalism, noting that she came to support the VRS ideologically. The preferred narrative is not able to capture experiences like Dunja's,

⁴³ Dunja states that that she is glad she stayed, *even if it was very hard*. Her words gesture to Čengić's (2016) finding that some Sarajevans who stayed in the besieged city position themselves as "the one[s] who know" the truth about the war, and who have the moral authority to both speak about the past and determine the future. Čengić, whose research included both civilians and soldiers, describes how this experiential knowledge of the war is often conceptualized as a *privileged* knowledge for civilians, who integrated it into their life histories and drew moral lessons from it, and as an *unwelcome* knowledge for ex-soldiers, who found it more difficult to integrate (63-66). But whereas Čengić's concept of "the one who knows" refers to knowledge of the external zone of VRS aggression, the woman above asserts an experiential knowledge of the siege's internal zone of violence, a zone which she insists *wasn't the same* for non-Serbs: *I saw from the inside. Nobody can tell me stories.*

insofar as it conflates the act of staying in besieged Sarajevo with political opposition to Serb ethno-nationalism.

Moral Currency

During the war, a salient moral boundary emerged between those who stayed and those who left, and in particular between Serbs who stayed and Serbs who left. Discussing how non-Serb Sarajevans view Serbs in the city, Sorabji (2006) offers the concept of the “wartime pedigree” (8). This “pedigree” distinguishes Serbs who stayed as “good Serbs,” morally superior to those who left (and possibly returned).

Snežana (see chapter 3, narrative 4), a woman in her eighties described how this moral boundary emerged and was socially policed during the war:

People watched who stayed and who left. In 1992, a friend of mine and my husband’s was in a café, and some man yelled, “Your buddy Dušan, he left to Pale to be with his own.” And our friend knew that simply wasn’t true, but it was true that my husband didn’t leave the apartment very much. So next time he saw me, he said “Tell your husband to start going out a bit more. I can’t get these Baliže⁴⁴ to shut up — those were his words, and he was a Muslim!” (*Ja ne mogu onim Balijama — ovim rečima, a on musliman! — da začepim usta.*) My Dušan is right there in Sarajevo and they’re saying he’s in Pale. You know? What I want to tell you is that there were wonderful people. Wonderful people. (Referring to her friend who warned her).

To quiet the men’s rumours, Snežana instructed her husband to go out in the city and show his face more often. But in the post-war period, demonstrating one’s “wartime pedigree” is more difficult. As Sorabji (2006) notes, this is the problem with this moral currency: it is more or less impossible to discern a stranger’s wartime pedigree, to know what they did during the war, and thus how one should behave towards them. Her research participants, Sarajevan Bosniaks, grapple with the worry that the Serb towards whom they behave warmly on the street may be the very same person whose presence in the city provokes fear in a fellow Sarajevan.

⁴⁴ A pejorative term for Bosnian Muslims / Bosniaks

The difficulty of discerning a stranger's wartime pedigree helps explain why many of my research participants who had stayed in Sarajevo throughout the siege frequently found ways to bring this up in conversations. They were effectively informing me, and others, of their wartime pedigree.

Going for a walk with a Milka in downtown Sarajevo, we stopped to say hello to an acquaintance of hers who was out walking with two other women whom Milka did not know. One of the women asked me what I thought of Sarajevo, and after I answered, Milka said "Yes, Sarajevo truly is beautiful. I have always loved this city, even throughout the war." Another time, at a busy art exhibition, I was standing with a circle of women, some of whom knew each other, and others who did not. Vesna, the woman I had come with, said to the group "Oh, but we who were here throughout the war know the value of art" – a reference to the way that Sarajevo's vibrant artistic and cultural life continued under the siege (Diklić 2004; Jestrovic 2013; Maček 2009). These quick remarks were ways of signalling their wartime pedigree to others, a pedigree draws on the narrative that those who stayed did so altruistically, while those who left were complicit. In this way, Serbs women who stayed were able to draw on the moral currency of the altruist narrative in order to assert their place in the moral community of siege survivors. Another woman, who never suggested in interviews that she had stayed *for* her neighbours, would often say, in public, "We who stayed with our neighbours."

While Serb women who stayed throughout the siege often asserted their pedigree in public, they also critiqued, in small ways and in private conversations, the notion that moral capital is earned by having stayed, while moral condemnation is earned by leaving. They critiqued it through their assertions that by the time they wanted to leave, it was too late, suggesting that the major difference between those who stayed and those who left was not their moral worth, but the permeability of the siege borders at the time they made their decisions.

Conclusion

This chapter reposes the question of why a minority of Serbs remained in Sarajevo throughout the war, while the majority left. Through the voices of Serb women, I present an alternative account that unsettles the preferred narrative, in which those who left were complicit, and those who stayed did so out of moral conviction. The depiction of Serbs who left on the eve of the war as complicit obscures the fact that many departures were motivated by a fear, however misguided, that Serbs would soon be attacked. It also obscures siege's internal zone of retributive violence, and the thousands of departures that took place only after violence against Serbs escalated in the besieged city.

The version of events presented in this chapter is, like much of the rest of this dissertation, not meant to wholly discredit previous accounts, but to contribute an additional layer to what we know about the siege and its aftermath. The preferred narrative is not untrue, but it is partial and inadequate. To better understand the civilian experience of war, including what compels civilians to stay in or flee conflict zones, we need to hear more diverse accounts, and we especially need to step outside of simplistic binary frameworks.

This chapter has shown that, contrary to the preferred narrative, the decision to stay or go generally did not reflect Serb women's political allegiances or moral convictions. Some Serb women stayed in besieged Sarajevo and supported the VRS, others left even though they supported an independent Bosnia-Herzegovina. Many Serb women who stayed in the city believed in Bosnia's "common life" (*zajednički život*), and their remaining in the city has absolutely helped to preserve it, but this was not the *reason* that they stayed. Serb women's reasons for staying were more pragmatic, more mundane. The reasons themselves are unremarkable, and are in fact very similar to what other researchers have heard from other Sarajevans: age, family ties, property, lack of information (see Maček 2000). And they are similar, in their lack of heroics, to what researchers have found in conflict situations more broadly (Butalia 2000; Kalyvas 2006; Lubkemann 2008).

What is remarkable, then, is the difficulty, both locally and within academia, to recognize them as unremarkable. Instead, Serbs remaining inside Sarajevo is framed as a

gesture of altruism, a sacrifice in the name of one's neighbours, or a declaration of political allegiance. We need to ask why so much moral good is repeatedly credited to this decision. I have argued that it is a product of a moral economy of victimhood in which those who suffer must be seen as pure, innocent, and good, in order to be worthy of compassion. For Sarajevo Serbs, members of the perpetrator nation, staying in besieged Sarajevo endows them with moral currency, and ultimately renders them grievable.

This moral economy can also be read in the difficulty of recognizing Serb departures as humanitarian, as motivated by fear and violence, and not always and only ethno-nationalism. Some Serbs who left on the eve of the war did have prior knowledge of the coming siege, and left without warning their neighbours. Some even left to fight for the VRS, and became snipers who shot and killed civilians on the streets of besieged Sarajevo (Vuković 1993). But only telling this story without also recognizing the thousands who left as a result of retributive violence is damaging. It reflects a refusal to extend recognition of suffering to those who fall outside of the moral community (Morris 1996). Among those who stayed and those who left, there were bona fide traitors and altruists, but none of the Serb women in this study fit easily into either of these positions.

Part Two: Aftermaths

Anxiety

Part Two of this dissertation moves into an ethnography of the present. I explore the war's enduring aftermath, and in particular the consequences of silencing the siege's internal zone of violence.

When I arrived in Sarajevo to begin fieldwork, the war had been over for twenty-two years. In interviews, Serb women often drew a line of continuity between the violence of the siege years, and the continued hostility and stigmatization they felt in the present. Many lived with the feeling that others in Sarajevo viewed them as aggressors, or blamed them for the war. Yet while the violence and hostility Serb women experienced inside the siege (and in the immediate post-war years) was generally concrete and specific, I found that the ongoing stigmatization they described in the present was more often elusive, and difficult to discern ethnographically. Many women described social life as hostile, relating to me numerous recent encounters where they had been made to feel as though they did not belong. But these encounters were often mundane and unthreatening, or so it seemed to me, and interpreting them as hostile depended on having a feeling, an intuition, a sense of things. For example, one woman in her sixties shared the following encounter:

I was at the post office and the clerk asked me for my father's name to fill out some form, and I answered Miloš [a Serb name], and I could just feel all the eyes in the room look at me. Nobody said anything, but I was still very uncomfortable.

This narrative is typical of the narratives I gathered, in that the speaker locates hostility and stigmatization in an encounter that, on its surface, appears to be uneventful. This discrepancy became apparent to me not only in interviews, but also as I accompanied research participants on various social outings, or tagged along as they ran errands or shopped for groceries. I consistently failed to see what they saw in these subtle but charged encounters. To me at least, everyday life seemed to unfold smoothly.

In this chapter, I tune into the affective registers of post-war social life in order to explain this discrepancy. I develop a concept of *cumulative ethnic anxiety*, an anxiety that I argue captures the post-war social experience of ethnicity for many Serbs of the pre-war

generation. This anxiety is rooted both in the unacknowledged retributive violence against Serbs inside the siege, as well as in a complicated shame for the violence inflicted on fellow Sarajevans by Serb forces. It is an anxiety that can conjure threats where there may be none, but that also makes people perceptive to hostilities that may be latent.

I then move to make visible this anxiety through the concrete examples of the body and the city. I demonstrate how this anxiety manifests in the body in practices of concealment, as Serb women make small alterations in order to avoid being read by others as Serb. By altering pre-war gestures and body language that have become politicized since the war, Serb women purposefully perform *ethnic ambiguity* in order to move more easily through social life. I then turn to the cityscape of Sarajevo, describing how the physical removal of Serb symbols from the city gives concrete weight to Serb women's sense of precarious belonging.

Anthropological accounts of post-war Bosnia have tended to celebrate instances of ethnic ambiguity, hybridity, or fluidity (Hromadžić 2015; Markowitz 2010). Given the violent ethnicization of social and political life during and since the war, the anthropological valorization of ethnic ambiguity has been crucial for problematizing the constrictive ethnic schema of the post-war Bosnian state, which divides citizens into the impossibly near "ethnic boxes" of Bosniaks, Serbs, Croats, and "Others" (Hromadžić 2015, 70). Choosing to emphasize instances of ethnic hybridity, fluidity, and ambiguity, anthropologists have shed light on how people exist across, between, and in spite of imposed ethnic labels (Jansen 2015; Kolind 2008; Stefansson 2007). But as I show in this chapter, approaching post-war ethnic ambiguity from the perspective of Sarajevo Serbs suggests that this phenomenon should not be so easily celebrated. It reveals an enduring anxiety over belonging, attesting to the ways that violence alters the social experience of ethnicity, reconfiguring ethnic categories into moral boundaries.

Re-approaching Ambiguity

As we went for a slow walk along the river, Dunja, a retired woman in her sixties (see chapter 3, narrative 2), related the following story to me. In 1996, soon after the siege had ended, she went for a walk with an old friend. Before the war, he would have referred to himself as a Muslim, but by 1996, he identified as a Bosniak, the category officially introduced in 1993 that describes Bosnian Muslims in ethno-national rather than religious terms, on par with the ethno-national terms Serb (the majority of whom are Serbian Orthodox) and Croat (the majority of whom are Catholic). As they walked along the river promenade that had until only a few months earlier been the frontline of the siege, they talked about what their lives would look like now that the war was over, and what it would mean for people to live together after so much violence. She told him she felt nervous about being a Serb in the post-war city. He turned to her and said, “Oh, but to me, you are not a Serb. To me, you are... Bosnian Orthodox!”

Perhaps her friend was only trying to tell her that he did not associate *her* with the Serb ethno-nationalists who had besieged Sarajevo for nearly four years; after all, she had spent the entire war in the besieged city. But in his revocation of her ethnicity, she interpreted a more nefarious message from Bosniaks to Serbs, telling them they were no longer welcome in the city *as* Serbs, that their very ethnicity had become tainted by the war. And when she told me this story more than twenty years later, her indignation felt fresh:

Why should I now be Bosnian Orthodox? The Muslims are all Bosniaks now. They're building a nation for themselves, but they want to tear mine down? [...] I didn't want to be Bosnian Orthodox; I didn't want a new name. I just wanted to keep being a Serb like I was before the war, and I wanted that to not be a problem.

The war in Sarajevo has changed what ethnicity means. Before the war, ethnicity was one identity marker among numerous others, and there was meaningful space for citizens to hold multiple, hybrid, or ambiguous ethnic identities. But the logic of war and of the post-war state has polarized people into discrete ethnic groups and solidified the boundaries between them. The intended kindness of the statement, “To me, you are not a Serb,” reflects

that ethnic categories have become weighted with the moral categories engendered by war, as Serb has come to signal aggressor, and Bosniak, victim.

Since the end of the war in 1995, ethnic divisions have become institutionalized in the constitutional and administrative structure of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The peace accords that ended the war also partitioned the country into two ethnically defined entities: The (Bosniak-Croat) Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Republika Srpska. The ethno-nationalist infrastructure of the state is apparent at every level: in the ethnicized educational curricula that teach students conflicting versions of history; in the incompatible national calendars where one side celebrates as a victory what the other side mourns as a defeat. This infrastructure extends to the government census, which requires citizens to declare themselves ethno-nationally (as Bosniak, Croat, or Serb, henceforth B-C-S), or else be grouped with the undifferentiated remainder under the controversial category of Others (*Ostali*). Conspicuously absent on the census are the options to declare nationally as Bosnian-Herzegovinian without specifying ethnic affiliation; to declare “mixed” or multiple ethnic affiliations; or to be counted as a specific national or ethnic minority (e.g. Jewish, Romani, Albanian, etc.). Being listed as an Other has practical consequences, making it more difficult to access state-backed credit (including mortgages and student loans), or to obtain a government job (Markowitz 2007, 59). To make themselves legible to the state, then, citizens who may hold a more hybrid or ambiguous “off-census identity” in their private lives can nevertheless find themselves compelled to declare according to the identitarian logic of the state (Markowitz 2007, 58).

Responding to highly ethnicized portrayals of Bosnia in journalism and in the academy, as well as to the institutionalization of the B-C-S schema by the state, critical anthropological research has provided a much-needed corrective. Using ethnography to highlight the various ways that Bosnians relate to themselves and one another in ways that are not reducible to ethnicity, anthropologists have focused special attention on urban–rural distinctions (Maček 2009; Rolland 2004; Stefansson 2007), neighbourly relations or *komšiluk* (Bringa 1995; Sorabji 2008), gender relations (Helms 2010), and local, non-ethnic classificatory principles such as “decent people” or *pošteni ljudi* (Kolind 2008; see also Neofotistos 2004). This literature has provided important documentation that although

the war may have resulted in an ethnic partition of the Bosnian state, it did not manage to completely divide and compartmentalize Bosnian people.

Yet the understandable desire of anthropologists in Bosnia to document and advocate for ethnic fluidity, hybridity, and ambiguity has in certain cases resulted in an *over-correction*, or a cumulative portrayal of Bosnian post-war identification as more ethnically fluid than it really is (see also Hayden 2007; Maček 2011). One factor that has swayed anthropological preference towards ambiguity or hybridity is that these forms tend to be interpreted positively, either as a kind of anti-nationalist social and political critique (Hromadžić 2013; Kolind 2008) or as a form of resistance by those rendered invisible or undesirable by the B-C-S schema (Markowitz 2007).

Given the rapid ethnicization of social and political life after the collapse of Yugoslav socialism, carving out space between and across ethnic labels *is* indeed a form of resistance for those whose identities do not fit into the categories on offer. The issue with this conversation, however, is that singular ethnic identification becomes easily collapsed with negative political attributes such as ethno-nationalism. For example, Jansen (2016) recently noted that anthropologists have been so focused on documenting fluidity and hybridity that they have neglected to explore the appeal of ethno-nationalism. I agree with Jansen's appraisal of the literature; ethnographic methodology has much to offer towards understanding how people explain, enact, and embody ethno-nationalist frameworks in the course of their everyday lives (J. E. Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008; Militz 2019). But I would add that there is an important middle ground to be explored between ethnic hybridity and ethno-nationalism, as people who maintain singular ethnic identities do not necessarily hold ethno-nationalist political views (Giuliano 2011; Skey 2011). Indeed, the transformation of ethnic groups into homogeneous *political* groups was the major goal of ethno-nationalist elites in the former Yugoslavia (Gagnon Jr. 2004).

Dunja's indignation at being told, "To me, you are not a Serb," contains a deep anxiety that reflects numerous historical contestations over belonging in Yugoslavia. During the Second World War, when Bosnia was part of the fascist Independent State of Croatia (see Introduction), Ante Pavelić's government took a threefold approach to the

“problem” of the Serb (Christian Orthodox) minority: deportation, murder, and forcible conversion to Catholicism. The message for Serbs was that they could remain in the state only if they ceased to be Serbs, that is, if they “converted” into Croats. In 1942, the government developed a novel conversion strategy, and created a “Croatian Orthodox” church (Greble 2011). While the Serb woman’s friend may have been attempting to console her, his formulation of “Bosnian Orthodox” recalled a more violent history of erasure (see chapter 4, Minja’s narrative).

Yet her indignant response — “Why should I now be Bosnian Orthodox? The Muslims are all Bosniaks now. They’re building a nation for themselves, but they want to tear mine down?” — itself gestured to another history of contested belonging. For clarity, her use of the term “nation” here is customary; Bosnians rarely use the word “ethnicity” in the sense intended in English, and more often use variants of the word nation (*narod*, *nacija*). After the Partisan victory over fascism in the Second World War and the establishment of socialist Yugoslavia, it was Bosnian Muslims who struggled to be recognized as a distinct and equal nation. The dominant view among Serb and Croat politicians was that Bosnian Muslims were not a nation in their own right, but were really Serbs or Croats who had betrayed their nations by converting to Islam during Ottoman rule. Therefore, to be a Bosnian Muslim was considered merely a religious designation, not a national one. In the first socialist Yugoslav census in 1948, Bosnian Muslims had the option to declare as a recognized national group (e.g. Serbs, Croats), or to declare as Muslims of “undeclared” nationality — the implication being that “undeclared” Muslims had not yet decided whether they were actually Serbs or Croats. When a category recognizing “Muslims in a national sense” was introduced on the 1971 census, nearly 40 percent of the population of Bosnia declared this way.

Folded within this checkered history, the anxiety of Sarajevan Serbs proves to be double-edged. While practices of concealment may help quell Serb women’s worries of social stigmatization, they only exacerbate another, perhaps deeper, anxiety: that of being erased from the city altogether, of having one’s ethnicity/nation revoked. This double-edged anxiety is why the phenomenon of post-war ambiguity should not be so easily

celebrated for transgressing ethnic boundaries. Approached from the perspective of Sarajevan Serbs, it reveals a complex and asymmetrical politics of belonging.

“I Can Tell That They Are Thinking It”

From the beginning of fieldwork, my efforts at recruitment were hampered by the local reality that many Sarajevan Serbs choose not to identify publicly as Serb, opting for a more ambiguous “Sarajevan” or “Bosnian” identification in their professional or social lives. And, while this identification is certainly not exclusive to Serbs — many Sarajevans of various ethno-national backgrounds would also identify first and foremost as “Sarajevan” (Jansen 2015) — I heard a joke that aptly captured the sense of *concealment* with which some Serbs asserted this identification. The joke concerned the census category of Others (*Ostali*), generally thought to be comprised of anti-nationalist or hybrid-identifying people who have rejected the B-C-S schema. Turning this idea on its head, the joke went that the *Ostali* were really “Serbs in hiding.”

During the initial stages of recruitment (see chapter 2), I would often hear from contacts that they had a neighbour or colleague with a Serb name, but that they felt uncomfortable asking this person whether they indeed identified as Serb. Others would report back that their Serb acquaintances were “too scared” to participate in an interview. Or, to the opposite effect: “You should talk to my friend Vesna. She is very open and she does not hide [her ethnicity]. She is not like those diluted Serbs.”

Eventually, I began to meet more Serb women, and to conduct qualitative interviews, asking them about their everyday experiences of the city. I was sometimes startled by their responses which highlighted ethnic stigmatization and hostility. If we met at their homes, participants would speak openly about such matters. But often, when we met in public places, participants embodied their anxiety in various ways: a cautionary glance behind one’s back, leaning in closely to speak (see also Burnet 2012), or whispering. One woman in her sixties whom I always met on a bench by the river was constantly worried that passersby might listen in, so she would pause her narrative when people

strolled by us too closely, either literally falling silent or creating a gap through an elongated “and so... as I was saying...”

Another woman, in her seventies, who was incredibly soft spoken to begin with, suggested we conduct our interview in a cafe, but the public setting compelled her to lower her voice numerous times, to such an extent that it was almost impossible for me to hear her. I had to keep asking her to speak louder, which made her visibly uncomfortable, as her eyes darted around the room at the other tables, checking whether anyone was listening. I suggested we go for a walk instead, or relocate somewhere quieter, but she said she wanted to stay. She was telling me about her experience leaving Sarajevo during the siege, and her decision to return afterwards. In the end, I missed a lot of detail in what she said. But her body language and her refusal to raise her voice conveyed clearly that her narrative was not permissible in the public realm.

When during my final week in Sarajevo, a participant said to me, “I don’t know whether you’ve sensed it — the feeling that others are listening” (see chapter 1), I thought of this woman and her nearly inaudible voice, and of the woman on the park bench with her long, intentional pauses, and of the many other women who had insisted on meeting inside their apartments, where they could “speak more freely.” One woman in her sixties kept telling me she wanted to take me to a particular café, which she described as “elegant,” but each time I suggested we meet there she redirected us to her apartment, or to a walk outside: “That way I don’t have to watch what I say.”

When talking about the immediate post-war years, many women shared stories of open hostility, harassment, or employment discrimination (see also ICG 2008). These examples were usually concrete and specific. One woman recalled seeing a former acquaintance on the tram, who asked her why she was “still” in the city, implying that she, as a Serb, was unwelcome. Such encounters were common. Another woman shared her frustration at being discriminated against at work. She had remained employed throughout the siege (a law was passed early in the war that made it mandatory to continue working throughout the war, or else you could be fired), and soon after the war, she wanted to retire. The director of her firm informed her that the documents she needed in order to file for her

pension had been lost in a fire during the siege, when a shell had hit the main office. Yet since she had remained on friendly terms with her (Bosniak) colleagues, she knew that they had received their documents, and she questioned how a fire could burn only her papers. “There actually *had been* a fire, which made things more complicated. But the documents were not held in the main office [which was shelled by the VRS]; they were in an administrative office at another location.” After first pleading with the director, and then bribing him with fancy, imported sweets (difficult to obtain in the post-war economy) she eventually received her papers, uncharred.

Such narratives folded easily for me into the narratives of wartime presented in Part One. They reflected the heightened tension of the first few years that followed the siege. But I was often startled to hear participants describe the *ongoing* stigmatization they felt in the present. As a contrast, I had my own unfolding experience of the city. Although my inventive grammar and anglicized pronunciation betrayed my early emigration from Yugoslavia, my quintessentially Serbian name, my Ekavian accent (typically associated with Serbs from Serbia) and, regrettably, my Cyrillic tattoo effectively marked me as a Serb. And yet, I did not feel stigmatized in my day-to-day life. Because of this discrepancy between my participants’ narratives and my own experience of the city, I initially doubted some of my participants’ claims. I dismissed them as over-reacting or reading too much into encounters that were not actually hostile.

Consider the following example. One participant in her forties who lives with her parents in the suburbs, told me that when she meets new (Bosniak) people in central Sarajevo and tells them her (Serb) name, they often challenge her belonging by asking her whether she lives in Istočno Sarajevo, the Serb-dominated district located on the outskirts of the city, in Republika Srpska territory. Surprised by this, I asked her, “Really? People actually ask you that? This has happened to you more than once?” And she responded, a bit reluctantly, “Well, sometimes they ask, but sometimes I can tell that they are thinking it.”

Narratives like this one accumulated. Again and again, the hostility or stigmatization that participants alleged would de-materialize when I pressed for details. I

found that although some participants' narratives gave the impression of constant and open hostility in all domains of social life, when I would spend time with the same women out in the city (e.g. running errands, visiting a pharmacy, grocery shopping), I would see that their encounters were not overtly ethnicized or problematic — at least not in a way that was recognizable to me.

No one directly told them, “You do not belong here,” but they nevertheless read this message in the quick tightening of a mouth, in a gaze averted or held too long, in the raising of an eyebrow. I eventually came to realize that while the woman quoted above may indeed be mistaken about the inner monologues of her new acquaintances, it would be a disservice to dismiss her overall feeling of exclusion as being simply imaginary. The point is, she was not alone in the conviction, “*I can tell that they are thinking it.*”

Cumulative Ethnic Anxiety

To clarify, the sense of anxiety I am describing does not invade each and every social encounter, nor, of course, does it apply to every Serb person in Sarajevo. Several Serb women I met were so unfettered by this anxiety that they were surprised to hear it was a pattern among some of my research participants. As discussed in chapter 2, my project tended to attract participants who had experienced what they felt was ethnically targeted violence or hostility, and who had ethnicized grievances to air. As a result, my data overwhelmingly points to a sense of anxiety in the post-war period. There is no doubt that the post-war period could also be described in terms of the constructive labour of rebuilding lives and repairing ruptured social relations, but these more positive aspects were under-represented in my data.

To understand why Sarajevan Serbs may be reading hostility in benign interactions (or why they may be sensitive to subtle hostility in seemingly benign interactions), we must attend to the affective dimension of post-war social life. Anthropologists have increasingly tuned into affective registers in order to capture the bodily intensities and emotional ambiances of the field that too easily elude empirical observation (Davies 2010). Tracing

the atmospheric effects of violence, Das (2007) writes that violence is not only a physical event, but encompasses the disruption of social relationships, trust, and community affiliations. She argues that one subtle form of violation involves losing the assurance of context, or ceasing to “trust that context is in place” (9). Violence introduces a skepticism into the everyday, such that social life is not assured but is transposed into a key of anticipation, anxiety, or even fear.

In an anthropological reading of anxiety among Gorkhas (Nepali-Indians) in Darjeeling, Middleton (2013, 609) reframes anxiety from an individual psycho-physiological state to a collective embodiment that is “at once historical, social, and political.” He argues that, for groups whose belonging is contested or denied, the experience of anxiety cannot be explained by the singular encounters in which it unfolds. Mundane events or language can act as triggers that produce an anxious response, but the response is not *about* those triggers. Rather, it carries the affective weight of a longer history of exclusion and precarious belonging.

Similarly, Schoenberger and Beban (2018) describe how their own experiences of fear and surveillance while doing fieldwork on land acquisitions in Cambodia allowed them to better grasp the affective experience of their research participants who were caught in conflicts over land. Initially, their participants’ stated sources of fear “seemed banal ... and not particularly threatening” (1340): a phone call late at night. But as the researchers began to feel threatened and harassed themselves, they were able to grasp the *cumulative* ambiance of fear that surrounded the land conflict, shaping social relationships and disciplining bodies and behavior. By itself, a late-night phone call may not be particularly threatening, but when woven into a context of accumulating affective intensity, the phone call “took on a new resonance” (1340).

The anxiety that marks seemingly mundane social encounters for Sarajevan Serbs, like the one above, cannot be explained if it is *reduced* to those encounters. It signals a complex and *cumulative* anxiety about belonging that is rooted in internal violence of the siege of Sarajevo and the role of Serb forces in the war. Drawing a line of continuity

between the past and the present, one woman described a shift from “open” to “subtle” hostility, telling me, “it’s different now, but it’s still there.”

The residual anxiety of conflict charges social encounters that may, on the surface, seem to be innocuous or unremarkable, compelling Serb women to code these interactions as ethnicized, and to interpret them as hostile. An element of confirmation bias may also be at play: the tendency to interpret or seek out new information that confirms one’s pre-existing beliefs (Hart et al. 2009; Nickerson 1998). Explicit instances of being made to feel unwelcome either during the war or in the early post-war period may have established an enduring belief in some participants that they are indeed unwelcome. It may be enough for just one troublesome encounter to occur to color a person’s total impression of what social life is like.

This is not to say that Serb women are necessarily imagining their own stigmatization, but that mundane social encounters can quickly become charged with the affective intensity of a more violent past. It is not that a raised eyebrow directly evokes a raised voice, but rather that memories of past events become part of how we inhabit the world after violence.

Embodying Ethnic Anxiety

I turn now to the bodily alterations by which Sarajevan Serb women of the pre-war generations conceal their ethnicities, and also affirm them through this concealment. In the subtle movements through which they alter pre-war gestures and greetings that they once enacted without a second thought, we can witness how the social experience of ethnicity has shifted for Serb women who knew life before the war. We can see how a residual but ever-accumulating ethnic anxiety conjures threats where there may be none, or makes people perceptive to hostilities that may be latent.

Ethnic differences (or more precisely, ethno-religious differences) between Serbs, Bosniaks, and Croats in Sarajevo are, for the most part, invisible, with the major exception of religious clothing worn by some practicing Muslims. Ethnic difference is also more or

less inaudible in Sarajevo, since Bosnians of all ethno-national backgrounds generally speak in the regional Ijekavian accent. The more frequent audible distinction heard in Sarajevo is between the accents of long-term urban residents and rural newcomers, reflecting the influx of rural refugees into Sarajevo during and after the war (but see Hromadžić 2018 on how urban-rural hierarchies in Bihać are embodied in ways of eating, walking, and so on; Maček 2009; Stefansson 2007).

Nevertheless, ethnicity is expressed by and ascribed to bodies through other cues. When I met with participants in public places, I noted that they would greet me with two kisses, one on each cheek, whereas some of the same women would greet me with three kisses when I met them at their homes. The three-kiss greeting is associated with Serbs, and several participants told me that they purposefully kiss twice in public because they were sure that “people count kisses” in order to decipher who among them is a Serb. One woman in her seventies explained, “It wasn’t written down anywhere; it wasn’t the law. But, after the war, people were very aware of it. They made sure to only give two kisses.” She recalled that when she greeted a friend with three kisses shortly after the war, he leaned in for a fourth, saying, “Let’s add one more, just so it’s not quite three (*da ne bude baš tri*).”

Yet what would actually happen if onlookers counted to three was always left unclear. Consider the following exchange (reconstructed from field notes) between me and Katarina (K), a manicurist in her late sixties:

K: I always kiss twice now; I have just gotten used to it. But also, people count kisses now. They don’t want to be kissing three times.

Me: What if a friend were to give *you* three kisses when they came in here [the nail salon]?

K: Actually, that has happened. My friend who is Muslim came in and for some reason she gave me three kisses, and I could see all the ladies [customers in the salon] give me a look. They must have thought that she was my relative visiting from Republika Srpska, Bojana or Dragana or something! [Note that she is not listing actual relatives, only offering “Bojana” and “Dragana” as typical Serbian names. Note, also, that in her scenario, this relative is visiting from Republika Srpska and is therefore unfamiliar with the local context. In other words, she is suggesting that

a Sarajevan Serb would not kiss three times]. So, I decided to have some fun with it. A few minutes later, I said “Hey, Aida” [so that the customers would know her friend was Muslim based on her name], and asked her some question, and I got to watch their faces as they tried to figure it all out.

Me: Why did she kiss you three times, then?

K: Oh, I think she is always trying to show how much she doesn’t care about all those things, about who is what. I mean, I don’t care, I would kiss her two times or three times or one hundred times if I’ve missed her so much! But it did make it a bit awkward for me.

Me: What kind of look did the customers give you?

K: Just a look.

Me: Would they say anything?

K: No, nobody would say anything, but they just sort of look at you.

Me: So, what were they saying by the look?

K: People count so that they know. They don’t have to say anything.

When I asked participants how many kisses their greetings involved before the war, they told me that they did not really know, since nobody counted before the war. A retired professor in her seventies said, “Maybe I would kiss two times or maybe three times. I don’t remember ever counting so I can’t say what I did.” Another woman, also in her seventies, also retired, said: “I always kissed twice or just once actually. I don’t know, I just like it better. It’s quicker. How long do you really want to spend kissing people hello?”

Another small bodily habit that suddenly took on new significance also concerned the number three. In the lead-up to the war, using the thumb, index- and middle-fingers to signify the number three (as opposed to the index-, middle-, and ring-fingers) became a symbol associated with Serb ethno-nationalism, as it was used as a form of salute at rallies (Maksić 2017). For the women I interviewed who happened to gesture three this way

naturally, without intending any ethno-nationalist messages, this new significance put them in an uncomfortable position. One woman who was in her forties when the war ended told me that, after the war, she spent time at home practicing the “other” gesture for three, quickly and repeatedly assembling her hand until it felt automatic, the way a guitar student might practice a new chord. “I didn’t want to order three *kifle* (pastries) at the bakery and have everyone look at me.” She acknowledged that it was unlikely that anyone would say anything negative to her about the gesture, but she explained, “It’s enough for just one person to tell you ‘Hey, don’t show me three fingers,’ to ruin your day. It’s easier to just avoid [that possibility] altogether.”

As the war changed the meaning of ethnicity in Sarajevo, sharpening boundaries and cultivating antagonism between ethnic groups, everyday practices that had benignly signaled ethnic difference began to take on a new weight. Gestures that had previously been enacted without a second thought became avenues by which ethnicity, and along with it hierarchies of morality and belonging, were inscribed onto bodies. They also became an avenue by which Serbs could conceal their ethnicity in the course of social life, unmarking themselves in order to blend in.

These bodily practices of concealment bear a family resemblance to practices that took place inside the siege. Chapter 3 described a woman named Milka’s concern when she saw her friend dressed in black mourning clothes, as she was worried this Orthodox custom would visibly mark her and make her a target for retributive violence. While Milka asserted that the siege was “no time for customs,” other women found adaptive ways to conceal this same custom, enabling them to continue to practice it discreetly. One woman, a retired banker in her seventies, explained that she would limit herself to only one black article of clothing during the siege, thus keeping the custom in a way that was inconspicuous. Another took a cue from the Greek Orthodox tradition, which she believed allowed dark purple instead of black, so she adopted this custom temporarily.

A Complicated Shame

Feelings of ethnic anxiety are not unique to Sarajevan Serbs but are common across various contexts of post-war co-existence. Palmberger (2016) describes a Bosniak woman who feels certain that when she goes to the Croat side of Mostar, people on the street can “tell” she is a Bosniak, even though nothing about her appearance would give this away. The drive to conceal one’s identity is also not unique: in World War II, Nazi-occupied Sarajevo, Jews disguised themselves as Muslim women to escape deportation, or, across the border in Serbia, took on Serb names and presented themselves as Serb refugees (Greble 2011).

But the anxiety of Sarajevan Serbs is unique in that it comes from a blend of persecution and perpetration, suffering and shame. It comes from memories of violence committed against Serbs inside the siege’s internal zone of violence, and from a complicated shame for the violence committed against fellow Sarajevans by Serb forces. I refer to this as a complicated shame to emphasize that it was felt differently by different women, and that some did not feel it at all. Certain participants felt a sense of collective *responsibility* (as opposed to individual responsibility or collective guilt) of Serbs for crimes that were committed “in their name” (see Gordy 2013). Other participants were unwilling to engage with ideas of collective responsibility, but they strongly felt that others in Sarajevo were ashamed *of* them, or *expected* them to feel ashamed. Dunja, the woman who rejected the label of “Bosnian Orthodox,” put it this way:

For some people, if you are Serb you are automatically guilty... I don’t like to complain, because then people will very quickly tell me, “If you don’t like it, you can just leave.” But I don’t feel that I belong in Republika Srpska either... There are some people who look at me like they hate me, like I am guilty for everything. But I didn’t contribute to this war in the slightest way, not even with my pinky finger.

The claims to innocence and victimhood present in this excerpt will be explored in greater depth in the next chapter; in this chapter, I am concerned with the sense of anxiety and precarious belonging that compels this women to read others’ gazes as accusatory, and that compels her to imagine hostile words that have not actually been spoken: *If you don’t like it, you can just leave.*

The unique blend of persecution and perpetration that drives Sarajevo Serbs to conceal their ethnicity contributes to an important distinction between the concealment practices of Sarajevo Serbs, and what Bryant (2016) terms “constructive ambiguity,” or the labor of managing difference in order to achieve or maintain everyday sociality in post-conflict spaces. Ethnographers in Bosnia have observed this strategy in various forms, noting how Bosnians skillfully make use of silence or ambiguous language to set aside tensions, avoid confrontations, and get on with daily life (Eastmond and Selimovic 2012; Jansen 2013a; Stefansson 2010). For example, Jansen (2013) describes the common practice of blaming everything that is wrong with the country on “politics” (*politika*), without specifying which politics or whose politics are precisely to blame (see also Smajlović 1995). Since there is a “shared aversion of *politika*” on all sides, this is an ambiguous position on which just about everyone can — at least on the surface — agree (Jansen 2013a, 238).

While the concealment practices of Sarajevo Serb women closely resemble the phenomenon of constructive ambiguity, they shed light on how the terrain of ambiguity is necessarily navigated differently by stigmatized or morally compromised groups (for examples from LGBTQ research, see Malterud and Bjorkman 2016; Meyer 2003). Although the cultivation of constructive ambiguity requires the engagement of all parties, the stakes are not symmetrical. For Sarajevo Serbs, an ethnic minority grappling with the stigma of being associated with the war-time aggressor, ambiguity is a performative strategy that reflects a deep anxiety about belonging in the post-war city.

But what does it mean for Serb *women* to feel this shame, to feel cast as aggressors in the collectivist script of the war? I noticed with some surprise that then as participants explicitly contested the ascription of aggressor, they never leveraged their *gender* to contest it. Given that post-war women’s activist organizations in Bosnia have mobilized around gendered terms (mothers, widows) in order to claim moral authority and effect political change (Helms 2013; Wagner 2008), I had expected to hear a similar discourse from the women that I interviewed, a discourse positioning women as peacemakers, or as innocent victims of *male* ethno-nationalist violence (for a critique, see Kouvo and Levine 2008; Žarkov 2007; cf. Hunt, 2011). However, participants generally felt that being Serb *women*

did not soften their position in the eyes of others. They recalled war-time accusations by neighbours that they were colluding with the snipers, that they were spies, or that they had shipped off their sons to fight for the VRS, even while they themselves stayed in Sarajevo (see chapter 3). They felt unjustly scorned as aggressors, but they viewed this as *an ethnicized* rather than a gendered ascription. In rejecting the label of aggressor, they repeatedly emphasized that they had stayed in the city throughout the siege, thus claiming their “wartime pedigree” (Sorabji 2006, 8) and implicitly diverting blame to the many Serbs, men and women, who had left quietly on the eve of the war (see chapter 4).

However, even though participants did not conceive of gender as something that “conjugated” their ethnicity (Clammer 2015) or effectively altered their moral positioning, there may well be gendered differences in how Sarajevan Serbs actually experience or express their feelings of ethnic anxiety. For Serb women, the ascription of aggressor may ultimately be more abstracted than it is for men, who can be accused of literally pulling a trigger. As Sorabji (2006) discusses through her concept of the “wartime pedigree,” what makes it difficult for some Sarajevans to behave warmly towards stranger Serbs is the impossibility of simply looking at a person and knowing what they did during the war, or who they may have killed. While Serb women’s assertions that they stayed in the city can be read as a way of claiming this pedigree, the under-explored *gendered* implications of Sorabji’s findings suggests that hostility towards Sarajevan Serb men may indeed be more prevalent, or more explicit, than it is for Serb women, although more research is needed.

Anxieties of Erasure

While Serb women’s efforts to present as ethnically ambiguous helped to quell the worry of stigmatization, they were underscored by another anxiety: the anxiety of being erased from the city altogether. In walking interviews (see chapter 2), this came across most visibly, as the changes to the cityscape lent concrete weight to Serb women’s sense of precarious belonging.

During and after the war, many markers of Serb history and culture were removed, as were many markers of Yugoslav socialism. These changes began to take place during the war with the removal of signs, a script associated with Serbs⁴⁵ (the local language had been previously been written interchangeably with both Latin and Cyrillic scripts) and the changing of street names (Skupština grada Sarajeva 1994a, 1994b, 1994c). However, these changes became more systematic after the war, as a commission was immediately created to perform these tasks (Robinson, Engelsoft, and Pobric 2001). Robinson, Engelsoft, and Pobric (2001, 967) argue that the renaming and de-Cyrillicizing process was “a conscious effort” to inscribe a uniquely *Bosnian* heritage onto the capital city of the newly sovereign state, by removing many of the previous associations with Serbia, Croatia, and Yugoslavia, but that this was often achieved by referring to specifically *Bosniak* historical or political figures.

In walking interviews, participants noted these changes to the city as a form of erasure. Several women would point out the name of the street we were walking on had changed, and would tell me what the street used to be called. In most examples, the pre-war names were associated with Serb historical figures or with socialist Yugoslavia, whereas the current names were distinctly *Bosniak*.

However, it is worth noting that every regime that has held power in Bosnia has liberally changed the city’s street names to reflect its power — including the Yugoslav socialist regime. Indeed, the seeming “*Bosniakization*” of street names was sometimes a *return* to a street’s historically Muslim name. For example, the downtown street that was re-named Ferhadija in 1993 actually bore this same name in the sixteenth century. In 1928, it was re-named after Yugoslavian King Petar, then re-named Ferhadija again during World

⁴⁵ The official language in Bosnia during Yugoslav socialism was called Serbo-Croatian. The 1954 Novi Sad Agreement gave equal status to two variants (eastern, associated with Belgrade, and western, associated with Zagreb); two scripts (Cyrillic, associated with Serbian, and Latin associated with Croatian); and two pronunciations (Ekavian associated with Serbian, and Ijekavian associated with Croatian). In Sarajevo, students were taught both scripts and could use them interchangeably. A *Bosniak* variant of the language is not mentioned in the 1954 Novi Sad Agreement, since *Bosniaks/Bosnian Muslims* were not recognized as a national, as opposed to religious, group until the 1971 census. For more on Serbo-Croatian and the languages that followed it, see D. Greenberg (2004).

War II, then named after Yugoslav Partisan leader Vaso Miskin Crni after World War II, before being re-re-named Ferhadija in 1993 (Zlatar et al. 2006).



Figure 13: A road sign with the Cyrillic writing spray-painted out
Source: Photo by author.

The changing of street names would come up often in casual conversation whenever directions were involved. Consider the following exchange, between me and two Serb women in their sixties. The two women were neighbours, and while I was visiting one of them (Tanja), her neighbour (Ana) stopped by and joined us. They had asked me what I had been up to socially, and I responded that I had gone with some friends to Kino Bosna, a socialist-era movie theatre converted to a bar with live Yugoslavian folk music:

Tanja: Kino Bosna? Look at that, she knows more about the city than we do! I haven't even heard of this "Kino Bosna," have you?

Ana: Is that on Alipašina⁴⁶ street? Alipašina used to be called Djure Djakovića⁴⁷...I don't know the names now. And I don't know that Kino either! I knew Kino Tesla, Kino Dubrovnik, but I don't know what they're called now.

Tanja: A friend [who lived in Sarajevo before the war] came to town, and I asked her where she had gone out, and — just imagine! — she responded like this: "Vase Miskina⁴⁸ beside Kino Romanija beside the Gallery." All three of those names, none of them exist anymore!

Ana: I don't know the new names because I don't go to town [downtown]. I don't have a reason to.

Me: How new are they?

Ana: New — postwar.

Tanja: Another time, I was going to meet up with a friend, and she asked, "Do you know where the place is?" and I said "No, but just send me the address, I'll find it." She gives me an address — Savfet-bega Bašagića⁴⁹ [she pronounces this slowly and unconfidently], I think. And I get a city map... It's Miloša Obilića! [Laughs] I *know* Miloša Obilića!⁵⁰

Ana: Me too, but I wouldn't know the other one.

Despite the fact that many of the street names were changed over twenty years ago, the two women refer to the post-war names as "new," and almost seem to refuse to learn them. Serb women often felt excluded by the new names as they tended to either replace previous

⁴⁶ Alipašina street is named after Ali Pasha, a sixteenth-century Ottoman statesman who ordered the building of a mosque in Sarajevo.

⁴⁷ Djuro Djaković was an early communist revolutionary and metal worker who was executed in 1929.

⁴⁸ Vaso Miskin was a Yugoslav Partisan leader.

⁴⁹ Dr. Savfet-bey Bagašić was a Bosnian writer (who wrote under the name Mirza Safvet) who published from the 1890s to the 1930s

⁵⁰ Miloš Obilić is the hero from a Serbian epic poem, who killed Sultan Murad during the 1389 Battle of Kosovo.

Serb names or reject what the women felt was a shared socialist history for a distinctly Bosniak history.⁵¹ One woman pointed out that while the street named after the Yugoslav People's Army certainly needed a new name after this army attacked the city, it felt hurtful that it was renamed in 1993 after the Green Berets, the Bosniak paramilitary organization that had been a source of fear for many Serbs in the besieged city.⁵²

In addition to the changes in name, the plaques that marked city streets were changed from blue to green, the colour associated with Islam. In 2008, entire sidewalks downtown were painted green, which was taken as a kind of provocation by many Serbs and Croats, although the mayor stated it was merely an effort to increase the city's "greenery" given the amount of trees that were cut down during the siege. The green paint has since been removed.

Ristic (2015) makes use of these colours and changes to describe the "intangible boundary" between Sarajevo and Istočno Sarajevo, the Serb-dominated suburb on the outskirts of the city, in Republika Srpska territory. While Istočno Sarajevo uses blue plaques as in the pre-war period, all the plaques are now printed exclusively in Cyrillic, thus marking a symbolic boundary between the two parts of the city, and the two ethnic entities in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

During walking interviews, women frequently noted the near absence of Cyrillic text, including street signs, shop signs, newspapers, books in bookstores, menus, and so

⁵¹ As mentioned, street names have changed with every regime in Bosnia. This is particularly evident in the last example Tanja offers, of (Dr.) Savfet-bega Bašagića street. This street was named after Miloš Obilić in 1931, then re-named after Dr. Savfet-bega Bašagića during World War II, then re-named after Miloš Obilić *again* after World War II, then re-named after Dr. Savfet-bega Bašagića *again* in 1995. To take another example, the main thoroughfare that runs along the Miljacka river was constructed during the Austro-Hungarian period and named after the National Administrator, Baron John Appel. After World War I, it was named after Duke Stepo Stepanović, a Serb who fought in the Yugoslav Army. During the Nazi Occupation in World War II, it was named after Adolf Hitler. Then after WWII it was re-named again after Stepo Stepanović. In 1993, it was named after Ban Kulin, the Ban of the medieval Bosnian state. (For more on street name changes, see Zlatar et al. 2006, 2007).

⁵² This street has had many names over the years. During Austro-Hungarian occupation it was called Franz Josip street, then King Petar street during the first Yugoslavia, then during the fascist occupation in World War II it bore only the name Street number 1 (see Zlatar et al. 2006).

forth. The Sarajevo daily newspaper, *Oslobodjenje*, stopped publishing in Cyrillic during the war, whereas the previous practice had been to alternate between Cyrillic and Latin scripts. This decision was actually made by a Serb editor, which Gjeltén (1995) suggests reflected the added burden on Serbs inside the siege to distance themselves from the wartime aggressor. Several women commented that they would not read a Cyrillic book or newspaper in public, and that during the war, they had purposefully destroyed Cyrillic books in order to reduce the potential for hostility during apartment searches (see Softić 1996). Vesna, a retired editor in her seventies (see chapter 3, narrative 2) said:

I had to burn them. If I threw them in the dumpster, they would sit there forever and signal to everyone that a Serb lived there. People were burning all kinds of things to keep warm. Dressers, cabinets. So I burned them. I had to.

The changes in the cityscape after the war materially reinforced Sarajevan Serbs' anxiety over belonging. The erasure of Serb symbols from the cityscape helped to cultivate a context where Serbs would make efforts to conceal their ethnicity, and not draw attention to themselves as Serbs. Thus those who were sure that others around them were "counting kisses" reserved the practice of kissing three times for the private space of their homes, or for mono-ethnic Serb spaces.

But even while these women felt they could not openly kiss three times in public, they did not seem to *want* to. Their anxiety about being erased from the city, about having their ethnicity revoked, would not be resolved by performing a *heightened* Serb ethnicity, such as insisting on kissing three times. Because what they missed was not the social permission to kiss three times, but the pre-war sociality of not counting kisses at all. Similarly, while many Serb women critiqued the apparent erasure of Serb-ness from the cityscape through the removal of Cyrillic signs and the changing of street names, what they seemed to miss was a social world in which Cyrillic was unremarkable, in which it was only an alphabet and not a symbol of aggression.

This was what the woman quoted in the introduction meant when she said, "I just wanted to keep being a Serb like I was before the war, and I wanted that to not be a problem." Being a Serb like one was before the war meant being a Serb without the additional weight of being seen as an aggressor. It meant never worrying about which

fingers to raise to make three. It meant kissing three times, or twice, or once, or however many times one felt like because the kisses signified a friendly greeting and not a political claim.

Remembering Care

The ethnic anxiety I describe in this chapter is difficult to entangle from another, much broader anxiety affecting Sarajevans as they navigate a post-war, post-socialist “transition.” Since the physical violence of war ended, Bosnians have faced other more structural and prolonged forms of violence: high unemployment and precarious employment; homelessness and poverty; devalued industries and brain drain. These problems affect Bosnians regardless of ethnic affiliation, even as they are routinely ethnicized by nationalist politicians (Hromadžić 2015; Jansen 2015; Kurtović 2015, 2018; Touquet 2015). Milka, a woman in her sixties (see chapter 1, narrative 1), put it this way:

The nationalists say they need to protect us from each other. But people aren't threatened by one another — we *know* how to live together! We lived together without problems in Yugoslavia. No, what people are threatened by is the *economy*, by not having a job. *That's* a threat, not other people.

The unemployment rate in Bosnia is approximately 40 percent, with a youth unemployment rate of 57.7 percent — the second highest in the world. These numbers do not reflect the significant amount of people who work in the grey market. During the siege years, participation in the grey market was an everyday survival strategy for ordinary Sarajevans (Andreas 2008). Now, a primary motivation for working in the parallel economy is to escape the high social security salary deductions, totalling 43.5 per cent (including pension insurance, health insurance, and unemployment insurance) (ILO 2009).

The grey economy thus acts as a cushion against unemployment but it simultaneously cripples the social security system: since workers in the informal economy do not pay into the pension fund, the pensions that are paid out are, in turn, chronically inadequate (ILO 2009). Pensions are so small that people sometimes wonder aloud how pensioners manage to live off of them, and the fact of the matter is that many pensioners

continue to work until they are physically unable to do so, or survive only with the help of remittances from family living or working abroad.

Against the present context of precarity, against an economy which has become a threat to most people, many Sarajevans remember socialism as a form of *care* (see also Jašarević 2017). One woman in her seventies explained to me, “Our socialism wasn’t communism, you know. It wasn’t Stalinism. It *really* was a socialism for the people. There was care for the people (*bilo je briga za čovjeka*).” Another woman, already in her late sixties but still working to support her adult children (and their children) answered slowly, thinking aloud: “What did socialism *feel like*? Hmm... You had a sense that someone was standing behind your back. Someone whom you could address (*obratiti se*), someone whom you could lean on.”

As Jansen (2015) has pointed out, the paradox of the Bosnian state is that it is simultaneously too absent and too present, ubiquitous and yet inadequate. Its “exaggerated presence” (19) stems from its overly complicated tripartite bureaucratic power-sharing structure that sorts people into ethnic compartments, meanwhile its absence is felt as a lack of system, lack of forward momentum, and lack of support. As the woman above aptly put it, it is not a state you can “lean on.”

The depiction of socialism as care was consistent across interviews with many women, whether they were remembering the economic, political, or social experience of life under state socialism. Sitting on her balcony, smoking endless cigarettes, in a voice full of a pensive kind of sadness, one woman in her sixties said to me, “Our life was wonderful. It never crossed my mind that I would want to live anywhere else. People could do things; people had things (*moglo se, imalo je*). They were beautiful times, but now they are over.” Another woman, long retired, and letting me join her as she ran errands, exclaimed, “How well we lived! There were factories! People worked!” She gestured widely to the main road connecting downtown Sarajevo with the suburbs, and said, “There would be bus after bus after bus taking workers to their jobs. Now people just loiter in cafes and do nothing.” Another woman, in her sixties, drinking instant coffee with me and her co-workers during a slow day at her shop, said something quite similar: “Everybody

worked. Everybody had a job. Nobody complained, because they had nothing to complain about. Nobody was ever hungry. Now, everybody is hungry; everybody complains.” Her co-workers nodded knowingly, but I smiled in spite of myself and she gathered that I did not quite believe her. She added, a little sternly, “I’m not just being nostalgic. That’s how it was.” A similar affirmation came from another woman in her seventies, sipping a macchiato with me in one of Sarajevo’s shiny new shopping malls: “I know it sounds [to you] like a fairy tale, but that’s really how it was.” She paused. “I guess it *was* a fairy tale, compared to now.”

Nostalgia should not be dismissed for being inaccurate: it is a politicized form of remembering through which people not only narrate the past but also critique the present and imagine the future (Sugiman 2004; Tonkin 1992). Some scholars have pointed to the reparative potential of “yugonostalgia” for Bosnia’s divided ethnic groups insofar as this popular nostalgia constitutes a shared narrative about the past and emphasizes shared grievances in the present (Maksimović 2017; Petrović 2013). Engaging in yugonostalgia in social contexts allows Bosnians to avoid more sensitive issues related to the war, and thus provides a discursive common ground that can foster social interactions across political divisions (Palmberger 2008). Kurtović and Hromadžić (2017, 267) align nostalgia with “a new political form,” whereby a possible political future is imagined outside of the hegemonic ethno-nationalist framework. In narratives of yugonostalgia, ordinary Bosnians, regardless of ethnicity, are positioned together as a *narod* (people, nation), and as economic victims of war and upheaval (Hromadžić 2013; see also Risør 2018 on “civil victimhood”). In this reorientation, *narod* comes to fill the function of *class*, imagined against the corrupt and wealthy political elite (Kurtović and Hromadžić 2017).

Before the war broke out, international spectators considered Yugoslavia to be well-poised to make a successful transition to market capitalism, having begun market reforms in the 1980s (Woodward 1995a). Many Yugoslavs anticipated the end of socialism, but they envisioned another sort of post-socialist future than the one that arrived (see also Alexievich 2016). While across Eastern Europe, newly independent post-socialist states were applying for EU membership, Yugoslavia was embroiled in a violent war. Popular nostalgia for the socialist past takes its structure from the devastating experience

of this war, as people not only remember and narrate the comfortable lives they led under socialism, but also imagine the lives they could have been leading in a different post-socialist future, if there had not been a war.

The disappointment of the post-war years, their failure to revert the quality of life back to the “normalcy” associated with socialism, are what make this nostalgia effective as a form of critique. Socialism is remembered as “a past that had a future” (Jansen 2015, 182), a past where people expected that the stability and comfort of their lives would continue on, where people planned for their futures with relative confidence. Even the war, for all its deprivations, held within it the hope that after it ended, life would go back to how it was (Čengić 2016; Maček 2009). The act of recalling this past in the context of present disappointments makes an implicit (and sometimes explicit) political claim, that, as Čengić puts it, life “can be different, and we know that because it actually used to be different” (2016, 72).

But while yugonostalgia holds reparative potential for inter-ethnic social interactions and new forms of political mobilization, it also seems to sharpen the ethnic anxiety of Serb women in post-war Sarajevo. Their feelings of ethnic stigmatization are starkly contrasted against their memories of socialism as care, and compounded by a more general disenfranchisement that has marked Bosnia’s so-called “transition.”

For instance, for many young people, emigration is an attractive option (see Hromadžić 2018). Several of the women I interviewed had children who were either working or studying abroad. One woman lamented about her son, a university-educated man in his mid-thirties who had recently gone to work in Western Europe, without documents:

What a shame it is that my children have to leave because the state offers them nothing. But what can we do? What can we do? That’s the way our state is. You just have to accept it and move on.

Another woman said of her young daughter: “I hope that when my daughter grows up, that she doesn’t stay here. I hope she has more ambition than that.”

Although it was not explicitly stated, the emptying of the state and the physical separation of generations likely compounds Serb women's feelings of erasure in post-war Sarajevo. Beyond the de-Cyrillicization of the city, beyond the changing of street names, beyond the decrease of the Serb population from 25 percent to less than four, many Serb women are confronted by the reality that future generations of their family will no longer call Sarajevo home.

In the immediate postwar period, it was particularly difficult to disentangle general economic disenfranchisement from ethnic discrimination. Although laws were put in place by the post-war Federation government that people could not be discriminated against for employment due to ethnic affiliation, many participants felt that these laws were often not enforced. As was the case for many Bosniaks and Croats seeking employment in Republika Srpska, Serbs in the post-war Federation often found themselves socially unemployable (see also ICG 2008). One participant in her fifties, who had fled Sarajevo with her family during the siege and returned afterwards, described the economic discrimination of Serbs as an "unwritten rule":

On paper you could work, of course. But nobody would hire you. I was lucky to get a job in my field, which is very specialized. But my parents? Who would give them a job? Because of that, they were driven out of here.

She explains that her parents' inability to secure employment after the war attests to how their decision to leave the city during the siege created a rupture in their pre-war social networks (see chapter 4), networks they would have needed to draw on in order to find employment. Those who stayed in Sarajevo throughout the siege and managed to keep their social networks intact were able to draw on these networks afterwards, even if not immediately afterwards. For example, one retired cultural worker in her seventies said:

I stayed in Sarajevo during the entire war, but when it ended, my work no longer had a place for me. My name was just crossed off the list. For two years, I couldn't find any work, but I made it through with the help of good friends. Good decent people. I'm not bitter about it. I understand the situation. What can I say? After the war, I had an uncomfortable last name.

Her positive outlook here, and her emphasis on the *good people* who were eventually able to help her as opposed to the people who crossed her name off the list, are not accidental.

She was one of several interviewees whose motivation in participating seemed to be to provide me with positive stories, assuming correctly that my research topic would tend to draw negative ones (see chapter 2). Similar to Snežana (chapter 3 narrative 4; and chapter 4), her narrative weaves positive and negative elements together, but purposefully re-orient the listener towards the positive. Snežana, after explaining that her husband was accused of leaving Sarajevo to join the VRS, redirected the attention to her friend's intervention, as he warned her of the local gossip: "My Dušan is right there in Sarajevo and they're saying he's in Pale. You know? What I want to tell you is that there were wonderful people. Wonderful people" (see chapter 4).

The narratives of economic discrimination here must be understood in the context of an injured and corrupted post-war economy in which many Sarajevans, not just Serbs, were also unable to find employment. Employment often depended (and still depends) on SDA party membership and thus systematically disadvantages Sarajevan Serbs, Croats, Jews, and others, but it also disadvantages those Bosniaks that did not want to join the SDA (see Kurtović 2016). On the other hand, many state-level government ministries are required to employ a certain quota of Serbs and Croats, and this is also common practice in many of the internationally-funded non-governmental organizations that proliferated after the war (Helms 2013). The relatively small number of Serbs and Croats in Sarajevo thus puts them at a relative advantage for securing quota positions.

Although the bleak economic situation affects everyone, some of my research participants could not help but wonder, as one woman in her forties put it, "Am I unable to find a job because *nobody* can find a job — or is it because of my [Serb] name?" With this question, she unknowingly comes into conversation with Milka, quoted earlier, who asserted that while nationalist politicians promote a fear of the ethnic other, the real threat facing Bosnians is not ethnic, but rather economic. In asking whether the problem is economic or ethnic, this participant weights the possible threats against her, without being able to conclusively ascertain their relative effects. The post-war state is an anxiety-inducing state, compounding the anxiety of its ethnic minorities.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the cumulative anxiety of Serb women in the aftermath of the siege, an anxiety that at once compels them to conceal their ethnicity in the course of social life, but that in turn exacerbates a deeper anxiety about erasure. Through this anxiety, we can read how the categories of victim and aggressor have remained fastened to ethnic labels, making these women anxious that they will be read by others not merely as Serbs, but as aggressors, as nationalists, as enemies.

The anxiety I described in this chapter is elusive, and difficult to capture ethnographically. Many of the examples presented depend on tacit knowledge and intuition, *feeling* the eyes in the room. They depend on reading small, non-verbal cues that carry intense affective weight. Because “nobody said anything,” I cannot know for sure whether the raising of an eyebrow or the quick tightening of a mouth are harmless or hostile motions. From my perspective, there is a notable discrepancy between the sense of anxiety that compels some Serb women to present ambiguously, and what I would describe as the relatively unproblematic encounters that, at least on the surface, seem to make up social life in Sarajevo.

But while this discrepancy initially led me to dismiss my participants’ claims of hostility as unfounded or over-sensitive, *attending* to this anxiety ultimately tells us more about how violence has altered the meaning of ethnic categories, and the possibilities for inhabiting them. Following this feeling allows us to draw a line of continuity between the physical violence of the war and the residual anxiety that seeps into the present, manifesting in the body through gestures that are so small they might seem inconsequential. Pulling away after two kisses, drawing the thumb and pinky together to make three.

Walking interviews allowed me to turn to the cityscape, and women’s relationship to it, to capture how the removal of Serb symbols from the city during and after the war has informed Serb women’s sense of precarious belonging. The erasure of Serb symbols from the city gives concrete weight to participants’ sense that they are unwelcome in the city *as* Serbs, and while they would not read a Cyrillic book in public, they nevertheless

critique this erasure in small ways, for example by refusing to learn the new (post-war) street names.

This research opens the door to important questions about how Serb ethnicity is felt by the *post-war* generation in Sarajevo. The concealment practices of the women in this study involve consciously altering *pre-war* bodily habits that became politicized since the war. It is possible that these habits did not extend to the next generation, given that they grew up in a social context where “people count kisses” (or at least their parents think they do). If the next generation was socialized to kiss twice, or to employ the more “neutral” gesture for three, then it is possible that the “clues” that mark ethnicity may look very different than they do for the pre-war generations, and may not be located in the body at all.

There is also the question of to what extent the post-war generation would feel burdened by a sense of anxiety. Research suggests that post-war generations tend to distance themselves from war, constructing narratives and identities without the “rupture” that characterizes pre-war generations (Palmberger 2016). This is especially the case when the war is a source of stigma and shame that the next generation wishes to avoid (Klvaňová 2019). Yet the very ability of post-war generations to create this distance is revealing of an intimate knowledge about the past, a knowledge gained both through the stories (and silences) of older generations, and through the post-war generation’s own experiences of everyday life in the war’s aftermath (Schwenkel 2011). Recent innovative work on youth in Sarajevo (Kadich 2019) and other towns in Bosnia (Hromadžić 2015) is showing the ways that youth disengage from the divisive ethno-nationalist framework of the state, and create new spaces for interaction.

Serb women of the pre-war generations felt the decline in social relations compared to the years before the war. The next generation did not experience this deterioration, but they also never experienced what it felt like “to be a Serb like [one] was before the war,” without the ubiquitous ethno-nationalist infrastructures of the post-war state. The ability to draw comparisons with the past may make pre-war generations more sensitive to hostilities

that lie below the surface of social life; it may also make them more prone to *conjure* ethnic hostilities out of unfriendly social encounters (see Bergholz 2016).

The conviction, “*I can tell that they are thinking it*”; the reading of negative thoughts in the silent looks of the ladies at the nail salon; the imagining of how fellow customers at a bakery might respond to the ‘wrong’ gesture for three pastries — these anxieties may not accurately reflect how everyday life *actually* unfolds in Sarajevo. But they do point to what Das (2007, 7) describes as a lack of trust in context that comes after the experience of violence, a lack of trust in the “boundaries between the ordinary and the eventful.” They signal a worry among Sarajevo Serbs that the contours of ordinary life might suddenly bend, that everyday encounters such as visiting a bakery or greeting a friend might suddenly and unexpectedly give way to feelings of exclusion or shame. As the women in this study take measures to prevent or defer this possibility, we see how the residual anxiety of conflict shapes social interactions and bodies, and how the affective intensity of war can charge even the most (seemingly) uneventful encounters.

Silences and Transcripts

This chapter takes a closer look at the silences of Serb women in post-war Sarajevo. In previous chapters, I have argued that the dominant narrative of the siege of Sarajevo provides space to remember and commemorate only those lives lost to Serb aggression, while rendering the internal violence of the siege “ungrievable” (Butler 2009). Through the voices of Serb women, I have shown that those stories and experiences that are censored by the dominant narrative are not simply forgotten because they are silenced; they are pushed into the private realm where they are remembered and retold quietly.

The oral history I have presented of the siege’s internal zone of violence can be considered a “hidden transcript,” to use a term from Scott’s (1990, xii) work on the arts of resistance, by which he describes how subordinated groups critique power from “behind the back” of dominant groups. Through this hidden transcript, Serb women bear witness to crimes committed against Serbs and other civilians inside the space of the siege. This transcript positions Serbs in war-time Sarajevo as inhabiting two *zones of violence* simultaneously: an *external zone* of VRS aggression, committed by the Army of Republika Srpska (VRS) and Serb paramilitary forces, and an *internal zone* of retributive violence that took place inside the siege, committed by Bosniak and Croat paramilitaries, militarized criminal gangs, rogue elements of the Sarajevo police force and Army of Bosnia-Herzegovina (ARBiH), and sometimes by neighbours. The hidden transcript of Serb women resists the silencing of this history, and it calls into question why only one of these zones is permissible to acknowledge or commemorate in the post-war period.

The negotiation between feeling compelled to bear witness, and feeling compelled to keep silent, is evident in the following words from a Serb woman in her forties:

Things happened that are not spoken about. I am not going to publish an open letter in *Oslobodjenje* [a daily newspaper]. But one day I will tell this to my daughter. When she is older, so that she knows what we went through.

Her words attest to how histories of violence are remembered and passed down generationally, and how they circulate within private networks or communities, even as

they are censored in public. Telling me her story in an interview, she balances a desire to have her experiences acknowledged (by me, and by an imagined audience that will read my work), against her understanding that she will not find sympathetic public recognition in Sarajevo. Her words almost define a hidden transcript: *I am not going to publish an open letter in Oslobodjenje. But one day I will tell this to my daughter.*

But the hidden transcript of the siege's internal zone of violence was not the only one that I uncovered. Over the course of my fieldwork, I also gained access to a *second* hidden transcript, one that took me longer to unearth because it was even more contentious, and thus even more securely guarded. It took me some time to distinguish one transcript from another, and to conceptualize them as distinct, since both transcripts ultimately consisted of the same raw material: personal accounts of anti-Serb violence spoken from inside the siege.

The second hidden transcript is distinct, however, in that it blends personal experiences of violence with Serb ethno-nationalist rhetoric, namely revisionist claims about the nature of the conflict and the historical suffering of Serbs as a nation. So, while the first transcript details crimes committed against Serbs inside the siege based on personal experience, the second transcript goes on and *uses* this history of violence to relativize, justify, or even deny the suffering inflicted by the besieging Bosnian Serb Army (VRS) on fellow Sarajevans. This transcript also extends past the borders of Sarajevo, to a denial or minimization of VRS crimes against non-Serbs in Bosnia more generally, most notably the genocide of over 8,000 Bosnian Muslim / Bosniak boys and men in Srebrenica (130 kilometres east of Sarajevo) in 1995.

*

My task would have been simpler had I only gained access to the first hidden transcript. It would have been relatively easy to vocalize a suppressed history of violence inside the siege, and to critique a moral economy of victimhood in which only certain deaths and

losses are considered “grievable” (Butler 2009). As I collected Serb women’s various articulations of the internal zone of violence, I felt the critical potential of this transcript as an escape hatch from the victim-perpetrator dichotomy. It seemed to promise a grammar for moving beyond ethnicized, collectivist notions of innocence and guilt, and for recognizing both suffering on the side deemed perpetrator, and complicity on the side deemed victim. I felt that with this transcript, I could document the *simultaneity* of two zones of violence, internal and external, without thereby declaring a symmetry between them. What was critical for keeping this simultaneity in the foreground was that narrators generally conveyed their experiences to me in the spirit of contributing an *additional layer* to the existing knowledge of the siege. A layer that would fill in some gaps, or overturn some contradictions, but not discredit this knowledge completely.

But gaining access to the second hidden transcript, and feeling troubled by how to vocalize it, led me to reassess the critical potential of the first. A closer look reveals that the first transcript’s critique of *collective* innocence and guilt is relatively easy to digest precisely because the *individual* narrator still appears blameless. For example, a Serb civilian woman’s fear of Bosniak paramilitary gang leaders exposes the inadequacy of collectivist notions of (Bosniak) innocence and (Serb) guilt by highlighting individuals whose actions and experiences do not correspond to that of their “side” in the dichotomy. But the moral force of this position, its palatability, comes from the Serb civilian woman’s personal blamelessness. In other words, we are more prepared to extend victim status to an individual on the perpetrator side so long as that individual is not implicated in the violence their side committed. The “pure” victim construct is still in operation here; it is simply displaced from the level of the collective to the level of the individual.

How do we respond when those seeking acknowledgement for their suffering are not simply *impure* victims (as in, members of the perpetrator side), but are in fact “complex victims” — victims who are implicated or even complicit in violence committed against others? (Baines 2017; Bouris 2007). How do we respond when a Serb woman details the violence she endured in the internal zone of the siege, but then goes on to align herself ideologically with the external zone of violence inflicted by the VRS — a violence to which she, unbelievably, was also subject?

In academic circles, I have faced some push-back when, critiquing the public and academic silence on crimes committed inside the siege, I have chosen to include personal accounts of violence from Serb women who are VRS sympathizers. One scholar commented that she accepted my critique of the moral economy of victimhood and the invisibility of certain classes of victims insofar as it applied to Serb women who were not morally implicated in VRS violence. She objected, however, to my failure to differentiate between the *victim claims* of unimplicated women, on the one hand, and VRS sympathizers, on the other.

Implicit in this scholar's objection was an adherence to the pure victim construct that makes complex victims morally ineligible for victimhood. Explicit in this scholar's objection was a concern that acknowledging the victimhood of implicated women would mean legitimizing their contentious and divisive political views. This concern is actually reflective of anthropology as a discipline. Despite decades of critique that anthropologists should not only "study down" but also "study up" (Nader 1972), the anthropological tradition is still better poised to study down. It is better equipped to study victims than perpetrators.

Among the various disciplines that make up the broader field of perpetrator studies, anthropology is unique. In disciplines such as criminology or political science, researchers generally do not seek to achieve a deep understanding of the views and perceptions of perpetrators, much less to empathize with them (but see Presser and Sandberg 2015 on the emerging field of narrative criminology; Rauschenbach 2019). Indeed, researchers in these fields often overtly discredit perpetrator voices, on the grounds of presumed dishonesty or immorality (Williams 2018b). They comfortably posit academic analyses that run contrary to the perpetrator-participant's own views and interpretations.

In anthropology on the other hand, and in kindred fields such as oral history and gender studies, the prevailing orthodoxy is to empower research participants, to amplify their voices, and to share authority with them (Lassiter 2008). This framework reflects the "tendency among anthropologists to identify with underprivileged, voiceless, or victimized groups" (Bougarel, Helms, and Duijzings 2007, 19). But it inadvertently constrains the

discipline's scope of analysis to those with whom we morally agree. Blee (2018) writes about the "awkwardness" of doing feminist research when one's respondents are organized racist activists, since the imperative of empowering and giving voice to research participants implies that one is researching a group with whom one morally agrees, or at the very least a group that does not actively seek to harm others. Operating within this framework, merely vocalizing contentious perspectives can be considered tantamount to legitimizing them.

Some scholars have pushed back against this orthodoxy. Low and Merry (2010, S213) point out that, in practice, anthropologists whose findings have been "unpopular" with the groups they have studied have had to engage in "forms of self-silencing" in exchange for access (see Low 2003). But, as Mosse (2006) points out, the issue is deeper than access; the issue is epistemological and concerns the extent to which we can or should defend ethnographic knowledge *against* the knowledge of research participants. Judging anthropological work by the extent to which research participants *agree* with the analysis may be suitable for participatory action research or community-based ethnography (Dossa and Golubović 2018), but it impedes the discipline's contribution as a form of social critique.

The tenets of empowerment and "giving voice" orient that discipline towards studying victims instead of perpetrators, but what kind of assumptions about the figure of the victim are embedded in this orientation? As I discovered through the second hidden transcript, anthropology is prepared to "give voice" to victims only so long as they speak like *pure victims*. The reigning assumption is that those whose suffering has been silenced have nothing harmful to say, and that "giving voice" will result in witnessing and truth-telling, and not in a dangerous revisionism. What analytic resources are we left with when victims stray from the idealized script? When their personal accounts of suffering are entwined with violence against others, in the form of ethno-nationalism, revisionism, or genocide denial?

I do not think the answer is to exclude the voices of women who are VRS-sympathizers from an oral history of the siege's internal zone of violence. These women

suffered inside that zone, and for some, their political views today may be a *result* of that violence. War changes people in profound ways, and forces them into political positions they would not have occupied otherwise (Bringa 1995; Fujii 2009; Straus 2006). Among scholars of the former Yugoslavia, there is a widely shared view that ethnic polarization and ethnic antagonism were the *consequences* (rather than simply the causes) of “ethnic violence,” in other words, that the experience of violence polarized people into ethnic sides and hardened the boundaries between them, enabling further violence to take place (Bergholz 2016; Dragojević 2019; Gagnon Jr. 2004). Instead of assuming these women were always already nationalists, then, I assess to what extent the internal violence of the siege and its decades-long silencing may have led them to turn to, and find solace in, ethno-nationalist ideology. How do unacknowledged injuries affect the micro-dynamics of post-war coexistence? What are the long-term consequences of bearing a violent past in silence?

I argue that the same lack of public recognition that compels Serb women to keep silent about their wartime suffering also fuels a furtive ethno-nationalism. In a post-war context where the violence they endured inside the siege is neither acknowledged nor commemorated, some Serb women find meaning in the ethno-nationalist ideology propagated by Republika Srpska, which affirms and gives expression to their suffering. The public silencing of the first transcript does not merely drive it underground, then. It *discredits* the dominant narrative in such a way that the revisionist claims of the second transcript become, for some women, believable. The second transcript appears then not as a *layer* of knowledge about the siege, complicating and refining what we already know, and moving us towards a more “ethical memory” (Nguyen 2016). It appears instead as an “only truth,” one that refuses to co-exist with others.

Consensus Silence

On a hot day in early summer, I took a taxi across town. Upon hearing my accent — at once Anglophone and Ekavian (associated with Serbs from Serbia) — the driver started to ask me questions about my life. Where I was born, whether I was married, what I did for a living. All typical, if perhaps a bit personal, questions to be asked by a taxi driver. I told

him I grew up in Canada, to explain my accent. “A Canadian! Very nice. But if you are from Canada, how did you learn to speak so well?” I then explained that I was born in Belgrade, and he turned around in his seat, gave me a big smile, and said, “So, a Yugoslav! (*Znači Jugoslovenka!*)”

This was his way of signaling his politics to me, politics that were already evident from the way he refrained from giving our language a name when he asked me how I spoke it so well. Calling the language Bosnian or Serbian or Croatian or Serbo-Croatian are all political decisions, and many Sarajevans choose to call it *naši* (“our” language), or to avoid naming it at all, in order to be more inclusive, particularly when speaking with strangers. Similarly, calling me a Yugoslav signaled a friendliness that saying “So, a Serb!” simply could not (see chapter 5), exemplifying one of the ways that “Yugoslav” continues to function as a relevant moral category despite no longer existing politically. He continued,

Jugoslovenka, you’re probably too young to remember, but Tito said that we must protect brotherhood and unity [among Yugoslav nations]. I am Muslim, and my wife is a Serb. And our daughter-in-law is a Catholic [Croat]! Imagine that mix! But we are all the same.

He gestured to his arm and then turned around in his seat to gesture to my arm: “Meat, meat. Blood, blood. The only difference is that my wife’s name is Katarina [a Serb name] while mine is Esad [a Muslim name]. She celebrates my Ramadan, and I her Christmas.”

While he spoke, I marveled at how easy it was to solicit this genre of narrative in Sarajevo. Without even being asked to, many Sarajevans seemed to enjoy offering reflections on their city’s cosmopolitanism and their own humanist values. Esad then asked me how I was spending my time in Sarajevo. When I told him I was researching the experiences of Serb women during the siege, he looked at me in the rear-view mirror and said, very seriously:

Listen, you’ll hear the same thing from everyone you talk to. You’ll hear how the Serbs were protected here. No one laid a hand on the Serbs. They were taken well care of. In Sarajevo, we know how to live together.

His words capture the tension between what I have called the *preferred* narrative of the siege of Sarajevo (see chapter 4), and the silenced history of retributive violence. The

preferred narrative of the siege emphasizes a multi-cultural city banding together against external ethno-nationalist forces. Yet in Esad's language of protection and care, there are small allusions to the siege's internal zone of violence: why would the city's Serbs have been in need of protection and care if "no one laid a hand on [them]"?

That Esad tells me in advance what I will hear ("you'll hear the same thing from everyone you talk to") suggests a degree of social consensus about which stories of the siege are appropriate or permissible. In this case, permissible stories about Serbs inside the siege revolve around inter-ethnic solidarity and care, or Sarajevans "knowing how to live together" despite the violence that was imposed on them. But a consensus script also entails a "consensus silence" about which stories should remain a public secret (Fujii 2009, 39). Berić (2002, 84) refers to this public consensus as a "deafening silence" about the crimes that took place inside besieged Sarajevo.

I felt the consensus silence on several other occasions during my fieldwork, generally at moments when a stranger or new acquaintance asked about my research, and I answered honestly. For example, I attended a social event with a friend in Sarajevo, where I was introduced to three of her acquaintances. We sat together at a big table, talking and drinking beer. In the course of the conversation, one of the three asked me what my research was about. When I responded that I was researching the experiences of Serb women during the siege, she leaned across the table towards me and said, "So, tell me, did *the Serbs* suffer in Sarajevo during the war?" Taken aback by her tone, I began to stammer, "Well, I'm sure you can imagine what a difficult situation—" when she cut me off to ask her friends, "Did you hear that? Did you hear? *The Serbs* really *suffered* in Sarajevo during the war." Her friends responded with light laughter and the conversation quickly moved on to more sociable topics, where it stayed for the rest of the evening.

This encounter is not representative of the many welcoming conversations I had about my research in Sarajevo, but it demonstrates from an everyday perspective how hierarchies of victimhood are constructed and maintained, and how certain narratives are policed or rendered impermissible in social settings. Unlike Esad, who asserted the *preferred* narrative of the siege (a city banding together against external ethno-

nationalism), the woman across the table enforced what I call the *dominant* narrative of the siege: the narrative that emphasizes collective, ethnic innocence and guilt. Individual Serb women's experiences of suffering inside the siege are conflated with the suffering of "the Serbs" as a collective, and are promptly dismissed. The preferred narrative and the dominant narrative tell the story of the siege in very different ways, but they both contribute to the consensus silence that covers the siege's internal zone of retributive violence.

A similar form of silence characterizes post-genocide Rwanda. The official, state-sanctioned history acknowledges only Tutsi victims of genocide: the half a million to one million people who were killed in the space of three and a half months by Hutu extremists. The annual mourning period can be difficult on Tutsi survivors of the genocide (D. E. Miller 2020), but also on those whose suffering is excluded from the official narrative. The state's version of history fails to include non-Tutsi who were killed by Hutu extremists, including Twa and thousands of Hutu, particularly those who were moderate, or those who resisted. It also brackets out the Hutu and Tutsi who were killed not by Hutu *génocidaires*, but by the Tutsi-led Rwandan People's Front (RPF) as it took control of the state (Chakravarty 2014; Mamdani 2001; Rever 2018). The years after the genocide were also marked by retributive killings of Hutu. These deaths, too, are not acknowledged in the official narrative.

Burnet's (2012, 11) concept of "amplified silence" captures the invisibility of certain classes of victims. She demonstrates that while Rwanda's state-sponsored national mourning period creates space to grieve Tutsi victims of Hutu violence, it also "amplifies" a fearful public silence about those deaths that fall outside the ambit of the official story. In post-genocide Rwanda, experiences that diverge from the dominant narrative are quickly "conflated with genocide denial, rejection of national unity and reconciliation, and historical revisionism" (Jessee 2017, 216). Researchers who seek out these narratives have noted the grief, but also the simmering resentment, anger, and frustration, that come as a result of silencing (Burnet 2012; Chakravarty 2014; Jessee 2017).

Encountering Silence

Consensus silence explains the secretive, reticent behaviour of many Serb women who agreed to be interviewed, and who shared stories of personal experiences of violence inside the siege (see chapters 2 and 5). If interviews took place in public spaces, such as parks or cafes, several women lowered their voices and looked around themselves to see if others were listening. If interviews took place during a walk, they would sometimes take long pauses to ensure that passersby would be safely out of earshot. These silences deserve special attention because they reflect Serb women's knowledge about what can be talked about, to whom, and where. They reflect Serb women's understanding that the internal violence of the siege is impermissible to mention in public spaces, and that this boundary may be socially enforced, as it was for me by the woman across the table.

Hermez (2017, 143) writes that “certain moments and spaces can intensify lived memory and influence subjective categories.” Sarajevo's commemorative cityscape provided numerous such occasions during walking interviews. Sarajevo was so brutally ravaged during the war that you can still see the physical aftermath from almost anywhere you stand: the pock marks of bullet holes that cover the buildings, the mortar shell explosions on the pavement. Some of the destruction has been memorialized. For instance many of the mortar shell explosions on the pavement have been filled in with red resin in order to repair them while still keeping them visible as a form of commemoration (called “Sarajevo roses,” see Halilovich 2013). The number of graveyards in the small city is staggering, as is the number of graves with dates between 1991 and 1995. And the engraved metal plaques that list names of fallen soldiers. And the embossed, white, ceramic plaques that tell you that on this very spot, this many people were killed by *srpski zločinci* — Serb criminals / evildoers (see figure 14).

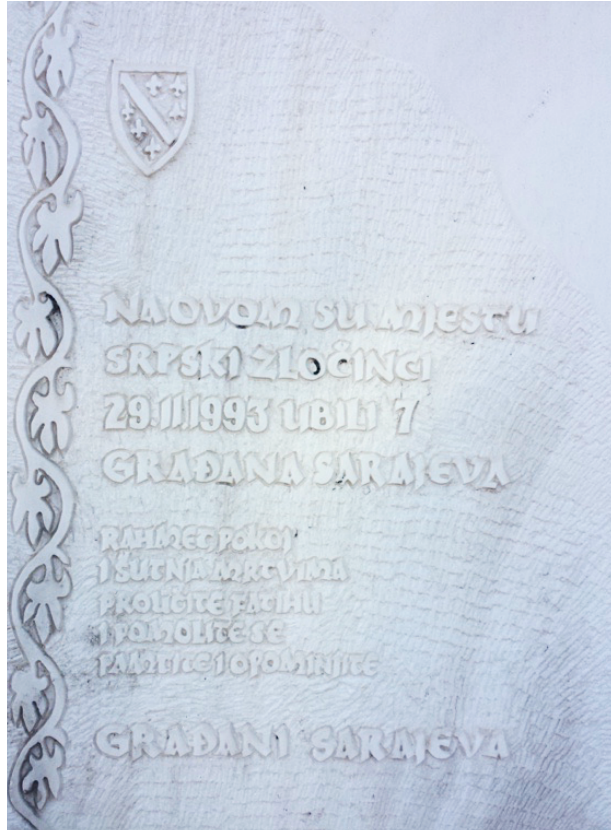


Figure 14: The plaque reads, in larger print: “On this spot, on 29/11/1993, Serb criminals / evil-doers killed 7 citizens of Sarajevo.” And in smaller print: “Respect. Rest in peace to the dead. Read the Surah al-Fatihah and pray. Remember and reprimand.”

Source: Photo and translation by author.

The larger writing at the top of these plaques uses ethnic language (“Serb criminals / evil-doers”) to identify the perpetrators, and civic language (“citizens of Sarajevo”) to identify the victims (see figure 14). However, a smaller inscription immediately below reverts to Islamic language, giving instructions to read the Surah al-Fatihah in the Quran, which is recited when a person dies, to reward their spirit. This inscription effectively Islamizes the victims, thus excluding not only Serbs, Croats, and others, but also secular Muslims / Bosniaks (see Bougarel 2007 on the Islamization of Bosniak victims of the war by the SDA).

The commemorative culture of Sarajevo is so prevalent that it made its way into walking interviews even without purposefully planning or setting a route. Although only a

few women referenced it explicitly, I was aware of the discrepancy between the violence I heard in their narratives, and the violence I saw publicly commemorated in the city.

As we walked through the Old Town and along the river, one woman in her sixties, Olivera, pointed up into the hills and told me I could find a metal plaque commemorating the death of Mušan “Caco” Topalović on the outside wall of an elementary school, as part of a memorial for fallen soldiers (see figure 6 in chapter 1). Moments before, she had been telling me about the atmosphere of fear that Caco himself, as well as other militarized gangsters, had created in the Old Town.

Caco, who was introduced in chapter 1, was a local gangster who operated inside the siege of Sarajevo and was officially incorporated into the ARBiH as the leader of the 10th mountain brigade, representing how the Sarajevo government relied on members of the criminal underworld for defense, even as these gangsters terrorized civilians inside besieged Sarajevo. As Caco’s unit’s attacks on civilians continued to escalate throughout 1992 and 1993, and his behaviour grew increasingly erratic and unpredictable, the Sarajevo government moved to defuse the situation. Caco’s unit was disbanded in October 1993. He was killed by police during the disbanding, and 16 of his soldiers were arrested. Those 16 soldiers were investigated in secret military trials in 1994. Of the 14 convicted, ten were released immediately; the remaining four received terms of less than 6 years (Hedges 1997). In 1996, Caco’s body was exhumed and reburied in a ceremony reserved for war heroes, the same cemetery where Alija Izetbegović was later buried. Caco’s funeral was attended by thousands, and aired on television (Andreas 2008, 95; Mann 2005; see also Verdery 1999 on “the political lives of dead bodies”). In contrast, a small plaque created in 2015 by the activist organization *Jer me se tiče* (Because I Care) commemorating the civilian victims of war crimes committed in besieged Sarajevo by Caco’s ARBiH unit was destroyed two days after it was erected. This quick destruction is evidence of the “ungrievability” of the siege’s internal zone of violence (Butler 2009), and the ways it is deprived of commemoration.

One participant, a woman in her forties, described the silence that continues to cover the crimes committed inside besieged Sarajevo: “It’s kept hidden. It’s not talked

about in Sarajevo — at all. Here they say, ‘we took care of our Serbs,’ and some did, but that’s not the whole truth. People here just don’t want to talk about it.” Her words reminded me of Esad’s: “You’ll hear the same thing from everyone you talk to. You’ll hear how the Serbs were protected here.” She continued:

So many of the people who experienced the worst things left after the war. You won’t find them in Sarajevo. They couldn’t stay living here after they were imprisoned, or beaten, or forced to dig trenches, dig the famous Sarajevo tunnel. Not that you would get this information if you go there for a tour. They’ll just tell you it was built by the ARBiH. Yes, but with whose labour? They have their story and they’re sticking to it. So many of those who know the truth are gone. And the ones who stayed don’t want to talk about it. They don’t want to remember.

For Olivera, the fact that a plaque bearing Caco’s (legal) name could hang unchallenged on an elementary school was not benign. It signaled a tacit acceptance by fellow Sarajevans to partake in a regime of silence, a tacit acceptance that the siege’s internal zone of violence would remain a public secret.

The Second Hidden Transcript

The second hidden transcript startled me when I first heard it. Since the women I interviewed had lived through the siege of Sarajevo, I found it confusing and contradictory that they would deny or minimize VRS violence. Had they not been forced to bolt across exposed streets for fear of VRS snipers? Had they not been terrified by the sheer randomness of an exploding mortar shell? Had they not felt the humiliation of deprivation: the hunger and the cold, the brittle fingernails? Of course, they had. Other parts of their interviews detailed how difficult it was for them to endure siege conditions.

In fact, it was precisely the way the second hidden transcript interwove with other narratives that unsettled and confounded me. Over the course of a single conversation, the same speaker could describe the terror of fleeing from VRS snipers and the maliciousness with which the VRS would cut off electricity, and then go on to absolve the VRS of guilt for the deadliest crimes it committed, or reframe the siege as an act of defense and not

aggression. In other words, the same speaker could position themselves as victims of VRS violence, *and* as VRS sympathizers, a contradiction I explain further below.

While a few women I interviewed showed their ethno-nationalist stripes right away, several women did not reveal the second hidden transcript to me until months into our research relationships. In one case (see chapter 2), I had interviewed a woman, Milka, numerous times over nine months, and she had shared a great deal with me about her experiences inside the siege, positioning herself as someone who suffered in both the internal and external zones of violence. She had always referred to Sarajevans as “us” and the besieging VRS as “them.” She had never said anything that even resembled a justification of VRS violence. Her shift in narrative startled me the most, when one day, unprompted, she began to use we-language to describe herself as a Serb, to tell me about her doubts that the VRS could really have been responsible for certain particularly brutal massacres, and to explain that the besieging Serbs were really waging a defensive war against Bosniak and Croat separatism.

I thus separate the two transcripts conceptually, but this does not imply that one group of women articulated the first, and a separate group of women articulated the second. Almost all of my research participants articulated the siege’s internal zone of violence. A smaller number among them *also* articulated the second transcript.

Three interrelated strategies were present in the second transcript. Relativization, justification, and denial. Relativization took the form of “blame-all-around-ism,” which declared a symmetry in the violence between the two warring sides. Such accounts conceded that the VRS and Serb paramilitaries had indeed inflicted violence, but stressed that so too had the Bosnian Army (ARBiH) and Bosniak and Croat paramilitaries inside Sarajevo. A symmetry was asserted between the internal and external zones of violence. “It was war” became an oft-repeated phrase, and an answer to my (very gentle) push-back in interviews. “It was war” asserted that the siege was not an unprovoked act of Serb aggression, but that both sides bore equal measures of blame and responsibility for the conflict.

Justification, closely related, transformed the aggression of the siege from an act of aggression into an act of defense. In justificatory narratives, speakers effectively acknowledged the violence inflicted by the VRS, but stressed that the siege was necessary to protect the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia from Bosniak and Croat separatism, and to protect Serbs who wanted to remain in Yugoslavia. One of the troubles with violence, as Arendt (1969) argued, is that it always seeks justification. It seeks narratives that affirm and legitimize it. Each side in a conflict will be determined in its own conviction that “it fights a just war” (Enns 2012, 12). Even though they had suffered siege conditions, women speaking from a position of justification tended to see themselves not as victims of VRS violence per se, but of Bosniak and Croat separatism that had, in their view, made the siege possible, or even necessary.

Denial took the form of displacing blame for the worst atrocities onto the Bosniaks themselves. The three most frequently invoked incidents for this strategy were: the breadline massacre on Vase Miskina street which killed 16 people on 27 May 1992; and the Markale massacres, two separate shellings that targeted the busy Markale marketplace in downtown Sarajevo. The first shelling killed 68 and wounded 144 people on 5 February 1994; and the second shelling killed 43 and wounded 75 people on 28 August 1995.

These three events were “central to the escalation of Western involvement in the war” (Burg and Shoup 1999, 164). The second Markale massacre resulted two days later in NATO Operation “Deliberate Force”: 11 days of air strikes on VRS positions that constituted “the largest operation ever conducted by the alliance and proved decisive in ending the Bosnian war” (Rusek and Ingrao 2004, 847). At the time, and still today, Republika Srpska denied responsibility for these three atrocities, and argued that the ARBiH had attacked its own side in order to rouse international sympathy and solicit Western military intervention.

Burg and Shoup (1999) argue that Republika Srpska’s version of events is highly improbable, but that it is not completely outside of the realm of possibility. There had been confirmed reports of much smaller-scale attacks by the ARBiH on their own side (Boyd 1995; Sudetic 1994), including UN peacekeepers discovering an ARBiH sniper who had

been targeting civilians inside besieged Sarajevo (Burg and Shoup 1999, 165; O'Connor 1995). But while the circumstances surrounding these massacres were somewhat unusual (Binder 1994; MacKenzie 1993; Rusek and Ingrao 2004), Burg and Shoup (1999, 168) make a crucial point: "The uncertainties surrounding these three events do not negate the evidence of disproportionate attacks and atrocities committed against Muslim civilians by the Bosnian Serbs."

These three strategies are revealing of a deep and complicated shame for the violence committed by Serb forces. Scholarship on denial in the aftermath of violence emphasizes that denial often occurs when a crime is considered too intolerable, and when accepting responsibility for it would create an unbearable burden (S. Cohen 2001; Frie 2017; Gordy 2013; von Kellenbach 2003, 2013; Uzun Avci 2019). As Steflja (2010, 235) puts it, the "defensive nationalism" of Serbs functions to displace feelings of shame, humiliation, and guilt, and thus to "soothe the bruised collective ego."

Similarly, cognitive dissonance theory posits that if people are confronted with information that challenges their accepted beliefs, they will generally make modifications to their beliefs in order to reduce or eliminate the dissonance (Festinger, Riecken, and Schachter 1956). However, if one's beliefs are integral to one's identity, and accepting the dissonant information would be too unbearable, then it may actually be "less painful to tolerate the dissonance than to discard the belief and admit that one had been wrong" (27). In other words, it may well be easier to deny what one already knows to be true, despite the mental cacophony this denial will produce.

*

What does it mean to conceptualize this second narrative as a hidden transcript (Scott 1990), spoken by the marginalized behind the backs of the dominant? The concept of resistance is being re-examined by scholars who have questioned its "implicit link to progressive politics" (Hathaway 2013, 87). For instance, Blee (2002, 158) conceptualizes

the private talk of racist activist women as a “racist variant of the ‘arts of resistance,’” reflecting how members of racist movements consider themselves to be victims who have been silenced by the dominant society. In these terms, the second hidden transcript could be considered a Serb ethno-nationalist variant of the arts of resistance.

Like the victim-perpetrator paradigm, the concept of resistance relies on a dichotomous framework where actors are divided into two camps: as Hathaway (2013) puts it, they are represented as being either virtuous resisters or villainous oppressors. In conceptualizing the second narrative as a hidden transcript, I aim to complicate this vision, and to re-assess some of the questionable assumptions that under-grid anthropological literature on silence and voice, and that set parameters around what is and is not acceptable for victims to say. Just as a “consensus silence” compels Serb women to keep quiet about their experiences of suffering inside the siege’s internal zone of violence, the second transcript provides evidence of Serb ethno-nationalist women’s *own* consensus on silence, and their knowledge that they should keep quiet about their political views. Taking these two silences together enables me to draw a line of connection between them, to make the case that misrecognition foments discontent and division, and ultimately feeds a clandestine ethno-nationalism.

Silence and Voice

Contemporary anthropology prides itself on its capacity to “give voice” to silenced or marginalized groups (Fernandez 1987). These claims are counter-balanced by anthropological inquiries into the extractive and potentially exploitative nature of ethnography, or what Whitehead (2013, 27) refers to as the “unsilencing of others” (see also Cuéllar 2005; O’Connell Davidson 2008; Razack 1993; Simpson 2007). But despite such concerns, the predominant view remains that anthropology’s capacity to “give voice” — or, to borrow Portelli’s term, to “amplify” the voices of others — remains one of its most important contributions.

A similar attention to voice is found in adjacent fields, namely conflict studies and gender studies. In conflict studies, especially where it overlaps with anthropology, extreme suffering is often conceptualized as loss of voice (Morris 1996), gesturing to the way that trauma can render people unable to articulate their experiences (D. E. Goldstein 2012; Scarry 1987; Warin and Dennis 2008). Reflecting the current “age of transitional justice” (Adler 2018; Bernath 2016; Moffett 2016), in which the right of victims to have their experiences recognized is considered paramount (Govier 2003; Haldemann 2008), the idea of “breaking the silence” is associated with moving forward and healing divided communities (Last 2000; Russell 2019). Yet scholars have also taken note of the silence that comes with research fatigue, and they have begun to challenge the disciplinary landscape in which victims of violence are called upon to vocalize their experiences over and over again (Boesten and Henry 2018; Finnström 2015).

Feminist writing on silence and voice exhibits a similar tension. Scholars have argued that in a world where women are so often silenced, it is important to learn to listen to women’s voices through their very silences, or what Anderson and Jack (1991, 11) refer to as the “muted channel of women’s subjectivity” (see also Di Lellio 2016; Ryan-Flood and Gill 2010; Srigley, Zembrzycki, and Iacovetta 2018; Visweswaran 1994). Attending with care to hesitations, evasions, and the “gaps between fragile words” (Ross 2003, 50), feminist scholars have excavated gendered narratives that would otherwise have remained unheard. Altınay and Pető (2016, 3) refer to this body of work as “feminist unsilencing projects” (3), noting the importance of critically interrogating which stories feminist academics choose to unsilence, and which they do not: “As Catherine Lutz succinctly puts it, ‘feminist margins have their own margins’” (Altınay and Pető 2016, 9; citing Lutz 1995, 251). However, the sense of mining for meaning in the unspoken finds a counterweight in work that respects the boundaries drawn by silent subjects, and that refuses to pry. Das (2007), for example, has challenged the too-easy equation of voice with empowerment, and has argued that the decision to remain silent can itself be a form of agency after violence (Jackson 2004; N. Mookherjee 2015; Parpart 2010; Ross 2003; Saikia 2011)

Across each of these fields, the tense interplay between amplifying voices and respecting silences is palpable. But whether speaking or silent, whether amplified or

suppressed, the common assumption across all these fields is the same: the voices of victims or marginalized groups may testify or bear witness to violence, but, like pure victims, they will not harm.

The first hidden transcript fit easily into the assumptions of the above literature; the “awkwardness” of my research became apparent only with the emergence of the second hidden transcript. It became awkward as victim-narrators (like the woman who changed her tune after nine months) suddenly strayed from the accepted “genre” of survivor testimony (see Chakravarti 2014; Kindersley 2015; Morris 1996; Niezen 2013; Reynaud 2014; Ure 2008), and began to show degrees of complicity. Fujii (2009, 36) describes a similar moment of disorientation in her fieldwork in Rwanda, when she interviewed a Tutsi genocide survivor who she assumed, based on his status, would have “nothing to hide,” but who turned out to have been implicated in the genocide as an informant.

The expectation is that “giving voice” or “breaking the silence” will bring to light individual truths that run counter to dominant, state-sanctioned versions of history. But, as Altınay and Pető (2016, 12) warn, there is a danger in “celebrat[ing] all forms of unsilencing as equally progressive.” How to respond when those speaking vocalize not only their own experiential truth, but also the harmful competing rhetoric of another government (or statelet)? When they recite a suppressed narrative that is dominant *elsewhere*, and that itself suppresses and silences *other* victims?

The awkward fit of the second hidden transcript is visible on multiple levels. The same blending of personal and political that makes the second transcript so insidious is a quality that is more easily celebrated in the narratives of other (more morally favourable) suppressed groups. Sugiman (2004) acknowledges the powerful weaving of personal and political in the narratives of Japanese women who experienced internment. Ackerman (2019, 77) describes how “personal narratives become embedded in a political voice,” enabling those who have suffered to speak politically through their own experiences. And Dossa (2014) notes that through the strategic use of “we-language” in their narratives of violence, Afghani women speak in a politicized voice that extends beyond their own

experiences of violence to encompass and elevate the experiences of other Afghani women, and of all Afghanis affected by war (see also Crapanzano 2011).

When those speaking are morally distant, when they share a measure of complicity, the assumptions and imperatives of the literature fail to hold. For instance, a critical component of the anthropologists' (and oral historians') imperative to "give voice" is the concept of sharing authority: of recognizing our research participants as experts of their own experiences, and repositioning ourselves as students who are willing to learn. This imperative is often problematic in practice — as Kindersley (2015) points, claims of "giving voice" and "sharing authority" are rarely accompanied by actually sharing *authorship* — but it is even more fraught when research participants are members of "unloved" groups (Fielding 1990, 608; Lee 1995, 25),, as sharing authority effectively provides a platform for their political views.

The solution, as I see it, is not to vocalize the first transcript and bracket out the second. This would be to turn off the microphone once the victim strays from the expected script. Instead, we might ask how our disciplinary conventions shape and delimit the narratives of our research participants (see Kindersley 2015). Anthropologists have begun to critique the dark subject matter of the discipline, and the overwhelming focus on human suffering and misery (Kelly 2013a; Ortner 2016; Robbins 2013; Thin 2009). What is still needed is a critical interrogation of the way we have conflated suffering with moral good (see Helms 2013; Enns 2012), a conflation that is revealed in our norms of research and representation, and their awkward fit for impure or complex victims.

Awkward Listening

The second transcript made for awkward listening, as I struggled between wanting to create rapport in order to encourage participants to speak, and at the same time wanting to distance myself from the things they were saying. This desire for distance has been discussed by various scholars that research perpetrators (Blee 1993; Rauschenbach 2019) or other groups with whom they morally disagree (Barrett-Fox 2011; Crapanzano 1986; Hochschild

2016). In political science, criminology, and other fields less concerned with sharing authority or giving voice, the task of building a surface rapport is important methodologically in order to make sure research participants feel at ease, and thus become more willing to divulge information. Researchers employ strategies such as beginning interviews with “unthreatening questions” (Straus 2006, 101), or simply displacing the task of rapport-building to a translator who is better equipped, both culturally and linguistically (Williams 2018b). But a deeper rapport is expected in anthropology and kin disciplines, as researchers are trained to minimize or overcome distance with their participants in order to reach deeper meanings (Jessee 2011).

As a Serb listening to Serb ethno-nationalist narratives, my discomfort was increased by the fact that I was necessarily being implicated in those narratives, as Serb ethno-nationalism by definition purports to speak on behalf of all Serbs. I said nothing that would affirm the speakers’ views, but my strategy of nodding, smiling, and asking follow-up questions likely signaled a quiet acceptance. I have struggled with the deceptiveness of this strategy, but the other alternative, critiquing the speakers’ views, would have ruined any possible rapport (Williams 2018b), and foreclosed my access to these narratives. It was precisely my being legible as Serb that allowed me to get close enough to hear them in the first place.

In fact, none of the women whom I would categorize as VRS sympathizers or genocide deniers would call themselves nationalists at all. They understood this to be a dirty word. Numerous justifications of VRS crimes began with introductory phrases such as, “I am not a nationalist. I feel for the victims on all sides of this war. However...” They would reserve the term nationalist for those with more extreme views (for instance, for family members in Republika Srpska who would not even visit them in Sarajevo, since they refused to enter the Federation). Or, they would point to their social tolerance as evidence of their liberalism (understood locally as the political opposite of ethno-nationalism). One woman told me she would help a Bosniak if they fell down on the street, and that she therefore could not be considered a nationalist.

My own discomfort in listening to the second transcript created blind spots in my analysis. For much of my fieldwork, my own defenses and failure “to listen deeply” (Jessee 2011, 292) led me to create superficial or “stock characters” (Blee 1993, 604) out of ethno-nationalist women. It was not until a “revelatory moment” (Parvez 2018, 460) late in my fieldwork that I realized my mistake, and began to attend more sensitively to the pain behind certain women’s ethno-nationalist positions (see chapter 2).

When Milka’s sudden narrative shift occurred, I was immediately able to recognize her new narrative as part of a Serb ethno-nationalist template. I began to wonder how much of her previous narrative had been part of a *liberal* script, one that emphasized ethnic hybridity and solidarity, one that I did not recognize was actually a script. It was difficult to shake the idea that everything she had told me before was not negated by her narrative shift into ethno-nationalist territory. It was difficult to shake the idea although only a minority of research participants had actually vocalized the second hidden transcript, that, with enough time, every participant would eventually “reveal” herself to be an ethno-nationalist.

The very language of “revelation” with which I thought about this possibility speaks to the power of the victim-perpetrator paradigm, and its static categories. It speaks to the strength of the instinct to categorize a person as one thing or another, to place them in a box from which they will not move. As if by aligning themselves with the perpetrators, these women could not also be “authentic” victims of that same violence. As if a Serb who harboured ethno-nationalist views could not possibly enjoy genuinely warm relations with her Bosniak neighbours, or would not share apricots with them in times of scarcity. Yet we know that people do not stay in the categories assigned to them. Over the course of a single war, the same person can alternately kill and rescue (Baines 2009; Bergholz 2016), and their dynamic actions defy easy categorization.

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None of the women I interviewed were perpetrators. None were directly complicit in violence against others. At least, none of them admitted to be. On the spectrum of possible offences that could be committed by Serb women from inside besieged Sarajevo — informing the VRS of ARBiH positions; signaling to VRS snipers about when to shoot their neighbours; becoming snipers themselves; encouraging their husbands to cross over and join the VRS; joining the VRS themselves; using covert signals to identify themselves as Serbs to VRS snipers and thus avoid being shot, but not sharing these signals with their neighbours (see Dauphinee 2013) — these women were guilty only of thinking ethno-nationalist thoughts, of sympathizing with the aggressor, of refusing to recognize the responsibility of Serb forces for the suffering of others. They were more accurately “implicated” rather than complicit (Rothberg 2019). In wartime, the most common strategy of civilians is neutrality (Kalyvas 2006). In practice, neutrality often “manifests as acquiescence to whichever side is in power” (Fujii 2009, 5). What compelled these women, then, to side with the aggressor, an extraordinary position to take?

Effects of Silence

Since I conducted interviews with Serb women more than twenty years after the war ended, it is difficult to know for certain how their views on the war may have shifted or cemented over the years. But whenever I was let in on the second hidden transcript, I would ask participants, “When did you come to feel this way?” I was asking, I suppose, for a “conversion story” (K. M. Blee 2002, 35). The responses I received from women were generally quite similar, and quite vague. Most women responded that in living through the siege and bearing witness to the internal zone of violence, something turned. In this way, they drew a line of continuity between the two hidden transcripts, connecting them in a tentative and unspecified way. Very few women cited a specific event that marked a turning point, but most asserted that prior to the war, they had enjoyed excellent relationships with friends and neighbours of various ethno-national backgrounds, and that they did not imagine a war along ethnic lines would have been possible in Sarajevo.

One woman, Marica, told me she became a member of the Serb Democratic Party (SDS) in 1991, but denied that she shared the party's political views. To be fair, in 1991, the SDS strategy was to recruit Serbs across the political spectrum, and their at times contradictory campaign rhetoric was designed to cater *both* to Serb ethno-nationalists and proponents of federalist Yugoslavia — and to the overlap between them (Maksić 2016). Many Serbs who stayed in besieged Sarajevo despite SDS calls to evacuate were SDS members themselves, who had joined the party but were critical of its escalation of war (see Pejanović 2004). Additionally, it must be recognized that people join political movements and organizations for a complex variety of reasons other than ideological conviction (such as to take advantage of economic opportunities, or to appease family members, see Kalyvas 2006). Nevertheless, perhaps because Marica understood that having had SDS membership is highly stigmatized in contemporary Sarajevo, she insisted that she signed up as a member...

only because the man they had sent door to door was so pathetic, so pitiable. I felt sorry for him, and I thought, how is he ever going to collect enough signatures? So I put my name down just to brighten up his day.

Numerous scholars of the wars in the former Yugoslavia have argued that violence was the cause, not the consequence, of ethnic polarization (Dragojević 2019; Gagnon Jr. 2006; see also Bergholz 2016 on Bosnia during World War II). The portrait of Serb women developing ethno-nationalist leanings as a result of the internal violence of the siege is consistent with this body of work. I want to suggest, however, that it was not only the internal violence of the siege, but the decades-long silencing that followed, and continues to follow, that has compelled some Serb women towards ethno-nationalist ideas. There are two main reasons for this.

First, the silence that surrounds the internal violence of the siege causes many Serb women to feel a strong sense of misrecognition, or a feeling that others in Sarajevo view them as aggressors instead of as victims or survivors. Many women expressed a hope that one day the crimes committed inside the siege could be acknowledged. The woman quoted at the beginning of this chapter, who said she would not write an open letter in a newspaper,

but would tell her story to her daughter, put it this way: *What happened needs to finally float to the surface.*

The feeling of misrecognition, and the isolating experience of bearing a violent past in silence, ferments tensions and entrenches divisions. This was evident in the caustic remarks of certain women regarding public commemorations of the siege of Sarajevo, from which they felt excluded. One woman in her sixties said, “We Serbs are more stoic. We don’t make it public; we don’t advertise it. We are not like them; they make a fetish out of remembering.” Another woman, commenting on the annual commemorations of the genocide at Srebrenica, said, “Their commemoration is a euphoria. Really, it is. It is a euphoria for them to remember” (see Duijzings 2007 on the politics of commemorating the genocide at Srebrenica).

Second, the silencing of the internal zone of violence affirms for Serb women that the accepted and dominant narrative of the siege is inaccurate. Since the official narrative goes against their personal experiences, it becomes thinkable to reject the narrative in its entirety rather than fill in its silences. Burnet (2012) draws a similar conclusion regarding Hutu women in the aftermath of the genocide in Rwanda. She finds that when the dominant narrative loses its credibility, people turn to other available narratives to help them make sense of the events they experienced. Consider in the following examples how the silencing of the siege’s internal zone of violence provides fuel for Serb ethno-nationalist revisionist narratives.

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Tijana, a woman in her fifties, doubted that the VRS was responsible for Markale massacres. Actually, she doubted these massacres really even took place. She considered that the ARBiH had not attacked its own side, but had dramatically staged the attack to look worse than it really was in order to elicit international sympathy.

They say that some of the bodies were not people killed in the explosion. They were people who were already dead, bodies brought in from the morgues. Mannequins, also, covered in blood. The whole thing was staged for the West.

Her interpretation of events recalls the claims of Serb ethno-nationalist politicians, particularly Radovan Karadžić, who often repeated that media vans and ambulances were parked around the marketplace before the explosion even took place — a claim which Rusek and Ingrao (2004) note has been refuted by UN officers who were present at the scene.

Sugiman (2004, 369) notes that in testimonial interviews, Japanese Canadian women reflecting on their experiences of internment drew on the existing and already-publicized narrative, but they sometimes personalized the public narrative by providing “one specific and highly intimate memory.” Tijana did the same. She recounted how her acquaintance, a Bosniak photographer for a local newspaper, warned her not to go outside for few days immediately before the massacre, telling her, “something big is going to happen.”⁵³

Why do people “buy into certain stories over others” (Steflja 2010, 234), even when those stories are untrue or implausible? Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper (2000) argue, political “templates” are only effective insofar as they find “resonance” on the level of everyday life. They suggest that we cannot pry apart lived experience and political rhetoric, and treat them as distinct, but instead should ask how political rhetoric comes to resonate on the ground, and how it comes to influence emotions and behaviour. In chapter 4, I discussed how Serb ethno-nationalist politicians stoked fears of incipient violence, but I argued that the emotional reality and social consequences of this fear should be taken seriously, despite the fact the fear was built on discredited information. Here, I am

⁵³ As a researcher, Tijana’s narrative corners into an uncomfortable position where taking her first-hand account seriously means ceding an ounce of credibility to revisionist claims that the ARBiH staged the massacre. I am forced into a position where I need to listen to her narrative skeptically instead of sympathetically (noticing, for example, that in the subgenre of personalized revisionist narratives, the well-placed acquaintance is almost invariably a Bosniak).

concerned with how ethno-national revisionist scripts come to find resonance among Serb women despite their inaccuracies.

If nationalism is “a symbolic space, a point of view from which we can appear likable to ourselves” (Salecl 1992, 57), it cannot contain unsavory histories where we are perpetrators and murderers. Tijana denies not only that the massacre was committed by the Serb side, but that it took place at all. Sarajevans’ dead and dismembered bodies are replaced in her version with mannequins and fake blood. That such a thing could be true would necessitate a conspiratorial silence on the part of the Sarajevo government and army, all Sarajevans present at the massacre, and the families, friends, and acquaintances of all those dead or injured. We have to consider how a woman whose own experience of victimization has been covered by a “consensus silence” could come to find it plausible that the true history of the siege is covered by other silences, too.

The second transcript also went beyond the scope of Sarajevo to deny or minimize VRS involvement in crimes against non-Serbs all across Bosnia. The centre-piece of these denials was of the genocide that took place at Srebrenica. During a walking interview with Dunja, we passed by a kiosk displaying various newspapers. The headlines reported the Bosnian Court had acquitted of Naser Orić of charges of crimes against Serbs in the Srebrenica region in 1992, while he served as the sub-regional ARBiH chief of armed forces.⁵⁴ What followed was a lengthy but almost entirely whispered denial of the genocide

⁵⁴ Some background context may be necessary to understand why this headline made a significant impact on some Bosnian Serb women. Orić was the ARBiH chief of armed forces for the sub-region of Srebrenica during the war. Before attaining this rank, he was staff commander in chief of the territorial defence (*teritorijalna odbrana*, or TO) of Srebrenica municipality, organizing local defense in response to VRS attacks in 1991 and 1992. In retaliation, units under Orić’s command allegedly organized and executed military operations against the VRS in early 1992, where they allegedly destroyed and pillaged at least 50 Serb-majority villages or hamlets. And, from 1992 to 1993, officers under Orić’s command allegedly detained and beat Bosnian Serb prisoners, leading to the death of one prisoner. Orić was actually indicted two separate times. He was first indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in 2003, where he plead not guilty to charges of individual criminal responsibility for the laws and customs of war: for the militarily unjustified targeting towns and villages, and for the looting and destruction of private and public property. He was convicted in 2006 for failing to prevent men under his command from killing and mistreating Bosnian Serb prisoners. He was sentenced to two years in prison, but released immediately as he had already spent more than two years in custody. The sentence was appealed by both the Prosecutor (asking for a harsher sentence) and by Orić (asking of acquittal).

at Srebrenica (although she conceded that “a great crime” had taken place), followed by an articulation of her conviction that crimes against Serbs would always be unpunished and ignored (as evidenced, she felt, by the acquittal of Orić).

As we walked away from the kiosk, she held tightly onto my arm and whispered a stream of “facts” into my ear: the number of deaths was much smaller than reported; people who were reported dead appeared the next year to vote in the elections; Izetbegović himself had ordered the attack to evoke Western military intervention; the genocide was staged to demonize the Serbs. (These last two points echoed previous assertions she had made to me regarding the siege of Sarajevo, claims about Bosniaks shooting at themselves). Each of her claims that day echoed those of Serb ethno-nationalist media. Milorad Dodik, for example, has repeatedly claimed that many victims of Srebrenica are still alive. He has also justified the massacre at Srebrenica as revenge for Orić’s attacks earlier against Serbs in the Srebrenica region (Lippman 2019; Toal 2013).

Dunja’s whispered narration was disconcerting and disorienting, as it reminded me of the way that she, and many other women, had lowered their voices to a whisper when describing the siege’s internal zone of violence (see chapter 5). This was the same woman who had told me beautiful stories of sharing apricots with her neighbours during the siege (see chapter 3, narrative 5). *Can you imagine that? Apricots! In the middle of a siege!* The same woman who had discussed the importance of neighbourly solidarity in wartime, who had even taken offense when I had asked her whether she felt obliged to help her neighbours on account of her inconvenient ethnicity. This first genre of war-time narratives

In 2008, the Appeals chamber of the ICTY reversed the decision and found Orić not guilty. Six years later, in 2014, Interpol issued an arrest warrant against Orić, put forward by Serbian authorities, for crimes committed in 1992. He was arrested by Swiss police in 2015, and while Serbia and Bosnia both sought his extradition, Swiss authorities eventually agreed to extradite him to Bosnia. Orić sought to have his case dismissed on the grounds that he could not be convicted of the same crime twice (the *non bis in dem* rule), but this motion was dismissed on the grounds that the specific indictments differed. The trial opened at the Bosnian Court in Sarajevo on January 2016. When he was acquitted in October 2017 five months into my fieldwork, it became a talking point in several interviews. The Prosecution appealed the acquittal decision in May 2018, and the Bosnian appeals chamber orders new trial June 2018.

did not cease after she let me in on the second hidden transcript. In future interviews, I would hear layered stories of ethnic solidarity and genocide denial.

Dunja explained that she felt charged about the topic because, earlier that morning, she had found herself standing with a group of Bosniak neighbour women outside their apartment building, near another kiosk with newspapers. She held her tongue as her neighbours discussed the news of the acquittal, which they considered just.

I didn't say anything so that I wouldn't give myself away. But I think the fact I was silent was enough for them to know that we see this issue very differently. [...] I felt like they were reading my face for a response.

Scott (1990) makes this very point in describing hidden transcripts. They can become visible not only through articulation, but also through conspicuous silences.

One important factor to note is that the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina is located in the former Viktor Bubanj barracks (later renamed the Ramiz Salcin barracks), a site where Serbs were detained and beaten during the war (Jeffrey 2020; Jeffrey and Jakala 2014). Discussing Orić's acquittal, another one of my research participants stated, "What kind of a message does it send to Serbs if this is the site of the Court? There should be a memorial there, not a court! No verdict from them can be neutral." Again, we see how the silencing of the siege's internal zone of violence works to discredit dominant articulations of the war, making plausible the possibility of a conspiratorial silence.

Republika Srpska's ethno-nationalist ideology offers some Serb women the recognition that they seek, and that they are unable to find elsewhere. It validates their lived experiences of wartime suffering. In its revisionist historiography and its reversal of categories, it tells a story where Serbs appear as victims and Bosniaks as perpetrators, and this story resonates with what Serb women endured inside the siege — once the broader context of VRS aggression is bracketed out.

Conclusion

Silence can be a strategy for achieving co-existence in the aftermath of violence. Ethnographers in Bosnia have observed this strategy in various forms, noting how Bosnians skillfully make use of silence or ambiguous language to set aside tensions, avoid confrontations, and get on with daily life (Eastmond and Selimovic 2012; Jansen 2013a; Stefansson 2010). But it can also be “the silence before the storm” (Hermez 2017, 150), a silence that foments tensions, entrenches divisions, and lays the groundwork for a dangerous future.

This chapter has distinguished between two hidden transcripts, and the differing approaches I have had to take in dealing with them. The internal violence of the siege that I have detailed throughout this dissertation constitutes one hidden transcript. The second hidden transcript takes this silenced history of violence and applies it towards revisionist ends, minimizing or denying the responsibility of Serb forces in the Bosnian war. With this second transcript, the “lowered voices” of Serb women come to refer not only to the way their voices would often drop to a whisper as they related their personal experiences of violence inside the siege, but also to the way they concealed the clandestine second transcript: Dunja whispering genocide denial into my ear as we walked away from the kiosk, or keeping her mouth conspicuously shut as her neighbours discussed the headlines.

By taking the two transcripts together, I have also critiqued some unexamined anthropological assumptions, arguing that the orthodoxy of empowerment and voice orient the discipline towards researching (and thus constructing) particular kinds of victims: pure victims. These assumptions need to be unraveled in order to encompass the experiences of impure or complex victims, and more generally to make room for those who have endured violence to stray from the scripts that we expect to hear.

I have argued that the same silence that drives the first transcript underground also engenders the second transcript. The consensus silence that covers the internal zone of the siege, and that negates Serb women’s lived experiences of violence, ultimately leads to a situation where, for some women, revisionist histories become believable. Researchers in Rwanda have reached similar conclusions regarding the effects of silencing. The repression

of violence that falls outside of the state-sanctioned narrative breeds discontent among those whose experiences are unrecognized. And this discontent is dangerous, as it threatens to trigger a new cycle of conflict (Burnet 2012; Chakravarty 2014; Jessee 2017; Mamdani 2001; Straus 2006).

Recognition of suffering is widely recognized as important for personal healing and for social repair after conflict (Govier 2003; Govier and Verwoerd 2002; Haldemann 2008; Molloy et al. 2015). This chapter has shown how a lack of recognition undermines the achievement of sustainable peace, as silences ferment, and entrench divisions below ground. In the concluding chapter, I rest on the theme of recognition, and the puzzle and promise of impure victimhood. I reflect on this research and its potential for charting a tentative way forward, for letting the internal violence of the siege float to the surface without submerging the stories of other victims in the process.

Conclusion: Zones of Violence

In this dissertation, I have tried to uncover a silenced oral history of wartime violence, and to attend ethnographically to the long-term social consequences of its silencing. Like any false dichotomy, the victim-perpetrator dichotomy produces a gap that it cannot contain, a space of “friction” where the two sides meet (Tsing 2005). Telling this history has meant moving into the uneasy space of “friction” at the centre of the victim-perpetrator dichotomy to describe a world where there is both suffering on the side deemed perpetrator, and complicity on the side deemed victim.

The narratives of Serb women presented here tell a different story of the siege of Sarajevo than the one that is commonly told, an alternative story that articulates two distinct but related *zones of violence*. What I refer to as the external zone of violence is well-known, well-documented, and publicly commemorated. It was the violence inflicted on the city by the besieging Army of Republika Srpska (VRS), along with support from the Yugoslav People’s Army (JNA) and Serb paramilitaries. It was the mortar shells, bombs, grenades, and bullets that ended the lives of nearly 5,000 civilians. It was the relative lack of food, water, gas, and electricity by which, for nearly four years, Serb forces aimed to debase and humiliate the city’s majority-Bosniak inhabitants.

Most accounts of the siege of Sarajevo describe only this zone of violence. They fail to recognize, or to closely examine, the *retributive violence* that took place within the space of the siege itself, or what I refer to as the internal zone of violence. The internal zone of violence consisted of violence against Serbs and other civilians by Bosniak and Croat paramilitaries and irregulars, as well as by rogue elements in the Bosnian army and police. It also implicated civilians, for example those who made allegations against their Serb neighbours, who marked their doors, or who simply stood by and did nothing.

I use the language of internal and external “zones” of violence in order to convey the relationship between these two forms of violence, and in order to keep them together, one nested inside the other. The internal zone of siege violence is ultimately a product of,

or a reaction to, VRS aggression. That is, the VRS siege created the *conditions of possibility* for the internal zone of violence to unfurl.

It is my moral conviction that while the story of the siege's internal zone of violence needs to be told, it cannot be told *apart* from its external zone. The crimes committed against Serbs inside the siege must always be kept nested within the broader context of the siege itself: a siege that was incomparably more violent and more deadly, and that was waged in the name of Serb ethno-nationalism. Keeping these two zones together makes it clear that they are neither symmetrical nor equivalent. Unlike the systematic violence committed against non-Serb minorities in VRS-held areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the violence committed against Serb and other civilians inside besieged Sarajevo was neither systematic nor overtly condoned by the Sarajevo government, although it was "tolerated" (Donia 2004, 9; see also Andreas 2008; Divjak 2004; Pejanović 2004). Keeping the two zones together is part of my strategy to make it more difficult for this history, or my work, to be appropriated by those who wish to legitimize the damage inflicted by Serb forces. Or to declare an equivalency.

My intention in articulating the internal zone of violence is to expand, complicate, and *pluralize* the sanctioned history of the war, rather than to discredit it. To contribute to creating an "ethical memory" (Nguyen 2016) of the siege of Sarajevo that can contain the experiences of the city's Serbs without thereby denying or relativizing Bosniak memories of suffering. The issue is that in continuing to tell the story of the external zone *alone*, we contribute to a process of history-making that "excises some episodes and people out of history" (Saikia 2011, 33). As researchers, we become implicated in our very own "grammar of complicity" (Krimmer 2018, 242) by which we turn our backs, and in doing so, become accomplices in "making evidence disappear" (Das 2007, 221). The two zones of violence I describe are inextricably linked, even if they may appear conflicting. The fact they are fundamentally telling one shared story just attests to the way that intimate histories of conflict often "cannot be disentangled from each other" (see also Butalia 2000; Thiranagama 2009, 143).

In his political memoir of the siege, Mirko Pejanović (the Serb member of the Bosnian presidency who stayed in besieged Sarajevo and continued to hold office throughout the war) reflected on the following dilemma. On the one hand, he knew that Serbs in besieged Sarajevo were suffering violent fates, and he was being compelled by members of the Serb community to advocate on their behalf, and to protect them. On the other hand, he felt that calling attention to their plight in the middle of the Bosnian war, in the context of incomparably larger atrocities committed *by* Serb forces, would not only amount to a relativization, but could even make Sarajevan Serbs more vulnerable to reprisals. Caught in an impossible position, he tactfully decided to advocate for universalist civil rights inside besieged Sarajevo, rights that he hoped would extend to the Serb population. Through this decision, he conveyed his position that the war years were not the appropriate time to tell this story. But in his 2004 memoir, he asserts a longer-term vision that what happened inside the siege must eventually be acknowledged: “what is known must be told” (2004, 146).

There will never be a perfect moment to tell what happened. Indeed, in 2020, with the 25 year anniversary of both the genocide at Srebrenica and the end of the Bosnian war, the recent flurry of Serb ethno-nationalist revisionism threatens to turn this into the worst possible moment.⁵⁵ But the continued threat of revisionism ultimately makes it more important to tell this story, to not let theirs become the authoritative account. With several of my research participants already in their eighties, I felt how easily this history could be lost (and has already been lost). I felt a profound sense of obligation to document their narratives while I still could.

But this dissertation is not only about the internal zone of violence. Some women in this study never felt this zone. Some women passed through the entire siege without suffering additionally on account of their ethnicity. For such women, who suffered only

⁵⁵ For a small taste of this flurry: in 2019, Republika Srpska created a controversial commission to investigate “the suffering of Serbs in Sarajevo”; in 2020, American scholar Jessica Stern published a book called *My War Criminal* that, based on an uncritical analysis of her interviews with Radovan Karadžić, presented his skewed self-perception of waging war in “defense” of victimized Serbs as historical fact; also in 2020, Vojislav Sešelj, an ultra-nationalist Serbian politician and founder of the Serbian Radical Party published a book called *There Was No Genocide in Srebrenica*.

the *external* zone of VRS aggression, what often grated them was the feeling that they were being excluded from the moral community of survivors, that, as Serbs, they were ethnically illegitimate victims of the siege of Sarajevo. In the words of Jevtić (2016), a Serb-Bosniak scholar from Sarajevo, “the war, it seems, is not mine to grieve, rage, or talk about.” My hope is that this research, despite its limitations, might help ignite a process that can enable grief, rage, and conversation to take place.

Opening up the Victim-Perpetrator Dichotomy

We are compelled to research violence by a hope, however small, that if we know enough, if we can learn to recognize it and even anticipate it, it could be averted elsewhere. Yet the victim-perpetrator “paradigm” (Jankowitz 2018) that structures most research on violent conflict deeply constrains what kind of questions can be asked, and thus what can be known, about war. It makes it difficult to recognize both suffering on the side of the perpetrator, and complicity on the side of the victim. Throughout this dissertation, I have argued for an *opening up* of the victim-perpetrator dichotomy in order to reveal the gradients that exist between these two poles, and to better account for heterogeneous and conflicting experiences of, and relationships to, violence. I have contributed ethnographic knowledge about a subject of post-war social life who is often overlooked, and about whom we therefore know very little: victims on the side of the perpetrator.

Attending to this subject has meant problematizing the ingrained association of victimhood with purity and innocence. I have done so with two goals in mind. First, to extend recognition of suffering to “impure” victims, understood as those who have suffered violence but who are not innocent, unimplicated, and unambiguously *pure* (Helms 2013; Jankowitz 2017; Ticktin 2017; Turner 2010), whether because they are categorized collectively as members of a perpetrator nation, or because they are actually implicated or complicit in the violence committed by their “side.” And second, to begin to articulate a reformulated conception of victimhood that makes room for victims like these, a conception that disengages from the moral economy in which purity and innocence are prerequisites for victimhood. The big idea, to borrow a few words from Morris (1996, 41),

is to “acknowledge suffering where we normally do not see it” (see also Kelly 2013). And then to ask why we have been unwilling to see it.

The implications of this line of research extend outwards, recalibrating how we understand the civilian experience of war and in particular the phenomenon of *retributive violence*, of which the siege’s internal zone of violence is just one case. Despite its prevalence, retributive violence is a sorely under-researched phenomenon. In part, this is because retribution often occurs after a war is deemed to be over, and thus slips between the cracks of pre-war/post-war research frameworks, which often assume that violence ends when wars end (Berdal and Suhrke 2012; Boyle 2014). Retributive violence also occurs during wartime, however, and it may be committed or commissioned by civilians who are not formally involved in the war (Balcells 2017; Fujii 2009; Kalyvas 2006). It is one of the notable ways that “violence gives birth to itself” (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004, 1). The lack of attention paid to retributive violence attests to the power of the victim-perpetrator paradigm in orienting where we, as researchers, look for and recognize both suffering and complicity. It is a form of violence that often implicates civilians, and that by definition creates impure victims.

There is something comforting about dehumanizing perpetrators, about keeping “them” separate from “us,” about imagining that we could never do what they did. But, as numerous scholars have argued, this logic ultimately mimics and creates the conditions for future violence (Baaz and Stern 2013; Baines 2009; Bouris 2007; Clark 2009; Mamdani 2001; Saikia 2011). This is particularly dangerous in cases where the label of perpetrator (or aggressor, enemy, other) is affixed to entire ethnic groups, and not only to those individuals who actually perpetrated or promoted violence. It was this fusion of ethnic and moral categories that led to waves of retributive violence against Hutu in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide, or to the mass rape of German women in liberated territories in the aftermath of World War II.

Part One of this dissertation focused in on how Serb women experienced the social transformation from neighbours to aggressors inside the siege, a demotion that made the retributive internal violence of the siege not only thinkable, but permissible. This violence

against civilians extended from the level of the government, through police, military, and paramilitary forces, down to the intimate micro-dynamics of everyday life (Kalyvas 2006). These chapters pointed to the war-time importance of the neighbourhood as an institution, as it was often at this site that Serb women and their families found themselves either endangered or protected.

This research further enables us to assess the social consequences of post-war silencing, and how it unfolds in aftermath of civil wars or other “intimate conflicts” where violence enters into neighbourhoods, families, friendships, and loyalties (Bryant 2010, 45). In such instances, where people must continue to live alongside each other in the very sites of violence, the task of regaining the confidence to share a space with one’s neighbours amounts to nothing less than “remaking a world” (Das et al. 2001). In Rwanda, the continued repression of Hutu experiences of violence contributes to genocide denial among Hutu (Burnet 2012), enabling radical Hutu elite to “sow the seeds of discord” and mobilize post-war grievances (Chakravarty 2014, 253). Part Two of this dissertation attended to the social afterlife of silence in Sarajevo, as Serb women navigate a post-war ethno-moral landscape where their experiences of violence remain unacknowledged, and there is no public space to mourn their losses. These chapters chart a cumulating feeling of anxiety, a persistent insecurity and mistrust within social life, and finally a space, created by this silence, for ethno-nationalist scripts to flourish in the undercurrent.

The Work of Recognition

The decision to extend or deny recognition of suffering is a political one. In making this decision, we demarcate which lives are, and are not, considered “grievable” (Butler 2009). Morris (1996, 40) argues that suffering is not an objective fact but “a social status,” and that “we extend or withhold it depending largely on whether the sufferer falls within our moral community.” Many Serb women in this study felt the exclusion from the moral community acutely. The feeling of being *unrecognized* as genuine victims of the siege, or worse, of being *misrecognized* as aggressors, contributed to a profound sense of injustice and indignation.

The quality of ungrievability (Butler 2009) sometimes came across surprisingly literally in my research, as when Serb women inside the siege were compelled to alter and conceal their mourning practices, or efface them altogether. In the post-war period, it remains visible in their reticence and their quiet narratives. This research unfolded slowly and tentatively because of the sensitivity of the subject matter, and the feeling among many of my research participants that their experiences of the siege were impermissible in public. These interviews mostly took place in homes, in parks, on strolls through the city, because these were settings where, unlike cafes, others could not listen in easily. Some interviews were marked by long pauses until someone who walked by too closely was safely out of earshot. Others were marked by cautionary glances, or turning around to quickly check behind one's back. To return to the words of the woman who opened this dissertation, the ungrievability of this history is wrapped up in "the feeling that others are listening."

But recognizing victims on the "side" of the perpetrator is not as simple as extending victim status, conventionally conceived, to innocent civilians whose suffering has been overlooked. I have argued for a more foundational overhaul of the concept of victimhood, and particularly the prerequisites of innocence and purity that only serve to reinforce an artificial dichotomy between victims and perpetrators. Too often, histories of violence that do attend to suffering on the side of the perpetrator fall into a trap where victimization functions to "offset" complicity (Krimmer 2018, 20). I have argued that the reality of war makes it necessary to hold suffering and complicity together, as people often inhabit multiple and contradictory subject positions in relation to violence. The point is to come to recognize the suffering of those who are not pure, of those who may be complicit in violence, and to recognize them as also deserving of a complicated compassion, and a complicated recognition.

In chapter 6 I describe how slowly, over the course of my fieldwork, I came to hear a second "hidden transcript" (Scott 1990), from women who supported the VRS from inside besieged Sarajevo, who doubted or denied VRS responsibility for the worst of the massacres, and who considered the siege to be an act of defense, and not aggression. These women daily suffered VRS violence (even as they justified it), and they also suffered in the siege's internal zone of retributive violence. How does one recognize the suffering of

those who are implicated in violence without thereby condoning their political views? It is impossible to do this without *opening up* the victim-perpetrator dichotomy, and disengaging from the moral economy that enforces a dichotomy between pure victims and pure perpetrators.

Thinking in terms of zones of violence — which can be overlapping, cyclical, simultaneous — allows us to begin to articulate how a person can come to inhabit conflicting subject positions over the course of the same war, or even simultaneously, depending on their location inside different zones. How a person can find herself to be a victim of violence in one zone, and a perpetrator of violence in another, or how she might occupy an altogether different position.

What is at stake for post-war societies when we refuse to acknowledge the suffering of impure victims? I make no claims about the potential of recognition to contribute to *reconciliation*, a term most of my participants dismissed as a foreign imposition, and that I therefore have not used to make sense of their experiences (see introduction). International non-governmental organizations proliferated massively in post-war Bosnia (see Helms 2013), part of a broader “global reconciliation industry” (Wilson 2003, 383), operating with the aim of reconciling Bosnia’s ethnic groups, but often failing to connect with local populations. Reconciliation suggests a shared conciliatory ideology between the parties to be reconciled, but everyday life goes on regardless of ideological commitments. I agree with Jansen (2013, 235) when he writes that what Bosnians want is simply to live a “normal life,” and if achieving normality involves some measure of reconciliation, then “reconciliation appears not as a priority but as a side effect.” This is to say that rebuilding social life is often a highly pragmatic task, rather than a morally or spiritually charged endeavor (Armakolas 2007; Jansen 2013b; Loizos 2009). Its achievements may be as small as simply “carrying on” (Das and Kleinman 2001, 23) or cultivating the ability “to pick up and continue” (Scheper-Hughes 1992, 16). It is a kind of work that is not so much virtuous as exhausting (Thiranagama 2009).

Recognition is important to strengthen Sarajevan Serbs’ sense of belonging in the post-war city, by opening the gates to the moral community of siege survivors. It would

restore in partial measure their collectively tarnished reputation, and thus create new social possibilities. This research has pointed to the importance of recognition on the level of the neighbourhood. During the war, it was often at this site that Serb women and their families found themselves either endangered or protected. After the war, the neighbourhood emerges as a site where recognition is extended or denied, and where social networks can be rebuilt, even if very tentatively, or very slowly, as in the case of Bojana (chapter 4) whose neighbour still refuses to greet her, but makes a point of greeting her young daughter. However, it is important for this to one day happen in the political arena of Sarajevo itself, and not only within personal relationships. As Thiranagama (2009, 44) argues, without structural political support that affirms and encourages a sense of belonging, “individual ‘repair’ can always be undone.”

Recognition would make post-war everyday life more inhabitable. But perhaps more important than the outcome recognition could bring is the outcome it could *divert*. I have argued that some Serb women who are excluded from the dominant narrative turn to, and find solace in, ethno-nationalist political rhetoric. To appreciate the danger of this, it is important to understand that Bosnia’s is a fragile peace (Less 2020; Toal and Maksić 2011). It was a peace-by-negotiation rather than outright victory, and it was a peace-by-partition, two factors that increase the likelihood of renewed violence (Fortna 2004; Meernik and King 2020; Sambanis and Schulhofer-Wohl 2009; Walter 2004). Territorial partition continues to be put forward as a solution to numerous contemporary conflicts including Iraq, Syria, and Ukraine, even while its implementation in other settings (Israel/Palestine, India/Pakistan) has escalated violence against civilians, and has failed to achieve sustainable peace in the long-term. In a context of frozen conflict such as Bosnia’s, unresolved grievances can dangerously threaten the stability of the post-war state. Serb (and Croat) ethno-nationalisms are bound up with overt separatist agendas (Kartsonaki 2016; Toal 2013), and with ethno-nationalism currently resurging across the world (Cederman 2019), these two might get their moment.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study that future research could address. In terms of participants, this research excludes three important groups whose voices would contribute a more holistic view of the experiences of Serbs inside siege, and in its aftermath: (1) Serbs who left Sarajevo during the siege and did not return; (2) Serb men; and (3) Serbs of the post-war generation. And, as a fourth point, the documentation of the internal zone of violence should ultimately go beyond the experiences of Serbs to account for all civilians affected.

Serbs who left Sarajevo and did not return

The absence of this group was felt at several moments during my fieldwork. As one woman in her forties, quoted in the last chapter, put it: “So many of the people who experienced the worst things left after the war. You won’t find them in Sarajevo [...]. So many of those who know the truth are gone.” Her words point to the way that my field site itself biased the data I was able to collect. While I discussed in chapter 2 how my choice of research topic tended to attract dark narratives of social stigmatization and violence instead of uplifting narratives of social solidarity, it is also true that the structure of my research inevitably excluded the voices of those Serbs who may have experienced the worst of the siege’s internal zone of violence, who were driven out of Sarajevo and never returned.

The one exception to this in my data is Minja’s narrative (chapter 4), as she discusses how she came to leave Sarajevo for good. Minja came into my project quite unexpectedly, and although she did not fit the ethnographic profile of living in post-war Sarajevo, I chose to include her narrative because it added depth and dimension to the narratives I heard from other women. But it is noteworthy that she and her family experienced a particularly high level of violence (such as her husband being forced to dig trenches for the ARBiH), and that this violence has made her feel that ever returning to live in Sarajevo would be impossible.

A full oral history of the siege’s internal zone of violence should include the stories of those who left. But as I have emphasized throughout this dissertation, it is not only

important *that* these stories are told, but *how* they are told, and to what effect. Testimonial accounts from Serb men who were imprisoned inside besieged Sarajevo have been published in books I would categorize as ultra-nationalist and historically revisionist, for example books which argue that the violence against Serbs inside the siege amounted to a genocide and that, incredibly, fail to account for the violence committed by Serb forces against all Sarajevans (Ivanišević and Grčić-Gavrilović 2016).

Serb men

Also missing from this study are the voices of Serb men, and their unique experiences inside the siege. As I discuss in chapter 5, the ascription of aggressor that Serb women rejected is likely much less abstract for Serb men. While Serb women were considered to be potentially complicit of sympathizing or colluding with the VRS (as in the rumours that Serb women were sending signals to snipers about when to shoot at their own neighbours), it was men who could literally be accused of pulling a trigger (as Minja's husband was, see chapter 4).

Many of the physical threats inside the siege applied to Serb men specifically, such as being forced to join the army and getting sent to vulnerable posts in the front lines, or being forced to dig trenches. In everyday conversations, I heard several accounts of Bosniak neighbours collaborating to hide young Serb men to prevent them from being taken by military or paramilitary units, knowing that Serb men were considered expendable soldiers and were often placed directly in the line of fire (see Divjak 2004); or simply as expendable labour, and forced to dig trenches on the front lines, as was the case for Minja's husband (chapter 4). I also heard creative strategies by which some Serb men avoided conscription, strategies which generally depended on trusted networks of contacts (*veze*) in official and administrative positions who could supply them with desperately needed, if not always truthful, documentation.

Finally, since a demographic feature of the siege was that many men stayed in the city while sending away their wives and children (Divjak 2004; Maček 2018; Softić 1995), my decision to focus on women meant that I often heard stories about the siege experience

from the perspective of “intact” family units. Expanding the focus to include Serb men would provide better access to themes of wartime family separation, and provide more contextualized information about how people make decisions to stay or leave conflict zones.

Serbs of the post-war generation

This project could also be expanded to include the perspectives of the post-war generation of Sarajevo Serbs. Research suggests that while generations who experience war tend to construct narratives of “rupture” between pre- and post-war periods, this rupture is often absent in the life history narratives of generations born after the war (Palmberger 2016). Instead, post-war generations tend to distance themselves from the war by consigning it to the past (Schwenkel 2011). This is especially the case when the war in question is a source of stigma and shame (Klvaňová 2019).

Yet research also suggests that memories of violence can be passed down intergenerationally in subtle and indirect ways, not through the actual stories of parents and grandparents, but through their moods, their silences, or their ways of caring (Bloch 2018; Schwab 2010; Starman 2006). Schwab, one of the few researchers attending to the aftermath of perpetration, as opposed to the aftermath of victimhood, argues that the silencing of a violent past ultimately leads to the transmission of trauma to the next generation — “be they the children of victims of perpetrators” (2010, 51). She warns that the silencing of violent histories, and in particular the trauma this silencing transmits, can have dangerous effects, leading to repetitive cycles of violence that extend across generations.

Some of the women I interviewed already had adult children when the war started, others had smaller children, or gave birth for the first time during the siege. Thus while some women had shared memories of the war and of the pre-war past with their children, others remarked that for their children, the post-war period was all they knew. One woman, reflecting on the decline between pre-war and post-war living standards, put it this way: “I look around me and I cannot believe the system we live in. For me, this is all backwards.

It's a disgrace. For them, this is all they have ever known. For them, this is completely normal." In this sense, as Maček (2018) suggests, there may be a discrepancy between how family histories of war-time suffering are transmitted to generations still within Bosnia and those who have emigrated to more secure countries (socially, economically, politically) in the West.

Non-Serb civilians

Focusing on Serbs alone was a necessary research decision in order to gain access to narratives from guarded participants who would have been unwilling to talk to me if I had been "talking to everyone" (see chapter 2). Additionally, focusing on Serbs alone allowed me to explore the fusion of ethnic and moral categories as an enabling condition for violence. However, future research on non-Serb civilians inside the siege is necessary to build on this work, and to provide a more complete and pluralized picture of the internal zone of violence inside the siege of Sarajevo.

Because I focus on Serbs in this research, the internal zone of violence I describe appears as a *retributive* violence against those associated with the ethnic aggressor. This is an important element of the internal zone of violence, but it is also wider than this. Serbs were not the only civilians targeted inside besieged Sarajevo; they were simply the only ones targeted on account of their ethnicity. But the general lawlessness created by the siege and by the rise of militarized criminal gangs within the siege allowed all kinds of crimes and violence to go unpunished.

The ungrievability (Butler 2009) of losses within the internal zone of violence extends beyond Serb victims. When the activist organization *Jer me se tiče* (Because I Care) erected a small plaque for victims of war crimes committed in besieged Sarajevo by Caco's unit, the 10th mountain brigade of ARBiH (see chapter 1), it used the non-ethnic language of *civilian victims*, recognizing that Caco's unit targeted not only Serbs but Sarajevans more generally. This commemorative plaque was destroyed two days after it was erected.

These stories are kept submerged because they threaten the dominant narrative of the siege, a narrative where Bosniak and Bosnian forces appear exclusively as defenders, and not as offenders or antagonists, and a narrative where civilians appear as innocent and helpless, and not as local enablers or commissioners of violence (Balcells 2017, see; Fogg 2017; Kopstein and Wittenberg 2018; Ott 2006). Future research could attend not only to additional civilian victims of violence, but also to the civilians who participate in commissioning it.

Conclusion

Veena Das (2007, 211) writes,

I try to defend a picture of anthropological knowledge in relation to suffering as that which is wakeful to violence wherever it occurs in the weave of life, and the body of the anthropological text as that which refuses complicity with violence by opening itself to the pain of the other.

Telling the silenced history of the siege of Sarajevo, I hope to have contributed to the anthropological on violence and its aftermath. Through the concept of zones of violence, I hope I have opened up a space beyond the confines of the victim-perpetrator dichotomy to theorize the multiplicity of experiences of war, and the different positions a person can occupy simultaneously depending on their relation to violence in each zone.

The power of the pure victim construct, and the hegemony of the victim-perpetrator dichotomy, make it so difficult to hold these two subject positions together. It is almost a reflex to switch between the two, to classify a person as being one or the other. As a paradigm, it offers us clean lines, but it renders entire regions of violence incomprehensible, invisible, and inaccessible. The issue is more pressing than achieving conceptual clarity or arriving at a more accurate knowledge of the civilian experience of violence, although these are both significant. The larger issue at hand is what refusing to recognize the suffering of “impure” victims does to a post-war society. Whether or not our analytic frameworks account for them, they are part of any conflict, and achieving a

socially thorough and politically sustainable peace after conflict may be bound up in their recognition.

The victim-perpetrator paradigm constrains what we can know about war, and it renders impure victims invisible and ungrievable. But it also *purifies* victims, in the sense that its parameters steer researchers towards unambiguous experiences of suffering, and elicit narratives of innocence and purity. The victim-perpetrator paradigm thus *produces*, rather than simply documents, pure victims. Opening up the victim-perpetrator dichotomy is thus not only about extending recognition of suffering to a hitherto unacknowledged class of victims; it is about creating space for impurity within the idea of victimhood itself, such that even the (pure) victims that we *do* readily recognize could stray from the script without penalty.

This dissertation only begins to chip away at the paradigm that structures conflict research, and that drives “impure” histories of violence below ground. Telling such histories is an uneasy task, and one which demands extreme caution so as to not re-victimize others. But it belongs to a tradition of anthropological knowledge identified by Das as “that which is wakeful to violence wherever it occurs in the weave of life” and which “open[s] itself to the pain of the other” (2007, 211). The charge of being “wakeful” should compel us to ask when and how we might extend a form of recognition, however complicated, to those whose lives have been irrevocably altered by violence, but who fail to live up to the ideal of the pure victim.

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