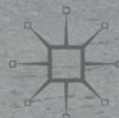
PALGRAVE STUDIES IN COMPROMISE AFTER CONFLICT

RE-MAKING KOZARAC

AGENCY, RECONCILIATION AND CONTESTED RETURN IN POST-WAR BOSNIA

SEBINA SIVAC-BRYANT



Palgrave Studies in Compromise after Conflict

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Re-Making Kozarac

Agency, Reconciliation and Contested Return in Post-War Bosnia

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In memory of my mother, Zuhra Sivac

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Series Editor's Introduction

Compromise is a much used but little understood term. There is a sense in which it describes a set of feelings (the so-called spirit of compromise) that involve reciprocity, representing the agreement to make mutual concessions towards each other from now on: no matter what we did to each other in the past, we will act towards each other in the future differently as set out in the agreement between us. The compromise settlement can be a spit and a handshake, much beloved in folklore, or a legally binding statute with hundreds of clauses.

As such, it is clear that compromise enters into conflict transformation at two distinct phases. The first is during the conflict resolution process itself, where compromise represents a willingness among parties to negotiate a peace agreement that represents a second-best preference in which they give up their first preference (victory) in order to cut a deal. A great deal of literature has been produced in Peace Studies and International Relations on the dynamics of the negotiation process and the institutional and governance structures necessary to consolidate the agreement afterwards. Just as important, however, is compromise in the second phase, when compromise is part of post-conflict reconstruction, in which protagonists come to learn to live together despite their former enmity and in face of the atrocities perpetrated during the conflict itself.

In the first phase, compromise describes reciprocal agreements between parties to the negotiations in order to make political concessions sufficient

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to end conflict. In the second phase, compromise involves victims and perpetrators developing ways of living together in which concessions are made as part of shared social life. The first is about compromises between political groups and the state in the process of state building (or rebuilding) after the political upheavals of communal conflict; the second is about compromises between individuals and communities in the process of social healing after the cultural trauma provoked by the conflict.

This book series primarily concerns itself with the second process, the often messy and difficult job of reconciliation, restoration and repair in social and cultural relations following communal conflict. Communal conflicts and civil wars tend to suffer from the narcissism of minor differences, to coin Freud's phrase, leaving little to be split halfway and compromise on, and thus are usually especially bitter. The series therefore addresses itself to the meaning, manufacture and management of compromise in one of its most difficult settings. The book series is cross-national and cross-disciplinary, with attention paid to interpersonal reconciliation at the level of everyday life, as well as culturally between social groups, and the many sorts of institutional, interpersonal, psychological, sociological, anthropological and cultural factors that assist and inhibit societal healing in all post-conflict societies, historically and in the present. It focuses on what compromise means when people have to come to terms with past enmity and the memories of the conflict itself, and relate to former protagonists in ways that consolidate the wider political agreement.

This sort of focus has special resonance and significance, for peace agreements are usually very fragile. Societies emerging out of conflict are subject to ongoing violence from spoiler groups who are reluctant to give up on first preferences, constant threats from the outbreak of renewed violence, institutional instability, weakened economies, and a wealth of problems around transitional justice, memory, truth recovery and victimhood, among others. Not surprisingly, therefore, reconciliation and healing in social and cultural relations is difficult to achieve, not least because interpersonal compromise between erstwhile enemies is difficult.

Lay discourse picks up on the ambivalent nature of compromise after conflict. It is talked about in common sense in one of two ways, in which compromise is either a virtue or a vice, taking its place among the angels

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or in Hades. One form of lay discourse likens concessions to former protagonists with the idea of restoration of broken relationships and societal and cultural reconciliation, in which there is a sense of becoming (or returning) to wholeness and completeness. The other form of lay discourse invokes ideas of appeasement, of being *compromised* by the concessions, which constitute a form of surrender and reproduce (or disguise) continued brokenness and division. People feel they continue to be beaten by the sticks which the concessions have allowed others to keep; with restoration, however, weapons are turned truly in ploughshares. Lay discourse suggests, therefore, that there are issues that the *Palgrave Studies in Compromise after Conflict* series must begin to problematise, so that the process of societal healing is better understood and can be assisted and facilitated by public policy and intervention.

In this next book in the series, the author addresses the vexed issue of the return of displaced peoples to their homeland after conflict, one of the central questions that bear on post-conflict social repair and healing for victims who were forcibly removed. Population relocation is a feature of many conflicts. Sometimes it is reluctantly voluntary in order to flee the violence, or escape hunger, enslavement or abuse, but occasionally it is done forcibly, in a process we know as ethnic cleansing. Population relocation of either kind ends up in migrancy, refugees, displacement camps, and, mostly, continued insecurity, threat and hunger for its victims. We know a great deal about the effects of displacement in fuelling further conflict. However, repatriation of displaced peoples afterwards is a rare phenomenon and greatly under-researched. This book represents a rich and detailed ethnographic account of one case where repatriation was relatively successful, the town of Kozarac in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and is written with a combination of passion and sober realism by one of the displaced people themselves. Sebina Sivac-Bryant has produced a truly remarkable piece of research. Forcibly removed as a young person, displacement permitted her to realise her ambition to attend university and years later she ends up being equipped to analyse the process of her community's return.

Re-Making Kozarac, however, is much more than a biographical journey for its author and her community of origin. The author brings to this insider story the objectivity of the trained social scientist as outsider, and

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the expectant and excited hope that carried the displaced peoples along during their relocation and during the travails of their eventual return, is matched with clear-headed and thoughtful realism about the difficulties, problems and despairs that dogged the process of repatriation in her case study. As the author makes clear, neither the struggle for return nor the rebuilding of the town could re-create the way of life or sense of community they had before the displacement. And the returnees had to overcome the challenges of a contested return within a hostile environment, making them ever feeling a 'returnee community' that is separated from the wider surrounds.

There are many salutary lessons in this case study that need to be borne in mind should repatriation become more widely used as a post-conflict strategy for social reconstruction and repair. The agency of the displaced peoples themselves is critical to realising the ambition to return. Effective leadership of the diaspora and displaced community is essential. But outsiders in the international community also need to avoid overtraumatising them as 'victims', downplaying their agency in a perspective that prefers passivity. Transitional justice policies can themselves become obstacles to return where they pathologise displaced peoples as passive victims. As the author concludes, returnees are far better at negotiating the complexity and contradictions of life in a hostile and precarious environment than international agencies and transitional justice experts give credit for. And they can be agents of their own reconciliation. The author wonderfully documents the everyday acts of compromise and accommodation of others by the returnees that are already creating reconciliation in a way that is far more sustainable than set-piece mediation across the table between two mutually exclusive 'sides' facilitated by trained transitional justice professionals. And she shows how some Serbs are changing their minds about the returnees and what happened to them. Yet perhaps one of the most important dimensions to re-establishing a displaced community and ensuring its long-term sustainability is economic and political capacity building. Returnees need a framework of economic and political stability in which politics and economics can themselves be re-made in order to facilitate the successful integration of displaced communities and their neighbours. Hope and agency are not enough; economic and political conditions need to be right.

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There are many wonderful insights in this book that tell of the resourcefulness and courage of one displaced community and yet which speaks also to repatriation as one strategy for societal healing and repair. As Editor I warmly welcome this new addition to the *Palgrave Studies in Compromise after Conflict* series.

Belfast, January 2016 John D. Brewer

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1
Introduction

> *We cannot deny the overwhelming sense of victimhood that continues to pervade every fibre of our life, but we have another story to tell and that is one of our fights.*

This book is about the repatriation of a displaced people back to their homeland after conflict. It is primarily a story about despair and then hope for one community in Bosnia-Herzegovina. But it also captures the lived experience of returnees and assesses the value of repatriation as a post-conflict reconstruction strategy. It uses one case study to explore the difficulties, risks and potential of repatriation. However, in setting out on a journey to understand the destruction and re-establishment of the town of Kozarac[1] in Bosnia-Herzegovina, I need to begin by declaring my own interest in the story. This study is about people and a town that I was born in, and later expelled from as part of the wave of ethnic cleansing that took place in 1992. To describe the remarkable trajectory of the community

[1] Kozarac was an important legal and administrative centre during the Ottoman period, but when Bosnia came under Austro-Hungarian rule, the city of Prijedor gradually became more important. In the 1960s, Kozarac's municipality status was abolished, and this was a time when many inhabitants left for Western Europe as economical migrants.

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who suffered a similar fate, I have relied on a privileged level of access to the personal stories that people have shared with me, and I am mindful of the potential (mis)use and multiple readings of these stories in the public domain. Therefore, in addition to the demands of anthropological reflexivity, I feel a duty to be part of this process of the textualisation of fieldwork. But also, by briefly describing my own experience of sudden loss and exile, I hope to illuminate the main thrust of the study, which is that it is impossible to understand social healing and reconstruction, without understanding what made it necessary in the first place. These days, international agencies working in the field call for 'empowerment' and more 'participation' of refugees/victims in developing strategies for sustainable return, but as this study will demonstrate, we are still at a stage where the work of international humanitarian interventions often neither builds nor encourages agency, capacity or ingenuity among the people they want to help. In fact, I will argue, they can actively undermine refugees by treating them as passive recipients of action, largely based on preconceived notions of helplessness as passive victims whose needs are defined by others. The tyranny of labelling is one of the most damaging aspects of post-conflict reconstruction, as it not only enacts rigid and performative roles such as victims, perpetrators or rescuers (usually outsiders), but it also limits our understanding of complex social realities regarding the people we work with and purport to learn from.

In the summer of 1992, I was seventeen years old. I hated rural Bosnia and buried myself in books, dreaming of leaving to attend university in Zagreb; but this was not how I imagined it might happen. We had been hiding in a cellar since the bombardment began two days previously, and as we left the house and were rounded up on the street, with homes around us already on fire, I realised the Serb soldier in front of us who was about to burn the house was actually a friend of my best friend, and we had met in a bar just a few weeks ago. He looked embarrassed, but did his job, which was to forcibly remove the population of the village of Kamicani and send them to the nearby town of Kozarac, from where the women and children would be put in buses to a camp at Trnopolje. I had only been in Kamicani for a week. I lived in Kevljani, a nearby village sandwiched between the Serb villages of Omarska and Radivojci. People

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in Kevljani were more likely to shop and intermingle with Omarska residents than with those in the predominantly Bosniak town of Kozarac, and several Omarska villagers who were friends of my father would later turn up on the Hague Tribunal's list of war criminals; but we were not to know that at the time. The women of my family had left Kevljani a week previously as it became clear that the village would be one of the first places to be attacked as part of the ethnic cleansing operation launched by the local Serb authorities in the wake of their takeover of the city of Prijedor on 29 April. On 22 May, the village of Hambarine was attacked and, because its inhabitants tried to resist, dozens of men were massacred and women raped. Two days later, the expected attack on Kozarac began and what had been a majority-Bosniak town of around 20,000 people was emptied into the camp system, while a few brave souls took to Kozara mountain in a futile attempt to resist, including one of my brothers. My eldest brother and the other men of Kevljani who had stayed behind were quickly overcome, and he was one of the first to be incarcerated in the camp at Omarska. As we would learn years later, however, he was singled out as a respected figure in the village, removed from the camp, tortured and executed before most inmates had even arrived. It took sixteen years before we found his remains in one of the 70 mass graves that have so far been identified in the Prijedor region (Begic 2015).

When we arrived in Kozarac, people were put on the bus to Trnopolje, but I was able to get off and stay nearby with relatives for a week, and then I walked with my two-year-old nephew to what had become a small Bosniak ghetto in the Puharska neighbourhood within the city of Prijedor, where we were relatively safe for a further month. Still keen to get to university in Zagreb, I visited my old school to ask for a copy of my end of year certificate, but was confronted by one of my former teachers in uniform holding a belt-fed machine gun in the empty school building; luckily his shock at meeting me overcame his aggressive hostility and I was able to leave. I would also visit my mother and sister in the camp at Trnopolje to take them food, but this became increasingly dangerous, especially with a hyperactive toddler. Eventually, Serb buses arrived to remove the community of Puharska and transport them across Mount Vlasic to Bosnian-held territory in Travnik. The journey was terrifying,

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but arriving in Travnik was also bewildering. In contrast to the modern, flat lands of the Krajina[2] region where I had come from, the Ottoman-style central Bosnian town of Travnik, overlooked by the towering Mount Vlasic, was very different indeed. Luckily, there were already other refugees from the Kozarac region in Travnik and they helped me survive until I could find the money for a bus to Zenica, where I had heard my mother and sister were now staying in a refugee centre after a long and arduous train journey in sealed cattle wagons that took them from Trnopolje to Maglaj and then on to Zenica. Later, one of my brothers who lived in Zagreb came to pick us up, and after a long and difficult journey, we ended up in the Croatian capital at a time when Bosniak refugees were regarded with contempt. I handed over my little nephew to his mother, who was still waiting in vain for news of his father, my brother, who had taken to Kozara mountain to resist the Serb assault. By the time we found his remains (he had been burnt to death in a house near Kozarac) and buried him seventeen years later, his son (my nephew) was a grown man who travelled from the USA to attend the funeral.

Our time in Zagreb was the hardest I had experienced. I remember registering for the library in Zagreb a few days after arriving, just to have a safe place to escape from my thoughts, and the shocked reaction of the librarian brought home to me the reality of my position in the country. I also had to watch my mother get sick and die suddenly at the age of forty-nine, denied not only adequate medical treatment but even a grave, despite her status as a Croatian pensioner. I ended up in a refugee centre where I could see that my life chances were ebbing away. Later, I met some aid workers from Ireland and they helped me get to the UK, but even upon arrival in London I realised that the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) wanted to herd me towards a refugee centre in Newcastle, while I was still naively asking how to gain admission to a university, so I left the airport on my own and found Bosnian friends who could give me a place to stay. After that, I moved to Ireland and finally found a place at university, and later went back to the UK to continue my education and continue the search for my missing brothers.

[2] The (Bosnian) Krajina (borderland) denotes the historic region at the edge of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires.

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At the time, the reason why my home was destroyed and I ended up in Ireland was hard to fathom, and it all happened so fast that it seemed like a natural disaster. But in fact, it was planned and had a logical purpose. The military operation that began in the spring of 1992 across northern and eastern Bosnia was part of a Serbian nationalist project to create a 'Greater Serbia' incorporating parts of Bosnia and Croatia into a single Serbian state, after the dissolution of Yugoslavia. In the aftermath of the withdrawal of the former Yugoslav Army (JNA) from Slovenia and Croatia in 1991, when those republics became independent, most of its heavy weaponry was relocated to Bosnia. The Serbian government of Slobodan Milosevic used the Army to provide military assistance and training to Bosnian Serbs and assist in building up a local Bosnian Serb Army (VRS) to execute the plan. The pattern was similar in areas the Serb forces intended to cleanse. First there were massacres committed by shock troops from Serbia, such as White Eagles and Arkan's infamous Tigers (Ron 2003), or sometimes by drunk and violent local militia; then came the expulsions, and finally the regular army would step in to secure the ethnically cleansed towns and villages.

When the war began, the Bosnian Army (ARBiH) did not exist. There were units of the Territorial Defence (TO) that consisted largely of regular police forces under the Ministry of Interior, and the Bosnian presidency ordered that these units were to be consolidated into a Bosnian Army on 15 April 1992, but it took a couple of months before the Army started to function in any meaningful sense (Pejanovic 2004). In his memoirs, Mirko Pejanovic, a Sarajevo Serb member of the Bosnian collective presidency recalls the early days of creating Bosnian state institutions including the formation of the Bosnian Army, which recruited based on the principle of patriotism of all its 'citizens and peoples, for the sake of defending Bosnia as an internationally recognised state' (Ibid : 85). According to former Bosnian General, Jovan Divjak's assessment of Bosnian forces in 1992, Sarajevo had only one tank at the beginning of the siege, while the JNA numbered over 180 tanks, and even by the end of the war, the Bosnian Army only had 80 (Magas and Zanic 1999a). But in the Serb stronghold of Prijedor, despite Bosniaks making up around half the population of the city, there was no chance

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to form a defence force and so the Bosnian declaration of independence from Yugoslavia after the referendum in March 1992 left Bosniaks there in a very vulnerable position.

After the initial ethnic cleansing campaign, the war went on for a further three and a half years, with around 100,000 dead and over half of the country's population (2 million people) becoming refugees or being internally displaced. European countries could not agree on a coherent response to the conflict, and came to see it as a civil war among three warring parties, despite the Serb Army having the legacy of the fifth largest standing army in Europe, while the newly formed Bosnian Army suffered an international arms embargo. As the war worsened in 1994, the USA began to take the lead diplomatically and militarily, and this process eventually led to the so-called Contact Group plan of 1994 becoming a negotiated settlement in Dayton, Ohio, that ended the war but divided the country into two ethnically based entities in 1995.

Kozarac, although completely destroyed in 1992, played a key role in forming one of the most effective fighting forces in the Bosnian Army—the 17th Brigade, dubbed the 'army of the dispossessed'—and later, one of the only successful example of contested minority refugee return in Bosnia. Today, the town is known as 'the biggest little city in the world' due to the size of its diaspora community around the world, who return every summer to help boost the town's rebuilding, and because of the courageous returnees who have worked hard since 1998 to re-establish the town despite being surrounded by hostile Serb authorities, for whom the existence of Kozarac as a majority-Bosniak town goes against all of their war aims. The story of how a town, whose houses were not just burnt but often dynamited to their foundations to prevent return, located in the 'heart of darkness' of the Serb-run Prijedor region, became a rare example of successful minority refugee return offers, I believe, some important lessons for how we deal with the challenges of post-conflict situations and minority return, with clear implications for refugee repatriation policy and methods (Fig. 1.1).

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Fig. 1.1 Prijedor region map
(Source: Original map from d-maps.com)

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Refugee Repatriation and Social Repair

Since the 1990s, the international community and UNHCR have focused on the repatriation of refugees to their original country as the preferred 'durable solution' to the various crises of displacement faced by people around the world who have been forced to move due to war, persecution or natural disasters (Harrell-Bond 1989; Black and Koser 1999). In cases such as Cambodia, Eritrea and Mozambique, millions of refugees were able to return to their country of origin after a prolonged period of life as refugees in collective centres and camps in host countries. In such cases, the build-up of semi-permanent camps outside the mainstream life of host countries can produce a range of negative outcomes: camps are vulnerable to attacks by armed insurgents and other military forces, and they can act as a recruitment pool for extremists; they are often overcrowded and suffer public health problems; and, due to maldistribution of aid, they can be vulnerable to hunger. Arguably, host countries sometimes deliberately concentrate refugees in camps on or close to state borders to keep refugees contained and away from their towns and cities, but also to encourage international assistance (Allen and Turton 1996: 15). A more robust policy of refugee repatriation was, therefore, a logical response to the build-up of these camps around the world. Repatriation projects have tended to result from a tripartite agreement between the UNHCR, a host country and a home country, after evaluating safety risks and devising strategies for return, but often without consulting the refugees themselves or indeed factoring their own capabilities and networks into the solution. Some argue that this top-down approach to repatriation has sometimes pressurised refugees to return en masse (McDowell 1996), rather than working with refugees to assist with voluntary return, and that these efforts often reflect policy makers' concerns with the impact upon a host country's resources in accommodating a substantial amount of refugees (Rogge 1994), rather than balancing these factors against the needs of the communities themselves.

There are, of course, many different reasons why refugees return to their original country, and aside from organised refugee repatriation programmes, many return independently even under unfavourable and volatile conditions, and sometimes even while conflict continues (Larkin et al. 1992). Ideal conditions for repatriation, such as security and favourable

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socio-economic conditions, are often impossible to achieve (UNHCR 1993). Complex and diverse factors influence refugee return, such as their experience of exile (permanent or non-permanent) and the extent of their social and economic integration in a host country. For example, Tamil refugees in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu are registered as Sri Lankan refugees by the Sri Lankan High Commission in Chennai, even if they were born in India during the thirty-year-long civil war. Tamil refugees live in over a hundred 'welfare centres' or refugee camps, but they have access to education that enables some to achieve professional occupations; however, their limited status denotes a mode of being in permanent waiting to be repatriated. Sometimes, it might be the case that a host country is no longer safe, as we have seen recently with the proliferation of violent ethnic and civil wars in Africa and the Middle East, meaning refugees may be targeted or scapegoated, in which case many will return to their original country even if it remains unsafe. For some groups that survived mass violence or ethnic cleansing, as is the case with Bosnia, the drivers are sometimes more psychological. They might seek to reclaim physical and social space for their own individual and collective healing, even if they later decide to return to their asylum country. In such cases, having a permanent residence in exile to fall back on if return does not work out for whatever reason might also be considered a 'durable solution'. Sentimental and emotional reasons for return should not be underestimated, as individuals and families might yearn for reunion to satisfy a sense of belonging, for example, regardless of practical considerations.

When we talk about refugee repatriation strategies, we usually think of governmental, intergovernmental or non-governmental organisation (NGO) and large-scale, top-down planning. But refugee repatriation strategies are also conceived and implemented by refugees themselves, sometimes without much in the way of international assistance. The level of self-reliance and resilience required to succeed in such circumstances can be a crucial resource for any post-conflict society that is trying to recover and reintegrate. For example, the decision of many Zimbabweans during the liberation struggle in the 1970s to leave the country was in some respects a rational decision to join the liberation movement, which was based in neighbouring countries (Makanya 1994), although it was often precipitated by police harassment of those

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suspected of being sympathetic to the rebels. Only by marshalling forces outside the country, drawing on a population of over 220,000 refugees in the camps, was it possible for Zimbabwe African national liberation army (ZANLA), and Zimbabwe people's revolutionary army (ZIPRA) to defeat the Rhodesian regime and achieve permanent return as well as political reform. A similar dynamic of refugee return contributing to political reform was also seen more recently in Rwanda, where the post-genocide Rwandan government was pressured by donor countries to encourage the return of refugees, many of whom were perpetrators rather than victims of the genocide. This act of pragmatism by the government helped curtail military training of Hutu refugees in the camps within neighbouring countries, and helped support their public policy of 'myth making' in developing a Rwandan national consciousness to forestall future conflict (Black and Koser 1999); but it was also arguably another example of top-down repatriation that did not pay much heed to the wishes or needs of the refugees. But there have been other cases where refugees played an active role in the repatriation process. Guatemalan refugees in Mexico, and their diaspora in the USA, devised their own plans in negotiating return with their government prior to the signing of peace accord in 1996, demonstrating that a return process that seeks to utilise the resourcefulness of refugee and diaspora networks can often be more successful than one that treats them only as passive subjects (Arafat 2000). One of the most extreme examples of this phenomenon is where international agencies categorise nomadic or itinerant peoples as refugees when they cross a national border that they do not recognise, such as in north-east Africa where people traditionally move from place to place to find fertile farmland or in response to changing climate. Cross-border movements in such cases might reflect regional and cultural attachments, support, family and communal networks where state borders are largely ignored, and yet UN agencies treat this as an issue of refugee repatriation (Allen and Turton 1996). Similarly, refugees from Mozambique in Malawi whose former homes lay just across the border in the northern part of Tete province of Angonia, probed the possibility of return years before a peace agreement came into place in 1992 (Juergensen 2002). To assuage miserable refugee conditions in Malawi, returnees to Angonia sought a solution by crossing the border in search

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of firewood or to attend to their gardens and sell goods at Dedza markets. This was largely undertaken with little interference or support from UN agencies, as their homes were in rural Mozambique under the dominance of the Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO) militia.

In the face of such a variety of refugee experiences and movements that reflect complex political crises and volatile post-conflict transitions, UN agencies concerned with the protection of refugees and a 'secure and dignified' return face enormous obstacles and challenges (HRW 1997). In the last two decades, UNHCR[3] and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have embarked on a comprehensive assistance programme for returning refugees, not only in terms of protection but also in promoting peace building and reconstruction (PBR) of war-torn societies through quick impact development projects (QIPs) designed to help returnees reach self-sufficiency while also benefiting the local population (UNHCR 1993). In the context of a post-conflict environment in which a country's infrastructure is often destroyed, these projects provide valuable assistance in rebuilding roads, schools and hospitals as well as creating the conditions in which normal life can be resumed. However, in many cases, material reconstruction is misused by the transitional governments that are necessary conduits for funding, and can encourage a kind of negative peace—continuing low-level tensions among people without necessary empowering or transforming society – where returnees are tolerated for the funding they bring, but their situation remains precarious.

The state-centric nature of the international aid and development system is problematic in post-conflict states that are often weak, and where warlords continue to compete over state resources for personal gain. In such environments, peace building may unintentionally assist in strengthening the political elite's grip on power[4] and thus international funding may be incorporated into the economies of a predatory elite that shows

[3] For an in-depth study of the historical development of UNHCR from a small refugee agency to the world's leading humanitarian agency in the 1990s, see Hammerstad, A. (2014) *The Rise and Decline of a Global Security Actor.*

[4] Human Rights Watch's report on Prijedor in 1997 claimed that failure to detain war criminals resulted in donors effectively providing aid funding and empowerment to some of the people responsible for ethnic cleansing. See "The Unindicted: Reaping the Rewards of Ethnic Cleansing in Prijedor".

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no concern for the poor state of the country or its people (Duffield 1994). Unlike emergency relief operated during conflict, development assistance requires a recipient government partner in order to assess and prioritise the needs of a wider society or community. In a country like Bosnia, where the state is divided into two mutually hostile political entities, the local entity or governing bodies are responsible for defining priorities and allocating funds. This often results in mismanagement of funds due to discrimination towards minority groups, often returnees, who are not welcomed back in any meaningful sense.

Although the burgeoning sector of international and national NGOs is actively promoting more community-based approaches, NGOs tend to follow funding trends, which are often detached from the real needs of local populations. So, for example in post-war Bosnia, psychosocial support was a key element of post-conflict rehabilitation efforts, with 185 such projects registered by the EU in 1995, growing to thousands of projects costing millions of dollars in subsequent years (Pupavac 2003). But by the turn of the century, these had declined until a new hot topic—helping victims of wartime rape—emerged thanks in large part to Angelina Jolie's campaign to raise awareness of the issue. There is little accountability or reference to earlier research in the work of the NGO sector, despite the huge amounts of money spent on psychosocial interventions in the past. More worryingly, rape victims are called upon to tell their stories in funded workshops, as if retelling their tale twenty years later will somehow help them recover. This issue of the misuse of refugee testimony is one I will return to in the context of the community I have studied.

In a post-conflict context, aid dependency, unemployment and corruption compounded by a weak or collapsed state all point to the need to reconsider how we undertake humanitarian interventions, and to reassess whether governments in transitional societies are the best partners in peace-building endeavours. The latter is particularly important as contemporary conflicts and often volatile post-conflict societies such as Bosnia suggest that violence can be a social condition orchestrated by political elites between former enemies—a kind of 'mutual enterprise' for holding onto power (Kaldor 2013).

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Reintegration

This study is concerned with returnees as agents of change, endowed with dignity, agency and knowledge that can assist with reintegration even in the radically transformed political and social landscape of their former home. If peace building and reconstruction are to harness these capabilities to deal with post-conflict transition, we need a strong ethnographic and historical approach to understand and learn from local processes of reintegration as returnees and local communities are ultimately the actors who will have to negotiate their contested past and future (Harrell-Bond 1989; Juergensen 2002). Much refugee repatriation is based on research commissioned by UN experts and researchers, and other international agencies, relying heavily on interviews concerned with the return itself, but not necessarily post-return integration, which plays out slowly and quietly over many years. Another challenge for understanding the dynamics of return is that researchers and agencies who are active in the post-conflict environment often do not have deep knowledge of what happened during the war, which means they fail to understand what is going on beneath the surface, as I will discuss in Chap. 3.

Although many scholars recognise the complex context of return and the difficulties in defining and implementing reintegration on a large scale for UN agencies, they predominantly deal with the precariousness of homecoming, and specifically the conceptualisation of home. Return home is never a restoration of 'the national order of things' (Malkki 1995); indeed home may now be a threatening place (Hammond 2004) and return may begin a new cycle of vulnerability (Black and Gent 2006). The scarcity of longitudinal empirical studies of the experiences of returning refugees suggests a lack of knowledge of refugee-owned initiatives, outside of international organisations, and of the integration process understood as 'the ability of individuals and groups to interact cohesively overcoming differences without a breakdown of social relationships and conflict' (Preston in Black et al. 1999: 25). How do returnees thrive? What must they do to re-establish themselves, and what obstacles and limitations do they encounter within their own group and among others? To what extent do they

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impact on the social and economic development of the wider society? Does reconstructing a community provide healing? And finally, how can a deeper understanding of the experiences, motivations and challenges of returnees help us understand how to better design refugee repatriation policy? These are some of the questions that I had in mind in embarking on this study.

Re-Making Community After Conflict

From the start of this project, which began over a decade ago, I was interested to understand how people respond to violence, how they sometimes manage to bounce back despite their trauma, and, overall, how a community can remake itself after having been completely destroyed in the physical realm. In search for answers to these questions, and informed by my ethnography, I identified three broad themes that seem to be important in evaluating the success or failure of operational strategies in post-conflict peace-building efforts.

First, the quality of resilience and agency in the 'victim' group will define what kind of victimhood emerges: passive or proactive, which, in relation to repatriation, will influence the level of integration. Of course, post-war reconstruction is not solely the responsibility of returnees, but those who are more assertive will at least challenge the often unchanged political climate that oversaw their expulsion in the first place, and therein may lie the seeds of potential social transformation.

Second, more awareness is needed of the potential for external interventions in refugee return and reconciliation to negatively impact on the social structures and agency of returnee communities. Much has already been written about the negative side of humanitarian interventions in general, such as the risk of encouraging aid dependence (Moyo 2011). In the Bosnian case, and in relation to the socio-economic domain, this primarily meant an exponential growth of the NGO sector, driven partly by the fact that prospects for employment within state institutions or the private sector were slim. This, and the interest of an army of external peace builders and scholars in conflict resolution, social justice and war trauma, has contributed to an approach that relies on (i) bringing together former

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combatants or victims and perpetrators in a mediation of predetermined roles and a sterile workshop environment (described in Chap. 5) and (ii) an assumption that there is a universally applicable meaning of social justice (Shaw et al. 2010). The latter is particularly evident in the discussions on memorialisation in recent years among NGO activists and scholars of transitional justice, and on social media, where the outward appearance of seeking justice is easier and more rewarding than the hard work of real-world social repair (Niezen 2010: 223). These global–local encounters seek solutions for the complex set of issues and realities, some of which may not even be related to legacies of the war, or at least not exclusively.[5] By contrast, in the context of organic return, people tend to embark on a more sustainable form of reconciliation constructed from lots of small interactions, confrontations and engagements that take place according to local social norms, rather than an external frame of reference. Reconciliation—or my preferred term, social reconstruction—is a long-term process that requires interest from affected social groups for it to have any meaning or aims.

Thus, any external attempts to facilitate social repair should start by understanding the resilient qualities and social structures of a so-called victim community, who, despite trauma, often possess a level of agency and strength that can be vital in social healing—for both sides. For this particular community, a sense of collective purpose was crucial in overcoming the humiliation suffered in the camps. This kind of proactive survivor mode of being, rather than passive victimhood as is sometimes assumed in the literature (discussed in Chap. 8), has had a positive impact on their personal interactions with the 'other' group. Small acts of cooperation exist albeit largely initiated by individuals belonging to the survivor group, such as the case of the Kozarac self-funded fire brigade's prompt and efficient mobilisation of firefighters in response to a fire in Serb villages, or the community assistance to Prijedor during the floods in 2014. Another interesting recent example is the involvement of the veteran returnee NGO

[5] A number of studies have illustrated how for many victims, post-war focus on justice is not their priority as much as security, and economic and social development. See Nee, A & Uvin, P. (2010) "Silence and Dialogue: Burundians' Alternatives to Transitional Justice" in *Localizing Transitional Justice*.

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Izvor's activists in collaborating with young Serbs who came together to fight local corruption and social injustice, which has reverberated within the wider society and influenced a small group of Serbs in other parts of Republika Srpska (RS) to begin critically reflecting on the absence of their Bosniak neighbours and their cultural heritage (cf. Susnica 2015). In Chap. 7, I discuss how this phenomenon is also evident in local economic activity, where some recent returnees have brought investment and a strong commitment to ethical and ethnicity-blind business practices, and whose work may potentially be among the most fruitful practical initiatives for the reintegration of the community.

Finally, the other dominant theme in this story is that of compromise as part of organic peer-to-peer reconciliation. In Chap. 3, I will show how this has its roots in the returnee leadership's military experience during the war, and informed the conduct of negotiations over return. For them, compromise first of all involved an understanding of their Serb counterpart's position in their own community, having assured their people that their former neighbours would never return. They saw pragmatism and compromise allied with persistence and patience as key to achieving their goal of return. This contrasts with other stories of mediated post-conflict reconciliation where former combatants can act against compromise when they are placed in a polarised framework that seeks to recognise and reconcile very different experiences. This also raises wider questions about how refugee repatriation initiatives deal with former soldiers, as the return to civilian life and suddenly going from 'all powerful' to utterly 'unwanted' can be an extremely difficult process, and many post-conflict societies grapple with inadequate reintegration of such groups. In Mozambique, for example, which received enormous funds for reconstruction and had a policy of retraining the demobilised population to readjust to civilian life and assist in employment, this process largely failed to deliver, and some people believe that this led to many former soldiers entering a life of banditry and crime (Juergensen 2002).

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Stages of Repatriation: Stones, Homes and Bones

The roots of the return process to Kozarac were created during the war as part of the remarkable story of the 17th Krajina Brigade, which I discuss in Chap. 2. The Brigade was formed outside the country by people who had been ethnically cleansed from north-west Bosnia and some ex-pats in Western Europe, and when they re-entered Bosnia, they became one of the most effective and well-organised forces in the Bosnian Army, dedicated to the goal of securing the return of their community to its home. Led by an experienced and highly professional General, Fikret Cuskic, the Brigade remained definitively multi-ethnic, even during the darkest days of what became a three-way conflict in central Bosnia in 1993, and highly disciplined. The Brigade fought its way to within a few kilometres of the camps where many of them had been tortured at the start of the war; when the war ended, although they found themselves on the wrong side of the inter-entity boundary agreed at Dayton, they applied the same dedication and organisation to supporting civilian return under the legal provisions of the peace agreement. Their ability to negotiate with their Serb counterparts, based on mutual respect as fellow soldiers, was crucial to allowing this process to happen. By the end of the war, the high level of agency and self-reliance exhibited by this group was key to negotiating the daily practical challenges of contested return. I think it is no coincidence that these former soldiers are today among the most pragmatic and least traumatised individuals in the area. And yet for international agencies who often see soldiers and civilians as two distinct groups, or actively seek to avoid the influence of former fighters, there is a danger of missing the key social role played by this group in the return process, with consequences for their interventions in post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation. The story of the Brigade foreshadows and exemplifies the Kozarac community's resilience and empowerment, and in a community so damaged by the 'eliticide' that saw their professionals, leaders and respected figures targeted for execution during the initial wave of ethnic cleansing (Gratz 2007), they provided a strong network that became the social backbone of

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Kozarac during the war. In a sense, the Brigade embodied a town that no longer existed, until the time when it could be re-established.

In Chap. 3, I look at the process of return itself after the signing of the Dayton agreement. When even former soldiers dared not to cross the inter-entity boundary, the women of Kozarac took the initiative. Foreign and local women's organisations persevered in their attempts to visit pre-war homes, despite verbal and physical intimidation, such as being pelted with stones whenever they ventured across the line. I will examine the self-organised return process, which took international organisations by surprise. These organisations did relatively little to support it, believing it to be spontaneous and potentially dangerous, when in fact it had been organised bottom-up by refugee associations and individuals. I explore the difficulties and setbacks during the negotiation of return, but also the creativity of the leadership in dealing with obstacles and communal trauma, such as the way they reinforced communal ties among the displaced and refugees to create a shared sense of working towards return, and in particular the role of women's organisations, which were key players and helped dispel the fear associated with going home to a new political entity that strongly discouraged their return.

Actual return began in 1998, with the Bosniak members of Prijedor's local assembly insisting that they no longer wanted to travel from Sanski Most to Prijedor to attend the meetings. They were ready to rebuild a small building in Kozarac which could accommodate around twenty of them. By the spring of 1999, returnees began moving into the fields around Kozarac and living in tents, despite officials from the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) worrying that their presence, in large communal tents, might be unhygienic and worrisome for the local population. They had waited nearly three years for the local authority and international humanitarian agencies to create conditions of security and temporary accommodation for them to move back to their original homes, and during that time the local authorities moved more Serb refugees from other regions into Kozarac in order to hamper the return of its original inhabitants. Many returnees decided to erect a tent in front of their former homes, and by physically reoccupying their land, they achieved the first stage of rebuilding their community.

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After the stones faced by the first wave, and the first reoccupation of homes, the priority became finding, identifying and burying the bones of the thousands who were killed around Kozarac during the ethnic cleansing. Chapter 4 looks at the politics of victimhood and memorial practice, in both private and communal rituals. I focus on the struggle over the dead and missing, their burial and the funeral practices that began to introduce new elements in the physical landscape that serve to remind the population of wartime events, and mark the renewed presence of the Bosniak returnee population. All of this took place in a hostile environment dominated by an almost psycho-sclerotic denial of war crimes, despite voluminous evidence, and the erection of monuments commemorating the dominant Serb narrative of the birth of RS. In this situation of divided communities sharing physical intimacy, and in the absence of official monuments for the Bosniak victims of the war, the annual mass funerals of victims whose bodies had been identified throughout the year played a key role in challenging the dominant public memory of the region. I also consider how political and religious leaders used these funerals to make political statements, and address the tension between memorialisation and the desire to move on.

Chapter 4 illustrates the new 'battleground' of return—the struggle over graves that symbolise ownership and belonging for both Serbs and Bosniaks; and it describes how the processes of mourning, pain and memory became driving forces for return. Despite the desire to overcome victimhood and humiliation suffered during the ethnic cleansing, the physical landscape of the area is marked by over seventy mass graves, and the experience of mass killings has had a major impact on the community's ability to form new social bonds and a sense of belonging. I argue that it is irreparable loss that continues to impact on people's lives, rather than an overt emphasis on memory as a cause of too much or too little remembering (Maier 1993; Olick and Coughlin 2003; Winter 2006a, 2006b).

Chapter 5 considers the question of reconciliation and the role of interventions from outside the community by exploring a case study of a failed international project to support the demand of survivors of the Omarska camp to create a memorial on its former site in an iron ore mine now jointly—owned by a multinational company. The project was

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envisaged as a reconciliation initiative by a British NGO, but I argue that the process not only contributed to creating divisions within intergroup relations, but also confirmed that the treatment of victims as powerless needy individuals filled with anger and a desire for revenge is both false and risks reinforcing the pain and suffering of an already marginalised community. Through its secretive 'closed-door approach to mediation', the project created renewed divisions between the diaspora and returnees, to some extent diminishing the natural resilience of the community, even going so far as to label those who disagreed with its approach as 'extremists' and 'spoilers'. In contrast to the self-reliance and communal strength that had achieved so much for Kozarac up to this point, it is interesting to examine the impact of an 'imposed reconciliation' process, between unequal partners engaged in asymmetrical power relations, where most of the pressure was on the victims to forget the past in order to achieve an outcome acceptable to the Serb authorities, who in reality never supported the process.

In the absence of public spaces where it is possible to debate or share war experiences, the communal estrangement from life in the Prijedor municipality, Serb denial and the future of the town, the online realm has become a vital alternative space. In Chap. 6, I look at the emergence of a pioneering online community called kozarac.ba, and consider how the site was utilised by both the diaspora and locals to overcome some of the structural holes in real-world social networks caused by the absence of those key figures who were killed in 1992, and also by the scattering of the Kozarac community around the world. The site played an important role during a key period of return, enabling discussions and debates about rebuilding the town to take place in a relatively safe space, and served as a galvanising force for charitable initiatives and projects as part of the rebuilding process. I also analyse the way the site's online forums were used to share communal stories of survival that can help shed some light on the gap between universal and local understanding of social justice and reconciliation processes.

In Chap. 7, I consider Kozarac's future as a sustainable community where young people might choose to stay and bring up their families, rather than leave to find employment and life opportunities. Despite all the successes of return, and despite the town feeling like Las Vegas during the summer months as thousands of the diaspora temporarily return,

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there is a danger that the town will end up as a place just for old people and the NGO activists who have worked so patiently over the years to create the conditions for the town's survival. Without economic sustainability, and without jobs and businesses, it will be difficult for more members of the diaspora to make the leap and return permanently. In this chapter, I will look at the challenges faced within the local political realm and how the town's representatives are trying to find a voice within the Prijedor assembly and local government. I will also examine the way that some of the committed local activists have become gradually professionalised within the international human rights and transitional justice world, and what this means for the town. Finally, I will cover the emergence of a new type of social action in the field of business, where returnee-run firms are trying to create international opportunities for Kozarac while developing the community's skills and navigating the endemic corruption that continues to hold back Bosnian business. The question of how to sustain development in Kozarac beyond levels achieved by the early pioneers is a fascinating one, and Kozarac may yet lead the way in business as well as social action; but if economic sustainability cannot be achieved, then the whole return process might fail to bring the town back to life and it could become just a holiday destination for those who used to live there.

A Note on Fieldwork

Long-term fieldwork is essential to understand the aims and needs of those who constitute such a community, but more modern methodological tools can have a significant impact on testing one's field experience and data. My experience suggests to me that combined field practice is crucial in post-conflict sites of research, as social structures and support networks are permanently in a state of flux. I have visited and stayed in touch with the returnee community since 2003, but have tracked their actions closely since 1995.[6]

[6] In the summer of 1995, I spent time with an Evening Standard journalist in central Bosnia, visiting displaced persons from Kozarac, and their Brigade, which was then conquering Mount Vlasic on their way home. Their journey home formed the basis of my master's thesis in history, Going Home, 2003.

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Participant observation entails a contradiction in itself as participation and observation are two different things (DeWalt and DeWalt 2002; Denzin 1997). Can and should one participate within the realms of survivors and war victims while staying emotionally detached? Perhaps that is possible, but in my case it was not. My own family background and loss meant that I was involved in the social web of connections and ways of being that can only be understood in silence, rather than objectively and impartially analysed through language. However, unlike most returnees and part-time returnees from diaspora, I had no home in Kozarac or Kevljani to go back to, as I had no family left alive in Bosnia after the war ended. Initially my 'homecoming' was quite uncomfortable; the landscape was relatively familiar to me but placing myself within it was a long and emotional process that I worked through internally over many years. Although many I interacted with treated me as local, they too perceived me as a bit of an odd *Kozarcanka* (citizen of Kozarac) as I did not exhibit overtly a sense of belonging, which in reality I did not feel. For me, my formative years happened in Zagreb and then Ireland and I made a family in London. But I had a personal investment in doing this research, as I have always felt responsible for finding and reconstructing the story of how my two brothers were murdered, which I eventually did. Seida Karabasic from *Izvor* became a good friend during my research, and I would sometimes stay at her lovely family house on the Kozarusa hills above Kozarac, and by a strange coincidence, I would later find the remains of my eldest brother just a few hundred metres from her house, in a small mass grave site at Patrija. I owe Seida my rediscovered sense of Bosnian warmth as, since 1992, I mainly lived and intermingled with foreigners and was not part of the diaspora community.

The participatory component of my field research had many sides to it and for me this often meant being available to translate during local peoples' encounters with foreign visitors, journalists, peace builders and so on, or to accompany them as a guide through the fields of a scarred physical landscape. I saw these tasks as a privileged responsibility rather than an obligation (Robinson 2005). Depending on the context, I might feel engaged or expected to actively participate, while at other times, to simply passively observe. There were times when, overwhelmed by the emotionality of narratives of violence, I felt a need to escape it altogether. On several occasions, I found myself passively

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observing a meeting between a foreign delegation from Sarajevo and the local associations, discussing the life of a returnee, discrimination and the sense of victimhood which gave me an inside view of the confusion and misaligned expectations that such encounters involve for the returnees. Often, no one had a clear idea what these visits were about, and one could observe the impatience of the foreign guests while listening to long monologues about life in Kozarac. At times, I shared their feelings, but in contrast to them, I also knew these individuals, which meant that my frustrations were centred on particular informants (Dawes 2007; Pickering 2001). With time, I learnt to cope and to manage certain impressions that the intensive intersubjective nature of the field elicited (Obeyesekere 1990). As I was a situated observer (Panourgia 2002), and in a place that is still defining itself socially and politically, I found that I had to abandon the ideas and plans of whom and when to meet, and in which social activities to engage, as many of them were emergent, informal and often did not happen as suggested by the participants. Rather I went with the flow and followed the daily social activities and rituals of the community, which involved a lot of hanging out and chatting. And a lot of coffee.

The nature of the community, its history of recent displacement and media coverage during and after the war, all influenced my decision not to conduct any formal interviews during the fieldwork. Avoiding interviews placed constraints on my research, such as lacking basic information about an individual's background in some cases, but it also avoided a form of communication that was manipulated on both sides to produce a predetermined outcome. The inhabitants of Kozarac and local associations are frequently approached by foreign and national media, and in the last couple of years, with a growing foreign scholarly interest in memory practices, the voluntary offering of personal testimony has become routine. In many ways, being native, I was largely spared this experience on the implicit assumption that 'I already know it' (Lambek 1997). However, in order to test my knowledge and assumptions regarding public narratives, I was able to position myself as a translator or a passive observer when an interview was being conducted.

Most of my interactions were with ordinary people and, in particular, elderly groups. Staying with lonely women, and listening to their life stories that often came out spontaneously, late at night, and carried on

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well into the early mornings, I felt obliged to listen. Although this developed a deeper rapport between us, it also meant that their perception and expectation of me would eventually lead them to disappointment. I recall meeting a Serb inhabitant of Kozarac, whom I often visited at her home, but this time I saw her at a conference in the Peace House. When she approached and embraced me, several women looked at me showing clear disapproval. They never spoke to me about it, but I detected a certain suspicion towards the cuckoo in their nest who was hard to categorise.

In the emotional practice of fieldwork within a post-violence community, reflexivity on the part of the researcher cannot be underestimated. Despite my apparent invisibility, there were times when I was aware to have influenced or directed certain themes of conversation among women in the Peace Centre, for example, or in the case of a rape victim, who once I met her, took me to her home and spoke all night about her ordeal in a very raw manner. These stories are permeated with powerful emotions and have an immediate effect on the listener and the narrator alike. Also, there was an element of 'ethnographic seduction' that I experienced (Robben 1995). In other words, some stories were told to me as a way of leading me to believe that a particular person's experience was perceived as worthy of recording. Others, like one persuasive informant, used rhetorical arguments and facts to pique my research interest. He perceived that my work focused too much on 'the success of return', while the facts such as the missing, the denial, the random attacks on religious buildings and asymmetric power relations illustrated a different, more depressing picture of the present.

Regular trips home to my family in London gave me space to reflect, and I am glad I did not stay for a single long period instead. Also, through Kozarac's lively online community, where most people I met continue discussions pertaining to communal problems and legacies of the recent war, I found a testing ground for my field observations. In fact, online debates seemed in some ways more authentic, as members did not feel a need to employ social manners in the same way as when they are regulated in a physical place (Bernal 2005). Online, one felt free to express an opinion and not suffer immediate (emotional) reactions, which is a very underappreciated aspect of social networking among vulnerable communities. Most key informants have stayed in ongoing communication with me,

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and in many ways continued to give me their analysis and impressions on the happenings in town and among its dispersed communities in exile. Even in the last days of writing this manuscript, many positively surprised me when I sought their views and knowledge about certain events or environment, after several years of no connection, and they responded promptly. In that sense, this work really is and has always been the story and product of a remarkable group of people whose life experience and knowledge taught me a great deal. While I do not expect everybody to agree with my conclusions, I hope they recognise the story as their own.

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2

The Army of the Dispossessed

> *One thing is certain: the needlessly spilled blood of Muslims is already beginning to retaliate against us. There is information that the Muslims who were expelled from the Prijedor municipality and those who left and have never done anything against Republika Srpska, are now arming themselves in Croatia and coming back to fight against us.*
>
> (Cuskic and Kliko 2010: 21)

This chapter tells the story of the formation of the 17th Krajina Brigade of the Bosnian Army, consisting of volunteers including Bosnians from abroad and those who were expelled from the region, and who travelled to central Bosnia to fight for the right to reclaim their homes. In describing their motivation and what they went through in pursuing this goal, the chapter provides the background to the return story, and shows how civilians became soldiers and then returned to being civilians again at the war's end, and how they were changed by their experiences, which brought a new solidarity and sense of collective purpose. I will also trace how a new leadership emerged that was crucial in providing a sense of safety for the return process.

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In late May 1992, rumours of the ethnic cleansing of non-Serb communities in north-west Bosnia began to reach diaspora communities and workers in Croatia, Slovenia and Western Europe from the Bosanska Krajina region. Limited communication with those at home in early May and then the sudden cutting of telephone lines created apprehension among those outside the region about what was happening to their friends and families. In order to receive news from home, radio stations[1] were set up in Slovenia and Croatia, transmitting family messages regarding their homes and relatives in Bosnia. Bosnian workers in Slovenia even called in to a live radio show from Ljubljana pretending to be Serbs from a village in Prijedor, to ask the Serbian Major Milovan Milutinovic about their families and what was going on in the region. They were told that they should not worry about their families as they were safe and that the Army had begun *ciscenje* (cleansing) (Burns 1992).[2]

For Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims) in Prijedor and Kozarac, the world changed very quickly indeed. On the night of 29 April 1992, the Serb SDS party and other nationalist groups launched a coup in Prijedor that saw them take over all key buildings and functions of the city, including the municipal assembly, and their military units set up checkpoints around the town. Shortly afterwards, attacks on non-Serb towns and villages began. Wherever civilians attempted to set up barricades to defend their homes, such as in the village of Hambarine and the town of Kozarac, Serb forces launched full-scale assaults resulting in many deaths. Hambarine was attacked on 22 May, resulting in a massacre of over 50 Bosniak men who were lined up and shot for resisting. Kozarac was attacked on 24 May, and over two days, several thousand people were killed before survivors were gathered in the stadium and then dispatched to the camps. The entire town was burnt, and then the remnants of houses were bulldozed to prevent people ever coming back. From late May until August, almost the entire population of the area went through the camp system, and above and beyond the everyday torture and beatings, there

[1] For example, there was a radio station at Ljubljana University run by a Bosnian student that became a popular place where people tried to get in touch with their families in Bosnia and hear some news of those that went missing. Later, it would transmit stories of survival, and help those expelled in finding family members that were scattered across the world.

[2] Field notes, in conversation with a former soldier, Hifo, February, 2008.

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were further massacres of whole groups from Hambarine, Brdo and other areas singled out as having resisted, while inside the camps. As international focus gradually turned to the camps, some groups were released towards the end of the summer and made their way to central Bosnia, and many then continued onwards to a life of exile in Croatia or other countries that agreed to take Bosnian refugees (Vulliamy 1994; Gutman 1993; Wesselingh and Vaulerin 2005; Maass 1997).[3]

As Prijedor is only sixty miles away from the Croatian capital of Zagreb, the news of the expulsion of Bosniaks and Croats from the municipality was well known by the end of May when the first refugees arrived in Zagreb. Workers would gather at the main Mosque in Zagreb seeking news about their families. On the walls of the Mosque, notes were left by those who made it to Croatia carrying messages passed on by those left behind. Typically, the messages might let families abroad know that they were alive but unable to move out of the occupied region, or that they had made it to central Bosnia but had been robbed of their possessions by the Serbs, and were in need of money to make it to Croatia. On 27 May, around a thousand people gathered to discuss how they could help their families back home (Cuskic and Kliko 2010: 23), and it was decided that they would form a military unit that could join with the Bosnian Army (ARBiH) and fight their way home. They stationed themselves in the barracks at Borongaj, where the Croatian Army (HV) conducted basic training. They named themselves the 1st Battalion of ARBiH, and their training was financed by donations from wealthy Krajisniks residing in Western Europe. These individuals would later become the backbone of a logistics network across Europe that would support the Brigade throughout the war.

The Formation of the 17th Brigade

Thus began one of the most extraordinary stories of the Bosnian war—the role of the so-called army of the dispossessed which would go on to have a major impact on the later stages of the conflict, and create the possibility for eventual return by ordinary people from Kozarac and the sur-

[3] See summary of ICTY, reports on Prijedor: http://www.icty.org/sid/10169

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rounding areas.[4] I will leave the full story of the Brigade's wartime activities to military historians, but it is impossible to understand the process of civilian return to Kozarac without examining the role played by the 17th Brigade both during and immediately after the war. As people who had suffered first-hand the worst example of ethnic cleansing at the beginning of the war, the soldiers of the Brigade drew upon this experience of loss and dispossession to motivate themselves, but it also gave their war a clear purpose: fighting for return. After expulsion in the summer of 1992, some of those who found themselves in a foreign country, unable to return, struggling to cope with massive loss, and to adapt to life in exile while the war continued, chose to return to the war zone and join the Brigade. For many who had directly experienced the ethnic cleansing, torture and beatings in the camps and the humiliation that accompanied it, joining up seemed like the only action that could assuage their traumatic memories. This backstory gave the Brigade a remarkable level of group cohesion and common purpose, which was in itself a form of coping, and possibly also healing. The Brigade, comprising members of the diaspora and survivors of ethnic cleansing, would become one of the best and most mobile units of the Bosnian Army, which until their formation was by necessity a mostly defensive force, trying to defend towns and villages against Serbian aggression. Their discipline, military training and success on the battlefield, and the comradeship this engendered, would later enable them to harness experiences of expulsion and trauma to drive social transformation and individual recovery after the war.

But their journey home was to be a very challenging one. The Croatian Army's assistance turned out to be short-lived and not without ulterior motives, but without a military background, the volunteers were dependent on the Croatian officers' training; but this was accompanied by political indoctrination such as the assertion that Bosnian Muslims are actually 'Croats of the Muslim faith', and they were given uniforms that combined the religious symbols of the Catholic and Muslim Rosaries (Cuskic and Kliko 2010). A few weeks into the training, restless volunteers were

[4] The Brigade consisted of around 6000 men and women, including those expelled from the area and some members of the diaspora, largely from Kozarac, Prijedor, Sanski Most and other towns of the Bosnian Krajina region. As the war went on, a small number of individuals from other parts of Bosnia joined them too. However, the main leadership was from Kozarac.

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eager to embark on their anticipated journey to combat. Their objective was to cross the border with Bosnia nearest to their now occupied home. The Croatian Army took them to Nova Gradiska, a Croatian town bordering northern Bosnia, and several soldiers attempted to swim across the river Una with a plan to attack the Bosnian Serb Army (VRS) from the direction of Mount Kozara; but it quickly became clear that the VRS was guarding all entry points to this part of Bosnia. The presence of such a large number of VRS soldiers was partly due to their ongoing search for any non-Serb citizens of Kozarac and surrounding areas that might have tried to cross into Croatia via Mount Kozara. In October 1992, a group of fifty men who hid on the mountain during the cleansing of Kozarac, swam across the Una river and arrived in Zagreb. During my fieldwork, I met a father whose son made it to the Croatian border but was accidentally shot by the Croatian Army. Those who did not make it were captured and taken to the former Yugoslav Army barracks on Mount Kozara and subsequently to the Omarska camp or else they remained in hiding on Kozara until late 1993 when the Bosnian Serb Army found and executed them all.

It gradually became clear to the volunteers that they were taken to this region of Croatia to safeguard the Croatian border rather than to engage Serb forces inside Bosnia, and the ensuing argument resulted in the volunteer unit leaving the Croatian Army early the next morning and breaking into the warehouse where their weapons were stored. Their return to Zagreb meant that they could no longer stay at the Borongaj barracks, so they moved to the Velesajam[5] (fair/exhibition zone), but the following day, Croatian police confiscated their weapons. Back to square one, and under constant fear of being forcibly drafted into Croatian Army units or the Bosnian-Croat Defence Council (HVO), they left for central Bosnia in a convoy of buses and private vehicles containing six hundred and thirty-eight people (Zukanovic 1994a).

Meanwhile in Rijeka, on the Croatian coast, another unit was formed consisting of Krajisnik volunteers from Slovenia, Germany and other neighbouring countries who had arrived in May 1992 at the Croatian

[5] A large area of Zagreb's fairground in the southern part of the town. During the Bosnian war, many international humanitarian agencies stored their food and medical supply in warehouses at the Velesajam.

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Army barracks at Klana. They too were to receive a month of training and weapons purchased from the Slovene Army, but their training was conducted by a former Yugoslav Army officer, and Kozarac native, General Fikret Cuskic. During the break-up of Yugoslavia, he had been stationed in the Croatian town of Varazdin, but he left the Yugoslav Army in September 1991 when it became clear that it was no longer genuinely a Yugoslav army, but was siding with the Serbs.[6] He joined the Croatian Army as an officer and commanded an armoured mechanised battalion, with responsibility to train all members of the Croatian tank corps. In May 1992, he requested that he be allowed to provide training for Bosnian volunteers in the HV barracks at Klana and then lead them to Bosnia. By June 21, his unit, the 7th Brigade, was officially endorsed by the Bosnian Army headquarters in Sarajevo. Their journey to Bosnia began on 9 July 1992, and they travelled through Herzegovina to Sarajevo, where their first objective was to engage in breaking the siege of Sarajevo from Mount Igman.

In his monograph on the 17th Krajina Brigade, Cuskic describes his observation of the military situation during the two-day journey from Rijeka to Mount Igman. Noticing the absence of Bosnian flags in the Southern region of Herzegovina, and constant checkpoints of the HVO, they realised that the Bosnian-Croat alliance was crumbling. They managed to get to central Bosnia relatively uninterrupted, due to the fact that he and a number of other volunteers had been part of the HV and therefore carried relevant Croatian accreditation. But they were stopped in Kiseljak, and denied entry to the town on their way to Visoko in central Bosnia, which was their final destination (Cuskic and Kliko 2010: 50). Upon arrival on Mount Igman, Cuskic observed that the local units of the ARBiH and the HVO seemed to be small, fragmented and operating on the basis of local, territorial defence. When his brigade arrived from Croatia, morale among the local units improved as they encountered a volunteer unit arriving from outside the country, at a time when the Army consisted mostly of local villagers and townsfolk defending

[6] International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) transcripts: Cuskic as a witness and Croatian Vice-Admiral Davor Domazet and his detailed description how the JNA became the Serb Army, 10 Sept 1998, Blaskic case. http://www.ictytranscripts.org/TrialTranscripts/HTML/transe14/98-09-10-oed.html

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their homes with personal weapons. This would later become a problem, as Krajisnik units would often be abandoned by the local units, who sometimes cared only about defending their homes rather than counter-offensive combat.

The 7th Brigade's first combat involved punching a corridor through Serb lines to the eastern town of Gorazde, which had been completely besieged by Serb forces. In cooperation with a Foca brigade, and several local units, the 7th Brigade began an offensive using infiltration tactics, where a small infantry force would attack the enemy's rear positions, while the rest of the unit would follow up in direct confrontation supported by other units on the flanks. Such sophisticated tactics came as a shock to the Bosnian Serb Army, and the corridor was opened from the eastern slopes of Jahorina mountain, through a deep forest to the entrance to Gorazde, which remained the only link to free territory throughout the war, known as the *put spasa* (survival path). For the 7th Brigade and the local people, this experience proved that it is possible to successfully attack the VRS by exploiting weather conditions, physical terrain, forest and night-time movement and manoeuvre (Cuskic and Kliko 2010: 53). These lessons would serve them well in subsequent engagements, and the myth of the Krajisnik volunteers was born. Their units were to be requested in many parts of Bosnia for special operations before they would be able to finally begin their march towards their own objective of Bosanska Krajina.

Travnik: Refugee Influx and a First Defeat

> Travnik was, in point of fact, a deep and narrow gorge…On both sides the hills divide steeply, crowding close together at a sharp bend in the valley, where there is barely room for the meagre river and the road beside it. The whole shape of the place is like a half-opened book, both pages of which are, as it were, illuminated with gardens, streets, houses, fields, graveyards, and mosques. (Andric, I. The Travnik Chronicle, 17–18)

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From late May 1992, non-Serbs expelled from Bosanska Krajina, and the survivors of the camps, were routinely dumped at Smet, the last post of the Bosnian Serb line, before being made to walk through no man's land across Mount Vlasic to Travnik.[7]

> One day in July, we heard a rumour that buses are coming next day to take us. We did not know where or when. In the morning, we were assembled in a large field surrounded by the Serb Army. Children were crying, hungry…women were quietly trying to calm down their young ones. It was a very hot day but suddenly it started to rain heavily. One woman whispered to me that it was as if the weather was crying for us. Fear, misery and not knowing… squeezed together like a tin of sardines, not allowed to sit, with our heads down, we were driven for most of the day, stopping briefly just outside the town, near the former ceramic factory, Keraterm, in which our men were held. They ordered us to look at them and their wretched existence, many with shaved heads, thin bodies… Children were so tired that most of them fell asleep or appeared half dead, with no water and unbearable heat; we all felt tired but fear kept us awake. I kept peeping through the window to see if I recognised anything. We passed through Banja Luka city. Afterwards, all became very unfamiliar to me. The landscape became wild and mountainous. The road we took felt like a narrow steep winding path that went on forever. At one point, we stopped near a brook and were allowed to get out and get some fresh air and water. I noticed many soldiers looking for young girls and taking them away. I decided to get back on the bus. At our final stop, we were ordered to get off the buses and walk away. At first, everyone was scared to move. We were standing near the edge of the cliff and in front of us was a winding mountain road that we were supposed to follow. We walked and after a while, we encountered the Bosnian Army soldiers near the village of Turbe… We were being shelled all the way to Travnik but, once we realised we were on free territory, the sense of relief was overwhelming.[8]

The city of Travnik is located in the heart of the Lasva Valley, bordered by Mount Vlasic to the north and Mount Vilenica to the south. Much of its beautiful Turkish-style architecture dates back to the Ottoman

[7] See Ed Vulliamy's testimony at http://ictytranscripts.dyndns.org/trials/tadic/960607ed.htm

[8] Field notes, 26 May 2007.

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conquest of Bosnia, when Travnik functioned as a trading post in central Bosnia and the seat of the Ottoman Viziers. For Bosanska Krajina refugees, this landscape was a stark contrast to their homeland, both culturally and physically. Before the war, closer to the Croatian capital of Zagreb than central Bosnia, many Krajisniks sought work and university degrees in Zagreb and Western Europe. The colloquial language of the natives of Travnik was imbued with Turkish words and the style of dress was very traditional and eastern, while the city itself felt claustrophobic, overlooked by Mount Vlasic and the powerful Serb artillery that commanded the city. The expansive rolling fields of Prijedor (*Prijedorska polja*) in which Kozarac and many other villages are located were now behind them. The Bosnian Serb Army and former neighbours were busily plundering and burning their homes; camp inmates later recounted how clouds of smog were hovering over the villages—a process of post-ethnic cleansing that lasted throughout the summer of 1992.

By the end of the summer, Travnik was overwhelmed with around 40,000 refugees. Consequently, the balance of the town's population was altered, which contributed to rising tension between local inhabitants and the newcomers, on the one hand, and between Croats and Muslims generally on the other. The Zagreb volunteers who formed the 1st Battalion arrived in Travnik during July 1992, which further created a sense of invasion of the town among locals. The battalion was immediately stationed on the defence line at Turbe, while its base became the former JNA barracks in town. Due to the large influx of refugees, and a lack of accommodation, in the first few months, refugees and soldiers of the 1st Battalion occupied the barracks together. Many encountered their relatives and heard stories of violence that had destroyed family and communities. It was a very difficult time for both groups, as their sense of dispossession intensified as a consequence of meeting each other in central Bosnia. At the same time, these stories of suffering and the subsequent discovery of the camps by foreign journalists and the resulting images of emaciated prisoners provided strong motivation to fight, and more survivors joined the 1st Battalion, which was renamed the 1st Krajina Brigade.

When, in the autumn of 1992, the VRS unleashed a full-scale attack on Jajce, a town twenty miles south-east of Travnik, the Krajisnik units were eager to assist local units of the HVO and ARBiH in guarding their

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defence lines. They saw Jajce as a gateway to Bosnian Krajina. Under the command of local Jajce forces, for the first time, the 7th Brigade was scattered in different parts of the battlefield. Meanwhile, their commander, Cuskic, observing the frontier between Bosnian and Serb forces, claimed that Jajce could be defended, but only with heavy weapons. He left for Croatia to obtain the necessary weaponry; but a few days later, on 29 October, Jajce fell. Some argue that the Bosnian forces, the HVO and ARBiH units did not cooperate, and as tensions rose, many abandoned their defence lines. The story of the fall of Jajce remains controversial (Hoare 2004). Cuskic claimed that the HVO suddenly withdrew without notifying the Jajce forces. On the other hand, two parallel commands existed in the town, and as Cuskic noted, it was illogical for the two to defend this area, each with its own strategy.

Jajce had always been vulnerable to attack, and once Serb forces decided to take over the town, they could not be stopped.[9] The fall of the town saw an additional influx of refugees to Travnik—over 50,000 Muslims and Croats by some estimates (Maass 1992). Since Travnik was already overwhelmed with the Bosnian Krajina refugees, there was no school or public hall left to take them in. Refugees began sleeping on the streets, in the open, vulnerable to Serb artillery from Mount Vlasic and the situation was extremely volatile. As the Bosnian and HVO units withdrew, Travnik's citizens worried that the city itself would fall. Croats from Jajce continued to Herzegovina and Croatia, while many Muslims remained in the area.[10]

This was the most difficult period for the people of Bosnian Krajina in Travnik, as Jajce was a symbol of hope: 'For us, Krajisniks, Jajce was an important symbol, and we thought from there we could very quickly reach the Sana valley and from there, connect with our forces from the Bihac region [the Fifth Corp]. From Jajce, we smelled the [river] Sana and Krajina' (Cuskic and Kliko 2010: 64). Bosnian Army military morale was very low, resulting in many soldiers—even entire units—leaving the army. Travnik's streets were filled with soldiers selling their guns in order

[9] According to a soldier that fought for the town, the Serb Army was a 'mighty army' at the time and there was no way they could hold the positions. September, 2003.

[10] Around the fall of Jajce, Croatia declared that they could not accommodate more Bosnian refugees.

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to buy a bus ticket to Croatia. An entire unit consisting of men from Velika Kladusa, who Cuskic brought from Croatia during one of his trips to logistic centres, returned to Croatia. The 7th Brigade was sent to help in defending Karaula,[11] a village close to Travnik where the local troops suffered low morale. In doing so, the units of the 1st Brigade and the 7th Brigade were merged to form the 17th Krajina Brigade on 25 November 1992. All through that winter, apart from defending Travnik, the Brigade organised military training to build on its success near Gorazde and learn from its painful experience at Jajce (Fig. 2.1).

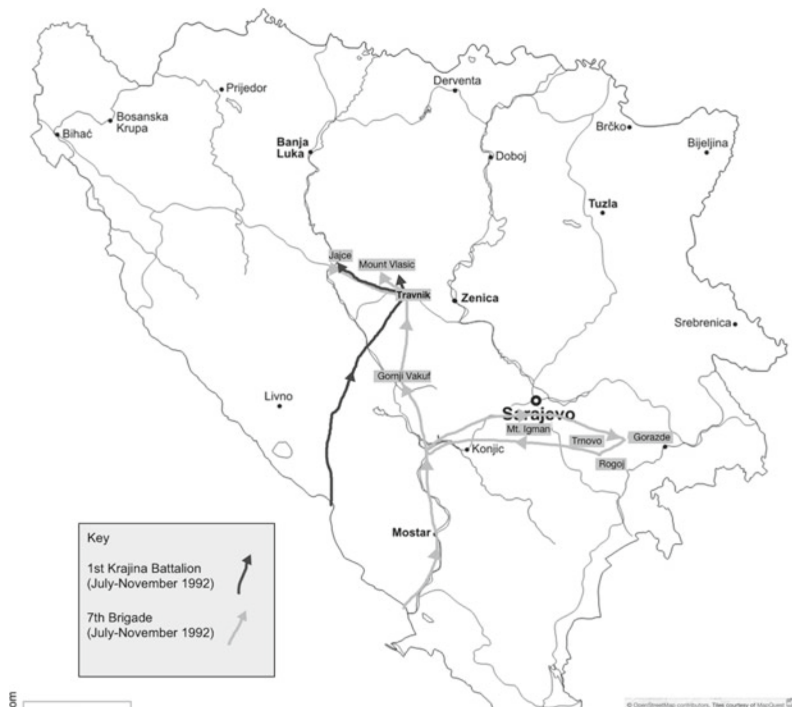

Fig. 2.1 17th Krajina Brigade (Source: Original map from d-maps.com)

[11] In defending Karaula, they saved Travnik; however, thirty-two soldiers were badly injured and later transferred to the UK, via logistic centres, for medical treatment. Most of them remained in the UK. See Cuskic & Kliko, *17 Viteska Krajiska Brigada*, 2010.

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The Croat-Muslim War in Central Bosnia

> Every Flag that they see in passing will remind them that this is the living space of the Croatian people.[12]

> A conflict with the HVO should be avoided at all costs.[13]

The next great challenge faced by the 17th Brigade, which was key to understanding their development as a group, was the dark days of the Croat-Muslim conflict in central Bosnia. For much of the war, Travnik was the main base for the volunteers of the 17th Krajina Brigade, and the main place where large numbers of those forcibly expelled from Kozarac and Prijedor sought refuge. But from late autumn of 1992 through to 1994, central Bosnia became the site of a vicious internecine conflict between the Bosnian-Croat HVO and the Bosnian Army, with the former centred around Vitez and the latter around Travnik.

The influx of refugees altered the balance of forces in central Bosnia, and made some Croat communities nervous.[14] Even in Travnik, locals perceived the newcomers as something of a threat.[15] Additionally, as others have argued, the Vance-Owen Peace plan (VOPP), which was evolving throughout the autumn and winter of 1992, was a key factor

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[12] Dario Kordic, deputy commander of HZ H-B, 1993. See http://www.ictytranscripts.org/TrialTranscripts/HTML/transe14-2/99-09-23-it.html

[13] Alija Izetbegovic, President of Bosnia and Herzegovina, verbal order to the 3rd Corps at the meeting in Han Bila in the autumn 1992. See Cuskic and Kliko (2010).

[14] See the work of American military historian, Charles Shrader (2003) *A Muslim-Croat Civil War in Central Bosnia: A Military History, 1992–1994*. His research is widely quoted by some Croats keen to claim that the conflict was precipitated by the Bosnian Army. The author uses extensively testimonies from the Hague Tribunal but also several low-ranking HVO officers in Bosnia to make a case that the predominant view of the Bosnian Muslims as the victims of the war is not based on a factual military account of the war. He argues that the Bosnian government used refugees in central Bosnia as a highly motivated and revengeful military force, due to their experience of ethnic cleansing, and was therefore the main propagator of the Muslim-Croat conflict. On the other hand, Croats are described as people who had neither reason nor motivation to embark on another war within a war.

[15] Bosnian General Jovan Divjak has claimed that Croats perceived the refugees as a group that wanted to take what was taken from them by the Serbs. In Magas, B. & Zanic, I. (Eds). *Rat u Hrvatskoj i Bosni i Hercegovini 1991–1995*. Dani, 1999. Also, see M.A. Hoare (2004) *How Bosnia Armed*.

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in sparking the conflict in central Bosnia. The VOPP offered Bosnian Croats substantially more territory than they held at the time, and more than was warranted in demographic terms; and as Anthony Lloyd wrote at the time, the proposed borders seemed so ridiculously advantageous to the Bosnian Croats that even they joked that HVO stood for 'Hvala Vance Owen'—thank you Vance-Owen (Lloyd 2001). This seems to have created an incentive to seize territory assigned to them under the plan, but not yet under their control. Whatever the intentions of its drafters, the VOPP clearly strained relations between Muslims and Croats, many of whom found themselves on the 'wrong' side of the proposed demarcation line of the peace plan, and made conflict more likely.

The Croat-Muslim war began in earnest during early 1993 in central Bosnia, sparked by hit-and-run attacks by HVO militia from Herzegovina into mixed and predominantly Muslim towns and villages in the Lasva Valley. In Travnik, the commander of the local HVO unit, a former JNA officer, Filip Filipovic appeared reluctant to engage in conflict, and so was relieved of his duty and a Herzegovinian commander replaced him.[16] This was enough to pit local HVO forces and the Bosnian Army against each other, even in towns like Fojnica, which had been regarded as an oasis of peaceful coexistence up to that point.[17] In April 1993, the worst of these incursions occurred at Ahmici, near Vitez, where approximately 120 civilians were slaughtered and burnt by an HVO militia.[18]

As the war went on, from the fall of Jajce onwards, many individuals joined the Brigade as it was seen to be a mobile unit that might bring the liberation of Bosnia and Herzegovina—even some foreigners, like a Finnish man, Jani Anttola, who wrote a book on his experience in the unit. And yet, when their Croat allies suddenly turned into enemies, they were caught off guard. At the time, their families were living in Croatia

[16] See Cuskic testimony: http://www.ictytranscripts.org/TrialTranscripts/HTML/transe47/04-11-22-IT.html

[17] See, for example, "Anonymous Hero" by Emil Habul (2000), *Oslobodjenje*, Sarajevo, 8 April 2000—translated here: http://www.cdsp.neu.edu/info/students/marko/oslob/oslob53.html

[18] See http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/603420.stm for a BBC report of the massacre; Croatian journalist Ivo Skoric later unearthed details of alleged Croatian government complicity in the massacre from the archives of President Tudjman, see http://list.iskon.hr/pipermail/attack/2000-May/000711.html for details of his findings.

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and many were still receiving their Croatian salaries there until the end of 1992. They saw Croats as an ally in fighting a common enemy—the Bosnian Serb Army. In military terms, although their manpower continued to grow, the Brigade could just about manage to fight one enemy, let alone two. Years later, some soldiers described to me how the Croat-Muslim conflict was the dirtiest and toughest they had to fight. A sense of betrayal left many with painful memories of battles and irrevocable loss in a conflict deemed unfathomable and pointless by most people.

It was a conflict forced upon them and one that quickly became a fight for survival, because it meant they were cut off and surrounded by hostile forces on all sides (Cuskic and Kliko 2010). From the beginning of 1993, the HVO put its troops on elevated positions around Travnik and secured important communication and strategic posts. As a result, nothing could be brought into town without going through an HVO checkpoint. The HVO developed a strategy in which they would encircle a town or a village and take over one place at a time. Controlling important military positions also meant that the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR), or any other international agency, had to attempt to pass through those checkpoints, often without success. Prior to the conflict, as British journalist Robert Fisk observed, the situation in Travnik was already dire and he wondered whether Travnik could defend itself at all, considering the absence of heavy weapons and the vulnerable position of the town surrounded by Serb forces on Mount Vlasic, who were shelling it daily. In such a precarious state, Fisk pondered if the international humanitarian assistance, without providing any safety for refugees, could be seen as merely 'fattening up refugees for further suffering' (Fisk 1992).

The peace negotiations in Geneva throughout the summer of 1993 often reflected the situation on the ground, and vice versa. Some argue that at the time of the Geneva talks, 'Serb and Croat forces were making their own deals on the ground, leaving the Muslims under pressure at every level' (Rhodes 1993). Indeed, the 17th Brigade believed that the Serbs who commanded the Vlasic features above Travnik had made such deals with the HVO (Cuskic and Kliko 2010). As one soldier of the Brigade recalls: 'The war against the Croats felt like a medieval battle in an arena where we were fighting for survival while the Serbs acted as

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observers, waiting to see who would be left standing to fight them.'[19] Later, as the Bosnian Army threatened to completely defeat the HVO, the same political process would lead to the 17th Brigade being ordered not to advance on Vitez even though they were close to its centre, in order to maintain pressure on the HVO while negotiations continued.

The intimate, complex and painful nature of this phase of the conflict is illustrated by the story of one operation around Vitez where, after a successful offensive on a hill above the town, a 17th Brigade unit dug in close to a nearby village. The following day, Croat women from the village came close to the front line and said they knew that it was the 17th Brigade that was fighting them, and they knew that the Brigade was from north-west Bosnia. They asked why they were fighting there, although they understood that their families had been expelled, and they began to cry as they asked about their own husbands and sons. According to soldiers who were there, what followed was not the usual crude exchange of words that often takes place across front lines, but a strange, thoughtful silence. The soldiers knew that the men the women asked about lay dead behind them, where they had fought the previous day. They did not suddenly feel guilty for fighting, but the words of the Croat women brought home to them that they had no families to return to in Travnik, nor anybody to mourn them should they die there in central Bosnia.

> Hearing these women crying and asking for their loved ones, it sounds like a paradox, but we felt deprived of the bond and care that one's family offers. In the last two years, we had been far from our homes, and our families were mainly outside Bosnia. That is why we were so quiet. We remembered our families and felt that familial care…We did not feel guilty. We did not empathise with them. In all of it, we only felt deprived…[20]

After the breakdown of peace talks based on the revised Owen-Stoltenberg plan (OSP) in the autumn of 1993, the US government began to play a greater role in diplomatic efforts to end the war, and tried to bring an end to the Croat-Muslim conflict. By late 1993, the Bosnian Army had the upper

[19] Interview with a soldier of 17 KB, September 2003. Also, see ARBiH General Divjak's similar reflection that for the Bosnian Serb Army (VRS), 1993 was a year of break. In Magas, B & Zanic, I. *Rat u Hrvatskoj i Bosni i Hercegovini.*

[20] Ibid.

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hand in central Bosnia, and a kind of uneasy stalemate had been reached. The US-brokered Washington agreement of March 1994, which created a Federation between Muslims and Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina, finally brought an end to the conflict, meaning that the 17th Brigade could focus on its main objective; but, as it turned out, this also set the scene for a two-way division of Bosnia and the creation of Republika Srpska.[21]

Conquering Mount Vlasic: Overcoming Fear

> Man only realises how small and lost he is when confronted with this immense, wild expanse of untouched nature. (17Kb soldier, Julardzija 1994)

During 1994—the third year of war—mobile units of the 17th Brigade had gained a lot of experience and engaged in many different battlefields across Bosnia. Not having their own homes to defend created a sense that the only way for them to operate was as an offensive unit, in contrast to the largely defensive character of the Bosnian Army. Hence 'they had the courage of those with nothing to lose, with nowhere else to go' (McDonagh 1995). This gave them some of the characteristics and spirit of a liberation movement within the Bosnian Army.

In April 1994, the 7th Corps was formed, based in Travnik and subsumed the 17th Brigade under its command.[22] The Bosnian Army brigades that congregated around the Krajisnik volunteer units were to be the main body of the youngest Corp of the Bosnian Army. Although it consisted predominantly of the refugees from Prijedor, Sanski Most, Kljuc—towns that were ethnically cleansed in the summer of 1992—others units were made up of non-Serb communities expelled later from places such as Jajce and Kotor Varos. During this year, the Brigade focused on taking the dominant feature of the region, Mount Vlasic, but although they slowly gained ground, Serbs continued to dominate the

[21] See http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/file/resources/collections/peace_agreements/washagree_03011994.pdf for details of the agreement.

[22] The primary source for this chapter was the 7th Corps' newspaper, *Sloboda* (Freedom), published in Travnik throughout the war. *Sloboda* is not available in public. I was given access to a personal archive of several former soldiers of the 17th Brigade.

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mountain, which is the second-highest peak in Bosnia. At 2000 m high, it overlooks the city of Travnik but also about 10 % of the entire country. It was held by Serb forces from the beginning of the war, and they used it to bombard most of the surrounding towns and villages in central Bosnia. For Serbs, Vlasic was regarded as 'the roof of Republika Srpska', and it held similar strategic importance for the Bosnian Army. Importantly, the mountain was very difficult to capture, because aside from a single easily defensible route up the mountain from the south-east, the only other lines of attack faced sheer cliffs on the mountain's south and eastern faces. Vlasic was also the location for an important telecommunications tower at Opaljenik, used from the beginning of the war in 1992 for retransmitting TV Serbia into RS. Hence the Bosnian Army's aim was to 'turn the propaganda around' by taking it over and transmitting Sarajevo television to Serb-held territory (McDonagh 1995). Another key strategic aim for the Bosnian Army during the war had always been to join up its 5th and 7th Corps based in Bihac and Travnik, respectively, to free the Bihac pocket (which was surrounded), divide Serb forces and create a powerful western front that could push them towards the Serb stronghold of Banja Luka and beyond (Musinbegovic et al. 1999). Mount Vlasic stood as a physical and symbolic obstacle that prevented the Bosnian Army from achieving this goal. From the beginning of the formation of the 7th Corps, their combat direction was decidedly towards north-west Bosnia, but the only way forward was over the mountain. As the gateway to north-west Bosnia, Vlasic stood between the 17th Krajina Brigade and their homes:

> After all the killing, there are only two things…home, and time. Home, because that is where we have to be in the end. And time, because that's what it takes to get there. I've stopped counting the time since I last saw home; I think it's three years we've been living in the forests. All I can count are the days until I get back. They burned our houses but they can't burn the land. And they can't fight time. Home and time. There's nothing else left…This war is the war to go home. (Vulliamy 1995)

Vlasic had itself been touched by the Serb ethnic cleansing campaign in 1992. When Bosnian Muslims and Croats were released from the camps in north-west Bosnia, they were most often transported to the mountain and then left to wander over the front lines to the relative safety of

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Travnik. These convoys were often stopped by Serb soldiers operating on Mount Vlasic, who would sometimes take girls away from their family and into the forest:

> They set apart about thirty girls. They separated an old woman from her two daughters; she protested, cried, went down on her knees and begged, but there was no mercy, she got a bullet in the head. The girls were taken to an unknown destination and even today it is not known (Rogel, 2004:177).

According to one soldier, when Vlasic was finally liberated, they stumbled across a bunker on which was written 'do not enter' and found a mass grave containing corpses with women's clothes.[23] In some cases, camp survivors were taken to the mountain to be killed rather than released. For example, the massacre at the Koricani cliffs on 21 August 1992, saw around 200 men shot and dumped in a ravine, with only seven survivors (IWPR 1999). 'We were told to line up along the cliffs and kneel there. Then the horrible shooting started. I was falling into the abyss', recounts Medo Sivac, a survivor of the massacre.[24] Later, he was found by the Bosnian Serb Army and taken to Banja Luka hospital. This was one of the only atrocities that the Bosnian Serb leadership ever acknowledged during the war. The Koricani massacre was certainly in the minds of the 17th Brigade when they looked up at Serb positions on Vlasic. For many soldiers in the 17th Brigade, then, Vlasic was the first 'graveyard' they wanted to recover. Many of them had walked across the mountain in 1992 as broken men, after surviving the horrors of the camps:

> Vlasic's shackles are being broken, Bosnian strength crashed it and that reminds me of a time when it was born [17Kb]…, it all coincided with the time when I was on that same mountain, humiliated and helpless, dragged in a truck, July '92, and was made to walk from Smetovi to Travnik, a route taken, before and after me, by thousands of wretched Krajisniks.[25]

[23] Conversation with soldiers, September 1995.

[24] Bosnian Serb newspaper, *Nezavisne Novine*, "Tracking Down The Crimes At Koricani Near Knezevo in August 1992", 1999.

[25] IS 17VKBR (1995, April 15:4).

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By the summer of 1994, the 7th Corps led by General Mehmed Alagic, a native of Sanski Most, realised that if they were to take this immense mountain, it would only be possible during the winter when his forces could use the weather to their advantage (McDonagh 1995; Musinbegovic et al. 1999). The communication tower at Opaljenik, at the peak of the mountain, was heavily mined, as were other features of the mountain, and to reach it safely was only possible when the snow was deep enough for soldiers to walk over minefields without activating them. At the end of 1994, a four-month ceasefire had been brokered by the international community, and this gave the Bosnian Army enough time to prepare for the attack on Vlasic. In fact, preparation was already underway in the summer of 1994, when the Army began to employ civilians in a Travnik factory to make special white camouflage uniforms from Scandinavian material sent from abroad by the Bosnian Krajina diaspora. Bosnian generals decided to be on constant alert throughout this time, aware that ceasefires tended to be honoured mostly in the breach.[26]

The first attempt to infiltrate Serbian positions, known as operation 'Domet-95', took place on 24 February 1995, in the region of Galica. A Bosnian brigade spent hours secretly climbing the sheer rocks of the Galica slope, before attacking the Serb Army bunker at the top. However, once up there, they could not see signs of the planned supporting operations from other brigades, and they panicked and began a chaotic retreat. Nevertheless, Serb forces were indeed surprised and lost approximately 60 soldiers, with many more wounded. As a result, fear also began to spread among units of the Bosnian Serb Army on Mount Vlasic (Musinbegovic et al. 1999: 34–36). The Bosnian Serb Army 1st Krajina Corps stationed there at the time was 'spread thinly, covering the area from Vlasic to Bihac' (Ibid: 34–36).

For the Bosnian Army, which was keen to continue offensive actions, this military setback was turned into a positive experience. It was partially successful to the extent that Bosnian soldiers proved themselves to have mastered the physical barrier of this enormous mountain, and reached a Serb position that many doubted it was possible to reach. However, as the former commander of the 17th Krajina Brigade and erstwhile deputy head

[26] *Sloboda*, Iz pozdravnog govora generala Alagica—"Sastat cemo se mi negdje u Krajini", p. 3.

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of the 7th Corp, Fikret Cuskic, remarked: 'We did not master ourselves' (Musinbegovic et al. 1999: 138). In other words, they did not master their own psychological fear of the task ahead of them. This was seen as the reason why operation 'Domet-95' failed. The fears that manifested themselves during the first attack were thoroughly analysed and dealt with during an intensive 21-day training programme that took place immediately after the 'Domet-95' operation. On Vlasic in winter, the temperature can drop to minus 20–30 °C, and harsh winds and snow make visibility difficult. The possibility to freeze or wander off into a Serb position was very real. These were the kinds of concerns that occupied every soldier's thoughts. General Alagic was aware of this, but insisted upon his claim that the harsh conditions were the only way for the Army to win this battle. To overcome fear, he claimed, 'one has to think about night or weather as our advantage. These are our allies' (Musinbegovic et al. 1999: 178). Musinbegovic, a commander for morale, emphasised that 'the enemy is scared of the 7th Corps' and, as Alagic pointed out, this type of fear 'conquers the enemy as it is a fear within him' (Ibid: 183).[27] They emphasised the contrast with 'our fear that is more real, such as weather' to show that this was something that could be overcome (Ibid: 183). To conquer their fear of the weather, the Bosnian Army invited doctors to demonstrate techniques that would help the soldiers to survive the harsh conditions and stay alive.

Memories of ethnic cleansing and thoughts about missing family members were always with the 17th Brigade soldiers. As one put it: 'During the offensive, one only had to think of those tortured family members in the camp to have the courage and will to continue the fight.'[28] However, the Bosnian Army realised that an important ingredient in effective combat and morale was not just motivation but also a 'clear vision of the reason to fight', and 'the importance of realising that this particular battle is necessary' (Musinbegovic et al. 1999: 183).[29] The military sociologist Charles Moskos has claimed that 'an understanding of the combat soldier's motivation required a simultaneous appreciation of both the role of small groups

[27] Ibid: 183. General Alagic argued that the fear within is the biggest downfall of any unit regardless of its manpower or technical superiority.

[28] Interview, Faruk, 20 September 2003.

[29] See Colonel Charles W. Brown, US Army, Charles C. Moskos Jr, "The American Volunteer Soldier: Will He Fight?", *Military Review*, June 1976.

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and the underlying value commitments of combat soldiers'. In other words, a soldier will be effective only if he has a specific shared purpose or fights for some wider ideology or values. The 7th Corps command insisted that they needed to help the 5th Corps in Bihac if they were to connect the two Bosnian Krajina Corps. But for the soldiers of the 17th Krajina Brigade, as we have seen, there was another, more specific and fundamental reason:

> When war is your whole life, you have to know what you are fighting for. And I know: not for some total power in Bosnia, like the Serbs want, nor is it revenge. I'm fighting for a normal life—to go home. Simple as that. (Vulliamy 1995)

The suffering and humiliation endured in the camps, and the journey from their homes to Mount Vlasic, both left an indelible impression on these men and women. And yet, despite the freezing, harsh conditions on the mountain, with no fire to provide warmth (in the night, it would make their position visible), they often found strength in stories of survival, childhood mischief and war comradeship as they huddled together. The stories, like their war experiences, would naturally evolve over the years, adding new elements, or perhaps a new emphasis, so that the humiliation and helplessness would be replaced with the strength of carrying one's children or helping the elderly during the expulsion.

> This story seems to have no end. Ismet always quietly, and with more and more gusto in his words and voice, firmer and faster relates the same story. He carried two of his children, and his sick wife, at one point it'd be the kids at another his wife. And each time [he tells the story] with less rest and more strength. Or so it seems to me. Or to him. I am not entirely sure, but I see and believe that on his journey he became lighter and self-assured. Due to the hidden strength that is always present in the Krajisnik when honour need be protected…But Ismet's Duge and Javorka [war gains] are his pride and soul. (IS 17VKBR 1995, 17 March: 7)

Equally important was a recognition of each other's perseverance by remaining and fighting in central Bosnia: 'step by step, word after word and we are closer to each other and Krajina'. The war comradeship was often coupled with childhood memories that sustained their sense of time

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Fig. 2.2 General Cuskic on Galica

and the progression necessary to imagine a possibility of return. While the events of ethnic cleansing and expulsion were dominant themes in conversation, stories of front-line gains and individual heroism were essential in keeping morale high. For the latter, Vlasic was a key source of Krajisniks' pride and accomplishment, as in the media, among senior members of the Army and some foreign analysts, it was regarded as inconceivable that the mountain could be taken by the Bosnian Army (Fig. 2.2).

The Journey Home

A month later, on 20 March, operation 'Domet-1' began. It took only five days to capture many of Vlasic's most important features (Kozar 1995: 3), and this time, the Bosnian Army concentrated on holding on to territories they had taken (Musinbegovic et al. 1999: 66). The central plateau of Vlasic was captured, and 'the roof of Bosnia' was now back in the hands of the Bosnian state. On 10 April, the telecommunication tower at Opaljenik

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was taken. This success contributed to an immense boost to morale among not only the 7th Corps, but the entire Bosnian Army. Vlasic 'proved to be the best source of motivation and combat morale' they had experienced in a long time (Musinbegovic et al. 1999: 86, Evan 1995). Moreover, the significance of Operation Vlasic was felt around the world as Bosnian society, politicians, friends from abroad, and international organisations began to discuss, for the first time, the possibility of the Bosnian Army liberating the entire country (Musinbegovic et al. 1999: 86–89). Travelling with General Alagic as he entered the hunting lodge at Babanovac for the first time (a symbolic position on the peak of Mount Vlasic), which his troops had just secured, the sense of achievement was palpable. When asked what support or assistance the 7th Corps needed to continue their journey home, his answer was simple: 'Nothing. We are fine.'[30] I sat with him in a makeshift command centre as unit commanders radioed in to report that Serb forces were on the run and asking what to do next, seemingly in shock at being part of such a rapid advance. Their sense of the war having finally turned around was astonishing to see. Other successes followed as a consequence of capturing Mount Vlasic. Most importantly, for the soldiers of the 17th Krajina Brigade, they were now in a position to proceed towards their ultimate objective. After three years of combat in central Bosnia and elsewhere, the Bosnian Krajina soldiers would, in the summer of 1995, finally begin their long-awaited journey home towards north-west Bosnia.

For Serb forces, the Vlasic defeat heralded a major crisis, both militarily and politically, and caused a rift between Radovan Karadzic and General Ratko Mladic (Swarm 1994). Despite the fact that their media attempted to hide the defeat, Bosnian television was now available in RS, and it showed the Bosnian flag flying from the TV relay tower on Vlasic. Military and political figures in RS quarrelled about who was to blame, but the fact was that Serb soldiers were not motivated to fight so far from their homes, regardless of their superiority in weaponry (Ibid). As Serbian commentator Stanko Cerovic wrote at the time: '[sometimes] defeat [can be] cleverer than winning' (Cerovic 1995: 27). According to Cerovic, what the peace process had needed since the beginning of the war was for the stronger Bosnian Serb side to suffer at least one military defeat to bring home to them the need for serious

[30] Personal interview with General Mehmed Alagic, Mount Vlasic, Bosnia, September 1995.

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and concerted negotiations to end the fighting. While they could not be challenged on the battlefield, they had no incentive to seek an end to the war (Ibid: 27). Cerovic was not alone in this view, and indeed this point was one of the founding principles of US government thinking about how to end the war from 1993 onwards, and they had pursued a 'balance of threat' between the parties on the ground by providing limited covert support to Bosnian forces and by threatening the use of air strikes against Serb forces in response to attacks on the so-called UN Safe Areas (Holbrook 1999).

At the same time, the Croatian government's lightning counteroffensive against Serb-occupied areas of Croatia opened the way for the start of a major combined offensive across western Bosnia involving both the Croatian and Bosnian armies, brokered by the USA. In May 1995, Operation Flash saw the Croatian Army retake Western Slavonia, and in early August, the Croatian Army launched Operation Storm to retake the Croatian Serb stronghold of Knin and the rest of the Serb-held Krajina in Croatia (Magas and Zanic 2001: 67–84). On 6 August, this operation broke the siege of the Bihac pocket in north-west Bosnia and opened up a route for a combined Croatian-Bosnian offensive towards Bosnia's second city, Serb-held Banja Luka. In September, following their victories on Vlasic and at Donji Vakuf, the 17th Brigade were earmarked to play a vital role in this combined offensive. They were assigned to move north towards Jajce, where they were to take the town in cooperation with the HVO, before proceeding further north towards their homes. In late September, Travnik was buzzing with preparations for the 'the march of return' (Hodzic 1998b: 260–261) as the 17th Brigade and other parts of the 7th Corps began what they hoped would be a major operation to defeat the Bosnian Serbs and liberate Bosnia-Herzegovina. At the head of the procession, symbolically, was the strongest unit in General Mehmed Alagic's 7th Corps, comprising thousands of soldiers of the 17th Krajina Brigade (Hodzic 1996a: 6).

After a series of fast-moving battles around Jajce, Kljuc and as far forward as Manjaca hill, close to the site of one of the infamous camps, the Bosnian Army had Serb forces on the run and, after retaking Sanski

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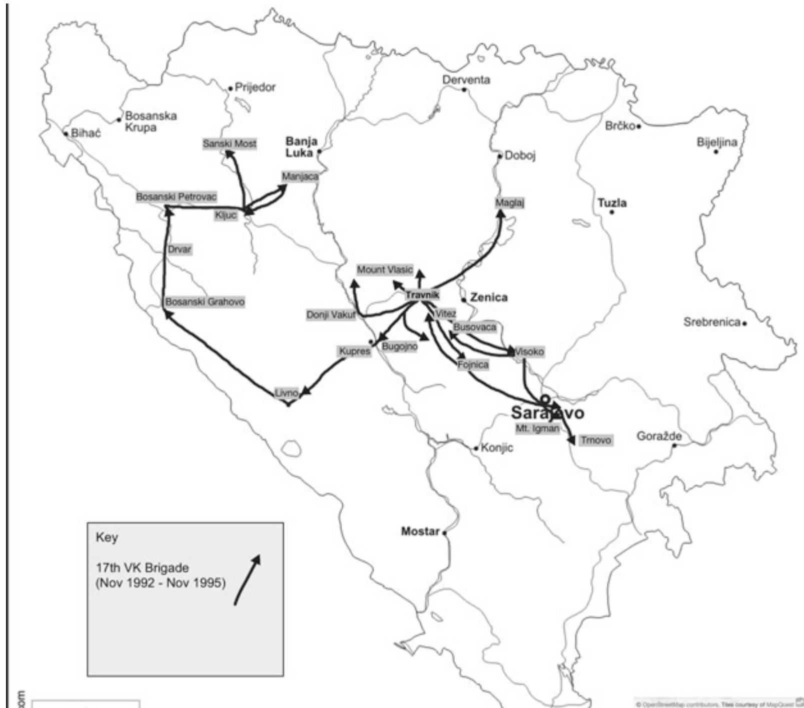

Fig. 2.3 17Kb zones of activity (Source: Original map from d-maps.com)

Most, it finally had Prijedor in its sights. But on 13 October 1995, as peace talks began, the Bosnian government was asked to cease all offensive operations, and so the 17th Brigade once again found its progress halted, and set up camp in Sanski Most near what would become the border of the Muslim-Croat Federation (Fig. 2.3).

Dayton Peace Plan: Legalising Ethnic Division

Following hectic negotiations in Dayton, Ohio, a final peace agreement was signed in Paris on 14 December 1995, which would lead to the deployment of a large US-led Implementation Force (IFOR). Ceasefire

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lines became demarcation lines and eventually the borders of two legally separated entities, albeit nominally within a single state. The 17th Brigade found themselves on one side, while their homes and the scene of the crimes that had spurred them on remained tantalisingly close just across the other side of that line, as Sead Cirkin, the commander of the 17th Brigade recalled:

> Our direction was Omarska [former camp]. When we arrived eight kilometres from our greatest site of suffering, we received an order to stop. My brother Sulejman was tortured and killed in the 'white house' in Omarska together with Omer and Nagib, the brothers of Sakib Mahmuljin. Our other units, from another direction, were near Prijedor too, only seven, eight kilometres away. Unfortunately, peace stopped us near Prijedor. (*Novo Ogledalo*, Sanski Most, March 1999, br. 3)

It is no coincidence that when the ceasefire began, the two sides held roughly 50 % of Bosnia-Herzegovina each—essentially the Bosnian government had been instructed to stop once they achieved that balance of territory held. There were a few minor trade-offs, with the Croatian Army pulling back from its positions in Mrkonjic Grad to ensure that RS would finally constitute the 49 % of Bosnian territory envisaged by the Contact Group plan, but the 'facts on the ground' that European governments had been so reluctant to reverse throughout the war now reflected the roughly 50–50 division implied by the latest in a long line of peace plans.

When the war had begun, in April 1992, the European Community took the lead in the peace process, culminating in the January 1993 VOPP that sought to cantonise Bosnia-Herzegovina along roughly ethnic lines. The VOPP in fact served only to intensify the war because it offered the Bosnian-Croat leadership more territory than it held, as the Croat-Muslim war in central Bosnia demonstrated. By the time of the second major initiative, the OSP in the summer of 1993, the US government was becoming more critical of European diplomatic pressure on the Bosnian government, whom they perceived as the victims of aggression, and advocated an alternative approach. They favoured a combination of military pressure on the Serbs (lifting the arms

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embargo on the Bosnian government and selective air strikes against Bosnian Serb forces in response to violations of UN resolutions) and forceful negotiation, which contrasted with the European approach of simply facilitating negotiations among the parties and trying to persuade the weaker Bosnian government side to accept defeat as a way of ending the war quickly. In the words of Richard Holbrook: 'the west could not expect the Serbs to be conciliatory at the negotiating table as long as they had experienced nothing but success on the battlefields' (Holbrook 1999).

Fig. 2.4 Post-Dayton Bosnia (Source: Original map from d-maps.com)

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With tacit US support, the Bosnian government voted to reject the OSP, and the USA set about trying to rectify the Croat-Muslim conflict as a precursor to a simpler two-way division of Bosnia. The Washington agreement of 1994 sought to achieve this, and laid out plans for a Muslim-Croat Federation within a loose confederation with Croatia. The agreement also opened the way for military training and support to Croatia. At the same time, the USA convened a Contact Group of leading nations (USA, UK, Russia, France and Germany), who would seek to use their influence with the parties to bring about a negotiated settlement. The USA sought to use the Croatian Army as a strategic ally to achieve the simple two-way split (actually a 51–49 % division) envisaged by the evolving Contact Group plan. The Dayton Peace Agreement gave Serbs RS, with almost half of Bosnia under their control. Croatia won US support, and although Bosnian Croats had to compromise on territory, they would be given a leading role in the Bosnian Federation. The Bosnian government saw an end to the war that was killing so many of its citizens, while maintaining at least the veneer of a unitary state. The question is: where did this leave the 17th Krajina Brigade and its soldiers (Fig. 2.4)?

Sanski Most: An Influx of Refugees and a New Displacement

For several months after the ceasefire, most soldiers enjoyed what they thought would be a temporary break before the battle for Prijedor resumed. Sanski Most became a focal point for an influx of refugees, including both those who had homes here before the war and those who were from the still-occupied Prijedor region. Also, several hundred refugees were forced to return from Germany, as the German government decided it was safe to return to Sanski Most. Upon arrival, the indigenous people of Sanski Most praised the 17th Brigade for liberating their town, while those from the Prijedor region felt 'cheated' by the peace. Since the summer of 1994, General Alagic had appealed to Krajisniks in exile to join the Army, and as the battle for Vlasic reached its peak, he issued a last call for them to return and help in the liberation effort. Shortly afterwards, a few people

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who heeded his call arrived from Germany—all were Manjaca camp survivors. This represented the symbolic beginning of the return process. By the end of the war, diaspora communities were anxiously awaiting the advancement of the front line towards Bosnian Krajina, and many joined the 17th Brigade in expectation of what they believed would be the battle to free their homes. Their experiences of expulsion, dispossession and the need for self-reliance meant that they saw military organisation and discipline—what they called *vojnicka cizma* (the soldier's foot)—would enable their return (Zukanovic, 17 September, 1994b: 7). They had little faith in peace plans or international agencies.

The Brigade still enjoyed its 'celebrity' status, earned during the war for its bravery; and, as one soldier later remarked, they 'subconsciously got used to the role of being great, special, immense and unique' despite their main objective remaining unfulfilled.[31] At the same time, the joint Croat-Bosnian operation in western Bosnia ensured an undisturbed supply of food and ammunition for the first time since the war began. They felt equipped and 'more ready than ever' before. As the former commander of the 17th Brigade, Fikret Cuskic, remarked: 'Dayton stopped us when we were on the verge of the realising of our objective and when we had, for the first time since the war began, complete superiority in all spheres of military combat.'[32]

At the beginning of 1996, the soldiers of the 17th Brigade were finally told that there was no immediate prospect of a resumption of hostilities, which meant that the ceasefire lines had become an 'inter-entity boundary' and they were to be demobilised. This came as a shock, and was seen by many as a political betrayal of their cause.

> All our aims fell through: the fight for our homeland, Bosnia, and the right for everyone to return to their town or village …making those who committed genocide accountable, finding mass graves… After three and half years of war, we, soldiers from Prijedor, Banja Luka and other Bosnian Krajina towns that according to the Dayton peace agreement belong to the Republika Srpska, overnight became displaced persons in the Federation.[33]

[31] Interview, Faruk, 28 September 2003.

[32] Interview, Fikret Cuskic, 2 October 2003.

[33] Interview, Faruk, 28 September 2003.

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Soldiers from the Prijedor and Banja Luka regions had become citizens of the RS they had fought so hard to defeat—an ethnically based statelet that was forged through ethnic cleansing and legalised at Dayton, but within which they were clearly unwelcome. At the very moment the war formally ended for the 17th Brigade, with their journey home still unfulfilled, many of them became 'displaced persons' once again in their new home of Sanski Most, which lay within the Bosniak-Croat Federation, just across the inter-entity boundary line from Prijedor. Others, who were from the newly liberated regions of Sanski Most and Kljuc, had a different experience of Dayton. They went home and thus some kind of normality could be restored in their lives. Inevitably, this also caused a division among the hitherto united 17th Brigade soldiers, as their destinies now took very different directions.[34] With the return of the indigenous residents of Sanski Most, they had to leave the flats and houses they occupied immediately after liberating the town. Cuskic warned at the time that many would not be able to deal with the new circumstances, and a large number of former soldiers left Bosnia.[35] Some of those who remained in Sanski Most and reunited with their exiled families very quickly felt 'unwanted' in the town and became known as *kesari*—literally 'bag people' (Ramulic 1999).

As displaced persons once again, they felt abandoned by post-Dayton Bosnia-Herzegovina, which was occupying itself with finding solutions to the many other problems created by war. In addition, the demobilised soldiers, with nothing to show for three years of fighting, had to explain to their own families why they had failed to take Prijedor. Many began to withdraw from society and could only feel understood and protected among their own: 'Suddenly we felt as outsiders, we felt as though we would be, individually, targeted by all those with unfulfilled expectations. Outside our own circle, we felt unprotected and without support.'

During my fieldwork, I encountered several lost souls who were once heroes of the 17th Brigade, but who were now drunk, washed up and with no prospects for the future. Modri, a survivor of the camp, joined the 17th Brigade in Travnik. He was one of the first to return with his mother to Kozarac when people began to resettle there after 1998. Modri was wounded several times during the war, as a result of which, his stomach

[34] Interview, Fikret Cuskic, 2 October 2003.

[35] Many settled in Chicago and a small minority joined their families in the UK.

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wounds never fully healed. He often walked on the main street of Kozarac, and would stop passers-by asking for money to attend a clinic or for transport to the town of Prijedor. He would approach a person, show his bloody wound, with its overwhelming stench, be given some money and then walk away. During one of our encounters on the road, his comrade approached me and explained that for many years they had been providing financial support for Modri, for food and house bills, but they realised that he only used the money to support his drug addiction. In the last two years, his war friends had attempted to send him to the local rehabilitation clinic in Prijedor, but he always returned. In the winter of 2010, Modri was found frozen to death in his house. The feeling of guilt among many of his former comrades that they could not help him, and that there were no local institutions that wanted to care for this former soldier, prompted them to construct a proper gravestone for him in December 2011. The experience of demobilised soldiers of the 17th Brigade is similar to many soldiers throughout history upon coming home (Larsson 2009) from wars all over the world. Many have no prospect of a job, and find it difficult to engage in everyday tasks, feeling lost and confused. But the most profound feeling in this case was the overnight change from being a hero, with agency, to becoming homeless once again, and a sense of despair that only the war profiteers benefited from the conflict.[36] Bougarel (2006) makes a similar point in his article The Shadow of Heroes, claiming that by the end of the 1990s, privileges enjoyed by the combatants were largely illusory. In some cases, the state offers some kind of psychological or economic assistance, but in this case, the former soldiers received only 'vouchers' entitling them to a discount if they are able to buy a home or a business. When I travelled to Sanski Most in March 1996, they proudly showed me their vouchers, confirming that the Bosnian government had not forgotten them. At the time, one could detect their anxiety about the future, as they already felt unfit for normal life. The newspapers wrote that the only jobs they could hope to get was washing cars or working in a petrol station. Then, IFOR arrived and required translators and fixers, and this meant an entirely new social group was in demand in the post-conflict context.

[36] In a Bosnian TV documentary "Fantazija" (2007), five demobilised soldiers from Tuzla talk about a feeling of being useless, relying on social services that hardly cover bills, and how they watch those who did not fight being enriched by the war: 'as though I fought for them not Bosnia, not my family or freedom', in the words of one soldier.

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Meanwhile, 'the war presidency of Prijedor in exile' decided to relocate their offices and people to Lusci Palanka, a place twenty kilometres from Sanski Most, deep in a valley surrounded by the mount Grmec, which would be their next temporary home until the hoped-for return began. This was a strategic move on the part of the leaders of the 17th Brigade. They were keen to maintain the sense of unity and purpose that was forged in the war among soldiers, families and other community members in the diaspora. This would not continue if they were to be dispersed throughout Sanski Most town and try to resume some kind of normal, individual life. But also, as we shall see later, there was a real fear of a new wave of emigration among those who fought for Bosnia but had never previously contemplated leaving.

The Bosnian Army 17th Brigade was defined by its experience of ethnic cleansing and its quest to return home to towns and villages in north-west Bosnia, notably Kozarac and Prijedor; and the people of the area vested in them their hopes for return. This meant the Brigade had some of the characteristics of a popular movement, having been created by local people in exile in Croatia after the first wave of ethnic cleansing in 1992. In the immediate aftermath of the war, they were also the only group with the capacity to organise logistics, funding and representation, and the Kozarac returnee community relied on their logistic centres, which had been set up during the war to finance and supply the Brigade. While in exile, refugee communities' monetary contributions, often organised around events such as humanitarian concerts, helped maintain an emotional bond with their original homes, and they shared the struggle to create the preconditions for return. These centres were instrumental in the development of networks of local associations—grass-roots movements for social change—that created the social capital needed to rebuild their communities from exile (Stefanovic and Loizides 2011). Refugees in exile, and the soldiers in central Bosnia, never fully 'accepted' the reality that they were no longer able to reclaim their home. This was important, as the activities in exile focused their emotional citizenship on Bosnia rather than their specific place of residence. Dreams of homecoming were encouraged in such a way that the four or five years of exile many spent outside Bosnia during the war were not seen as a time of settling in another country. At the same time, five years of exile nevertheless created a mythical sense of pre-war homes, although in many cases their homes had actually been burnt or demolished.

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In planning the next stage of the struggle for return to Kozarac and Prijedor, members of the Brigade played a major role. By the end of the war, the Brigade had produced two generals, Fikret Cuskic and Sakib Foric—all from the town of Kozarac. However, Sead Cirkin, the last commander of the 17th Brigade and also a former resident of Kozarac, was in charge of the war presidency of Prijedor, and arguably played the pivotal role in negotiating return with his Serb counterparts. He and his young family were to be one of the first to return to the overgrown fields and burnt houses in Kozarac, and paved the way for a wider, more organised approach to return.

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3

Return

> *Our goal is clear. The goal is to return. Return is possible through the implementation of the Dayton agreement … Of course, it is clear who we are dealing with. However, this is the cost of reintegration in BiH, and we are faced with all realities. Indeed, for us Prijedorcanine, it is an aggravating circumstance that we sometimes have to sit down with those who are to blame for all this, against our will. However, in doing so, we see our chance for the possibility of returning to our town, and we shall do our best to use it in the best possible way.*
>
> (Sead Cirkin in *Prijedorsko Ogledalo*, Hukanovic, 1 Oct. 1996a: 4)

In this chapter, I look at the build-up to the return process after the signing of the Dayton agreement that ended the war, and how hopes for action were initially vested in the 17th Brigade, which had the capacity to organise the logistics and funding for the initial return process, but then picked up by women's organisations, who were the first to probe the possibility of return.

On 5 September 1996, the first official meeting took place in Prijedor between the town's Serb authorities and the representatives of Bosniak Displaced Persons (DPs) based in Lusci Palanka. The main negotiators

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were the then mayor of Prijedor, Milomir Stakic, a convicted war criminal now serving a forty-year sentence in France, and a leader of the 'war presidency of Prijedor', Sead Cirkin. Cirkin had been through the camp system during the Serb takeover in 1992, and later became a commander of the 17th Brigade of the Bosnian Army. Supported by UNHCR and in the presence of the NATO-led Implementation Force (IFOR), they were to discuss *sloboda kretanja* (freedom of movement) as mandated by the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA). But at the time, the international agencies authorised to implement the provisions of DPA were reluctant to support the right to return home, fearing a possible resumption of violence. In particular, Prijedor was seen as an unlikely case for significant return due to the brutal nature of ethnic cleansing there, which was considered to be of genocidal proportions by observers at the time (UNGA 1994). Also, Serb hardliners there opposed NATO's presence, and had announced that no returnees would be welcome to return. As a result, international officials regarded this municipality as a special case to be dealt with at a later stage (Belloni 2005). For the Serb side and the international officials present, the meeting was seen as a tentative, albeit premature, refugee visit to former homes; but Cirkin's group saw it as the first concrete step towards real return. They had a clear shared vision and had been preparing for this moment since their expulsion in the summer of 1992 (Cirkin in Hukanovic 1996a). That they eventually achieved their goal is a remarkable story of patience, persistence and resilience.

Studies on forced migration and peace building have identified a number of factors that can be used to evaluate the dilemmas of post-conflict return. One obvious issue is safety, including the presence of an international force, the level of resistance on the part of the local government to accommodate returnees, the structure of local police forces and whether they consist of one or multiple ethnic groups, and also the presence of war criminals in the sociopolitical environment. These factors all affect whether and how return can occur. Secondly, material incentives, such as whether financial assistance is available to encourage return and rebuilding, and the level of international donor investment will also influence the decision to return. But in addition to security and sustainability concerns, the level of war-related hostility is also a key variable that determines the success or failure of a return process (Doyle and Sambanis 2006).

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Refugee repatriation in post-war Bosnia was particularly challenging for those who wished to return to their pre-war homes. Around half the population—over two million people—were forced to leave their homes during the war. Displacement through ethnic cleansing was a key war aim for Serbian forces, rather than just a by-product of conflict, as they fought to create a contiguous swathe of mono-ethnic Serbian territory across Serbia, Bosnia and Croatia (Cigar 1995; Haskin 2006). While Dayton brought an end to the war, it also legalised territorial gains achieved through ethnic cleansing (Bose 2002), and the state was de facto partitioned into two political entities along ethnic lines—the Serb RS and the Bosniak-Croat Federation. In addition, since enmity was used to support policies of forced displacement in the war, resistance to widespread return in peacetime would become a continuation of the wartime policy of ethnic cleansing. In such a political climate, the challenges of contested return to the Prijedor region were great, especially given the particularly bitter legacy of the war.

The Heart of Darkness: Prijedor's War Legacy

Towards the end of the war, in the summer of 1995, the advance of the Bosnian and Croatian armies appeared to threaten the very existence of the Republika Srpska. But having achieved a neat 51/49 % territorial division, both NATO and Serbia were keen to end the war quickly, and the US government instructed Bosnian forces to stand down. After intensive negotiations in Dayton, Ohio, the peace agreement was formally signed in Paris on 14 December 1995. The same month, around 60,000 IFOR troops were deployed with a mandate to implement the military provisions of the agreement, namely separating the forces and monitoring the inter-entity boundary line (IEBL) (Belloni 2007). Crucially, however, the DPA also enshrined the right of return (in Annex 7) in order to reverse the results of ethnic cleansing by allowing the expelled to return home. In the early years of post-Dayton Bosnia, return was indeed a preoccupation of the UN and international agencies that poured into the country. UNHCR and OSCE were the main agencies dealing with the civilian aspects of the DPA and were mandated to support and monitor

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repatriation, elections and human rights at this critical time in the transition to peace. However, in a hostile environment, without significant military support, the civilian personnel had no way to guarantee or provide safety for returnees. IFOR was authorised to support international organisations in their humanitarian aid work, provide protection and prevent violent attacks towards civilians—and also to arrest war criminals if they encountered them—but in reality the core of their mission was to police the separation of forces. Though a commander on the ground was authorised to support the civilian provisions of the DPA, more often than not, they decided not to get involved in areas outside their main duties (see IFOR transcripts).

In RS, IFOR were reluctant to station their troops in north-west Bosnia (HRW 1996) as Banja Luka and Prijedor were perceived as the most dangerous areas in the country for non-Serbs. In the final report on violations of international humanitarian law in former Yugoslavia, the UN Commission of Experts, a precursor to the Hague Tribunal, noted that 'it is unquestionable that the events in Opstina [Municipality] Prijedor since April 30, 1992 qualify as crimes against humanity' (UNGA 1994). Furthermore, it is likely to be confirmed in court under due process of law that these events constitute genocide (Kutnjak Ivkovic and Hagan 2011). Also, the ethnic cleansing did not end with the war. A last wave of expulsion was happening right as the peace settlement was being put in place, with around 6000 non-Serbs driven out between August and November 1995.

In order to incentivise local authorities across Bosnia to allow freedom of movement and eventual return of former citizens, a programme of open cities was established in March 1997 (Rutland 1998). International donors would continue to provide financial support for returnees to build homes and local infrastructure, but instead of working directly with refugee organisations, they would work with municipalities that were willing to support return. In this way, it was hoped, the wider community would also benefit, thus promoting social repair. The problem was that in most places, power structures remained the same as during the war, and yet international development organisations seemed oblivious to the challenges this would present. One of the largest donors in Prijedor was the British Overseas Development Agency (ODA), partly because the USA had imposed an aid embargo on Prijedor due to it sheltering a

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number of war criminals (Belloni 2005). Since it was impossible to award contracts or distribute aid independently from the local authority, as Carol Hodge writes, they often financially rewarded those who orchestrated ethnic cleansing and obstructed the return processes (Hodge 2006: 141), arguably also prolonging the nationalist parties' grip on power. As David Harland (a former head of UN Civil Affairs in Bosnia) noted, 'While we dithered, organised crime sank deep roots. We then watered those roots by channeling generous aid funds through local crime bosses. Worst of all, we allowed a culture of impunity to develop' (in Hodge 2006: 135). Human Rights Watch wrote two damning reports in 1996 and 1997 on Prijedor's war legacy, and how the authorities harboured the largest number of war criminals on the list of those sought by the Hague Tribunal, some of whom continued to govern the town's public institutions.

In March 1996, I travelled with an Evening Standard journalist to Sanski Most, just across the IEBL from Prijedor. We spent several days in the company of demobilised 17th Brigade soldiers, who were spending their days sitting in cafés and watching TV, still wondering whether the peace would last or whether they might be back in action, marching towards their homes in Prijedor and Kozarac. Although weary of fighting again, for them the future looked bleak. They continued to live a soldier's life of doing things collectively, still reluctant to embrace an individual existence in an uncertain time. They laughed at our plan to go to Banja Luka and Prijedor, as there were no civilian movements between the two entities at that time, and both sides were still very much on a war footing. International agencies and IFOR were moving unobstructed in most of Bosnia, but not in Prijedor. At the time, the hard-line chief of police and former chair of the Serb 'crisis committee' during the war, Simo Drljaca, was still very much in charge. He was an ardent opponent of NATO troops being allowed in his town, and supported violent action if returnees attempted to enter. He continued to maintain military checkpoints around the town, although they were supposed to be removed shortly after the deployment of NATO troops.

We visited the British IFOR unit stationed just outside Sanski Most, and asked if they were willing to provide transport for us to Banja Luka. The command post was on the outskirts of Banja Luka, Bosnia's second city, which would become the capital of RS. We wanted to interview their

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commander and visit the International Police Force (IPTF). They did indeed have an IFOR vehicle going to Banja Luka, but told us that they could not protect me if we came across military checkpoints in Prijedor. I hid in the back of the jeep, peeping through the covers as we reached Prijedor, where I noticed the old library where I had spent much of my free time as a teenager, recalling that I had not managed to return two books borrowed in the spring of 1992, before our home was burnt: Adam Smith's *The Wealth of the Nations* and Hermann Hesse's *Steppenwolf*. The latter, I was told many years later, was taken to Omarska camp by a friend who ended up there, and he and other inmates read it obsessively because of its musings on a man's spiritual journey towards self-knowledge.

Once we reached the British Army, housed in a metal mill, I naively believed IFOR would understand how dangerous my presence in the town was, and perhaps provide safe return; but during an interview with a British commander, we realised they had taken a conscious decision not to delve into 'the past' of the conflict, as they saw it, in case it were to complicate their role. They were here to keep the peace, but unfortunately for me, this did not extend to providing a lift back out of the RS, since he claimed it was a safe enough environment to use public transport. Like our British host, the International Police appeared to have little or no knowledge of what had happened there so recently. We spent a few days in Banja Luka visiting UN agencies to ask for safe passage, but to no avail. Leaving the British IFOR base, we walked half an hour back into the city while Serb soldiers drove by in military vehicles, singing and firing into the air. Eventually, after a few days hiding in the flat of an international policeman, we hitched a lift from a British engineer's IFOR vehicle to get back to Sanski Most. The journey was stressful, as we had to pass Prijedor again on our way to Bosanska Otoka, where the bridge was a crossing point over the IEBL. We were stopped by a Serb military checkpoint near Bosanski Novi (now renamed Novi Grad) and the soldiers spoke briefly with the British engineer before turning their attention to us, asking who we were and why we were there. My friend responded in Serbian, saying that we were British journalists who had visited the British troops in Banja Luka. They kept their gaze on me, and I froze while my friend held my hand so tightly that she nearly broke my finger. But they waved us through to continue our journey.

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International agencies remained quite passive in those few years after the war (Belloni 2007). The civilian and military personnel focused on fulfilling their mandate in a rather restrictive manner. When, for example, Amnesty International urged them to protect sites of mass graves such as one in the Ljubija mine where, in January 1996, the local authority tried to hide the crimes by exhuming the remains of victims from numerous mass graves in the area and dumping them in the mine, the commander in charge decided that was not under his jurisdiction, though it took place only a mile away from the British base (Hedges 1996, Amnesty International March/April 1996). Meanwhile, Simo Drljaca continued his reign of terror and occasionally engaged in hostile verbal exchanges with NATO troops when their path crossed. On one occasion, just after the first post-war elections in September 1996, he refused to give up weapons discovered in his truck by British IFOR. In response, he shot above their heads to scare them away. It was a year later that a more vigorous approach would finally be adopted by IFOR. In response to a critical mass of individuals willing to return home regardless of threats, the Peace Implementation Council (PIC), a body set out to advise international organisations on the ground, met at Sintra, Portugal, in May 1997 and decided that it would not tolerate any attempts at partition (PIC 1997). On the local level, leaders of displaced persons groups and grass-roots women's organisations were trying to deal with security fears over return and reaching out to Serb refugee associations to assess if there was a mutual interest in supporting bidirectional return (Ramulic Sept. 1997: 9). In an interview for the local DP newspaper, *Prijedorsko Ogledalo*, Sead Cirkin explained how during his first meeting with the Serb authority in Prijedor, he realised IFOR's presence did not provide real security and could not be relied upon: 'We didn't ask for it [security]. This is proof that all of us that want to return, we are not scared of incidents nor their possible consequences' (Hukanovic Oct. 1996a: 4).

The first real robust action by NATO troops took place in Prijedor, on 10 July 1997. In Operation Tango, British SFOR troops (the stabilisation force that succeeded IFOR) attempted to arrest two war criminals, Simo Drljaca and Dr Milan Kovacevic, under sealed indictment from the Hague Tribunal. Drljaca resisted and was shot dead, while Kovacevic was taken from his office at the hospital to the Hague Tribunal. This event,

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combined with the removal of some policemen implicated in war crimes, and the sudden departure of Stakic on an extended holiday, broke the culture of impunity and paved the way to begin the process of return and for a more moderate, pragmatic politics to emerge in the least expected place in Bosnia (Belloni 2007). In reality, the Bosniak DPs, like the entire international machinery in Bosnia, supported the action, but they remained cautious while the local Serb government were devising new strategies for blocking return.

Spontaneous Return (1996–1999): The Role of *Srcem do Mira*

The only guarantee for return is ourselves, our desire and our strength.

People first began trying to cross the IEBL to their former homes in 1996. International agencies regarded this as a 'spontaneous minority return', but it was in fact a well-organised endeavour by several refugee associations and individuals across Bosnia (Stefanovic and Loizides 2011; Belloni 2005/2007). In the case of Prijedor, women's associations played a crucial role in gathering large numbers of people willing to risk the trip.

The first attempt to enter Prijedor in May 1996 drew a violent response from the Serb authorities. Bosniak DPs and refugees in Sanski Most made several attempts to visit their homes, but were attacked by locals or stopped by the Serb police, run by Simo Drljaca. This continued during the September elections, when Bosniaks crossing the IEBL were prohibited from entering their home towns (Human Rights Watch 1997: 4). Meanwhile, *Srcem do Mira*, in conjunction with women from the Hazelwood women's group in the UK, organised a busload of women who wanted to visit their homes in Kozarac.[1]

[1] It is often noted, by scholars and those who resist the return of their former neighbours, that the elderly and women are the most favoured social group to be allowed to return, as they do not imply a threat or ability to challenge the status quo. Indeed, the logic of allowing the elderly to return rests on the fact that they want to spend their last years in familiar surroundings before dying, and women are seen as generally apolitical. In fact, the Bosnian war has shown that women were instrumental in diffusing ethnic tensions, encouraging cross-border cooperation and actively supporting

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Their bus was attacked at the entrance to Prijedor, where a couple of hundred Serb residents threw stones at them and shouted abuse. The Serb mayor, Stakic, responded that 'a visit by seven or eight buses, four hundred people, a third of whom are extremists whose names alone irritate the citizens…would lead to an incident'.[2] They were forced to return after two women were injured and a NATO observation post was attacked.[3] At the time, many Serbs perceived Dayton's return policy and freedom of movement as nominal, while the new entity borders were seen as real: 'I don't care what the Dayton agreement says. It's just a piece of paper. The border is real', as a Serb separatist Obren put it (Roane 1996).

Sead Cirkin recalled that time for me later, saying that no soldier in Sanski Most believed anyone would dare to enter RS territory, let alone a group of women![4] Many years later, Emsuda Mujagic, the leader of *Srcem do Mira* (Through Heart to Peace), told me how certain leaders of the Brigade did not really take the women's plan seriously, but when they succeeded in 1997, former soldiers organised a welcome party for the women at the Sanski Most hotel, and their leader bowed down and apologised for doubting them.

Srcem do Mira has been one of the principal NGOs in the region since then, and a key focal point for return (Helms 2013). The group originated in Zagreb, Croatia, when the first wave of women refugees arrived from Bosnia in late 1992, and fifty women, all victims of rape or incarceration, formed a Bosnian women's organisation. They offered help in accommodating women, and three large shelter homes were established for victims of rape, in particular for those who had become pregnant as a result. Counselling services were provided and various social gatherings organised to help the women cope with their experiences. They also

the right to return. See Elissa Helms 2003, "Women as agents of ethnic reconciliation? Women's NGOs and international intervention in postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina" in *Women's Studies International Forum*, (26)1. p. 15–33.

[2] Interview, 'Sadako Ogata—UN High Commissioner for Refugees', 20 May 1996. Transcript at www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/bosnia/ogata_5-20.html

[3] http://www.nytimes.com/1996/05/28/world/bosnia-serbs-again-block-entry-by-muslims.html. Serbian news agencies reported the event claiming that international officials tried to 'smuggle in' the Muslims.

[4] Interview with Sead Cirkin, a former commander of 17Kb, conducted in the summer of 2008.

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began recording testimonies that were later used at the Hague Tribunal.[5] Although these women's associations saw their activities as humanitarian, their goals regarding return and collecting rape testimonies were essentially also political. They were instrumental in helping define rape as a war crime and crime against humanity for the very first time.

The group's leader, Emsuda Mujagic, was in her late thirties with two young children when she was taken to Trnopolje camp. She managed to reach Croatia via central Bosnia after being released, but I first met her much later in 2005, in London, when we met to discuss the process of setting up a memorial to the Omarska camp. My immediate impression was that she was a dedicated woman, and her role in *Srcem do Mira*, a decade or more after its formation, gave her an air of self-assurance. After the war, she returned to Sanski Most with her husband, a primary school teacher; and both played an important role in reclaiming Kozarac's primary school during the process of return (Sivac-Bryant 2008). By 1998, *Srcem do Mira* had developed close working relationships with international women's networks, most notably the group who run Hazelwood House in Devon, a centre for culture, arts, healing and hospitality. The Hazelwood women were active throughout the war, and developed a ritual of planting a tree in a different 'dark sites' of the conflict zone every year. When they met Emsuda in Zagreb in September 1993, they resolved to plant a tree once a year in Kozarac, despite the difficulties of getting there during the war. This ritual then expanded to become an annual conference in Kozarac, which has become something of a local tradition for the returnee community. In 1994 and 1995, they held their conference in Sarajevo, at a time when getting in and out of the city with a large group of middle-aged and older women was highly risky. When their bus drivers abandoned their vehicles due to the danger, they continued on foot into the city. The Hazelwood women also brought various groups of Bosnian youngsters to the UK for a break from the war in their wonderful, large estates in Devon and France. Their long-term support for Emsuda and *Srcem do Mira* has been a vital source of solidarity and assistance to Kozarac in developing the capacity, confidence and connections to help in the difficult process of re-establishing the community.

[5] See "Calling the Ghosts", documentary, 1996, in which Jadranka Cigelj talks about her decision to record the plight of the women.

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In 1998, *Srcem do Mira* made contact with Serb NGOs in Prijedor to organise a conference to discuss refugee return on both sides. The conference, entitled Building Peace and Return, gathered together over four hundred participants, but no international agencies were present. Arguably, this only reinforced the perception that they were not interested in the process of return through local initiatives (Belloni 2005: 8). After the conference, where it was obvious that most refugees on both sides were eager to return to their original homes, a party was held where people got together to drink and dance just like the old pre-war days.[6] It was anticipated that cooperation between these NGOs would support the return process, but after NATO bombed Belgrade in 1999 in response to Serbia's actions in Kosovo, local Prijedor NGOs declined to participate in *Srcem do Mira's* annual conference. Despite this setback, Emsuda's organisation contributed a great deal to the re-establishment of communal life in the early days of Kozarac's reconstruction.

Prior to return, *Srcem do Mira* and *Izvor*, a Prijedor women's association formed in Sanski Most, had taken the lead in organising projects to help women stay socially active and self-sufficient while they were in limbo, waiting to go back home. Through foreign donations, they acquired sewing machines to set up a small clothes factory, and a training centre for hairdressing. They organised day care for elderly people at home and medical support for poor families who could not afford travel and medical expenses, and they supported children's schooling and material expenses. When return began, these two organisations would eventually move to Kozarac and Prijedor to continue their work. But at the crucial time when return was being negotiated, *Srcem do Mira* played an important role in amassing families and maintaining their motivation to return when the situation looked especially bleak in early 1998. They organised social gatherings to discuss fear and common concerns about how people would be able to support life in a region that clearly did not want them, and with no clear economic prospects. By sharing and giving voice to these anxieties, they were able to find common solutions, such as the creation of a mobile kitchen in Kozarac for those who were spending their weekends clearing away house rubble and overgrown vegetation. Years later, many returnees

[6] See Peter Lippman's detailed reports on the conference and his trips to Kozarac during 1998 and 1999 at www.advocaynet.org

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would recall with nostalgia this period of communal building, despite the fact that it had been a rather daunting time.

An anthropologist who studied the role of women's NGOs in Bosnia, Elissa Helms, described how these women negotiated a rather patriarchal environment by embracing their womanhood, and even manipulating it, to play an active part in all forms of public life (Helms 2003). For example, they maintained their organisations were not at all political, despite a range of activities that might suggest otherwise. Until recently, *Srcem do Mira* saw the focus of its work with women as raising awareness of their human rights, educating them in schooling their children and providing assistance for medical needs. This narrative was encouraged by foreign donors, who were keen to finance projects for 'women's emancipation' as part of their work in the region. During my fieldwork, I witnessed numerous examples of organisations attempting to 'bring democracy and freedom' to Bosnian women, but few were even aware of the long tradition of women's contribution to culture, literature and

Fig. 3.1 Emsuda Mujagic from *Srcem do Mira*

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political participation in Yugoslavia, from the key role they played in the anti-fascist Partizan's movement during the Second World War, through to the leading role they played on all sides during the war.[7] *Srcem do Mira* was very much part of this tradition, rather than an entity shaped by international donors (Fig. 3.1).

Kozarac: Contested Return

> Everything we wanted, we got.[8]

Cirkin's contribution in negotiating return as a member of the local municipal assembly is now remembered only by some former soldiers and members of his negotiating team, while scholars and the media have focused mostly on the women's organisations, partly as a source of testimonies for the media that illustrate victimhood. But the story of return to Kozarac is less a story of victimhood and more one of discovered agency, human resilience and perseverance; and in that sense, the period of transition that saw the 17th Brigade put down their weapons and take up the logistical and political organisation of return was a key period. The Brigade was unusual in many ways—steadfastly multi-ethnic, even during the dark days of the Bosniak-Croat war in central Bosnia, they were highly disciplined, and prepared to fight across the country, rather than just for their own area—but most importantly they were also almost entirely self-reliant and self-sufficient, with a network of funders and supporters in the diaspora working as part of the unit to supply uniforms and equipment.

[7] See the story of 'mama', a young Kozarac woman who joined the 17 kb, participating in the battlefields and caring for the injured soldiers when it was needed. They called her mama, understood as the highest accolade one can hold. She died in 2007 at home in Kozarac due to injuries suffered in the war. A soldier once told me the story of a group of women with exceptional skills and bravery during the attack on a front line in central Bosnia, asserting that due to their calmness and fearlessness in contrast to some male soldiers, if war happens again, he would only join in a women's brigade. On the contribution to the Partizan's movement and post-Second World War, see, for example, the autobiographical work of a Croatian writer Eva Grlic, *Sjecanja*, Durieux, Zagreb, 1997.

[8] In conversation with Sead Cirkin, 13 April 2008.

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They took it for granted that they could only rely on themselves to organise return, rather than the Bosnian government or international agencies.

A former Yugoslav Army officer and later a commander of the 17th Krajina Brigade (Gunic 2000), Cirkin was one of the key individuals in the struggle for the right to return during and immediately after the war. In the months leading up to the attack on Kozarac in May 1992, Cirkin was busy training members of the Kozarac Territorial Defence (TO) and other volunteers in the hills above the town. They had a few dozen guns and were determined to defend their homes if attacked, but as he later recalled, it was clear within two hours of Yugoslav Army shelling that they had no chance at all. In the spring of 1992, the JNA Army had encircled their base on Mount Kozara, and as soon as the shelling began, many threw their guns away and ran to join the rest of their families to be taken to the camps. Others attempted to escape across the mountain to Croatia. Cirkin was captured and, in contrast to many of his fellow volunteers, was brought to court in Banja Luka and charged for 'armed rebellion against the legal Serb authority in Prijedor' (Hodzic 1997a: 13). His brother was taken to Omarska camp and killed, while he was imprisoned in Keraterm and Manjaca, before being exchanged on Mount Vlasic in August 1993 by soldiers of the 17th Krajina Brigade. He joined the Brigade as a soldier; but by the time of the march towards Bosnian Krajina at the end of the war in 1995, he was a commander of a unit that was only seven kilometres from Omarska when they were ordered to halt the offensive.

I first met Sead Cirkin in 2003, when I was doing field research about the Brigade and its history. At the time, he was quite reluctant to share his wartime experiences as a leader of return. After the war he became a farmer, immersed in his daily life of tending to his cattle and trying to build a self-sufficient business to provide for his family and his community. He was intent on leaving politics for good, although his withdrawal from public life was a surprise to many returnees, who looked to him for leadership. It was not until we met again in 2007 that he felt comfortable to recount the early days of return and his role in the process to me. I was struck by his 'unburdened' attitude every time I met him. He spoke concisely when discussing past strategies for return, and was satisfied that the goals they set out had been achieved. He continues to

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live the quiet life of a farmer in his home in Kozarusa, a village on a hill a few kilometres from Kozarac.

As a leader of the war presidency of Prijedor and the association for return in the early days of negotiating return, Cirkin recalls meetings with the local Serb authority to discuss *sloboda kretanja* (freedom of movement) as intense, but his approach was to show a degree of understanding on the basis that both sides had suffered loss, albeit in a very different context, during the war:

> After the war, a tremendous tension. We held grenades in our pockets, facing one another. I tried to understand where they coming from first, to put myself into their shoes. So, for example, I was aware of the fact that although they killed our people, on the other hand, they have lost theirs too in the battlefields.[9]

These initial meetings, hosted by UNHCR, between the Bosnian representatives of returnee associations and the Serb local authority of Prijedor, were intended to consider the possibility of return. During the first official meeting in Prijedor, on 5 September 1996, the Bosnian delegation with Sead Cirkin entered their town for the very first time since they were ethnically cleansed in 1992. Cirkin was struck by the depletion of the old part of town where the wealthy and prominent Bosniak community had lived. Only one old-style Bosnian house survived as a café, while the rest of the land had become a farmers' market. In the meeting with the Serb authority, he explained that, for them, freedom of movement was a first step towards return, stressing that the Bosniaks would not accept just a one-off tour of their destroyed villages and occupied flats in town: 'We do not accept the visit to Brdo, Hambarine, Kozarac or any part of our municipality as a single trip, but we request and ask that each such visit is in the service of our return' (Hukanovic Oct. 1996a: 4). His Serb counterpart, mayor Stakic, already identified by a Human Rights Watch report on Prijedor as a war criminal who was enjoying the financial benefits arising from the local authority's role in ethnic cleansing, consented to Cirkin's view. However, these discussions were among ten to twenty people, and the Bosniak participants regarded Stakic's apparent

[9] In conversation with Sead Cirkin, Field note, 13 April 2008.

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agreement as unconvincing if not stated in public and among his own party members, which never happened.

Aside from the obstruction by the Prijedor local authorities and their nationalist supporters, there was also a feeling that international agencies in charge of overseeing return were unwilling or lacking the capacity to fully support the process (Cox 1998b; Doyle and Sambanis 2006). When a bus line between Prijedor and Sanski Most was established, providing transport for refugees on both sides once a day, UNHCR brought a minivan to Sanski Most, not expecting a large number of returnees to willingly put themselves at risk, and were met by a long line of people determined to get home. In December 1996, refugees visited their homes in the village of Alici—a Prijedor suburb—and discovered that the last dozen houses that remained throughout the war had just recently been burnt to the ground. The refugees stood quietly crying, while Serb policemen guarding the site smiled. UNHCR claimed the local Serb government was responsible for the arson, as the staff of UNHCR had naively provided a list of names of those wishing to visit their homes to the local authority prior to the visit (Ito 2001, Hodzic Dec. 1996a: 9).

Once it became clear that implementing Dayton's Annex 7 might actually happen, the main Serb nationalist party (SDS) began a pre-election campaign based on the slogan 'we succeeded, and we are continuing' (*uspjeli smo nastavljamo*). The rhetoric of 'we cannot live together' and the dissemination of fear were used by local media to amass large numbers of citizens opposed to return, while calling for Serb refugees to remain in the RS[10] and not return to their original homes (O'Connor 1996). In an article entitled 'Refugees on test', for example, a journalist advises Serb refugees from Croatia and internally displaced persons that they ought to appeal to relevant parties to assist them in their wish not to return to their original homes, but rather to ask for compensation in the form of property located in the other entity to demonstrate their 'patriotic and constitutional awareness, and their will to preserve and defend Republika Srpska' (Recevic Feb. 1997). On the Bosniak side, the refugees temporarily based in Sanski Most registered to vote at their original homes in

[10] Krajina war leader Martinovic, for example, was personally in charge of bringing more Serb refugees to populate Kozarac in order to stop its indigenous population returning.

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Prijedor. However, the largest body of the electorate was now in the diaspora communities across the globe, so the former logistic centres were mobilised to register them. In the first two elections, Bosniak members of the assembly won ten seats more than the Serb SDS party, but the SDS joined a coalition with other Serb parties to control the municipality decision-making process and local institutions, leaving the Bosniak representatives powerless. Since then, some argue that Bosniak representatives have remained as 'decoration in Prijedor's democratic grounds' (Hodzic Nov. 1997c: 5), and municipal assembly sessions have been regularly boycotted by the Bosniak representatives due to overt Serb nationalist symbolism expressed at the meetings, be it through their choice of an anthem—*Boze pravde* (God of Justice), the Serb national anthem—or the lack of Bosnian state symbols in the official correspondence between the Serb local governing bodies and the returnee political coalition (Ibid). The Serb authority has continually tried to exclude them from any meaningful participation in the government by constantly evoking the idea that the Serb entity is in fact the state in the making, rather than an entity of Bosnia-Herzegovina, which has led to stasis in the governance process.

War Crimes, Fear and Denial

> Why would I plough the fields? In a month's time I will be in my home. (Hodzic 1998a: 4)

While the return mandated by the Dayton accords continued to get bogged down in negotiations between Serb and Bosniak politicians well into the second year after the end of war, a socio-psychological dimension came into play among those in Sanski Most, and by the beginning of 1998, many were cultivating land and buying properties there. Many ordinary people saw obstruction to return being created by Serb nationalist resistance, but also a lack of interest on the part of UN agencies. With the depletion of enthusiasm for return, other factors such as delayed fear, or a memory of suffering in the camps, or concern about bringing up young children in this toxic post-war environment began to chip away at their confidence. The arrest of war criminals in Prijedor

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in the summer of 1997, and the shooting of Simo Drljaca, Prijedor's chief of police, who was responsible for overseeing many of the crimes committed in the camps, was a useful counterpoint (Phuong 2004: 187). But my findings show that although potential returnees' first reactions were indeed relief after the arrest, as it gave them hope that return would follow, their experience of the camps and lack of intervention by the international community during the war made them suspicious and cautious. On Slobodni (Freedom) Radio Prijedor, based in Sanski Most, for example, people phoning in remained sceptical about their prospects, and worried how former Serb neighbours would respond to them (Hodzic July 1997b: 2).

They hoped that all the alleged war criminals on The Hague's Prijedor list would be arrested and charged, which was seen as a signal that the international community was committed to a new start for the returnees; and for the Serbs, they hoped this would mark the beginning of a process of reckoning. In reality, the arrest of Milan Kovacevic, a local doctor implicated in the crimes at Omarska and the takeover of Prijedor, just strengthened the perception of the Serb public that their heroes were being taken away just because they defended their people—a narrative that continues today despite thirty-seven Prijedor Serb citizens having been charged at The Hague (the largest group in the country). In response to the arrest of Dusko Tadic—a Kozarac native who was the first to be tried at the Hague Tribunal—in Germany on 12 May 1997, the government in Banja Luka chose Prijedor to host a public procession of the RS Army (VRS). Its commander, Pero Colic, announced: 'the army will be a factor in stopping the return of Bosniaks and Croats back to their homes in the area of the Serb entity' (Ibid).

This was also a time when Serb official denial began to be tested, and over time mutated into different forms. Some Serbs claimed that no camps ever existed, and that Bosniaks left their homes in search of a better life in the West or moved to Sarajevo, as outlined by John Ostojic, for example, in his legal defence of Milomir Stakic at The Hague. A more intimate example of the way in which local Serbs used this narrative in a rather threatening way comes from comments added to an article in the returnee's newspaper, responding to an article on fear. The article talked about the panic in Prijedor caused by the arrest of Stakic, and a

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Serb commentator responded in rather sinister terms, reminding Bosniak returnees of the reason why their return was not possible:

> It is true that there were some expulsions of unwanted faces [Non-Serbs] and people who for whatever reasons left the town, but that is only a small number. It is true that many people (Serbs) have moved in from Sanski Most, Petrovca, Bihac, etc and from Knin [Croatia]. Most of the latter reside in Kozarac now. Rebuilding is going slow, primarily because most 'objects' (houses) had to be burnt down because of low quality build or because they were abandoned....Returnees are lecturing on fear but, I believe, they are most familiar with it....So, the return of those people [Bosniak returnees] is a problem due to lack of housing. However, we could solve that problem by putting them in temporary centres of Keraterm, then Trnopolje and Omarska [i.e. former camps], until we find a final solution…and with regard to fear, come back if you are not SCARED. (*Prijedorsko Ogledalo, July:17*)

The expression of active denial of war crimes and ethnic cleansing began to move into the realm of official public memory as local authorities erected memorials to celebrate Serb soldiers who gave their life for the fatherland. Several of these were constructed while the debate about return continued, leading Bosniak refugees and DPs to conclude they were part of a campaign to intimidate them (Ramulic 2001: 2). One such monument is the large concrete eagle statue erected in front of the former camp of Trnopolje to fallen Serb soldiers (none of whom, evidently died in this camp for Bosniaks). Others include those built in public spaces around the school centre and local government institutions, such as the wall of the dead at Mittal Steel company's office in Prijedor. This practice of historical revisionism through public memorialisation continues today with new examples, such as a commemorative plaque unveiled at Prijedor's hospital to remember Serb doctors who gave their lives in the fight for the *odbrambeno-otadzbinski rat* (the war for defending the fatherland).

Since 2012, a new campaign to rewrite the history of Prijedor's role in the war has emerged. Prior to the twentieth anniversary of the ethnic cleansing, RS institutions dealing with war crimes in Banja Luka began a process of targeting former victims as possible war criminals, and on

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16 May 2012, two Kozarac returnees were arrested. In January 2012, RS's Centre for investigation of war crimes submitted a report to the RS National Assembly, in which it stated that a hundred Serb victims were killed in the Prijedor region during the war, and the culprits were identified as *zelene beretke* (green berets). A local journalist, Paulina Janusz, noticed how the Serb victims gradually became a priority for the Banja Luka war crime investigation, while war criminals responsible for the murder of around 1800 Bosniaks in Kozarac were not dealt with at all (Janusz 2013). Samir Alukic and Fikret Kirkic were tried for the murder of two Serb civilians in August 1992 and jailed for 12 and 7 years, respectively. During the ethnic cleansing of Kozarac, both men were hiding on Kozara mountain, and tried to cross the mountain to reach Croatia. For some Kozarac men, this was the only *put spasa* (path to survival) at the time. However, the two Bosniaks arrested had been back in their homes for over a decade and did not think that they would be subject to investigation. While some media outlets in the Serb entity talked about the two male victims as having been civilians, in fact Janusz reported that they were soldiers of a well-known 43rd Prijedor Brigade that had conducted ethnic cleansing at the time.

Most returnees support the idea that war crimes should be punished regardless of the ethnic background of the perpetrators, but they were genuinely shaken by the recent arrests given their past suffering and denial. Kozarac natives who refused to submit to Serb nationalist forces or tried to resist the bloody takeover of the town, plus those who played an important role in the Bosnian Army during the war, all seem to be the target of the recent campaign. In fact, Cirkin was one of the men who had tried to reach Croatia and was arrested at the bank of the river Sava. He claims that during ethnic cleansing, most Bosniaks on Mount Kozara were hiding as they were completely surrounded, and their logic was to become invisible and only attack in self-defence as they had neither ammunition nor manpower to fight the Serb Army. They were essentially civilians who tried to protect their families and homes. When the Prijedor local authority perceived him as a threat because of his role in the return process, in the spring of 1997, they began a media campaign in *Kozarski Vjesnik*, the town's newspaper, with a series of articles entitled 'Who represents Muslim refugees: Sead Cirkin—Tito's officer and Alija's

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soldier' (Hodzic May, 1997a: 13). At the time, Cirkin received a letter via UNHCR from the Prijedor Centre for Public Security (the police), in which he was accused of organising an armed rebellion at the beginning of the war. The letter was signed by Ranko Mijic, the head of the Public Security Centre and a former interrogator at Omarska camp. The Serb officials threatened Cirkin with arrest if he entered the Serb entity, branding him a war criminal in the hope that this would render his leadership over return illegitimate.

However, the threat did not dissuade Cirkin from involvement in the return process, nor did it stop him going to Prijedor. Faced with the inevitability of return, the Serb local authority plan was to allow a certain number of returnees back into the municipality as long as they kept to remote villages. So for example, they allocated Dera, a small hamlet deep in the forests of Mount Kozara and Kevljani, my own village on the outskirts of Kozarac, bordering Omarska, as designated sites of return. Minority return would be tolerated only in rural villages without economic or strategic importance in order to dissuade the development of a strong community (Cox 1998a). Most Kozarac returnees were unwilling to accept such a proposal, but Sead Cirkin decided to do so. He believed that once return began, there would be no way to stop people returning to their original homes. It had been rumoured that Cirkin had a plan in 1996 to gather twenty thousand temporarily accommodated refugees in Sanski Most to march into Kozarac and set up tents until the international observers took them seriously, and European Commission monitors claimed that the Serb authorities were worried Cirkin might smuggle his soldiers into the region under cover of return and instigate a new conflict (Oliver 2005).

In reality, return was much smaller and slower than that.[11] 1999 became the year of return on a practical level; only Cirkin and around twenty for-

[11] No census has been conducted since 1991. Demographic statements have been estimates since the changes brought about by war. A census was planned for 2011, but authorities could not reach an agreement. Bosniak politicians feared that the new census would further legitimise the results of ethnic cleansing, while Serb nationalists were eager to prove the homogenous nature of their RS. In 2002, it was estimated that in Prijedor, 20 % of the non-Serb population have returned (Wesselingh and Vaulerin 2005: 91). Recently, the local authority of Prijedor claimed that in total there were 24,997 returnees, of which Kozarac had 11,938. See "Strateski plan: dobre uprave u oblasti voda i zastite zivotne sredine Opstina Prijedor 2008–2013" at http://www.opstinaprijedor.org

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mer soldiers and respected community figures had returned the previous year. The idea was that if the leadership returned, people would feel safe to follow. Another difficult issue was the presence of hundreds of Serb refugees from Knin, in Croatia, who were living in the primary school building in the centre of Kozarac with their commanders and soldiers who had fled when Croatia retook Serb-occupied territories.

The early returnees restored several Bosniak cafés to kick-start social life in the area, but the issue of which areas the municipality would allow to be resettled remained unresolved. There was a case of an elderly man who refused to continue past his house on the way to the designated place of return, so he stopped and began clearing the rubble that used to be his dwelling, when local Serb refugees arrived with the Prijedor police,[12] who told him to leave. By that time, Cirkin had called UNHCR and IFOR to the site and the man explained 'that was his home and that the cafe next to his house is also his property but he was alright for the Serbs to use it for now'.[13] The international agencies essentially heard the story of a man in danger of being driven from his house for a second time, and decided that could not be allowed, thus validating Cirkin's hypothesis about the unstoppable nature of return once it had begun.

With a plethora of bottom-up, locally organised activities pushing for return, the international agencies were eventually forced to take a decision about how they would support the process. The British IFOR contingent in the region stepped up the arrest of indicted war criminals in the summer of 1997, taking a more active stance after the May 1997 PIC meeting in Sintra. International agencies declared 1998 the 'year of minority return', and to entice local authorities to support the process, large sums of money were offered for rebuilding infrastructure. As a result, fifteen towns were declared 'open cities', but Prijedor was not part of this due to the US Congress embargo on aid to places suspected of harbouring war criminals. However, after realising that return was imminent, and that it

[12] The police was staffed with men who played a role in the ethnic cleansing of non-Serbs from Prijedor. In 1996, an American journalist identified four indicted war criminals in the force. See Neuffer, *The Key to My Neighbour's House: Seeking Justice in Bosnia and Rwanda*, Picador, 2002. Also, *ICG* report "Going Nowhere Fast", 1997.

[13] Field notes, April, 2008.

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could lead to aid and investment, Prijedor's obstruction to return began to recede.

Kozarac became the first site of significant return from the Federation to RS. By 1999, there were 10,000 returnees living in the area, and the following year saw the first Mosque to be rebuilt in the whole of RS. The lack of housing was a major problem in the early days, but returnees organised *satorska naselja* (tent settlements) in the face of opposition from both the Serb authority and OSCE representatives, who claimed the local Serb population may find the tents intimidating. Nonetheless, the Prijedor return initiative, which was almost entirely the result of self-organisation among the local population, convinced international agencies to create a Reconstruction and Return Task Force, whose mandate was literally to follow the flow of displaced persons and to offer protection using the peacekeeping force, SFOR (Belloni 2005: 9).

Having established the kernel of their community on the ground in Kozarac, the thoughts of those involved in promoting return turned to the question of how to re-establish themselves in the public realm and in the landscape of memory that surrounded them. The first practical aspect of this would be to begin locating, marking and dealing with the hundreds of mass graves around the region, and then to identify the victims and give them proper burials and recognition. This would become the next focus for the returnee community of Kozarac and Prijedor, and the next challenge they face in being recognised and acknowledged as something more than just faceless victims.

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4

A Community of Mourners: Collective and Personal Rituals of Loss

After the initial phase of return, how does a community begin to re-establish itself and seek recognition within the wider society for what happened to make return necessary? The returnees of Kozarac, with little access to political or media channels, focused on commemorative practices, both private and communal rituals, to achieve this. Here, I consider the struggle over the dead and missing, their burial and the funerals that accompany the process, which would produce new elements in the physical landscape that serve to remind the population of the wartime events and mark the renewed presence of the returnee population. All of this takes place in a hostile environment dominated by the denial of war crimes, and surrounded by the erection of Serb monuments commemorating their competing narrative of the ethnic cleansing. In this situation of divided communities sharing physical intimacy, the absence of official monuments for the victims of the war was partly countered by the annual mass funerals of victims whose bodies had been found and identified during the previous year. This chapter looks at the key role of this process in bringing the community together, but also addresses the tension between memorialisation and the desire to move on.

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In the autumn of 2003, during a meeting of the Forum of Municipalities, the fourth EU-funded economic forum in Prijedor, where international organisations, local authority and NGOs debated post-war economic development, representatives of *Srcem do Mira* gave out leaflets to the attendees produced by another Bosniak organisation *Izvor*. The leaflets read: 'Watch out for human bones! Take care when walking the streets of this city, because you may step on the bones of one of the victims. Try to persuade the local authorities to identify the location of the mass graves where 1500 victims are buried' (Tinjak 2003). On both sides of the leaflet was an image of a human skull half covered by grass. Representatives of *Srcem do Mira* and *Izvor*, then, as now, were trying to raise awareness that in this city, 3227 people, including 122 children, were murdered in the summer of 1992, of whom over 800 are still missing at the time of writing. Prijedor's local authorities and police treated the leafleting as an inflammatory act—an attempt to create tensions between ethnic groups. Some of those responsible were taken to the police station for questioning and kept for hours, including Emsuda Mujagic from *Srcem do Mira*. Remembering the dead is a contentious issue in a place like Prijedor.

The initial phase of physically repopulating the town was a success, but while Kozarac has indeed been rebuilt, it remains an unwanted Bosniak enclave within the entity of RS, estranged from the local authority of the Prijedor municipality. Its inhabitants contend that they live in an island within RS, unacknowledged and, although allowed to occupy their original homes, treated essentially as second-class citizens.[1]

The pervasiveness of RS official denial of the crimes committed since 1992, and their reluctance to reintegrate former citizens, both the dead and the living, into the wider community, compounded by the impact on the physical landscape of hundreds of individual and mass graves, have all contributed to the returnees' preoccupation with the dead. During the war, some soldiers of the 17th Brigade fought to regain the territory where the camps were located so they might find their dead and give

[1] See Amnesty International's report (2006), "Bosnia and Herzegovina. Behind Closed Gates: Ethnic Discrimination in Employment", at http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR63/001/2006; and, Tinjak, E (2003) "RS Police Continue to Intimidate the Bosniaks of Prijedor", *Bosnia Report* 36, at http://www.bosnia.org.uk/bosrep/report_format.cfm?articleID=1026&reportid=162

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them a proper burial at home. Through a process of emplacement of the dead and the living, there was an implicit belief that former neighbours would have no choice but to recognise their suffering and endured loss, and that this might lead to normalisation of social relations.

Since return, the dead have become social agents in the public sphere, the interlocutors of transition, for social and political transformation to happen after mass violence (Rojas-Perez 2013; Colovic 2002). In Kozarac, as in other places where a radical transformation of society has caused a particular group to feel marginalised, burial rites can appear to be divisive rituals in the post-war context, as they lay bare the gulf between those who want to forget (or indeed not to admit that the events even happened) and those who want to remember. Together with days of remembering, these annual rituals focus on sensory evocation of

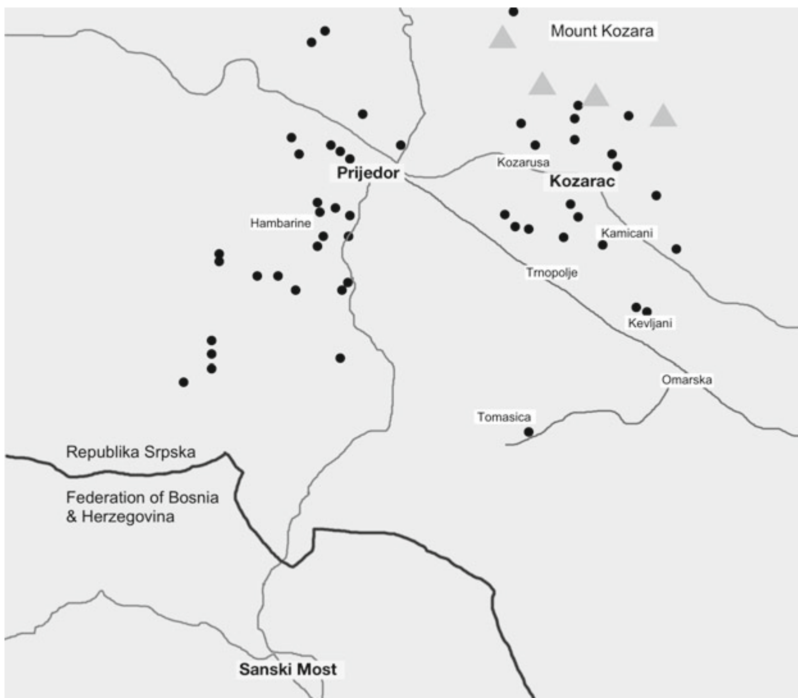

Fig. 4.1 Map of mass graves in Prijedor
(Source of data: Mujo Begic)

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loss (Wagner and Nettelfield 2014: 39) while reoccupying social space, if only temporarily. By contrast, the perpetrators—mostly Serb soldiers—are depicted in the public memory as heroes who sacrificed their lives for the foundation of RS. In a sociopolitical context where public anniversaries and days of remembrance connote a 'celebration of violence' (Last 2000) as a way of giving freedom to the Serbian people, who might have suffered if '[their leaders] had not reacted first',[2] what happens to the real victims? How can they grapple with the deliberate rejection of their suffering in everyday life and their profound sense of loss and alienation when their private memory is so completely at odds with the officially promoted public memory (Fig. 4.1)?

On Loss

> Those years, she [Republika Srpska] was still smelling of blood and crime. Bones were still visible on the grass, blood of civilians was smelling….with tears in his eyes, he was barely able to pass through the shrubs, broken bricks and cement to reach the back entrance [of his destroyed house]. There, on the 25th of May [1992], he had seen his grandmother for the last time. All is empty…he nearly expected to find her there…nearly…[3]

While my focus here is on the loss of human life and its impact on survivors and families, it is worth noting that many of my informants have also experienced other senses of loss, such as the loss of home, of childhood or of a formative generation, and for some, a loss of the future. The notion of loss is defined as an emotional assault on the survivors' world of meaning, and the process of grieving is partly a way of reconstructing self, identity, and of creating new meanings and belonging through communal practices. Relationships between people and places have been explored in various fields of literature—for example, phenomenological

[2] The Serb war victims groups in Prijedor argue that an incident where several civilians were wounded and two policemen killed in the Bosniak village of Hambarine just before the main expulsion and systematic murder of non-Serbs began, proves that Serbs would have been exterminated if they did not act first. Furthermore, this line of argument, explains that 'the reason for the crimes apparently committed against the Prijedor's non-Serb inhabitants is the reaction to this incident'.

[3] From Satko Mujagic's blog http://kasaba.blogger.ba/arhiva/?start=560

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studies have explored the structure of sentiments such as 'out of place', home, not belonging, nostalgia and so on (Tilly 1997; Casey 2004). Many of these sentiments are understood as a longing or a nostalgia for 'the good old days', and rarely refer to the anguish of real physical loss and its psychophysical symptoms. However, as Fullilove (1996) notes, centuries ago, nostalgia was perceived as an illness that can have detrimental effects on its sufferers, sometimes resulting in death or suicide. He points out that an equivalent, modern expression of nostalgia can be seen in depression. Over the course of my fieldwork, I noticed that many returnees, usually when conversing among themselves, spoke about how return gave them a new lease of life. Individuals from the diaspora would discuss online, days in advance of an anticipated trip home, how as soon as they approached Kozarac, life felt real once again, as opposed to just surviving (*prezivljavanje*), which was how they felt about their life in exile. A few people residing outside Bosnia have communicated to me how important it is for them to visit their former homes every year, not only for the days of remembering but also to reach out to their childhood memories that are inscribed in the physical landscape. Recalling different, happier times, for example, one informant told me how he used his gaze to regulate his moods by recalling a particular past event, all the while hoping that no other returnees would puncture his fantasy by greeting him. In fact, he did not want to dwell much on the present position of his estranged community as, for him, communal life was now non-existent. He wanted instead to reach an old part of his self, uninterrupted by fellow returnees.[4] But for those who returned, the past cannot remain fixed in the same way as it might be for members of diaspora (Wagner and Nettelfield 2014). Through psychological and physical reclamation entailed in the process of return, their pasts have been re-contextualised while building a family life, and future-oriented goals require new social interactions and careful consideration of challenging sociopolitical processes.

The last few decades of the twentieth century witnessed conflicts that created millions of refugees and internally displaced persons, and the devastating effects of war continue today.[5] It has become evident that a troubled population suffers in their attempts to re-establish themselves in a new unconquered

[4] In conversation with a former soldier, May, 2007.

[5] See UNHCR statistical online population database www.unhcr.org/statistics/populationdatabase

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environment in addition to the burden of recovery from trauma related to war or torture. Psychiatrists, clinical psychologists and anthropologists have all begun to recognise the significance of a loss of place, and in particular the loss of a communal life, for a displaced population's mental health, and they have started considering how this might be incorporated within the medical realm of treatments and diagnosis (Summerfield 2003).

In many respects, it is elderly women who experience the painful absence of their younger relatives due to their age and social position. I spent some time talking to several middle- and older-aged women, all permanent returnees to Kozarac, to explore their perceptions and feelings associated with loss, how they manage the feelings and to what extent 'being at home' has helped their personal recovery. The process of reintegrating oneself into a community one imagined as one's own, but which might have changed as a result of war trauma, presents its own challenges and demonstrates that these processes are as much about definition by exclusion as by inclusion. Elderly women[6] are a very interesting group for this study, as they have endured a disproportionate impact of loss in this region, where the age group 25–35 was the most highly targeted segment of the population.

(I)

When I first began my fieldwork in May 2007, after spending a few days at a friend's house, an elderly widow took me in. Mersa, aged seventy at the time, was one of the first people to return to Kozarac in 1999. Her house's outer walls, unusually, were still standing at the time of her return, and so the building retains a look that is evocative of the architecture of pre-war Kozarac. Before she returned, Mersa received a donation from a German humanitarian agency, who employed local Serb workmen to repair the house. Recounting those days, she remembered her frustration and anger when asked by Serb refugees who were living in a local primary school if

[6] All my elderly informants are those who have returned permanently, and in most cases have either lost most of their children or those who have survived live in other parts of Bosnia or a former republic of Yugoslavia. It is important to note this, as those who remain in exile and spend their summers in Kozarac, might have a very different attachment, and anxieties, in relation to the 'new' place and their sense of belonging due to their family being abroad, particularly to their grandchildren.

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they could move in with her, as she was alone. A decade on, her discontent with the way that her house was rebuilt is still a topic of conversation—the creaking stairs and draughty windows both precipitate her sense of grievance. She remarks how once there had stood a beautifully crafted wooden spiral staircase, which her husband and son spent many days building, and how the new badly constructed stairs take centre stage in her living room, so there is no escaping the comparison. She often directs a monologue towards them, momentarily forgetting the presence of visitors. The stairs represent both a good, old time, permeated with family warmth, and also 'the ugliness of present existence', as she says, which reminds her of her loss.

Mersa's story was particularly poignant to me as it embodies many aspects of pre- and post-war life in Bosnia. Her only son was killed on the first day of the ethnic cleansing in May 1992. As with so many returnees, she was incarcerated in one of the camps, and then lived in Croatia, where her husband died. Her everyday routine consists of daily prayers, a search for drinking water (the local authority provides only one hour of water during the summer months) and evening walks through the town. In Bosnian culture, generally speaking, it is rare to find an elderly person who has no family to help with daily chores, especially chores like fetching water on time every morning so that his or her garden and food can be taken care of. These daily house chores are remnants of Mersa's past life that connect her with a constant sense of being deprived of her loved ones. Her home contains a collection of memorabilia relating to her son. On the living room walls, there are a few photographs from the 1980s that depict happy days of garden parties, with her son surrounded by friends and neighbours. In the late evenings, as I approached her front door, I would hear her reciting a prayer in a corner of the living room, where most of those photographs reside. At times, I felt uneasy as, in the darkness of the night, the house felt like a shrine, wanting to be left alone, uninterrupted by me.

(II)

Mersa is still waiting for her prayers to be answered—to find the remains of her son—while many other returnees in this area have discovered their relatives' bones in surrounding fields or even their own

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gardens. The late Nana was a seventy-three-year-old mother of one of my principal informants, and a friend who kindly let me come and stay whenever I needed to retreat from Kozarac to their lovely, quiet house set on the hills above in Kozarusa. She recalled her first visit to her destroyed home, and how her mind kept wondering whether they would step on the bones of her late husband. During her incarceration in the camp at Trnopolje, she heard stories of her husband hiding in the forests, and how he was captured and murdered in their garden, where his remains lay. Her first visit home resonated with these stories, which she had got used to hearing during imprisonment, and later in exile, but she was unable to search the grounds as they were completely overgrown with bushes.

Nana's son, Iso, who had lived in Slovenia since the 1980s, decided to visit their former Serb neighbours and ask them about the fate of his father. After a few drinks, a Serb neighbour told him that his father was indeed murdered in front of their home and buried in the garden. They paid local Serbs to clear out the garden, as they were worried about mines. The grave was exactly where their neighbour told them, covered with planks of wood. Nana spoke to me about the discovery of her husband's remains as an 'act of fate'. She has constructed a story that she calls the 'circle of life', which serves a religious purpose for her—a sense that life is complete, albeit imbued with pain and struggle. Narrating the story of her husband's exhumation by her son, she speaks as though she was (emotionally) present:

> My son took him out under a large pile of planks that were scattered all over him, but he had to put him back there immediately as they were waiting for the forensic team to investigate the location. For Iso, that was the most difficult moment in his life: putting his father back into the grave and covering him with a plastic bag, as it was about to rain. That night, twelve relatives and friends gathered in order to guard the grave until morning. Serbs drove hundreds of cars most of the night, singing and waving their Serb flags, shooting into the air…as though to frighten us. And all of them drove to our Serb neighbours.[7]

[7] Field notes, 26 October, 2007.

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In fact, at the time, Nana was unaware that her husband had been found. She was living in Lusci Palanka, just across the inter-entity boundary in the Federation. She was only aware that her son's search was underway; and, a night later, her husband's remains were brought in a van, along with other bodies, and parked in her courtyard. In the morning, upon discovering that her husband's remains spent a night in her front yard, she construed it to be a story of fate: 'You see what fate is, God's will, that his bones, all night sleep in my courtyard…After the camps, exile in Slovenia and return to Lusci Palanka…we meet again…Fate reconnected us again. A life circle. He saw us again, thanks to God's mercy.'

(III)

The experience of Ika, a middle-aged Serb woman who lives in the centre of Kozarac, has much in common with the struggle of the two women above—redefining what is home after expulsion and an (in)ability to deal with loss—and yet, uniquely in this story, she never left her home. Ethnic cleansing changed her predominantly Bosniak community dramatically, and the process of the return of her former neighbours has redefined her sense of belonging. The loss of her husband and a twenty-one-year-old son is mourned only in the privacy of her home. She feels as though her best friends have returned but 'things are not the same'. They do not visit each other. She talks how her son was 'the first to declare loyalty to Bosnia' and her family is 'very mixed'. Her husband was a Croat, and his father was a Muslim. So, she considers herself as not belonging to anything in particular: 'Ika Mandic, I am nothing, neither Serb nor Croat or Muslim.' But she is very aware of her Serb heritage: 'I am not guilty that I come from that miserable background.' Prior to the war, she lived a good life, her husband earning his salary in Germany, while she worked as a cook in local restaurants in Kozarac and Prijedor. When the ethnic cleansing in Kozarac began, she 'joined my people in Trnopolje camp'. Her inquiry into the fate of her husband and son, in the camps of Trnopolje and Omarska, exposed her to all kinds of physical and mental torture in which she often was called a *Muslim Balinkusa* (a derogatory

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word for Muslim). In the camp, she felt that Muslims were avoiding her, and that she was mistreated by Serbs. As a result, she regards her suffering as unique: 'No one has survived what I have.'

From the camp, she eventually returned home to what was then a 'ghost town', while her house stood empty of all household goods. Even now, sixteen years later, her house remains unfurnished, with very few basic goods such as a bed, a small table and a few chairs centred around a stove. As we sipped local plum brandy, *rakija*, she kept reminding me that 'I can take what I think is relevant and can forget her rambling on about her neighbours who turned away from her', clearly not wanting to appear critical of them. She remarks that her life is very poor now, and she cannot buy herself any clothes from her insignificant RS pension, but she manages to grow enough food in her garden to survive, and annual visits from her foreign friends (the Hazelwood women) help her get by. She notices how other women, victims of war (and accepted as such), get much more humanitarian aid at the *Srcem do Mira* centre, but she is never invited. She only wants to be 'accepted as a victim, a human being who also lost her loved ones'. She recalls the early days of return, and her happiness at encountering and welcoming her friends and neighbours, who were very generous in giving gifts to her. She remembers how she helped them by letting them stay in her house and use her telephone to keep in touch with their families abroad, while building their own houses. And now, the only comfort she finds in the community is not with her old best friends that she helped, but with those mothers, like herself, who lost children and 'understand the pain of a broken heart'.

Ashamed of her Serb heritage, she keeps remarking how she would never ask them for anything as they are *Chetnici* (Chetniks—ultranationalists). At the same time, she is very aware that she is estranged from her Bosniak community: 'My mother-in-law, despite being married to a Muslim, a woman who wore all her life *dimiye* and *shamiya* [traditional Bosnian Muslim clothes inherited from the Ottomans], was not allowed to be buried in the Muslim cemetery a few years ago. Instead, she had to be buried among Chetnici, in a Serb cemetery, away from her husband.' Despite her experience of a communal life in which she does not appear to have a place, she chooses to stay with them: 'My Kozarac, my people. I attached myself onto them like a drumstick to

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a drum. I have "*prisvojila*" (adapted) to them, let God forgive them…' Ika's vocabulary resembles that of a Bosnian Muslim. She greets me with *merhaba*, and constantly refers to 'dear, great Allah' in her talk. When I greeted her with a secular greeting 'good day', she replied with a Muslim response *aleykumu selam*. Visiting Ika is always disturbing, as it touches the core of our human identity as social beings, inextricably linked to one another, while illuminating the painful experience and shame when a human being is rejected by all those around him or her, and becomes persona non grata. Like the stories of emotional turmoil from her Bosniak counterparts, hers are imbued with pain and suffering; however, her stories are unshared and unrecognised by her community, so she keeps resisting complete alienation by inventing herself, through language, and narrating her own imaginary sense of belonging, although some perceive this adaptation as a sign of madness, and regard her as a 'woman who lost the plot'.

At Home: Group Belonging as Communal Healing

> It brought me back onto my feet, this town and this people. There, I was withering away, without feeling it. Like a frog in water that's slowly boiling, but she does not jump out because she does not know she will boil, as it happens gradually…Only now do I see how everything is feeding me, a glimpse of a smile, an ordinary word, a meaningless glance, tasteless music…How strange it is how man awakes 'when he returns', how life is full… (a friend who recently returned to Bosnia, 2010)

Even the handful of stories above demonstrate how within the same social group, various different temporal dispositions and constructions of meaning concerning loss are at work. Mersa's story suggests that homes can, besides triggering memories from the past, also be perceived as 'second bodies' (Lang 1985). This is usually exemplified through analysis of childhood homes as principal sites of inhabitation (Chawla 1994). However, in this case, we see how home can be reconstructed as an intimate site of worship (a prayer room filled with old photographs of

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Mersa's son). In my observation of the bereaved families, I found that in the absence of bodies, many turn to physical sites of memory as a way of reconnecting with the spirit or image of the dead. It seems to have a particular calming effect on them, and helps assert their own sense of themselves as social beings that last longer than their lifespan (Hallam and Hockey 1999). Moreover, even when a body is found, many choose to continue imagining meeting their loved ones 'behind a tree' or in many cases using the physical landscape as a source of 'good memories' of those past relationships that continue in the present (cf. Hallam and Hockey 2001). The experience of families of the missing who (over a decade or more) have become used to living without knowing has a profound impact on the way they construct their own reality, even if a body is eventually found. The prolonged state of not knowing what happened to loved ones creates a state of being in which hope and a sense of loss coexist in a dreamlike reality: 'Would her prematurely killed child appear? All the time she is dreaming until one day, she hears, "Here, we found him in that and that pit." And since then, she recalls as before—she dreams of him how, that despite it all, he is coming back.'[8]

The physical destruction of a community profoundly impacts the consciousness of its inhabitants. The effacement of communal life can leave many adrift (Fullilove 1996; Fried 1963), as in the case of Ika. She remained at home, but her sense of belonging has been compromised by the war's legacy of politicisation of identities and belonging. Like Nana, she manages her war experiences and life in complete privacy at home, but not by choice. Her experience of alienation is profound in that every day she feels lonely: 'I have no longer a friendship of any sort…I am alone.' And while one can observe individuals passing by Ika's house greeting her, she has effectively lost her place in the community. During my fieldwork, I rarely heard people referring to the small number of Serb or Croat houses that constitute part of the centre of Kozarac. Members of these households sometimes directly participated in the ethnic cleansing as the case of Dusan Tadic at the Hague Tribunal demonstrates. But there are very different stories too, often involving mixed marriages, like the Serb woman who was unable to fathom the violence inflicted on her

[8] Field notes, July 2008.

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husband and the community, and who committed suicide. Or the story of a young Serb, Sasha, who joined the 17th Brigade after expulsion. These examples are seldom present in any discussions among members of the local community at times when war experiences are remembered, and this level of complexity and detail is sadly missing from most policy debates about how to deal with post-war societies in transition.

On the other hand, Nana's daily visits from families and friends, centred around coffee drinking, gardening and narratives concerning children and marriages, all suggest a return to a normal life. In fact, her home felt closest to the pre-war experience of a Bosnian life, where family life, respect for the elderly and neighbourly help in all spheres of life remain a prevalent social norm. Yet, surrounded by many empty houses and a dearth of children in the neighbourhood, one often witnesses narratives of loss and a yearning for the living members of the community, which is in stark contrast to the number of dead that were exhumed in several mass graves in the vicinity. This kind of longing for the old way of life is constantly worked through in terms of discourses on survival. Accepting the reality of life at present, many remark how, despite estrangement and concerns whether their community will survive, return is seen as a testament that one can envisage, and therefore create, a better future at home. For individuals who have returned and 'worked it through' by integrating events from the past into the present, survival is used in the past tense. In other words, the notion that *prezivjeli smo* (we have survived) is part of life, allocated to a particular time and place.

However, for returnees, experiences of loss and betrayal orchestrated by their former neighbours seem most challenging to grapple with. Nana's story, or at least her personal narration to me, is permeated with a sense of betrayal by her former Serb neighbour, Savka, but also a mourning for the loss of a dear friend. When she speaks of the Serb crowd's intimidation during the night when her family guarded the grave of her late husband, she briefly mentions, 'and all of them drove to our Serb neighbours'. It seems unimportant, as she does not dwell on it, but every morning while we drank our coffee, she would look through her window across the road onto the land and family home of her Serb neighbour, and most of her stories from the past would somehow mention Savka. She would speak of the support that she had given to her neighbour at times when she suffered at the hands

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of an alcoholic and abusive husband. Nana comes from a generation that had a particular code of behaviour towards their non-Muslim neighbours, when it was not customary for women to visit their Christian counterparts in their homes. Nonetheless, they met on the road for a chat, or to exchange experiences when needed. And, sometimes, she would invite Savka to stay at her home when Savka's family violence was unbearable. Nana's memory of support and trust between the two women, coupled with the murder of her husband, believed to have been committed by a neighbour, has left her with an emotional void that she was unable to fill. She believed that Savka 'could not look into my eyes' when she returned home, before Savka left for Serbia to die, as 'she knew who killed my husband and where he was buried'. She remained alert to the activities of Savka's sons as they worked in the fields that border her land, always waiting for a moment when she could summon the courage to tell them that 'they cannot steal from her and her community' anymore. However, when such a moment arose, she conceded she was unable to approach them.

In contrast, Ika suffers complete isolation from her immediate Bosniak neighbours in Kozarac, where she is not perceived to have suffered by one community and regarded as persona non grata by another. She is unwanted and invisible, despite having stayed in her home throughout both war and return. In such a social environment, she has changed her behaviour radically, adapting the 'visible manners' and attributes of a Bosnian Muslim. During long conversations with her, and at moments when she lets her guard down, she concedes, 'I am more a Muslim than many of them.' She continues to absorb the vocabulary of appropriate religious and cultural references of her 'emerging community' in the hope that she will eventually be regarded as belonging to it. She remarks how only men, mainly from the diaspora, tend to greet her when passing by, but that no one visits her. Her physical home is a peculiar example of a Bosnian post-war life, in the sense that on the outside, it resembles the unattainable image of the past due to its (rare) untarnished and unchanged facade, while inside it contains a fragmented picture of a lonely life.

Loneliness is palpable in the individual and communal experience of everyday life, despite various attempts to assuage it. I have often encountered women that I stayed with who would spend most of the night recounting their war stories and experiences after return, always imbued with a tangible sense of loss and grief. These narratives were not necessarily about telling a

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coherent story. They often serve a need of the narrator to relieve, albeit temporarily, an emotional burden of unmediated traumatic memories, and in some cases, psychophysical symptoms of complicated grief such as sleep disturbance, skin rashes and loneliness. Dozens of women have all complained about problems with digestion, sleeplessness and skin rashes that were often noted during the attack on their homes and continue to be a major irritation in the present.[9] Nonetheless, some noted that physical symptoms either disappeared or occur less often since return. Communal attachment and care were regarded as main contributors to their well-being. But also, those who have managed to construct a story that makes their life liveable again, such as Nana's act of fate, give themselves a sense of an ending, and this reaffirms their agency (Lifton 1999; Jackson 2002; Kerby 1991).

By contrast, the main Imam of Kozarac spoke of those in exile who have died prematurely as a direct result of war. He noticed that many were in their early thirties when the ethnic cleansing took place and that due to their age, or what he calls 'being robbed of the early stage of adulthood or a family life', events have left a permanent imprint on their personhood, making them unable to start life anew. Instead, they adopted a way of life where they work abroad and live only for spending summer vacations in Kozarac, but never manage to release their *pritisak*, tension, explained as a psychophysical symptom that affects their bodies and mind. Those who returned do indeed seem less anxious and more content; they often ridicule the diaspora and their busy lives. Unlike permanent residents, the permanently displaced carry a burden of mitigating their family and professional duties in exile with their emotional bond to their country of origin.

The House of Peace: A Community Gathering Space

The House of Peace (*Kuca Mira*), run by *Srcem Do Mira* in a former school building, is both a centre of the local community and a meeting place for international friends who have helped the town over the

[9] Cacioppo and Patrick (2008) have conducted various longitudinal studies regarding the effects of loneliness on individuals. He points out how loneliness, as a direct result of loss and violence, has psychological symptoms, such as disassociation, lack of trust and other asocial behavioural tendencies, but also physical symptoms which may contribute to premature death.

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years, as well as the various researchers who sometimes pass through in exploring post-war Bosnia. It hosts events, days of remembrance, conferences on human rights, educational workshops and women's meetings. Spending time in the House of Peace, one can observe some remarkable interactions among well-meaning individuals from abroad and the local women. But its main function is to provide a public space for communal discussion, where elderly and young women with children meet on a daily basis, discussing everyday life, sharing personal experiences of loss, stories of injustice and discrimination relating to their current political and social status within the Prijedor municipality, and also funny stories about the diaspora who descend on the town every summer like tourists. Listening to these stories, at first they all appear fragmented, going backward and forward in time. However, what I eventually learnt is that stories are told in this way precisely because the audience is very familiar with each other's past experiences and chronologies. A shared history has created a special emotional bond among Kozarac inhabitants. So, there is no need to explain things in a well-articulated way; and if I would interrupt, they would stop for a moment, and a listener would wave her hands as if to say 'details are not important, don't interrupt'. Their focus is not on a particular story but rather on the emotions that are shared among the members. These are stories of belonging, home, memory and sometimes also of their challenges in asserting themselves in their former homes and confronting former neighbours. In my experience, what binds these intimate stories together is that ultimately their challenging and traumatic fragments of past experiences are weaved into a story of empowerment, resilience and recovery achieved through return that enabled them to reclaim their past on their own terms and resume normal everyday life. They also depict the fragility of a life lived in an unresolved, post-war society. For example, one afternoon at the House of Peace, a group of women were recalling their experiences in the early days of return, when they encountered their former Serb neighbours in police uniforms at a polling station in Kozarac:

> Goran [a Serb policeman] and his grandmother entered [the communal building during elections]. He was muttering: Why did he fight? In his house, there are four voters and they only received one ballot paper… I did

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> not react nor did Suvada…there were many people around…I needed to give my post and all other paperwork to Mirko [a local policeman]. Suvada and I were entering [the building] and Mirko and Goran were playing cards. Goran blushed, looked at me and said 'How come you, my neighbour, are not reacting to how many people [Serbs] are not on the list for voting?' I said, 'why would I react?' Suvada said to me 'I will never again go anywhere with you.' Goran replied: 'Well, we are neighbours.' I said, 'We were neighbours until 1992 and since 1992 we can never be neighbours again. If we were neighbours in 1992 you would have told me: Hey, you are young, this and this will happen, you should run.' I said: 'You know very well that it was a Friday before the Sunday when all began [the attack], and your mother and wife were preparing some food saying they are going to Palacinste whilst I was waiting for a bus at the bus stop. She could have told me too….' I said: 'Even if I could have helped [regarding voting] I would not. Who are you to me that I ought to report?' He became very angry, 'how… he is in the uniform and I dare to speak like that'…Emsuda [listening this story] replied, 'You should have told him, you know Goran, your people are walking and ours are not [implying they are dead]....I always have something ready to tell them.'

Conversely, in their social interactions with foreign visitors, another side of their story is put forward, contingent on several factors such as what is expected from them, their past experiences and a sense of duty towards their own activists groups, and whether they feel obliged or bound by funding received or anticipated from an international organisation. The conventional and most common demand from international visitors is for a story of traumatic experience to be narrated. I particularly recall one wonderful laughter-filled day when a young researcher from Finland organised an art therapy workshop based on drawing family trees as a way of dealing with trauma. She was referred to Emsuda by a Finnish organisation that provided the funds for the reconstruction of the House of Peace building. On such occasions, Emsuda, spreads the word to her women, who dutifully turn up to draw and be healed. As the women took part in this exercise, it was obvious many were humouring the nice young researcher, who was diligently and seriously searching for meaning in the drawings of the women. Meanwhile, the women were having their own private fun (the

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researcher did not speak Bosnian), laughing at each other's inability to draw, ridiculing Emsuda's attempt to match a story of her past struggles and future vision as closely as she could to the needs and expectations of the researcher; but all the while they were kind and not in the least bit cynical towards the nice young lady who thought she was helping them. These meetings bring something new into the mundane day-to-day life of the women, and as soon as spring approaches, they immerse themselves in organising the various social activities generated by the centre, which also provides some financial assistance in the form of odd jobs such as cooking or cleaning. But for me, the most important role the centre plays is as a communal institution where social norms and behaviours have been ritualised to the extent that it is an oasis of stability and socialisation amidst the scarcity of public institutions that might cater for the welfare of returnees.

Mass Funerals

> I remember in 1998, standing over a pit full of bodies, just a few hundred metres above our house. It rained, and everything looked miserable and filthy. Bodies bathing in the mud. We just found a mass grave containing dozens of bodies. I was thinking of my father at the time so went to look at it. There was a forensic team already working, and around us Serb policemen were guarding it. It was a sad scene in which those bodies and their clothes appeared so wretched…I glanced at the policemen and they were smiling…[10]

Mass funerals have become a significant social and cultural practice among the returnees, and the reasons why this practice has become so central to returnee life can be found in the early days of return. In those days, the discovery of mass graves by returnees was very common. The pressing issue at the time was not finding the missing, as the graves seemed to appear of their own accord, but rather how to ensure their remains were buried in their home town or village. Home had become a territory transformed into a new statelet that does not want to embrace either its former Bosniak residents or their dead. For returnees, then,

[10] In conversation with Seida Karabasic, May 2007.

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the struggle to bury the dead in local cemeteries was an affirmation that they would eventually return and reclaim their homes. At the time, the local Serb authorities were willing to transport bodies to the Federation, but would not allow any land in the Prijedor region to become a site for a graveyard. Bosniak leaders decided to go ahead and bury them in the local Kozarac cemetery, at Kamicani, which was legally owned by the Islamic community. The first few hundred that were buried were unidentified, as DNA testing was not yet available, followed by those identified on the basis of clothes found in the mass graves.

> At the time, we could not get a reasonable solution from the authorities. In other words, they would not allow a burial site. Hence we decided without asking for permit anymore, to bury our sehide [martyrs], their remains, in our local cemeteries.

Sead Cirkin spoke to me about how dangerous it was to bury hundreds of remains in 1998. During the funeral procession, they had to bury the dead without much care for religious procedure, as local Serb villagers drove around shooting into the air, and sometimes in their direction. At the first two funerals, very few people attended due to this intimidation, aside from men who had fought in the Bosnian Army. And, yet, the idea gained ground that 'once our dead remain, we shall return', and mass funerals evolved into commemorative practices, where the returnee community pay a visit to the cemetery twice a year in the months of May and July. Thus, the roots of current practice are about return and re-establishing the community, as much as they are about individual and collective mourning.

Communal rituals act as an opportunity for expressing individual loss, refashioning collective identity and the social production of space. In such communal practices, the dead are perceived not merely as ghosts of the past, but are regarded as current social figures, encapsulated in various collective categories that play a role in the re-making of social and political life in the community. In part, this is because of the hole in the community's social fabric resulting from the deliberate targeting of respected figures and potential community leaders in 1992—precisely the people others would turn to in a time of rebuilding and return—but in part this is also a simple human response to the loneliness and absence of loved ones (Fig. 4.2).

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Fig. 4.2 Looking out across Kamicani cemetery

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The Religious Dimensions of Communal Rituals of Remembering

Every year on 24 May, the anniversary of the attack on Kozarac, people gather on the main street of the town, and after midday prayers in the main Mosque, they recreate a walk that was taken by many on that day in 1992, en route to the camps, to visit the *sehidsko mezarje* (martyrs' cemetery) in Kamicani. All shops are shut during the visit and no music is played in the usually bustling bars and cafés on this day. Most women, young and old, cover their heads or wear long dresses that were, before the war, a rare sight among the younger generation. The image of hundreds of white head scarves on the main road of Kozarac, is an attempt to show the local Serb neighbours that they have not succeeded in ridding the area of its Muslim inhabitants. The context and nature of mass murder as remembered by the survivors, and the subsequent sociopolitical societal response—a 'transitional context'—can tell us a great deal about the emotional orientation of the population in the present (Bar-Tal et al. 2007). The effort by the architects of ethnic cleansing to inscribe a new political order into the landscape they cleansed, by building new churches, renaming the streets and towns (in the aftermath of violence, Kozarac was renamed Radmilovo referring to the local Serb commander who led the plunder), and by orthodox priests blessing public institutions such as schools, was all intended to send a clear message to Bosnian Muslims that there is no place for them in RS (cf. Duijzings 2007).

Like the annual walk to the cemetery, there is a striking level of conformity with the religious dress code at the funerals, although it is important to note that these ceremonies are attended by a far wider group than the religious community of practising Muslims. I attended the procession for five consecutive years (2007–2011), during which time I have buried two of my brothers whose remains were finally found and identified in this period; but even as a Bosnian Muslim myself, I have felt uneasy at times during the visit to the cemetery. I was well aware that many people might disapprove of my resistance to covering my head, as my closest friend pointed out in May 2011, but

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on the other hand, on the way to the cemetery, acquaintances would ask me to take a photograph of their fancy Muslim dress, as if they had acquired a national folk costume for a fancy dress party, while others fished for compliments in the way they dressed their head scarves and did their make-up. Of course, old people, more accustomed to the Bosnian way of Islam, wore modest long dresses and *shamiya* (a head scarf decorated with silver or string ornaments), which are consistent with the appropriate dress code for observing, from a distance, a funeral before the war (traditionally women did not attend funerals). The latter often complained about the inappropriate and 'imported' Muslim dress code that the younger generations wore, but were nevertheless content to see diaspora communities observing at least some elements of their tradition.

The desire by many to reiterate their Muslim identity in the post-war life of Kozarac is closely associated with their direct experiences of suffering during the ethnic cleansing, when they were persecuted or tortured on the basis of being a Muslim. In the camps, Serb guards targeted inmates whose way of dressing or talking would suggest a Muslim identity. A green coloured top would be regarded as provocative, and many owners of such tops were tortured or killed. There is an infamous story of a man being beaten to death after instinctively responding to a guard using the polite (Muslim) expression *bujrum*, and this has become part of a shared collective memory, often narrated by survivors and their relatives. One day, inmates were sitting in rows on the *pista* (a stretch of tarmac in front of one of the buildings in Omarska camp), and an inmate was eating a small piece of bread that he had saved in his pocket after lunch, as they were only given three minutes to enter the canteen and eat. A guard passed by and said 'bon appétit', and he instinctively replied, *bujrum*. He did not manage to digest that small piece of bread before several of them began beating him brutally; half an hour later he fell into a sitting position and a witness recalled the image of the now dead man being dragged in front of inmates while the piece of bread fell from his mouth (Fig. 4.3).

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Fig. 4.3 A mass funeral for those identified in 2008/2009

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A Time to Remember and Gather

> For us Kozarcani, every year (in comparison to others who attend happy anniversaries)…we, every year, attend funerals. People find it unusual when you, months ahead, say that you are busy at that particular time because you are going to a funeral. First question, how do you know that a funeral will take place so far ahead…and then, you explain, they have no word of reply…[11]

Some people see the focus on martyrs' cemeteries and mass burials as an explicitly political response to the attempt to destroy their community, and that they should not be viewed as only religious rituals. Since July 1998, mass funerals of those identified or discovered in the preceding twelve months have developed a consistent theme, where religious and political leaders give speeches at the event on the importance of not forgetting. Each year, a procession of coffins carried by male members of families is arranged in a different location, usually a small returnee village chosen as a central focus of the ceremony (*centralna ceremonija*). Coffins are laid out in a field, each covered with a green cloth. Before the official ceremony begins, many mourners walk around the coffins looking for the name of their kin so as to stay closer to them during the communal prayer. Some recall or contemplate their own sense of mortality, and how they too could easily have been among them. One can observe children as young as two years old standing beside their mother or grandmother, bending over the coffin or even embracing it. These bodies each have histories, and each is in a way the mirror image of those who survived. Hence the display of the coffins reminds the living of the blurred line between them and their dead, creating a sense of their destinies being bound together. A dais is constructed at the front, where Imams, Parish Priests, community leaders and the former head of the Bosniak religious community, Reis Mustafa Ceric, all give speeches about the need to remember the events of the summer of 1992, and 'how each year our dead remind us and warn us not to forget the injustice done to us'. Over the years of funeral orations, the local community has grown weary of speeches given by Sarajevo leaders such as Ceric, as they see no direct help from the government for most of the time. Other politicians stand beside them, but do not usually speak on these occasions, at least since the

[11] Field notes, July 2008.

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Fig. 4.4 Visiting dignitaries address a funeral at Rizvanovici in 2009

public criticism of the highly politicised 2005 funeral, when prominent local individuals criticised the organisers for paying too much attention to whom they invite from the political establishment, at the expense of the experience of those that matter—the families of the missing (Fig. 4.4):

> A funeral board in Prijedor…has made, collective farewell to innocent victims murdered in 1992, into agony. On an extremely hot day, without any sun protection, we had to stand an hour and twenty minutes, and listen to a parade of speakers. Without any concern or respect towards the elderly and sick, they kept giving their speeches. My mother felt sick and we had to go home instead of attending a proper funeral for my neighbours and friends at the martyrs' cemetery.[12]

A central part of the ceremony is the reading of the names of the victims, performed by children whose relatives are being buried. In recent years, the Serb mayor of Prijedor, Marko Pavic, has also made a short

[12] Ramulic, E. 28 June, 2005. On local website www.mojprijedor.com

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appearance, although returnees generally perceive politicians with suspicion, saying that they are 'only here to score some votes'. After the speeches, there is a collective prayer for all martyrs (*zajednicko klanjanje dzenaze*), and then each village takes their dead to their local cemetery (*mezarje*). Depending on the distance travelled, and the weather, they carry them either on foot or in a van followed by a convoy of cars guarded by police. A final prayer is then performed before the burial, conducted by a local Imam at the cemetery.

It has been claimed that Bosnian Muslim death rituals, which provide a shared experience of bereavement, are an important ingredient in calming down the grief and reinforcing a sense of communal belonging (Verdery 1999; Bringa 1995, Stover 2002). This certainly was the feeling of pre-war communities, regardless of religious affiliations, as neighbours were always keen to share the burden and help a family to deal with loss. Traditionally, forty days after the burial, *tehvid* is organised by the family of the deceased, where neighbours, friends and family join in collective prayers, eating and talking, while sharing a sense of loss of a member of the community (Bringa 1995; Stover and Shigekane 2002). To some extent, this tradition still exists, but the radical transformation of demographic structures of the community in which many individuals have not resided in the same specific physical site of home for decades, and where an entire generation was born in exile, has created a new social group of grievers who do not share communal life in the present. One can observe familial grief being shared, but not necessarily the same level of communal grief. And in some cases, the sharing is not the only concern of the bereaved as these mass funerals evoke a sense of injustice and betrayal experienced at the hands of their former neighbours. For example, prior to the mass funeral in July 2011, and the burial of an engineer, Zlatko Besirevic, his family put an obituary in *Kozarski Vjesnik*, the local Prijedor newspaper that played a key role in creating enmity and encouraging violence in the camps, that read 'this picture should remind your friends that left you there [Omarska]', alluding to the betrayal by his former Serb friends and their own unacknowledged suffering.

As soon as the burial is over, another form of social interaction begins: the search for the living amidst the dead. Although the funeral ritual is generally acknowledged as the saddest event of the year, many mourn-

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ers anticipate an encounter with an old friend or a relative that has been out of touch since the war. On these occasions, in the cemetery, one would take a photograph of such encounters to capture the image in case they never meet again. Scarves are often removed at this point to aid recognition. I recall a meeting of two women relatives who, during the prayer, were constantly gazing at each other, unsure whether they recognised each other. When the religious ceremony ended, one cried out: 'Take off your scarf to see if it is really you.'

Human suffering on such a scale seems to reduce our capacity for attachment to another human being or place, while reinforcing links among the community of sufferers that shared a life in the past (Arendt 1994). Hence, a shared moment of joy in such a meeting is rarely frowned upon by the community, despite the funeral context. In fact, one could argue that the social aspect of the funerals, especially for individuals in the diaspora who seek a familiar face in the crowd, is an important part of the ritual. The significance of a face is also illuminated in the way children or a young child of the dead is approached. Relatives of the dead, in meeting his or her child after a decade or more, often burst into tears while searching for resemblances to their lost one in the child's face. It is a painful and joyful moment of the encounters between former friends, neighbours or relatives, in which past and present collide. These moments are filled with brief exchanges about their experiences of life in exile and their families' situations, followed by an exchange of contact details. There is a particular sense in which these conversations seem to acquire deeper meanings for all involved, as though some form of social repair takes place, even if it is momentary.

The Memory of Bones

Apart from the religious undertones of funeral practices, the speeches are often intended to warn returnees of their duty to the dead and to memory. A local Imam might speak of our burden of the past, of the need not to forget, and warn those who stray away from these memories that 'we will suffer again' if they do so. Through the funeral process, the mortal remains (*posmrtni ostaci*), the bodies (*tijela*), are given back a personal

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identity, but also a collective one—that of *sehidi* (martyrs). In short, they are reunited with their living community and the living are informed of the importance that *sehidi* hold, and reminded of the duties (*emanet*) that are passed onto them.

It is well documented that in the post-Holocaust period, the families of the dead and individuals who lost their entire families often focused their life on creating a new one (Danieli 1985). In such cases, newborns would often be named after those who had vanished. This is also evident among dispersed Bosniak communities, but it is not widespread—in fact, there is some anecdotal evidence, according to both locals and diaspora alike, that Bosniaks residing abroad tend to avoid giving Muslim names to their children, for various reasons, one of which is a recent pervasive discourse on Islamic Extremism (Cicak-Chand 1999; Kalcic 2005). Nonetheless, the sense of duty, communally expressed, is in the way one carries his or her *emanet*, given by the martyrs. According to some of my informants, *emanet* is understood as a spiritual inheritance. It has religious and cultural connotations of a duty transmitted or left by the dead for the living to carry on, on their behalf, be it in their jobs, ways of life, learning or wisdom. For example, several friends of mine have either returned or become involved in NGOs dealing with the missing as a sense of duty towards their fathers who have been murdered. Some who lived in Prijedor before the war, returned not to the city of Prijedor but to the small town of Kozarac. I asked a woman why she did not return to her original home, and her response was that 'my father's birthplace is Kozarac, and he always loved this place, so I returned for him'.

Individuals from the community who were executed have been given a status of holy innocence, as they are perceived to have been targeted not for their (imagined) crimes but because of their religious affiliation alone. As a result, a particular sense of duty, that of being entrusted to keep Bosnia alive in the predominantly Serb entity of RS, permeates communal life. 'They entrusted us' is an often-used vernacular in various social actions pertaining to memory and the reconstruction of social life in the present. This discourse is particularly explicit during the time when local or national politics set discernible boundaries for memory, justice and social recovery. Just as the images of the missing were used by soldiers of the 17th Brigade during their battles as a vehicle for motivation, so

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too the dead are seen as the communal guardians in all fields of social action, and are central to all practices of 'memory-justice' (Booth 2001). Common perceptions of being invisible as a marginalised community within the wider affairs of the local social and political activities during most of the year are transcended on the annual days of remembrance and funerals. In those days, a shared emotionality is reiterated among members of the community (Bar-Tal et al. 2007) while the public sphere is temporarily reclaimed.

In such an emotional climate, it is not surprising that these burial rituals have become a major preoccupation of communal life. These emotions do not necessarily need to be a product of direct experiences of individuals. By evaluating a social context, rituals that invoke a particular set of shared emotions, besides enriching our understanding of social dynamics, can illuminate an emotional orientation of a society or community. And although it may provide an opportunity to change or transform, for example, a negative emotional climate by changing its context, the recovery of a (positive) emotional climate is a challenge in a society that has been greatly weakened or radically transformed (cf. Bar-Tal et al. 2007). Policies of impunity and denial that often continue long after the conflict ends contribute to the inability to transform negative emotions for individuals affected by violence (Miller et al. 2009). So, despite these intimate communal rituals, the denial of the crimes exemplified in the political discourse of local Serb politicians has not only limited public expressions of grief, but also affected the community's ability to fully mourn their own loss. In turn, this has impinged upon any possibility of a wider social recovery.

Kamicani Cemetery: 'Our Best Memorial'

> We are pleased that the sehidsko mezarje (martyrs' cemetery) is indeed in this place, for a number of reasons. We have a historical monument, a burial chamber (turbeh) built in 1713, which is only three hundred meters from the cemetery. During the Ottoman period, there was a battle when the local population defended Kozarac. At that time, a traveller arrived, an unknown individual, who lost his life on this site. In his honour, the turbeh was built

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> because he was a sehid too who was defending his place… Perhaps it is good, historically, that [the present cemetery] is not far away…We will build a turbeh for our contemporary sehide, we will write all their names on it. And, that old one is nearby… [it was] God's will to be in the same setting.

The personal experience of grief and remembering the dead is to a large extent subsumed within a collective framework and dynamic. The duty to provide a proper burial for a large number of victims stems from both an individual and collective need to remember the magnitude of loss caused by mass killings. There is a religious component to shared bereavement, and its accompanying norms of behaviour and dress code at the funeral events, and a specific emotional climate that surrounds the ceremonies, as well as the way they are received by the wider social and political milieu. Over time, the Kozarac community has begun to realise its own vulnerability within RS, and, although they might not agree that life in Kozarac will again end, as some Serb neighbours foretell, they have begun to contemplate how to ensure that historical traces of their own existence remain. They want to create public as well as private memory of their experience. There is a common belief among prominent members of the community, both local and in the diaspora, that the past continues to exist only by means of recitation. This creates a burden for succeeding generations, who are expected to carry forward this memory by narration, in both the written word and any other means of communication that will ensure the past will not be forgotten. However, some Bosniaks remain concerned that their community is too likely to forget, and they are starting to ask what happens once the missing are all located and buried. Without the annual funerals and speeches on the importance of not forgetting, how can memory best be preserved? Apprehensive for the future, at the 2009 funeral, some leaders declared that the slow process of identification of the remaining thirteen hundred missing people is not due to Sarajevo politicians, or a lack of interest towards the suffering of Prijedor's Bosniaks, but rather because these gatherings to bid farewell to 'our *sehidi* [are] a way to face ourselves as, and if it was not for these funerals, we would have already forgotten. Like this, we are always reminded'—the implication being that *sehidi* and/or God's will is choosing for us not to bury all the victims in order to avoid collective amnesia among the victims.

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Due to the decision taken in the early days of return to bury the dead in their local cemetery in Kamicani, this site has gradually been accepted among community members as 'our best memorial'. When the Kamicani cemetery was chosen as a martyrs' graveyard, most people felt disconcerted as it was not as central as they would have liked:

> We looked for a spacious location and close to the main road as our victims deserve a place that would often be visited… We have a partisan's cemetery on a very central and beautiful location… At the time, we were disappointed that we had to choose a site that is hidden from the main road. To us, it looked, then, as though we had to bury our sehide in a corner, somewhere where no one can see them.

Over the years, the cemetery has been developed and expanded as a memorial to the dead, and as such 'needed to be seen'. As luck would have it, the local urban plan has ensured the visibility of the cemetery that accommodates nearly a thousand victims, since local Serbs who travel to their villages in the vicinity of Mount Kozara, or tourists visiting the National Park, will now have to pass by the cemetery thanks to a new bypass road: 'However, at present, that all looks very different. It was Allah's will that all turned the way it did for our benefit. So, for example, with the new urban plan, a road in front of the cemetery will become a bypass road.' Thus, the cemetery is understood to play a central role in the collective imagination of suffering of the community and in the safeguarding of memory:

> Our generations remember, but we would like, in the future, when new generations visit this graveyard…when they see a large number of '*nisana*' (tombstones), that should tell them something: what happened to this people? What have they done? Who did this? When you see so many nisana, every tombstone is a person that tells you quite enough.

As scholars of the First World War have noted, the significance of the names and tombstones as 'markers of the graves' (Laqueur 1994) is partly that they express, visually, what a large number of dead looks like, but also, as the Imam implied, that each tombstone has a history to tell. More

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importantly, for the families of the dead, inscribed names of the victims represent an objectified recognition that these men existed. An interview with 'Mothers of Kozarac' for a Bosnian Television documentary on *Hronika Krajisnickih Gradova* asserts that for those whose children have not been identified, having their name put on a memorial is a way of marking their existence (27 March 2010). A walk around the cemetery, reading the names of the victims, with their birthdates inscribed on the uniformly white tombstones, with a crescent and a star above the name to illuminate their religious affiliation, shows that many were born in the late 1960s or 1970s, but all have a common year of death: 1992. This gives an impression of the scale of violence that took place in the summer of 1992. Many relatives, especially children and their parents, are buried next to each other, even though they were often found in different mass graves and at a different time. Families of the missing would ask the Islamic Association of Kozarac, the guardian of the cemetery, to keep a place next to their kin already buried, while hoping to hear that another relative is identified. So when a visitor comes to the cemetery, an image of parents and children buried next to each other evokes a story of obliteration of a family as a vital unit of communal life.

Thus, for many Kozarac diaspora communities, a visit to Kamicani cemetery on the annual day of mass funeral has become a sacred pilgrimage. Like the rise of the pilgrimage to Gallipoli by young Australian backpackers since the 1990s that has ensured the representation of Gallipoli as a 'cultural centre' (Hannaford and Newton 2008), or Israeli school trips to death camps in Poland (Buruma 2014), many youngsters from the diaspora flock to the town to pay their respect to the dead, arranging their annual holidays so as to be present at the funeral.

Contemporary Kozarac is a community shaped by loss, and one in which grief continues to be a driving force for cultural and political construction of memory and identity. On a communal level, visits to the cemetery, days of remembrance and funeral rites fulfil a need to create an historicised sense of self—a register of history both forward and backward looking. These practices of remembering also show how difficult it is for personal grief, embroiled in identity politics and manipulation of suffering, to distinguish itself from the community and its pervasive sense of victimhood.

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Individuals' coping mechanisms demonstrate that the nature of their relationship to the deceased, the circumstances surrounding their loss, the presence of ongoing stressors, an individual's belief system and the availability of communal support are all important indicators of how they will deal with prolonged distress associated with traumatic loss. There is no one-dimensional approach to individual and social reconstruction, but I have observed that above all, 'homecoming'—return to Kozarac—has had the most positive and empowering impact for all concerned in the local community. Whether the community of mourners will remain a returnee enclave in the RS focused on righting their wrongs through pursuit of acknowledgement, or perhaps develop to become a local economic hub, as some evidence suggests might be happening, it is too early to say.

It is important to register the actual experiences of historical victims, as these authentic moments might well capture nuances of human struggle in the aftermath of violence. But I find that victimhood—a notion derived from suffering and humiliation—is not what most survivors want to be associated with, and yet many researchers and activists continue to seek those attributes in the fields of peace building and memorialisation, as we shall see.

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5

Omarska

The early successes of return and rise of commemorative practices led to a desire among returnees to puncture the bubble of denial about the crimes of 1992, and in particular the infamous camps that shocked the world, but they were not yet in a position to achieve this alone. The announcement of a joint venture led by the multinational firm Mittal Steel to restart operations at the Omarska mine facility provided an opportunity for action, which would spawn an international mediation project to explore the possibility of a memorial at the site of the former camp. In this chapter, I will examine the process by which the bottom-up return process intersected with a classical top-down attempted reconciliation project, which provides an interesting case study in the limits and dangers of well-meaning outside intervention in such a complex and sensitive process.

After the takeover of Prijedor, and as a part of a systematic attempt by Serb nationalists to ethnically cleanse non-Serbs from areas of Bosnia that were earmarked to become Greater Serbia, a network of camps was established at Omarska, Keraterm and Trnopolje, in addition to various other

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extrajudicial detention facilities. Omarska camp operated from 25 May to 21 August 1992, on the site of an iron ore mine. During this time, more than 5000 Bosniaks and Croats were confined, suffering cruelty and torture; thirty-seven women were subjected to repeated rape, and estimates for the number who died in the camp range from 500 to 900 to over 4000 people.[1] Conditions were so bad, with 45 people packed into a tiny room in the White House (20 sq m) and around 500 in another room behind the mine's restaurant (180 sq m), that some people died of suffocation or exhaustion, rather than torture or targeted killing.[2]

The first news of camp was reported by Roy Gutman (1992a, 1992b) of Newsday on 2 August 1992, before an ITN TV crew, and the Guardian journalist Ed Vulliamy visited Omarska on August 5 (Vulliamy 1992), but rumours of the existence of the camp had been spreading throughout June and July. The resulting images of emaciated, terrified inmates shocked the world and led to calls for a war crimes commission, as a result of which the Hague Tribunal was eventually established. The first Hague indictee, Dusko Tadic, was a local Serb from Kozarac, and in total some 19 individuals were charged in relation to the crimes that occurred in the Omarska camp. Testimonies of systematic rape in the camp, gathered by two female inmates, would prove instrumental in the recognition of rape as a war crime for the first time. It is hard to exaggerate the central role of the Omarska camp, and the stories of torture and murder that occurred there, in the traumatic memory of events that surrounded the ethnic cleansing of this area in the summer of 1992 (Fig. 5.1).

On 6 August every year, an annual visit to the Omarska camp commemorates the day in 1992 when the camp officially closed, and the whole community is united in a convoy of dozens of cars that set off from Kozarac to visit the mine. In the early years, people were only able to stand outside the main gate and look across at the mine buildings where over three thousand people were incarcerated in 1992, as cows grazed on the fields around the buildings. The tarmac between the large hangar building and the small notorious white house, where hundreds of prisoners lay all

[1] 'The International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia Charges 21 Serbs with Atrocities Committed Inside and Outside the Omarska Death Camp,' UN Doc. CC/PIO/004-E (13 February 1995).

[2] http://www.icty.org/x/cases/stakic/tjug/en/stak-tj030731e.pdf

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Fig. 5.1 Ed Vulliamy addressing the crowd at Omarska, 2006

day long in the hot summer days of 1992 witnessing torture and killings, seemed a lot smaller than some of the survivors had remembered, with its broken surface and emerging weeds; but the blood stains could still be seen on unpainted walls nearby. On these visits, the buildings would act as part of the survivors' sensory landscape, from which they recall the events of 1992 and the people they lost here. On their return home, the convoy of cars would pass through the village of Omarska, where, in the first few years, they would encounter verbal aggression and occasional stone-throwing. On one occasion, they were intercepted by a Serb wedding procession, and as the convoy passed by, people were hit with bottles and the butts of guns that are traditionally shot into the air during wedding celebrations. Later, survivors would be allowed into the mine complex itself, but with various restrictions in place about which buildings they could visit. Now, the annual event is well established, with accompanying media and dignitaries pointing to the symbolic importance of Omarska as a site of memory central to the experience of non-Serbs in north-west Bosnia.

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I first visited Omarska in 2006, joining a convoy of over a hundred cars that set out from the centre of Kozarac to visit the (now reopened) mine. As we approached the Omarska complex, the stillness and quiet was only interrupted by the sound of a conveyor belt turning. A survivor in the car remarked how some prisoners spent days on this conveyor belt, beaten and with their skin scorched by the sun, in their last moments of life. The once deserted buildings, such as the hangar, now housed machinery, and workmen who continued working, creating a lot of noise during the visit by survivors, many of whom had brought their children to show them where their fathers and relatives had been held. As we stood in the centre of the hangar, a survivor began to recall his experience during incarceration. Several policemen stood around us to ensure the group did not enter restricted areas of the building, which had resumed its pre-war function as offices above the hangar. There was a minor confrontation, and after an emotional debate, some survivors broke the yellow tape that prevented them accessing the first floor rooms in which many used to sleep in the summer of 1992. Several policemen tried to remind them that this was a working area, and they were not allowed to enter, but to no avail. Everybody rushed forward, albeit in a relatively calm and orderly way, to view the rooms in which they or their loved ones had suffered. Passing along the narrow corridor, squeezed tight between the narrow walls, survivors and their families, who now lived all round the world, glanced at one another in the hope of seeing a familiar face. It was an emotionally charged experience, with survivors eagerly pouring out memories of their experience of this place, often to children brought up in the diaspora, all the time surrounded by Serb police and mine workers that created echoes of 1992 (Fig. 5.2).

Approaching Mittal Steel

In November 2004, the multinational giant Mittal Steel acquired a majority stake in the iron mine company 'Ljubija Rudnici' in Prijedor, which runs the Omarska mine. Local returnees believed this would create an opportunity to finally commemorate the site, given the company's commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility. A survivor now living in Holland, Satko Mujagic, and several other individuals and local organisa-

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Fig. 5.2 Former camp inmate recalling experiences at Omarska, 2009

tions, such as *Srcem do Mira* and *Izvor*, wrote to the new owner of the mine asking to be allowed to create a memorial on the site:

> …to help heal the wounds of the survivors is to acknowledge what happened. That is why we are appealing to you to dedicate part of this special place to the memory of what happened there only 12 years ago… Your company owns a place with a legacy. Although you are not responsible for what happened there, I hope that you will look compassionately upon our request so that the past will never be forgotten.[3]

There was a strong view among returnees that a memorial to the Omarska camp would be a far more useful and locally relevant initiative than the distant war crimes process and 'a fantastic opportunity to tackle the past',[4] as one put it. Many discussed, both privately and in public online forums, various ideas about the possible final shape of the memorial, and much of this discussion was caveated by a stated wish to not be

[3] Optimisti 2004 Foundation, October 2004, on file with author.

[4] Personal interview, project participant, Prijedor, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 9 June 2010.

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too 'demanding' or 'insensitive' towards the Serb community that held a generally antagonistic view of the project.

The Mediators: Soul of Europe

Mittal responded by appointing a small British charity, Soul of Europe (SoE), which consisted of a former priest, Donald Reeves, and his colleague Peter Pelz to take the project forward. Their mandate was to work locally among all communities to achieve a solution based on a process of mediation that would 'bring Bosniaks and Serbs together to agree on a compromise for a memorial' (Pelz and Reeves 2008: 7). SoE had been involved in the former Yugoslavia since 2000, mostly working with religious leaders in Belgrade (Serbia) and Banja Luka, the capital of RS. In talks with Mittal, they stressed their friendship with the Serbian Church in Banja Luka and its leaders whom, in the past, they had brought over to England for debates and interfaith dialogue meetings (Soul of Europe 2005a).

In their initial proposal, SoE (2005a) state that the mediation project 'leaves consideration of the place, the type of memorial and those who should be remembered as a matter for debate' (Ibid). In essence, the project never actually guaranteed to accede to the survivors' request to be allowed to commemorate the specific site of the former camp, although this was never fully understood by those from the community who gave their support to the initiative. SoE acknowledged that the collective trauma of Kozarac and its inhabitants was something that needed to be dealt with carefully, and hoped that by bringing together different ethnic groups to plan a memorial, they might create a basis for a wider process of reconciliation in Bosnia (Ibid). From the outset, they were more interested in creating a showpiece reconciliation project than a memorial.

A Framework of Mediation: Critical Yeast, Not Critical Mass

In their proposal, SoE's methods and strategies aimed to create a 'critical yeast' as opposed to a 'critical mass'—a catalyst for a solution, rather

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than the solution itself (Pelz and Reeves 2008: 110). They began working with a core group comprising significant members of the communities involved, with the idea that these people would then influence the rest of their respective communities. There were supposed to be three stages to this process:

1. identify significant members of the communities,
2. organise round tables and workshops among the chosen members; and
3. finally begin moving towards a memorial.

While there were neither 'fixed sides' nor a fixed number of members allowed within these talks, in retrospect it became clear to some Bosniaks that certain individuals had been chosen to negotiate, while others were excluded by the mediators. 'Critical yeast' meant targeting either powerful or prominent members of the communities rather than approaching survivors or local activists. On the Serb side, they involved three Serb women from the mine's management team and a former mine manager, who was in charge of the mine during the time of the camp, Boris Danovic. He acknowledged on several occasions that the mine vehicles, for example, had then been used for carrying bodies and digging mass graves.

Over the course of the mediation, SoE paid many visits to the most important man in Prijedor, mayor Pavic, 'the godfather of the town' (Ibid: 47), in a vain attempt to seek his support. Two other men who had been interrogators in the camp were also involved in the talks, which was regarded as an outrage by Bosniak participants. Among Bosniaks, there were three Omarska survivors: a former judge, Nusreta Sivac; a journalist and author of a book about Omarska, *The Tenth Circle of Hell: A Memoir of Life in the Death Camps of Bosnia*, Rezak Hukanovic; and late Omarska survivor and local politician, Muharem Murselovic. The main interlocutor from Kozarac was Emsuda Mujagic from *Srcem do Mira*. Local managers of the project were also appointed: a young returnee, Anel (Murselovic's nephew), and a Serb refugee from Croatia, Zoran, who SoE hoped would work together to help build common purpose among the participants.

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I got to know two initial participants from the 'Serb side', both of whom had a mixed ethnic background. Vedran, whose father was one of the only local Serbs to publicly recognise the crimes committed against Bosniaks in Prijedor, and another young man, Sacha, both supported the idea of a memorial. But as the discussions evolved, they felt uncomfortable with the process and both left the group, as SoE notes, 'because he [Vedran] became adamant that only victims should be allowed to decide on a memorial and that Serbs had no right to be involved' (Ibid: 123). Separately, Bosniak representatives appeared to have been given the impression that the mediators' job was primarily to help support them against what they regarded as the politics of discrimination. There seemed to be an uncritical acceptance that the project existed for them on the basis that such a project ought to address the grievances of victims; and, after all, they argued, it was a direct response to their request to Mittal. This sense of ownership of the project among a small group of Bosniak representatives would later lead to a major struggle over who among the victims had the right to be involved. But from the beginning, the majority of survivors in the diaspora were not informed about the project, and only became aware of it as a result of the online discussions and subsequent press articles. This lack of transparency would further contribute to the victims' sense of isolation and marginalisation.

Closed-Door Negotiations

SoE mediators contacted several individuals and institutions in the UK, who might be able to help them in making contacts with local activists' groups. Their main contact among the diaspora in the UK eventually was Kemal Pervanic, a survivor of Omarska and author of a book chronicling his experience, entitled *The Killing Days: My Journey through the Bosnian War*. Indeed, Donald Reeves and Peter Pelz, in their book about the project, The White House, mention that Pervanic was an inspiration behind their involvement in the process (Ibid: 19). Pervanic, like other Bosnian representatives, initially believed that SOE 'hearts [were] in the right place'.[5]

Within weeks of contacting prominent members of the communities, a group of around twenty people was formed, which would take responsibility

[5] Informal interview, London, UK, 5 September 2005.

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for exploring common ground for a compromise concerning future memorial plans. In order to get Serbs on board, SoE began to approach senior people from the Serb authorities in Prijedor, notably Marko Pavic. These intensive small gatherings and individual meetings, in the summer of 2005, were meant to probe an idea of a memorial for all, and gauge whether there was enough goodwill among the communities to reach a solution. Rumours and leaks from among individuals involved in the project eventually reached the wider community and people were anxious about possible Serb obstruction. However, SoE assured Emsuda Mujagic from *Srcem do Mira* that Pavic was willing to let the memorial be built, although he could not support it publicly.[6] Reassured by the mayor's apparent approval, Emsuda's job was, albeit implicitly rather than explicitly expressed, to garner support among her own community.

In public, mayor Pavic's formal response was to argue for the creation of a state commission to deal with issues of commemoration on all sides, asserting that he would only consider a memorial to the camp at Omarska when similar consideration was given to a monument for Serb victims of war in Sarajevo. SoE continued meeting Pavic in the hope of finding a compromise, while the project group met several times a month, discussing plans for the expected memorial. Survivors were given an opportunity to talk about their experiences in the camp in front of Serb youth, mine workers and occasionally foreign media, which they saw as a small step forward, reflecting that although the Serb participants 'sometimes try to tell us that it is not true that rape took place in the camp, or reiterate that Serbs too suffered',[7] they felt able to demonstrate that they knew the facts about camp violence, as they had experienced it directly.

These kinds of discussion appeared to be more about contesting the past rather than supporting the idea of survivors to create a memorial. As Vedran put it, 'the crimes committed in Prijedor are known to every citizen of the town, even if it is not openly spoken about'.[8] He saw a need for a process to create a climate in which public debates concerning the recent past could be possible; but to his surprise, the mediation

[6] Field notes, July, 2008.

[7] Telephone interview, Nusreta Sivac, 10 September 2005.

[8] Skype conversation, 9 June 2010.

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process became solely an exercise in *pregovaranja*—negotiations between the sides—in which he could not see himself having a role, as he did not regard himself a Serb, but rather a *Prijedorcanin* (a citizen of town).

He eventually left the project after a visit to workers at the mine, where many of them claimed that 'nothing happened at Omarska', and 'if there was something, it surely was not a camp' but rather a 'transit centre for Bosniaks who needed protection from their extremists'.[9] According to Vedran, the SoE mediators responded by trying to equate these views with the allegedly extreme views of local returnees in the small hamlet of Hambarine (the site of an infamous 1992 massacre), which they were due to visit immediately afterwards, and where 'there too exist many problematic, demented and aggressive individuals'.[10] He could not comprehend how someone could compare 'this madness [the Serb mine workers' views] with a real human tragedy, equating those with trauma and those with fascistic tendencies'.[11] Vedran summarised his objection thus:

> Of course we agree that the memorial is important. Only survivors and victims should be asked about it in the first place. No other solution is acceptable or moral. Consult them. Don't ignore them. They have to say what the memorial looks like. It should reflect the enormity of the crimes that happened here, the extent of suffering at the hands of soldiers, the media and politicians only because they were not Serbs. We have to emphasise the human tragedy and avoid politics. (Pelz and Reeves 2008: 123)

The mediators responded by further locking down the process to avoid facing such criticism in public. SoE's agenda became to prove that it was possible to break through the veil of silence by making victims and perpetrators talk to each other (Ibid: 43). However, while those within the SoE group played their allocated role based on ethnicity, Vedran's criticism of the mediation was publicly taken up by the local NGO *Izvor*, a leading organisation dealing with the missing and their families, who felt that a larger body of survivors and families of the missing needed to be

[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.

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consulted and argued that only the victims ought to decide what kind of memorial they wished to build.

The Survivor Community

SoE assumed that Bosniaks would be sympathetic to the project given their wartime experiences and their wish to create a memorial at Omarska. So, when they approached *Izvor*, SoE emphasised Mittal's position as working with Serb partners but nonetheless their willingness to find some kind of compromise by, for example, creating a 'visitor's centre' at the mine. With hindsight, in their book, the mediators recognise the upsetting nature of their proposal:

> Disregarding their obvious discomfort we continued with a description of a visitor's centre at the mine, which along with being a museum would tell its history, including its use as a concentration camp....To cap everything we spoke about the white house being made beautiful, mines being ugly places, and the need to honour the deaths of the innocent, turning the place into an oasis of peace. As though we had not inadvertently insulted them enough we suggested a union of religious symbols of death and resurrection, Christian and Bosniak at the memorial. As an example we described the church at Presnace outside Banja Luka where a Catholic priest and nun had been murdered by Serb soldiers and which had become a shrine. (Pelz and Reeves 2008: 96)

Izvor's Edin Ramulic responded by saying: 'This is scandalous! If you were not a religious organisation, I would not even talk with you and would kick you out of here' (Ibid: 97). This quote was later to be interpreted by Donald Reeves as implying that Ramulic threatened his life and was used to justify his exclusion from the process. Ramulic told Soul of Europe that he had never encountered an oasis of peace in a place like Omarska:

> I have been to many places of suffering all over the former Yugoslavia and never saw an oasis of peace. Bodies cry out for justice. They are not asking for oases of peace! I am here to make sure they get justice. Not vengeance,

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> but justice! Victims need justice more than peace. We cannot be any part of your proposal. Talk to the families of victims. Listen to what they want, to what is important to them. This initiative has to be transparent and cannot be imposed. Nor can there be any religious components in the white house, and definitely not Orthodox ones. There can be no help for the Orthodox Church anyway. Read my lips: those who suffered want no religious symbols! (Ibid: 97)

Like Ramulic, others who disagreed with the SoE process reiterated the need to make the project as transparent as possible, and to consult as many survivors and families of the missing as possible. However, the mediators and some Bosniaks in the group closed ranks, began to see any critical views as coming from 'extremists', or 'spoilers' (SoE 2005b). SoE went further by praising loyal Bosniak participants as 'prominent leaders of the community' and convinced them that 'only they can decide what kind of memorial will be built'.[12] But they never defined what was meant by 'they'—this ambiguity appeared to be deliberate, and was reflected in the quite different stories that each participant group was told, privately, over the course of the process.

Generally, Bosniak delegates interpreted the SoE process as 'being on our side', and helping them to achieve the memorial. Informality in the process, and a lack of documentation did not worry them, as they were used to operating in this way as a marginalised group. On the other hand, those abroad were eager to hear about the project's conduct, and came to see its opacity as a deliberate attempt to disregard their views. This led to divisions, not only in terms of those who were for or against it, but also on the question of who had the right to be involved in the project at all.

Online Debate: A New Public Sphere

Due to the closed-door approach to mediation, in the autumn of 2005, the debate about the project shifted largely to online discussion, predominantly on the kozarac.ba forum. Debates such as 'Who is in Control of a Memorial [Process] at Omarska?' and a subsequent thread 'Some

[12] Field notes, July 2008.

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questions regarding a memorial centre at the site of the former Omarska camp' were posed in order to make those already involved realise the responsibility they were taking on, but also as a way of bringing together a much larger body of survivors and others concerned and willing to play a part in the process. There were numerous warnings to the Bosniaks in the SoE group not to follow in the footsteps of the 'Dayton principle', which, according to many participants, was based on the idea *'bolje ista nego nista'* (better anything than nothing) among Bosniak delegates during the Ohio talks that ended the war. Also, it was stressed that the content and design of the memorial should be carefully considered, and therefore not rushed through.[13]

Six months into the process, it was revealed that there would be a press conference in Banja Luka, which would disclose the results of the mediation so far, but not even the Bosniak project members knew what was going to happen there or what might be announced. Prior to the conference, a British journalist wrote to SoE asking who was going to attend, what was going to be discussed and whether it would be open to the public. The reply was a single sentence stating that 'legitimate individuals on all sides'[14] would be there. Eventually it came to light that the main participants were fourteen Serbs, six Bosniaks and four Croats. As pressure from the diaspora mounted, SoE informed people to contact local associations and individuals involved to find out about the project and how they can help to get involved, because after all 'it is not our memorial'.[15] However, when those such as Pervanic, who appeared to have inspired the SoE to take the project on, received no reply from either the local managers or the British mediators, he inferred:

> I was the first survivor with whom 'mediators' got in touch with regard to this issue [memorial]. I was quiet for some time now observing all what was happening but in fact I knew very little. As a result, it was hard to comment upon it [the process]. Even several attempts to get some information from 'the right place' did not come to fruition. Moreover, my attempts to get to some information brought about tensions. If that happened to me, to

[13] Kozarac.ba debate, October 2005; all citations are the author's translation.

[14] Email correspondence with a journalist, 15 November 2005.

[15] Email from Reeves to a family member of a missing person, 18 November 2005.

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> whom mediators said without my support they would have not gone to Bosnia, that I was their inspiration for this process. What then should others expect? It is tragic that we had to get to this [tension] in order for some relevant information to come out. (kozarac.ba debate, 9 December, 2005)

In practical terms, it appeared that young Serbs had worked together with the survivor Rezak Hukanovic on visual designs for a memorial, which contradicted assurances given to the Bosniaks that there would be no design work. In their book, SoE mediators explain these discussions about design as a way to 'kindle their own [survivors'] imagination' (Pelz and Reeves 2008: 104). Eventually, on 1 December 2005, it was announced that Mittal would finance the building of a limited memorial. Bosniak representatives seemed relieved and content with their achievement; but in reality, there was neither documentation nor any serious discussion about ownership or access rights to the land on which the memorial would stand, nor even a solid commitment to build the memorial, which mayor Pavic made clear he did not support. In the diaspora, reactions were mixed. Most felt emotionally exhausted and troubled by the ambiguous outcome.

As the online debates intensified around the unclear conclusions of the conference, foreign newspapers reported on 'a success story of a British clergyman in bringing former foes to agree on a memorial' (Hawton 2005) while stressing the courage of the young Serbs who played an important role in the process. In fact, the role of the Serbs as 'active and willing participants' came out as the main focus of this process: 'What makes this project unique is that the Serbs are participating actively and willingly, thanks largely to the intervention of a British clergyman' (Ibid). Meanwhile, online members of the forum called upon their Bosniak representatives to clarify what they had actually achieved. Eventually a report was emailed to the managers of the online forum, which stated that at the Banja Luka conference, the Bosniak project members had spoken about their experiences in the camp and their annual visits to Omarska since 1999, before SoE presented a proposed memorial design based around one small but symbolically important building in the mine complex, the White House, and said that Mittal would finance its construction.

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In fact, no solution had been agreed with either the Serb authorities or Mittal Steel. By December 2005, SoE continued to present the participation of a few Serb youth in the project as a sign of successful reconciliation, but in reality Mittal had already accepted that the Serb authorities' refusal to engage meant the process was effectively dead. In conversation with Satko Mujagic, the author of the first letter to Mittal, the company said that the December 2005 conference made them realise there was no support for a memorial from Pavic and there were differences of opinion among the Bosniak organisations about how to proceed. In an email in April 2011, Mittal clarified that the company had 'no authority to build a memorial and ArcelorMittal does not get into political or religious issues' in countries where they work.

When these details were revealed on kozarac.ba, many survivors felt betrayed and, in important ways, directly misled. They began to focus on the need for transparency and wider consultation among survivors and families of the missing, and to agree on a set of principles that should underpin any memorial project.

Online Petition: Moving Towards Structure

After several weeks of consultation with *Izvor*, individuals and organisations abroad, a new online petition and website was launched, outlining five key principles, and emphasising that survivors and families of the dead and missing must lead the design and management of the Memorial Project, and that all stakeholders should acknowledge the psychological and historical significance of those buildings formerly used for purposes of incarceration, torture and killing. It also sought to place commemoration before reconciliation, saying that acknowledgement of the crimes at Omarska was a 'precondition for reconciliation'[16] and implored Mittal to make a public commitment to investigate the possibility of mass graves still being present in the mine. While there was no official organisation behind the petition, several survivors, including Kemal Pervanic and Satko Mujagic, acted as liaison with other bodies. During its construc-

[16] https://web.archive.org/web/20060323192134/http://headgroups.com/display/om/Online+Petition

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tion, all Bosniak individuals in SoE's mediation were contacted, as well as the local project managers, and they were assured that no one was seeking to take the project away from them, only that the diaspora wanted to be involved on the basis of clear principles and a transparent approach. Only *Srcem do Mira's* Emsuda Mujagic replied. She spoke with Nusreta Sivac and others, and apparently agreed to uphold those principles, saying these principles were exactly what they already aspired to.

Within a month of its launch, the petition had over a thousand former inmates and families as signatories, but soon afterwards, Mittal decided to halt the project and SoE's contract was prematurely ended. This announcement brought back tensions among local leaders and the diaspora, based on SoE's analysis that 'more extreme voices on all sides [had] begun to oppose the plans' (Hawton 2006), but also their patently false assurance that the Serb authorities were ready to support a memorial. The BBC worked with Reeves to cover the project, and reported how it was remarkable as it involved all three sides, Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats as 'a rare example of cross-ethnic co-operation over such a controversial issue' (Ibid). However, after Mittal's froze the project, the BBC claimed that many Serbs had always been completely against the memorial while Bosniak activists 'believe it should not be built until all the victims have been located and only then if the whole mine—which is currently working again—is used for the memorial' (Ibid). The latter unattributed claim was puzzling, as no individual or organisation (including the petition website) had stated such a position. Advocates of the memorial had asked only for the white house building, which was no longer used by the mine.

Satko Mujagic and others attempted on various occasions to contact those people directly involved in the process in order to find some kind of common ground, but the process had by that point created divisions within the local returnee community and between them and the diaspora. The SoE mediation process generated emotional turmoil for the survivors and the local community, but ultimately there was no result. Finally, Mittal effectively washed their hands of the problem by informing the survivors that they should approach the local Serb authority first and win support before Mittal would take the process any further.

A year after the mediation project ended, as the survivors and their families continued to debate its impact on the community, a conference was

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organised in Malta in another attempt to bring the issue of a memorial to the fore. I was asked by a survivor connected with this initiative to attend with a small group of Bosniaks. I was unable to elicit much information about the focus of the conference, but British friends who regularly attend conferences on Bosnia were able to get more information from a British charity that was organising the event. It was to be an international conference on healing that had been planned without a focus on Bosnia, but after the organiser had met a Bosnian survivor in London and heard his story of Omarska and the struggle over the right to commemorate the site, she decided to incorporate this theme into the conference.

When I arrived in Malta, I was taken by a young psychologist to a house where the rest of the Bosniak participants were staying, but it struck me as unusual that in my initial contact with the organisers, they were not interested in who I was or why I might be participating in the conference. The next day, things became clearer: we, the Bosniaks, were supposed to play the role of survivors, and upon arrival at the hotel where the other participants were staying, we were told that the psychologist would be there to assist us at any time, should that be required. Our group consisted of Edin Ramulic, from *Izvor*, Sacha, two survivors (Mirza and Hamdija) and myself. As Mirza was the main contact with the organiser, and himself chose the people in group, we naturally asked him what the conference was about. We understood that Mittal representatives would be present, and that there might be discussions about the Omarska memorial. But from the start, it became clear we were to have 'special treatment' as a group of survivors—in fact, we could not even go to the bathroom alone without the psychologist accompanying us. I was soon sufficiently irritated to have a private talk with the psychologist, and learnt that she had suffered sexual abuse as a child and was determined to help others.

Another way of emphasising our status as 'victims of trauma' was in the way we were coached to enter the conference room. We were asked to wait for all participants to take their seats and then our psychologist would invite us in. A back corner of the room was allocated for us, and upon entering the room, the participants' gaze turned towards us. It felt as though they knew something we did not. The conference was opened by a British woman, the organiser, and her daughter, who talked about

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their own life tragedies, and how they learnt to overcome them, which was why they founded a charity that helps others work through their trauma. While the atmosphere was high on a note of self-healing, our group was struggling to remain quiet as our own conversation was mostly humorous. Meanwhile, a famous American psychologist began 'a puppet show' in which he described how to regain self-worth. Although we were entertained, we could not fathom what all this had to do with us. Mirza was listening to the psychologist, trying to take on board his advice for personal growth, but the rest of us either did not understand English, or were too bored to listen.

Most participants seemed to consist of international middle-aged women in search of healing. So when Mirza spoke for nearly two hours about his experience of the camp, projecting an aura of helplessness as expected in such a situation, an impatient Danish woman interrupted him by asking 'why did you not do anything about your own life?', which was at least a novel response. The sudden interruption meant that Mirza reached for an explicit explanation of his miserable state in the camp, and provided so much detail that several women began to cry, and they all finished in a ritual of embrace and a shared feeling of disempowerment.

The rest of the day continued with advice and training given by the American psychologist on self-healing, but in the meantime, we were trying to identify the Mittal representatives. In anticipation that they might be as confused as us, we looked for signs of movement and bewilderment among the other participants. Over lunch, we learnt who the Mittal representatives were, but, due to our special status, we were kept at a distance from them. Over the next couple of days, we learnt that the conference organiser was a possible candidate for the mediation role vacated by Soul of Europe, and she wanted to make clear how 'traumatised' and 'needy' the survivors really are, and how much we needed an organisation such as hers to be able to know what we wanted. Eventually, we left the session and our group, Mittal and the organiser began a dialogue in another room. Mittal's Bosnian representative in charge of the mines at Omarska[17] and Zenica (central Bosnia), together with Managers

[17] In conversation with Mittal Omarska mine managers, I learnt that they had no idea why they were invited nor did they regard issues concerning a memorial as relevant to their own position

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from Luxembourg, were to sit opposite us. In the middle was Kate, who would act as a mediator, explaining to each side what the other was saying. In practice, this involved the survivors talking about their frustration, pain and incomprehension over the memorial struggle, hoping for some response from Mittal, but it became a travesty of mediation. In the evenings, we were all very tense and could not grasp the relevance of the conference. Unable to sleep, several of us would begin discussing our sense of 'not being in charge' and being easily led by foreign mediators, and the conference came to encapsulate the survivors' feeling of bewilderment about the way in which outside parties try to engage with their situation. In the end, we decided to approach Mittal's delegates alone, and explain that the conference organisers had not been asked 'to heal the survivors'—indeed the survivors did not know what the conference was going to be about until it began. Upon hearing that we met Mittal without them, the organisers were furious, and claimed that the survivors alone were unable to communicate their needs to Mittal. A few days after the conference, a letter was sent to Mittal claiming that there was no need for more mediation, while the Malta conference organiser was informed that her expertise would not be needed.

Experiencing the confusion and frustration of such events and processes from the point of view of survivors was quite illuminating. First of all, having very little knowledge or experience of the challenges faced by Kozarac returnees and survivors of the camps does not appear to hold back small charities like SoE and the group behind the Malta conference from jumping straight in and telling the 'subjects' of their intervention what to do. Despite the muffled laughter from our side of the room, I doubt they were even aware that the (by now quite experienced and resilient) survivors saw the organisers as being more psychologically vulnerable and confused than themselves. Secondly, the basic equation of performative story-telling with healing obviously remains a prevalent approach, despite all its problems. But also these groups sometimes appear to use survivors as a currency to be traded for project funding. In this case, the organisers

within Mittal mining company. They were asked to be present and that is what they were doing. The discussions we had were mainly related to finding a way to enjoy the break by playing tennis, visiting galleries and exchanging experiences about holidays.

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had approached Mittal to fund a conference in which an American psychotherapist would provide healing for the survivors, but without asking the survivors if they needed or wanted it. The implication was that only by healing 'us' could they contribute to finding a solution to the memorial that would not risk the business relationship between Mittal Steel and the Serb government, which retains 49% ownership of the local operation. Just as the Soul of Europe's original mediation had been concerned that 'destructive elements' might be present within the Kozarac community, as its inhabitants were former detainees of the camps, so too did this process regard healing as a precursor to 'us' playing a part in the memorialisation process. For SoE, their process carefully chose those who were supportive of the project, while defining critical individuals as 'spoilers', regardless of their suffering or their right to participate as survivors of Omarska. The latter were compared to the Serb nationalists and the camp deniers, on the basis that both exhibited negative and rigid emotions, such as anger, revenge and an unreadiness to find a solution under the framework of reconciliation. However, those who have given a 'voice' in the SoE process, like *Srcem do Mira*, Nusreta Sivac and others, all say they were treated well and listened to by the foreign mediators, but when asked what they actually did, the response was just they had 'told the story' of their experience in the camp to various groups, from a small number of Serb youth to BBC journalists and other media outlets that were asked to cover the story of (imposed) reconciliation.

The participants in the SoE process had been asked to take various groups to the site of the camp and tell individual stories of suffering. The expected narration of suffering is so intimately interwoven within the community sense of suffering, that it is nearly impossible to hear a story in public that does not sound the same. Of course, this is partly due to the nature of suffering and the specificity of the event in which, more or less, every individual from Kozarac suffered a similar fate. On the other hand, scholars critical of narratives as a source of reclaiming the self, or rebuilding the social body after violence, claim the repetition of a story demands a coherence from the audience, courts and truth commissions, who then decipher the meanings through interpretation depending on the context in which such a story is told, but also its political or social

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use (Ross 2003; Tal 1996). The social ramifications of story-telling, for those who do it, are rarely explored (Ross 2003). In the SoE project, the story-telling was supposed to heal the perpetrators' side by softening their preconceptions regarding the 'Bosniak side' and thus garnering empathetic mutual understanding that might bring about social transformation. In bringing the enemies together, as it were, scholars have often claimed that 'contact' is the best form of building bridges or pathways to reconciliation, as it ostensibly breaks down prejudices and other forms of discrimination (Bar-On 2007).

The Omarska project was intended to be a mediation initiative based on bringing former enemies together to seek a solution that would suit all parties regardless of their asymmetrical power relations. The failure of the project illustrates several aspects of the social dynamics between survivor or 'victim' communities and well-intentioned external players, whose intervention raises hopes and expectations that cannot always be fulfilled. It also demonstrates the limits and pitfalls of an approach based on recent thinking about the role of narratives as the main expression of memory, and in particular the danger of appropriating survivors' narratives without due consideration for their psychological needs. Even the assumption that there are two clearly delineated 'sides' to mediate between proved incorrect and increased divisions both within and between the groups involved.

The inability of the mediators to engage with a wider body of survivors, their ignorance of basic post-war environmental factors and the manner in which a selected representative group of survivors was treated all illustrate the way in which we need to re-evaluate how victims' needs are addressed in practice.

Of course, the specific failures of this project should not be extrapolated to derive conclusions about other projects, or indeed the whole field of reconciliation or transitional justice. But, having observed the procession of scholars, activists and NGOs that has engaged with the same group of local organisations and activists in Kozarac over a long period of time, the patterns described here have been evident all too frequently. Rather than begin from the maxim 'first, do no harm', in my experience, many of these initiatives seem blissfully unaware of the impact they have on

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Fig. 5.3 Releasing a balloon for every inmate at Omarska, 2012

local dynamics, for better or worse. This project is a good example of such unintended consequences, as the main role of Bosniak representatives was to recite stories of suffering and trauma, further reinforcing a kind of performative victimhood that is neither healthy nor a real reflection of the maturity of the community. These and other hidden harms are often not worth the benefit that any one project can bring to the community, other than through a small stimulus to the local economy. Finally, the very notion of reconciliation in such a situation is sometimes problematic, suggesting staged, almost ritualistic, interventions to bring people together to fulfil predetermined, usually adversarial roles that do not take into account the day-to-day reality of coexistence and contact—peaceful or not—that has been going on since return began and will continue (Fig. 5.3).

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6

Kozarac.ba: Online Community as a Network Bridge

As we have seen, the online community of kozarac.ba hosted some lively and heated discussions around the Omarska memorial debate, but its wider role in bridging between local returnees and the diaspora is worth further attention. With significant structural holes in the social network of the town, resulting from the deliberate policy of 'eliticide' in 1992 that saw leading figures and potential leaders eliminated, the online networks that connected Kozarac people around the world played an important role in overcoming the gaps, but sites such as kozarac.ba also provided a safe space for survivors to tell their stories, find each other and remember the dead.

I visited Kozarac in the summer of 2003 to speak with former soldiers of the 17th Brigade that had returned to their homes. I sat with several former soldiers at a café opposite the police station, but they were reluctant to talk; after a while, one offered to drive me to Kozarusa to meet Sead Cirkin. The driver was Svabo, a young man in his early thirties. His story was similar to most inhabitants of Kozarac. After incarceration at Trnopolje camp, expulsion and arrival in Travnik, Svabo joined the 17th Brigade. He was living in the centre of Kozarac now, in a half-built

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home with his young family. In 2003, Kozarac looked a desolate place to a visitor, but the returnees were nonetheless busily engaged in rebuilding their homes despite there being no running water, only occasional electricity and telephone lines that had yet to be reconnected. But there were a couple of satellite dishes positioned on minarets in the villages of Hadzici and Kozarusa that could provide internet access, and a visitor from Zagreb suggested to Svabo that he might set up a wireless network so they could play online games and chat. They put antennas on the roofs of houses and hooked up a network, and started an online games server that soon spawned a blog, named bihcom, which would eventually became a thriving online community named kozarac.ba. Little did they know at the time that their desire for nine gaming would eventually create an online community that would become a key vehicle for the regeneration of the Kozarac community after the initial stage of physical rebuilding was complete (Fig. 6.1).

Fig. 6.1 Kozarac.ba internet café

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To understand why its role was so important, there are two key factors to consider. First, the fact that people from Kozarac were literally scattered to the four winds of the world, from Sweden to Sydney, with only a small minority having returned to re-establish the town. Second, the fact that even if the residents of Kozarac were all gathered in one place, the structural holes in its social networks were such that the community was missing many who would normally be expected to organise and to lead. This was a result of a deliberate policy of *eliticide*, whereby Serb forces chose to kill any recognised or potential leader, professional or just popular figures in 1992 (Gratz 2007),[1] as the journalist Peter Maass wrote in Vanity Fair in 1996: 'This was eliticide, the systematic killing of a community's political and economic leadership so that the community could not regenerate. At least 2500 civilians were killed in Kozarac in a 72-hour period. It was a slaughterhouse.'[2] The forum provided by kozarac.ba was interesting partly because it used online social networking to link locals and the diaspora in a way that could overcome these structural holes. As Lee Bryant wrote in a study of the site,[3] it is also an interesting example of the phenomenon of 'ambient intimacy'[4] as an affordance of online community—in other words, people inside the town and outside the country can coexist in the same space and share apparently mundane, but emotionally important information, such as photographs and videos of day-to-day life in Kozarac. For example, members of the diaspora became obsessed by one small feature of the site called *jutarnji trac* (morning gossip), written by Svabo, which began as

[1] A survivor of Omarska camp and a pre-war journalist, Hukanovic (1996), describes in his book *The Tenth Circle of Hell* witnessing horrific torture of his friends in the the white house who were once the intellectual community of Prijedor. In his doctoral thesis, Gratz (2007) claims that the term eliticide was first used in 1992 by a British reporter, Nicholson M. Reporting from Bijeljina, a town in north-east Bosnia, Nicholson described the elimination of a dozen respected individuals in the town. A former Prijedor resident and journalist, Nedim Kadiric, who worked for local newspapers in 1991 and often reported about events in the local assembly sessions, reminded me of his observations on the tensions and hostilities among Prijedor politicians a year prior to the war. He felt fear at that time and decided to 'run to Germany'. Unfortunately, as soon as Serb nationalists took Prijedor, his father was murdered. With Nedim's help, we accounted for 55 intellectuals, doctors, professors and economists who were murdered (facebook chat, September 2011).

[2] http://www.petermaass.com/articles/bosnias_ground_zero/

[3] http://www.headshift.com/our-blog/2008/10/26/solving-real-world-problems-th/

[4] http://www.disambiguity.com/ambient-intimacy/

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informal daily update about the weather, with a few pictures of Kozarac and surrounding villages that showed the progress of new houses being built by the diaspora. Many of those in the diaspora have told me that the first thing they did in the morning while drinking coffee was to read the *trac*. Over time, Svabo's trac and various discussions concerning issues important to returnees, such as the campaign for a memorial at the Omarska camp, or the returnees' sociopolitical situation in RS, earned the site's position as an important *drustveni faktor* (social factor) in all spheres of communal life (Jutarnji Trac:10 November, 2005) (Fig. 6.2).

Kozarac.ba launched on 28 September 2005 by announcing: *chat RADI!!!* (chat is working). By February 2007, over 6000 active members were conversing and planning their summer trips to Kozarac, while financially supporting various humanitarian projects through the site. I was part of this community from the beginning, and watched it become an invaluable site for social networking—a global and yet intimate village. But most impor-

Fig. 6.2 The kozarac.ba website showing Jutarnji Trac from May 2007, used with permission

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tantly, it was a site that offered unparalleled insights into a community in the making; experiences and knowledge were shared that often appeared more authentic than my fieldwork observations. It became the principal manifestation of a community that had been decimated and dispersed by ethnic cleansing as it nurtured the identity of Kozarac until members of the diaspora were able to reconnect and inhabit their former homes. It reunited people around the world in their need to transcend physical distance and play an active role in the reconstruction of their community.

Many social initiatives emerged on kozarac.ba such as *Dani Kozarca* (the days of Kozarac) organised every summer since 2004, with a wide range of cultural and sporting activities. Some of these events have become part of the post-war tradition, such as a basketball competition 'Amir Kljucanin' named after a former soldier and returnee who played basketball, but died suddenly in 2004 at the age of thirty-two. His school friends, Satko and Svabo, were devastated by his death and decided to create a group called *Optimisti 2004* in the Netherlands, where Satko lived, to help rebuild the sports field for new generations to use, and to restart the basketball club in Amir's name. Similarly, the local football club *Bratstvo* (Brotherhood) has been supported and financed by its members in the diaspora, partly through online community engagement.

Groznica subotnje veceri (Saturday Night Fever) was a disco night dating back to the pre-war era, with 60s and 70s tunes, hosted at the Kozarac Fire Station building, and this became another important tradition that would be re-established. The Fever night was organised to support the recreation of the famous Kozarac volunteer fire brigade, which was in its centenary year when the town was destroyed in 1992, and thanks to this and generous support from the diaspora, the famous Kozarac fire brigade was able to resume operations. The re-establishment of the fire brigade was the first significant endeavour between locals and the diaspora, organised largely through the online community, and involved a group of locals travelling to the Austrian town of Innsbruck to meet their fellow citizens and collect the vehicles and other supplies. Their trip was documented online and their arrival back home was welcomed with a triumphant procession of vehicles on the main street, followed by a party. The fire brigade has gone on to become a source of great civic pride in Kozarac. The Prijedor local authority has refused to support the project,

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despite the firefighters soon proving their worth by serving the local Serb villages of Lamovita and Omarska, when they found themselves abandoned by the main fire station in Prijedor, which is all the more remarkable given that the Kozarac fire chief survived the camp at Omarska and fought in the 17th Brigade, and that one of his brothers was murdered in the camp and two others murdered during the Koricanske Stijene massacre on Mount Vlasic.

Visits to Omarska camp and mass funerals are also incorporated in *Dani Kozarca*, and as a result, returnees and the diaspora discuss and plan these activities online, usually during the winter, prior to the summer events. Another regular subject of discussion and coordination is the plight of some of the more vulnerable members of the local returnee community. In September 2007, for example, an old lady was living alone in dire conditions with no proper home, but several months later, she moved into a brand new home entirely financed by those living abroad—another initiative that began in online 'virtual' discussion but quickly crossed over into 'real-world' action.

Over the years, the fire brigade, the trainers of *Bratstvo* and *Optimisti* have all become involved in educational seminars for the local Kozarac primary school, and also other schools such as those in Trnopolje and Omarska, where the majority of children are Serbs. *Optimisti 2004*, led by Satko Mujagic, were instrumental in soliciting donations for the refurbishment of Kozarac's school, as well as for various local associations that needed help. In 2010, *Optimisti* was relocated to Kozarac from the Netherlands, and Svabo became the president of the organisation that has since focused on dealing with the difficult past (*suocavanje sa teskom prosloscu*) and the culture of memory (*kultura sjecanja*) through various international and local seminars and training opportunities.

In part, Svabo's new role of peace-building activist, and the resulting gradual decline in writing his morning gossip blog, stemmed from years of advocating, without success, for the creation of a body of local people and those in the diaspora, who could define a strategy for the community's development and sustainability in the long term. But it is also an example of the growth of internationally funded transitional justice projects within Bosnia since 2010 that provide NGO activists with financial support and trips abroad to learn from the post-war experiences of other countries. In some cases, these NGOs were unaware of the existing capacity that

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existed among returnees, or even that local activists had a far deeper and more nuanced understanding of what they were doing than the international NGO, whose generic, universal approach to post-conflict social justice often appeared oversimplistic to local participants. But local activists would soon pick up this generic, theoretical language and learn how to apply for grants and structure projects of the kind the NGOs wanted to see; but in some cases the unintended consequence of this process was to denude local capacity as people like Svabo began to spend more time on the international seminar circuit. In this case, as Svabo's writing began to focus on youth camps organised in collaboration with Sarajevo-based NGOs, or brief stories of trips to France or Germany as a part of the Bosnian team studying other cases of memorialisation, engagement on kozarac.ba began to decline. Perhaps its members were less politically engaged than Svabo, wanting just to talk about everyday aspects of the town, or perhaps some were too caught up in their relatively comfortable diaspora lives, but either way, the fact is that Svabo's work with the online community had played a vitally important role in bringing the town together, and he deserved his chance to develop his interest in social justice. But it points to a dilemma that runs through the story of rebuilding Kozarac: What is the right balance between dwelling in the past, perhaps by campaigning for memorialisation, and simply getting on with normal life?

As communal life became more orderly, Kozarac's returnees and diaspora settled into their routines of seasonal visits home in July and August, supplemented by online discussions throughout the year. In this respect, kozarac.ba played a very important role in bringing the returnees and the diaspora together; the diaspora who would look forward to spending their summer holidays in Kozarac and discuss their plans on the site: 'I can't wait to go back to see what's going on in Kozarac' (Jutarnji Trac, 4 January, 2006). During July, the main street of Kozarac is flooded with thousands of *Kozarcani* (Kozarac's inhabitants), young and old, speaking many languages, which transforms a tiny provincial town into one that never sleeps, which locals call *Najveci mali grad na svijetu* (the biggest little city in the world). Newspapers often refer to Kozarac as Bosnian California (Gorinjac 2014), with its main street dotted with bars and restaurants and its impressive water park, built in 2007, which attracts visitors from across north-west Bosnia. And yet, under the surface, and outside the summer months, the unfavourable sociopolitical and economic status of

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the returnees, rooted in the dysfunctional nature of the divided state, its corruption and nationalism, continued to have an impact.

This was also a time when intense debates about the sociopolitical challenges of the community were conducted online, in addition to seasonal visits and the planning of humanitarian endeavours. At times, these debates were heated and emotionally draining, such as the Omarska memorial debate, as there were many different perspectives and positions resulting from an opaque mediation process that generated a great deal of interest and also suspicion. In such instances, friendships were challenged and emotional outbursts and personal insults were the norm (Fig. 6.3).

Reading back over almost 400 *trac* posts and many more online debates over the past decade, it is clear that despite attempts to regenerate communal life anew, war experiences and life in exile have influenced the fragmented nature of social ties, which are further constrained by the lack of a systemic approach to tackle the legacies of war. The basic facts of a divided Bosnian state and the location of Kozarac amidst a nationalist and broadly hostile Serb entity continue to impact on the return and rebuilding process.

Returnees remain largely excluded from local decision-making processes, and are regarded as a nuisance by their own local authorities. Even those returnees who are elected to the Prijedor assembly, quickly learn they are token Bosniaks within a much larger group of powerful Serb hardlin-

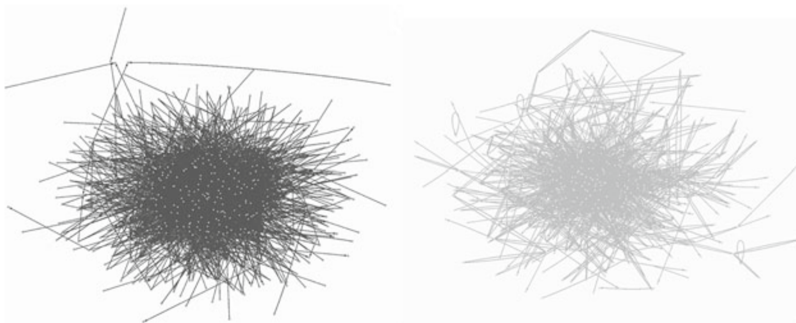

Fig. 6.3 Social Network Analysis of 6900 forum posts (*left*) and 6468 private messages (*right*) shows a tight-knit community

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ers, and after a while, tend to settle down into a comfortable routine, rather than trying to change the status quo. In an attempt to address this problem, a local Kozarac political party was initiated on kozarac.ba, called *Nova Gradjanska Inicijativa* (NGI—new citizens' initiative) Kozarac. In 2008, it prompted the largest electoral turnout among the diaspora since the first post-war elections, resulting in two MPs being elected to the Prijedor assembly, but even they were quickly faced with the dilemmas and contradictions of participating in a political entity they opposed, when members of diaspora criticised NGI for hoisting the Serbian flag during their initial gatherings. Local returnees responded by reminding them that they needed to accept the compromise, albeit an unjust one, that was inherent in the peace accord: 'Personally, I accepted the flag as a necessary evil, for which we, ordinary people, are the least blamed for. RS, however repugnant to me, was recognised at Dayton' (Jutarnji Trac, 13 February, 2008). Reflecting on the contradictions contained within this compromise, Svabo noted: 'Our biggest sin is that we have returned to live in Kozarac, which unfortunately remained in the other [Serb] entity, for which we did not fight, nor did we fight for the Federation BiH—but both entities are de facto and de jure, at the moment, recognised by the world…In the end, on the one hand, we have become refugees, while on the other we are [perceived as] war criminals' (Ibid).

Without an agreed strategic plan for the community, the remarkable ad hoc activism of civilians reached its peak, as some members of the diaspora became disillusioned by local politicians and dominant actors, who they saw as always asking for project funding from the diaspora, but without necessarily taking their wishes or suggestions into account. On the other hand, locals understandably believed they were in charge of rebuilding the town, and tried to make the diaspora understand that without a dynamic and prosperous community on the ground, their new homes would be nothing more than holiday homes. Clearly, both the returnees and the diaspora are key factors of social and economic development of the Kozarac community, and projects like kozarac.ba that provide a forum for them to coexist and work together online are very useful.

The site also spawned some very interesting and self-aware debates about victimhood, the struggle to come to terms with the past, and the need to share stories of those who were killed as a way of reclaiming

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their presence within the community. In a section called *Otrgnuto od Zaborava* (Taming Oblivion), people share stories of the good old days of pre-war life, as well as their war experiences at the front line or in the camps. These narratives are constructed in such a way as to illustrate the resilience and strength of communal life despite everything, as a way of reaffirming its continuation. They also illuminate the victims' need to control their destiny, and a desire to have an impact on a society that created their trauma in the first place, even if only to claim small victories such as those embodied in stories of encounters with former interrogators. In much research on trauma, one is often overwhelmed with a pool of meanings ascribed to the survivor's psyche—the language of therapy, talking cures and medicalisation of an individual psyche all focus on how to modify the negative feelings of survivors, and arguably perpetrators, as a way of dealing with collective trauma (Summerfield 2002; Tall 1996). In contrast, having access to so many raw, personal stories told for their own sake, and without an external audience in mind, is both fascinating and refreshing.

Victims of trauma are not one-dimensional beings, and just because they all experienced a similarly traumatic event, we should not lump them together and assume they have a broadly similar understanding of events or ways of coping. As with other communities—arguably more so because of the impact of trauma—survivors and returnees have a diverse range of ideas, feelings and understandings of how best to re-establish their community. Another common feature of community formation is the question of legitimacy: Who is a 'legitimate' victim, and who can speak on their behalf? In the Kozarac context, this issue has been present in various online discussions, but came to the surface most noticeably in debates about memorialisation and the campaign to create a memorial at the site of the Omarska camp. But most of all, these narratives and debates give us a unique window into the formation of meaning and individual and collective coping strategies for victims of ethnic cleansing.

These narratives, shared among survivors, are often different to those articulated in public when talking about trauma and identity to the media or other inquirers. They tend to be cogent and self-reflective, and centre around the subject's position during and after the traumatic event. In contrast to public narratives, there is no need to explain oneself, for example, when discussing a relationship, or lack of it, with the other. It is

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taken as read, for example, that the reader understands that in any social or ethnic group, there are good and bad people. So, stories about brave Serb neighbours who acted as rescuers can be told without the need to qualify and explain the participants' ethnic identity. In such cases, any readers who respond with negative nationalist comments tend to be either ignored or treated with contempt, while the rescuer is admired for 'being human' and 'a Serb that his people ought be proud of'.

While many depict suffering and loss, the stories are mostly about survival. Traumatic experiences can be a source of improved resilience, as Nietzsche infamously remarked, in the sense of being able to maintain 'a stable equilibrium' and a relatively healthy psychological and physical functioning after the event (Bonanno 2004). In analysing over sixty stories of this kind, and several (unpublished) personal diaries, I have identified two main categories of narration. Firstly, there are stories of bravery and solidarity, which describe human resilience in the midst of an individual's torment at the hands of interrogators or guards at the camp, or perhaps in the chance encounters with perpetrators in a local setting a decade or so after the war, or in some rare examples, of rescuers from the 'other' ethnic group in the midst of violence. In contrast to conventional narratives with a beginning, middle and end, these stories are often left open-ended, or with an end that is formulated to jump directly from one specific time of the individual's suffering in the past to the present position of the protagonist. In this way, the protagonist's moral virtue and emotional capacity is accentuated. A second category of narration depicts the tragedy and sadness of extreme vulnerability and lack of control over one's destiny in dehumanised conditions, in which, for example, only a neutral force of nature such as the rain is perceived as an empathetic witness. I label these narratives 'the humane face of the rain', where the weather mirrors their feelings at such an extreme moment, when there is no rational explanation for why their neighbours would suddenly transform into merciless enemies.

This feeling of sudden and inexplicable betrayal is well captured in the story of Sendo, which was widely read on kozarac.ba and exemplified not only the sense of 'a carnivalesque glee in the suffering of others',[5]

[5] La Capra (2001: 68), and to some extent Goldhagen's provocative book (1997), in which he claimed a large number of ordinary people were 'Hitler's willing executioners', write about an elevated state of awareness for those engaged in inflicting pain on 'the other' that cannot be rationally understood even for those participating in it. La Capra, notes that 'the victimizing excesses of the

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but also the strength and dignity of the victim. Sendo, in his twenties, was regarded by his friends as a wanderer, often seen 'hanging around' the cinema or waiting for his girlfriend, Azra, to return from school at the bus stop. According to the narrator, Sendo was a fragile and sensitive young man, and Azra was his anchor. One summer evening, he became anxious about rumours that Azra might have another boyfriend, and went to a local bar to drown his sorrows. A local policeman, Krstan, arrived and asked him if Sendo would buy a drink for *narodnoj vlasti* (the people's authority). Sendo retorted that this was all he needed to ruin his night, and the backward shepherd should go back where he came from and mind the sheep in the mountains above the town. A fight ensued, in which Sendo was beaten. His family sent him to Zagreb, Croatia, as punishment for his behaviour, and he only returned on the eve of the ethnic cleansing of Kozarac. Like many other men, he soon found himself in Omarska camp. During one of his interrogation sessions, where inmates were supposed to sign various documents implicating themselves in a plan to exterminate their Serb neighbours, he recognised Krstan as his interrogator, but Krstan could not recognise him because he had been so badly beaten. Instead of signing a document, Sendo decided to draw a sheep. At that point, Krstan realised that their paths had crossed before, and he decided to make Sendo's life in the camp unbearable. The narrator briefly depicts some of the suffering that Sendo had to endure, and how at the point when he could no longer take it, Sendo decided to communicate his last 'worldly deed'. Krstan wanted to extract from him information about where he hid his money, and Sendo finally appeared willing to 'confess'. But by this time, he was physically unable to speak. He used his last scream to call for his interrogator, and using rudimentary sign language, he called Krstan to him. Krstan was pleased to see that Sendo was willing to communicate and sat him at the table. Sendo showed three fingers as a sign that there were three things Krstan needed to know. And as the story goes, the first two words were clear to Krstan—'to take'—and the third seemed equally easy to guess: men. He

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Nazi genocide were related to a deranged sacrificialism in an attempt to get rid of Jews as dangerous, impure objects that contaminated the community of people'. In Bosnia, this sense of impurity is sometimes perceived as the legacy of the religious conversion left by the Ottomans.

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inferred that Sendo was trying to say 'to take your men to Kozarac'. At that point, Sendo shook his head, vehemently disagreeing, and tried to make sure that Krstan understood the last word correctly. Krstan became irritated and for a moment turned away from him, while Sendo made his last sound before being slaughtered—the sound of a sheep. He was mocking him. As an epilogue, the narrator recalls meeting Azra, Sendo's former girlfriend, standing on the ground where the cinema used to be, completely absorbed in her thoughts. She told the narrator that she would give up all her life and opportunities in exile if she could see Sendo waiting for her at the bus stop one more time.[6]

In stories of dehumanisation, the symbolic depiction of rain often appears to assuage the immediate experience of loss and suffering, as if the weather empathises with a human being who has been stripped of humanity, home, identity, feelings and ideals. In many stories, survivors remark how, on the day of a particular egregious example of violence, there was unusually heavy rain. For example, when the old sixteenth-century Mosque in Prijedor was set ablaze, a witness writes about the Mosque's desire 'not to give up' and the rain's role in trying to stop the crime (Redzic 2006, Feb 14). Writing about the days before he was taken to the camp, awaiting the moment of 'being taken' and observing the flames of the burning Mosque from his flat, he recalls watching 'as she was vanishing in the fire, as though she was leaving a message that she will not surrender so easily and that we will remember her', juxtaposing this memory with the graffiti that appeared the next day on the ruins: 'where is your mosque—*allahimanet*'. The ongoing slaughter of 'all non-Serb existence in this town' (*svega sto nije srpsko*) at the time, led to metaphorical contemplation of the rain as a force that shares the victim's plight and thus provides a refuge:

> Those days, every day in the afternoon…[it rained] as if the heavens wept over what had befallen us. Prior to the clouds, for a moment, [the ruins of the Mosque would] lift up, in fact, more like it swelled up; deposited mass of ruins and a small dust burst into a cloud of smoke. And, so it goes, until I was taken to the camp, albeit demolished the Mosque continue to fight and defy her arsonists. (Ibid)

[6] Sendo, kozarac.ba, 16 February, 2007, http://www.kozarac.ba/kolumne/item/2157-1739-272-sendo highlight=WyJzZW5kbyJd

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For others, rain is seen as a saviour, just as the leadership of the 17th Brigade regarded the harsh winter weather when trying to take Mount Vlasic. One survivor of the 1995 massacre at Srebrenica described his horrific escape from the town after it was taken by the Serb Army, and how he walked as part of a column of those who refused to surrender, through forests and mountains towards the Bosnian-held town of Tuzla, during which time, his father and three brothers were killed before they managed to pass through the Serb front line. At the moment when he reached the front line, a hail storm began. The Serb soldiers 'retreated into bunkers and shelters' and with the cover of the storm, he was able to cross the line to free territory without being noticed.[7] In Kozarac, many recall a time when they discovered or stumbled across mass graves, and how during the exhumation of the remains, it rained as though 'the heavens were crying with us'. Similarly, it has been noted how every July, on the day of the mass funerals, the rain comes to 'share tears with the mothers'.

Stories of encounters, after a decade in exile, between the victim and former friends on the streets of Prijedor, chronicle a surprise for both protagonists: the survivor's shock when confronted with a former friend's welcoming smile and 'open arms' on the one hand, and the perpetrator's apparent incomprehension in receiving 'the cold shoulder' or 'seeing a ghost' from the past:

> When he saw me, his face smiled, looking at me straight into my eyes, with open arms and wholeheartedly said: 'May I'. It is a gesture when one meets a dear friend that you wish to embrace or at least shake hands with. It must be that through my gaze permeated with ice in me, over the last eight years, it all came out towards Zlaja. The gaze accompanied with the words: 'Why, how dare you, Zlaja?, It enshrouded him. On his face, a smile suddenly was replaced by a surprise and disbelief, he paused, shrugged his shoulders as if he could not grasp it, he turned and walked away. He stopped abruptly, stilted for a few moments. Then, Ratko, as though he saw a ghost, turned suddenly and almost ran away as far as he can from the ghost. (Redzic 2006, Feb 22)

Reflecting upon these encounters, survivors tell how, in exile, for many years, they dreamed or fantasised how a meeting with a former friend or neighbour might happen, and how, on such occasions, they imagined

[7] Vukic, Suzana, 2011, "Revisiting The Srebrenica Slaughter", http://test.chicagoraja.net/2011/07/12/revisiting-srebrenica-slaughter/

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they would tell them exactly what they thought of them. However, often, in reality, this need was absent as the narrator realised that they no longer had an emotional attachment to the individual in question:

> I imagined our meeting, most often, in a way where I would 'throw out' everything I think about him. But at this point, I felt nothing for him. Friendship has long since ceased, and hatred did not, thank God, pervade me. And when one has no feeling towards another being, then, it is difficult to say anything. (Redzic 2006, March 15)

Redzic writes about Doctor Divna, who, in the summer of 1992, saved Redzic's 12-year-old daughter by giving her a necessary injection despite a nurse's assertion that 'these injections are for our people'. He poignantly describes a meeting between his daughter, now a young adult, and the doctor, when they first visited their original home and his daughter decided to visit Divna to thank her for saving her life: 'You probably do not remember me, but in ninety-two you saved my life and I came to thank you.' It was everything Jasmina was able to say before she burst into tears (Redzic 2006, September 2).

Kozarac.ba has played a unique role in creating a space for dialogue that is both intimate and public, and which creates a bridge between the small local returnee reality of Kozarac and the much larger diaspora community around the world. Local people and those in exile are able to share and discuss their emotions, past experiences and common goals in relation to re-establishing their presence in RS. The anthropologist Victoria Bernal writes that we need to look at the 'significance of violence and conflict in order to understand community' (Bernal 2005: 661), and in Kozarac this is at the heart of understanding how a community that was supposed to be destroyed is re-establishing itself in a hostile environment.

Bernal, whose research deals primarily with the Eritrean diaspora in the USA and Europe, has conducted long-term investigations into the use of cyberspace for theorising transnationalism and raising questions concerning public spheres and notions of community. Her analysis of the diaspora's dehai.org website deals with the mobilisation of social action during the war, such as financial support, debates about the constitution, influence over politics in the country and how Eritreans who reside

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in the homeland have begun to use new communication tools to bring an end to media censorship in the country. She claims that when something important is at stake, the emerging technology can become a public sphere for a new public or a 'counterpublic', such as might be the case with a 'community which is constructed out of violent process of conflict and exclusion' (Bernal 2005: 662). Thus, Bernal makes it clear that perceiving and utilising the online as a public sphere should not mean that we equate it with the conventional exchange of information by other more traditional media communications:

> What is powerful about the access opened up by cyberspace and by public spheres is the ways they allow diverse actors to call into question the terms of knowledge production, relations of authority, and the politics of representation and the ways they give rise to alternative knowledge and counterpublics. (Bernal 2005: 672)

Cyberspace can help those who have experienced displacement, people in the diaspora or (as is the case with Kozarac) those trying to recreate a community and reconfigure their place of home and sense of belonging (Bernal 2005, 2006). This has certainly been the case with kozarac.ba. It is a remarkable example of how online community can overcome structural damage to social networks in the 'real' world. The site has also played a more direct role in the economic development of the town, by communicating needs that can be addressed by projects supported by the diaspora network. The examples of how the historic fire service was re-established, and sports clubs such as *Bratstvo* and the basketball initiative named after Amir Kljucanin show how so-called virtual discussion spaces can impact upon the physical 'real world'. Whereas many online communities are whimsical and virtual, kozarac.ba is driven by a need to positively impact on the reality of the town, which gives it both a relevance and urgency rarely seen in such forums.

In addition, through kozarac.ba, people have also learnt that the diaspora does not just represent a financial backbone in rebuilding Kozarac, but also an 'emotional citizenship' that is deeply intertwined with the destiny of the community at home, as the many stories on the site illustrate. As Bernal found, cyberspace gives an equal opportunity for ordinary

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people to participate in the production of their cultural, social or political knowledge and identity formation, and we often see working class individuals without higher degrees hailed as important writers within the website. However, the fact that the town's intellectual and economical elite was systematically eliminated during the ethnic cleansing, and that the new one resides largely in exile, continues to present challenges for the development of the town. There is a recognition among those who have participated in kozraca.ba and other initiatives, that the next stage requires the establishment of the kind of modern political and economic infrastructure that might enable Kozarac to enjoy a secure and prosperous future, despite its many challenges. The return of several wealthy entrepreneurs to their original homes to set up companies in the area has provided a much-needed injection of enthusiasm. But they also face substantial hurdles in an environment of unresolved political violence and continued hostility towards returnees.

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7

Economic Sustainability in a Land of Corruption

> *Should Kozarac seek a solution in all those names on the spomen obiljezje [the Kozarac memorial to the dead] and constantly point a finger at it and always talk about it, and exploit it? Those…are people, which are…something most sacred. But, in economic terms, they cannot help us.*
>
> (Arifagic, 8 September, 2015)

Having re-established the town and publicly asserted their own story, the focus of many returnees began to shift to the next phase: achieving sustainability for Kozarac, in both the political and economic domains. In the political domain, the town was still very much dependent upon the local government in Prijedor for action, despite the early electoral successes in the first stages of return; but in the sphere of economic activity, they found themselves more free to act, and this provided an opportunity for the resourcefulness and experience of exile to be used as an advantage.

As we have seen, the Kozarac leadership that emerged from the war was adept at seeking solutions even in the most challenging of times. They

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understood that the best solutions emerged from acceptance of reality on the ground, through compromise, but with a strong dose of self-reliance. After the war, prospective returnees faced major obstacles, violence and intimidation that prevented them from reclaiming their pre-war homes. The Serb authorities in Prijedor saw the initial visits to pre-war homes as a token of goodwill in the presence of international monitors, but hoped the process would end there. In the crucial year of return, 1999, even the relatively moderate mayor, Borislav Maric, interpreted Dayton's return policy as a gradual, slow process to ensure safety given 'the peculiarities of the situation that caused their departure and return' (Ramulic and Kahrimanovic 1999: 11). However, as discussed in Chap. 3, Cirkin saw these first steps as an opportunity to be seized, and his war presidency team, including women's organisations like *Srcem do Mira* and *Izvor*, were all put to work to prepare for what he saw as inevitable return.

These small steps were indeed considerable achievements in the life of a community that had survived a highly organised attempt to eliminate it, especially while those responsible for ethnic cleansing remained in power to safeguard their newly formed ethnic entity by ensuring former neighbours would not return, or at least, if absolutely necessary, only in very small numbers. As a result, over the last two decades, the institutionalisation of discriminatory practices against the Bosniak minority has become the norm and, together with the divisive nature of the post-war settlement achieved in Dayton, forestalled community development and reintegration into the wider political and social structures of the city of Prijedor. Meanwhile, the state itself was in a position of political, social and economic stagnation resulting from the politics of predatory elites,[1] but bolstered by international policy makers' failure to recognise the shortcomings of the peace settlement, it chose instead to ameliorate its worst effects by funding and promoting a peace-building culture that lacked understanding of local dynamics and realities.

[1] The historian Barrington Moore, Jr, labelled rulers of regimes as predatory, who in the process of generating wealth for themselves, have produced unwanted poverty among their people unwarranted for that particular society (Moore 1978).

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Twenty Years of Dayton Bosnia: A Local Experience

As we have seen, the Dayton Peace Agreement enshrined a theoretical right for people to either return to their original homes or choose to stay where they ended up after the war ended, which resulted in many house swaps between entities. It did little in reality to reverse the process of ethnic cleansing, and so post-war Bosnia looks far more divided and polarised than the very mixed pre-war ethnic map. Dayton's power-sharing provisions meant that an ethnic majority is legally entitled to more rights, and more political power within their entity, than those that belong to a minority. This practice is now accepted and widespread in all regions, towns and villages in Bosnia. A distressing aspect of this is that it encourages an absence of empathy towards minorities, even though each group is aware that while they might be enjoying majority rule in one place, 'their own people' might be discriminated against in another. Minorities, then, perceive themselves as unequal citizens of a place. Consequently, within minority communities, an enclave mentality often pertains, in which its permanent residents have become completely inward looking, and in searching for personal fulfilment, the community often faces social and cultural stagnation.

Another visible effect of this process is the tendency of post-war minority politicians to occupy a symbolic niche within the dominant parliament or local assembly of 'the other', fulfilling a democratic mandate on behalf of 'their' people, but without having any power over the political and social development of their region. As Cirkin notes: 'Here, it is good for perhaps a dozen Bosniaks who are hand-in-hand with Dodik [RS president] and Pavic [Prijedor's mayor], but the rest are without a future. There is no force to create a vision, but just a few loan sharks who are only thinking of themselves' (Hadzic 2009).

In the early days of return, electing Bosniak politicians to the local assembly in Prijedor was seen as a way of entering the social and political structures of the new political entity of RS—a sign of hope. So when, in the first local election, they won 24 of 65 seats in the assembly, this

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was seen as Bosniaks resuming their rightful position in the decision-making process for Prijedor (Hodzic, October, 1997b: 2). Many of the representatives were former soldiers of the 17th Brigade, including eminent members of the pre-war community, such as the late businessman and Omarska survivor, Muharem Murselovic, and the former secondary school teacher, Mesud Blazevic. Having former soldiers play a part in politics was a way to garner electoral support from the diaspora, but also a logical extension of their leading role in organising return. But some soldiers were unable to deal with sitting around a table with men who might have been their interrogators or had been known to have committed war crimes. One member of the assembly recalled to me how, during a session where a Serb member was speaking, he began imagining all the Serb members being killed. He said: '[In my mind] I took my gun and looked at their faces that pretended to bear with us, knowing that they wished us death; I pulled the trigger and suddenly all of them were dead. I felt happy.'[2] He realised that he could not deal with seeing them every day and although he formally remained a member of the local government, he never again attended the assembly and eventually emigrated.

In conversations, several Bosniak politicians who have been in office on and off since 1996 contend that the main reason why returnees in Prijedor have remained politically weak and unrepresented is an inability within the Bosniak elite to share their power and position with others. In other words, a small group of individuals have continued to support each other and put their names on the ballot, and have sought to protect this position against competition from within their own community. To some extent, it is fair to say that they were the only people available within the first few years of coming home; but on the other hand, it is alleged that some prominent politicians have been reluctant to allow any educated younger members of their community take similar posts in local institutions. Returning as a minority, I was told, meant that there will be no important jobs for them to claim, but if they have had a clear strategy they might achieve, for example, employment as a doctor in the local hospital, or as an engineer in the department of commerce. But they largely exhibit the classic Balkan 'one-man leader' traits of political

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[2] Field notes May 2007.

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leadership—wanting to personify the Bosniaks' struggle in themselves, rather than develop collective political structures.

This phenomenon is not unique to political representatives. Some members of other types of Bosniak-led organisations, including NGOs, have made similar points about each other in terms of an inability to delegate, share the workload and the funding. This has created a culture in which a dozen or so individuals who pioneered the return process have remained the principal spokespeople and community leaders. At first, the returnee community held these individuals in high regard, and their public personae grew as researchers and the media continued to seek their opinions about life as a returnee in RS. However, in recent years, their conduct during assembly sessions and in public appearances has been scrutinised more closely by local NGOs and journalists in order to raise awareness of local politics among the diaspora electorate.

In one online forum thread on kozarac.ba, entitled 'I know them…', over four thousand potential voters discussed their politicians' treatment of the recent past and their efforts (or lack thereof) to reintegrate returnees. Several people claimed that these politicians are doing everything they can to forget (or move on from) the past to present Prijedor as a 'beacon of return and tolerance'. On particular target for criticism in this debate was local politician Azra Pasalic, who had been very supportive of mayor Pavic's campaign to encourage international investment, and, in meetings with foreign diplomats, media and at various workshops, asserted that returnees are sharing the same fate as other citizens, and [that] Prijedor is a safe and favourable place for foreign investment, maintaining that the municipality is doing everything it can in giving everybody equal and fair treatment in employment, regardless of ethnicity. However, she said that she regretted the fact that her neighbourhood is devoid of Bosniak intellectuals, and because most returnees do not have a university education, this means that job opportunities for them are scarce. For her Bosniak constituents, however, her assertion that *ti stradalnici rata* (those casualties of war) are slowly reintegrating into the community which they had to leave, and that 'barriers between indigenous, refugees and returnees are disappearing' caused outright indignation. A decade after return, they felt that their reintegration had stalled, and highly sensitive to feeling that they were being treated as a second-class citizen, the implication that

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they are still only returnees and therefore not on a par with the local Serb population offended some people deeply.

The precarious sense of belonging among the inhabitants of Kozarac comes into sharp focus with the anniversary of the founding of RS on 9 January each year, which was when, in response to being outvoted in the former parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Serb deputies had issued a Proclamation of the Serb Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992. Since then, RS government institutions commemorate this day by laying a wreath on the monuments erected to remember fallen soldiers, followed by congratulations on the anniversary to all citizens of the entity in the local newspaper, *Kozarski Vjesnik*, and other media. In 2009, as a previous president of the Prijedor council, Azra Pasalic gave a statement on the anniversary to the newspaper that was widely criticised by returnees in Kozarac. Other local Bosniak politicians and ordinary people began a campaign against her public praise of the entity, which they regarded as essentially a murderous enterprise built on their suffering and loss. Under pressure, she claimed that she never mentioned RS as a 'state', but rather spoke of an entity, and the fault was with the newspaper's transcription of her statement. For most people, particularly those in the diaspora, her public speeches mirror the mayor's rhetoric of tolerance, multi-ethnicity and Prijedor's ability to move forward to a future of jobs and prosperity, and they feel this renders them voiceless in the political system. Many had voted for Azra Pasalic as a respected doctor, who herself suffered during ethnic cleansing, being kept under house arrest and subsequently expelled, while her parents were murdered at home. But the gulf between her own experience after return and Azra's patriotic rhetoric meant that she lost some support.

Despite the overwhelming sense of disempowerment among ordinary people, in contrast to the freedom and power held by a few Bosniak politicians, they still need these politicians to articulate their grievances in the political system as a marginalised community. This is not at all unique to Kozarac, but is a feature of post-war Bosnia, where there is a pervasive sense that people can do nothing to change or influence their political leaders, who are voted in with the support of the media on the basis of nationalist identity and discourse, rather than competence. It is feared that any alternative might bring about *unistenje*—the elimination or destruction of 'their

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own'. In other words, the dissemination of fear has become the key feature of ethno-politics, which only promulgates divisions among constituencies while advancing the position of nationalists on all sides. Bosnian society, argues Lovrenovic and Jergovic (2010), has yet to deal with social segregation and a lack of responsibility emanating from the absence of political reflection. Thus, asymmetrical power relations continue to be reflected in the language of the dominant majority, who endorse the status quo and the idea of 'moving on' towards economic progress, while the weak minority persists in trying to slowly pursue bottom-up social change.

In addition, given the fact that there is no institution within RS that concerns itself with the social and political life of returnees, NGOs seem to be the only social organisations monitoring minority rights and seeking to uphold them. In RS, returnee rights are not incorporated within the local governmental institutions' mandates, and so, for example, returnees could not apply for funds until very recently, as there was no budget allocated to dealing with civil victims of war and their representative bodies. However, if returnee NGOs become too vocal about social injustice and denial, as they did recently during the twentieth anniversary of ethnic cleansing in 2012, these funds can be withdrawn. In contrast, the RS entity government is a major funder of the three main Serb war-related organisations: the War Veterans, the Association of Camp Inmates and the Organisation for Captured and Killed Soldiers and Missing Civilians. These organisations are recognised as official bodies and receive large subsidies (Bougarel 2006: 114); for example, Serb war veterans received over four hundred thousand convertible marks (KM) in 2010 for their activities (Ninkovic-Papic et al. 2011) (Fig. 7.1).

So without doubt, sustaining Kozarac beyond the initial phase of return that began in 1998–1999, would be challenged by the post-war political situation of the returnees, and it would need more than just access to the entity government. After the physical reclamation of the town, rebuilding homes and local infrastructure, and then recovering bodies and commemorating the dead, what did a long-term vision for the community look like? Kozarac has a strong local NGO network, and civil society in general, but sustainability requires a strong local economy as well, especially in the absence of access to functioning, entity-level political institutions.

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Fig. 7.1 Protest in Prijedor to remember the child victims of ethnic cleansing, 2012

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Economic Self-Sufficiency as a Solution to Political and Social Stagnation

> [We should] activate Kozarac's land with a system of small cooperative farms and production facilities … guided by science and educated people. [We should] merge diaspora and local knowledge, and aim for high quality standards, while those abroad seek networks where we can export our products—apples…milk—to different countries. If we think like this we can revive Kozarac overnight.[3]

Sead Cirkin is now a farmer, working on the hills behind Kozarusa. Another former 17th Brigade member, Jusuf Arifagic, runs a high-tech, modern dairy farm that has ambitions of European competitiveness and exports. Enes Kahrimanovic runs a local joint venture with Austrian manufacturer Austronet. These are a few examples of a passionate and purposeful entrepreneur network that is trying to create a local economy that can sustain the town and encourage the younger generation to stay and build a future rather than leave the area. In some respects, these firms represent a paradigm shift that does not ignore the past, but is focused on building capacity for the future that surpasses political, economic and ethnic constraints of the state by operating internationally; but they too suffer the effects of bad governance and systemic corruption in the short term. This sector has great potential to change people's mindsets (*mjenjanje svijesti*), which have been deeply affected by the erosion of social trust and a corrupt political culture, outside the vehicle of politics, and it shows the same self-reliance and imagination that served the 17th Brigade so well during the later stages of the war.

In Bosnia, systemic corruption is the norm, which is partly explained by centuries of colonial Ottoman rule followed by fifty years of communism, four years of war and then twenty years of post-war dependence on aid and international institutions. The old communist *nomenclatura* system of party patronage and state monopolies has passed into the hands of agents of a modern form of corruption: nationalist political

[3] Interview with Jusuf Arifagic, September 8th, 2015.

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elites, their family relatives and war comrades. Both systems tend to put state resources in the hands of political elites that see themselves as the embodiment of national destiny, resulting in a blurring of lines between personal and official interests. Widespread nepotism and bribery in public offices is present even at the prominent institutions such as the judiciary (World Bank Report 2000; Adzanela 2012).

Curbing corruption, which is deeply ingrained in all aspects of social structures rather than just being an exception (individual cases), is a slow and challenging process. As North points out in his Nobel Prize talk, rules may be changed overnight, but the informal norms only change gradually—and it is they, not rules, that govern behaviour. There is also the classic game theory problem—if everyone assumes others are corrupt, they are less likely to behave correctly themselves, as to do so would be to lose out without any prospect of changing the norm. In some instances, those who refuse to succumb to bribery are ostracised, victimised and may be forced to leave their institution (World Bank 2000).

Two decades of a post-war 'transition' in which billions of dollars were poured in to build democratic, liberal governing institutions have not contributed much to social and political transformation. One of the reasons is that international donors have helped to keep the predatory elite in power, cooperating with them even in instances where they are attempting to fight widespread corruption, oblivious to the fact that the state's politicians are in fact the crux of the problem. As Mungiu-Pippidi notes, international organisations fail to take into consideration a particularist political culture and underestimate the extent to which corruption, in post-communist countries at least, is inherently political: 'Corruption actually means "particularism"—a mode of social organisation characterised by the regular distribution of public goods on a non-universalistic basis that mirrors the vicious distribution of power within such societies' (Mungiu-Pippidi 2006: 87).

This phenomenon is problematic, but in a situation of contested return such as Kozarac, its impact can be even greater, because the authorities are broadly hostile to the returnee minority and ready to use official RS institutions against them. Therefore, joining in with local corruption presents risks, but so too can any attempt to resist it and refuse to 'play along'. A defining characteristic of the Kozarac return story has been the need for self-reliance. In the early years, this was played out in fighting for

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return, re-establishing the local community and standing up for political rights and memorialisation. Increasingly today, the priority is economic self-reliance if the community is to reverse the slow drift of young people away from the area in pursuit of a future for themselves and their families.

In September 2015, I visited Arifagic's business and Austronet, two firms remarkable for their commitment to internationally competitive quality and standards, but also for the way that they handle the ever-present challenge of corruption and other aspects of the prevailing 'mindset' that they believe needs to change. These two firms are both led by members of the returnee community who seem motivated to create a sustainable local legacy, rather than just create short-term profits. Their work employs a curious mix of path dependence—knowledge of how and why things are the way they are—and also new thinking in the Bosnian context. They are aware that history matters, and here I do not mean only recent war losses and terrible experiences, but a long intergenerational heritage of economic models that created the country's political culture. And yet, their life experiences and exile exposed them to new forms of learning and knowledge necessary to combat a 'stuck' society such as Bosnia. They also draw upon their experience of doing business in Norway and Austria, respectively, to inform their belief that only by upholding the highest standards of quality and ethics can they avoid being dragged down by local norms. They not only refuse to take part in customary corrupt practices, but also understand that to do so requires them to be scrupulously 'clean' as any compromise on this point would leave them vulnerable. Therefore, although it is not perhaps their primary goal, both firms are pioneers that are changing the local mindset and demonstrating that even in Bosnia, and specifically in RS, it is possible to create internationally successful businesses.

In some ways, these firms represent a much-needed philosophy of abandoning what we know and embracing new learning practices and behaviours in the pursuit of radical change of a value system that governs both formal and informal institutions. The cornerstone of this is building a culture that goes beyond the self-interest of a leader. But how does one articulate, let alone achieve this in a community that often sees personal success as a threat, or assumes it derives from some form of corrupt behaviour? Social trust is in short supply regardless of which ethnic or social group one may belong to.

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Jusuf Arifagic returned to Bosnia from Norway a few years ago with a significant personal investment and several hundred Norwegian cows from a special and highly prized breed. He bought a plot of land in Trnopolje, not far from the site of the camp where he and his family were interned during the war, and established Arifagic Investment as an agricultural business with innovative strategies for the future of Bosnian farming, meat production and biogas generation. He also planned to improve the education and training of young people by building a secondary school with Norwegian standards of education, which could also provide additional training in Norway. Since his official opening of the company in late 2014, the media has reported how he has left his past behind and is focused on building a better future both for himself and his community at home. Arifagic alludes to his return as providing him with a deeper purpose and life fulfilment than his life in Norway, but also serving to prove to himself and the perpetrators of what he suffered in 1992 that they did not defeat him. In our interview, he describes his grounds for starting a business and resuming life in Kozarac in similar terms:

> One survived… whether life is a reward or perhaps it is a punishment? For many [camp] inmates I do not know if they know an answer to this, you can ask. I am not sure that they would instantly tell you: yes, this is my reward that I'm alive. Many would contemplate whether life is a reward or a punishment. Somewhere in the West, everyone concedes, you'll have a full fridge, and the economy works…but there is something else in every inmate…It is essential to decide for oneself whether to live in a country like Norway and to participate in building a Norway and become emotionally invested in her. Can one spend the rest of life there and not be defeated by the Chetniks?[4]

Thus, he believes that to deal with the devastating effects of mass violence and displacement, human beings tend to create new life. As Peter Loizos (2008: 186) noted, in his study of the Greek Cypriot internally displaced village of Argaki, 'identity and grievance are both protected by thick process of normal life' where future-oriented life goals, familial

[4] Interview, 8 September, 2015.

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or collective, are crucial for recovery. For people like Arifagic, it is important to actively participate in the recreation of the social life of his community. During our conversation, I mentioned how, in my research about re-making Kozarac, I realised that those who played some of the key roles were ordinary, unassuming and yet some of the most remarkable persons that I encountered. More often than not, these men had also been soldiers or leaders of the 17th Brigade during the war. Arifagic had also been a soldier in the 17th Brigade, joining towards the end of the war, when there were signs that the 7th Corps in Travnik would begin their long-planned journey home. At the end of war, he felt that return to Kozarac would be slow, so he went back to Norway to begin his business while continuing to support the community's effort to organise themselves and prepare for return in Lusci Palanka.

Enes Kahrimanovic, the director of Austronet, did not experience the war, as he was working in Austria at the time, but he was a president of the regional Unsko-Sansko association that was part of the network of logistic centres supporting the 17th Brigade during the war. In an interview for the *Prijedorsko Ogledalo*, when refugees were being repatriated but still residing in Sanski Most, like Cirkin, he spoke about his conviction that there was no alternative other than to return (Hodzic, Dec., 1996a: 11). His elderly parents returned to Kozarac when they could, and while he remained employed by an Austrian company, Plaspack Netze GmbH, he spent much of his time in Kozarac. In 2007, he managed to persuade his company and another Austrian investor to buy a plot of land and build a small industrial zone in the village of Kozarusa. This was a time when several foreign investors were seeking to invest in the Prijedor region, either by buying ruined factories such as the Kozarac paper factory, or by opening a new factory like the Croatian footwear firm *Ivancica* that has established its production line in Kozarac.

I met Kahrimanovic in the summer of 2008 at a local bar. I was curious about returnee-led businesses, as many locals viewed the Croatian *Ivancica* as exploiting cheap labour, and suggested that employment there did not add up to 'a good life for the worker'. But Kahrimanovic spoke to me about his vision for life in Kozarac, where a family would be able to support itself, like anywhere else in Europe, and go on holiday twice a

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year, rather than be consumed by past victimhood. His speech reminded me of Judith Herman,[5] who reminds us that a victim only feels vengeful when (s)he is powerless and has no prospect of a future. Kahrimanovic wished to offer people a future in which nationalism and the legacy of war would start to fade away. It is not a question of whether one hates Serbs, or whether one can forget the past; according to him, forgetting is impossible and hating those who committed the worst crimes is to be expected; but it should not influence our relationship with other Serbs who were not involved. Similarly, Arifagic argues that solutions are always based on cooperation, and this can only be possible if we forgive, which does not have to mean forgetting. His understanding of forgiveness is accepting the past so that it does not define the future, as Staub and Pearlman (2005) write, which turns it into a simple continuation of the past (Fig. 7.2).

Both men are forward-looking in their approach to the war and its legacy, and also when it comes to their business endeavours. By focusing on creating high quality products using modern technologies and competing in a market economy outside the country, a new managerial and working culture is encouraged in which creativity and personal responsibility are core elements. As Arifagic puts it:

> We know very well what is modern management. I am constantly forcing people to take responsibility, because that way you force him to think, to bring something new and creative. I am not 'the almighty'. I cannot be a cop who controls each worker…what I need is to create, from these young people, a quality team of managers who will know how to lead and develop further.[6]

He believes in leading by example as a way to influence his workers and the local community; he employs young professionals who, despite being smart, are not above working in the stables; and needless to say, ethnicity does not count here—just a willingness to work hard, an eagerness

[5] Judith Herman has claimed the fantasy of vengeful victim is omnipresent. In reality, referring to Orwell's 'revenge is sour', the victim only feels revengeful when he is powerless. At a conference, 'Beyond Reconciliation', Cape Town, December 2009.

[6] Personal interview with Arifagic, 8 September 2015, Trnopolje.

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Fig. 7.2 Austronet production facility in Kozarusa, 2015

to learn and strong personal ethics. For example, one young returnee, a law graduate, could not find a job despite being a star pupil in RS, so he became a shepherd to support his old parents. Upon reading about him in the newspaper, Arifagic called him and after a ten-minute interview, gave him a job as his legal adviser.

This all seemed rather too professional and organised to be found in the middle of the Bosnian countryside. At Arifagic's farm, the cows enjoy the most up-to-date luxury accommodation, air quality is digitally controlled, and they are massaged and entertained with music to keep them relaxed (Associated Press 2014). He is well aware that building an organisation so alien to local practice will take time, but he is clear about the long-term benefits: to create something larger than his life, to leave it behind for his children and the coming generations to work on. He asserts that he can only create the right conditions for new ways of thinking and work ethics to emerge, in the hope that society might focus on creating a better future that is free from corruption and war.

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Arifagic has a vision, but achieving his goals has been harder than he anticipated. To some degree, it is to be expected that the local authority would not be supportive of his development without bribery. Registering a new company in Bosnia often means facing the reality of bribery and corruption on a larger scale than just the influence of various political parties. Arifagic mentioned to me, in passing, that regional politicians have tried to lure him into politics to bring him 'on side', but he is adamant he will not be joining them. This, in turn, means more inspector visits and ambiguous charges outside the formal taxation regime. Indeed, even while I visited the farm, an inspector arrived and Arifagic instructed his young lawyer to show him around, explaining to me that he receives so many inspection visits, but does not want to deal with them personally, as most of them expect a bribe.

Like Arifagic, Kahrimanovic has a very clear focus on bringing a more reliable and ethical way of working to the Kozarac region, explaining that this is the only way to respond to the apparatchiks of old and new corruption. To illustrate his point, he told me the story of a recent fire inspection:

> He asked me if I have installed a fire sprinkler system with pipes that are at least 8mm in diameter around my warehouses. I said that if the regulations require it, then, yes I did. He then said: 'Oh don't worry, most people install pipes of 6mm, because the 8mm versions are very expensive. So I am sure you have not installed the 8mm one…but do not worry.' I assured him that if the law requires 8mm pipes, then that is what we have, and told him he can view our technical drawings.[7]

Kahrimanovic then remembered that there was a place in the building where the pipes are visible above the ground, so he measured them. They turned out to be 10 mm wide. The point of his story was to illustrate how inspections are often performed informally, as though an inspector is doing you a favour and you ought to compensate him because it is expected behaviour to bend the rules.

The entrenched belief system that 'everybody is corrupt, so why shouldn't I or you be' is difficult to change in a political culture that has

[7] In conversation, 9 September, 2015. Prijedor.

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no incentive to tackle it. Mutual expectations that everyone will cheat eventually are particularly hard to grapple with in a post-war context. But as part of building a better future for the re-established community in Kozarac, these two businesses are examples of why it matters to do things differently.

Their own community can also act as a barrier to achieving their goal of economic self-sufficiency. The Arifagic Investment strategy is largely about local development through an ecosystem of small-scale farming operations, which draws on the experience of small collective farms from the *zadruga* era of Yugoslavia, which were joint family- or communally owned enterprises that developed after the agrarian reforms in 1920s Yugoslavia (Zagoroff et al. 1955) that would share capital and the means of production to help small-scale producers who lacked information and resources to meet quality standards and formal market specifications (Bienabe and Sautier 2005). But for Arifagic, two issues emerged within the community: first, the ownership of land was often unclear or contested within families; and, secondly, there was a general suspicion towards shared capital: '*I've been trying to talk to people to form a collective, 100–200 of us, so that we combine our land together, in order to produce food and buy from the collective. However … they still concern themselves with the borders of their farmland, whether it will vanish and how they will find their land tomorrow, something they've worked hard for all their life.*'

The company has around 600 Norwegian cows that need to be well-fed for milk production. In order to feed them, Arifagic needs around 300 hectares of land. His plan was to build another large stable for more cows to be accommodated, to have enough resources for the production of quality meat. But he is already starting to feel disempowered with the constant barriers his Investment company is facing. Last year, he put an advertisement on local websites and kozarac.ba, hoping that the diaspora would be willing to rent their uncultivated land to him. Only a very small number of people approached him directly as a result of these ads to rent land or seek advice to help them to understand modern technologies and food production. He is aware that it will take time for new ways of food production to take its roots, but as a result of this initiative he acquired less than 100 hectares, and this was achieved mainly through direct interaction with members of the community when they came on

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holiday to their former homes. A considerable portion of privately owned land has been uncultivated since the 1990s, and many in the diaspora are concerned with the possibility of RS authority passing a law that would impose taxation on unused land so having their land rented for agricultural purposes would exempt them from it. However, many raised concerns that in 5 or 10 years, Arifagic might appropriate their land, despite the fact that the rental contract between the company and the landowner would not allow him to do so, and some of the elderly worry that if they die, perhaps their children will not inherit the land, although of course the younger generation residing abroad may not want the land anyway, and may choose to sell it.

Kozarac has lots of small, fragmented parcels of land that are not of much use to an operation like that of Arifagic in the absence of a collective will to use them. In fact, he argues, Kozarac has no other capital except for the land. Arifagic sees agriculture as an opportunity to create jobs for those who reside in Kozarac, and to stop youth emigration, while hoping to attract other people to work and eventually resettle in the town. His worry is that in ten or fifteen years, there will be no community:

> Nobody is thinking what is the future of Kozarac, will it survive? Can it survive on today's postulates, where there are no jobs, where there is no economic strategy? No manufacturing plants that could employ 50 or 100 young people. Mainly, through the wedding ceremonies, young people are leaving Bosnia. This is a fact with all people…In Kozarac, this is particularly prevalent recently. The old are dying and the young are leaving… What will happen in 10 years? Will there be more than 2000 of us who are living permanently here? We will have 5000 objects [houses] and 2000 elderly folks.[8]

Clearly, his plans are wider than Kozarac, where the land is insufficient for large-scale production of food, so he seeks new opportunities elsewhere. The local authority in Prijedor have promised to allocate state-owned land for his needs, but this has yet to materialise. On various occasions, the local authority and the RS Veterinary Ministry have stated

[8] Personal interview, 8 September, 2015.

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that they have around 36,000 hectares of state-owned land available for renting, but they never follow through and make a deal for him to use it. According to Arifagic, on the state level, there is no agricultural strategy or even a Ministry for agriculture (the Office of Veterinary is responsible), and the system is too complex for agriculture to thrive. Furthermore, there is no planned strategy for which part of Bosnian land is good for animal husbandry, and no planned production or a guarantee of purchase price. In short, farmers are left to their own devices. Thus, any export and import is strictly controlled by the political lobby, and so, for Arifagic, to import something he has to seek the papers and ensure he has appropriate storage or warehouse, that must be followed by several visits from the local commissions to 'check his records'. His modern farm uses the latest technology relating to air conditioning, heating systems and milk production, so power cuts have been a major challenge for making the farm workable. In the summer months, several times a day, they experience power cuts because of overloaded transmission lines. He bought a large electricity backup generator to kick in when this happens in the middle of milking cows, but it takes twenty seconds to work, so everything stops functioning for a moment. He has campaigned through the media and in person to the local authority, trying to persuade them to invest in upgrading power stations and transmission grids that have not been updated since 1960s, but in vain. He claims that the money, from a state institution, that is supposed to go towards the transport of electrical energy mostly ends up in the governing bodies of the two entities, and usually for salaries rather than investment in power stations. The Swiss government has been a significant donor in the reconstruction of water supplies in Prijedor for some years now, but still during the summer, everyone talks about water shortages. The Arifagic farm had to make their own reservoir of water, but still they had to install a water meter, and then register and pay for its use. A lack of state investment in public infrastructure continues to hinder economic and social progress. And so far, in this case, no amount of media interest has created pressure for change, while the local authority in Prijedor, and its mayor Pavic, have been awarded with certification as an exemplary municipality in which to invest.

Knowing the dysfunctional nature of the state's institutions, I asked Arifagic how he can contemplate success given the local authority's lack

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of support and all other constraints he has encountered thus far. In response, he claims that they are not important and that in a country undergoing a painful transition, it is about belief systems, and the small and gradual impact one might have on changing people's mindset by giving them a glimpse of the possibilities in a society that may still emerge as functional: '*In every hindrance and every issue, man can perceive a problem, but he can also understand that we are society in transition. That through every day work and processes, many things are changing, and I am sure that through this [his endeavour]…they are all changing their habits.*'[9]

In many ways, these endeavours are about the creation of ideas and social norms as strategies for cultivating a different kind of collective experience that can bring about new collective culture and memories. This, in turn, may influence established rigid senses of who we are and who are the others, through a new working culture and social interaction. I recall a story Kahrimanovic told me back in 2008, at the bar, when we were both looking weary for a very different set of reasons: he was grappling with Bosnian complex bureaucratic processes and encountering all kinds of inept officials, and I was overwhelmed with stories of survivors and a sense that everything is stuck and problematic. I asked him whether he was planning to employ Serbs in his company. He said he already has a middle-aged pensioner who works as a cleaner at the construction site, as his meagre RS pension cannot feed his household. The cleaner makes a point to Kahrimanovic that if he had not given him a job, that travesty of the Serb entity would have not rescued him or his family. Giving the pensioner a job, Kahrimanovic chose to place trust in him, and the employee responded by downplaying the ethnic component of his RS entity in relation to his own identity as a decent person.

Meanwhile, Arifagic Investment and Austronet both try to support an economic self-sufficiency that is slowly emerging in Bosnian municipalities. In a recent building of a new product, Austronet brought together several Bosnian firms from Prnjavor, Sanski Most and Kozarac to work on a new product, Soliday (sunshades), to compete in the foreign market. They used each company's expertise in working with material such as aluminium, copper and iron to create parts for the product that

[9] Interview, 8 September, 2015.

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is assembled in Austria. By using locally produced parts, Kahrimanovic wants to help other small-scale factory producers in Bosnia to access the international market and strengthen their business, while limiting the need for goods from China. Both companies believe in team work, be it within and among communities or in a future of multinational cooperation where local ethnic politics would not play a significant role. Referring to Tesanj, a similar returnee-focused town in northern Bosnia, Arifagic notes how 20 % of the Federation exports goods come from there, and that this is solely due to the town's diaspora investment and local cooperation, including the mayor's office. Similar small-scale economic cooperation exists in other places and towns in Bosnia like Vitez in central Bosnia, with a predominantly Bosnian-Croat population that is surrounded by Bosniak villages and towns. In such cases, it is local people who are developing their town with the help from their diaspora communities, something that Kozarac could simulate given the fact that more than half of its pre-war population live abroad but remain connected with the place. According to Arifagic, a strategy, in which the diaspora and locals would come together is much needed for the Kozarac community to survive and prosper.

Post-war Dayton Bosnia proves to be a challenging environment for those who seek the sociopolitical and economic transformation of the country, and for whom 'dealing with the past' requires a form of personal and collective transcendence. The legacies of the war, in particular the personal and collective sense of loss and narratives of denial, have produced a society paralysed by peace but unable to create a better future for all its citizens. And, so far, no amount of conversing, debating about truth and justice issues and memory practices have persuaded local and national rulers to adequately deal with social grievances, as that would mean relinquishing or at least sharing power they acquired through conflict. After so much time, focusing on the challenges of post-war contested return through acts of commemoration and other transitional justice mechanisms, it was quite uplifting to learn more about how ambitious and innovative some returnee-led businesses have become in recent years.

Informal, personal modes of exchange that grant access to familial, socially or politically related individuals, rather than universal, impersonal access based on merit, are the dominant approach in Bosnia today.

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But creation of sustainable businesses and institutions requires a more impersonal approach based on equality under the law, and in the absence of a healthy state that can create such an environment, perhaps it comes down to determined individuals such as Arifagic and Kahrimanovic to show that another way is possible.

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8

Conclusion: On Return as Redress

The story of the Kozarac returnee community is one of solidarity, rediscovered agency and strength born out of suffering, from its beginnings in violent ethnic cleansing, the camps and displacement, through the fightback led by the 17th Brigade and on to the return process itself. This experience gave the community confidence and shaped their strategies in navigating the politically fraught, and at times violent, landscape of refugee return in Bosnia. For many of them, return to Kozarac seemed to close the circle that began in 1992, and they hoped it would alleviate their feelings of dehumanisation and loss. But in reality, neither the struggle for return nor the physical rebuilding of the town could recreate the community and life they had before the war, nor overcome the challenges of contested return in a hostile environment. It would take another decade to accept the fact that, although the community was rebuilt, it remains a 'returnee community' that is separated from the wider municipality of Prijedor.

Reparation is no simple strategy for developing compromise and community after conflict.

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But the remarkable success of this return process under such difficult conditions can teach us a lot about how refugee repatriation can be improved, and how we can better understand the dynamics of reconstruction, reconciliation and social repair. In what follows, I will briefly reflect on the key points I have learnt from a decade or more of observation, looking in particular at two paradigms that coexist in all war-torn societies when we think about how to build a lasting peace: local (in this case, returnee-led) action and international intervention. I hope to illuminate some of the drawbacks of conventional approaches to addressing past violence and rebuilding social ties, but that is not to imply that local action alone is always the best solution. In fact, the two approaches are not mutually exclusive and good policy should be designed to maximise synergies between them. An important starting point for this, I would argue, to better understand the complex web of social processes that determine the outcome or degree of social repair, is to critically re-examine our conceptions of victimhood and reconciliation—terms that feature prominently in peace-building processes, but are often misunderstood. We need to understand the function of victimhood in the lives of affected groups, and especially how it impacts on social relationships. In my experience, so-called victims are much more critical of their own understanding of victimhood as a mindset, and its potential long-term negative consequences, and many recoil from both the term itself and its implications. As makers of their newly rebuilt community, returnees after violence may seem focused on the past, such as when they try to honour the memory of the dead, but they are equally likely to seek forward-looking socio-economic solutions for the next generation so they can look forward to a better future at home or abroad.

Headless Community

In 2008, a decade after return began, prominent members of the community began discussing the fact that they felt alienated by the local authority in Prijedor, and that sporadic violence and threats experienced in the early days of return had been replaced by less obvious institutional discrimination, illustrated by the fact that only a few non-Serbs

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held posts within the local government, and these were largely symbolic in nature. There was a sense that new strategies were needed that could bring together the diaspora and locals to come up with a plan. Lively discussions on kozarac.ba took place, out of which several initiatives arose. Most notably, *Kongres Kozarcana*, a one-time gathering of eminent individuals from exile and residents of Kozarac to discuss the priorities of the community, and also the founding of Kozarac's own political party, *Nova Gradjanska Inicijativa* (NGI-Kozarac). Both organisations were premised on the idea of better cooperation between the diaspora and locals in the next phase of communal development, and specifically to seek to reclaim the status of municipality for the town. Discussions revolved around how to channel diaspora spending in the town rather than being taxed by the local authority in Prijedor, and innovative measures were suggested such as each diaspora family being taxed (a symbolic sum of €5 was suggested) during the summer as a way of leaving something for the local community. However, besides NGI, none of these initiatives came to fruition, which led to some people questioning just how sustainable Kozarac was becoming.

What was missing at this point was the kind of leadership that the community relied upon during wartime and the early years of return. The Kozarac Generals of the 17th Brigade, Cuskic and Foric, now live in Sarajevo, while Sead Cirkin left politics a long time ago to run his farm. The new generation, who arrived as children in 1998–99, were mainly catering for diaspora tourism in the summer, working as waitresses, hairdressers, and sometimes hoping to meet a life partner and go abroad. Over the years, this second post-return generation grew weary of communal and political activities relating to the past, and were much more interested in economic activity that might give them a better future in the town. This highlighted the need for a different kind of leadership—one that was less focused on opposing local authority denial of the past or discrimination in the present, and more focused on creating a sustainable and independent future for the town, regardless of the political context. The rise of returnee entrepreneurs like Arifagic and Kahrimanovic, who I wrote about in Chap. 7, is one example of this phenomenon. By sticking to their principles and developing businesses that can compete internationally, observing the highest standards and using modern technology,

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they demonstrate a different kind of leadership by example that has the potential to build a future for Kozarac that is less dependent on the local political environment in which it finds itself.

Seeking Recognition

In my study, several returnees remarked how they expected their homecoming would impact on former neighbours and friends by confronting them with the reality of the crimes committed in 1992, and how they hoped this would eventually pierce the bubble of denial and lead to a normalisation of life and perhaps even accountability. However, they did not anticipate that the search for the missing and annual mass funerals would carry on for decades and yet, despite more and more mass graves being discovered over time, their Serb neighbours would remain reluctant to recognise their loss. The search for the missing and annual collective rituals of mourning and commemoration have become the backbone of the emerging community. In addition to the physical presence of returnees who engage in these activities every summer, the reach of social media such as kozarac.ba has enabled many more people in the diaspora to reconnect with their home town, friends and family, but also to contribute to communal activities and post-war reconstruction. For many, these new social networks became an important component in overcoming personal grief and trauma—especially when combined with loneliness and loss—and helped many re-establish a second home, if not always permanent residence, in Kozarac.

This process of emplacement through return has helped returnees relegate the events of 1992 to the past, and therefore helped overcome trauma, whereas some of those who have not retuned can remain stuck in 1992 despite moving on and making a new life abroad. Similarly, the self-reliance that characterised the Krajisnik soldiers' war experience helped not only to drive the return process, but also to change their experience and memory of the original events as their attempt to reverse ethnic cleansing elevated them beyond victimhood and gave them more control over their situation. Return, it seems, is also good for the physical health of returnees, as several survivors recalled to me during my study,

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explaining how stress-related skin conditions and anxieties associated with trauma disappeared when they went home. By contrast, those who participated in their expulsion and the wider community that largely ignored what happened to their former neighbours had a very different war experience. Firstly, they did not leave their homes; secondly, they assumed their former neighbours would never return, and so their social life took a different path where a collective amnesia was actively reinforced by the political establishment. As a result, we must acknowledge that the return process poses challenges to their own sense of self, home and purpose, as well as for the returnees. For the returnees, 'coming to terms with the past' meant, first of all, reclaiming home, finding and burying the dead and overcoming personal trauma through collective efforts to rebuild communal life. This process, in many ways, has run its course, however imperfect it might be, but it has not led to recognition or acknowledgement from the Serb community.

Repairing the Irreparable

The politics of reparations, as Torpey argues, 'tend to invoke a conception of people as weak and as permanently damaged by adversity' thus sacrificing a vision of the future by attending to the past (Torpey 2006: 166). Such an approach shifts attention away from other issues that are more practical and perhaps more important to people (Kirmayer et al. 2008; Herman 1992) and may require a locally attuned response (Hinton 2010).

Top-down approaches to justice that rely on the narratives of suffering as emotional tools to garner empathy and recognition of suffering as an end in itself are often highly problematic. In my study, I looked at one failed attempt at mediation between 'the victims and perpetrators', which used survivors' stories of suffering to elicit an empathetic response from the 'other side'. However, as Buruma (2014) notes, feelings can only be expressed and listened to; they cannot be debated or argued, and hence no mutual understanding is reached about the past—in fact they tend to increase polarisation by locking people into mutually opposing roles. These narratives also do not account for how people move on and

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develop, assuming those who were victimised stay in a kind of fixed state of victimhood irrespective of their own complex and contradictory feelings in relation to the same. Also, focusing on the experiential dimension of a survivor's memory deprives the story of political undertones, rendering it detached from historical context.

The long-term effects of telling the story on the victim is still relatively unexplored, but a number of scholars have begun to think critically about the ways in which victims' testimonies have been appropriated and commodified by scholars and the media (Colvin 2000; Ross 2003; Kleinman and Kleinman 1996; Kleinman 1997). Others are concerned about the dangers of trapping a survivor in a victimhood mentality that, in a long run, inhibits social reconstruction (Weinstein 2014: 174) and may also negatively affect personal health (Saunders 2008). I have encountered all the above, but in my experience, most victims are reluctant to share their personal stories, as they are well aware of the futility of doing so. And those that do it claim that their testimonies, given at the Hague Tribunal, were most effective, although they have had limited or no effect on their social repair (Hodzic 2010). The impact of encouraging the dissemination of stories of suffering has, at times, also resulted in tensions between the minority who speak out and those who would rather focus on other aspects of communal life that they feel are more fruitful in effecting change. This has led to misunderstandings and debates about who has legitimacy to speak on behalf of survivors and returnees among activist groups interested in *kultura sjecanja* (culture of memory).

While victims are rarely seen as agents on their own terms, those who exhibit resilience or behaviour that does not conform to the idea of a helpless victim can sometimes be criticised or treated with contempt (Dijk 2009: 4). The example of the Omarska memorial campaign in Chap. 5 demonstrates how survivors who do not conform to the helpless, grateful victim role can be excluded. If we are to improve the way international actors approach reconciliation initiatives, there are important lessons to be learnt from this that suggest a need to recognise the inherent self-reliance, agency and responsibility of their own future that returnees can exhibit, and first and foremost do nothing that could inhibit this, such as taking away responsibility for reconciliation or making returnees dependent on others. We need to re-evaluate the way we perceive

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victims, especially those who are ready and willing to return home and rebuild their lives, and understand they are far better at negotiating the complexity and contradictions of life in a hostile and precarious environment than we realise. The example of Kozarac shows that even where recognition and acknowledgement—often regarded as necessary precursors to reconciliation—do not exist, small everyday acts of compromise and accommodation of others are already creating reconciliation that is far more sustainable than set-piece mediation across the table between two mutually exclusive 'sides'. Reconciliation is an abstract and ambitious term with wide connotations, understandings and applications (Chapman 2009). A variety of types and levels of relationship are treated as reconciliatory processes. In transitional societies, particularly those that experienced mass atrocities, various social and political groups hold different understandings of what reconciliation entails (Hamber and Van der Merwe 1998). A socio-psychological approach emphasises attitudinal change of a larger group, achieved through communal dialogue that may help in emotional and cognitive realignment (Nadler et al. 2008; Bar-On 2007), while peace builders stress personal encounters as most significant in building relationships after conflict (Lederach 1997). Others claim the focus on truth finding and acknowledgement, as hitherto advocated by transitional justice mechanisms, may not be applicable in all cases (Weinstein 2014). As these mechanisms operate in societies where grievances are still fresh, perhaps it would be better to focus on socio-economic and political changes that may contribute to societal tolerance, accommodation of 'the other' and coexistence (Ackermann 1994).

Social Reconstruction

I dubbed the first phase of return as 'stones, homes and bones': resist the stone-throwing to establish a physical presence, start reoccupying or rebuilding homes, and then find, bury and commemorate the dead. The second phase was largely about memorialisation as part of the drive for public recognition of return and acknowledgement of past crimes and present discrimination. In my view, the third phase seems to be about securing the sustainability of the town in both the political and the

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economic realm. Those working in the political realm are still very much influenced by global-local encounters with NGOs, transitional justice activists and politicised members of the diaspora, while those working in the economic realm tend to be more locally embedded, focusing on 'fixing the past' through future-oriented goals. Both are important for social change in the long term, although they come at the challenge from different perspectives.

For people I got to know over the last decade, pragmatic steps such as creating jobs that enable new personal and social networks seem to have the greatest potential to improve the paralysed peace of Bosnian society. This, in turn, would create conditions in which interpersonal communication could lead to interpersonal trust that can potentially become intercommunal (Albeck et al. 2002). As Maoz (2011) has claimed, intergroup dialogue is necessary for breaking the psycho-cognitive barriers within the context of intractable conflict. I would argue that this can only be potentially effective if those belonging to victim and perpetrator sides inhabit the same physical and work spaces, and there is a societal or communal need for social transformation rather than the kind of performative, artificial reconciliation workshops that are so overused on reconciliation projects. For example, the director of Austronet, Enes Kahrimanovic told me how deeply he was affected by his visit to Tomasica, the largest mass grave in the region, that was discovered in 2013. Marked by this visit, in his meeting with Serb business partners, he later declared how thorough they had been in murdering his community members during the war, and made clear that he could never forgive them for that until they distanced themselves from those crimes. This combination of a willingness to continue sharing the same space and working together, but with a clear statement of what one expects in terms of acknowledgement of the past, is a form of compromise that I believe has a greater chance of influencing change than any number of set-piece political initiatives. By creating jobs and opportunities for all, not just for their own community, entrepreneurs such as Kahrimanovic and Arifagic are trying to tackle the war legacies and systemic corruption of Bosnian society, arguing for cooperation in the pursuit of public good.

The experience of war and the struggle for return fostered group affiliations and strong personal bonds (Pickering 2007) that were necessary at

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the time, but arguably what is needed now is many more 'weak ties' with others if the inhabitants of Kozarac are to reintegrate within the wider community, rather than remain 'an island in RS'. Several survivors and returnees I know have reconnected with former school friends from the 'other' side, initially out of curiosity about their life today, but once their former friends showed remorse and recognised the crimes of 1992, they have often moved on to begin attending events such as the annual visits to the former Omarska camp together.

As Brewer (2010) notes, compromise 'does not request forgetting but a conscious decision to transcend divided memory for the purpose of relative closeness'. There are a number of signs in the past few years of new forms of social connectedness that endeavour to open a public space for intercommunal dialogue regarding the recent past in the Serb entity. Most of these encounters were initiated in the Prijedor region, or have been inspired by activists from the area. In Prijedor, the returnee veterans' organisation *Izvor* has been supporting a multi-ethnic youth organisation, KVART, in their attempt to tackle wider issues of social injustice than just war crimes and denial. In turn, a small group of young Serbs have begun to change their own assumptions with regard to the war, inspired by this interaction. When I visited the KVART organisation in September 2015, a young Serb, Goran, spoke with me for over five hours and singled out Edin Ramulic from *Izvor* as the person who had most influenced his understanding about what happened to non-Serbs in Prijedor. I asked him if he remembers how in 2003, Ramulic and other activists from *Srcem do Mira* protested in Prijedor with posters that said 'Watch out for bones as you may step on them.' He said at that time, in his early twenties, he believed returnees were just 'making things up' and falsely claiming to be victims, which is indicative of the journey his own thinking has taken thanks to small-scale interactions with returnees.

There are many other examples of how the returnees are slowly changing minds in the region, such as one outspoken local Serb doctor who talks openly and online about her view that what happened in the Prijedor region was genocide, and how her people need to recognise this in order to heal. One young Serb from Omarska turned up at a memorial event dubbed white armband day, an annual event since 2012 where people walk through the centre of Prijedor recalling 31 May

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1992, when Serb nationalists ordered all non-Serbs to wear a white armband if they ventured out of their home. He told a journalist how his secondary school education, and his own family and official narratives had impacted on his own nationalist understanding of the war, but also how he discovered new ideas reading books and websites, and since 2009 has joined local activists who organise debates and discussions about the war (Ahmetasevic 2015). None of this would be possible if it were not for returnees reoccupying their former homes in Prijedor and Kozarac. Kozarac remains the largest returnee community in the region, and as Nusreta Sivac, a survivor of Omarska and former judge from Prijedor reminded me recently, Kozarac was a beacon of return in the wider community of Prijedor, and so when she felt unsafe in the city, she would call Emsuda at *Srcem do Mira* and sleep in Kozarac instead. In most of post-Dayton Bosnia, it makes no sense to talk about reconciliation because different ethnic groups live entirely separate lives, with their own media and even their own education systems and curricula. But in Kozarac and Prijedor, return has meant that coexistence has been re-established, however tenuous, and despite all its difficulties and challenges, this keeps alive the possibility of a shared future.

Refugee repatriation in itself is not sufficient to affect the social and political structures of a post-conflict society that remain vulnerable to violence and where communities are segregated, nor does return to original home grant the kind of equal citizenship that was once enjoyed. To have an impact, it requires proactive, concerted efforts by returnees to actively challenge the local political system and social mores. This, in turn, demands new approaches to refugee issues centred around education and jobs in order to empower people to claim responsibility for their future, rather than become dependent on international humanitarian intervention. Kozarac has succeeded in many ways due to self-reliance, the pre-war *gastarbeiter* culture and a strong emotional attachment to home. Crucially, Kozarac has also achieved a constructive and mutually supportive relationship between local returnees and diaspora networks around the world. As a result, we now know more about how online social networks can help bridge structural holes in the physical networks on a community whose leaders, intellectuals and key figures were subject to eliticide, which can help us build connected solutions that use the

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capacity of diaspora and local communities to create protective and supportive networks around the return process (see Chap. 6).

Lessons for Policy

There are a few general themes in this study that suggest some ideas for better policy in relation to refugee return.

The first and most important implication is the need to focus on better understanding of the dynamics and capacity of refugee groups, especially in relation to their agency and resilience, which are the most important resource for any return initiative, whether forced repatriation or voluntary return. By encouraging and supporting community leadership (as opposed to cultivating individual leaders) at every level, international agencies and governments can play more of a supporting role later in the process and the chances of success will increase. Social Network Analysis and ecosystem mapping are two relatively new approaches that can help, but they should be used alongside more traditional ethnographic research. The social networks that connect refugees with each other, with their former neighbours and with others in the diaspora are vital for supporting return.

Secondly, this understanding of refugee and returnee groups needs to be allied with a more sophisticated understanding of trauma and victimhood, which need not be seen as permanent, unchanging states of being, but rather responses to circumstances that can, at least in certain respects, change over time. As Torpey (2006: 166) reminds us, 'the goal should always be to inculcate an image of people as strong and resilient' in order to overcome the devastating effects of violence, rather than just to support the victim's moral authority. The latter usually leads to overlooking agency and disempowering people by focusing on individual suffering and a shared experience of pain as the most important component of historical reality and identity formation. Returnees to Kozarac realised that only as a strong community, rather than pleading victims, would they be able to influence their neighbours' understanding of the recent past, but also that compromise was the only way to negotiate day-to-day realities of local interaction. Naturally, some things cannot be fixed,

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but pragmatic people work around potential sticking points, driven by a desire for a better future for them and those who follow.

Thirdly, we should be more optimistic about the ability of people to achieve compromises and accommodation as part of getting on with their lives. Sometimes, external interventions pay too much attention to the polarised identities and positions of groups during and after conflict, and by designing policy around these differences, or assuming that there are indeed fixed 'sides' with clearly delineated views, these interventions can exacerbate the problem and create perverse incentives for people to continue playing the roles they believe are expected of them. Instead of demanding compromise from 'both sides', we might try instead to place people in a situation where compromise is the natural course of action as they work things out. Sharing the same workplace, the same social spaces and the same social settings will probably lead to more compromise and more low-level reconciliation than set-piece top-down initiatives based on bringing people to the table to talk.

Also, rather than seeing return as a single process, it might be possible to focus on different support and assistance at different stages of the journey. For example, during the pre-return phase, we could do more to keep communities connected in exile—to link refugees, locals and diaspora communities so that refugees can use the time in exile to develop a desire for return, plans and also skills and connections that can help them achieve it, as a counterpoint to the dependency that often accompanies the refugee experience. Technical and connectivity support might be helpful here, as well as encouraging and supporting refugees to discuss and plan for return within online communities. The role of the 17th Brigade in carrying the torch for return during the dark days of the war was crucial for Kozarac and it gave people hope as well as something to support. This might not always be the case in other stories of return, but we can still learn lessons from the way the Brigade inculcated a sense of purpose, hope and self-reliance that is so vital later on during the return process. Voluntary return is obviously preferable to forced repatriation, but we need to be realistic and accept that sometimes the latter is necessary; but that does not mean the process cannot be managed by learning lessons from the success of bottom-up, voluntary processes led by returnees themselves. And in such cases, starting with a more detailed

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understanding of the dynamics and capabilities of the refugee communities affected will help design better policy and support during the journey.

During the early phase of return, depending on the security situation, providing returnees with a sense of protection can be very important, but this should be responsive to needs rather than heavy-handed. Although UN agencies were taken by surprise by what they saw as spontaneous return to Kozarac, the UN-led implementation force IFOR actually did a reasonable job of providing security support once return began, partly because they did not have a plan and had to be responsive instead. In terms of reconstruction, aside from practical assistance in building homes and re-establishing key services such as schools and healthcare facilities, this is a time when returnees need to lead the process, partly for reasons of self-reliance but also so they cannot be mis-characterised as proxies of the foreign governments or organisations that might be assisting the process. International organisations also need to be able to operate in a more agile and locally attuned way during this phase, which does not come naturally for planning- and budget-led bureaucracies, but the fact is needs will change week by week and month by month during such a period of rapid change. This is also a key period where international governments and agencies can pay attention to legislative or governmental barriers to integration, and use their leverage (such as infrastructure funding) to clear a path for reintegration beyond the first phase of return.

Once return is fully underway, agencies and governments should take their lead from the returnees in terms of current needs and barriers to integration during the next phase, when returnees are focused on re-establishing themselves and their community in the wider society. In Kozarac, this phase was characterised by memorialisation and forcing the story of what happened there, and those who were killed, into the public realm in order to achieve acknowledgement and begin the process of recognition and reconciliation, but in other cases, the need for re-establishing a public presence and re-engaging with the local socio-political environment might be expressed differently. In this case, the absolute refusal of Serb authorities to acknowledge their crimes in any way was a problem for both communities and still holds back reconciliation (cf. Hodzic 2015). Making local authority support conditional upon upholding freedom of speech and freedom of association might

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help avoid this situation, but perhaps international agencies need to go further and actually fund and support initiatives such as the Omarska memorial project, as long as they are educational rather than sectarian or divisive, so that the local community can see that the international community supports the right of victims to represent what happened to them. But the most important guidance for agencies and governments during this difficult phase of return is to obey the physician's mantra: first do no harm (to returnee agency or their social networks). Instead of trying to force communities to come together to reconcile their differences, it is often better to simply support and protect returnees and encourage them to work it out for themselves. This also applies to how funders and international NGOs engage with emergent local NGOs. They can do a lot to support their work, but they should try to avoid pulling activists so closely towards their own orbit that they end up either leaving the country to pursue a career in this area or perhaps just change the focus of their own work to become compliant with NGO trends or buzzwords that unlock funding and opportunities to attend international conferences. In Kozarac, the work they were doing was brave, valuable and in some ways groundbreaking, regardless of the labels applied to it or the international recognition that came later.

As attention moves from re-establishing a community to ensuring its long-term sustainability, the needs of returnees will shift towards political and economic capacity building. The skills, capacity and funds they sometimes bring back from exile can be a boon for the local economy, and this is perhaps the most fruitful area of local cooperation that can lead to reconciliation. In the Prijedor region, whereas local Serbs remained pretty much in stasis since 1992, Bosniak refugees, by necessity due to their 'in-between' position (Hall and Kostić 2009; Jones 2011), had much wider life experiences, learnt languages and other skills within their host countries, and in many cases created successful careers or businesses. This can not only help them re-establish their communities, but also accelerate development in the region as a whole. In Kozarac, it soon became quite normal to have local Serbs working in the many bars and cafés that spring to life during the summer months, and then later we saw the emergence of innovative and ambitious businesses that have the potential to improve the lives of people around them, provide jobs for all communities and

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act as a beacon of modernisation for the whole region. The most practical policy recommendation to support this phase is perhaps to allocate a proportion of support money to an investment fund that can help small firms and social enterprises develop and grow quickly, on the basis that they are open to employing people from all communities in the region. In addition, there may also be a need for work on the governance and policy level locally to ensure that returnee businesses can operate freely and without corruption. When people work together for a common aim, mutual understanding and social repair is an almost inevitable result.

Having witnessed the resourcefulness of returnees to Kozarac over a decade or more, I am optimistic about the potential for returnees to have a positive effect on their home regions, even where return is contested and highly contentious. Learning the lessons from such case studies, I believe, can help us design better, more imaginative and more effective policy for similarly affected communities around the world.

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