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A Thorn in the Eye:

Bosnian Mixed-Ethnicity Families in a Polarized Land

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Anthropology

by

Hannah Keziah Conrad

2014

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

A Thorn in the Eye:
Bosnian Mixed-Ethnicity Families in a Polarized Land

by

Hannah Keziah Conrad

Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2014

Professor Douglas W. Hollan, Chair

This dissertation draws on extensive field experience in Sarajevo between 2002-2012 to provide an intimate account of how individuals from mixed families in Bosnia today manage their sense of self and their kin relationships in the face of pressures to align themselves with a single ethno-national category. Such families, which were associated with the socialist rhetoric of “brotherhood and unity” during the Yugoslav period, came under severe pressure during the war, as the populations of entire towns fled “ethnic cleansing” and sought safety in territories controlled by their own people. Mixed families and persons continue to represent “a thorn in the eye” that troubles nationalism, unsettling national categories and insistently recalling histories of interconnection that bind the peoples of the Balkans despite war and the ravages of communal hatred.

This work traces the repercussions of mixing, the challenging experiments with ethno-religious affiliation that face not only the marriage partners, but move through extended kin networks and profoundly influence the lives of children born into the family. Using audio and video recordings made over 12 months in 2011-2012 among 11 families in Sarajevo, the dissertation focuses on everyday family interactions—routines and conversations located in households—as a way of gaining insight into the micro-processes through which persons and identities are constituted as kin relations are enacted. It shows how particular metaphors of kinship are employed to naturalize nationalist xenophobia, and how mixed marriages challenge these claims. Emphasizing everyday ethical responses to violence, or the ways ordinary people participate in struggles to define and transform social reality, the dissertation underscores the importance—and the difficulties—of creating meaningful relationships with real individuals who represent “otherness,” recognizing them as multi-dimensional human beings rather than caricatures.

The dissertation of Hannah Keziah Conrad is approved.

Elinor Ochs

Jeffrey Prager

Christopher J. Throop

Yunxiang Yan

Douglas W. Hollan, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2014

Dedicated to Nada Bojanić

1942-2014

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Guide to pronunciation

c *ts* as in “**pats**”

č, ć *ch* as in “**match**”

dž, đ *j* as in “**judge**”

h *ch* as in “**loch**”

j *y* as in “**Yugoslavia**”

š *sh* as in “**sheep**”

ž *zh* as in “**measure**”

Transcription conventions

In this dissertation I have chosen to represent the speech of my interlocutors in several ways. Sometimes, I simply quote people's words in English, using an idiomatic, loose translation within the flow of text. At many other points, I reproduce a transcript of their words in the Bosnian language, and provide a gloss that strives to balance intelligibility in English with a bit more information about how the speaker delivered the words and how interactions unfolded in time (Ochs 1979, Duranti 1997). These transcripts vary in their level of granularity, but draw on conventions developed by conversation analysts for the representation of talk in social interaction (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974).

- . A period indicates falling intonation, not necessarily the end of a sentence.
- ? A question mark indicates rising intonation, not necessarily a question.
- , A comma indicates slightly rising, “continuing” intonation.
- ::: Colons indicate elongation of the preceding sound, proportional to the number of colons.
- A hyphen indicates that the speaker abruptly cut off what they were saying.
- hh This indicates aspiration, audible out-breathing. It often suggests laughter or sighing, and may occur in the middle of a word.
- word Underlining indicates a part of an utterance that is stressed in some way.
- WOrd Capitalization indicates that part of an utterance is markedly louder.
- ° ° Talk that occurs between degree signs is markedly softer.
- ↑ An utterance preceded by an upward-pointing arrow is of markedly higher pitch.

- (()) Text appearing within double parentheses is a description of behavior, gesture, gaze, or other aspects of the utterance difficult to reproduce in the transcript.
- (word) Text within single parentheses represents an inaudible or inarticulate utterance.
- (xx) Xx's within single parentheses represent a totally unintelligible utterance.
- ... An ellipsis represents a stretch of speech irrelevant to the transcript, which has been left out.
- = An equal sign indicates that the speaker went on with no pause, or that the next speaker began speaking without a discernable pause.
- [Left brackets, appearing in adjacent lines of transcript, indicate that two speakers began to overlap at that point
- (.) A dot in parentheses indicates a short pause, hearable but not necessarily measurable.
- (0.5) A number in parentheses indicates a longer pause, in this case about half a second.

I have adopted these conventions fairly idiosyncratically, using them only as needed to indicate salient features. Other choices I have made in the dissertation include the use of a different font, `Courier New`, to represent speech transcribed directly from my recordings. I also occasionally insert clarifying text or alternative translations within paired right and left brackets, as one ordinarily does in a passage of text quoted from another source.

Acknowledgments

I remember my first arrival in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in 2002, when I moved to Sarajevo to work in a local NGO. I knew, from books and film and news coverage, about the war and the dreadful violence of the 1990s. I knew something of the courage Sarajevans had shown during the long siege of their city. But I was unprepared for the generosity, warmth, and humor with which Bosnians lived their lives, and with which they received me among them. There is no way I can adequately thank the people who welcomed me then, nor those who opened their doors to me during my fieldwork in 2011-12, offering their family lives to scrutiny and speaking candidly about their own private thoughts, doubts, and ways of finding meaning and belonging. I am profoundly grateful for their participation, and have tried to show my deep affection and respect for them in these pages.

Ever since those early days, I have admired the priority given to family in Bosnian life, and I have been moved and humbled by the family relationships that I witnessed. I want to express my gratitude to the families in Bosnia who welcomed me and made me feel as if I were an honorary daughter, especially the families of Dževad and Lida Avdagić, Mehmed and Safija Kokorović, and Nada and Nenad Bojanić. Friar Ivo Marković and the Pontanima choir drew me into another form of family, a dynamic, often turbulent, and always richly meaningful community. My thanks go to Randy and Amela Puljek-Shank, Sandra Kasalović, Nataša Maksimović, Matt Harms, Daniel Janzen, Julianne Funk, Boris Mrkela, Sabaheta Abadžić, and Sabina Dervišefendić for companionship in Sarajevo and important insights into life and family relationships there.

I would never have written this dissertation without the guidance and support of my committee, and I thank Jason Throop, Elinor Ochs, Yunxiang Yan, Jeffrey Prager, and especially my chair, Doug Hollan. His unwavering belief that I could pull it off kept me going at times when I doubted in my own capacities, and his thoughtful questions and comments have challenged me, always reminding me of the complexity of human lives and the limits of anthropological theorizing. Sandro Duranti and Linda Garro deserve thanks, as well as members of the Mind, Medicine and Culture working group, the Discourse Lab, and the Culture, Power, and Social Change group, who all offered forums for discussion of my work at different points along the way. Crucial individuals who supported me through the writing process include the members of my writing group, Anna Corwin, Katja Antoine, and Ellen Sharp, and a larger circle of friends and colleagues, especially Jennifer Guzmán, Katie Hale, Rachel Flamenbaum, and Bonnie Richards. It has been a delight to have Merima Ključo in Los Angeles as occasional expert consultant and constant friend.

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Introduction

A thorn in the eye

Milka and Hamid have pulled out albums and boxes of old photographs. For over two hours they've been giving me an illustrated tour of their lives: their childhoods captured in black-and-white images of Sarajevo and its surroundings in the 60s and 70s, pictures of Milka participating in Yugoslav youth work rallies, pictures of Hamid's trips to Iraq in the 80s, when the company he worked for was engineering enormous tunnels. We've exclaimed over pictures of their son Emir and daughter Danijela as toddlers, searched out the one or two photos they were able to take during the period between 1992-1995 when Sarajevo was under siege. They've reminisced about family members, friends, and co-workers who are no longer living or who now live scattered across the world.

At last Milka asks me, "Have you ever seen photos from when Tito died?" She goes to get a heavy coffee-table book chronicling the death of this icon of Yugoslavia—the charismatic man who led the Partisans to victory over fascism in WWII, uniting the disparate peoples of Yugoslavia under the banner of "brotherhood and unity," establishing the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia as a leader of the Non-aligned Movement and a force to be reckoned with worldwide. "That was a statesman who was respected by his friends and his enemies," Milka tells me. "When he died, everybody cried. Everybody." Hamid describes how he watched soldiers at the barracks in Sarajevo falling to the ground, because they were so wholly overcome with grief at the news of Tito's death. They point out photos of people in Ljubljana, in Zagreb, in Belgrade and all across Yugoslavia, all of them gathering to commemorate Tito's death with tears. They show me pictures of Brezhnev and US vice president Mondale, the

opposing Cold War states both paying their respects at Tito's funeral along with many other world leaders.

For Milka and Hamid, Tito's death marked a turning point. After his death in May of 1980, things just weren't the same. "You could already start to feel the crisis," Milka says, an economic and political crisis that culminated in violent conflicts in the 1990s as Yugoslavia broke into several independent republics: Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, and eventually Kosovo.¹ The shocking violence of these conflicts, particularly in Bosnia, profoundly changed the ways ordinary people thought of themselves and their neighbors, bringing ethno-national identity into the foreground of their awareness. Milka reflects on the result of all these divisions for her own life in Bosnia:

Sad je došlo vrijeme
Now a time has come
kad ti moraš da se opredijeliš po naciji po vjeri
when you have to define yourself according to nationality, according to religion
i da se držiš toga nečeg svog
and you have to keep to whatever it is that is your own
nema miješanja nema druženja.
without mixing, without socializing.
Oni u Banjaluci su tamo svoji,
Those [people] in Banja Luka² are their own over there,
ovi svoji,
these [here in Sarajevo]³ are their own,
oni u Hercegovini svoji,
those in Herzegovina⁴ are their own,
a mi miješani smo trn u oku svima h:h:
but we mixed [people] are a thorn in the eye for everybody ((laughs softly))

¹ The dissolution of Yugoslavia was not complete by the end of the 1990s. Until 2006, Serbia and Montenegro together formed the Republic of Yugoslavia, but in 2006 Montenegro declared independence. Kosovo has also declared independence, in 2008, and is recognized as a state by a growing number of UN members.

² Banja Luka is the capital of the Serb administrative entity, Republika Srpska.

³ Sarajevo, though the capital city of the entire state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, has a predominantly Bosniak population.

⁴ The Herzegovina region is known as a center of Croat identity.

Milka is “mixed” by birth and by marriage. She is the daughter of a Serb father and a Croat mother who met in the aftermath of WWII. That was the time, Milka says, when the young people were sent throughout the land to build it up, but also to meet one another, to mix, to see how other people lived. Milka herself eventually married Hamid, a Bosniak man. But the landscape has changed since their marriage in 1985. Mentioning each of Bosnia’s three “constituent nations” indirectly, by referring to locations that serve as centers of power for them, Milka argues that each group tries to be self-contained, sealed off in its own territory with everything that belongs to it, simultaneously possessive and exclusive. Milka and others like her—people in mixed families, people who refuse to take on a single ethnic identity—are an unwelcome irritant, a thorn in the eye. Like Tito himself, they are icons of the Yugoslav period, alternately reviled and yearned after as a remnant of the utopian idealism of that time.

Milka’s comment about mixed families suggests how contests over the nation and political organization—arguments about autonomy and interdependence, solidarity and security, belonging and exclusion—frequently take place in the idiom of kinship or reproduction (cf. Borneman 1992, 2001; Gal and Kligman 2000; Faubion 2001; Albanese 2006). Public rhetoric about the three dominant “constituent nations” in Bosnia tends to represent Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks as distinct lineages, genetic pools whose purity can be easily sullied, each vulnerable to the encroachment of the others. For this reason, the phenomenon of mixed marriage carries heavy ideological baggage. Partners in a mixed marriage are popularly imagined as traitors who have turned their backs on their own people and doomed their children to a life of existential uncertainty, or as courageous idealists who believe in the power of love to overcome all obstacles, even deep enmity.

From time to time the topic of mixed marriage emerges in public forums such as TV shows or news articles, functioning as a barometer of national unity or division. Talk shows convene religious leaders, angry parents, mixed couples, and their offspring to debate whether mixed marriage is a good or a bad thing (OBN 2012). TV reporters poll passersby on the streets at random, asking, “Do you believe that mixed marriages can succeed? Yes or no?” Public interest articles report on the tragic story of the “Romeo and Juliet of Sarajevo” who fell in love during the war and were killed trying to escape Sarajevo (Džaferović 2013), or the plight of mixed couples in rural areas who currently live in abject poverty and require donations of household goods from readers (Stipović 2013, Salimović 2012). Op-eds decry the fallen status of mixed marriage in today’s intolerant Bosnia (Topić 2012), or argue that these marriages represented a “fascist plot” of the communist leadership to forcibly assimilate Yugoslavia’s peoples (Pejaković 2012).⁵ In all of these forms, discussion of mixed marriage has little to do with the actual experiences of real families, but allows people to formulate their own positions about the nature of the society they live in or the way things ought to be instead.

Scholars, too, tend to think about mixed marriage in terms of its structural significance or symbolic meaning. Social scientists generally agree that rates of exogamy are an indicator of tolerance or social cohesion in multi-ethnic societies, and that mixed marriages may also be a driver of integration or reconciliation (Botev 1994, Borneman 2002, Monden and Smits 2005, Smits 2010). Burić (2012) summarizes literature on mixed marriage in the former Yugoslavia

⁵ Interestingly, mixed marriage does not seem to be a theme that has been taken up in film. I am aware of only two films that address marriage or romance across ethnic lines, and both are bleak portrayals that highlight the explosive potential of mixed relationships:

Halima’s Path (2012) involves a Muslim woman who elopes with a Serb neighbor, and eventually moves with him to Serb territory. Although she seems to hide her identity, others in the community give her husband grief for having a Muslim wife. We learn that he committed atrocities against Muslims; he descends into alcoholism and eventually kills himself. His wife then moves back to her home community with her two daughters.

Angelina Jolie’s film, *In the Land of Blood and Honey* (2011), opens as the main characters, a Muslim woman and a Serb man, are going on their first date. As the film progresses, the woman ends up in a rape camp where the man turns out to be an officer. He makes her his concubine.

and shows how writers trying to account for the war in Bosnia have used claims about mixed marriage to substantiate their views about the nature of life before the war and on the nature of the war itself. He juxtaposes two camps, one whose main goal was to counter the dominant assumption in the mainstream Western media that the Bosnian war was the natural or inevitable result of pre-existing oppositional identities that clearly distinguish Serb from Croat from Bosniak, “the culmination of ancient ethnic hatreds” (Burić 2012:4). These writers, including Donia and Fine (1995) and Malcolm (1994), cite high levels of pre-war urban interethnic marriage (30-40%) as evidence that Bosnia had been a place of tolerant coexistence. Burić notes that “the overall effect of these studies was the impression that the wars in Yugoslavia were a tragic anomaly in that they did not reflect any popular ethnic hatreds” (2012:4). On the other hand, demographers such as Botev (1994) or Smits (2010), who carefully analyze Yugoslav census data over time, show that rates of mixed marriage in Bosnia as a whole were much lower (around 11%). They argue that these low rates of intermarriage indexed relatively great social divisions and were a harbinger of Yugoslavia’s dissolution.

Of course, there is nothing automatically wrong with using an issue like mixed marriage as a way to highlight salient social concerns and set up one’s own argument. Brubaker (2002) argues that the animated struggles over how to interpret the Yugoslav wars are themselves “integral and consequential parts of the conflicts” (Brubaker 2002:174) that situate these violent, localized conflicts within larger-scale attempts to work out moral consensus in a rapidly changing, globalizing world: Where do we find solidarity and security? How do we deal with difference? How do we define difference in the first place—where do we draw lines of inclusion and exclusion? Choosing to write about mixed families, I certainly participate in these debates myself. Let me lay my cards on the table: I regard nationalism, in the form it has taken in the

Balkans, as a dangerous and harmful ideology, a fundamentalist response to the uncertainty of human existence and the frailty of our human capacity to know and control events. An anthropologist by training and by personal inclination, I recognize that real, intimate engagement in the lifeworld of the other is demanding, “a kind of ‘limit-experience’ in which one’s identity and sanity are risked” (Jackson 2009:241), but I am convinced that such engagement is both necessary and valuable. I support “mixing” in many forms, not just marriage—but I am intrigued by the way formal ties of kinship often foreground dilemmas of identification, affiliation, and relationship with the other. These are dilemmas that confront not only partners in a mixed marriage, but also members of their families who did not choose the alliance, demanding some sort of morally-weighted response.

I find that the debates about mixing and its meaning for society that I outlined above are often not very illuminating, generally because they are not very well fleshed out. Real people in all of their complexity and inconsistency tend to disappear, replaced by caricatures, even numbers. In one rendition, these flattened figures seem to be defined wholly and solely by their “ethnic identity” or their supposed lack of a clearly-defined identity. Arguments fall back on an essentialist view of identity, taking for granted that ethnicity and nationhood are primordial “things” that exist in the world, fundamentally stable, clearly bounded groups into which people are simply born, and within which everyone is more or less interchangeable. Demographically-oriented work, in particular, depends on the census categories that it investigates, assuming that each person can be unproblematically sorted into a single category, and often excluding from analysis those that do not.⁶ This is, ultimately, the view of the world that nationalism advocates:

⁶ Botev, indeed, excludes people who called themselves “Yugoslav” in the census because he says this category was shifting and indeterminate. He also notes an example brought to his attention by the anthropologist Joel Halpern, of a set of 5 brothers in Macedonia, of whom 2 considered themselves ethnically Macedonian while 2 said they were

that identities are natural, enduring, one-dimensional; that everybody has one and only one essential self; that people and territories can or should be “pure” and homogeneous.⁷ Brubaker and his colleagues note that it is difficult to write about ethnicity and conflict in postcommunist Eastern Europe without being drawn into essentialist, nationalist modes of thought. This is sometimes because authors align themselves with particular politicized positions, but more often because it is easy to “remain nationalist...in methodological orientation and analytical language, uncritically taking nations and ethnic groups as basic frames of reference and units of analysis” (Brubaker et al. 2006:24). This unconsciously nationalist, essentialist orientation is widespread even among those who oppose the current state of xenophobic politics and wish to redress wrongs (Jansen 2005, Helms 2013).

Again, real people are rendered one-dimensional when they are portrayed as if they *are* intrinsically (anti-)nationalist or (in)tolerant in all of their actions, all of the time. Mixed marriages do not necessarily contain any element of overt protest against nationalist politics, nor must they represent self-aware statements about the need for better integration on a societal level. Moreover, people in mixed-ethnicity families have no monopoly on tolerance or commitment to reconciliation; many other actors can and do contribute to these processes. Claims about the nature or significance of mixed families rarely allow for human ambivalence, inconsistency, or the idiosyncracies of individual histories, nor do they provide insight into questions of *when, why, how, or to what extent* people are able to sustain subjectivities and relationships at odds with the current nationalist climate.

Bulgarian, and the fifth alternated between calling himself Serb or Yugoslav. Botev considers this sort of fluidity to be a problem for his data set but says the net effect is “not significant” (Botev 1994:467-468).

⁷ See Jansen (2005) for further critique.

Certainly it is difficult to remain alert to all of the bewildering complexity of human experience, a complexity that always overwhelms our capacity to theorize, understand, or put into words. But recent work in psychological anthropology suggests that theories of culture and society need to be—and *can* be—grounded in more complex understandings of the human subject (cf. Hollan 2000, Ortner 2005, Biehl et al. 2007, Linger 2007, Parish 2008), by prioritizing first-person perspectives rather than categories (Desjarlais and Throop 2011, Mattingly 2012) and by paying more careful attention to the unfolding *processes* through which selves and social reality are intersubjectively constructed (Carrithers 2008, Ochs 2012, Hollan 2014).

As an effort of “person-centered” ethnography (Hollan 2001, 2012), this project represents a type of qualitative research in stark contrast to much of the top-down, experience-distant research in the region (cf. Jansen 2005, Bougarel et al. 2007). It also contrasts with work in cultural studies that focuses on the interpretation of public discourse and assumes that culture can be read as text, and is read the same way by everybody (cf. Linger 2007). My fieldwork combined elements of phenomenological and psychoanalytic approaches, emphasizing lengthy, repeated engagement with families and individuals and exploring their lifeworlds, the things they attend to most, and the ways that they create meaning for themselves. My goal has been to capture something of the excess of everyday lives, recognizing that I have access only to fragments of stories or scenes that I stumbled into, but trying to trace experiments with subjectivity, “intimate aspirations... negotiated outside the realm of publicity” (Das 2010), or the ways self and relationship are shaped by being “mixed” in a society and time when mixing is highly-charged.

Families, Selves, and the Ethics of Everyday Life

Family is a central notion in this dissertation. I attend to the ways kinship itself is imagined and given form, the ways relatedness is constituted through ritual, custom, daily practice, and bureaucratic record-keeping. I also focus on everyday family interactions—routines and conversations located in households—as a way of gaining insight into the micro-processes through which persons and identities are constituted, and contested, as kin relations are enacted.

Anthropology, of course, has long been centrally concerned with kinship and with the diverse structures and systems of categorization that human societies use to organize relatedness and reproduction. Earlier fascination with the ideal structures of descent or alliance in “primitive” or stateless societies (Radcliffe-Brown 1952, Levi-Strauss 1969 [1949]) have given way to closer examinations of what kinship *does* and how it is lived as a cultural phenomenon, even in modern, rationalized states. Lambek (2013) develops a particularly helpful theory of kinship as social practice. He argues that “kinship...is (re)produced in explicitly performative (illocutionary) acts that identify, name, introduce, acknowledge, relate, unite, separate, bless, bestow property, and so on” (Lambek 2013:247). These acts are very often regulated by state or religious structures and they may be highly formalized—as when a couple marries or divorces, or a child is given a birth certificate. Yet they can also be informal acts that “occur less explicitly or elaborately in the course of everyday life and may be as simple and as common as addressing someone by a kin term” (Lambek 2013:247). These acts bring persons into relationship within a pre-existing order and establish ethical criteria by which to evaluate their behavior. Lambek notes that various modes of creating and disciplining kin relationships can, in turn, produce different types of persons, relationships, and forms of subjectivity; he traces

changes that have occurred in his fieldsite, the island of Mayotte, as the state has taken over regulation of kinship from religion.

In his study of kinship in East and West Berlin in the late 1980's, Borneman (1992) explores how the state institutionalizes ideologies and narratives of "the nation" through laws and rhetoric about family, marriage, citizenship, and gender. Like other scholars of nationalism, Borneman points out that nation-states authorize themselves by generating a sense of relatedness among their citizens (Anderson 1983, Handler 1988, cf. Linger 2007). He notes that West Germany held an official ideology of ascribed or innate identity in which Germans were imagined as sharing blood. Under this vision of national kinship, newcomers (like *Gastarbeitere*, or "guest-workers" from eastern and southern Europe) could never become Germans, whereas people who were *deutschstaemmig*, of German origin, had rights pertaining to citizens of Germany even if they were part of a population living in territories outside of Germany. Meanwhile, the East German state envisioned its people as equal and in brotherhood with all socialists—as long as somebody wanted to be German and upheld the socialist ideology, their "blood" didn't matter. East and West Germany constantly worked to differentiate themselves from one another throughout the forty-four years of their separation by creating policies on marriage, gender, reproductive rights, schooling, and religion that were guided by their stances on political and economic issues. Nevertheless, Borneman argues that each state can be understood only as part of a whole, a dual structure or moiety, and that their laws ultimately created similarities as well as differences between the citizens of the two Germanies.

Another set of literature I am strongly influenced by regards family as the primary site for the constitution of social identities and the model for other relationships in the world. While these works do not explicitly focus on ethnicity or nationness, they provide a good deal of insight

into how family members constitute themselves as mother/father, husband/wife, parent/child, brother/sister, benefactor/dependent, and so forth, as they perform these roles in unfolding interactions. Casual give-and-take sets patterns of interaction and creates expectations about who does what, in what way. These can be moments of socialization into overtly articulated attitudes about ethnicity, religion, hospitality, belonging or exclusion, and boundaries between self and other. They are also critical sites for the instantiation of less-explicit norms surrounding hierarchy, authority, love, restraint, conflict, or the expression of desires.

Elinor Ochs, for instance, has published studies that reveal the micro-processes of how children come to be socialized into appropriate language and bodily practices, as well as attitudes of responsibility, respect, or anxiety about the world beyond the home (Ochs and Schieffelin 1994, Ochs and Izquierdo 2009, Capps and Ochs 1995). In a study of how gender asymmetries are instantiated within families, Ochs and Taylor (1996) analyze video recordings of spontaneous conversations at middle-class American family dinner tables. They notice that, in these multi-party interactions, telling a narrative about one's actions or experience opens one to the scrutiny of others, sometimes in unpleasant ways. Throughout the data corpus, mothers and fathers both participate in setting up a hierarchy of authority within which the father is invited to problematise and pass judgment on narratives told about other family members. Ochs and Taylor argue that "family exchanges do not simply exemplify gender relations otherwise shaped by forces outside the family but, rather, are the primordial means for negotiating, maintaining, transforming, and socializing gender identities" (Ochs and Taylor 1995:100). In other words, children observe these interactions and learn over the course of time to expect and enact these repertoires of relationship, just as they learn about other cultural norms. But adults, too, shape and reinforce one another's participation in these routines.

Other writers, such as Jean Briggs (1998) and Margaret Trawick (1992), offer in-depth ethnographic portraits of family life and trace patterned interactions through time. Trawick investigates the ins and outs of love in the Tamil lifeworld, showing its distinctively cultural qualities both in terms of beliefs about love, and in the ways love is expressed between marriage partners, siblings, and other family members. Briggs analyzes a playful genre of interaction between Inuit adults and small children that she calls “dramas.” These dramas often start with a provocative question to the child: “‘Why don’t you kill your baby brother?’ ‘Why don’t you die so I can have your nice new shirt?’ ‘Your mother’s going to die—look, she’s cut her finger—do you want to come live with me?’” (Briggs 1998:5). Such questions and the related “plots” that Briggs follows generate strong emotional reactions in the children, and therefore, in Briggs’s analysis, function as powerful teaching tools as adults force children to consciously consider morally-charged dilemmas. While these dramas are not “about” ethnicity, they are centrally concerned with the constitution of distinctively Inuit subjectivity and with questions of belonging, exclusion, trust, and responsibility to the group. One of the central lessons that the three-year-old protagonist of the book learns is that while she is safe and secure, she must also maintain an appropriate wariness, politely concealing some of her desires, likes and dislikes because their expression can make her vulnerable in a world where small groups of people depend heavily on one another for emotional and physical survival (Briggs 1998:5,11).

Like Ochs, Briggs, and Trawick, Veena Das’s work concentrates on everyday life and relationship in family settings. She has written sensitively about children’s socialization into ways of life defined not only by cultural tradition but also class and episodes of violence (Das 1989, Das 2007). But Das’s work often presents these mundane scenes as sites of *contestation*, not just socialization. She highlights the subtle but often quite fierce struggles that go on within

the everyday as people seek to authorize particular versions of normality or reality. A woman named Manjit, for example, spends years in patient endurance of abuse by her husband and his mother, biding her time, “more of a stalker than a rebel” as she waits for moments she can seize to bring about her own ends (Das 2007:85). Das provides a brief description of an exchange between Manjit and her mother-in-law: the mother-in-law disparages Manjit, reminding her that “a woman eats the dung of the man.” “Mother,” Manjit replies with apparent innocence, “but we eat bread,” and she goes on to say that her mother-in-law was so angry that she did not speak to her for two days (Das 2007:82). Here, Das says, Manjit managed to employ language—the pronoun “we”—to distinguish herself from the mother-in-law and place herself in a community of women who eat bread and *not* dung.

While everyday life seems in some respects like a space of intimate knowledge and secure routine, these qualities emerge in Das’s work as illusory or at least extremely fragile, the product of constant re-working and contestation. The everyday seems to have a particularly unstable quality in the aftermath of violent crises, where norms have been upended and relationships radically called into question. Das and others have called for more attention to the everyday as a site of ethical contingency and ongoing action in which subjects are constantly engaged in “moral striving” (see for example Das 1998, 2010, 2012; Jackson 2007, 2009; Carrithers 2008; Lambek 2010; Han 2012; Mattingly 2012, 2014; Ochs 2012). These writers observe that human existence takes place in the midst of “uncertainty, suffering, injustice, incompleteness, inconsistency, the unsayable, the unforgivable, the irresolvable, and the limits of voice and reason” (Lambek 2010:4). This experience of limits and fragmentation is one that they argue characterizes human experience, especially in the aftermath of war, but possibly for all of us who live at this point in history (cf. Lear 2006, Hinton 2007). It is one that demands

investigation of how people “go on living in this very place of devastation” (Das 2007:6), maintaining hope against all hope and trust despite the ever-present possibility of skeptical doubt in human trustworthiness.

Fieldwork and methods

Field research took place between September 2011 and late August 2012, with funding from the National Science Foundation and the Fulbright IIE. During that time I lived in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, developing relationships and collecting data with 20 primary individuals from 11 different families (various other family members were present at times but not officially enrolled in the interview or videotaping portion of the research). This research is also based on an additional four years of residence in Sarajevo between 2002-2006, and, in the case of several participants, reflects relationships that have a time depth of ten years. It was enabled by the fluency in the Bosnian language that I developed during my time there through active study and habitual use of the language in a variety of colloquial and academic contexts, and also by my familiarity with the city of Sarajevo: my exploration of the city on foot and using public transport; investment in regular activities such as a choir, a mountaineering group, and a children’s shelter; encounters with friends and acquaintances outside the scope of the project itself; public interactions with passersby, shopkeepers, and service providers; and attention to events of political or cultural importance. This provides an invaluable contextual backdrop against which the families’ stories take on meaning.

This study combines elements of psychoanalytic and phenomenological approaches, emphasizing lengthy, repeated engagement with families and individuals and exploring their lifeworlds and the ways that they create meaning for themselves. It depends heavily on “person-

centered” ethnography (Levy and Hollan 1998, Hollan 2012). Person-centered ethnography involves repeated interactions with the same person over an extended period of time, including both participant observation and interviews during which the researcher encourages the interviewee to talk freely about a wide range of topics and intervenes as little as possible in the flow of the interviewee’s narrative associations. Person-centered interviewing builds on psychodynamic theories of the complex human subject, seeking to understand more than the surface content of the interviews by attending to underlying elements such as emotional disposition, narrative structure, and patterned repetitions. These elements may not be consciously controlled by or readily accessible to the interviewee, yet with close analysis, can reveal a great deal about her preoccupations, fears, and the tensions generated by internalized cultural ideals faced with the reality of a unique individual’s temperament, wishes, and history. This type of data, and the different ways that participants return to similar themes over the course of time, provide insight into individuals’ subjective, inner worlds, the themes that are most important in their lives, and the ways that they make meaning out of their own experiences through the process of narration itself (Ochs and Capps 2001, Strauss 2005). It illuminates how individuals internalize cultural models and struggle with (or against) norms; how they appropriate available symbols to articulate their own experience.

Research and analysis also incorporate linguistic anthropological tools suited for exploring emergence and processes through which social reality is intersubjectively constructed (Duranti 2012, Ochs 2012, Hollan 2014). Spontaneous interactions, not elicited in an experimental or artificial setting, reveal how people actually behave rather than how they believe they behave, or how they would like others to believe they behave. Audio and especially video recordings of these interactions provide unparalleled opportunities to look repeatedly at the same interaction

and analyze it in minute detail, examining not only the audible utterances of the participants, but also the communicative work carried out by participants' bodily positioning, expressions, and gestures (Duranti 1997, Keating and Egbert 2004). They are invaluable for documenting the relational, intersubjective construction of social roles and realities that happens in the most mundane of interactions between individuals (eg., Kulick and Schieffelin 2004).

Anthropology in urban areas presents challenges to an ethnographer who wants to be deeply embedded in the everyday lives and concerns of study participants (Ring 1996, Foster and Kemper 2010, Gmelch and Gmelch 2010). Families of mixed ethnicity do not form a bounded community nor even a loose network of social ties; they do not live in a single neighborhood, but are dispersed throughout the city. Some of the families I worked with knew one or two of the other families or individuals, but most did not socialize on a regular basis. For this reason, much of my contact with research subjects occurred in the context of formally-arranged social visits: meetings in cafes, visits to their homes, or other types of excursions to sights in and around Sarajevo. Much of my data correspondingly comes from interviews recorded as audio or video files. Some of these conversations happened one-on-one, but others included multiple family members at the same time. They generally lasted at least an hour in length, and often were considerably longer, as I simply left the recorder running while I was present. Interviews were in the Bosnian language except in a few cases, with individuals who had spent extensive time in the United States and preferred to use English or move between Bosnian and English.

Interviews take a different trajectory with each person, but I actively solicited conversation about the following themes over a series of 3-8 meetings: life histories, family genealogies, reflections on family photographs, attitudes on politics and nationalism, and discussion of important relationships within and beyond the family. Over several meetings, I could ask people

to reflect further or to give me more detail on issues that emerged as particularly important to them. The corpus of recorded material is over 75 hours. Interviews were supplemented and stimulated by a questionnaire with four components: 1) information on education, housing, and employment; 2) assessment of values using Schwartz's Portrait Values Questionnaire; 3) assessment of psychological health in the form of the Brief Symptom Index; and 4) a questionnaire on the individual's network of caring relationships. While I do not formally present aggregated results here, the questions often opened up interesting avenues of discussion.

Of the 11 families represented in this sample, three became "focal families" in the sense that multiple family members in the nuclear or extended family participated in the interview process (one of these families includes two households). These focal families provide a densely contextualized view of familial relationships and individuals' reflections about events and issues. Moreover, two families consented to video recording of their daily routine and interactions. Recording took place when family members were at home in the evenings or on weekends. Each case involves around 12 hours of footage gathered over three to five sessions.

Chapter outline

In chapter one, I show how nationalism authorizes itself as "real," natural, and unassailable through the imagery of kinship ("the national family"), and how mixed marriages unsettle these claims. All the families I worked with are constantly involved in a struggle over the "real," trying to legitimize themselves as "normal" or unremarkable families. I demonstrate that nationalist rhetoric in Bosnia focuses on abstract pedigree, patriarchal descent and (theoretically changeless) reproduction, building on anxiety about the impending death of the nation or its domination or even extermination by hostile others. I present three cases in which people in my

study also call on kinship metaphors in ways that seem initially similar to nationalist tropes. However, I show that they emphasize other dimensions of relatedness: emotionally important relationships, links to the maternal line, and processes of change and incorporation whereby families are enlarged and enriched.

The second chapter explores two stories of intra-familial conflict during the war, stories that indicate the way relationships "become mixed" experientially, and the dangerous way that ethnicized conflict can be layered onto existing conflicts in the family. This chapter develops the basic constructivist insight that ethnicity and nationhood, like other aspects of identity, are complex, ongoing *processes* of attention and identification that are embedded in particular circumstances and enacted in particular interactions and relationships (Barth 1994:12-13, Jenkins 2008:15, Brubaker et al. 2006:7-10 and 207-8). Following Das (2007), I argue that the solidity of everyday intimate relationships can never be "proven" but must be taken on trust, and ask what happens when this trust is undermined by skeptical doubt in the faithfulness of the other.

In the third chapter, I focus on a single couple's narratives about the history of their relationship, and about their experiences with crossing or disregarding boundaries. The story of a couple, Jaca and Dado, illustrates some of the ways ethnicity has become solidified after the war, and how this polarization continues to impact the lives of people in mixed families. In this chapter I discuss evidence of the fluidity and complexity of identification within particular local Bosnian contexts, both before and after the war. I look at change over time in the meaning of ethnic categories: the way certain types of violence were used strategically to re-shape and politicize people's relationship to ethnicity (Sorabji 1995, Kaldor 2004), and the ways ethnic categories have been institutionalized since the war, making it more difficult to act outside of

national frameworks. The chapter also explores what is involved in creating a new mixed family in spite of this polarization.

The fourth chapter returns to Jaca and Dado's story to show that mixing sometimes seems to take a back seat to other factors, especially the general hopelessness of life in a country that seems stuck in "transition". Here, I foreground issues of loss, aspiration, and lack of control that were a marked part of Jaca and Dado's life at this time, but that also crystallize common themes and anxieties that seem integral to Bosnian life. I present indicators of Bosnia's economic and political woes, describe the generalized overwhelming pessimism about the country's future, and try to show how this couple experiences that reality in the nitty-gritty of their own lives.

The fifth chapter demonstrates how mixed families can contain a lot of internal diversity and even conflict (in terms of attitudes toward religion, ethnicity, politics), but can resist the weight of the political and refrain from interpreting this diversity or these conflicts as "ethnic" in character. I focus on a festive meal that I filmed in one family's home, arguing that a lot of intersubjective work takes place to achieve the sense of an ordinary family evening. This is the counterpart to Chapter Two, in which I explore how conflict framed as "ethnic" can destroy a family—this chapter argues that family relationships can trump ethnic labels, and looks at how this happens in interaction.

I conclude with reflections on the ethics of kinship, family, relatedness: how the self is constituted in relationship, often in the ways one conceptualizes oneself as being related to another, or not related. The issue at stake is how to establish small spaces of commonality or shared ground or shared belonging in a context that demands clarity of self-definition and marks off "mixed" relationships as prone to failure. These are spaces that can perhaps be established through love, and they demand continual offerings of attention to the other, attention that goes

beyond “love” or may not be motivated by emotion or empathy, but possibly by feelings of responsibility, reciprocity, even the desire to take the moral high ground and heap burning coals on the other (as in the case of Vera, which I explore in Chapter Two). My fieldwork highlights the way that any family, any real, deep, complex human relationship, can (or maybe inevitably does) contain not only positive loving feelings of attraction but also some degree of resentment, frustration, jealousy, even hatred. In a sense, one of the major challenges of establishing a mixed family, or successfully maintaining these relationships, is allowing these feelings or qualities of relationship to be there, too—cultivating a bond that can withstand even this disagreeable aspect of relationship, accepting it as a natural part of relatedness, rather than allowing it to be read through the lens of ethnicity, allowing it to introduce skeptical doubt, or to constitute “proof” that the other is one’s enemy instead of one’s family member.

Chapter One

Nationalism, Kinship Ideologies, and Mixed Marriage

In a political cartoon from early February 1992, as Yugoslavia moved deeper and deeper into war,⁸ a man and a woman stand facing one another, yelling with open mouths, bulging eyes, and fingers pointed. The woman, standing on the left side of the picture, wears an apron with the Croat “checkerboard” flag. The man, on the right side, wears a large necktie emblazoned with the Serb coat of arms. Between them dangles their child, his arms pulled from their sockets by his parents’ strenuous tug of war. His shirt carries an emblem that is half Croat flag, half Serb coat of arms. He is looking straight out of the picture, and he is crying (Otaš 1992).

In this cartoon, Otaš illustrates the interpersonal costs of the conflicts unfolding in the Yugoslav republics, costs that he may have seen firsthand as a Serb from Belgrade married to a Croat woman (Jovanović 2000:260). But he also presents Yugoslavia as itself the result of a “mixed marriage” between Croatia and Serbia, the two most populous and powerful “constituent peoples” within the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The layout of the cartoon reflects the layout of a map, with Croatia in the west, Serbia to the east, and Bosnia caught between them. Imagining his country as a mixed family—and a troubled one, at that—Otaš succinctly captures the tension between solidarity and exclusion, between intimacy and difference, that lay at the heart of the Yugoslav project. Djokić and Ker-Lindsay argue that “Yugoslavia was more than a country—it was also an idea,” one that stood for utopian multinationalism or, alternatively, the

⁸ By this time, Slovenia and Croatia had already declared independence from Yugoslavia, and war in Croatia between the Croatian army, the Yugoslav National Army (JNA), and ethnic Serb forces within Croatia, had killed thousands of people, displaced hundreds of thousands, and destroyed infrastructure across much of Croatia. Bosnia was about to hold its referendum for independence at the end of the month.

suppression of diverse identities and the forceful containment of historic enemies within a single state (Djokić and Ker-Lindsay 2011:1). Are the South Slavs, the Slavic-language speakers of the Balkan peninsula, descendants of a common lineage with a shared experience of history in a turbulent frontier region between Europe and Asia? Are they a collection of distinctly bounded groups, bitter enemies whose very self-definition arises out of a history of opposition to the others? For the nationalist regimes that have come to power in many of the post-Yugoslav states (certainly in Bosnia), kinship provides a language and a performative domain that is both intuitively understandable and persuasive, making certain forms of relationship appear natural while others seem impossible or wrong. Nationalism foregrounds particular ideologies of gender relations, sexuality, reproduction, and affiliation; it authorizes itself by calling on these ideologies and treating them as self-evident facts.

As anthropologists have long observed, kinship (like the closely-related concepts of gender and ethnicity) often appears “natural,” as if it straightforwardly “embod[ies] primordial ties” (Strathern 1992:11)—yet ways of thinking about and enacting family relationships vary widely and are thoroughly “cultural” (Morgan 1877, Schneider 1984, Strathern 1980, Yanagisako and Collier 1987). In this chapter I consider mixed marriage in Bosnia as producing a form of kinship that challenges dominant ideologies, presenting an aspect of family and relatedness that unsettles nationalist claims to represent reality. Mixed families and the ways they struggle to legitimize themselves make clear that nationalism is not, in fact, *given* but has to be actively maintained.

The chapter proceeds in two parts, first laying out the characteristics of kinship emphasized by nationalism, which form an environment hostile to mixing. I note that nationalists appeal to the logic of kinship to claim authentic legitimacy for themselves (cf.

Borneman 1992). But where kinship appears, it represents a very specific, constrained vision of the family: this is kinship in terms of lineage, legitimate descent, or “correct” reproduction. It has to do with the authentic inheritance of tradition and custom from one generation to the next. Individual uniqueness and change are de-emphasized or flattened out. There is a certain emotional resonance to this vision of family, but it is not one that has to do with particular relationships between real people. It is a deeply masculine, patriarchal vision of relatedness through the male line. As such, it is fraught not only with pride but with anxiety. As Veena Das observes with regard to Sikh nationalism in India, “The concern with establishing ‘pure ancestry’ with the accompanying doubts about illegitimacy and true paternity are *male* doubts” (Das 2007:112). Kinship becomes a narrow domain of descent and correct transmission of genetic and cultural material—a very patriarchal system governed and motivated by fears that a lineage/nation may die out completely or lose its dominance vis-a-vis others. According to this logic, mixing brings the risk of losing control over one’s children, losing one’s identity, or forgetting who one’s fathers were—all of which are framed as existential risks for the nation. Purity must be guarded; it is vulnerable and easily lost. This sets up a well-documented dynamic of gendered expectations and prohibitions, according to which women are vulnerable “guardians of the nation” and keepers of the hearth, whereas men are their protectors (Albanese 2006; Bracewell 1996; Cockburn 2004; Žarkov 2007; Helms 2008, 2013).

In the second half of the chapter I turn to data from my research to describe how people in actual mixed families experience this environment. These families face a particularly acute dilemma of authorizing themselves, resisting the idea that they are “others,” or traitors, people who do not belong, people who have no voice in civic or political life in their society. They struggle to authorize a reality in which they and their relationships are legitimate, even

unremarkable. Their counterclaims call on metaphors and images of kinship that initially can appear similar to the nationalists'. For example, in the three cases that I present in this chapter, a young couple together construct a vision of what it is to be Bosnian that depends on "authentic" use of Bosnian words acquired through transmission from parents; a man anchors his sense of his own identity in genetic research that reveals his ancestry; a woman talks about her strong sense of a personal *right* to the city of Jajce that comes from her family's long history of living there. Yet upon closer examination, each of these (self-consciously anti-nationalist) examples is indeed quite different from the nationalist discourse about kinship. They don't escape the language of "nations," pedigrees, or lineages, but they use these concepts in different ways. They introduce much greater complexity into the domain of kinship, drawing attention to maternal lines of inheritance, highlighting the intensity of emotion in attachments, and witnessing to the shifting dimensions of selves and relationships as they unfold in time. Thus, they highlight how members of a family appropriate heritage in unique ways, changing it, incorporating new individuals and new ways of thinking about oneself.

Subjectivities and relationships that emerge through mixed marriage in Bosnia today stake a claim to the real, to the possible.⁹ They represent a lived reality at odds with the hegemonic patriarchal, descent-based logic of nationalism, and one that can expose some of the workings through which nationalism situates itself as *really* real, the one and only reality within which people can live their lives in Bosnia at this time. I do not pretend that mixed families are equal partners in the argument I portray, nor that they are likely to overturn nationalist power. Instead, I follow Das (2007, Das and Das 2007), who points to the subtle but fierce struggles that go on within everyday life to authorize particular versions of reality or normality. I look for

⁹ The "real" I am talking about is the social world in all of its taken-for-granted self-evidence, the world of relations, roles, hierarchies, and meanings that we simultaneously submit to and participate in creating, reproducing it or transforming it as we do so.

ways that mixed families hold themselves together in the face of hostility, ways that people in these families find the sense of solidarity and belonging with others, ways that they adamantly hold themselves apart. In a cultural and political community that quite rigidly defines appropriate forms of relatedness, these families demonstrate that there are still slippages, alternatives, or multivalent aspects of the ideal that are *already resonant* to some extent within that context and that are available for creative, transformative use.

The nation as kin

Radovan Karadžić was the political leader and supreme commander of the Bosnian Serbs during the war. In photographs from the war years, he often appears together with Ratko Mladić, the military chief, sometimes in a suit, sometimes wearing combat fatigues. While Mladić is clean-cut and usually wearing a cap, Karadžić maintains a shaggy mane of thick hair. Both he and Mladić are currently on trial before the ICTY in The Hague for genocide, war crimes, and other atrocities.

During the early months of the war, in 1992, Karadžić appeared in a documentary exploring the cultural roots of Serb aggression (Pawlikowski 1992).¹⁰ In one brief clip, he takes the film crew to visit the house of Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, an iconic Serb figure of the 19th century¹¹ whose family home in southern Serbia has been reconstructed as a museum of sorts. Vuk Karadžić was a Serb philologist and language reformer who collected Serbian folk stories and songs and developed the Serbian cyrillic alphabet. He took part in the romantic nationalist movement that accompanied the rise of the nation-state in Europe, politicizing ethnic and

¹⁰ I became aware of the film because Petrović (2000) briefly mentions this episode.

¹¹ Vuk Karadžić was born in 1787 and died in 1864.

linguistic differences (cf. Brubaker et al. 2006:37). Today he is a sort of national father figure, a powerful symbol of the Serb nation.

Playing the role of benevolent tour guide or interpreter of family history, Radovan Karadžić stands in the dim room before an icon depicting St. Michael the Archangel. “This is Vuk Karadžić’s house,” he says in carefully enunciated English.¹² He lights a candle and places it on a platform in front of the icon, explaining that this is the Karadžić family’s patron saint:

This is St. Michael the Archangel,
patron saint of our family, family Karadžić.

He turns to the camera and explains:

The most famous Karadžić was Vuk Karadžić,
who is founder of modern Serbian culture.
He revived Serbian medieval culture which was buried down
in memory of people
during long centuries of Turkish occupation.
And that’s his portrait.

He gestures toward a portrait of Vuk Karadžić on another wall of the house, putting a finger on his cleft chin to indicate a feature that they share:

We have this thing in common.
My son has it also.

After this, he sits down on the bed that belonged to Vuk Karadžić and plays on the *gusle*, a traditional Serbian single-stringed instrument that accompanies epic poems about the heroism of the Serbs.¹³ The house is dim, lit only by the daylight filtering through two small windows.

Radovan Karadžić sings in a harsh, throaty voice, his eyes half-closed. The verse describes a band of brave Serb warriors, hiding out in a freezing cavern high in the mountains from which

¹² As part of his training to become a psychiatrist, Radovan Karadžić spent a year at Columbia University in the US.

¹³ Serbian epic poetry, and the *gusle*, is associated with nationalist retellings of events in the distant past, such as the famous battle between the Serbs and the Ottoman Turks at Kosovo Polje in 1389.

they would emerge to harry the Ottoman occupiers. The music is austere, repetitive, in a minor key.

In this segment of the film, Radovan Karadžić constructs himself as the heir of Vuk Karadžić, establishing his own authority to lead the Serbian people by virtue of his purported ties to this important figure. Each of the actions Radovan Karadžić performs in Vuk Karadžić's house dramatically indexes his kinship with Vuk Karadžić and his acceptance of everything Vuk Karadžić stands for. In just a couple of densely-packed minutes, Karadžić invokes his membership in the Karadžić family and demonstrates the family's allegiance to the Serb Orthodox church, the primary institution that represented Serbs during the period of Ottoman rule. He refers to a history of oppression and occupation by the Turks, and to a period of fierce resistance when the Serb chieftains plotted uprisings from mountain strongholds, but he also alludes to a deeper history of medieval Serbian flourishing. He takes on the part of a scholar—like Vuk—and *also* of an authentic Serb bard, a repository of living history. He claims literal and symbolic kinship with an iconic Romantic reformer who sought to re-invigorate the Serbian people and preserve the cultural treasure represented by their oral epics and their unique language. Finally—and I think this is more important than it seems at first glance—he establishes himself as a virile man who has his own son, to whom he has passed on certain recognizable family characteristics like his cleft chin.¹⁴ In short, Radovan Karadžić positions himself as a (male) descendent of past (male) heroes who is worthy to lead and represent the

¹⁴ Note that what he has passed on is a physical attribute, a result not of their relationship but simply of the biological fact of fatherhood.

Serbs, and he positions his military action against Bosnian Muslims within the tradition of scrappy Serb fighters fending off the Ottoman Empire.¹⁵

Whether or not there are any actual ties of kinship between Vuk Karadžić and himself,¹⁶ Radovan Karadžić takes advantage of their common last name—and a number of personal or cultural qualities—to assert an almost dynastic right to rule. Everything that he does self-consciously enacts Serbian identity and constitutes him as a Serb par excellence. His performance is effective because he is operating within an ethnonationalist paradigm, one that already leans on the imagery of kinship to distinguish between those who are part of the nation and those who are not. The idea that nationhood (ethnicity) is a natural result of shared ancestry, a single lineage, blood ties—kinship—is one of the most fundamental assumptions of ethnonationalist thought. In his pioneering work on ethnicity, Weber sees descent as a central feature, defining ethnic groups as “those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent” (Weber 1978:389). Of course, he points out that this belief may or may not be true, but he says, “it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists” (Weber 1978:389). In fact, beliefs about relatedness or distinction are based on circumstantial or political factors and—like all systems of kinship—organized according to a wide variety of cultural norms. Nevertheless, people’s commonsense intuitions about ethnicity are often strongly essentialist and tend to represent ethnic groups and similar categories as bounded genetic fields, as if they were biological species (Gil-White 2001). Parentage is the foremost criterion of inclusion in any ethnic category. National belonging presupposes birth into the group, shared

¹⁵ Of course, Karadžić was in charge of forces whose goal was to permanently remove Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats from what they considered Serb territory. As Pawlikowski’s film documents in chilling scenes, some of these forces were already arrayed in the mountains around Sarajevo, shelling the city and targeting civilians to accomplish this goal.

¹⁶ Petrović (2000) points out that although they do share the same last name, there is no known familial relationship between Radovan and Vuk Karadžić.

blood and genes, legitimate descent in an organized, regulated, patriarchal (often religious) system of reproduction.

Simić argues that folk ideologies of ethnic identity and enmity based on kinship or tribalism form a “pervasive ideological substratum” in the former Yugoslavia, one that predated European intellectual formulations of nationalism but also dovetailed neatly with them (Simić 2000:108). Simić and other anthropologists who researched family structures in the region during the 20th century documented strong traditions of patriarchal authority and patrilocality, as sons either brought their wives into their parents’ household or lived nearby and continued to participate in the life of the larger family (Erlich 1966, Hammel 1967, 1969, Lockwood 1975, Bringa 1995, Petrović et al. 1996, Simić 1999). They observe that conjugal relationships are secondary to the ties between parent and child, and marriages are organized around the upbringing of children and the maintenance of the household rather than around a romantic or even openly friendly relationship between the parents (Erlich 1966, Hammel 1967, Simić 1977). Members of a family regard themselves as a collective, pooling their resources and feeling a strong sense of responsibility to one another even when some members move far away to urban areas (Simić 1973, 1977). Simić contends that these characteristics add up to a folk nationalist belief system held by Serbs, Croats, and Muslims,¹⁷ according to which the world is divided into distinct moral fields guiding behavior toward kin and non-kin. Within the domain of the kin group, ethical behavior is required, while, on the other hand, “behavior toward those lying outside its boundaries...may be idiosyncratically benevolent or, inversely, purely exploitative, hostile, or cruel without the threat of the imposition of in-group sanctions” (Simić 2000:113). In his view, therefore, nationalism has a tenacious hold in the Balkans partly because it is in some

¹⁷ Although Serbs, Croats, and Muslims may share these beliefs, this does not imply the acceptance of intermarriage between the three ethno-religious groups. All of these ethnographic accounts note (or assume) that marriages are almost always endogamous along religious lines. See especially Lockwood 1984.

regard autochthonous and not “imposed” from without; it builds on a view of kinship that feels unquestionably “natural” to people from the region.

While Simić’s point is compelling, a close reading of the literature on regional kinship traditions—including even Simić’s own work—suggests that there are other (equally traditional) features of the kinship system that might resist being co-opted by nationalism, or run counter to it. For instance, traditions of fictive kinship include both ritual godparenthood (*kumstvo*) and “milk kinship,” ties formed through infant fostering and nursing (Hammel 1968, Parkes 2004). Lockwood (1972) documents the priority of alliances between affinal kin (*prijateljstvo*), as the parents of a married couple build a relationship of reciprocal responsibility that can last across generations. Meanwhile, Simić (1999) goes so far as to say that the Balkan kinship system could be called a “cryptomatriarchy” on the basis of the strong affective ties between mother and son that give women power. All of these practices complicate the boundary between kin and non-kin, creating alliances to people who are not bound by ties of blood; they may challenge the primacy of father-to-son lineages; and they have at least sometimes been used strategically to create inter-ethnic alliances or to stop conflict (see Parkes 2004:348).¹⁸ It is clear, then, that nationalism appropriates elements of the local ideology of kinship only selectively.

Reproductive anxieties

During the course of the 20th century, Yugoslavia went through the “demographic transition”—a decrease in birth and death rates associated with a higher standard of living, greater access to

¹⁸ The practice of godparenting (*kumstvo*) takes several different forms. Most of the families in my study associated *kumstvo* with baptism and did not use this practice to build fictive kin relationships because they avoided overt religious practice and did not baptise their children. There was one Serb man who was selected by his wife’s Muslim friends to be the *šišani kum* (“first haircut godfather”) of their child. On the other hand, most of the couples had established this sort of “sponsor” relationship, also termed *kumstvo*, with the friend who was the best man/maid of honor at their wedding. Such *kum* relationships often did cross ethnic and religious lines, and did create enduring relationships marked by high levels of reciprocal responsibility and care.

education and medical care, and shifting gender roles. As early as the 1930s, Ehrlich (1966) documented evidence of this shift, especially in parts of north-western Croatia in greatest contact with Western Europe. Couples were marrying later, having fewer children, and losing fewer of them; the traditional joint household, or *zadruga*, was dying out as the nuclear family became more important. These changes accelerated in communist Yugoslavia after World War II, under policies that emphasized women's rights, family planning, education, and urbanization. But as the country entered an economic and political crisis in the early 1980s, demographers sounded warnings about the ominously-named "*bela kuga*," or "white plague" of low fertility. Alarm at the center of power in Belgrade had to do especially with the unevenness of population growth rates—specifically, with the fact that fertility remained very high among Albanians in Kosovo, whereas among Serbs it was much lower, threatening to dip below replacement rates. Concerns that the Serb nation was under threat¹⁹—that it was likely to become a minority in its own territory, or, even worse, that it was faced with the prospect of "dying out" entirely—helped to stimulate Serbian nationalism and the rise of Milošević's regime (Bracewell 1996:26, Gal and Kligman 2000:27).

Anxiety over "the death of the nation" is evident not only among Serbs but also among Croats and Bosniaks. It resulted in pro-natalist movements seeking to curtail women's access to abortion and birth control and keep them out of the workforce in both Serbia and Croatia (Shiffman et al. 2002, Cockburn 2004, Žarkov 2007). It contextualizes the strategic use of rape, especially the systematic campaigns of rape and deliberate impregnation in the Bosnian war and their portrayal in media representations (Morokvašić-Müller 2004, Žarkov 2007). It has also

¹⁹ As many others have documented, this sense of threat was framed not only in terms of low birthrates but also in terms of historical events, including the "genocide" against Serbs by Croats during WWII, and of course the defeat and occupation of the Serb Empire by the Ottomans in the 1400s. These events were laminated onto current events of the 1990s, such as the conflict in Croatia in which Serbs were being expelled, or the rumored massacres of Serbs by Muslims in Bosnia, to generate a feeling of profound vulnerability.

amplified doubt among all three groups about mixed marriages, casting them as risky alliances that pose an existential threat to the nation.

During the war in Bosnia, for example, the issue of mixed marriage became one through which Muslim intellectuals positioned the Bosnian Muslims as a fully-fledged “Bosniak”²⁰ *nation* on par with the Serb and Croat nations,²¹ and distinguished themselves from the supporters of a secular, multi-ethnic Bosnia. Responding to a group of anti-nationalist intellectuals who declared themselves members of a “fourth nation”—that is, a secular Bosnian “nation” superceding the Serb, Croat, and Bosniak nations—leaders in the Islamic Community published a series of articles decrying mixed marriage and the positive attitudes toward mixing that had prevailed in communist Yugoslavia (collected in Hadžić 1996). In these writings, ethnic intermarriage is represented as a shameful and dangerous practice, a rejection of religious morality, tradition, and the family—but above all, one that puts the entire existence of Bosnian Muslims at risk, even participating in the campaign of genocide perpetrated against the Bosnian Muslims by outsiders.

The writers of these articles argue that every mixed marriage involving a Bosniak person (especially a woman) represents a loss to the Islamic Community because the children will inevitably be raised outside of the faith. They are infuriated by the notion that there might be a group of people who are non-aligned religiously and ethnically and who think of themselves primarily as citizens of Bosnia, calling them traitors and fascists. They claim that people entered into mixed marriages in droves during the Yugoslav period, as part of a Communist/Serbian

²⁰ Helms (2013) traces the evolution of this term, which was only introduced during the war to provide a term that would include those who considered themselves culturally Muslim but not religious.

²¹ As Helms (2008) points out, “it is significant that [the Islamic Community, an] official body with close ties to the governing party chose [the topic of mixed marriages] for its first postwar publication in a series on religious issues affecting the Muslim community” (Helms 2008:99). This booklet (Hadžić 1996) collected the articles I describe here.

campaign to weaken national identities and ultimately ensure the dominance of Serbs/Christians and the eradication of Bosnian Muslims. The imam and professor of sociology Mustafa Spahić, for example, says that mixed marriage was attractive to Bosnian Muslims in the way that open flames are attractive to moths, leading them to destroy themselves. People enter into mixed marriages, he says, because they focus on surface characteristics they find appealing, but once they are married they ultimately doom themselves and their children to a life of conflict or divorce because of the unbridgeable differences that they confront on an everyday basis. He writes that while the campaigns of mass rape that played such a prominent role in the war are terrible, “from the perspective of Islam, they are easier to bear and less painful than mixed marriages, the children and the kin relationships (*prijateljstvo*) that come out of them” (Spahić 1996:187). Like the other writers, he portrays the Bosniaks as an endangered people who face genocidal aggression, both overt and insidious, and who must resist by embracing traditional, religiously-guided family life.

These Muslim intellectuals have plenty of company among the religious leaders of the Christian communities—the Croat Catholics and Serb Orthodox who each worry about the extinction of their respective peoples and exhort good Catholic or Orthodox women to bear children on behalf of the nation (see especially Bracewell 1996 and Shiffman et al. 2002:636). But strikingly similar arguments and imagery appear in other contexts, such as an editorial by the actor and director Nikola Pejaković published in 2012 in the Banja Luka online magazine *Glas Srpske* (Serbian Voice). Like the writers in the Islamic Community’s publication, Pejaković (2012) argues that mixed marriage was a plot of the communist leaders of Yugoslavia, who tried to forcibly mix people together in a fascist “Nazi-program,” ignoring their real differences and time-honored traditions. He believes that this attempt to create a “Yugo-melting-pot” inevitably

created conflict in families and was ultimately responsible for the violent dissolution of the country. Much like Spahić, who talked of moths flying into open flames, Pejaković says that people entered into mixed marriages willy-nilly, “like flies with their heads cut off.” He laments the wholesale abandonment of tradition, religion, and community that he perceives as the heart of mixed marriage. Like a number of other Serb nationalists (cf. Perišić 2012:114) he worries about the risk of genetic degeneration and “negative selection.” He seems especially upset to think that mixed families may have destabilized traditional gender roles, that they were families “in which one doesn’t know who is the man and who is the woman,” families in which the mothers covertly introduced their children to their own religious tradition, while the father looked the other way, impotent. “The mother’s side was always stronger,” Pejaković insists, “and the children forgot that their fathers were Serbs.” He seems to believe that mixed marriage is entirely a phenomenon of the Yugoslav period, and mostly uses the past tense to refer to these families.²²

Ironically, demographic studies of mixed marriage indicate that the anxiety about the enormous number of mixed marriages that supposedly took place in Yugoslavia after World War II is misplaced.²³ Given the vagaries of demographic data-collection over time and across regimes, the subjective nature of judgments about ethnicity, and the politicization of mixed identities, it is difficult to estimate the current percentage of mixed marriages or even the trends over time. Bosnians, at least in urban areas, often do have the impression that mixed marriage

²² Pejaković also seemed completely taken by surprise when he received a generally negative reaction to his opinion piece, as if it did not occur to him that living people who were in mixed marriages or from mixed families would actually be alive and reading his article (see Pejaković 2012 “Posljednja kolumna”). His original article was removed from the website of *Glas Srpske* and Pejaković no longer writes for the magazine.

²³ Marriages were officiated by religious leaders up until 1946, when the state took jurisdiction over marriage and introduced a civil ceremony (Jancar-Webster 1990:163). See Burić 2012 for discussion of several cases of mixed marriage that took place prior to this time, causing the authorities considerable confusion as to appropriate protocol.

was extremely common under Yugoslavia. Some published sources contain high estimates: Noel Malcolm, for example, asserts that by the late 1980s 30% of marriages in Bosnian urban areas were mixed (2002:222), Donia and Fine say 30-40% of marriages in the larger cities were mixed (Donia and Fine 1994:6), and Markowitz calculates the proportion of mixed marriages in Sarajevo's city center as 20-25% even in the years after the war, between 1996-2003 (Markowitz 2007:61).

But others using more rigorous statistical analysis have argued that the number of such unions in Bosnia as a whole was never more than 10 or 11% (Botev 1994), a surprisingly small number relative to the heterogeneity of the population (Morokvašić-Müller 2004). In fact, while Bosnia has the reputation of being the Yugoslav republic with the highest rate of intermarriage, its rate seems to have been rather *low* especially compared to other regions such as, for example, the Vojvodina region of Serbia. Clearly, if people in the cities developed an "urban sensibility" (Hromadžić 2011:278) that accepted mixed marriage, people in rural areas maintained a high degree of endogamy. Ethnographers who documented life in rural areas through the late 1980s report very few cases of intermarriage (Lockwood 1984, Bringa 1995). Consensus also finds that, despite official rhetoric about "brotherhood and unity," Yugoslavia did not consistently support exogamy or hybrid identities with effective policy, and such identity categories were never embraced by significant proportions of the people (Botev 1994, Sekulić et al. 1994, Petrović et al. 1996, Morokvašić-Müller 2004, Smits 2010, Burić 2012).

Mixing

While Pejaković (2012) is certainly wrong in his assumption that mixed marriage is a thing of the past, it is also clear that Bosnia 20 years after the end of a bloody war of ethnic cleansing

remains an environment hostile to mixing. Based on her ethnographic observations in 2005-06 of Croat and Bosniak high-school students in the nominally integrated Mostar Gymnasium, Hromadžić reflects that common pre-war practices of mixing have taken on a “risky and subversive” tone, becoming practices that “[threaten] the cultural purity and segmental autonomy of the three main ethnic groups” (Hromadžić 2011:280). She finds that for these youth, even casual inter-ethnic socializing requires intentionality and maneuvering. Although she says that many of the students eagerly sought opportunities to mix, the interactions she portrays are fleeting, and seem to stay at the level of superficial flirtation and teasing without offering to deepen into more meaningful, complex human relationships. In the anecdote with which she opens her article, the students gathered together jokingly bring up the idea of mixed marriage:

One of them says: “Amna, would you ever marry a Croat?” She replies swiftly, her voice rising above the smoke: “Sure, but he would need to convert to Islam first.” Damjan says: “No problem, teach me some verses from the Koran.” I jump in: “Marijan said yesterday that he would marry a Muslim girl.” Marijan replies, promptly. “Sure, but only if she is infertile.” The whole group laughs. Amna and Marijan hug tenderly. (Hromadžić 2011:269)

This is a light-hearted interaction across ethnic lines, but it underscores the enormous barriers to the formation of real cross-cutting ties. Even as they actively try to build some kind of solidarity with one another, the youth show each other that they are self-consciously aware of their own ethnic identity, and of the ideologies against mixing that circulate among their elders. Their apparently quick uptake of the possibility of marrying somebody from a different group is just as quickly marked as a joke. Each joker ups the ante until mixed marriage appears utterly ridiculous, removed from the whole domain of family and reproduction.

People in the families that I worked with have already moved well beyond the *idea* of mixed marriage, of course. Most of the twelve families in my study came into being before the

war, and in some cases one or both spouses already came from a mixed background.²⁴ Nevertheless, each of them contends with the same climate of skeptical doubt that suggests mixed marriage is not a viable form of family, that partners in a mixed marriage must give up their own ethno-religious identity, and that children of such marriages cannot possess a grounded sense of self or durable ties to relatives. They push back against these doubts, insisting that they are *normal* families, often pointing out that all families are “mixed” in some respect or other. Many of them do not like to refer to themselves as mixed. They resent the label and all the assumptions it drags with it.

Being Bosnian: Jaca and Dado

Jasmina and Dalibor are migrants from smaller provincial towns who have rented an apartment in Sarajevo for the last six years. Dado came from the Serb entity to join Jaca while she finished her university degree; months after her graduation, Jaca is still unemployed and they live on the wages Dado earns working in a local pizza restaurant. They are one of the younger couples in my study, one of three couples who married after the war. Look at them from a distance, and they are an unlikely pair: a woman raised in a traditional Muslim *mahala*²⁵ in Tešanj, a man from the Serb town of Novi Grad in northern Bosnia. Closer in, they explain, first, that Jaca’s mother was Serb, and came from the area Dado grew up in. They also explain, emphatically, that they are both *Bosnian*, citizens of a Bosnian state that has a distinctive identity encompassing all of its ethno-national groups. This is a reality that they seek to authorize not just through their words but through pragmatic performative actions—believing that no boundaries divide them, they

²⁴ One woman had a Jewish mother and a Serb father who had married in the late 1930s. This was the earliest mixed marriage reported in my study.

²⁵ Neighborhood

have acted out their belief, forming a family *as if* it were true. Being Bosnian unites the two of them, making their relationship natural, not “mixed.”

Jaca and Dado both express frustrations with the Bosnian state and with life in Bosnia, but they nevertheless use the idea of Bosnia or *being Bosnian* as a resource for their relationship. They imagine what it is to be Bosnian as something broader and more inclusive than being Serb or Muslim—much like their former sense of being Yugoslav, but situated within a smaller cultural space that gave Bosnia its integrity even within Yugoslavia. Being Bosnian is not something they invented; indeed, they see Bosnianness as an obdurate quality, recognized by outsiders and resistant to personal attempts to deny it. “Wherever you go, you’re a Bosnian, both in Serbia and in Croatia,” Jaca points out. “Wherever you go,” Dado agrees, “they say ‘stupid Bosnian.’” He reminds me that there is a whole genre of jokes dealing with the exploits of the quintessential Bosnian dufus, Mujo, who is renowned for his simplicity. Dado and Jaca prefer to emphasize a common cultural life expressed in linguistic and artistic forms that, they argue, have long circulated among Muslims, Serbs, and Croats alike. They work to invest Bosnianness with qualities of home, love, and family, portraying it as an authentic heritage passed down from parents and grandparents.

Arguing that Bosnia contains a single, whole cultural tradition, Jaca and Dado are pushing back against determined nationalist attempts to parse out particular elements and associate them with a single group, removing them from common usage or accentuating differences. This process has been especially evident in terms of language, which has been a focal point of nationalist tension at least since the 1960s, starting with Croatian resistance against perceived Serbian domination. Scholars have worked hard to magnify existing differences in language variants, to authorize standardized forms of “their” Croatian, Serbian, or Bosnian

language, and to encourage “correct” use of language among their people (cf. Bugarski and Hawkesworth 2004, Alexander 2006). Music is another domain in which certain iconic elements are thought to express the essentialist spirit of the nation. Baker (2008), for example, analyzes negative reactions within Croatia to the country’s 2006 Eurovision contest entry, performed by the singer Severina. The song, “Moja štikla” [My Stiletto], contained elements of folkloric music and dance that brought to mind “spaces which had been marginalized as ‘eastern’ or ‘Balkan’ in comparison to privileged inland and coastal traditions,” and certainly in contrast to the European identity Croatia sought to project (Baker 2008:741). Meanwhile, Serbia’s musicians were playing up medieval and Byzantine associations “to produce a positively valorized version of the Balkans which overlooks the Turkish legacy” (Baker 2008:745). These maneuvers in the domains of both music and language do emphasize distinctions between Serbian and Croatian variants of Slavic culture, but above all they create an apparent dichotomy between Slavic/European and Turkish/“Eastern” components, distancing Serbs and Croats alike from the traditions inherited from the Ottoman Empire.

In contrast, Jaca and Dado go out of their way to undermine this dichotomy, characterizing Bosnia as a space of mixing and incorporation. Indeed, they depict a cultural field in which ethno-religious groups may have their own distinct traditions, but *everyone* bears traces of the Turkish or “eastern” presence. In the illustrations below, this topic arises because Dado uses a “*turcizam*,” a word marked as Turkish and associated with Muslim dialects. He quickly stops and substitutes another, more standard word, evidently assuming that I would not know what the first word meant. Yes, Jaca agrees, Keziah doesn’t know that word. (I did not.) She explains that a *turcizam* is an old-fashioned word that comes from Turkish.²⁶ Then she points

²⁶ Some of these distinctive words originate in Arabic or Persian, or are used in different forms across the Muslim world, but of course they came into local usage through the influence of the Ottoman empire.

out that the Bosnian language is full of such words, and that Dado uses these words because he is *Bosnian*—even though he happens to be a Bosnian Serb:

J: Pa ima puno turcizama u bosanskom. Bosanski-
Well, there are a lot of Turkish expressions in Bosnian. Bosnian-
Dado je srpski u svedjočanstvu-
Dado's Serbian (by confession/officially)-

D: A sve sam ja to ono. znam.
But all of that is like. I know it.
Moja mama je isto- sve te izraze zna
My mom also- she knows all those expressions

J: Pa Bosna.
Well (this is) Bosnia.

D: Moja mama koristi te izraze.
My mom uses those expressions.

Dado picks up on Jaca's argument right away, finishing the sentence that she began, explaining that though he is Serb, he is no stranger to vocabulary supposedly set aside as belonging to Bosniaks or Muslims. Notice that Dado claims an authentic right to use these words by associating them with a particularly warm, central attachment—his relationship with his mother. He says he knows these words, and his knowledge came from his mother, who not only knew them but *uses* them even today, even since the war. At other points in our conversations, I realize that Dado is really fond of his mother. He and Jaca say that he looks like his mom, he smiles like his mom, he even sniffs like his mom and holds his cigarette in his mouth the same way she does. Words that he associates with his mother, then, have a special “flavor,” the flavor of love and intimacy. This claim to long-term, continuous use of Turkish words in the context of his family constructs Dado as a person who already was Bosnian, who didn't just suddenly turn his back on Serbs when he married Jaca, but who has a longstanding sense of himself as a distinctively *Bosnian* Serb.

To reinforce her point, Jaca asks whether I know about *sevdalinka* music. *Sevdalinka*, she says, is a traditional musical form associated with Bosnian Muslims—but it does not belong

only to Muslims. “Sevdalinka is the cultural heritage of all Bosnia’s peoples,” she declares. “It is in Bosnia and it doesn’t belong only to Muslims; it is everybody’s.” She comes up with examples of famous performers of sevdalinka who were not Muslim but Catholic (Jozo Perava) or Orthodox (Ljubica and Spaso Berak). They were fantastic, she says. Like Dado, she mentions her mother as the person who transmitted this heritage, explaining that her mom loved sevdalinka and knew “every one” of these songs. Her mother—a Bosnian Serb—appreciated and sang these songs of love and longing as something that authentically belonged to her, something familiar and intimate, in just the same way that Dado’s mother uses words of Turkish origin.

Jaca and Dado’s account noticeably prioritizes Muslim or “eastern” cultural features as markers of authentic Bosnian identity. This mirrors the common assumption that the only people who really support Bosnia are Bosniak nationalists or Muslims—the only ones who cannot look elsewhere for their “homeland.” It may be that Dado is the one who needs to “prove” his Bosnianness; Jaca is already mixed, and thus is already unquestionably “Bosnian,” if the heart of being Bosnian is about incorporating both east and west. Jaca and Dado’s relationship demands more compromise or change from Dado than it does from Jaca. He is the one who left his home territory, the *Republika Srpska*, to enter the other Entity, one that his friends told him would be hostile to him.²⁷ Dado is the one who comes from a community that resists being Bosnian, and

²⁷ The state of Bosnia and Herzegovina is divided into two territorial “entities,” one called the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the other called *Republika Srpska*, glossed as the Serb Republic or sometimes the Republic of Srpska, but usually referred to in major English-speaking media outlets simply as *Republika Srpska* (or the RS). Sarajevo, the capital of the whole country, is also the capital of the Federation; Banja Luka is the capital of the RS, which generally tries to behave like an independent state and not part of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Serbs predominate in the RS, while Bosniaks comprise the majority in most of the Federation. The inter-entity boundary line (IEBL) basically follows the front lines at the end of the war and was set (with some revision) by the Dayton Agreement in 1995. As the Federation supposedly represents 51% of the total territory, while *Republika Srpska* represents 49%, Sarajevans commonly refer to the Federation as “the larger entity” and the RS as “the smaller entity.” See Chapter 3 for more about the administrative constitution of this boundary line and people’s experiences of crossing the boundary and being in the “wrong” place.

he is the one who makes the most strenuous explicit claims to be Bosnian because others assume he is Serb (and thus, a Serb nationalist). Still, the two of them work together, orienting to me as a foreigner, to construct an account in which they both are familiar with authentic “Bosnian” culture from the cradle, and in which that mutual familiarity is one of many elements that prove and reinforce their joint identity as a *Bosnian* couple. They argue that Bosnia is a unified cultural field, where Serb Orthodox, Croat Catholics, and Bosniak Muslims all share influences, and they both stake an authentic claim to this Bosnian culture through family ties. Thus, their relationship appears natural, rather than “mixed.”

Citizen of the world: Senad

Unlike Jaca and Dado, Senad finds it difficult to think of himself primarily as Bosnian. Senad grew up in Sarajevo, developing a strong sense of secular Yugoslav identity. He married a woman of mixed Serb and Croat background in the late 1980s and had a daughter with her. He was airlifted out of Sarajevo during the war because he was badly wounded and needed specialized surgery. He then spent years living as a refugee in Germany and eventually made his way to the US, where he became a naturalized citizen. After the failure of his second marriage, he had tried to return to Bosnia and reestablish himself there with his mother, his siblings’ families, and his daughter from his first marriage—but he was discouraged about the possibilities for change and was beginning to feel that he would waste his life if he stayed there. During the months I was meeting with him for interviews, he made the decision to leave Bosnia once again and go back to New York City. In our first interview, before he had come to the conclusion that he would leave Bosnia, he told me:

Hajd’ ja sam tu.
So okay, I am here.

Al' nikako ne mogu (u) sebi da izgradim taj osjećaj državnosti.

But I just can't find any way to build up (in/for) myself that feeling of statehood.

At the time, I understood him to be saying that he wasn't able to generate a feeling of patriotism toward the Bosnian state, or a sense of citizenship and belonging—and I think that is more or less accurate. But the word he uses, *državnost*, literally means “statehood.” Senad says he is having a hard time recognizing (*feeling*) Bosnia as a legitimate, sovereign state. In this, he is hardly alone. Bosnia's statehood is constantly challenged, especially by Serb and Croat nationalists. It often seems that the only supporters of a Bosnian state are Bosniak nationalists (Hayden 2007, Helms 2013). I suspect that this connection between Bosnian patriotism and Bosniak nationalism is an important factor that prevents Senad from freely claiming Bosnian identity. Senad is not Muslim and does not think of himself as Bosniak; in fact, he resists classifying himself at all.

In contrast to the nationalist prioritization of inherited identity, Senad brings up another form of inheritance—the inheritance of property, of a lifestyle, even of a deep-rooted sense of place. He tells me that histories of violence have repeatedly destroyed the lives of his family in such a way that he has not inherited anything from his forefathers. His paternal ancestors were scattered by violence that accompanied the withdrawal of the Ottoman Empire, fleeing their homes as refugees. His great-grandfather came to Sarajevo in the wake of war, and grew up in an orphanage. “You're starting from zero,” he says, “And you inherit nothing. You inherit nothing.” Senad contrasts his own family with families that live in peace over long periods of time:

I mean, if you compare, just for comparison, with somebody who lives in peace two, three hundred years and from grand-grandfather, from grandfather, from father, you have something to inherit,

you live in peace (.) and you feel good.
And after this war.
I was a victim by myself, everything was lost,
spent one year in hospital and then again, I'm starting
from zero
like my father, like my grand-grandfather and-
Just very sad, isn't it?

This sense of repeating a sad story, the same story that his father and grandfathers lived through, inheriting patterns of conflict rather than stability, enters into Senad's decision to leave Bosnia once again. "Who can convince you that things will never happen again?" he asks me.

For Senad, the solution to this dilemma would be for the peoples of the former Yugoslavia to begin seeing themselves as members of the European or world community, where the intricacies of Croat, Serb, or Bosniak background disappear into the woodwork and appear insignificant. He thinks this is the only way to avoid cycles of violence in the Balkans:

Na ovim prostorima to jedino tako može biti.
In this region that is the only way it can be.
Jedino se tako može dogoditi.
Only that way can it happen.

If the countries of the Balkans are effectively incorporated into the global community, he argues, then today's petty quarrels over autonomy will become meaningless: "Then, in the future, it won't be important to anyone anymore whether an area is called this or that. Then it will be erased from people's heads." Senad finds hope in processes of European integration and in other forms of globalization that reduce diversity. He informs me that seven languages disappear from the world every day, on average, and that this is a positive development, a movement toward universal understanding. He himself often refused to speak Bosnian in our interviews; he said he preferred English because English is the international language of understanding and tolerance. "I believe that a new world order is on the way," he told me. "I see this as some sort of transitional period."

Senad described how, living in New York, he had participated in a National Geographic study about genetic heritage, and had given a DNA sample to learn more about his ancestry. He discovered that he had Jewish ancestors on his mother's side of the family. Neither he nor his mother had previously had any inkling of this relationship, but the knowledge spurred him to find out more. He was able to trace her maiden name to a small town along the border of Poland and Ukraine, where most of the inhabitants were Jewish. He also identified a handful of people with that name who had died in the Jasenovac concentration camp in Croatia during WWII. "I did find six," he said, "six [of] my relatives from my mother's side who were killed." These revelations have strengthened Senad's conviction that divisions based on ethno-national belonging are arbitrary and deceptive. You might be brought up to think of yourself in one way, he points out, but you could just as well have been born elsewhere and taught something else. Indeed, he says, human beings are all one family:

Ako idemo nekoliko hiljada godina nazad,
If we go back a few thousand years,
pet-šest hiljada godina
five-six thousand years
onda sva naša različita porijekla vode samo ka jednom
mjestu
then all of our various backgrounds lead to just one place
i mi svi dolazimo sa jednoga mjesta
and we all come from that one place
i mi potičemo od iste grupe ljudi.
and we all originate from the same group of people.

Only by appreciating and accepting this fact, Senad argues, will people be able to reduce conflict in the world. He suggests that it may be necessary to expand both spatial and temporal horizons, transcending the present time and place, in order to open up the possibility of recognizing the commonalities between human beings—but also, perhaps, the possibility of really *being with* others, recognizing them as unique beings.

Recognized for myself: Azra

Azra has thought long and hard about who she is, who she wants to be. She has analyzed her life history in the context of her studies of psychology and conflict transformation in the United States; she has talked it through in years of therapy for depression and trauma. She makes acute observations about the nature of family, and about her own relationship to her family, how she both uses it to understand and legitimize herself, and also finds it a barrier that she has needed to move past. Even more than Senad, she has actually enlarged the domain of her own family, effectively *becoming* a world citizen and affirming that as an aspect of herself—but unlike Senad, she does not feel that this requires her to let go of her other identifications with place, country, ethnicity, or religion. She never mentions the abstract, universal humanity of other people, as Senad does, but focuses on the quality of the relationships she forms with locally-situated others. She struggles to authorize (even within herself) a way of enacting kinship that involves more autonomy for the individual, less hierarchy and obedience to authority, and fewer feelings of guilt—but without completely giving up the sense of closeness and mutual responsibility that she values.

The daughter of a Bosnian Muslim mother and a Croat father, Azra grew up in a secular home in a Muslim neighborhood, but later, to her own surprise, became attracted to Christianity. During the war, living in miserable displacement after her family was expelled from their hometown by Serb forces, Azra began working with a German Protestant relief organization. As the war ended, she married one of the other workers, a young American man. The two of them spent a number of years in the United States, where Azra came to know her husband's family and home community, and completed a BA and an MA. Then, in about 2002, they returned to live in Sarajevo, both of them working once more for an international development and

peacebuilding organization. Unlike many expats in Sarajevo, Azra's husband has become fluent in the Bosnian language and has even gained Bosnian citizenship.²⁸ They have one son whom they are bringing up bilingual. Though Azra's mother died a few years ago, she and her husband continue to support her father, who is now living alone in the family home in Jajce.

When I asked Azra to give me a sense of who she is, she began by saying that she is, above all, a person from the city of Jajce. "For us in Bosnia," she says, "where you come from, how deep your roots are—it's become less important, but it is still crucial for me." Azra claims deep roots in Jajce via her mother's family:

A: Moja porodica
My family
priča je takva da ide tri sto godina,
the story is that it goes (back) three hundred years,
znači smo živjeli u gradu, moji,
meaning that we lived in the city, my (family),
od moje mame preci.
the ancestors of my mother.
Tako da je baš . established što bi se reklo.
So that it is really . established, as one might say.

The city of Jajce is old; its fortress walls were built in the 1300s and the city was the seat of Bosnia's kings before their fall to the Ottoman Empire. As a child, Azra lived in an apartment building with her parents and her sister. Her mother's five brothers and two sisters all lived within a few minutes' walk, and her maternal grandparents had a house a few streets away, in the shadow of the fortress. She grew up in constant contact with her maternal kin, regarding all of her cousins as brothers and sisters. The family was nominally Muslim, though Azra's mother and most of her aunts and uncles did not actively practice religion. One of her uncles married a Serb Orthodox woman from Jajce; meanwhile, Azra's father was a Croat who had come to Jajce from Croatia. He had little contact with his own family, and Azra hardly knows her paternal

²⁸ Both Azra and her husband now hold dual citizenship in the US and in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

kin—but she hardly missed them, either, surrounded as she was by relatives. Azra felt a total and natural ownership of the whole town, knowing it from every angle, climbing the ancient fortress walls and belting out Beatles songs from above with her friends. She described how she spent her childhood playing in the streets with other children, going in and out of other people’s houses, being fed by any adult who happened to be at home. “My mother was most important, and then my father,” she said, “but I experienced my mom’s sisters, especially her youngest sister, as moms. And her brothers were like dads. I mean, we really were tightly, tightly connected.”

Azra’s story involves a series of painful disruptions that began with the war and her family’s flight from Jajce. She vividly portrays terror, flight, exhaustion, and extreme hunger. But the ghost that haunts her narrative is the family-that-was, the collective body that she belonged to, completely, without effort or thought. She wonders if it might have been an illusion in the first place. It’s not that her family has fallen apart—in fact, her aunts and uncles have gone back to where they were before the war; they haven’t quarreled. Still, she says, things have really changed. Family members have become distant from one another. Her mother, one aunt, and one uncle have died; the remaining uncles and aunts don’t seem to visit each other as they used to, even when they live “half a meter” from one another. “You can see the effects of the war, Keziah,” she tells me, “The effects of age, the effects of being worn out.”

Oni su se toliko okrenuli unutra prema sebi
They have turned inward toward themselves
a opet nisu okrenuti prema sebi.
but again they aren’t turned toward themselves.
Na jedan način su toliko izolovani i sami od sebe
In a way they are so isolated even from their own selves
a i ne primjete koliko su.
and they don’t even notice how much they are.

Along with this new sense of isolation has come a new experience of bitterness, unmet expectations, and resentment. Some of Azra's male cousins seem to have freed themselves from any sense of obligation to keep up relationships or responsibilities, whereas she has felt intolerable pressure placed on her because she is female. Finding her place in this new family, Azra says, has been a difficult and lengthy process, one that has involved making painful "cuts" and drawing on new perspectives on family relationships that she witnessed in the United States. She feels she has reached a kind of balance, a middle point between cold distance and smothering closeness, but it has not been easy.

Meanwhile, these family members, people she feels should know her better than anybody else, have proven unable to keep up with Azra's internal evolution or the shape of her family—meaning both the family she has formed with her husband, and also the nuclear family she grew up in. She realizes they are confused by the fact that she has become Christian (but not Catholic), while still claiming a sense of Muslim identity. They are also confused by her sister, who has "found herself in Islam," yet celebrates Christmas at Azra's house, pointing out that Jesus is an important prophet recognized not just in Christianity but in Islam. When Azra's mother died, one of the aunts arranged for a Muslim prayer ceremony to be held at her own house—assuming that Azra, her sister, and their father would not observe any proper religious ritual. In fact, Azra says, they have long practice in finding ways to create and participate in rituals capacious enough for all of them. She feels hurt to think that her relatives understand so little of her world:

Ja sam- m. mislila da me razumiju i da me znaju,
I th- thought that they understand me and that they know me,
međutim, ja ne znam uopšte više,
however, I don't know any more at all,
ne znam ni šta misle o meni
I don't even know what they think about me
niti koliko me znaju ustvari.

nor how much they actually know me.

Azra admits that she sometimes feels like it would be easier to let her ties to relatives go, to stop visiting and calling and holding onto responsibilities. At the same time, she realizes that grasping her trajectory asks a lot of her family, especially those who have a much more limited experience of the wider world. The reality Azra seeks to authorize, one in which individuals can contain multiple heritages and shift between seemingly-opposed positions, is not always comprehensible to them. Once, she says, the family was confused because she and her husband had decided to circumcise their son. Were they now Muslim, or making a statement related to religious belonging? Azra laughs as she tells me how she found herself awkwardly explaining to one of her uncles that her husband is also circumcised—though he is not Muslim—because Americans treat circumcision as a matter of hygiene.

Azra's marriage to an American, her experiences in the United States, and her job with an American organization surely go a long way toward easing the burdens of being "other" and "mixed." She gains some prestige through these connections, and is perceived as somewhat removed from the struggles between Bosnia's three peoples. She has recourse to a much wider intellectual and social sphere, and can selectively participate in relationships that validate her. But the misrecognition she experiences within her family seems to indicate the extent of the challenge she faces in making her life choices seem "natural" in the context of today's nationalist climate.

The complex course of descent

Azra, Senad, Jaca, and Dado participate in a sort of argument, a contest over the nature and the possibilities of life in Bosnia. Kinship metaphors are employed by nationalists to authorize their

own vision of reality in which strictly segregated, internally homogenous groups stand in hostile relation to one another. Radovan Karadžić cloaks himself in authority to lead the Bosnian Serbs by claiming kinship with the romantic nationalist and folklorist Vuk Karadžić; nationalist leaders in the Islamic, Catholic, and Orthodox communities build anxiety about the impending death of the nation, or the personal and collective dangers of mixed marriage. They insist that alterity is intrinsically menacing, a source of conflict at interpersonal and inter-group levels, and they claim that one group's success would mean loss, or even extermination, for the other(s). Clearly, kinship affords them a useful, indexical vocabulary that constructs a kind of solidarity and motivates certain types of behaviors on behalf of the nation. A nation predicated on kinship is one that seems natural, real, and hard to argue with. On the other hand, the same obsession with descent and purity simultaneously undermines the legitimacy of a unified Bosnian state if Bosnia's people are imagined as belonging to three separate nations.

The historian David Nirenberg notes that this sort of "exclusionary logic of lineage" (Nirenberg 2002:5) has deep roots in European thought, preceding the rise of nation-states in the 19th century. He focuses on Spain in the 14th and 15th centuries as a particularly important period during which upheaval and ambiguity led to the increased rigidification of boundaries between religious communities and the perception that Christians and Jews represented distinct lineages or "races" of people with enduring, opposed characteristics. He traces an increasing preoccupation with descent as the centerpiece of communal identity, arguing that among both Sephardic Jews and Christian Spaniards this was a response to the "crisis of classification" (Nirenberg 2002:10) that followed persecution and forced mass conversions of Jews in the Iberian peninsula. The upheaval, paradoxically, created a fundamental ambiguity, uncertainty about who was who, and what it meant to be "really" Christian or Jewish, as groups of *conversos*

(newly converted Christians) continued to live in their former neighborhoods or even with spouses who had not converted. Especially as the “new” Christians rose to positions of power that had not been open to them when they were Jews, “old” Christians increasingly looked for ways to document their authentic Christian heritage and restrict the *conversos* from full participation in Christian life. Jewish leaders, for their part, sought to reclaim the integrity of Jewish identity and insisted that the converts and their descendents still counted as Jewish (Nirenberg 2002:21).

Nirenberg finds a more or less simultaneous, dialogic recourse to the logic of lineage among both Christian and Jewish writers of the 15th century in Spain. In Bosnia, the Serbs, Croats, and the more newly-formed Bosniak nation have a similar mimetic relationship, each using much the same tools in an effort after purity, and each ultimately engaged in the same project of division and homogenization. Yet my goal in this chapter has been to trace the ways in which Bosnians in mixed families *also* take up discourses of kinship and inheritance, and to show that their use of this genre of argumentation is at once problematic (insofar as they *cannot* use it as neatly and unequivocally as the nationalists do) and fundamentally unsettling for the nationalist status quo.

The cases I presented here do not lend themselves to a neat summary of an anti-nationalist view of kinship, one that stands in opposition to the nationalist view (which *is* fairly well-defined). Instead, it seems more accurate to say that these families are finding their own path, bushwhacking their way, making sense of things as they can, using whatever tools they find to hand. Each of the cases in this chapter is unique or idiosyncratic, and their differences seem as important as their similarities. Jaca and Dado argue for the integrity of “Bosnia” as a cultural zone, and thus for the integrity of their relationship as two Bosnians, who may come from

different regions and backgrounds, but who share an underlying cultural orientation that encompasses those internal differences without needing to erase them. Senad finds it impossible to think of himself as “Bosnian,” and instead adopts a scientific, objective manner of speaking about history and identity, one that emphasizes the “facts” of descent and reproduction but insists on the ultimate kinship of all human beings. He discovers a link within his own DNA to previously unguessed-at Jewish relatives. Azra identifies a tension between the faithful reproduction of collective identity, and the embrace of change arising from individual autonomy. She wrestles with this dilemma in a very different way than nationalists do; she is not much worried about “authenticity,” but she wishes to hold onto aspects of collective identity that have to do with emotional warmth and closeness. She also puts her finger on the ambivalence of family relationships, the mixed and conflicting feelings of love, resentment, ownership and rejection, and how these were stirred up even more by all the tumultuous events of the war.

To look closely at these individuals’ lives and the ways they struggle against the nationalist logic of descent is to appreciate how this tight, neat logic of purity fails to accurately describe the complexity and contingency of the world. When they use the language of kinship and descent, they seem to echo Foucault’s and Nietzsche’s call for a new form of genealogy that truly “listens to history” (Foucault 1984:78):

Genealogy does not pretend to go back in time to restore an unbroken continuity...its duty is not to demonstrate that the past actively exists in the present, that it continues secretly to animate the present...Genealogy does not resemble the evolution of a species and does not map the destiny of a people. On the contrary, to follow the complex course of descent is to maintain passing events in their proper dispersion; it is to identify the accidents, the minute deviations—or conversely, the complete reversals—the errors...that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us... (Foucault 1984:81)

In their emphasis on affective ties in the family, on inheritance through the maternal line, on unexpected meetings and discoveries, on change for better and for worse, Jaca, Dado, Senad, and

Azra each disrupt the discourse of nationalist purity. They put the lie to any expectation that being Serb, Croat, or Bosniak could possibly mean having a singular, unchanging essence passed down through centuries. They take up the challenge of living together despite differences, even celebrating those differences. They do not always succeed, as I explore in chapter 2, but they look for other ways to understand why they have failed. Though their existence in Bosnia today is marginal, their dogged insistence on their own *normality*, their own legitimacy as an expression of an authentically Bosnian form of sociality, stakes an important claim to a reality that nationalism would deny.

Chapter Two

What is at Stake

Vera and I are in a coffee shop, each with a small pot of tea, a shallow teacup, a neat metal gadget for squeezing lemon into the tea. She listens as I explain that I'm in Bosnia for a year this time, investigating what it is like to be part of a mixed-ethnicity family. "Is that interesting?" she asks first. "You don't have that in America?" This reaction has been taking me off guard for months, and I stumble to explain that I am interested in the special significance of mixed marriage here because of the political context, even while it has much in common with other types of mixing in other places. Vera considers. "The question is," she says, "will you be able to tell the truth about these families?"

Vera begins to tell me about her own family. Like several others in my study, she is simultaneously the daughter of mixed parents, and in a mixed marriage herself. Her mother is Croat and her father (no longer living) was Serb; she describes her husband as Bosniak though not really Muslim. Vera grew up with one younger brother in a secular home in the 1950's and 60's and always thought of herself as Yugoslav. As a teenager she was baptized in the Catholic church, since religion was important to her mother. Her mother also objected when Vera chose a husband who was not from a Christian background. She made it clear that if Vera married a Muslim man, she was acting on her own behalf and making her own choice, going her own way, cutting herself off from the family. Vera's marriage has been successful, but she tells me at some length, with quiet intensity, about painful experiences with her brother and her mother.

She tells me how her brother came to her house during the war while her husband was away on the frontlines with the Bosnian Army, and began making derogatory comments about

Muslims and glorifying Serbs—proclaiming that he himself was a Serb. Vera was horrified to think that her husband might come along and hear him talking like this. She had never thought of her brother as a Serb, and had never heard him talking about being Serb. She called her mother to tell her what had happened and get sympathy from her, but to her utter shock her mother said, “Didn’t you ever realize it? You were brought up Croat and your brother Serb, one for each of the parents.” Vera says she was so distressed to hear her mother talking this way that she slammed her fist through a pane of glass and cut herself. “I almost went crazy,” she says. Vera keeps regular contact with her mother, who is increasingly dependent on Vera as she ages, but she remained estranged from her brother up until his death from cancer a few years ago. She has no contact with her brother’s wife and two children even though they still live in Sarajevo.

In this first meeting, Vera portrayed the truth of her own family and of mixed families in general as a tragic one, a story of loss and alienation. She said that mixed couples are often cut off from their extended families’ support, that they feel adrift and excluded. Her story expressed one facet of “the truth about these families,” suggesting that they can be convulsed by conflicts and ruptures along ethnic lines, that it is difficult to escape the politicization of identity and the insertion of conflict into private lives. I suspect that Vera asked whether I would be able to tell that truth largely because it isn’t a pretty truth; it seems incompatible with a sympathetic representation of mixed marriage. It is not far from the popular perception that mixed marriage spells trouble and should be avoided. Many of the other people from mixed families who talked to me resisted the idea that friction or broken ties in their family could have anything to do with ethnic divisions. They worked hard to convince me that their private relationships are free of ethnic consciousness, let alone animosity. To me, this vehement denial that ethnicity has any disruptive force in family dynamics sometimes felt artificial and strained, almost as one-

dimensional as the opposing claim that mixed families are automatically doomed. I welcomed Vera's story because it began to open the door to exploration of how a particular rupture played out in a particular family. Even better, Vera returned to this story in later conversations, modifying and reframing its significance as she gave me more context and presented multiple ways to understand her mother, her brother, other family members, and herself.

This chapter aims to explore what is at stake for mixed-ethnicity families in a highly polarized society, within the complexity of family dynamics. In other chapters I look at interactions unfolding in my presence, but here I focus on two introspective accounts told by two tellers, Vera and Senad, about past events: specifically, stories that describe the Event of war in the 1990s and its impact on mixed families. Vera's story involves estrangement from her brother; Senad's has to do with his divorce. To some extent these stories are unusual, not representative of everyday experience now, but they give some idea of why mixed marriage is thought of as a risky choice, why people hesitate to enter into mixed marriages, why mixed marriages and identities are marked in Bosnia now. Indeed, these stories provide insight into a central aspect of life in contemporary Bosnia in the aftermath of ethnic cleansing, where a poisonous lack of faith infects political and personal relationships, and into the mechanisms through which this mistrust comes about. These stories of pain and loss describe what is most at stake in the sense of being most at risk, of highest value—they show what can be lost, or indeed, what *has* been lost, what stands in need of recovery.

Unpacking these stories requires, I think, recognizing how the everyday, the lifeworld, is constituted through interaction, continuously emergent, and subject to contestation and doubt. One way this can be seen is in the process through which ethnicity enters into daily life, taking on force and reality in the ways people inhabit and employ it. In the Bosnian context today

ethnicity is a readily available framework, one that almost inevitably suggests itself as people try to interpret or justify behavior. But ethnicity is only one modality of social life, and in some ways the focus on ethnicity only disguises the extent to which these are also struggles over fundamental relationships, roles, and norms. In Vera's and Senad's stories, I see a struggle over the reality of ethnic categories and their relevance for organizing life, certainly—but there is more going on in the nitty-gritty of family relationships, much of which seems obscured rather than revealed by a focus on ethnicity alone. What is it to be a brother, a mother, a daughter, or a husband? What is the strength of these relationships, or the nature of love in the family? What is it to be a patriot? Which ties take precedence, when there is a conflict between them? The stories in this chapter show the tragic impact of nationalism on families as ethnicity gets mapped onto existing conflicts and generates doubt as to the trustworthiness of basic relationships and values.

Throughout the chapter, I draw on the notion of *doubt* as developed by Veena Das in her work on recovery from catastrophic violence in India (Das 1998, 2007). In the sense that she uses it, doubt is an attitude of disbelief, or skepticism, about other human beings. This attitude threatens the everyday because, as Das writes, “if I come to doubt such things as my relations to my parents, the fidelity of our love, or the loyalty of my children, these are doubts that put my world in jeopardy” (Das 2007:4). But the fact that these qualities of human relationships are not necessarily susceptible to “proof” or knowledge generates a central dilemma of social life. Das suggests that there are several dimensions of doubt that can emerge during violent events, including disillusionment about the world, the sudden revelation of one's own previously-unknown frailty or ignorance, and—paradoxically—a type of paranoid certainty about others. I trace this attitude of doubt as it infiltrates relationships in mixed families during the war.

Senad: (De)constructing ethnicity, or how a relationship *becomes* mixed

“I really have a hard time saying the words ‘mixed marriage,’” Senad comments wryly, breaking off in the middle of a narrative. “I always say that ‘mixed marriage’ is any marriage between a man and a woman.” He is describing to me how his first marriage ended in divorce, a deliberately negotiated divorce meant to keep his young daughter safe during the war.

Anticipating some of the dangers of the disintegration of Yugoslavia, he and his wife managed it so that their daughter would have two sets of papers, and could use either parent’s last name.

“As it turned out, her name helped,” Senad explains. On the basis of her Serbian name, one associated with a prominent Belgrade family, his ex-wife and daughter were able to leave Sarajevo and go to France, where they spent years. Senad remained in Sarajevo, under siege as Serb forces bombarded it from the surrounding hills. Shortly after they left, Senad was badly injured in a bomb blast. He was hospitalized for months, and eventually airlifted to Germany because he needed a specialized operation. Immigration restrictions prevented him from moving to France to join his family, and kept them from coming to Germany. Eventually, he says, “the time apart had brought its changes; we couldn’t function as a married couple.”

Ethnicity in Senad’s story seems to have an undeniable, tangible reality, a devastating force. Senad is Bosniak, his wife is Serb: this fact, in the context of the war, drives a wedge between them, gives them tickets to two different countries and two different futures. There seems to be no other reason for their divorce, in this depiction, except that Senad and his wife came from different ethnic backgrounds. But Senad, paradoxically, emphasizes that it was not *ethnicity* or ethnic difference that tore his family apart: it was *time* that did so. He would rather not describe his marriage as mixed.

Senad's distaste for the term mixed marriage reflects his resistance to categorization as a source of friction between people. He says that he sees ethnic identification as a negative thing: "You have to love your own people, and maybe despise another. I am free of all that." He refuses to categorize himself as Serb, Croat, or Bosniak, saying "I am none of those things—and all of them, in a certain way." He admits that his brother, or at least his brother's sons, would likely call themselves Bosniak and Muslim, but he tells me that on the last Yugoslav census in 1991, he described himself as "Indian" in order to protest the available categories. Indeed, he says that he has always wanted to be Indian, always felt that in some way he truly *is* Indian. As a child, he says, when the neighborhood children played cowboys and Indians, he always insisted on being an Indian. He expresses an affinity and a yearning for a society that respects dreams and intuitions. He feels alienated from his own society and the ways of being that are open to men of his generation. He searches for clues, proof that he does not really belong here or does not fit into the boxes. Not long ago he participated in a National Geographic study tracing ancestry through DNA in a blood sample, and was surprised and fascinated to learn that he has Ashkenazi Jewish ancestry. He reflects that "if we go back a couple of thousand years, then we are all from the same group of people," and tells me of his hopes that we are moving toward a new world order that will unite even bitter enemies into a single global community.

Senad's frustration with the term mixed marriage also points to the lack of "content" or meaningful features that would distinguish a Croat from a Serb from a Bosniak, or prevent representatives of different groups from forging a relationship on the basis of commonality—especially if each grew up in the same city. Difference is not visible, not mapped onto skin tone or outward appearance, only occasionally signaled by dress. Difference is not encoded in mutually unintelligible languages. Difference is not clearly related to degrees of wealth or

privilege. Difference is supposed to lie in mutually exclusive religious traditions—Catholicism, Orthodox Christianity, and Islam—yet for many of the secular urbanites of Sarajevo, religion is or at least has been a matter of celebrating a handful of holidays with the extended family. Of course, it is easy for people to signal ethnic affiliation or interpret subtle cues as to another’s identity,²⁹ yet even then it often does not seem that ethnicity is a product of substantially different lifestyles, worldviews, or cultural practices. Like Senad, most of the couples I knew found it difficult, slightly absurd, to think of their marriage as “mixed” in any significant way when they had so much in common.

Senad grew up in socialist Yugoslavia and married in 1988, three years before Slovenia and Croatia declared independence, during the period when Yugoslavia was clearly under severe strain but nobody could yet imagine Sarajevo under siege. This was the same period when the Sarajevan comedy TV show *Top Lista Nadrealista* [The Surrealists’ Hit Parade] was satirizing the increasingly divisive political rhetoric in a number of prescient skits. One, a spoof ad for a fake translator’s dictionary, proclaims that the language previously known as Serbo-Croatian has now been scientifically proven to be no less than *six* distinct languages: Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian, Herzegovinian, Montan, and Negran. Through a scene in which a young man who speaks “Herzegovinian” encounters a beautiful young woman who speaks “Serbian,” the skit showcases the “immense difficulties” young people from different Yugoslav groups have in communicating with one another. The man asks, “Would you like to go with me for a coffee?” [*hoćeš li ići sa mnom na jednu kafu?*] Alas, she does not understand. He repeats the question with vigorous miming gestures, but nevertheless they are stymied until a helpful linguist comes along, translator’s dictionary in hand. Having consulted his dictionary, he translates word for

²⁹ These cues often have to do with names, details of pronunciation or vocabulary, affiliation with key neighborhoods, schools, or other locations, and occasionally dress or habitual gestures associated with religion.

word: “Would you like to go with him for a coffee?” [*hoćeš li ići sa njim na jednu kafu?*] An omniscient narrator’s voice clarifies that “in Herzegovinian, the word for coffee is *coffee*.” It requires more hunting in the dictionary and queries of “what does she say?” before the young man is able to understand her answer: “Certainly!” [*Svakako!*], and the two go off, arm in arm, for their first date. The Surrealists’ skit captures, it seems to me, something of Senad’s attitude toward the label of mixed marriage. If these are the supposedly insurmountable barriers to communication and relationship, what is the big deal?

While Senad works hard to convince me that ethnicity is not “real” for him, not a legitimate basis for organizing the world or a descriptor that captures his experience, he does acknowledge the insidious pull of nationalist logic. He tells me he knows, from his own case and that of others, that it is destabilizing when people around a couple begin to focus on the fact that they are a *mixed* couple. It can start to disturb them, he says. When I ask him to give me a better idea of what he means, he tells me he has reservations even about my research because just calling a marriage mixed, drawing attention to it as such, asking couples for interviews because they are mixed, could make a couple think of themselves in that way, and might introduce problems for them. It can plant the seeds of doubt, he says (literally: a worm creeps in between them, *uvlači se neki crv među njih*). Naming or acknowledging mixing, labeling people as members of different groups, risks undermining the partners’ confidence in one another, inserting poisonous doubt into the relationship.

I never learned exactly how doubt began to creep into Senad’s relationship, or what role it may have played in his divorce, but the observation that ethnic identities come into being as people focus attention on them is a basic insight into the construction of social reality. Social scientists have come to see that ethnicity and nationhood are not primordial “things” that exist in

the world, but complex, ongoing *processes* of identification that are embedded in particular circumstances and enacted in particular interactions and relationships (Barth 1994:12-13; Jenkins 2008:15; Brubaker et al. 2006:7-10 and 207-8). In other words, ethnicity is not an empirical way of categorizing cultural diversity, and it need not be based on any systematic differences between Serbs, Bosniaks, and Croats. “Ethnicity is not a thing, not a substance; it is an interpretive prism, a way of making sense of the social world,” write Brubaker and his coauthors (Brubaker et al. 2006:15). Ethnicity is meaningful because of people’s attention to it in specific situations, because people act as if it is important, integrating it into their sense of self, using it to make decisions, to understand other people’s actions, and to organize their lives. It is not the only framework available, but it was foregrounded during the war in dramatic ways. Brubaker argues that framing any given act as an “ethnic” act tends to heighten awareness of—and belief in—ethnic groups as homogeneous, discrete, bounded, and enduring actors. It can effectively crystallize participants’ sense of *being* part of a unitary, agentic group, creating a feedback loop that generates increasing groupness. Labeling violence “ethnic,” as so many observers and participants did during the 1990s in Yugoslavia, is not a simple descriptive act—it actively *constitutes* the violence as such, imputing ethnic motivations and a sense of groupness to those involved (Brubaker 2002:173). Labeling couples “mixed,” Senad suggests, likewise constitutes them as members of distinct and opposed groups.

Because ethnicity is constituted in this way, it tends to have an episodic quality, becoming *experientially* relevant only at certain points. Brubaker and his collaborators, who conducted a study of everyday ethnicity in a Romanian town, find that even when people nominally belong to different ethnic groups, ethnicity is frequently an irrelevant or ignored aspect of the relationship, left in the background while other frameworks guide interactions:

As a nominal phenomenon, “mixedness” is a continuous and stable property of a relationship or an interaction; as an experiential phenomenon, it is episodic and intermittent. In the nominal sense, an interaction or a relationship *is* mixed; in the experiential sense, it *becomes* mixed—in the sense that it comes to be experienced *as* mixed—at particular moments. (Brubaker et al. 2006:314)

In any nominally mixed interaction, Brubaker et al. note that ethnicity becomes salient only at certain moments: during conflicts, in self-conscious attempts to avoid sensitive issues, through certain types of teasing and joking, and when partners must choose between ethnically marked alternatives such as the type of wedding ceremony, the religious traditions they will practice, the rituals accompanying the birth of a child, the child’s name, and so forth (Brubaker et al. 2006:302). Building on this argument, Burić (2012) takes a historical perspective and discusses the conflicts of the 1990s as one climactic moment in Yugoslavia’s history when ethnicity, and with it mixed marriage, became especially marked, when relationships *became* mixed in the experiential sense, on both political and interpersonal levels. He describes his own Croat-Muslim family’s frantic “identity acrobatics” as they scrambled to hide, justify, or redefine who they were in front of a shifting audience of hostile soldiers, border guards, officials, relatives, and neighbors. Far from maintaining some sort of neutrality or indifference to nationality, he says, they had to navigate a “sudden flood of ethnicity in their lives” and were compelled to give animated performances in the “drama of nationalism” (Burić 2012:228-229).

The disruptive and shocking moment when ethnicity shifts from a benign or irrelevant aspect of personal identity and begins to index a host of attitudes, motivations, and material possibilities—this is the centerpiece of many narratives about the war. To some extent this is what *happened* to everybody during the war; it forms the essence or meaningful core of the war experience. The extreme violence of the Yugoslav conflicts functioned to *ethnicize* the population: to polarize and harden the boundaries between groups, reifying ethnic categories,

crystallizing people's sense of "groupness," and making categories highly salient while rejecting hybrid forms of identification as transgressive (cf Sorabji 1995, Werbner 1997, Borneman 2002, Young 2003). It also functioned to introduce radical doubt as to the possibilities for solidarity or intimacy on any basis other than shared ethnicity. Ethnic categories became meaningful through memories of real terror and suffering at the hands of the Other(s): killing, rape, detention, displacement, and the targeted destruction of culturally-meaningful objects such as mosques, churches, or museums. Sorabji (1995) emphasizes the significance of "personalized" violence carried out by neighbors and colleagues and friends to obliterate positive associations of life together and replace them with unequivocal support for one's "own" nation. Less obviously dramatic, but surely even more common, were the personalized betrayals of the sort that Vera describes. I think of my friend Aida telling me how her friends at school began to say that she "looked like a Croat," or Tanja recalling visitors who turned to her when her Serb father went to the bathroom and whispered, "Do you think he *knows* something?" I think of Rada's indignant rage when she told me how neighbors suggested she could keep her job and stay in Serb-held Pale if she let her Muslim husband and young son be deported without her.

Senad doesn't tell such a story; he speaks in generalities, veiling his own emotional relation to the events he describes dispassionately, obscuring the details of how he and his wife recognized the sudden importance of ethnicity. "People got divorced," he says. "Out of fear of their own national communities, they got divorced. Or out of a growing feeling of national belonging, they got divorced." My imagination fills in gaps in Senad's story, puts me into his wife's shoes: there she is in Sarajevo in 1991, early 1992, young, married just a few years, with a daughter who is hardly a toddler. She watches the war in Croatia, wonders what awaits for Bosnia. As she never has before, she suddenly feels acutely aware of herself as an outsider, the

daughter of a Serb man and a Croat woman. She misses her father, wishes he were still alive. Watching the ominous strength of the former Yugoslav National Army settle into the hills around Sarajevo and begin to rain death onto the city, she fears for herself, her daughter, and her mother. She feels a responsibility for their safety. What whispered hints and allegations does she hear about her husband, about herself, about their daughter's future?

Perhaps the interruption created by the war, the gnawing doubt that arises between them, grows from the lopsided possibility of leaving (cf Maček 2007:50-51). The wife knows she *could* get out. She could pull together everything she knows about Belgrade, all of her father's stories and turns of phrase; she could convincingly play up her Serb identity and get past the checkpoints to find a safe refuge somewhere else. Her mother perhaps pulls toward leaving, reminds her that they have relatives in Croatia who might help for a little while. Her husband, on the other hand, feels a compulsion to stay.³⁰ He resists the idea that he is running away; he feels some sort of deep loyalty to the city, to the ideal of multicultural Sarajevo and a multicultural Bosnia that represents the best of Yugoslavia. He feels, perhaps, betrayed by her wish to leave. He also knows his name makes him Public Enemy Number 1, and his chances of getting out *with* wife and daughter are slim—that would be an escape, not a departure. Senad tells me: *my daughter and I would have been liquidated*. Both parents worry about their daughter. They worry that even if Senad is not with them, they have no chance of passing military checkpoints if they all carry *his* last name. They make a striking decision to formally split up, for the wife to take her Serb name back and for the daughter to have that name as well. The differences between Senad and his wife, which he says they did not recognize as barriers before, now are made definite in their separate names, which become badges of affiliation and passports

³⁰ On the differential meanings of fleeing the war for men and women, see Morokvašić-Mueller 2004:149.

permitting certain types of movement. I wonder, do they live together for a while, uneasily, before she leaves?

Vera: War in the family

We're on one side and you're on the other

Vera spent the entire war in Sarajevo, in Mojnilo, a neighborhood adjacent to the front lines along the north-east part of the city, not far from the airport. It was one of the most dangerous neighborhoods, under heavy shelling. She lives in the same apartment to this day, but describes what it was like during the war: unheated, the windows shattered and covered with UNHCR tarps. “I thought I would never fall asleep again,” she says, explaining how she would lie with her two adolescent children in the dark hallway as shells exploded nearby, knowing that there was only one floor above their heads, between them and the bombs. Her husband served in the BiH army and was often away. Vera fought a different battle, “to kill time and to stave off fear,” a constant struggle to keep up her children’s spirits, to remind them all of good times. She whispered prayers, sang all the songs she knew, told stories. She hoarded supplies and scrambled to prepare meals out of scanty and tasteless humanitarian aid packets. She waited anxiously for news of family members caught on the other side of military boundaries. Later, her husband was badly wounded and spent months in the hospital; Vera walked miles back and forth to see him and help care for him. She laughs about how she was as thin as a rake. With the passing of time and the accumulation of new good events, she says, the war fades in her memory much like the terrible pain of giving birth. “Now you can practically tell stories about it with a comical twist,” she says, even if it was far from comical as it unfolded.

Out of all these dreadful events, Vera picks out her confrontation with her brother, and her mother's response, as one of the most difficult things that ever happened in her life—and one that she is still unable to make light of. She tells me the story twice, once in the coffee shop where we first sat down together, and then a couple of weeks later at her kitchen table. Unlike most apartments in Sarajevo which tend to have small kitchens isolated from the rest of the living space, Vera's kitchen is a sizeable room that also holds the table her family eats at. We sit at this table with the video camera running as she reads me letters and other papers from the war and then tells me this story once more, much as she had told it in the cafe. Her narrative is detailed, filled with direct quotes and embodied actions that convey the emotional stance of the participants, as well as with descriptions of her internal turmoil as the event unfolded. Sitting in the kitchen with her as she tells the story gives it an additional immediacy, as she turns to indicate spaces in the house where each element of the action happened.

Vera sets the stage by telling me how her brother, Zoran, stopped by with his wife and children sometime in early 1994 while her husband was away at the front. Her story begins on a mundane note, with the observation that the gas was (for once) turned on and she was cooking a pot of beans. During the war, services such as gas, water, and electricity were only intermittently available in Sarajevo. Stories of the siege often indicate intense preoccupation with these basic necessities, describing people's attempts to predict when utilities might come on, or be alert to their presence so as to take advantage of them even in the middle of the night (cf. Maček 2009). Here, Vera remembers that her gas was on and she could cook beans and offer her guests coffee or tea. She explains to them that she expects the gas to be turned off again soon; her husband told her the BiH army is preparing an offensive action and he is hopeful that they will be able to break the siege. They will turn the gas off on purpose to prevent explosions. But rather than

sharing her hope for an end to the siege, Vera's brother shocks her by saying that the BiH army is too weak to do anything against the Serb army:

V: Kaže on,
He says,
Ko:ja deblokada?
What do you mean, break the siege? ((*sneering voice*))
Ma srpska vojska je, kaže, broj tri u Evropi
The Serb army is, he says, number three in Europe ((*hitting the table*))

Vera tells me that her brother served in the HVO, the Croatian defense forces. He was not, therefore, directly involved in either the BiH Army or the Serb military. Croatian and Bosnian forces initially collaborated in defending Sarajevo from the Serb army, but by late 1992 or early 1993, fierce fighting between Croats and Bosnian Muslims in other parts of the region had disrupted this relationship. Some of the HVO fighters in Sarajevo were incorporated into a unit of the BiH army, but it is not clear to me from Vera's story whether her brother was one of those or not; it seems unlikely. He and his family left Sarajevo sometime after this incident, and spent the rest of the war in Slovenia, where his wife came from. In any case, when Vera tells the story she portrays him not as if he is *worried* about the strength of the Serbs, but as if he is *proud* of it. As his words come out of Vera's mouth, she adopts a sneering tone, lifting her lip and impersonating his incredulous dismissal of the Bosnian defense forces. She hits the table twice with her fists as she recalls him saying "the Serb army is number three in Europe."

Vera is aghast:

V: Ja gledam
I look [at him]
↑ma kakav- kakve balije, kakav balija
↑what- which *balijas*, what *balija*
A ja- ↑e Izet moze svaki cas na vrata
and I- ↑ey, Izet could come through the door any minute
↑ja ne znam sta on govori
↑I don't know what he's talking about
a tamo mi djeca i njegova i nasa (kako li nesto)

and our kids are right there ((*gestures to the next room*)), both his and ours (whatever)
E:j, ja: ne mogu da shvatim sta pri:ca
E:y, I: cannot grasp what he's sa:ying

Here it seems that Vera has skipped a piece of the dialogue, focusing on her response rather than her brother's words. He has, evidently, not only expressed his approval of the Serbs, but dismissed the BiH army as a bunch of "balijas." *Balija* is a derogatory term for Bosnian Muslims. Vera sputters with indignation to hear her brother using this word, worries that her husband could come home or that their children in the next room will hear what is going on. This is a moment like those Brubaker et al. identify (2006), in which a relationship that was nominally mixed suddenly becomes experientially mixed as well, as ethnicity becomes the primary framework for interaction. Although Vera and her brother were raised in the same home and are not nominally of different ethnic backgrounds, her marriage to a (nominally) Muslim man makes her sensitive to insults like "balija;" she identifies with Bosnian Muslims and with the Bosnian army defending Sarajevo. Vera's brother had apparently been on good terms with her husband up until this point and she is unprepared for him to say anything like this. All at once, she is at a loss to understand her relationship with her brother. He becomes a stranger to her, somebody whose words don't make sense. Even as she relates the story to me, her words become chaotic, she cuts herself off and speaks in fragments. Her voice rises in pitch, sounds both horrified and helpless, as she portrays her own reaction to her brother's statement.

Moving back into the narrator's voice, she tells me how she busied herself with the pot of beans, how she didn't make any coffee or tea for her guests. She confronts her brother:

V: a ja kažem, rekoh (.) Zorane kakva ti je to priča?
and I say, I said (.) Zoran, what kind of talk is this?
Kaže, što? kaže,
He says, so what? he says,
Ja se osjećam kao srbin. ((*hitting chest*))
I feel like a Serb. ((*hitting chest twice*))

Hej. Drugo je biti srbin, drugo je biti napada- četnik,
napadati,
Hey. It's another thing to be Serb, it's another thing to be attack- a Chetnik, to attack,
ti budi sta hoćes, reci ti
You be whatever you want, say the word

Vera's brother, perhaps only now, recognizes that she is personally upset by his statement, but denies her grounds for taking offense. In her rendition he hits himself on the chest in a gesture of masculine dominance, and adopts a crude and belligerent tone of voice as he declares that he feels himself to be a Serb. Vera immediately protests that it is one thing to be Serb and another to associate yourself, as he has just done, with the Serb army currently sitting in the hills around Sarajevo and bombarding her own home, attacking innocent civilians. She also brings up the Chetniks, who were historically Serb units in the Balkan Wars and in WWI, then a WWII nationalist group that terrorized and massacred non-Serb peoples in an effort to claim territory for Serbia. During the wars of the 1990s, various Serb paramilitary and military troops referred to themselves as Chetniks, calling on this legacy (Maček 2009:169, Judah 1997:187). During my time in Sarajevo, people most often used the word Chetnik when they wanted to distinguish between ordinary Serbs (who could be good, kind-hearted people) and violent, "primitive" ultra-nationalists who would stop at nothing to achieve a Greater Serbia. As Maček observes, "the word [is] loaded with moral condemnation" (2009:169). By mentioning this term, Vera ups the ante, draws the lines even more clearly—her brother is not just a Serb, but a Chetnik. She sarcastically tells him, "be whatever you want," highlighting her sense that this is an arbitrary and unexpected move on his part, but it is clear that she condemns this particular choice. She then accepts the label *Baliija* and personalizes her own links to the term:

V: Rekoh, ↑ti si u kući baliije, rekoh,
I said, ↑you're in the home of a Baliija, I said,
da li ti shvaćas?
do you realize that?

One of the things that strikes me about this conversation is not merely *that* the interaction becomes ethnicized, but how quickly it progresses from the political level to the personal—or how quickly the personal relationship is subsumed into the political. There is no possibility of neutrality. Zoran cannot say that the Serb army is powerful without aligning himself with Serb interests, and then, in Vera’s mind at least, with Chetnik brutality and ultranationalism. Vera cannot hear her brother’s comments about the BiH army without feeling that she is personally implicated, that Zoran is insulting her husband and herself. Perhaps they start the encounter as brother and sister, but they finish it as enemies with battle positions drawn. The interaction comes to an abrupt end as her brother and his family leave her house without the offer of coffee or tea.

Yet this is not the end of Vera’s story; in fact, it is only the preface to the most distressing part. No sooner have her brother and his wife departed than Vera rushes to her telephone, calling her mother to share what happened. “You won’t believe it,” she exclaims, and tells her mother how Zoran declared he was a hardcore Serb, called Izet a *balija*, said he was in a *balija* army, and claimed that the Serbs were going to beat the *balijas*. She expects her mother to share her shock. But her mother only compounds the situation:

V: Kaže mama, a:::a, pa kaže,
Mama says, A:::h, she says,
Zar tebi još nije jasno (.)
Isn’t it clear to you yet (.)
da smo Zoran i ja na jednoj a ti na drugoj strani. (4)
that Zoran and I are on one side and you are on the other. (4)

Vera pauses for several seconds before she goes on:

A (.3) to je. nešto teže što sam u životu doživjela.
So (.3) that is. one of the hardest things I ever experienced in my life.
Ja sam rekla, °dobro, dobro, nisam znala.° Stvarno nisam
dosad znala.

I said °okay, okay, I didn't know. ° I truly didn't know before now.

Until this point, Vera has been fired up with indignation, offended by her brother's behavior and ready to take him to task. Suddenly, the wind goes out of her sails. She is left with nothing to say, nothing to do. "Okay," she says quietly to her mother, "I truly didn't know." She hangs up the phone and then is overcome by physical sensations—trembling, tingling in her hands, a pounding headache. She feels that she is going to faint. The noise of her children playing in the next room overwhelms her. To quiet them, she raps on the door between the rooms, but the force of her blow is such that her hand goes right through the glass pane in the door. The glass shatters. Her children stop, startled and afraid—"what will we tell Daddy?"; her hand bleeds all over the floor. She cannot explain to the children what has happened, but sobs and sobs uncontrollably. Her husband comes home in the midst of this dramatic scene and listens soberly to the tale. "What can you do," he says. "You have us."

Family tensions

Vera, like Senad, points to the sudden foregrounding of ethnicity that she experienced during the war and describes a scene in which ordinary people began to actively identify with and apply labels that had up until then seemed less relevant or less politically charged, losing track of each other as fully individual beings. Both of their stories illustrate the episodic nature of ethnicity as an interactional *process* rather than a static object in the world. But Vera complicates her narrative. She seems reluctant to leave me with the firm impression that nationalist animosity is the real source, or the only source, of the division in her family. In fact, over time she develops several overlapping accounts, each of which perhaps captures a different aspect of the truth about her family. Each one also reveals a subtly different perspective on the ways ethnicity enters into

perceptions of self and other within particular relationships, and the specific instances when it is meaningful or contested.

At first, Vera focuses on her brother's wife, whom she portrays as a greedy, calculating person who manipulates identities and relationships as tools to ensure her own financial profit and security. The wife has a dual background herself: her father is Serb/ Orthodox and her mother is Slovenian/ Catholic. Vera says that in the past, her mother was always closer to Zoran's family, "because they baptized their children [in the Catholic Church] and they put more emphasis on that." Vera and her husband saw this as a "dishonest game" (*nepoštena igra*), a deceitful ploy to curry favor and gain material benefits such as inheriting the comfortable family apartment in the city center or the smaller "weekend cabin" in the mountains. Indeed, after Zoran died of liver cancer a few years ago, Vera says his wife and sons promptly cut off ties with the family. They merely stopped by to take possession of the keys to the cabin. "My sister-in-law has carried off a good piece of the pie," Vera laments, "and I think that's where it begins and ends." She says that Catholicism seems to have fallen by the wayside as well, as the wife declared herself to be Serb once organizations were obliged to follow ethnic hiring quotas and it became advantageous to seek employment in Sarajevo as a Serb. "We're not really in contact," Vera says, suggesting that if she and her mother were to press their case, "the court would have something to say," and the sister-in-law would have a lot to lose, both materially and in moral standing. "Neither Mama nor I want to get mixed up in it," Vera declares. "We have enough, and they have already been hurt badly enough—she doesn't have a husband, the children don't have a father—so we don't touch it. It would absolutely ruin her."

In the tale of the conniving sister-in-law, Vera casts her brother's wife as the person responsible for the uneven family dynamic in which the mother preferred her son Zoran's family

over her daughter Vera's. Here, ethnicity appears not as an authentic index of identity or self, and not even as a true difference that might reasonably come between people, but rather as a costume to be put on or off as Zoran's wife chooses to represent herself in one way or another. The story sets up a moral hierarchy: Vera and her husband recognize the games being played and take the high ground, refusing to participate even though it costs them materially. Vera's mother (and to some extent even her brother) are duped into going along with these games. The sister-in-law appears entirely despicable, the stuff of bad soap operas. Amazingly, by the end of the story Vera and her mother end up as allies, at least insofar as they are both the victims of an unscrupulous in-law, and both gracious enough to let the matter rest.

I suspect that this story allows Vera to conceal much of the hurt and rage she feels toward her mother and brother, and to displace it onto another person who doesn't mean as much to her. But one thing that does emerge is the sense that the encounter between Vera and her brother during the war, and their subsequent estrangement, was a continuation of longstanding family tensions and patterns of alignment. This event that seems to have to do with political nationalist events on the macrolevel in some ways just borrows that veneer and adds it on top of an already-troubled family scene.

At other moments Vera exposes more of her pain, which comes principally from her mother's persistent tendency to prioritize Zoran. "My mother really messed up," Vera says, going on to say that she now believes her mother's distance was not really about Vera's choices or her family. In other words, the real issue is not ethnicity or her mother's prejudice about the fact that she married a Bosniak man. Instead, it had to do with her mother's single-minded desire to save her brother, who in his youth showed signs of "slipping off the road." Even the mother's preoccupation with religiosity comes from this source—Vera explains that the reason

she and her brother were sent to catechism classes as teenagers was her mother's hope that the church could keep him on the straight and narrow. She reminds me of the parable Jesus tells about the shepherd who leaves his flock of 99 sheep to look for the one sheep that has strayed, and says that at some point she started to connect it with her own life. She says, "I am one of those 99 sheep, and for my mother, my brother is the one. She was always focused on keeping him from straying. No matter what I did, it was always unremarkable."

Vera describes how she drove her mother to the graveyard to mark the anniversary of her brother's death, and how her mother hurt her yet again:

V: Mama tamo gladi mramor i kaže, dijete moje jedino.
 There Mama caresses the marble and says, my one and only child.
 Plače. Kaže dijete moje jedino.
 She cries. She says, my one and only child.
 Ja onda počnem gore šetati, meni suze ne može
 I start to walk around up above, I can't even cry [have no tears]

Even after Zoran is dead and buried, Vera's mother focuses her loving attention on him, calling him her one and only child. She fails to see the daughter who is with her, but instead merely demands that she share these feelings of loss:

V: onda ona meni kaže,
 then she says to me,
 Je li tebi nedostaje Zoran?
 Do you miss Zoran?
 Rekoh hoćes li istinu? Ne.
 I said do you want the truth? No.
 Pa ostala si bez brata
 But you lost your brother
 ja kažem, davno.
 I say, long ago.
 Ne sad kad je umro. Davno sam ostala bez brata.
 Not just now when he died. I lost my brother a long time ago.

Vera refuses to go along with her mother, rejecting her statement that Zoran's death represents a loss for her. She tells me that she feels nothing but ice inside her when she thinks about her brother or about their encounter during the war.

As poignant as the relationship between Vera, Zoran, and their mother appears, the role of their father adds yet another layer to this story. Her father is no longer living, but I start to see that Vera was very close to him, emotionally affiliated with him. If the mother doted on Zoran's family, their father was devoted to Vera's. He bought gifts for the children; "he wanted to be the one to get their first pair of shoes, their first schoolbooks," Vera says. He appears in family photographs embracing them affectionately; in letters, he asks after his grandson and calls his granddaughter by the nickname Una, Unikata (the one and only). Vera tells me that while her mother opposed her marriage because her husband is Bosniak, her father supported the marriage. In fact, when others hesitated he said, "if only my son were half the man my son-in-law is." It seems, then, that the rivalry between Vera and her brother for their mother's love mirrored a similarly skewed relationship to their father. Vera basked in her father's attention, pride, and sympathy, whereas it may be that her brother never quite had his approval even though, as Vera herself reports, he did settle down, marry, do well at work.

When the war started, Vera's father left Sarajevo and went to live in Novi Sad, a city in Serbia. Vera explains that he had diabetes and could not manage his blood sugar under the unstable conditions in besieged Sarajevo, so he went to Novi Sad to wait for things to calm down—and could never get back. She reads me some of the letters he sent from Novi Sad, sounding anxious about their welfare and guilt-stricken over his own departure, urging her to take care of her family. I ask Vera if there was any discussion of her mother going along with him. No, she says, no, no. Her father believed his wife wanted him to leave so that she could

take possession of their apartment and give it to their son. Vera suggests that her parents had an unhappy relationship for years before the war, and traces this to their disagreements over how to discipline Zoran when he got in trouble. She says her father always felt it was important to agree on measures to keep their son in control, but her mother always took the son's side and explicitly chose him, saying: "I don't care about you, only about him. You can go away, but as long as I'm alive I will stick with him, whatever he does." Yet her parents did not separate until the war.

Yes, Vera says, something in their perspective shifted when the war came:

V: i sta se tu pomutilo i kada i zbog cega
and what went wrong and when and why
jer mama hrvatica, on je srbin
because Mama is Croat, he is Serb
i tu je nedgje u taj "klik" proradio pred rat
and it's there somewhere in that "click" that happened before the war
aha, mi nismo isto (...)
aha, we aren't the same (...)
apsolutno tu se nesto pokvarilo
absolutely, something broke down there

Vera does not delve into her parents' relationship beyond this. I know that her parents married just a few years after WWII, in 1951; I know that both their families were upset by their marriage. Her father's parents had died during that war in the infamous Jasenovac concentration camp, where the fascist Croat Ustashe regime exterminated Serbs as well as Jews, Roma, and members of the resistance. Vera says their Serb-Croat marriage, at that time, was "revolutionary." It expressed the spirit of the revolution led by Tito's Partisans, who had fought to liberate Yugoslavia from the Axis occupation and sought to unite all the republics after the war. But somewhere along the line, for some reason, something went wrong. When did they begin to see their discord as "ethnic"? Did the brother's behavior sow the seed of doubt and division between the parents, as Vera proposes?

For someone who seems to be at the root of the family conflict, it is interesting how invisible the brother is, how he fails to emerge in Vera's stories as a person with his own emotions, desires, or plans. I never gathered what sort of trouble he got into as a young man or why the family was so worried about him. Other people make pronouncements about him, develop a strong stance toward him. The personalities of his mother, his father, even his wife, show up as Vera animates them. But the brother is vivid only once, in the confrontation during the war when he declares he is a Serb. Most of the time he is a blank, a figure others define themselves against. I have the feeling Zoran is important not on his own, but because of his alliance with the mother. Certainly it is "safer" for Vera to react against her brother than to cut off ties with her mother; maybe it *allows* her to carry on her relationship with her mother. It may even be the most effective way of taking revenge on her mother.

Vera sees a poetic justice, or as she puts it, "the punishment of God," in the fact that her mother has lost her son, lost touch with her daughter-in-law, lost her grandchildren, and is forced to turn more and more to her daughter's family. "Now, Mama has us," Vera says, "as family and as people who help her out and cheer her up and who do everything for her that she needs in her life. That's us." Has she made her peace with this fate? "We don't talk about it," Vera tells me. I get the feeling that she and her mother have reached an uneasy truce; they are sometimes even companionable allies. But Vera says there is still something "ugly" in the relationship. She describes a day recently when she and Izet drove her mother to the grocery store, took her to lunch, spent time with her—and when they dropped her off she got out of the car and turned away without a word. It bothers Vera, though she seems determined to heap burning coals on her mother's head by ignoring the ugliness and helping her no matter what. "Who knows what goes on in her head," she says, and tells me how her mother still refers to some of her least

favorite neighbors as “that *Balija*,” “that Serb lady,” and so on. “If you didn’t know you might say it was just that she’s old,” Vera says, but that would miss something about the depth of her prejudice, which is not a recent outgrowth of peevish old age but related, somehow, to the events of the war:

V: Naprosto kao da je to čučalo negdje zatvoreno
It’s as if that was crouching somewhere closed in (*closes hands around imaginary sphere*)
i samo je rat to (.) otvorio.
and the war just (.) opened it.

The truth about these families

As Vera looks for ways to make sense of conflict in her family, she does not resolve the issue of how the war, or the concern with ethnicity, folds into it. At one point she accounts for her mother’s distance by saying that it was due to a longstanding preoccupation with the brother, or to the money-grubbing machinations of her brother’s wife—and had little do with nationalist prejudice. At other points she suggests that her mother is profoundly prejudiced and carries her suspicious way of thinking into all sorts of interpersonal relationships, including even her own marriage. Both these things, of course, can be true. It’s clear that ethnicity is always “there” as an explanatory framework, a reservoir of feeling, a set of indexically-linked signifiers that can very easily attach itself to interpersonal friction. This was the case even before the war, but has taken on greater importance since.

Another truth is this one: that families—all families—experience conflict, that they are not only havens of security and warmth, but often also sites of aggression, jealousy, failure, and betrayal. Mixed families are faced with the challenge of navigating extreme situations (the war, the nationalist political climate of the postwar period, and the stress of a dysfunctional economy) *and* intimate, emotionally powerful relationships in the family—and for them, these two domains

can intermingle and amplify one another. This seems to have been the case for both Vera and Senad. Their stories show how the resort to nationalist categorization is sometimes a precipitating factor that generates conflict, drawing people into a xenophobic mode of reasoning, inserting skeptical doubt into their relationships, simply because it is a conveniently available framework for interpreting social relations. On the other hand, sometimes it is a *result* of conflict, a way of expressing conflict. Vera's story suggests that a focus on ethnicity can even be used as a distraction from other types of pain: Vera concentrates on the ugly incident with her brother, rather than dwelling on the underlying pattern of unequal attention in her family and her longing for her mother's love.

Despite these dangers, Vera says that she has successfully created for herself a family that she treasures, and a family that supports her in meaningful ways. She and her husband have evidently built a relationship founded on mutual care and genuine respect for one another, and a family unit that acts as a buffer from the world's ideals of "purity." Vera remembers that in the moment when she was beside herself with grief and anger over her brother's words and her mother's betrayal, her husband came home and comforted her by saying, "You have us." Perhaps this small world of belonging that she has created with her husband and children grounds her, even allows her to reach out. She uses almost the same words, later, when talking about her continued care for her mother: "Mama has us. As family and as people who help her out and cheer her up and who do everything for her that she needs in her life. That's us." Vera resolutely maintains her relationship with her mother, deliberately overlooking the past and pretending not to notice new slights, enacting the bond between daughter and mother even at times when she does not *feel* particularly loving. This, it seems to me, is a turn away from

skeptical doubt, a choice to turn back even to the place of devastation and to redeem it, not necessarily by fixing it, but by patiently drawing it back into the everyday, over and over again.

Chapter Three

Family in the Margins: Inhabiting a World Divided

Prelude: A love story

Jasmina and Dalibor go together. Dado's gentle, earnest presence complements Jaca's energy, gives her the space to shine. They keep track of one another, tell stories in tandem, their words spilling out together or filling in each other's gaps. Dado sits in the living room with me, keeping the thread of conversation winding in one direction, while Jaca gets up from time to time to fetch sweets, coffee, to show me a matched pair of mugs her mother got for them. Children's mugs, she says, with giraffes on them. "You wouldn't know we're 33 and 35; we're 18-year-olds in love."

They are telling me about how they met, how he came to pack his white uniform from the pizza shop where he worked in Bosanski Novi and travel south, seven hours by train, to join her in Sarajevo. "Dado is the bravest person I know," Jaca had told me privately. "I don't know if I would have been able to do that." His friends had asked if he was crazy, and teased him that he would have to start attending a mosque. One of her best friends, from her hometown of Tešanj, had cautioned her that she should think carefully about this relationship because Serbs were not exactly popular around there. But the neighbors had also looked askance because of differences in their status. Jasmina's father came from an aristocratic Muslim lineage, a family that had been at the core of Tešanj society for generations: "From such a family, rich, illustrious, educated, I married a man who was from a poor family, a Serb, who had no college education and who is of a different faith." For both of them, this marriage has meant stepping forth into the unknown, being certain only that they should be together.

Yet Dado and Jaca don't perceive their relationship as one that bridges insurmountable divides. They emphasize what they have in common. Thinking of themselves as Serb and Bosniak makes little sense to them—they are both simply *Bosnian*. To his friends who wondered if he was crazy to move to Sarajevo, Dado said: “What’s wrong with you guys? This is my country, my people, my folk; I was born here!”

As it turns out, Jaca and Dado do have a lot in common. Jaca’s maternal kin, like Dado, are Serbs. In fact, her mother grew up in Dvor, a small town on the Croatian side of the river Una directly across from Dado’s city, Bosanski Novi.³¹ Jaca’s mother and father met at the university in Banja Luka when both were students. Both of them, Jaca explains, were secular people. They lived in Tešanj, in the heart of a Muslim neighborhood and among observant relatives, but Jaca was not brought up in any faith tradition.

At 27, Jaca had recently broken up with a long-term boyfriend and decided that she would never marry. Then in November of 2004 she went to spend some time with her maternal grandparents—who by then were living in Novi. “It was fate,” she says. She wasn’t intending to go out, hadn’t even brought along her make-up kit, but an acquaintance who lived in her grandparents’ neighborhood invited her to a birthday party. There she met Dado. They hit it off, talked for an hour, and he asked for her phone number. Things got off to a slow start: her cell phone’s network service was only good within the Federation, and so when he contacted her she couldn’t send a message back to him in Republika Srpska until she got a new phone a couple of months later. They kept in touch, more or less, but Jaca didn’t even notify Dado when she came back to visit her grandparents in June 2005. He noticed her at a cafe, sitting three tables away

³¹ This city appears on current maps as Novi Grad, “New City.” Before the war it was called Bosanski Novi, literally “Bosnian New.” Since it is located in Republika Srpska, its name was officially changed after the war, erasing its Bosnian character. Dado often continues to use the old name. At other times he simply calls the city “Novi.”

from him, and sent her a text message under the table: *Hey, nice to see you. Why didn't you say you were coming?* They went out together the next day and spent five hours talking.

Now both of them began thinking about the possibility that this was a serious relationship. “When you’re 27 and 29 you know you’ll either go for it or you won’t,” Jaca says. They began to write letters, “real letters on paper.” Dado explains that he bought one envelope and one sheet of paper at a time from a shopkeeper who knew him and his family. He came in to buy them so frequently that she got curious.

“Why do you need all of these envelopes?” she asked.

“Because I’m writing letters,” he said.

“Who are you writing to?” she asked.

“To a girl,” he replied.

“But nobody writes letters anymore!”

“But I do!” he said.

The shopkeeper was touched. “She didn’t want to take any money after that,” Dado says.

Both Dado and Jaca talk about how important it was that their families supported their romance. They describe an elaborate series of visits and introductions as the two families became acquainted³². Jaca’s parents stopped in to meet Dado in the summer of 2005 on their way back from a vacation on the coast. They didn’t tell Jaca they were getting together with him, but showed up back in Tešanj with a gift he had sent for her. Jaca went once more to Bosanski Novi by train, carrying a gift for Dado that her father had helped her pick out. She met Dado’s parents. In September, Jaca’s parents formally invited Dado to come visit them in Tešanj, assuring him that they had an extra room where he could sleep. They drove to pick him

³² Though they do not use the term, what Jaca and Dado describe sounds like the formal process of establishing *prijateljstvo*, an important ritual bond between in-laws (Lockwood 1972).

up at the train station in Dobož, and he stayed for two or three days. Sleeping was hardly an issue because Jaca and Dado stayed up talking, trying not to waste a moment together. Later, Dado's parents came to visit Jaca's parents.

“They loved each other and they loved getting together,” Jaca says.

Dado adds, “They are normal people who survived all of this”—all of the upheaval of the past 20 years—but who managed to hang on to their open-minded tolerance toward other people. “They were taught that way, brought up that way,” Dado says. “We were taught that way too.”

Eventually, Jaca asked whether Dado would consider coming to Sarajevo, where she was studying at the college of medicine. She thought he would come to check it out before he moved there, but he said it was all or nothing—“If I come, I'll stay.” He came. He packed his things into three big bags and came by train on the 11th of February, 2006. “Could we have made a mistake?” Jaca asks. “Probably.” She points out that before Dado came, the two of them had been in one place together for a total of only ten days or so. There was a moment on the day Dado arrived, she says, after the celebration with friends was over and the two of them were alone, when she felt panic. “What have I done?—got married!” But really, she says, the transition was smooth. “After three days we functioned as if we'd been living together all our lives.”

Putting division into place: Maps, census boxes, and borderlines

When Dado got on the train to Sarajevo, he took a leap of faith. He was carried by the conviction that he and Jaca could make a life together, that they could survive financially, and that he, as a Serb, could find a home in Bosniak-dominated Sarajevo. Because of their marriage, Jaca and Dado have each ventured across borderlines and into territories—physical and

metaphysical—in which they do not belong, where they have met with skepticism and cold exclusion. In this chapter, I explore what it means and what it *feels* like to live in a deeply divided society. Before looking more carefully Jaca and Dado’s stories, I present some background context. What does Bosnia’s ethnic division consist of? How does it come about? What creates and reinforces divides, not only as lines drawn on the map, but embedded in the assumptions and lived experience of several million people? I draw from other ethnographic work in the region to explore the ways ethno-national identity continues to be prioritized and reified in the period after the war, particularly in bureaucratic categories and “national numbers,” and through practices of spatial control that map certain kinds of people onto certain “ethnically cleansed” territories. I also ask what it means to create a mixed family in this divided context, to set in motion relations that propel not only oneself but one’s family members across borders, to carve out spaces to be together and to *become* a family that lives as if those divides do not exist.

Nearly twenty years after the end of war in Bosnia, Dado and Jaca live in a country that is quite literally divided—Dado’s family lives in one semi-autonomous “entity,” Republika Srpska, which holds 49% of the territory and is administered by a Serb government and populated almost exclusively by Serbs; Jaca grew up in Tešanj, a town that is now in the other entity, the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Bosnia they live in is a state with no “Bosnian” citizens—it is a state whose citizenry is supposed to cleave cleanly into distinct “constituent peoples” of Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs, each electing an ethnically-designated president to represent them. It is a state defined by government dysfunction, corruption, economic crisis, continued (ambivalent) international intervention, and—above all—by divided sectarian politics. Here, the rights of the group seem more precious than those of the individual, and, in fact, “the

notion of the individual citizen, abstracted from his ethnic and religious kinship, is viewed as subversive” (Mujkić 2007:120).

Jaca and Dado, both adolescents when the war began in 1992, refer to the war as a turning point, the event that marks the beginning of their personal awareness of ethnicity and of a generalized preoccupation with “who you are, what you are, and where you’re from” as Dado puts it. “I had never thought about it much before,” Jaca said, “I mean, I knew I came from two different people who were from different backgrounds. But in 1992 when the war broke out I started to realize who was shooting against whom.” She saw Muslim refugees from neighboring towns, fleeing Serb forces and bringing reports of atrocities. She describes the angst of a 14-year-old faced with difficult questions of belonging and identity, and her mother’s attempts to help her see her dual Serb-Muslim heritage as an asset. Dado did not confront the same kind of internal struggle, but he mourns the loss of a sense of unity, a common identity shared with others. “Everything that’s happened has distanced us from one another,” he says. “Even though we’re all one.”

While the war clearly represents a critical moment that made ethnicity salient and “real” (cf Brubaker et al. 2006), ethnographic research supports Dado’s intuition that “everything that’s happened” in the two decades since the war has tended to reinforce and entrench people’s experience of ethnicity as the most important basis for solidarity and difference. This more subtle distancing³³ often takes place through banal, routinized mechanisms—such as the way Jaca’s cell phone service in 2004 only worked within the borders of the Federation, hampering

³³ It is important to emphasize that there is not just a “push” but also a “pull” factor involved in these processes of ethnic identification. I am thinking about Maček’s (2009) writing on how she came to be aware of herself as a Croat in Sarajevo during the war, often not so much through violence or through actual exclusion/outright expressions of prejudice, but through differences or degrees of warmth present in various interactions. In other words, as she was subtly “warned away” from certain people or situations, she was also drawn effusively into others because people greeted her, treated her with regard, and went out of their way to include her.

her communication with Dado in Republika Srpska. The war's violence generated strong emotions of terror and hatred deliberately meant to force people apart³⁴ (Sorabji 1995, Kaldor 2004), and political leaders continue to manipulate such feelings (Mujkić 2007). Nevertheless, recent scholarship highlights the ways pragmatic forces also draw people to inhabit “pure” territories and “pure” identities almost without regard to whether or not they *feel* nationalist antagonisms or commitments. The lives of Bosnia's people are deeply embedded in nationalist logics through their daily experiences of spatial division, institutions such as segregated schools, and the fact that nationalist political parties control access to scarce resources, jobs, and opportunities (Markowitz 2007, Hromadžić 2011, Kurtović 2011, Jansen 2007, 2013b). This creates a backdrop against which Jaca and Dado's life together in Sarajevo comes to seem transgressive, even subversive—despite (perhaps because of) their own assertion that their relationship is a private matter, contracted between individuals who see one another purely *as individuals* and not as representatives of other ethnic groups.

Observing the first post-war census carried out in the Federation³⁵ in 2002, Markowitz (2007) shows that in the post-war political economy, identity choices have narrowed, and tolerance for hybrid or ambiguous affiliations has decreased. She notes that in the census results, a full 99% of people in the Federation are categorized as Bosniak, Serb, or Croat—only 1% are “Other.” This is a change from the last Yugoslav census of 1991, in which over 8% of Bosnia's people chose to categorize themselves as Yugoslav, Undeclared, Roma, or a variety of other

³⁴ Of course, it was also designed to force them “together” in selective ways, in the sense that they should accept group interests for their own group.

³⁵ Not surprisingly, the project of carrying out a country-wide census has been a politically contentious issue. Although there were obviously massive shifts in demographics during the war—including deaths, emigration, and displacement of over half of Bosnia's people—the Dayton Peace Agreement apportioned political power on the basis of the last Yugoslav census, done in 1991. BiH finally completed its first census in late 2013 after years of wrangling, but the results are not expected for some time.

labels such as Jews, Albanians, Czechs, and so forth (Markowitz 2007:42). Markowitz explores the bureaucratic and social forces that drive this trend, compelling people in Sarajevo to designate themselves as either Bosniak, Serb, or Croat in order to “count and be counted,” (2007:61). Indeed, counting is quite literally the issue, as the constitution of Bosnia-Herzegovina is written in language that takes for granted that *all* political office-holders will be either Serb, Croat, or Bosniak³⁶. As Mujkić cogently points out:

Due to her or his marginalized and discriminated-against position under the Constitution, a Bosnian citizen is valuable *only* as a member of an ethnic group. He or she, according to ethnopolitical expectations, has two purposes in his or her individual life: a *reproductive* purpose (to increase the biological mass of the collective) and a *pseudopolitical* purpose (to vote for ‘his or her kin’ in elections). (Mujkić 2007:119)

Therefore, an election becomes much like a census, a way of declaring that one’s group is strong, rather than a way to vote for or against specific *policies*. Perišić, who regards mixed marriage in terms of its constitutional status, argues that those who resist and try to claim a more complex subjectivity are effectively invisible in public life³⁷ (Perišić 2012).

Although she finds evidence that many people privately continue to identify in complex ways, Markowitz documents real shifts in people’s personal sense of affiliation that result from the newly-constrained legal categories, as in the case of 21-year-old Amar, who told her in 2004:

“Look, until a few years ago I went around telling everyone I was a Bosanac [pan-ethnic Bosnian] until I realized that this category is illegal; it doesn’t exist in our constitution.

³⁶ This constitutional marginalization of “Others” was challenged in the European Court of Human Rights by two plaintiffs, Dervo Sejdić and Jakob Finci (who are Roma and Jewish), and was found illegal in 2009—yet no actions have been taken to implement the decision.

³⁷ Note, however, (a) that this political disenfranchisement is not limited to “mixed” people, and (b) that resistance may be quite widespread, including simply the fact that most Bosnians dismiss political participation in their so-called democracy as a farce (cf Helms 2007), and/or engage in a wide variety of voting practices “including ‘voting against,’ partial voting, ballot invalidation, drawing and writing profanities on the ballot, adding names of absurd candidates and so on” (Kurtović 2011:243). People describe similar practices of resistance when talking about censuses, including writing in their identity using absurd categories like “Eskimo” or “Extraterrestrial.”

So I thought about it and decided that I wanted to count as one of the constituent groups of my country. And now, I feel like, yeah, I'm a Bosniac" (Markowitz 2007:56).

Markowitz also describes incidents of nefarious manipulation such as when census takers make their own judgments about what people "really" are even if this means classifying a Czech woman as Croat because she is Catholic (Markowitz 2007:58), or insisting repeatedly that a person of mixed identity "pick a side" (2007:59).

According to the families I worked with, this type of pressure is common during almost any routine bureaucratic paperwork. Even when there is no census-taker or clerk recording one's identity, it takes a certain stubbornness to escape the Bosniak/ Croat/ Serb labels and remain "Other." In one household, a woman named Sanja and her parents described the social pressure they feel to conform:

Sanja: Ti ne možeš ni reći da si bosanac, to oni su - nigdje ne piše
You can't even say that you are Bosnian, they've - it doesn't say that anywhere [in writing]

K: To ne postoji
That doesn't exist

Mother: Da. Nego u zavodu za zapošljavanje imaš- i bilo gdje-
Right. But in the office of employment you have- and wherever else-
imaš (.) rubriku (.) ostali
you have (.) a box (.) "Other"

Father: I to su- kao otpadnici
And those are- like traitors

Mother: I mi smo tako. napisali ostali.
And that's what we. wrote down, Other.

Father: A onda srbi, hrvati, ili musl-muslimani (.) bošnjaci
But then Serbs, Croats, or Musl-Muslims (.) Bosniaks-

Mother: [bošnjaci
[Bosniaks

Father: smatraju one koji se izraze kao bosanci kao otpadnici
consider those who describe themselves as Bosnians to be traitors
jer zaboga oni gube svoje članove
because by God, they are losing their members

Sanja says that there is no official option to designate oneself a Bosnian on the basis of citizenship; her mother clarifies that the only available option on government forms, such as

those in the office of employment, is to check the box marked “Other.” She says that their whole family chooses “Other.” But Sanja’s father adds that people who refuse to choose a side risk being seen as traitors. He repeats this point twice, the second time elaborating that Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks consider “Others” to be traitors because it means that their numbers look smaller. Because of the way political power is linked to national numbers, this is indeed a concern for political parties and religious leaders. Indeed, to say it is a political concern risks understating the urgency of the stakes, which are often portrayed as “existential... questions of national survival” (Jansen 2013a:240), ever raising the possibility that one group is at risk of total extermination.³⁸

Jansen (2005) argues that the essentialist core of nationalism is the simplistic assumption that people can be unambiguously sorted into categories, and represented in numbers. He critiques what he calls the “‘mosaic’ mode of representation” that links demographic data with neatly demarcated territories on a map, arguing that mundane tools such as multi-colored maps have been central to the nationalist project of neatly sorting people into mutually-exclusive groups and territories (Jansen 2005:45). Underlying these maps, Jansen’s article suggests, are several assumptions that characterize not only nationalist ideology but the modern ideal of sovereign nation-states that coexist in a “family of nations” (Jansen 2005:61). On the one hand, there is the myth that every person fits unambiguously into one and only one box (“no fractions,” in Anderson’s words, 1991:166) and can be represented with a number—that hybridity is artificial and masks the “real” underlying essence (Jansen 2005:54-55). Jansen sees this as part

³⁸ One ad produced in the run-up to the 2013 BiH census uses powerful imagery of men whose mouths are taped shut to allude to genocide against Bosnian Muslims. One by one, the men take the tape off of their mouths and defiantly state: “I am Bosniak. My faith is Islam. My language is Bosnian.”

In elections, Mujkić (2007) points out: “... you don’t vote for lower taxes, ecological laws, and the like; rather, *you vote for your own survival* (every four years or so). So each and every election is described during the campaign as ‘decisive,’ ‘crucial,’ a ‘matter of life or death.’” (119-120).

of the modern urge toward categorizing, knowing, and achieving order (cf Bauman 1991). Then there is the myth that all members of a national identity category share interests and are homogeneous (Jansen 2005:58). And finally there is the idea that population percentages can be visualized on maps, and territories imagined as (and to some extent actually turned into) ethnically pure regions controlled by one group (Jansen 2007:47-48). All too often, Jansen says, such maps are presented and used uncritically, without context; they have been tools taken for granted “not only among the main proponents of the various hegemonizing post-Yugoslav nationalisms, but also in the technologies of power/knowledge deployed by ordinary people, the so-called ‘international community’ and scholars” (Jansen 2005:60).

There is no question that military commanders and nationalist strategists used maps and demographic numbers in the recent war to achieve their goals of “ethnic cleansing” and expanded territorial control. International mediators seeking to end the violence also accepted the framing of “ethnic conflict” without question, effectively rewarding the forcible takeover and “cleansing” of territory through the creation of the ethnically-defined “Entities,” and institutionalizing ethnicized politics in the Constitution that appears as an Annex to the 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement. Indeed, even post-war interventions seeking to diffuse nationalist sentiment have often reinforced it. Many international and local organizations paradoxically uphold and reinforce nationalist thinking by hiring staff or electing representatives on the basis of their nominal ethnic identity, to fulfill quotas. Aid agencies, trying to support the return of displaced people to areas from which they had fled ethnic cleansing, participate in the same “mosaic” logic by “fetishizing” minority returns (Jansen 2005:51).

Two recent ethnographic articles provide examples of how the mundane, everyday pressures to perceive and define oneself in nationalist terms occur through the literal structuring

of space and boundary-lines. Jansen (2013b), for example, traces the “materialisation” of the Inter-Entity Boundary Line between the Federation and Republika Srpska (RS) where it runs along a street in Dobrinja, an outlying neighborhood of Sarajevo. The east side of the street lies in RS and is part of the newly-formed City of East Sarajevo, while the west side is in the Federation and is part of Sarajevo. This segment of the borderline was drawn in 1992, according to the frontline of the siege of Sarajevo by Serb forces, but remained contested until it was fixed through international arbitration in 2001. Jansen describes how this line is demarcated not by fences or checkpoints, but by more subtle signs indexing identity such as different names for the same street, the use of Cyrillic lettering on one side and Latin lettering on the other, the presence of Serb or Bosniak apartment-dwellers, or the (non)availability of ethnically-marked commodities such as pork sausage in the shops on either side of the street (Jansen 2013b:25). The line is also demarcated through logistical practices, the provision of services such as gas and water, and the pragmatic orientation of people’s lives to government and commercial systems in the Federation or in RS.

Hromadžić (2011), meanwhile, observes spatial practices in an “integrated” high school in Mostar that provides concurrent but entirely separate classes (and curricula) for Croat and Bosniak students. The school, on contested territory between eastern “Bosniak” Mostar and western “Croat” Mostar, has separate classrooms for Croat and Bosniak students. Even in spaces such as the hallway or the teacher’s lounge that are used by both groups, Hromadžić documents pervasive segregation of Croat and Bosniak people. The school was carefully designed, she says, to create “an absolute equilibrium, in which Croat (student, classroom, etc.) stands next to the Bosniak (student, classroom, etc.)” (Hromadžić 2011:277). However, she says, this very equilibrium made spontaneous movement difficult:

The (in)visible walls between ethnic communities made every interaction across ethnic boundaries risky and exaggerated, evident in behaviors such as loud speech across the divided table in the teachers' room or performative hand-shaking in the "no-man's-land." In this way, practices of border-crossing often accentuated the firmness of the borders themselves, causing continuous re-ethnicization of school life. (Hromadžić 2011:277)

She depicts teenagers whose city is so divided that their primary space for "mixing" and socializing with students of the other group between classes becomes the school's public bathroom. Here, anxieties about purity and boundary maintenance run high even as students flirt with each other and with the possibility of transgressing these boundaries (Hromadžić 2011).

Jansen stresses how "the everyday *practical* structuring of bodily movement through government and urban logistics [is] perhaps the most powerful dimension of the materialisation of the border" (Jansen 2013b:33). But his work, and Hromadžić's, suggests that these pragmatic, impersonal elements of daily division, in turn, structure emotional experiences of belonging, exclusion, and self-consciousness. Being in territory that is not "one's own" can carry with it a sense of threat (or illicit attraction, in the case of the Mostar high school), but also heightens and crystallizes a sense of one's nationality and that of other people. Jansen notes that "most people [that he interviewed]...did experience an acute sense that they were crossing a border" if they crossed into the other Entity, and felt self-consciously aware of their national identity while there (Jansen 2013b:31). Jansen argues that this type of affective experience structured by post-war spatial boundaries has by now become so powerful that it can even override spatially-located memories of war-time trauma in organizing people's movements and stimulating their emotional response to being in a certain place (Jansen 2013b:32).³⁹

³⁹ As an example, Jansen gives the case of the Grbavica neighborhood of Sarajevo. Grbavica was occupied by Serb forces and was the scene of atrocity and suffering. However, since the war it has been firmly a part of the city of Sarajevo, in Federation territory, and most Sarajevans pass through it regularly—even if they still avoid other sites, such as the mountain, Trebević, which was also used by Serb forces in their siege of the city and is now in RS territory.

The irony of the preoccupation with both territories and census boxes is that—of course—purity is an illusion.⁴⁰ If Jansen’s work (2013) shows that the Inter-Entity Boundary Line can powerfully structure people’s movements, it also demonstrates that other logics may be even more important. In particular, the pull of Sarajevo’s urban center (with jobs, shopping and entertainment) means that many Serbs regularly overcome their ideological distaste or anxiety about going into the Federation. Hromadžić, too, describes patterns of alternating antagonism and friendliness in relationships among the Croat and Bosniak students in the “integrated” Mostar high school she observed. She notes:

This particular cultural logic is a local response to the consociational model that assumes concurrent integration and segregation of peoples and territories. In addition, it is a powerful commentary on the complexity embedded in everyday negotiations of shared histories and diverging socio-political identities. (Hromadžić 2011:280)

Multi-faceted connections between the different ethno-religious communities of Bosnia (including neighborly relations, fictive kinship, and marriage) are a well-documented feature of Bosnia’s history; many types of mixing have existed and still exist even in the most insular settings (cf Hammel 1968, Lockwood 1972:70, Bringa 1995, Sorabji 1995, Buturović 2002, Burić 2012). Today, the heightened self-consciousness associated with border crossing in its literal and symbolic forms is not rare, but a familiar part of daily life for many people.

I look at Jaca and Dado’s experiences in light of this paradox—the intense push for purity that takes place in a society that remains deeply interconnected—for, in all their uniqueness, they provide some insight into a phenomenon that any Bosnian might identify with. In the following sections I attend to the ways Jaca and Dado talk about what it is like to be “misplaced” in Bosnia

⁴⁰ The very fact of these extensive connections suggests that it is also an illusion to assume that simply *unmixing* territories, creating a careful balance in which “Croat (student, classroom, etc.) stands next to Bosniak (student, classroom, etc.)” (Hromadzic 2011:277) will automatically bring people to build meaningful relationships and destroy nationalism (Bougarel, Helms, and Duijzings 2007; Jansen 2005).

today, to come up against reminders that one is the “wrong” sort of person in the “wrong” place and to feel acutely aware that one is under scrutiny (if only from oneself).

Dalibor in Sarajevo

Consciousness of ethnicity and nationalist division is close to the surface of my conversations with Jaca and Dado—whether they are describing confrontations with prejudice, or smoother encounters in which everyone looks past identity categories. They both assure me that family and close friends have accepted their marriage without any problem, that Jaca’s friends in Sarajevo—people of Muslim background—have received Dado without a moment’s hesitation, saying he is perfect for her. On the other hand, they admit, it is hard to find a space where both Jaca and Dado can both feel equally at home. “There [in Dado’s hometown] I am a bit of a problem,” Jaca tells me, “and here [in Sarajevo], Dado is a bit of a problem.”

I learn almost immediately that Dado feels self-conscious in Sarajevo. “When I meet somebody, if I say my name is Dalibor, they look at me like—” He cuts off abruptly, demonstrating a look that is not exactly horrified but measuring, guarded, a pause in the interaction. “Not everybody, but it happens,” he says. “Dalibor is Serb or Croat, Catholic or Orthodox, but it isn’t Muslim, you know.” When people hear his name, then, he feels their immediate awareness of him *as a Serb*, or at least as an unknown, non-Bosniak element. This theme of Dado’s awkward self-consciousness comes up a lot, one of the motifs of their life in Sarajevo.

Dado is a large man, bald, with a long face, projecting an impression not so much of physical strength as of solidity, a gentle steadfastness. He is slow to speak, slow to express himself, but follows Jaca’s quick, energetic words with obvious interest. He is the older of two

sons; his father was a shopkeeper and his mother worked in a clothing factory in Novi until it closed during the war. He talks of his cousins as if they were sisters and brothers, tells me this is what people do in Krajina, his home region. He misses home, where he had many friends and spent a lot of time with other people. He misses the landscape; he misses the cool river Una.

Slowly, I start to glimpse some of the dimensions of what it is like for Dado to live here, in alien territory. It seemed reasonable to me from the start that he should feel uneasy or unwelcome as a Serb moving to Sarajevo. Like Jaca, I felt awed by his bold decision to move there for a relationship. Sarajevo is the capital of the Federation, the city that was besieged by Serb forces for four years, the city where nearly 5,000 civilians lost their lives under constant shelling and deadly sniper bullets (Tabeau et al. 2003:2). Sarajevo is the city at the center of the energetic promotion of Bosniak national identity (Markowitz 2007).⁴¹ It is the city in which new mosques financed by Malaysian and Saudi Arabian sources signal a growing concern with public religiosity (cf Maček 2007). Sarajevo is the city that Serbs abandoned en masse at the beginning of the war, seeking security in the newly created Republika Srpska (Armakolas 2007:86-87). Jansen (2006) says that Bosnian Serbs displaced from the Federation “have never displayed a desire to return” (182), and Armakolas (2007) documents the reluctance with which Sarajevan Serbs displaced to neighboring Pale began to make forays back into Sarajevo for employment or city amenities. Dado is acutely aware that from the vantage point of Sarajevo, it is easy to

⁴¹ Markowitz traces the transformation of Bosnian Muslims into a new *Bosniak* nation, on par with the Serb and Croat nations, after leaders of the Muslim Community during the war appropriated a 19th-century administrative term that once applied to all Bosnians. This new eponym, she says, “has put the Muslims on par with the Serbs and Croats by filling a troublesome gap in the terminological table. Now that Bosniacs are to Muslims as Croats are to Catholics and Serbs are to Orthodox, Bosnia’s Muslims-as-Bosniacs have gained recognition as a political force as well as a ‘culture’” (Markowitz 2007:55). See also Helms 2013.

stigmatize Republika Srpska as the “‘dirty backyard’ of Bosnia-Herzegovina” (Armakolas 2007:84), and its inhabitants as genocidal nationalists.⁴²

Dado is anxious not to be conflated, in his neighbors’ minds, with Serb nationalism and exclusivism, but he worries that this is the only way his presence can be read: if he is Dalibor, he must be Serb; if he is Serb, he must be a particular type of extremist Serb. Dado, of course, has staked his life on the unity of Bosnia’s peoples, but he doesn’t expect others to understand that. In Sarajevo, he keeps a low profile by calling himself Dado rather than Dalibor. “I say Dado so that I don’t have to explain myself,” he said. “Around here they call me Ado, Adnan, Darko—all sorts of things—Davor.” The nickname disguises him to some extent, allows him to blend in and interact more smoothly with strangers on a daily basis. But from the stories he tells, I also realize that the issue is more complex than I thought at first, and that other types of discomfort accompany his capacity to move chameleon-like through life in Sarajevo.

He tells me about a co-worker, a Serb, who orients himself to Serbia and talks a lot about it. It may be that this man is trying to intimidate non-Serbs at work, but it sounds more as if he wants to forge a bond with Dado on the basis of what he assumes is their common Serb identity—imagining, for example, that both of them would root for Serbia in a soccer match against Bosnia. Dado finds this irritating, but puts up with his talk the first time he hears it, “and the second time, the third time, even the twenty third, sixty third, one hundred third time.” Finally he loses his patience and tells the man vehemently, “You know what man, I am not *Serbian*. I am *Bosnian*.” Showing more emotion and decisiveness than I otherwise witnessed in him, Dado insists that his country is not Serbia, but *Bosnia*—he has no other country:

Kao ovaj što- radi sa mnom on kaže moja je država-

⁴² This stigma attaches to Serbs from Serbia as well, of course. Greenberg tells the story of a young woman in Serbia who encountered visitors from Western Europe and noticed that they appeared frightened of her and her high-school peers, “‘as if we wanted war, as if we would all be walking around carrying guns’” (Greenberg 2011:92).

Like this guy who- works with me he says my country is—
ma ni:je, brate. Ne može biti.
well it i:sn't, man. It can't be.
Ne može nikako, nikako ne može. Ne može.
There's no way it can be, no way it can be. It can't be.
Ne može, to ne ide.
It can't be, it doesn't work like that.

What upsets Dado in this instance is not hostility directed toward him. Instead, he strenuously resists being positioned as a Serb nationalist, a Bosnian Serb who would actively undermine the legitimacy of the Bosnian state by constantly looking to another country. Dado, who sees himself as a *Bosnian* Serb and condemns Serb xenophobia, is adamantly opposed to this type of rhetoric.

Jaca brings up a very different occasion when a man came into the pizza shop where Dado works and recognized Dado's accent, but misinterpreted the circumstances that brought him to Sarajevo. From the accent, the customer correctly deduced that Dado comes from the Krajina region of northwestern Bosnia, a region that also encompasses the cities of Prijedor, Sanski Most and Banja Luka from which Muslim populations were “cleansed” during the war. The customer may also have noticed that Dado refers to his city by the pre-war name Bosanski Novi (literally, “Bosnian New”), rather than using the new name, Novi Grad (“New Town”), that erases its “Bosnian” character to suit its new position in Republika Srpska. Given the fact that he is in Sarajevo, Dado's accent and the way he names his hometown could index a Muslim/Bosniak identity, and the customer clearly assumes he has figured out Dado's affiliation. With this incorrect assumption, the interaction goes terribly wrong:

J: ušao mu je neki čovjek iz Krajine on je progovorio onako taj
specifičan naglasak
some guy from Krajina came in (to his shop) and he said something in that specific accent
Dado ga još uvijek ima—
Dado still has it—
D: da da
yes yes

J: i onda kaže, otkud ti, odakle si ti
and then he says, what are you doing here, where are you from
On je rekao ((Bosanski Novi))
He said ((Bosnanski Novi))
Jesu li tebe protjerali jesu li sve pobili
Did they force you out, did they slaughter everybody
Znaš, on mislio da je Dado znaš musliman
You know, he thought that Dado was, you know, a Muslim
i kao da je Dado protjeran kad je rat počeo
and like, that Dado was forced out when the war began

Here again, somebody who doesn't know Dado mistakenly imagines that they have a lot in common. This time, the mistake must have been intensely uncomfortable for both men. The customer has situated himself in a particular way, said things he likely would never had said if he had known Dado's *actual* background. He has implicitly revealed his own Muslim background and stance toward the events of the war. He has assumed common ground with Dado, imagining that they share a common experience of victimization during the war, and invited Dado to complain *against* Serb aggression.

Dado, in response, is forced to explicitly reveal who he is. As he picks up the story from Jaca to describe how he answered the man, he speaks slowly, as if searching for words:

D: a ja njemu kažem
and I say to him
nije mi .
none of (.)
J: niko
nobody
D: nije mi niko poginuo
nobody in my family died
nije me niko protjerao
nobody forced me out
ja sam ovdje došao poslije rata.
I came here after the war.
I sad ja njemu objasnim da sam ja došao poslije
And so I explain to him that I came afterwards
da sam ja Dalibor, da ja živim ovdje,
that I am Dalibor, that I live here,
njemu je to bilo nejasno.
it didn't make sense to him.

Dado uses oblique references to deny the man's assumption that he, too, is a Muslim. No, nobody in his family was a target. He did not have to flee. He did not come to Sarajevo as a refugee during the war; he came here later. Finally he says that his name is Dalibor. Each of these cues is highly significant, indicating that he is not Bosniak, but Serb. In Dado's case, though, they don't add up to an easily recognized category—Dado feels that he remains an uncomprehended enigma to the customer. Why would a Serb from Republika Srpska voluntarily move to Sarajevo after the war; why would he choose to live there? For his part, Dado seems unsure how the man will react to him, or how to interpret the man's lack of obvious response:

Muslim ne, ja ne bi mu-možda
I mean no, I wouldn't be (to him)- maybe
ali bi- bi bilo-
but it would- would be-
Otkud si ti tu
“What are you doing here?”

Dado stammers, backtracks, and cuts himself off as he tries to estimate the man's reaction. He doesn't describe how the man *did* respond, but uses the conditional to frame it as something that *would* or *could* happen. This creates a sense of a more enduring, generalized concern. Dado's hesitant phrasing suggests that he believes that *as a rule* a person like this man wouldn't—what? Wouldn't necessarily see Dado as his enemy, as a threat? Wouldn't make a big deal of it? Maybe not, but he *would*, Dado concludes, challenge Dado's right to be there. Even if the man is not aggressive, the question in his mind *would* be: What are you doing here? What Dado expresses most clearly is a sense that his presence in Sarajevo is not legitimate, not wanted. Interestingly, though, Dado's sense of discomfort seems to be based as much on his own inner

fear that people *would* not want him there (if they knew who he was) as it is on experiences of outright exclusion or challenge.⁴³

Dado says that in their neighborhood, everyone recognizes him by now; they know him because they come in to the pizza shop, or they greet him as he goes about daily tasks such as buying bread at the bakery. They don't necessarily know his name, but call him *Ćelo*, "Baldy." "They call out, 'Ćelo, Ćelo, what's up Ćelo!'—you know, everybody knows you," Dado explains. I think he is telling me how he feels accepted in the neighborhood, but when I say this, Jaca disagrees. "You know what it is," she says. "When they meet you, people generally assume that you are like the majority, that you are Muslim." This assumption allows for smooth daily contact, but it leaves Dado feeling mis-recognized; in a way it creates a barrier to deeper interactions:

J: Dado se ne- manje više nikom ne objašnjava ko je šta je
Dado doesn't- he almost never explains to anybody who he is and what he is
i onda kad si s nekim znaš,
and then when you are with somebody, you know,
pa te neko prihvati, zavoli il' mu se svidiš,
and somebody accepts you, becomes friends or likes you,
pa kad kažeš da si Dalibor ono-
so when you say that you are Dalibor then-
Ao: zar ti nisi musliman, znaš.
Ao: you mean you aren't Muslim, you know.

"Yeah," Dado agrees, "That's it, that's *it*." Jaca has captured something critical about the way nationalist categories function, inject mistrust into relationships. A friendly acquaintance might feel surprised, uncomfortable, even betrayed at the revelation that Dado is not Muslim.

⁴³ Dado's sense of guilty anxiety may be more widely shared. I particularly recall a time when I happened to get lost while driving to the Catholic pilgrimage site of Međugorje, and had to stop for directions in a small community near there. Vera, who was traveling with me, remarked afterward that the man who gave us directions was surely a Serb, saying, "you can always recognize Serbs because they bend over backwards to be polite." She implied that "ordinary" Serbs do what they can to distance themselves from extremism.

I think for Dado, the uneasy sense of being misrecognized, of having to specify who he is every time he meets someone, is tightly connected with the fact of being a *stranger* in the city—somebody who appears as an individual, unconnected to family members and histories of interaction. He says several times that where he comes from “everybody knows” his father; he explains that in Krajina, people accept strangers because of their ties to known individuals or families. In Sarajevo it is different, as he and Jaca agree: you never quite know who a stranger really is and what her intentions are, so people are justifiably wary.

Jaca: Being “mixed”

Jaca’s experience is different from Dado’s. Having grown up in a “real, old-fashioned Ottoman casbah,” a picturesque neighborhood where most people were observant Muslims even while her family was staunchly secular, Jasmina is not out of her element in Sarajevo in the way that Dado is. She primarily expresses a sense of Sarajevo as the big city, a cosmopolitan metropolis with all of the diversity—and sometimes, alienation—that urban life entails.

Jaca says of herself that she is Bosnian, a secular citizen with no ethno-religious denomination. Of course, she says, “When I declare myself as Bosnian they say that that doesn’t exist.” Since that category is erased, she comments wryly, “We are Other, as if we are sheep or cattle.” Nevertheless, she is firm in saying that she does not consider herself Bosniak, Serb, or Croat, and she never will:

Ja se ne izjašnjavam
I don’t declare myself
ni kao bošnjak ni kao pravoslavac ni kao katolik.
either as Bosniak or as Orthodox or as Catholic.
Niti želim.
Nor do I want to.
Niti ću ikad.
Nor will I ever.

Using the words Orthodox and Catholic rather than Serb and Croat,⁴⁴ Jaca seems to imply here that ethno-national difference in Bosnia boils down to religious difference. She says she believes in God, but claims no religious affiliation. She refuses to choose a side even though, as she explains to me, local practice would immediately sort her either according to her father or according to her husband. “My father is Muslim,” she says, “so I should be Muslim.” But she rejects this option on the grounds that even her father isn’t really Muslim:

Prvo, moj otac nije musliman.
First of all, my father isn’t Muslim.
On jest musliman ali nikad nije vjerovao
He is Muslim but he never believed
u smislu da ide u džamiju da se nešto-
in the sense that he’d go to the mosque or anything-

She also rejects the idea that she might adopt her husband’s ethno-religious affiliation, thinking of herself as Serb or as Orthodox. “Dado and I don’t function that way,” she says adamantly, and indeed, Dado seems more willing to modify his own affiliations than Jaca does.

Jaca does indicate a sense of personal belonging and allegiance that is focused locally, on her hometown of Tešanj—but which associates her most closely with Muslim or Bosniak interests. She describes her childhood neighborhood as a “purely Muslim environment” and tells me that most of her friends, to this day, are Muslim. Her brother’s girlfriend is also Muslim. During the years of the war, she was in Tešanj, her father absent for months at a time fighting in the BiH army, while she lived with the terror and deprivations of wartime and witnessed the flow of refugees from nearby towns of Doboj and Teslić. These were “people who had lost everything but their lives fleeing from Serb—that is, Chetnik—that is, JNA forces.” In this time of catastrophe, Jaca says, “I didn’t feel any difference between myself and the other people of Tešanj.” After the war ended, she said, it was difficult to venture into Doboj—only 29

⁴⁴ On the other hand, her use of the term Bosniak rather than Muslim is interesting here, especially since she often ignores the new term Bosniak and continues to use the word Muslim.

kilometers from Tešanj, but now in Republika Srpska rather than Federation territory. “I wasn’t brought up in the spirit of looking at things [with prejudice],” she says, but still it was hard.

By 1997, Jaca went with her mother to check on her grandparents in Bosanski Novi, which had been re-named Novi Grad. Jaca had just finished high school. She had last been in the area in 1990, before the war started, when she was a child. The trip was tough for her. “Believe me, it made me feel uncomfortable,” she said. Two cousins she didn’t really know stopped by to see her, asking whether Jaca lived surrounded by women wearing (Muslim) headscarves:

I došle su kao-
And they came like-
Zar kod vas sve žene tamo ne nose maramu?
“Don’t all women in your area over there wear headscarves?”
Kao- sve. Znaš.
Like- all of them. You know.
To je medijska kampanja
It was the media campaign.

Jaca sounds shocked, even today, that her cousins would think the entire Federation was filled with traditional Muslims who marked their religious identity with their clothing. Wearing a headscarf is relatively uncommon in Bosnia and, especially in urban areas, tends to be interpreted as a strong, even militant, statement of identity. In Jaca’s response—“Are you guys crazy?”—I hear her desire to distinguish herself and her hometown from a stereotype of conservative/ backward/ violent Islam. Jaca explains her cousins’ misperception by saying that they had been duped by media campaigns designed to sow mistrust along religious lines. But she indicates that their assumption made her feel uncomfortable, exotic, misunderstood.

Jaca says that over time, she has come to feel at ease in Novi, especially around Dado’s family. Nevertheless, she still locates herself firmly as an outsider, a person from the Federation,

when she talks about Novi. She says that Dado's friends have accepted her, but still she doesn't exactly feel welcome:

Mada se to tamo- da ne zvučim ružno-
There it's—not to sound ugly—
malo više ističe- (.) znaš,
it's emphasized a little more— (.) you know,
Srbija,
Serbia,
i oni svi piju i navijaju za Srbiju
and they all drink and cheer for Serbia [in sports]

Dado's friends display more patriotism toward Serbia than they do toward Bosnia, perhaps hoping that Republika Srpska will be united with Serbia someday (cf Armakolas 2007). Jaca points out that she and Dado both find this orientation away from Bosnia and toward Serbia problematic. But clearly, given her personal history and paternal family background, she is the outsider in Novi—much as he is the outsider in Sarajevo.

Jaca is not only self-conscious when she visits Republika Srpska, however. Wherever she goes, even in her beloved hometown of Tešanj, she carries with her the sense that others might, or do, look at her differently because of her mixed parentage. She says that people very rarely say anything about it to her face, but “you do feel it, you know.” The figure of the “child of mixed marriage” (*dijete iz mješovitog braka*) is one commonly portrayed with a combination of hostility, dread and pity: such a child is the serious consequence that follows the willful decision of two individuals to marry across ethnic lines. Of course, nationalist or religious voices talk of bastards, degenerate genetic “experiments,” and intense intra-familial conflict, and decry supposed political projects to destroy or “genocidally assimilate” distinct Yugoslav peoples (“Mixed Marriages a Titoist Political Project” 2003; Pejaković 2012; “Bosniaks-turned-Serbs are a Direct Result of Mixed Marriage” 2012). Even media coverage sympathetic to mixed marriage tends to emphasize the misfortunes that attend children of such marriages. Children of mixed

marriage appear likely to be troubled, traumatized, unhappy, caught in the middle of politicized conflict (see articles such as “Children from ‘mixed’ marriages: Invisible victims of war,” Arnautović 2009; and “Mixed marriage as the burden of today’s Bosnia,” Matejčić 2012). Such children will be constitutionally disenfranchised, without rights, discriminated against, invisible, unable to get jobs, or constantly faced with the psychic pressure of picking a side and thus rejecting the other side (cf “What are the lives of children from mixed marriages like?” 2012, and Topić 2012 “The short path from desirable to scorned”). Matejčić quotes a young man from Mostar who says, “smiling bitterly,” that “Those of us who live in mixed families can only be in the middle, and in the middle [of Mostar] is the river” (2012). For him, evidently, there truly is no place in contemporary Bosnian society for people who do not or cannot fit into pure territories and pure identities.

Jaca chafes against these pessimistic visions of what it is to be “mixed,” even while she also confirms that it is not always an easy position for her personally. She tells me about one time when some of her fellow students at university broached the subject of her mixed parentage:

Pitaju mene onako znaš
They ask me, you know,
sijeli su oko mene ...
they were sitting around me ...
'Kako je biti dijete iz mješanog braka?'
((breathy voice)) “What is it like being a child of mixed marriage?”
'Kako je biti miješano' . 'Eto xx'
“What is it like to be mixed?” ((inbreath)) “Like xx”

As Jaca portrays the classmate who asked the question, her voice becomes breathy, soft, extravagantly deferential. The question becomes disingenuous, sugary sympathy masking a greedy desire for the inside scoop on Jaca’s presumed inner turmoil. In light of the prevailing stereotypes about the “child of mixed marriage,” Jaca clearly did not read their question as an

honest attempt to understand her reality; she found it insulting and was incensed. She says she responded forcefully:

Da imam zelenu krv rekoh
If I had green blood, I said,
i rogove, rep koji vadim navečer
and horns, and a tail that I pull out in the evening
neću pred vama na fakultetu.
I won't (talk about it) in front of you-all at the university.

Answering their question by distorting it beyond recognition, Jaca shows that she finds the question offensive and absurd. So you think I am a monster? she asks implicitly. So you want me to reveal all my most intimate oddities? Too bad! I will not expose them to you here.

Reflecting on the exchange, Jasmina rejects the underlying assumption that her life is qualitatively different from anybody else's, or that she is somehow set apart. She believes that her classmates probably wondered how she could stand to live with herself:

Možeš misliti kako je to glupo pitanje.
Just think what a stupid question that is.
Izgledam li ja tebi drugačija nego bilo ko ...
Do I look (to you) any different than anybody else ...
Njima je to- Ne-
To them it was- No-
Njima je valjda bilo teško shvatiti kako ja živim sa tim što
ja jesam.
To them I guess it was hard to understand how I live with what I am.

She resents the classmates' breathless assumption that she is miserable, that she doesn't belong anywhere, that she has some sort of experience incommensurable with theirs, unimaginable to them. She also implies that they are being forward, crossing some sort of line, both by asking her in public, and (especially) because most of them are 9 years younger than she is and should show her more respect.

The final point of this narrative is that it *is*, in fact, a thorny matter to be a child of mixed marriage in Bosnia today. Jaca moves straight from outrage at her fellow students' assumptions

to a firm statement that appears to confirm those same assumptions: “I can tell you that it is not easy not to be aligned.”⁴⁵ While this might seem contradictory at first glance, there is a clear line of logic: Jaca has told me firmly that *she* is perfectly comfortable with herself and her family—she does not feel internal turmoil over which side of the family she is closer to; she is not scarred by a history of family conflict; she is not “confused” about her religious or political identity. It is only the constant confrontation with questions and assumptions like her classmates’ that bothers her. “I have no problem with it,” she says, “but people here have started to pay attention to it—what your name is, who your parents are, who stands behind you, do you have some sort of political or religious affiliation.” The constant negotiation of these questions, and the attendant sense of being excluded and exoticized, does indeed wear on her.⁴⁶

Jaca tells me about one of her cousins, who is the child of a mixed marriage and moved with his wife to live in Texas. Jaca, too, dreams of leaving Bosnia and finding somewhere to live where she does not have to be preoccupied with the question of her parentage and identity. Significantly, one of the reasons she gives for wanting to leave has to do with her belief that if she has children, they will be subject to these same disagreeable dilemmas:

Vjeruj mi, da imam živaca, para i vremena
Believe me, if I had enough nerve, money and time
da bi se vjerovatno spremila i otišla odavde
I would probably get myself ready and go away from here
Znaš zašto se bojim . živjeti ovdje
You know why I’m afraid . to live here
zato što ne znam kako će moje dijete sutra živjeti
because I don’t know how my child will live tomorrow

⁴⁵ This is key - this is where there is most social pressure. For further exploration of how being undeclared is treated by many as the worst crime, cf Vuić 2005 and Jansen 2005.

⁴⁶ While Jaca’s narrative focuses mostly on pervasive nationalist attitudes that show up in interpersonal interactions of this sort, or in bureaucratic paperwork that requires her to state her ethno-religious identity, she also illustrates the stress involved in negotiating divided logistical systems when she talks about her mother’s sudden death. Jaca’s mother practiced no religion, but since she was technically Serb and since Tešanj has no municipal graveyard, the family was forced to bury her in the Orthodox graveyard. This was awkward, Jaca says, since the church functionaries didn’t like it and the family didn’t know anything about the appropriate rituals.

gdje će-
where (he/she) will-
kako da se zove, da spada negdje
what (his/her) name will be, (how he/she will) fit in somewhere

Here, Jaca's own frustration with the nationalist assumptions and borderlines, her own sense of constantly fighting exclusion, is channeled into a new set of anxieties about a possible future in which her own child might have the same type of experiences. These anxieties, in turn, justify a fantasy of leaving Bosnia altogether.

A space of their own

In an essay on German families with mixed Jewish heritage, Feuchtwang notes that the process of "creating a family as a social being" involves developing and re-telling family stories, stories that become "ways of creating and maintaining a shared history" (Feuchtwang 2007:154). Dado and Jaca's stories deal with their individual experiences and confrontations with ethnicity, but also the joint experience of their relationship. They solidify this relationship and its primary importance for their lives as they tell stories, *by* telling stories, forming themselves into a family even in the encounter with me. The stories Jaca and Dado tell about themselves, one another, and their relationship paint a picture of two idealistic, brave young people who follow their own values rather than the herd mentality; they distinguish Jaca and Dado as people who truly love one another, enough that they are willing to make substantial sacrifices in order to be together. They set up a marked contrast between "feeling misunderstood" outside of the home and "feeling truly recognized" inside their apartment, in the sanctuary of their relationship or among select friends and family members. The stories identify Dado as a person who is brave, grounded in a counter-cultural sense of himself as a Bosnian, willing to take a leap of faith and come to Sarajevo to be with Jaca. They identify Jaca, too, as a strong-minded individual who is able to

disregard public opinion about her marriage and choose a husband who is different from her not only in ethnic and religious background, but also in education and status. Finally, the stories they tell characterize Jaca and Dado's relationship as loving and fulfilling, emphasizing their care for each other.⁴⁷ They are one another's best friends, they say. For Jaca and Dado, I wonder if the stories about not fitting in actually serve the purpose of making their connection to one another stronger, binding them together as two outsiders who find their belonging in their own relationship.

Thus, despite his awareness of himself as an outsider with an uncertain welcome, Dado has made Sarajevo his home for years. Despite her fantasies of leaving the region altogether for a place where ethnicity does not matter, Jaca has also put down roots in Sarajevo, and regularly travels with Dado to his home community and hers. The relationship that started tentatively, with interrupted contact at cafes, over the telephone and through the post, has become a solid fact, a "social being" (Feuchtwang 2007:154) that lives through both of them and has reconfigured the circle of relations around them. The life Jaca and Dado have cultivated—their marriage, the ties between their families, their move to Sarajevo—has opened up a small space in which differing identities can be seen not as opposed to one another, but as necessary components of the same social fabric, tightly interconnected and worth preserving. This impulse, too, has been an important aspect of Bosnian life, and they strive to normalize it and prioritize it in a time when it has fallen out of favor.

⁴⁷ Though I have not drawn attention to it here, it is important to note that Jaca and Dado represent themselves as "different" also in the domain of expected gender roles. Dado makes a point of telling me how he supported Jaca through school, despite derision from his co-workers, and Jaca often takes on the role of primary spokesperson for their family, even for Dado's experiences.

Chapter Four

Stuck in Transition: Loss and Aspiration in a Time of Uncertainty

It was January 2012, the dead of winter, the first time I met Jaca. Sarajevo sat muffled in coal smoke and damp fog; the streets were filled with grit and slush. I rode the tram to Otoka, trying not to breathe deeply, my body too warm and pressed against other sweaty, well-wrapped bodies, the meltwater from our shoes leaving a slick mess on the floor. I had just returned from a week's vacation in Austria with friends, and coming back to Bosnia felt like descending again into a dark tunnel, a claustrophobic space of anxiety from which I had briefly been free. Austria seemed so bright, so well organized, the towns and farms so prosperous, the people so contented. What was I doing in Bosnia, the land that the poet Mak Dizdar described as barefoot, cold and hungry, ready with the quick flashing anger of one who has been startled out of her sleep:

*Forgive me there once was a land sir called Bosnia
A fasting a frosty a
Fointsore a drossy a
Land forgive me
That wakes from sleep sir
With a
Defiant
Sneer⁴⁸*

I felt oppressed by the winter darkness, the choking smog, the petty frustrations of ethnographic research—but also by a sense of stasis, of the enormous difficulty of change. I thought back to my first days in Sarajevo, in 2002, and decided that people had been more optimistic then. The situation was difficult, but the country was recovering and rebuilding after the war, transitioning to a modern European, capitalist, democratic order. Things had been worse, and they were

⁴⁸ Dizdar 2009, translation by Francis Jones.

bound to get better. Now, ten years later, it seemed that changes were cosmetic—buildings rebuilt, new shopping centers—but more profound transformation was slow in coming. “*Nema, nema, nema napretka,*” one woman had told me emphatically: There isn’t, there isn’t, there isn’t any progress at all. Those fancy new shopping malls—great places for the diaspora to come spend a few euros on their annual vacations, as they nurse their nostalgia for home—but why don’t they stay? No, she said, the truth is, people are digging through the trash containers to find food, people with college degrees. She reflected on the corruption in politics, the media reports linking high-level politicians with all sorts of clandestine violence, and told me she saw three stark choices, none pleasant:

Il’ ćemo postati mafijaška država totalna
Either we will become a total mafia state,
il’ ćemo postati robovi mafije i šutiti i trpiti
or we will become slaves of the mafia and shut up and bear it,
il’ ćemo se iseljavati kako ko može.
or we will move away from here, each as they can.

I didn’t want to believe her, but in these grim wintry days I wondered if she might be right.

It would be good to meet somebody new, I thought, but unfortunately I was already running late because it was a Saturday and I had forgotten to leave myself extra time to accommodate the tram’s weekend schedule. As the tram jerked slowly along its metal path, I sent a text message to Jaca: *I’m on my way, but it looks like I will be a few minutes late.* She wrote back to say that she was waiting for me at the entrance to the Otoka market, but had gotten my message.

When I found Jaca a few minutes later, she immediately thanked me for sending a message and said she tries to be scrupulous about doing the same because she hates lateness and values people who are responsible and on time. She launched straight into a flow of words, warning me, as we walked the short way to her apartment, that she talks quickly and if I miss

anything I should just let her know. Was it okay if she used the informal “ti” instead of the formal “vi” to address me? She had been worried about recognizing me, she said, because the picture I had sent via email was dark and it was hard to see my face. Luckily, she had spied me right away—“You have a real American face, don’t you!” Dado was at work, she explained, but I would meet him another time. Meanwhile, the way home led past the pizza joint where Dado was working, and we could wave at him through the glass storefront. He waved back. Jaca told me, “He is a hundred times better than me; I don’t know anybody as good and as brave as he is. He moved here from Republika Srpska to marry me and didn’t know a soul here or have a job or anything, and he works terribly hard.”

We continued on around the corner, where she advised me to be careful of a slippery patch of ice, and warned me that the building has no lift. It was built during socialist times and is a typical example of such architecture, an unadorned concrete rectangular block; because it is only 5 stories tall the builders were not legally obligated to put in an elevator. I opened the building door, and she apologized that she should have done it, as a good hostess. While we climbed the stairs she told me that she had other American friends, a group of Protestants who had come to Bosnia about 10 years ago with an organization called Hope and Life, and who had lived in the student dormitory when Jaca was there. She said they hadn’t known anything about Bosnia, and had assumed that Bosnians knew nothing about the contemporary world. We got to the top floor; she unlocked their door, saying, “Welcome to our house. We’re renters, of course.” I took one step inside, onto a cloth Jaca had set there for wet shoes, and balanced awkwardly as I tried to take my boots off without touching anything else.

Inside, Jaca continued talking without missing a beat while she got me slippers, took my coat, told me to sit down, and walked to the other room to prepare coffee. She showed me a

photo of her mother, brother, and dog—her mother recently died, and so did the dog—and told me about other family members and friends, including one couple in Sarajevo whose baby boy she looks after and loves as if he were her own son. After a while she checked with me to see if she were digressing, explaining, “I am a communicative person in general, I am alone a terrible lot, and I am really sad.” She worried that since I didn’t know her, I might think she was disorganized, leaping from one topic to another. But, she said, her need to talk was related to the amount of time she spends alone in the house, particularly now that she is finished with her degree in laboratory diagnostics but hasn’t been able to get a job:

J: Dado jako puno radi, ja sam sama,
Dado really works a lot, I am alone,
meni je u biti sve i umrlo, nemam ja nešto rodbine.
basically everyone important to me has died so I don’t have many relatives.
Nemam ovdje- dvije, tri prijateljice ...
Here [in Sarajevo] I don’t have—two, three [female] friends ...
Onda sam ja puno sama
Then I’m alone a lot
onda valjda se to malo skupi ...
then I guess it collects a bit ...
Što mi kažemo ovdje, izjeda te.
As we say here, it gnaws at you.

She observed that, sometimes, it is easier to talk with somebody you don’t know, somebody who knows nothing about you.

During the hours we spent together that first afternoon, and in subsequent meetings, what I noticed first was the precarity of Jaca and Dado’s existence, their isolation, the note of sadness that ran through even light-hearted banter. Misfortune had already upended their plans more than once: expectations of prosperity built up during childhood in Yugoslavia turned into the nightmares of war, nationalism and economic collapse; expectations of health and family support had been suddenly reversed, especially for Jaca, who found herself mourning her mother and caring for her father rather than being cared for. Meanwhile, energy put into self-development,

like Jaca's studies or a business skills course Dado completed, hadn't yielded the return they hoped for. Even their desire to have children had not been fulfilled so far. Jaca and Dado continually gestured towards alternative possibilities, other lives, other paths their lives could have taken or might still take. They contrasted their own insecure, anxious daily reality with the stable trajectories they imagined for me or their relatives living abroad. Their stories made me sharply aware of life's fundamental contingency, and the limits of our human ability to control events. I was reminded that everyday life is not only a space of routine, intimacy, and trust, but often an "eventful" space in which one's projected future, and even one's present self, can be abruptly recognized as a fleeting illusion (Das 2007, Parish 2008, Gammeltoft 2014).

As much as Jaca and Dado's life was marked by uncertainty and contingency, by a sense that things could have been otherwise or are not yet settled, it also seemed stuck in an endless moment of suspension. In this moment nothing happened; nothing *could* happen. As insistently as Jaca and Dado threw themselves into efforts to create a better life, they also encountered setbacks and found themselves, as it seemed, right back where they started. The more carefully I analyzed our conversations, the more it seemed to me that their sideshadowing of alternative paths was in fact not about genuine possibilities, but often about foreclosed possibilities, what could have been but wasn't, or what hasn't happened so far, or what can't happen for one reason or another even though they wish for it: if socialism hadn't collapsed, if there were jobs in their hometowns, if Jaca's mother hadn't died, if they had gone to Australia or elsewhere right after the war when it was easier to leave. Perhaps they lamented these lost possibilities partly because the realistic options open to them as they tried to shape their future felt so limited. With frustration, Jaca said:

J: Znaš, stojiš u mjestu
You know, you're standing in one spot

ništa se ne dešava
nothing happens
i čini mi se da ne ide naprijed.
and it seems to me that nothing's moving forward.

She acknowledged all that they have done. They have created a life for themselves together in Sarajevo; they rent their own apartment, feed and clothe themselves, take care of their own bills through their own hard work. They both have more training and skills than they had six years ago. Nevertheless, they continue to eke out a bare living on the small salary Dado makes working in the same local pizza shop while Jaka remains unemployed. Both of them feel that something is missing, something critical:

J: Mi ovako tapkamo u mjestu već šest godina.

We've been marking time like this for six years already.

Puno smo mi napravili.

We've done a lot.

I školu završili [ja i on, i- Dado radi

We finished school, [both of us, and- Dado works

D: [a fali ti ta mala- stepenica
[but what you're missing is that little- step

J: ta mrvica, dok kreneš, da počneš živjeti.
that tiny bit, before you get going, to start living.

K: Ja.

Yeah.

J: A ona nikako.

And it just won't come.

This theme of being stuck or trapped in place, being unable to take a step forward, emerged in our conversations as a metaphor that captured the quality of Jaka and Dado's life at that moment. They felt frustrated by the way they had invested time and hard work in efforts to make a better life for themselves—to no avail. Feeling stuck involved a metaphoric sense of being trapped (of watching their hopes be foreclosed, of being in a place where they did not fit, or of being endlessly unable to reach goals despite hard work)—and it also involved literal experiences of having their field of movement limited, especially by financial and bureaucratic circumstances,

but also by paralysing emotion. This was their personal experience, and it resulted from the conjunction of circumstances unique to their lives, such as the sudden death of Jaca's mother and their own schooling and employment history in the six years of their marriage. But they also linked their feeling of stuckness to broadly relevant events, particularly the transition from socialism to a "wild west" type of capitalism. Their lives take place within the particular ecology of contemporary Bosnia. Jaca and Dado's struggle to imagine and bring about possible futures for themselves occurs in the context of generalized anxiety that Bosnia's future is uncertain, that changes since the war are solely for the worse, and that achieving a "normal life" may demand a willingness to emigrate or to use unsavory means to advance one's own interests at the expense of others.

Many people, certainly including Bosnians themselves, have written about Bosnia from a top-down perspective, arguing that *the country* is stuck, politically and economically, stuck in a post-war, post-socialist moment that never seems to turn into a new era. Despite enormous investment of aid (perhaps the highest per capita amount in history, UNDP 2013:135), Bosnians remain poor and unemployed; despite constant international monitoring, the government is dysfunctional, nationalism is ever more deeply entrenched and cities remain divided; despite carrots and sticks of many kinds, the country has not turned into a nice, politically-correct, gender-balanced, free market democracy and seems no closer to European integration. Despite the passage of twenty years since the end of the war, the fear of ethnic cleansing and the possibility of violence continue to shadow everyday life. In short, there is a widespread feeling among foreign observers, local pundits, and ordinary people themselves, that "things are not getting any better and...there are no signs that 'normal life' is about to re-emerge" (Jansen 2013a:239).

This chapter shifts the focus from “indicators” of stasis to an experience-near account of lives lived in the midst of these troubled times. In their singularity, Jaca and Dado are not exemplars representative of all Bosnians, yet they illuminate dimensions of yearning and disappointment that characterize the context they live in. Indeed, the dilemmas they face are all too familiar to me, and surely to human beings the world over. We are, after all, what Lear (2006) has called “finite erotic creatures,” desiring more than we can bring about, limited in our capacity to control events but forever reaching out to the world in an attitude of longing.

The previous chapter explored the experience of living in a deeply divided society. I focused on the fact of division in Bosnia today, and drew out stories Jaca and Dado told that illustrate the types of prejudice they face in their daily routines. But while nationalism is a real and meaningful factor that troubles their lives, it often seems to pale in importance compared with other obstacles they face as they try to make ends meet and achieve a “normal life” (Cf Maček 2009, Jansen 2014, Greenberg 2011). These problems are deeply connected to nationalism, yet to think of them only in these terms would be misleading.⁴⁹ Jaca herself reminds me that nationalism is only one of several lenses through which people perceive her marriage: “Prejudices have to do not only with faith [ethno-religious background] but with schooling, with status symbols, with money, with position, with employment.” She and Dado highlight the tumultuous reconfiguration of political-economic life in post-socialist, post-war Bosnia, where the expectations of predictability and prosperity built up over the years of their childhood come up against today’s reality of crisis, lack, and disappointment. This chapter

⁴⁹ Jansen (2006) criticizes international interventions and studies that too often focus only on the upheaval of the recent war, but render invisible the socialist transition.

At the same time, Gilbert (2006) argues that the socialist past is not recruited as a resource in post-war Bosnia (in the way it has been in other post-socialist states), and barely makes an appearance in public discourse. This is partly because the atrocities of the war are so egregious that socialist abuses pale in comparison, and partly because forms of government or rhetoric from socialist times have been imported into the present in ways that undermine their legitimacy and create a sense of stasis.

explores the forms of (im)possibility, aspiration, and frustration that Jaca and Dado experience in their everyday lives.

Bosnia in suspense

One aspect of Jaca and Dado's discontent—a large component—comes down to finances, the constant anxiety over how to make ends meet. Here they have plenty of company. Like about 18% of their compatriots, Jaca and Dado were living beneath the relative poverty threshold, which in 2011 was 416.40 KM (212.9 Euros) per equivalent adult per month (UNDP 2013:23).⁵⁰ Dado earned around 470 KM (240 Euros) every month making pizzas and waiting tables in a local restaurant. His pay was significantly lower than the 816 KM net average wage in 2011 (UNDP 2013:24). Jaca told me she regularly scoured up a little more cash by taking on odd jobs like babysitting, selling Avon products, translating documents, or cleaning for others, so that they estimated their average monthly income at around 600 KM (306 Euros). Their expenses included 200 KM for rent, plus utilities that can become quite expensive, especially heating in the winter months. Jaca explained that after rent and utilities they often had less than 100 KM left to cover all of their other expenses. “Can you imagine that?” she asked me. Jaca said she wasn't sure herself how she managed it. A major part of her responsibility in running the household involved hunting for bargains at the market, preparing humble foods, and stretching meals as far as she could. She and Dado restricted their expenditures to a bare minimum, rarely going out. When Dado had a day off they took walks in the neighborhood rather than spending money on tram tickets to go downtown. Meanwhile, Jaca worried a great deal about familial

⁵⁰ According to the OECD-modified equivalency scale Jaca and Dado's household contains 1.5 equivalent adults; if the relative poverty threshold was 416.4 KM per equivalent adult (UNDP 2013:23), they would need to earn above 624 KM per month to move out of relative poverty.

Cf <http://www.oecd.org/eco/growth/OECD-Note-EquivalenceScales.pdf>

expenses resulting from her mother's death and her father's deteriorating health, which she couldn't help with but felt responsible for.

The economic situation during my fieldwork in 2011-12 was bleak, as Bosnia struggled to cope with not only long-standing economic woes caused by the war's destruction and the structural "reforms" mandated by international agencies, but also the shocks of the international financial crisis that began in 2008. The recession in Europe meant that industrial activity and exports from BiH, which had increased in the post-war period, declined markedly after 2008, as did construction in the local economy (UNDP 2013:132). The BiH Central Bank reported that remittances from emigrants living outside the country, which made up 7.1% of the overall GDP in 2012, had also fallen and remained lower as the recession continued (BiH Ministry of Security 2013:70). A recent account published in the *Economist* noted that meaningful economic growth has been absent or even reversed since 2008, with negative consequences for Bosnia's people in terms of lower wages, higher unemployment, and lower public spending. The article estimates, in fact, that "living standards have declined to levels prevailing at the end of the 1992-95 war" (Economist Intelligence Unit 2014). Meanwhile, the country remains deeply dependent on foreign lending agencies, which insist on neoliberal reforms and austerity measures to bring BiH's economy under control. IMF-imposed budgets severely restrict levels of public spending, forcing successive Bosnian governments to freeze or even cut pensions and the wages of public employees despite popular outcry (Jansen 2006, Božić 2012, Larouchepac 2014).

Very high unemployment rates, much higher than elsewhere in Europe or even in the South-East Europe region, are a major problem contributing to poverty. Bosnian industries, primary employers before the war, are now largely defunct, and other forms of employment have not emerged. As Jansen observes sharply, foreign intervention agencies bent on re-shaping BiH

into a market economy have pushed income-generation programs that rely on “self-employment through micro-credit schemes, craft, agriculture, etc – all aimed at encouraging entrepreneurialism and discouraging a sense of entitlement to employment” that was a hallmark of socialism (Jansen 2006:192). None of these programs have substantially boosted labor force participation. Whereas average unemployment in all EU countries was 10.9% in 2012, unemployment in Bosnia stood at 28% in 2012, according to International Labor Organization estimates (UNDP 2013:148). Official unemployment is even higher, and has remained around 44% for years on end; the discrepancy results because many who are registered with the office of unemployment do work in the informal economy, which in 2002-3 was estimated to account for 36.7% of GDP (UNDP 2013:33).⁵¹ Among young people ages 15-24, the unemployment rate reached a “staggering” 63.1% in 2012—up from 34.8% in 2000 (UNDP 2013:148). Even more than others, youth are pushed into the informal economy as their only option.

Yet being employed in the formal economy does not guarantee a steady income: private companies and even the public sector frequently fail to pay their workers, sometimes for months or even years on end. Protests that began in the industrial center of Tuzla in early 2014 reflected the fact that privatizations of formerly state-owned industries (another key “reform” mandated by foreign intervention agencies) have regularly failed as buyers stripped the assets, laid off the workers, and declared bankruptcy (Larouchepac 2014, Economist Intelligence Unit 2014). As the Economist Intelligence Unit reported:

Tuzla, which used to be a relatively prosperous industrial stronghold, has turned into an economically deprived area as the poorly managed privatisation of its flagship companies has resulted in their effective bankruptcy. Chemical plants, such as Dita, Polihem and Gumara, and a wood-processing enterprise, Konjuh, have failed, resulting in thousands of

⁵¹ Jaca, for example, is registered as unemployed even though she generates some income through informal work as babysitter, cleaner, etc. I suspect that even Dado’s job is not fully in line with official employment policies—for example, he only has a few days off every year instead of the full 18 required by law. Obviously, informal work is generally less stable, and does not provide as much income, as work in the formal sector.

workers losing their jobs or being owed wages that have not been paid, in some cases, for two years. Other workers have been left without pensions, because their former employers have not paid their social insurance contributions. (Economist Intelligence Unit 2014)

The failure of these companies and others is interpreted by many Bosnians not as an inevitable consequence of globalization and the shift from industry to a service-sector economy, but rather as the result of nefarious dealing by self-interested profiteers, often people closely connected to nationalist politics. Indeed, there is extensive evidence that many of the same individuals who were vastly enriched by their participation in the smuggling of arms and supplies during the war have continued to benefit from “the spoils of peace” (Pugh 2004:54). Andreas documents the continuity between criminal networks that took advantage of the war and an emergent “nouveau riche ‘criminal elite’ with close ties to the government and nationalist parties” (Andreas 2004:44, cf Divjak and Pugh 2008). The Center for Investigative Journalism (CIN) in Sarajevo has reported on numerous cases in which state-owned firms have been sold for almost nothing under suspicious circumstances to figures who siphon off what profits they can and then file for bankruptcy, while workers who also owned shares in the company are left languishing without compensation and without wages owed them (CIN 2007, 2011, 2013).

Anger over economic stagnation and lack of opportunity is entangled with frustration about the lack of any positive developments in the political arena.⁵² Mujanović argues sharply that Bosnia’s politicians have “no substantive interest in meaningful reforms in BiH because they understand that a genuinely democratic and participatory society would effectively spell the end of their oligarchic reigns” (Mujanović 2013). Far from acting in good faith to develop the economy or infrastructure of BiH, elected officials regularly engage in power struggles that paralyze government, as Serb and Croat politicians refuse to recognize the legitimacy of a

⁵² I should also mention the existence of OHR and the continued presence of European figures who have the power to fire Bosnian elected officials.

unified Bosnian state (cf Hayden 2011). The parties voted in during October 2010 elections, for example, failed to form a national coalition government for a full 16 months. Contests between the leading Bosniak and Croat parties played into the hands of the Republika Srpska president, Milorad Dodik, who argued that BiH is a “failed state” and raised the possibility that the Bosnian Serbs should hold a referendum on independence (Economist Intelligence Unit 2012). In 2013, thousands of people protested in front of the parliament building in Sarajevo because newborn babies were no longer being issued ID numbers and could not obtain documents such as passports. Parliamentarians had bickered over how to assign numbers: Serb representatives wanted babies born in Republika Srpska to have numbers distinct from those of babies born in the Federation, but Bosniak and Croat representatives refused this demand. When a 3-month-old girl named Belmina needed to travel outside of the country to obtain life-saving medical treatment but was unable to obtain a passport, the issue gained widespread attention and provoked mass protests. These “Babylution” protests—and the even larger ones of 2014—expressed a “[deep] dissatisfaction over the country’s prolonged political stalemate” (Armakolas and Maksimović 2013:7).

Glimmering like a mirage in the desert is the great hope⁵³ of European integration—joining the European Union and NATO—goals that, aside from any potential economic benefits, symbolize recognition by the European community and inclusion in its systems of power. Some also believe that EU membership might orient Bosnians away from petty internal squabbles and allow a new form of political community to arise. The EU itself, together with OSCE and other bodies of the European community, has invested a great deal in the effort to stabilize BiH and

⁵³ I use this word with some irony, because I think the question of who (if anyone) is actually “hoping” for EU integration is open. Many Bosnians I know are quite skeptical of the EU’s technocratic pronouncements and the likelihood of actually addressing Bosnia’s economic woes through reform and integration into European markets. Nevertheless, my impression is that the prospect of *non*-inclusion in the EU generates a lot of resentment and that people in Sarajevo generally assume that Bosnia should be making progress toward EU membership.

bring its institutions in line with EU standards of neoliberal democracy.⁵⁴ Bosnia and Herzegovina has been a “potential member state” since 2003, and Bosnian citizens with biometric passports have enjoyed visa-free movement throughout the European Union since 2010. But the country has not met key criteria for membership, such as revising its constitution to allow all citizens, regardless of ethnic background, to run for all political offices.⁵⁵ When it does pass legislation that meets EU standards, BiH often does not implement it (European Commission 2013). As of 2014 it is the only Balkan country, aside from the special case of Kosovo, that remains without EU candidate status.

It is hard to witness all of this economic stagnation and political deadlock, especially from the ground in Bosnia, without feeling that Bosnia is indeed stuck; even the hopeful signs of citizens’ engagement in the “Babylution” protests of 2013 and the “Bosnian Spring” protests of 2014 presage an immensely difficult process of change. For those who need to live *now*, temporary or permanent emigration is an attractive option. Though BiH is a small country with a population of only around 3.8 million, an estimated 40% of the population—1.5 million people born in Bosnia—live outside of the country (BiH Ministry of Security 2013:66), mostly throughout Europe, North America, and Australia. Hundreds of thousands of them left after the war’s end (Jansen 2006:194). Many of these migrants are young and well-educated, and in fact significant numbers of them are engaged in higher education while living abroad (BiH Ministry of Security 2012:66, 2013:69-70).

⁵⁴ This intervention, of course, has been filled with its own internal inconsistencies, as projects both strengthen and undermine the Bosnian state and its relations to other states in the region. For critique, see especially Juncos 2012.

⁵⁵ Dervo Sejdić and Jakob Finci, Bosnian citizens who are Roma and Jewish respectively, sued the country of BiH in the European Court of Human Rights because its constitution allows only ethnic Bosniaks, Croats, or Serbs to run for President or membership in the House of Peoples. In 2009, the Court ruled in favor of Sejdić and Finci and ordered BiH to change the constitution.

One account of a young man who recently left, Eldar Sarajlić, emphasizes his gradual disillusionment and growing sense that he could not bring about change, and indeed could not live a full life in Bosnia. A political theorist and researcher, he came to the conclusion that “[c]hange in Bosnian society would require the sacrifice of an entire generation, who would need to pay the expenses of a revolution with their own health, ambitions, dreams, and personal comfort. I’ll be honest with myself and readers: I only have one life (I don’t believe in an afterlife) and I don’t want to spend it on a revolution” (Latinović 2013). Sarajlić left Bosnia, first to enroll in a PhD program at Central European University in Budapest, and is now living in New York City with his wife.

Loss: Foreclosed possibilities

“I’ve said to Jaca many times,” Dado tells me, “‘If only we were 60 years old now!’”

He looks at me to see if I am properly puzzled, then goes on: “If only we had lived during that beautiful time and now we were older, if we had grown-up children and had succeeded at all that.”

Dado’s wish can be heard as an expression of “Yugonostalgia,” a genre of lament often heard in the region, which many have interpreted as a form of moral evaluation or as a critique of the corrupt nationalist system within which post-Yugoslav peoples are trapped (PalMBERGER 2008, SIMMONS 2009, GILBERT et al. 2008, cf THROOP 2014). His statement also suggests a hesitancy or uncertainty that Dado feels when he thinks about managing his own adult life—taking care of a family, bringing up children—in the new world that confronts him. Will he and Jaca succeed at this? But as much as either of these, I think Dado’s wistful statement laments the

loss of a life-world, the world of Dado's childhood that he knows his own future children will never experience.

Dado and Jaca are in their mid-30s, which means they were adolescents by the time the war started; they were formed during the last years of the socialist regime and they are old enough to remember Yugoslavia. Their memories are romantic, a little vague. Life wasn't fancy, they say, but it was nice. They felt secure:

J: Mi smo onako bila staromodna država, u onom, komunističkom sistemom.

We were sort of an old-fashioned country, in the previous, communist system.

Znaš, francuzi su uvijek na nivou, talijani su na nivou, You know, the French are always at the cutting edge, the Italians are at the cutting edge, nijemci su ne znam možda najjači u Evropi the Germans are, I don't know, maybe ahead of everybody in Europe.

Mi smo živjeli onako- (.) starinski nekako.

We lived like- (.) old-fashioned somehow.

D: Mi:rno

D: Peacefully.

J: Državni stan, državni posao, ideš na more,

Government housing, government job, you go to the sea-side,

djeca idu u dobre škole, svi imamo džaba zubara, džaba doktora

the children go to good schools, all of us have free dental care, free medical care, znaš, nekako smo bili u svoj-

you know, we were somehow in our own—

D: [Besplatno. besplatno je školovanje bilo. sve besplatno

[Free. Schooling was free. Everything was free.

J: i lijepo je sve bilo.

-and it was all nice.

D: Država se brinula o tome.

The government worried about it.

Jaca and Dado emphasize two primary features of Yugoslav socialism: first, the secure and care-free feeling of knowing that one's needs were met through a social contract in which citizens could expect a certain basic standard of living. Like so many others, they highlight memories of "relative wealth, well-being, security and opportunity within structures of welfare, employment, educational provisions and other entitlements" (Jansen 2006:191). No, it wasn't "cutting edge,"

and maybe it wasn't even very exciting, but anyone had access to schooling, medical care, and leisure opportunities. Significantly, as Dado suggests, the burden of *worrying* about these things was taken on by the state rather than left to the people.

Second, they recall a context of fairness and equality, one in which differences of status or wealth were not extreme. Dado describes how he went all through school with another boy whose parents held prominent leadership positions at a major company that employed over a thousand workers in Bosanski Novi. Dado's parents were both ordinary working-class people, his mother a worker in that same factory and his father a shopkeeper. "The difference between me and him was—almost nothing," Dado says, emphasizing how both families had similar incomes and both could afford a vacation at the sea-side without scrimping and saving. Jaca represents her own family as "wealthy" and higher class; it's clear that her parents were more highly educated than Dado's and held better positions with more influence. Jaca and her brother were brought up to read books, participate in "cultured" activities such as musical training, and to grasp opportunities for self-improvement that were not available to Dado. Nevertheless, differences in their level of income and in most aspects of their lifestyle were relatively slight. She says, for example, that when she attended music school she chose accordion, not piano, because a piano was such an expensive instrument that nobody owned one.

Both Dado and Jaca grew up in fairly small towns—Novi has around 30,000 residents, while Tešanj has only around 6,000. They describe networks of support and relationships ratified through links of kinship and neighborly reciprocity, where people drop in to each other's homes without ceremony and gauge the character of an unknown person by asking "*čiji si?*" (literally: Whose are you?) Who are your parents? What family are you from? Dado tells me, "When you say my father's name, everybody alive knows my dad. And they immediately know

who I am.” He explains that if I went to Novi and needed, say, a ride to Bihać, people would help me out as soon as they knew I had links to Dado. “They’ll take you,” he says, “Why? Because of us, they figure you’re okay.”

Dado seems to have been well on his way to becoming as well-known as his father, before he left Novi for Sarajevo. He knows people, tells stories about his own extended family as well as many of Jaca’s maternal kin. Socializing, being with people, going out with them to cafes, or to set up a grill under the trees on the riverbank—these are his associations with life in Novi. Jaca has lived in Sarajevo twice as long, but she, too, says that most of her real friends are from Tešanj. Lines between friendship and family seem indistinct—“aunts” who cared for Jaca and her brother when they visited Novi were not strictly relatives but close friends of her mother’s mother; friends in Tešanj were part of family events and included in her own mother’s loving care. Yet friends were relatives, too—Jaca laughs that she couldn’t date anybody in Tešanj because they were all related to her somehow. What I see when I visit them in Sarajevo, what they say when I ask about their support network there, does not reflect what they think of as their “real” social lives, their real relationships. “If we were at home right now it would be very different,” Dado says.

But they aren’t at home. Jaca tells me she identifies with me, with my position of being a foreigner: “Believe me,” she says, “we ourselves are just like you.” It’s not that Sarajevo has been hostile to them, not even that they can’t muster up a feeling of being “at home” in Sarajevo—but after all, Sarajevo is not *home*. One of the ways they articulate a sense of dislocation and insecurity is, indeed, by reminding me and themselves that they have no real, permanent claim on the place where they live. “We’re renters, of course,” Jaca had said the very first time she welcomed me to their apartment. This had struck me as a peculiar thing to point

out. As I thought about it, though, I realized that aside from myself and other foreigners, and perhaps one or two students from out of town who share rooms, I knew almost nobody who rented. People live in housing that they inherited from their families, or became entitled to through their workplace, or exchanged after the war with a Serb who didn't want to return to Sarajevo,⁵⁶ they live with their parents or other relatives; some build houses or add a new story onto the top of an apartment building. If they have enough income, they buy a place.

“Her parents, and mine,” Dado says, “they simply got their apartments from the firm they worked for.”

“Before the war there was something called government housing,” Jaca explains.

I realize that renting is one aspect of the profound insecurity that characterizes their life, symbolizing the impermanence of their presence in Sarajevo as well as the abrupt and painful transition from socialism to a dysfunctional form of neoliberal capitalism that emphasizes privatization and the wholesale shift of responsibilities from the social body to the individual (Jansen 2006). Rent is, of course, the largest single expenditure they have every month. But renting also contributes to their sense of living in exile despite being in their own country. As Vettters observes, “Being a tenant and paying rent is a strange situation for persons having been provided with social housing in Yugoslav times... To rent a flat is commonly attributed to strangers having no roots in town” (Vettters 2007: 201).⁵⁷ Being tenants, people obliged to pay

⁵⁶ During the war, of course, populations shifted enormously as people sought the safety of territories controlled by their own group; many fled from their homes and inhabited other people's abandoned homes. A major component of the international community's post-war efforts to undo the war's ethnic cleansing involved property restitution. Jansen argues that for many, this emphasis on regaining private property seemed to be “the only tool on offer within Bosnia-Herzegovina for their struggle against precariousness” (Jansen 2006:193). Many who did not feel comfortable returning to live in their pre-war place of residence went back only long enough to sell their property or exchange it for equivalent property in the area where they now lived.

⁵⁷ Vettters is writing about people from Mostar whose property was destroyed or who were displaced from one side of the city to the other during the war; because they do not qualify as officially displaced people, some have never recovered any property and feel a sense of righteous indignation about their precarious position as renters *in their own city*.

rent simply to have a place to stay, not only means that Jaca and Dado watch their income evaporate before their eyes, it also encapsulates their feeling of being ever-so-slightly excluded from the city and from the new state of Bosnia.

“Would you ever go back?” I ask, thinking about how different things were for them in Novi and in Tešanj.

“Well you know, if there were jobs,” Jaca says. To my surprise, she and Dado go on to say that this is—or *was*—more than a fanciful dream. They tell me that they had been planning to go back to Tešanj after Jaca finished school, to be closer to both their families but to live in a house that Jaca’s parents built, where they would have an apartment of their own:

J: Da je moja mama živa mi bismo vjerovatno vratili u moj grad pa bi tamo živjeli.

If my mom were alive we would probably go back to my town and would live there.

D: Bi, bi.

We would, we would.

J: Jer su moji napravili kuću pa smo onda imali- stan.

Because my parents built a house so therefore we had - an apartment.

D: Mi smo uvijek imali- maštali o tome.

We always had- we dreamed about it.

J: u toj kući su nam davali stan.

In that house they were giving us an apartment.

i onda smo mi htjeli vratiti da smo bliže mojoj mami prije svega

And so we wanted to go back to be closer to my mom, above all,

i Dadinim roditeljima

and to Dado’s parents.

The fact that Jaca and Dado are living as rootless tenants in Sarajevo, rather than inhabiting an apartment of their own in Tešanj, speaks to a conjunction of societal and personal tragedy: on the one hand, there is the privatization and collapse of industry across the country (cf Donais 2002, Jansen 2006) and the pull of urban areas, particularly the capital city, as relative oases of opportunity in a landscape otherwise barren of prospects (Armakolas 2007, Jansen 2007).

Tešanj, in particular, is a very small city and it is hard to imagine that both Jaca and Dado would

find good jobs there. On the other hand, Jaca's mother emerges as a key person, a woman with energy and resources at her disposal, whose absence pokes a fatal hole in their plans. Jaca expresses great admiration and love for her mother. Even after the war, even as a woman of Serb background in Tešanj, Jaca's mother kept her job and wielded power to change other people's fates, sitting on commissions to assign aid or student stipends. "She was completely on top of her game," Jaca says:

J: Žena koja je sve stizala koja je nama trebala biti od pomoći

[She was] a woman who got everything done, who was supposed to be a great help to us

D: koja je mogla pomoći i meni da se zaposlim

Who would have been able to help me get a job too

J: -i oko bebe i Dadi oko posla bude li imalo djece i znaš.

-and with babies and Dado with a job and if there were children, and you know.

She would have been of real help to Jaca and Dado if they had moved back to Tešanj, helping Dado to find a good job, helping with the babies Jaca hasn't yet conceived but hopes for. Both of them say she loved Dado and welcomed him into the family with open arms. Now, given her death and uncertainty over the father's fate, Jaca and Dado seem to feel that the possibility of moving home has been foreclosed, almost as surely as the possibility of moving back in time to live in socialist Yugoslavia.

Attacks of sadness

The months since her mother's death have passed slowly for Jaca. "I have these attacks of sadness," she confides. "Sometimes I'll lie down in the evening and cry a lot." Her mother was such a wonderful person and had so much ahead of her, but now she is gone, just like that; she got sick in May and died in August, after countless medical tests that failed to determine exactly what was wrong. Maybe it is the recency of her death, the close relationship Jaca has with

sadness,⁵⁸ that first attunes my ears to the motif of loss that runs through her words and Dado's. Loss appears not just in concrete form, as in the unaccustomed absence of a living, breathing, charismatic mother, but also in terms of the abrupt closure of possibility, the absence of what might have been, what one had looked forward to but now will never see. The loss of Jaca's mother seems to interact with and compound all the other losses, small and large, that form such a prominent feature of their lives.

"There are days when it just builds up," Jaca says. "It was all there yesterday and the day before that, and it'll be there tomorrow—but there are days when it gets to be too much." She tells me about a bad day earlier in the week. She got up on the wrong side of bed, felt uninspired all day, made a mediocre meal that Dado wasn't hungry for when he came home from work. Maybe it was PMS, she says. What sounds like a very mild conflict between the two of them turns into a moment of shared affect, as Dado too takes on Jaca's melancholy:

J: Ja tu legla i plakala.
I lay down here [on the sofa] and cried.
Šta ti je.
"What's [wrong] with you."
Ne znam.
"I don't know."
D: I onda ja stavih ovaj jastuk kod nje ovdje
And then I put this pillow by her here,
legao i ja, pokrio se i ja tužan.
I lay down too, covered myself up and I was sad too.
J: Onako malo xx
Just kind of xx
pokisli⁵⁹ obadvoje, znaš.

⁵⁸ Probably Jaca would be better able to cope with her sadness if she were working, or even if she still had the structure of her studies and internship to give shape to her life. Her graduation in the fall of 2011 was a celebration that has not, so far, become a stepping stone to a job or a new life as a wage earner, a person who uses her expertise for the good of society or specific individuals, or even just to make money. In essence she has lost a certain aspect of her self (as a student) and a structure of forward movement, activity, and purpose that shaped her life for many years. She has also lost the context within which she spent time with others and had positive relationships—which she clearly did have, both in the classroom and in her internship. Now, she has only her worries and fears to keep her company at home while Dado is working. Unemployment makes her feel worthless, unneeded, and unwanted.

⁵⁹ This gives the impression that they got wet by being rained on, drenched, drowned out, damp spirits.

both of us wretched, you know.

It sounds like Jaca's misery sucked Dado in with her, like a malevolent swamp, dampening his own mood and immobilizing both of them. Another way to see it is as a moment in which Dado accompanies Jaca, attunes his own mood to hers and cares for her by recognizing and mirroring her gesture of resignation, acknowledging the impossibility of fixing things or recouping the loss she has suffered—the multiple losses both of them have suffered.

Beating your head against a brick wall

Writing about young, urban, middle-class Serbians, Greenberg (2011) identifies a central tension between their aspirations and their agentive capacity to bring their wishes to fruition. Her interlocutors complained of a life in which they were unable to make promises and follow through on them, in which they felt helpless to achieve their private goals, let alone create meaningful changes in their society, and in which they were unable to ward off the critical gaze of Western “internationals.” In the “abnormal,” chaotic and unpredictable context of post-Milošević Serbia, they found themselves unable to carry out even simple plans such as saving enough money to buy a car, and their personal aspirations for a “normal life” were stymied.

Greenberg notes that what is at stake here is not only “a vision of a good life defined by modern, Western, and European forms of consumption and belonging” (Greenberg 2011:89), but also the absent “material, structural, institutional, and social conditions that would need to be in place for [young Serbians] to translate aspirations into realities” (Greenberg 2011:94). She argues that because the Serbian state is unable to uphold its sovereignty on the world stage, or perform the work of a state for its citizens, Serbian people likewise experience a lack of personal sovereignty; that is, they feel that their own agency has been severely undermined.

Greenberg notes that young Serbians often express their frustrations in terms of lack of control over mobility, specifically lamenting the barriers against the type of casual tourist travel that had been a prized aspect of life in socialist Yugoslavia. Metaphors of immobility are frequent in Jaca and Dado's narratives, too, as they try to articulate the feeling that they are not in control of their lives. Casual travel has its place within their fantasies of the "normal life" they want for themselves: "We're young; we'd like to go places and do things," they tell me. Yet the imagery they employ has less to do with crossing borders and more often concerns their inability to move about in Bosnia, even in Sarajevo itself. They worry about expense—the 1.5 KM it would require to take a tram downtown, the larger sum needed to get to Novi or Tešanj by train—and about time, since Dado's job only gives him a few days off every year. And, of course, they have a constant awareness of the many barriers preventing them from moving forward, from taking "that last little step" into a more authentic, fulfilling life. They have no money, they have no influential connections to advance their interests, they are not aligned with party politics, and the deck is stacked against them. Jaca, in particular, evokes the image of walls keeping her from moving. "*Ne možeš glavom kroz zid,*" she tells me, illustrating her helplessness: you can't get through a brick wall by beating your head against it.

The theme of being stuck or trapped, for Jaca, often appears in an image of being imprisoned alone in the house. Jaca is clearly not the type of person who enjoys inactivity. She presents herself as an energetic person, a talented woman, a go-getter, a person who undertakes decisive actions in order to solve problems that she sees in her life or in the lives of people around her. She tells me she takes after her mother, who was "very effective" and good at everything she did. Until recently Jaca has been in school, doggedly obtaining an undergraduate degree in medical laboratory diagnostics and then completing an unpaid internship. Her

graduation in the fall of 2011 was a celebration that has not, so far, become a stepping stone to a job or a new life as a wage earner, a person who uses her expertise for the good of society or specific individuals. For months she has been looking for work, so far in vain. She knows she is good at her profession, and the fact that she cannot use her knowledge and her skills and her energy frustrates her immensely: “There’s so much I could do!” she exclaims. She tells me about a conversation she recently had with a former co-worker from her internship, when she tried to explain the worst aspects of being unemployed and at home:

J: Znaete šta je strašnije od siromaštva,
You know what’s more terrible than the poverty,
jer ja ne radim pa je jako teško živjeti kao podstanar s
jednom platom
because I don’t work and it’s very hard to live as a renter with one wage—
sjediti rekoh u kući brinuti se, sekirati se, razmišljati
cijeli dan.
sitting, I said, in the house, worrying, fretting, thinking all day long.
Znaš jer ti kad si u kući, onda ti hiljade nekih misli
prolaze kroz glavu
You know, because you, when you’re in the house, then thousands of thoughts go through
your head.
Pa šta ovo pa kako ovo pa kako ću ono (inbreath)
And what about this and how about this and how will I do that (inbreath)

Sitting still in enforced inactivity has something in common with the paralysis of grief that Jaca also experiences—and indeed, she says that some of the “thousands of thoughts” running through her head have to do with her mother. Yet Jaca is not, I think, describing an inactivity born of depression, an inability to feel motivated or to do what needs to be done. Quite the opposite—if anything, it is a depression born of sitting still,⁶⁰ a melancholy that arises out of Jaca’s own aspirations to do so much.

Jaca believes she might be happier if she had lower expectations. In a counterpoint to Dado’s wish—If only we were in our 60’s—Jaca declares she often wishes she lived in a remote

⁶⁰ It may be that the “sitting still” is not literal but, again, a sensation of being unable to move. As far as I can tell, Jaca was often relatively busy, and she did venture out of the house and interact with other people on a regular basis.

village and had four or five children, no education, and little awareness of the outside world.

“The more you *work* on yourself,” she says, “the more you realize how small your horizons are because you haven’t seen anything yet!” She feels caught between her own education and her relative ignorance, her own capacity to get things done and the way her hands are tied:

- J: Tako da, znaš, ja:ko teško- e:
So that, you know, (it’s) rea:lly hard- eh:
što si pismeniji, obrazovaniji, urbaniji u Bosni,
the more you’re literate, educated, urban in Bosnia,
to si u biti nesretniji ako nisi našao svoj posao
the greater your unhappiness, in essence, if you haven’t found your own work
jer vidiš i razumiješ sve oko sebe.
because you see and understand everything around you.
- K: mmhm
Mmhm
- J: A ne možeš ništa uraditi.
But you can’t do anything.

Dado’s ambitions seem, at first glance, more modest than Jaca’s. One of the first things Dado says to me is that he thinks women are the people who truly get things done in the world; he knows this because of watching his mother, Jaca’s mother, and Jaca herself. He also tells me he knows that without a college education, his possibilities for finding well-paid and fulfilling work are smaller than Jaca’s. He is philosophical about this, saying, “It doesn’t bother me. I’m not one of those people who says ‘Ah, if only I had this or if only I had that, if only I had I don’t know what.’” Faced with the doubts of his friends in Novi who thought he was taking a risk to move to Sarajevo, Dado replied that as long as he could hold a broom he could earn a little money and take care of himself. Still, he confides, he hoped that he would not have to start from scratch and learn a new trade, but would be able to continue working as a waiter and pizza cook, just as he had done in Bosanski Novi. His account of packing his bags to come to Sarajevo expresses a diffident, “secret hope” that this type of job might work out:

- D: Ja sam znači zadnju noć radio i prljave stvari svoje bijele one-
So I worked the last night [in Novi] and my dirty white things, well-
stavio da Jaca-
I put them in so that Jaca-
kontao sam ako slučajno takav posao ispadne,
I figured if that kind of job happens to work out,
to znam raditi, razumiješ,
I know how to do that, you understand,
opratiće mi ona to pa ću ja-
she'll wash [my things] for me and then I-
Jer sam uvijek negdje u podsvijesti onaj potajno se nadao,
Because I always somewhere in the back of my mind secretly hoped,
rekao, ako mi ispadne tako nešto a to znam raditi (.)
preživjet ćemo od tog.
I said, if something like that works out for me and I know how to do it (.) we will survive
on that.
- J: Eto i sad živimo.
Indeed we do live [off of it] now.

Dado's job has been their primary source of income for the past six years. His life is a mirror image of Jaca's in the sense that he spends long hours outside of the house working as hard as he can; he comes home exhausted and often has a hard time waking up in the morning. Yet in other ways, he is imprisoned by his job in much the same way that Jaca is by her unemployment. He works erratic hours, sometimes during the day and sometimes until late in the night; he works up to twelve or thirteen hours at a stretch. When he has a day off, about once a week, he catches up on rest while Jaca gets up early to use the building's washing machine at 6 am, while the cost of electricity is cheapest, so that she can get all of his white uniforms spotless, dried, and ironed. This schedule tires him, and doesn't give him much opportunity to do anything else. At one point in our conversation, it becomes clear that he barely knows the city outside of his own neighborhood. Jaca is talking about a particular cafe that she used to go to when she was a student. Neither Dado nor I know the cafe, but she describes the location, listing a number of well-known landmarks. I nod, but Dado looks baffled. "I've never even gone by there," he says.

Jaca turns to me, explaining that Dado does not have many chances to go sightseeing or exploring the city:

- J: Pa nije Dado, slabo, kako puno radi, slabo poznaje Sarajevo.
Dado hasn't, hardly, he works so much, he hardly knows Sarajevo.
Vjeruj mi šest godina u Sarajevu, slabo zna ovdje.
Believe me, six years in Sarajevo, and he hardly knows it here.
K'o nikad ne ide nigdje.
Like, he never goes anywhere.
- D: Slabo ja- ne idem ja nigdje.
I hardly- I don't go anywhere.
Slabo, slabo. Pogotovo- . naveče.
Hardly, hardly. Especially- . in the evenings.

Dado worked even harder during one six-month period when he was enrolled in a private business school, completing coursework in accounting, business management and English. Dado worked full time, came home to change out of his work clothes, and went to sit through four hours of classes. Then he came home, worked on the homework until two or three in the morning, slept a few hours, and got up again to begin the cycle all over. He never missed a lecture. Unlike Jaca, who says she has always loved learning and been at the top of her class, Dado said he found his coursework difficult—especially the English language. Sometimes Jaca would help with his homework, explaining things to him, but of course he had to pass the exams on his own. This was while Jaca was still going to school as well. She says she tried to convince him to wait until she was done with school and could support him better, because it was so exhausting, but he was determined. He has been joking, saying with exaggerated intonation that he thinks he *still* needs to rest up from that grueling marathon, but his smile fades. “I thought it would change something,” he says, with a flat, quiet voice:

- D: Mislilo sam da će nešto promijeniti.
I thought it would change something.
Nije mi ni ovo riješenje, razumiješ.
Even this isn't the solution for me, you understand.
°Šta ćeš.° Šta ćeš, eto.

((What can you do.)) What can you do, anyway.
Nešto se nije dalo, biće valjda.
Somehow it didn't work out; I guess it will [someday].
Mislim, šta ćeš.
I mean, what can you do.
Ja sam to mislio da je tako.
I thought it was that way.

Dado's disappointment comes through in an understated way. He hoped the course would change something; he goes so far as to admit that his current job "isn't the solution" for him, even if it has paid their bills. He believed the diploma would change something, and he accepted financial help from Jaca's maternal uncle, and he threw all his energy into it—but as it turned out, nothing has changed. Several times he repeats the phrase *šta ćeš*, what can you do. Maybe someday the effort will bear fruit. For now, he keeps on making pizzas.

Jaca and Dado recognize that if they *had* good jobs, if they were earning money, their life in Sarajevo would be very different. With money, "there's nothing you can't do!" If your heart desires something not available in Sarajevo, perhaps Dolce and Gabbana, why—hop on an airplane and in no time you're in Italy, in Austria, in Turkey. They sound perfectly willing to participate in capitalism, if capitalism is the route to a normal life these days. But they feel continuously vulnerable, even exploited, within an endless "transition" that seems to have abandoned the good aspects of socialism and introduced the negative aspects of capitalism without ensuring that any of the benefits go to ordinary people. "You can't do anything without money," they say, but in contrast to functioning capitalist systems like in the US, you also have little chance of earning money. Here in Bosnia, a few people benefit from the prevailing chaos:

D: (A ovo je naj- najgori oblik kapitalizma)
(But this is the worst- worst form of capitalism)

J: Ovo je ostalo ono staro od prije, što je njima odgovaralo,
This is the leftover old stuff from before, the parts that suited them,
ovima što su- koji određuju kako ćemo živjeti

the ones that are—who decide how we are to live
a ubacili su iz kapitalizma ono što je njima odgovaralo.
and they added in whatever suited them from capitalism.
U biti mi . mi ni nemamo neko društveno uređenje.
In essence we . we really don't have any social system.
Ovo niti je demokratija, niti je kapitalizam.
This is neither democracy, nor capitalism.

Here, Jaca indicts a powerful minority, “the ones who decide how we are to live,” who she believes have allowed their own interests to undermine all attempts at building a social system—any social system at all. She also argues, once again, that crucial decisions about how she and Dado live are not ultimately in their own hands.

Fantasies of flight

Jaca and Dado talk about leaving Bosnia—of course they do. Their conversation is full of references to those they know who live abroad, friends, cousins, people they went to school with and keep up with casually on Facebook. Jaca's maternal uncle departed over twenty years ago from Yugoslavia, was caught away from home when the war started, and made the best of the situation by completing a PhD in Lisbon. He now has a Spanish wife and teaches at a Portuguese university. He flew them out to visit him a few years ago, and they enjoyed a fairytale vacation and saw firsthand “what it means to live in Europe.” As Jaca puts it, “People live like multimillionaires compared to us.”

Jaca says she would be ready to leave, not just because of economic factors but also to escape the constant nationalist pressures for self-definition. It would be nice, she says, to live somewhere with real diversity, where people simply think of themselves as citizens of the country. “In Australia you're just—whatever you are, an Australian. Or an American. That's a good thing, other places, which isn't good here.” She recalls that right after the war there were agencies helping people of mixed families to leave the former Yugoslavia for new homes—

America, Australia, New Zealand. Her parents didn't do it. She and Dado have looked into and thought about this option, even though they would not like to leave behind their family members. Maybe they could go somewhere, get situated, and help others to come there too. Dado's brother, in particular, is unattached and could find a job and settle down somewhere else. They've considered the pros and cons of various locations: better to be in Europe, where they wouldn't face such a grueling journey to reach home. Better to be in an English-speaking context, since Jaca knows English and even Dado has some background. The destination they've given most thought to is England. Dado says when they talk with Jaca's uncle on Skype he has mentioned that England needs medical personnel and that Jaca might find a job quite easily. Two friends Jaca went to school with in Tešanj ended up in England during or after the war, and both of them have been very successful and have degrees, families and good jobs. They say wonderful things about England.

Yet despite the obvious material allures and the advantages of being in a country where things are "a little tidier, wealthier, more normal, better organized," despite their serious frustration with life in Bosnia, neither Dado nor Jaca seems invested in any real plan for leaving. If anything, their conversations about departure form a platform that they use to reinforce their own identity as Bosnians and solidify their commitment to staying in Bosnia—even to give themselves hope for a good future in Bosnia. They express skepticism - things can't really be that good elsewhere; leaving is not a silver bullet. In the conversations I have with them, discussion of leaving becomes a way to contest the idea of Bosnia as a peripheral, "Oriental," "backward" space and the West as the center of power.

Narratives about leaving, or about those who have left, take a strong moral stance: they build up an idealized vision of what it is to be Bosnian. This is an ideal Jaca and Dado want to

identify with (though it often contrasts with their description of their actual lives), and one that they evaluate positively. The good Bosnian is poor but resilient in the face of ill fortune, temperamental and touchy, but also passionate, warm, and welcoming; she devotes a lot of time to relationships, shares what she has, and knows how to really live life to the fullest. The figure of the good Bosnian emerges in opposition to the (equally stereotyped) foreigner—which almost always means a white Westerner and/or a Yugoslav who lives in diaspora. This foreigner builds up wealth and owns a house and a car, appears gracious but stand-offish, and lives at a frenetic pace, consumed by work and able to live only on the weekends or during a brief annual vacation. The foreigner can be ridiculed, even condemned, but she may also deserve pity.

During our first meeting, I mention to Jaca that my recent trip to Austria made me feel discouraged because there was such a stark difference between living standards in Austria and in Bosnia. She says she understands me completely, and that although she loves Bosnia she would leave in a flash if she could. But then, in a remarkable shift, she re-frames the difference I have just set up (between comfortable wealth in a supportive state and tragic poverty in a dysfunctional one). Jaca focuses on ordinary people and their quality of life, contrasting foreigners with people who live in Bosnia. She first designates these foreigners as Europeans, but modifies the subject slightly to specify people who live in developed nations:

J: Znaš šta je razlika između evropljana i -
You know what's the difference between Europeans and -
ljudi koji žive u tim malo sređenijim, bogatijim,
normalnijim, uređenijim državama,
people who live in those countries that are a little tidier, wealthier, more normal, better
organized,
ljudi su - u Bosni su ljudi strašno pristupačni
people are- In Bosnia people are terribly approachable
što mi ovdje kažemo merhametliji, znaš,
as we say here, more charitable/generous, you know,
jer dočekni su ljudi, ono što te ima iznijeti, počastiti.
because people are welcoming, whatever they have they'll bring out, to serve you.

Ti nećeš nigdje vani vidjeti ako neko puši da ti postupi cigaru, to ne.

You'll never see anywhere abroad if somebody is smoking, that they'll offer you a cigarette—no.

Da neko plati nekom piće.

That somebody pays for another person's drink.

Dosta su ljudi hladniji, manje se druže-

People are quite a bit colder, they socialize less-

Kod nas je sve- znaš, daj nam dekiću, gitaru, odmah dernek.

With us it's all—you know, give us a blanket, guitar, right away it's a party.

Znaš, nekako - e: puno se obilazimo i radnim danom

You know, somehow—ah: we visit one another a lot even during the work week

vani se vjerovatno više radi, drugi je sistem. Dalje si

Abroad one probably works more, it's a different system. You're farther away.

Vikendom se živi

One lives on the weekends.

To ljudi koji vani žive, koji su otišli u izbjeglištvu pa

su ostali kažu

That's what people say who live abroad, who left as refugees and stayed there.

Ljudi su hladniji.

People are colder.

Jaca's characterization of people in Bosnia and people "outside" (*vani*) reflects conventional wisdom, using phrases that I've heard in nearly identical ways from many others. Bosnians are welcoming, generous, they share what they have. They need very little to make merry. People in wealthier countries hoard what they have, they are colder, and they have no time, or perhaps inclination, to socialize. She destabilizes the caricature of foreigners by going on immediately to tell a story about how she was warmly welcomed in Spain by friends of her uncle. But the overall impression of contrasting cultural norms is not without insight—and it certainly leaves little question as to Jaca's moral evaluation of these norms.

Later, Jaca and Dado together paint a comical, derisive picture of the Bosnian diaspora, people who live in Western Europe and come back to Bosnia for a week in the summer to flaunt their wealth. "Usually, you know," Jaca says, "they earn money there and build an enormous house here, give their relatives a leg up, and then when they're ready to retire they come back here." They also come for their yearly vacation, flying or driving big fancy cars. Jaca and Dado

are skeptical about whether these Bosnians truly live upscale lives in their new homes. Dado suggests it might be that they take out credit; Jaca insists that they just work like dogs:

- J: Rade od jutra do sutra i kad dođu u Bosnu [žive ti-
They work from morning till night and when they come to Bosnia [they live those-
D: [ili puno rade, možda i rade puno
[or they work a lot, maybe they work a lot
J: žive tih petnaest dana na godišnjem, Dado.
They live those fifteen days on their annual vacation, Dado.
D: pa i to je isto. Pa isto je.
And that's the same thing, too. It's the same.
J: Zarade cijelu godinu da bi došli ovamo petnaest dana
They earn money all year long so they can come here for fifteen days.

Whatever the hard-working life that these emigrants may experience abroad, according to Jaca and Dado, they make the most of their time in Bosnia, aided by the credulity of their old neighbors. Jaca and Dado parody the awe and deference of the local residents, who know nothing of what life is truly like in Germany:

- J: Sad čitava mahala . pada u trans što on ima para.
Now the whole neighborhood . falls into a trance because he has money.
D: I onda donese sto, dvijesto eura,
And he brings out a hundred, two hundred Euros,
J: Ma ja, pun ko brod.
Well yeah, he's rolling in it.
D: da izvineš u kafanu i onda daje svima pivo
[he goes] into a bar and then he gets everybody a beer
"joj vidi ga pun kao brod"
"Wow look at him, he's rolling in it"
J: "a u Njemačkoj živi, ohhh"
"Ah, he lives in Germany, ohhh"
D: a onaj, pa da:j.
and um- come o:n.⁶¹
J: e. On živi u Njemačkoj on je pun kao brod
Hey. He lives in Germany, he's rolling in it.
D: On živi u Njemačkoj jo:j
He lives in Germany, wo::w
J: Oni priljepci oni dođu pa zakače se hoće li častit',
znaš.
Those freeloaders they come and hang around to see if he'll pick up the tab, you know.
K: A kad je u . Njemačkoj tad [skroman je

⁶¹ This might be Dado's comment or it might be Dado, in character, performing the false modesty of the Bosnian/German.

But when he's in . Germany then [he's humble
J: [-pašteta .
[-tinned meat.

This, too, is a very common caricature of the Bosnian diaspora, a scenario that expresses the resentment and envy of those still stuck in unemployment and poverty when faced with their rich cousins who breeze in from abroad and moan about how homesick they have been. It identifies and rejects normative ideas of wealth as synonymous with happiness or prestige. It also positions Jaca and Dado as sophisticated, morally upright people who are not fooled by the veneer of European lands, nor lured away to live a life in service to the accumulation of riches. Staying in Bosnia may mean that they remain poor, but it also gives them a type of moral legitimacy that the emigrant cannot rival.

But I also want to emphasize that these conversations about leaving Bosnia are not just about elevating themselves, not just stereotypes that Jaca and Dado employ to make themselves feel good about their decisions and put down others who have higher status in the world. They do not arise simply out of a desire to spoil or spite what is inaccessible to them. Instead, there's an important thread of optimism or hope, an attempt to remind themselves that what they really need might already be there for them in Bosnia. Dado, in particular, voices the idea that maybe all he and Jaca require in their journey toward success is time and a little luck, or the right attitude that will help them recognize the gifts that are in front of them already. In this, he suggests, they can actually learn from foreigners who visit Bosnia and are surprised and enchanted by what they find there.

D: Mi kontamo da je negdje bolje nego ovdje ...
We think that it's better somewhere (else) than it is here ...
Dođe neko sa strane na primjer
Somebody comes from outside, for example,
i kaže, kako je ovdje vama lijepo, kako imate ovo pa imate
ono-

and says, “How nice it is here for you, why, you have this and you have that—
pa joj, živite normalno, pa vi niste—
wow, you live normally, you aren’t—
vi niste oni što smo mi gledali preko TVa ...
you aren’t what we expected from watching TV” ...

A mi to ne vidimo, mi to ne znamo

But we don’t see that, we don’t know that.

K: ja

Yeah.

D: jer nama je sve nešto ljepše od- tamo nekud

Because to us everything looks better than- over there somewhere

onaj tamo ima sve ali to je-

that guy over there has everything, but that is—

K: to uvijek izgleda.

It always looks that way.

D: ustvari svagdje.

As a matter of fact, everywhere.

Before I leave in August, Dado asks if I am going to miss Bosnia. He says he expects I will, because it’s a special place. He tells me how he went with one of his co-workers to sit in a cafe in Sarajevo’s old town. He hadn’t been there for a while, and he was pleasantly surprised to see lots of people out, people with fancy cameras, tourists—all sorts of people walking around, enjoying the atmosphere. He thought to himself that Sarajevo really does have something about it, especially in the old town where the artisans are hammering out copper pots and other crafts, something you can’t find elsewhere. He and Jaca make plans for all the things we will do someday when I come back to visit Bosnia again. Next time, Dado says, we’ll both be working. Next time they’ll have the resources to cook me a real Bosnian meal. Next time we’ll have a car, Jaca says, we’ll be able to take you to visit Krajina. We’ll be able to go places, Dado says.

Epilogue

In this chapter I have focused on the interplay between immobility and aspiration, between disappointment and longing that Jaca and Dado communicated to me. I have tried to present

them as individuals fully caught up in the ongoing events of their own lives, individuals whose histories, reflections, and anxieties reminded me that, as Jackson has said:

human existence is never a stable state. Not only is it subject to unforeseen vicissitudes such as sickness, loss, war, and economic collapse; it is in its very nature a projective affair in which we strive, both in practice and in the imagination, for what we do not yet have or to recover that which we once possessed, while all the time comparing ourselves with others. Being is thus, as Karl Jaspers put it, ‘potential being’... and lived in perpetual uncertainty... (Jackson 2007:43)

Jaca and Dado’s own histories have been subject to all of the “unforeseen vicissitudes” that Jackson enumerates, and continue to unfold in conditions of uncertainty in which it is hard to tell whether they will come “unstuck” or not, and harder to say whether any particular step forward will make the difference. As I left Bosnia, changes were in store: Jaca had been given money by her uncle to embark on MA studies. Two years later, she has found a good job at the government laboratory where she completed her internship, and she and Dado have made a downpayment on an apartment of their own. Does this change the essential contingency of their lives? Does it change their relationship to the losses and disappointments they have experienced?

During the months that I was a visitor in their home, Jaca and Dado faced pressing existential dilemmas: they had barely enough money to make ends meet, they were coping with the sudden death of Jaca’s mother, and they felt frustrated in their struggles to achieve a “normal life.” Their narratives evoked the sense that they were suspended, caught in a moment of time that endlessly repeated itself or stretched in all directions, a moment in which they felt themselves to be waiting without being able to bring about change. This feeling of being immobilized was also always a sense of being on the edge of control, in the full knowledge that disaster could strike, and had done so before. Indeed, their constant side-shadowing of alternative life-paths focused on scenarios that were already foreclosed, or ones they rejected as

impossible or not worth pursuing, in a way that seemed almost to reflect a blindness to the unfolding nature of time and the multiple possibilities it may offer. Maybe this is a strategy for handling the uncertainty or the likelihood of disappointment, a way of magically working on oneself in a situation that does not seem to admit of one's own active intervention or control (cf Jackson 2005).

It appeared during that time period that a major part of the struggle to achieve a liveable everyday, especially for Jaca, was a struggle against despair, against coming to see the world as a relentlessly bleak place in which one's life is not worth living. Das refers to the abrupt traumatic revelation of one's powerlessness in an unstable world as a type of "poisonous knowledge," and suggests that people who have experienced such events could be thought of as "being cursed or sickened by the fact of knowing itself" (Das 2007:77). Much like Das, Bernstein (1994) argues that survivors of extreme traumatic events, and even onlookers, can be seduced by the belief that catastrophe reveals the true face of the world. He cites a videotaped interview in which a survivor of the Nazi concentration camps says that "the 'extreme pessimism' that haunts her is part of a 'total worldview' in which she feels that she has learned the real 'truth about people, human nature, about death...'" (Bernstein 1994:89). This quote resonates with statements I've often heard in Bosnia about how the recent war was an education more useful than a university degree, how people's masks were removed during the war, how people learned "who was who," who was friend and who was enemy. Its echoes are also felt in the pervasive attitude of resignation or expectation that regards the period of peace sustained in Tito's Yugoslavia as an illusion or at least an aberration from inevitably cyclical violent hatreds (Hayden 2007, Simić 2000, Mustafić 2003). Lament, complaint, speaking in the register of the impossible—these are modalities that came to be familiar to me during my time in Bosnia, modalities of thought that

sometimes form an atmosphere as oppressive, and pervasive, as the winter smog that settles on Sarajevo.

At the same time, the “poisonous knowledge” of the world’s tumultuous unpredictability presents itself alongside other types of awareness, the knowledge of other lives and other realities that surpass one’s own. In a twist on Das’s concept, Jaca said to me that she felt trapped or cursed by her own knowledge—not her knowledge of the war, of hatred and rupture and loss, but her knowledge of comfortable lifestyles and luxuries, other places where people like her can put their skills and training to good use, while she felt hers were going to waste. Like the young people Greenberg encountered in Serbia (Greenberg 2011), Jaca and Dado contend with a society that seems “stuck,” a state that is incapable of creating the structural conditions within which its citizens can thrive or even bring about basic goals and plans. Whether their newly increased financial means will provide Jaca and Dado with “enough” in Bosnia’s limited economy remains an uncertain question, a reminder, once more, of life’s contingency.

Chapter Five

Achieving the Ordinary

“What time is it, exactly, that it starts tonight?” Milka asks, standing in the doorway that separates her tiny kitchen and dining area from the room where her husband, son, and in-laws are sitting on sofas, talking and watching TV. It is a hot evening at the end of July, the sun still streaming in through the open door to the balcony of the apartment. Milka has come to double-check what time sunset falls, the moment when Muslims who are fasting during daylight hours for the month of Ramadan can break their fast with the *iftar* meal. She is preparing a variety of foods for *iftar*, and she wants to be sure everything is in place before sunset. Her mother-in-law, Safija, answers, “Tonight it is 8:20.” Forty minutes to go. Milka urgently reminds her son that she has asked him to make lemonade. “Come on, Emir, the lemonade!” She disappears back into the kitchen.

The month of Ramadan represents a special time in the lives of Bosnian Muslims—a festive time during which people often visit one another or eat together at communal iftar meals. Milka and her immediate family, staunchly secular, do not observe the fast, but are drawn into patterns of giving and receiving hospitality. Tonight, they are hosting Hamid’s parents, Safija and Refik, and have invited me as well. Next week, they are invited to visit Hamid’s sister. When Ramadan comes to an end with the three-day feast of Bajram (Eid al Fitr), they will attend a larger gathering of family at Safija and Refik’s home. At other points of the year, they join Milka’s Serb and Croat kin to celebrate the major Christian holidays.

The evening has a dual quality to it, being simultaneously a special occasion and an ordinary family gathering. Clearly, the meal is a departure from routine. Milka has shown me

the spread she is cooking, a number of different vegetable and meat dishes that have kept her busy all afternoon. She goes out of her way to make specialities that are traditionally served for iftar in Bosnia, foods that she does not ordinarily make and did not grow up eating. When Safija and Refik arrive, the family receives them with formal attention, despite their intimate status and their obvious affection for one another. The meal itself has a specific ritualized form that Milka does her best to uphold, starting at exactly the right time and bringing foods to the table in the proper order. She does not sit down with her guests but remains standing as the rest of us eat so that she can serve us, quickly take empty platters off the small table, and bring out the next dish from the kitchen. When the grandparents protest that she should not have gone to so much trouble, she reminds them that she also invited me, “to see what it is like.” Indeed, the evening has an almost self-consciously theatrical aspect, as we play out our respective roles of host, guest, family, American observer, and the “real Bosnians” who, if they themselves do not fast for Ramadan and break their fast at iftar, nevertheless honor the friends and family members who do.

As it turns out, not even the grandparents have fasted today. Safija, when Milka asks, says she *meant* to fast this morning but she got such a terrible headache yesterday that she decided not to risk it today. Refik ignores the whole conversation, his eyes fixated on the television. I recall his granddaughter Danijela telling me, with laughter in her voice, “Grandpa is not *any* kind of believer at all; I think Nana gets on his nerves with her religion.” So nobody is especially ravenous, and there is no buildup of tension as people wait for the sound of the cannon that will alert us to sunset. This may be one reason why the evening feels so ordinary, so comfortably mundane. Here are Nana and Grandpa, come over for a meal. Hamid calls their attention to the newly painted walls of the living room, and Emir lines them up in front of the computer to show

them Facebook photos of Danijela, his sister, who has recently gotten a job working on a cruise ship and is somewhere in the North Sea in Russian waters. No one seems very religious, nobody talks about anything especially meaningful, nobody gets into a fight—in fact, nothing “extraordinary” happens, except that Milka has made so many different foods that she forgets to bring out one of the side dishes and only discovers it after we have finished eating. The evening is ordinary in the sense that this type of special meal *is* ordinary, happens regularly, brings to mind similar meals elsewhere and in different contexts. It is not something that happens every single day, but it is part of the expected rhythm of events marking the passage of the year. It is a *marked* occasion, but fully within the realm of the ordinary, an instantiation of norms and habits, roles and relations that make up the everyday.

In this chapter, I show that this ordinariness is not simply given, but is an achievement shadowed by other possibilities and the outcome of careful intersubjective work. I follow Veena Das and others who point to the everyday as a space of ethical contingency and ongoing action in which subjects are constantly engaged in moral choices and struggles (see for example Das 2007, 2010, 2012; Ring 2006; Jackson 2009; Lambek 2010; Mattingly 2012; Ochs 2012). Within this family, as in any other, individual members hold a variety of stances toward religion, ethnicity, and the question of what it means to be Bosnian. However, given the sociopolitical circumstances of life in Sarajevo today, it is hard to retain multi-dimensionality or resist the narrowing down of identity into categories—in this case, the opposed categories of Bosniak and Serb, or Muslim and Christian. This means that interactions have explosive potential; there is always the danger that conflicts in the family can be read as having to do with ethnicity. This family contains within itself the volatile divisions of daily life in post-war Bosnia; it faces the dilemma of building solidarity or keeping a sense of “being a family” despite the existence of

differences within the family that can be read as “ethnic.” With Ring (2006), I ask whether the sort of delicately-balanced everydayness they achieve might not be thought of as peace.

In the case of Bosnia as a whole, writers and Bosnians themselves tend to emphasize either the inevitability of “ethnic conflict” that explodes out of historical rivalries and memories of past violence (Hayden 2002, Simic 2000), or evidence of the fundamental tolerance of Bosnia’s people in their long-standing capacity to live together in multi-religious towns and neighborhoods (Donia and Fine 1994, Sells 1996, Baskar 2012). Yet what does this tolerance consist of? As anthropologists investigating peace in other contexts suggest, it seems to involve the achievement of a sociability predicated as much on sanction, restraint, and avoidance as on mutuality and cooperation (Gregor 1994:245, Ring 2006:64). It seems clear that the simultaneity of *both* inclusion and exclusion, both enmity and intimacy, the “ambiguity created by the constant enactment of both similarities and differences in...social life” (Bringa 1995:82), constitute an important dynamic of Bosnian life and Bosnian identity. This dynamic is prominent in Milka’s family during the iftar meal.

This chapter attends to the ways family members construct solidarity and distinction during the iftar meal, focusing closely on a “dangerous moment” that occurs during the meal. I also contextualize these interpersonal negotiations by drawing on other interview data in which family members reflect on complex histories of alliance and friction in the family, histories that are in turn related to the larger events of the war and the rise of nationalism. While interactions have some explosive potential, family is not just a space of danger and betrayal, as it appeared in the stories of Vera and Senad in Chapter 2, but also a space where people are looking for opportunities to behave in ethical ways that sustain relations. In this family, at this point in time, the everyday “holds,” or is in fact ordinary; relationships contain “ordinary” amounts of conflict

and irritability, but potential breaches of the peace are overlooked or deflected, attention turned away from them, rather than taken up and turned into overt conflict.

Food, hospitality, and boundaries

Food and the sharing of foods are richly symbolic domains for the negotiation of self and social relationships, sameness and difference. Ochs and Shohet note that “food preparation, distribution, and consumption authenticate both social order and moral and aesthetic beliefs and values” (Ochs and Shohet 2006:35). Mealtimes are important not only as opportunities for people to satisfy their body’s hunger, but as occasions for them to enact or defy social roles, construct relationships, and assert moral judgments (Bourdieu 1984, Stasch 2002, Aronsson 2011). With whom does one share food? From whom does one accept food? Who provides, and who prepares, food? Who eats the most or the choicest food? Which potentially edible items count as food, and which are out of the question? What etiquette governs the positioning of bodies and the types of communication that are acceptable during the sharing of food? When does one abstain from food? Food practices are often bound up with religious practice, but they are also governed by local norms and customs, and reflect standards of class, gender, age, and social standing. Any meal, Douglas argues, encodes a “message...about different degrees of hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across boundaries” (Douglas 1972:61). Giving food can be an act of care or one of dominance, and refusing food can represent a struggle for control or a declaration of separateness. Eating together can transform strangers or mere acquaintances into friends, and it is fundamental to the constitution of family and community ties.

In an essay on family roles and relationships in rural Serbia, Hammel (1967) reflects on his own experiences as a recipient of hospitality in Serbian homes. The most obvious aspect on first encounter, he notes, is the great generosity with which a stranger is welcomed, made to sit down, and served *slatko* (something sweet), brandy, and coffee, and sometimes an entire spread of cheeses, meats, pickled vegetables, and cake. Ruefully, he says:

The warmth of the reception leads the ethnographer to assume that he has established rapport, but what he has established (or been placed into) is a role—that of guest. The ritualized hospitality is, like much hospitality anywhere, a distance-maintaining and boundary-setting mechanism. (Hammel 1967:55).⁶²

Hammel comes to perceive a significant difference between public displays—including those of ritualized hospitality and of highly patriarchal gender roles—and actual behind-the-scenes family dynamics. He depicts “the Serbian family” as one that strictly differentiates between members and outsiders, closely guarding its private life. As children are socialized into these boundaries between the family and the outside world, Hammel says that they are often offered food by neighbors, but are taught by their parents not to accept it: “Their parents say, ‘You want them to think we don’t feed you at home?’” (Hammel 1967:59). Food, then, plays a meaningful and complex part in the constitution of love in the family and also in the construction of boundaries between insiders and outsiders.

Bringa, who did her fieldwork in a mixed Muslim-Catholic village in central Bosnia in the late 1980s, describes a network of reciprocity among neighbors of both communities, who exchanged various kinds of support and social visits. Like Hammel, she comments on the lavishness of hospitality, especially that offered to prominent guests or outsiders. She notes that “[h]ospitality is closely related to the reputation of individual households; indeed the verb for

⁶² Sorabji, who did fieldwork in Sarajevo in 1984-85, comments similarly on the function of hospitality during coffee visits. She notes the emphasis placed on preserving the secrets of the household and says, “The formalised nature of the coffee visit helps to ensure that a visitor sees the host household only at its best, as it would like to be seen” (Sorabji :80).

offering hospitality (*častiti*) has the same etymology as the word for honor (*čast*)” (Bringa 1995:69). Even in the brief everyday coffee-visits that women made to one another, women represented their households and built ties between them, with careful regard to the frequency of their visits. “A woman was obliged to go and see all her immediate neighbors in turn during the week,” Bringa says, adding that “If for some reason she went several times to visit one house consecutively without visiting another, people would start to talk” (Bringa 1995:92). The fact that both Muslims and Catholics lived in the same village with their houses interspersed made possible the development of a common sense of neighborly belonging to the village, alongside the awareness of being part of two separate communities.

Yet Bringa also describes the way consciousness of ethno-religious difference was reinforced, as Muslim and Catholic women used phrases such as “among us” (*kod nas*) and “among you” (*kod vas*), and identified certain practices with one group or the other (Bringa 1995:67). As an example, Bringa writes of a day when she joined three Muslim women to visit a Catholic woman who had just been in the hospital. There were other Catholic visitors, as well.

We sat around a table and drank from cups; this was in contrast to the traditional Muslim custom of sitting on sofas or mattresses on the floor and drinking coffee from *fi džans* (a small cup without a handle)... Furthermore, when setting out the coffee cups the hostess allotted one teaspoon for each guest. The Muslim women said they could share one, but the Catholic hostess answered that “Among us we have one teaspoon for each person.” Since in both Muslim and Catholic households teaspoons may be shared or there may be one for each person, this woman’s comment perhaps said more about what *she* did than about what Catholics as a group did. Nevertheless, from her perspective she was communicating who she was in terms of who (collectively) she identified with. (Bringa 1995:67-68)

Bringa specifies that all of the women were born in the village and had been neighbors all their lives. They shared similar life experiences, types of household labor, and worries about making ends meet. Their comments differentiating between “us” and “you” were humorous in tone, followed up by jokes and laughter about the common themes of their lives.

As in the serving of coffee described above, nuanced customs having to do with eating and drinking were important as markers of difference in a village where most people lived similar lives. One woman explained to Bringa, “The difference between Muslims and Catholics is in the way we pray and what we eat” (Bringa 1995:81). The eating of pork generated a particularly significant boundary line between Muslim and Catholic communities in the village. Indeed, Bringa found that when she first moved into the village, the Muslim family with whom she stayed—knowing that she was not Muslim—had been worried that she would require them to cook her pork. At the same time, Catholic women wondered how she could live without pork and wine (Bringa 1995:xv). Some Muslim women in the village hesitated to enter Catholic houses lest they be served food cooked with lard, or eat off of plates polluted by the residue of pork (Bringa 1995:79). This issue was also a major factor in the villagers’ concerns about intermarriage; it would be a major challenge to incorporate into the household a daughter-in-law who celebrated different holy days and prepared different foods (Bringa 1995:80).

Bringa’s ethnography emphasizes the simultaneous marking of difference and maintenance of common identity, “the ambiguity implied in belonging to one village and one neighborhood, but two communities, and in expressing similarities and unity, differences and separateness at the same time” (Bringa 1995:73). Of course, after she returned from the field and as she wrote her book, Bringa found herself watching the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the violent expulsion of Muslims from the village she had worked in. She returned to Bosnia several times during the war and produced a documentary film, *We Are All Neighbors* (1993), chronicling the tragic disruption of friendship between Muslim and Croat neighbors as events of the war swept the villagers into a frightening vortex of violence, terror, and betrayal. “War changes people in profound ways,” she reflects. “It changes their perceptions of themselves and who they are, and

it changes their perceptions of others and who they are” (Bringa 1995:5). Nevertheless, a similar consciousness of simultaneous unity and separateness is familiar to me from my own field work, particularly within mixed families. In Milka’s family, as in others, individual family members quite often seem to identify themselves with a specific religion or ethnicity, even *while* they also go out of their way to reject these categories and dismiss their importance.

Belonging and affiliation at an *iftar* meal

The iftar meal Milka prepares is a gesture of respect for her husband’s parents, a chance to renew ties and catch up on the small news of one another’s daily lives, one visit in the long skein of reciprocal visiting that knots this family’s relationships together. It is an enactment of family and a celebration of the unique identity of this particular family. At the same time, though, its religious motivation and form asserts the importance of ethno-religious affiliation, and acts as a subtle reminder that people at the table have different upbringings, different allegiances.

In this section I attend to the interactional details of how ethnicity is made discursively relevant, even though family members do not discuss it directly. Using what Bucholtz and Hall (2006) call “tactics of intersubjectivity,” family members produce and call attention to socially-recognized similarities, or emphasize and create social differences among themselves. Here I am emphatically *not* saying that the members of this family, who take pains to avoid ethnic labels, are otherwise hiding their “true” selves or are somehow deceived or lying about who they are. But I am trying to explore the ways that they struggle to incorporate aspects of their own selves that can sometimes seem incompatible; I am trying to hold up together different facets of the self that these family members showed me at different times, recognizing each one as a valid expression of subjectivity. I am also trying to show how the members of this family shape one

another in interaction just as the women in Bringa's study did when they visited one another for coffee, sometimes emphasizing their unity and sometimes their differences.

Milka, who is in charge of the meal and its coordination, comes to the living room twice to admit her ignorance of one of the finer details of its execution—once, simply to check the time at which the meal should start, and the second time, to ask whether the first course is supposed to be soup or *topa*, a specialty prepared during Ramadan. These are small questions, and when Safija answers she also tells Milka that it doesn't matter. "Technically it should be *topa*, but you can serve us soup first," she says. She seems to find it slightly uncomfortable that Milka is working so hard to reproduce an authentic iftar meal. I, too, feel much more aware than usual of the fact that Milka grew up in a Christian home and married into a Muslim family.



Figure 1 "I made okra, Grandpa."

Later on, as she serves us the delicious food she had prepared, Milka declares: "I made okra, Grandpa. For you." Her tone is humorous, in a pronounced shift from the business-like way she had just been talking as she distributed soup and lemonade. She smiles and stands up straighter, clasping her hands as if she is self-consciously and somewhat mockingly inhabiting the persona of a young girl who wants to boast about her deed. She uses the plural form of

address (*vi*), suggesting that she made the okra for both grandparents,⁶³ but she singles out Refik as her addressee. “Did you,” he responds, continuing to spoon soup into his mouth. “I did,” says Milka, as Safija laughs and Hamid teases under his breath that she’s never once made it before:

M: <i>Pravila sam dedo bamiju.</i> <i>Za vas.</i>	Milka: I made okra, Grandpa. For you [pl].
S: <i>((laughs))</i>	Safija: <i>((laughs))</i>
R: <i>Jesi li</i>	Refik: Did you
M: <i>Jesam</i> <i>Pa eto.</i>	Milka: I did So there.
H: <i>Prvi put.</i>	Hamid: First time. <i>((leaning toward Refik))</i>
M: <i>Ni:je prvi put</i> <i>Pravila sam je dva:put za ova dvadeset</i> <i>godina</i> <i>((laughter))</i>	Milka: It's <u>no:t</u> the first time I made it two: times in the last twenty years <i>((laughter from the women))</i>
H: <i>O:: je:bo:te ((turning to look at Milka))</i>	Hamid: O:: damn it! <i>((turning to look at</i> <i>Milka))</i>
M: <i>Pa kad je ne voli (.) Danijela</i> <i>Ja je mogu pojest ali nije da je nešto</i> <i>obožavam</i>	Milka: Well, when (.) Danijela doesn't like it I can eat it but I don't particularly love it
K: <i>Ni ja je ne obožavam.</i> <i>Ja isto (nisam veliki ljubitelj bamije)</i>	Keziah: I don't love it either. I'm also not (a great fan of okra)
M: <i>Aha. Ma ja</i>	Milka: Uhuh. yeah
E: <i>Ja: mogu.</i>	Emir: I: can.
S: <i>Volio bi moj E:mir dra:gi.</i>	Safija: My de:ar E:mir would like it.

At first glance, this conversation about okra seems unremarkable, related simply to idiosyncracies of personal preference. Milka says she doesn't much care for okra, but evidently she knows that Refik does. Hamid's observation that she never made it before seems to indicate that he, too, likes okra and would have appreciated it if Milka made it more often. Emir says that he likes it, and I chime in to admit that okra is really not my thing. The mood is light-hearted and there is a good deal of laughter. However, as I listened to this conversation on the recording after the fact, it began to take on a different significance to me. Is it a coincidence that Emir and Hamid like okra, as the grandparents also apparently do, whereas Milka says she and her

⁶³ Possibly, her use of the plural “*vi*” form indicates that she is addressing her father-in-law formally. But during the rest of the evening, she uses the informal address form (*ti*) when speaking with both of her in-laws.

daughter do not? Has Milka deliberately failed to make okra in the past? Why does Safija encourage Emir's liking of okra with such a warm assessment, emphasizing her own loving connection with her grandson and affirming that she would have expected him like okra?

Okra is not an obvious boundary-marker, a food explicitly associated with religious observance the way avoiding pork is a sign of being Muslim. Still, in this case it does seem to be a marker of allegiance, something like drinking one's coffee out of a *filđžan* instead of a cup with a handle (cf. Bringa 1995:67, Maček 2009:17), a subtle way for the family members to indicate their own positioning with regard to Bosnian Muslim identity. There are several reasons why okra can take on this symbolism. In the Bosnian language, okra is called *bamija*, a word that occurs in similar form throughout the Middle East in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish, and both the word and the vegetable were evidently introduced to the Balkans during the rule of the Ottomans. Okra commonly appears in the creamy soup known as *begova čorba*, "Bey's soup," whose name suggests that it was a dish preferred by Ottoman noblemen (who carried the title *beg*), and uses the Turkish-derived word *čorba* rather than the "standard" word for soup (*supa*). In Sarajevo, okra also seems to be prepared specifically during Ramadan or for Bajram festivities. In the years that I lived in Bosnia I did my best to avoid it, but inevitably found myself obliged to eat okra stew when I was invited to join Muslim friends for an iftar meal or to celebrate Bajram. Although I found the slimy texture almost intolerable, I remember on at least one occasion being told, sternly, that I could not possibly skip the okra because it was a festive Bosnian dish and a Bajram specialty. Of course, I knew people who sometimes served okra at ordinary meals, but nevertheless okra seems to be a food associated with Bosnia, with the Ottoman past, and with Bosnian Muslims more than with Croats or Serbs.⁶⁴ This conversation at Milka's table suggests

⁶⁴ An internet search for "bamija" turns up recipes from several Bosnian cooking sites, but also the website of a Croatian farm (<http://www.bamija.hr/recepti.html>) that is evidently trying to introduce okra in Croatia, highlighting

the same thing. One's stance toward okra seems to function as an index of one's affiliation with Bosnian Islam, or at least with Bosniak identity. It makes sense, then, that the child Milka and Hamid have given a Muslim name should like okra, whereas the child who bears a "European" or Christian name might not.

Talking about one's taste for okra allows family members to acknowledge "ethnic" differences and discursively position themselves with regard to ethnic categories, without talking explicitly about ethnicity or nationhood. Milka distances herself, and her daughter, from a food indexing Muslim identity, even as she communicates her allegiance to this family by highlighting her choice to prepare it. Other fleeting instants of interpersonal alignment within the family emerge even in this short portion of the video recording. One has to do with gender: Hamid's comment ("First time"), directed to his father, seems to construct a small coalition of husbands whose wives exercise power over them by cooking what *they* want rather than what the men want. Milka's retort ("I made it two: times in the last twenty years!") seems to confirm this, suggesting that she has indeed avoided making okra. The laughter that follows this exchange comes from the three women—Milka, Safija, and me. While Hamid cracks a wry smile and turns to look over his shoulder at Milka as he swears, Refik remains expressionless, his eyes on his food.

Another moment of alignment occurs when Safija responds so fondly to Emir's statement that he likes okra. She doesn't say it loudly; it may be a comment meant mostly for Emir rather

it as a novel, healthful and aphrodisiac food. That site included a brochure titled "Haremski populjci," Harem Rosebuds, describing okra as an oriental food that delighted the Ottoman sultan and the ladies of his harem. It has innovative recipes including "Bosnian Pyramids," for which the cook uses a triangle of cheese and a long, thin style of okra in a carefully-balanced creation resembling a pyramid. The brochure mentions "Bosnian stew," and also says, "in neighboring Bosnia...this exotic vegetable has cult status." This website illustrates the construction of Croatian identity in opposition to a fantastic Orient (often represented by Bosnia). Cf. Baker 2008.

than the whole table. The two of them, sitting next to one another, turn toward each other, make eye contact, and both smile.



Figure 2 "My dear Emir"

I know that Emir has a special relationship with his grandmother. He has talked about his tendency, even as a child, to feel more comfortable with elders than with his peers. Emir, who is fascinated by growing things, cultivates a garden at his grandparents' "weekend" cabin outside of the city. He is also in the habit of casually dropping by his grandparents' apartment in Sarajevo.⁶⁵ Once, he took me to visit his grandparents at home, where he was welcomed with calm warmth and sat chatting with both of them for several hours. In contrast, Emir and his mother are known within the family for their disagreements, especially over matters of politics and religion. These arguments are humorous and stop short of real acrimony, but they are also dramatic and vehement.⁶⁶ The combination of these two different relationships, I believe, does

⁶⁵ He does not have a similarly warm relationship with his mother's parents—Milka's mother died some years ago, and her father lives in Pale, the town about 30 minutes from Sarajevo in Republika Srpska. He is not in good health, but though Milka visits regularly she usually does not take Emir with her when she goes to visit him. Emir describes his maternal grandfather as somewhat forbidding, or at least not welcoming of Emir's presence.

⁶⁶ When I listened to their occasional arguments, it was quite difficult for me to figure out what their disagreement entailed. It seemed that their positions were not so far apart, yet they (especially Milka) kept up a combative stance no matter what. I began to suspect that Milka's complaint about Emir had less to do with any disagreement about his political ideas, and more with the fact that she worries about his future, and about what she perceives as his

play a role in the structuring of Emir’s emotional sense of attachment to the Bosniak community—even as he maintains political stances that are strongly anti-nationalist, and defines himself officially as a secular Bosnian.

Refik, who barely responded to Milka’s announcement that she made okra for him, and who has stolidly continued to eat soup throughout the ensuing conversation, suddenly returns to the topic just when everybody else seems prepared to move on. As Milka returns from a brief trip to the kitchen, he looks across the table at her with eyebrows raised, establishes eye contact, and begins to expound on the technique of making “real” okra. As if Milka has just asked him how to make okra, rather than telling him that she is about to serve it, he explains what ingredients are essential for “real” okra:

R: <i>Za pr<u>a</u>vu bamiju se pravi- (.) janjećem me:som? i to (.) dobro ma:snom?</i>	Refik: For <u>real</u> okra you make it- (.) with la:mb meat? and (.) a good fa:tty piece?
M: <i>To je <u>nekad</u> bilo.</i>	Milka: That’s how it <u>used</u> to be. ((waves hand, laughs, turns toward the table))
R: <i>ma- a oni sad prave od teletine (ovo, ono,)</i>	Refik: ma- but now they make it with veal (this, that,) ((lifting one side of his lip slightly))
M: <i>Ma ja</i>	Milka: Well yeah ((taking the soup pot from the table and moving into the kitchen))
R: <i>a pra:va bamija se samo pravilo u-</i>	Refik: but re:al okra was only made in- ((continuing to look toward Milka))
S: <i>Dobro Refike</i>	Safija: Okay Refik

Here Refik orients to Milka, capturing her attention and indicating, through repeated rising intonation, that he has more to say and could go on at length (Schegloff 2007). Though Milka has not yet brought the okra to the table and he has not yet tried it or even laid eyes on it, he implicitly contrasts what she has prepared with an idealized version of okra prepared with a fatty

preoccupation with abstract political matters rather than practical engagement in finding employment and securing a future for himself.

piece of lamb. When Milka objects that this is an old-fashioned way of making okra, he agrees that “they” make it these days with veal or other meat; he evaluates this choice by lifting his lip in a gesture of dismissal. Milka has already shifted her gaze and her physical alignment from Refik, and moves to carry the soup pot away from the table and into the kitchen behind her.



Figure 3 "For *real* okra you make it with lamb meat"

Refik continues to look in Milka’s direction and continues to talk. *Real* okra, he says, needs to be made in a certain way. Before he can go on, Safija cuts him off, saying “Okay Refik,” in a warning tone. Refik glances briefly toward Safija before returning his gaze to his food, but he stops talking. Safija and Milka, talking loudly with a great deal of overlap, both rattle off a number of reasons why cooks no longer make okra in the same way: there is now better meat available, people eat meat more often and can’t afford to eat so much fat, the introduction of refrigeration has made it possible to eat beef rather than meat from smaller animals:

<p>S: <i>prije je zavisilo od- [kakvo je bilo meso, većinom je bilo (xxx)</i></p>	<p>Safija: But it used to depend on – [what kind of meat there was, most of it was (xxx)]</p>
<p>M: <i>[pa prije bi se Dedo meso jednom u</i></p>	<p>Milka: [it used to be Grandpa you ate meat once</p>

<p><i>mjesec dva, tri i onda možeš</i></p> <p>S: <i>Nije samo to onaj-</i></p> <p>M: <i>A sad se svaki dan jede</i></p> <p>S: <i>prije je bilo većinom bravetina janjetina,</i></p> <p>M: <i>jeste</i></p> <p>S: <i>vrlo malo je bilo teletine [nije bilo frižidera, nije bilo-</i></p> <p>M: <i>[što je manje, znaš i što će se brzo potrošiti</i></p>	<p>every month or two, or three and then you <u>can</u></p> <p>Safija: It's not just that, uh-</p> <p>Milka: And now you eat it every day</p> <p>Safija: It used to be mostly mutton, lamb,</p> <p>Milka: Right</p> <p>Safija: there was hardly any veal, [and there weren't refrigerators, there weren't-</p> <p>Milka: [the smaller things, you know, that can be used quickly</p>
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Milka largely speaks from the kitchen, where she is not fully visible to people at the table.

Though Safija begins speaking while looking at Refik, he acts preoccupied with his food and she shifts her orientation toward Milka, leaning sideways and craning her neck toward the kitchen when the two women cannot see each other. After Milka and Safija subside, there is a lengthy pause (nearly six seconds) during which nobody talks, but spoons move back and forth. Then Refik tries again, this time without lifting his gaze from his bowl:

<p>R: <i>Ja kažem, bosanska-</i></p> <p>S: <i>[Razumijem ja šta ti kažeš.</i></p> <p>M: <i>[Ma jeste, prije je(.)janjetina, bravetina-</i></p> <p><i>e, to ti je bamija.</i></p> <p><i>Ima još: (.) ako se budite ja:hahavili</i></p>	<p>Refik: I'm saying, Bosnian-</p> <p>Safija: [I understand what you're saying.</p> <p>Milka: [It's true, before, it was (.)lamb, mutton- (coming back into the dining room)) eh, that's okra. ((placing okra on table)) There's more (.) if you speak up h.h</p>
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Refik is quite persistent in trying to make his point, and yet the women again cut him off. This time they both assure him that they understand and that he's correct, and then Milka firmly changes the subject. Refik has explicitly connected okra with *Bosnian* tradition, and implicitly suggested that Milka's okra is not an authentic version of the dish. He claims a proprietary knowledge of what "real okra" consists of, and reasserts the theme of okra as a marker of identity by raising the question of whether the food Milka has prepared can be *authentic* okra. It is not really clear what his purpose was in bringing this up; I know of no underlying conflict between

Refik and Milka, and it may be that he is simply self-absorbed and fails to consider that his words might be taken as an insult to Milka. What does seem clear is that this is a dangerous moment, one in which he disaligns himself from Milka in a fairly dramatic way, rejecting the food as authentic after she has publicly declared that she made it *for him*.

This dangerous moment could, perhaps, turn into a rift in the family in which ethnicity becomes salient, but family members do not seem to take it up in this way. Milka shows mild disaffiliation with Refik's statement, withdrawing her gaze, rejecting the truth of what he just said ("that's how it used to be"), occupying herself with shifting food off of the table, and showing ("Well yeah") that she is not interested in hearing more about traditional ways of cooking okra. Safija also intervenes, indicating strongly that Refik should contain his opinions and stop talking. The women jointly downplay the "ethnic" significance of okra and reposition the cooking of okra, not as a marker of "real" Bosnian identity or authenticity, but as a common task of cooks (presumably women, though this is not stated) who must deal with the ingredients they have at hand. They argue that many factors influence the choice of meat in this dish, and suggest that the meat available now is better than what people used to have access to. They reject Refik's attempt to set up a distinction between Milka's okra and "real," "Bosnian" okra, instead aligning themselves in a single community of women who cook with the best materials they can find. Together, they claim authority over the skill of cooking, as they challenge Refik's authority to comment on it.

If every meal encodes a message, as Douglas (1972) suggests, what is the message of this meal? I've said that it simultaneously creates a feeling of family unity, and sets up divisions. One message of the meal seems to be a reminder that *Milka* has a problematic position; she both is and isn't a part of this family gathered right now. In other words, Hamid and his parents are a

fairly obvious unit; all three of them could be considered Bosnian Muslim despite their different shades of religiosity. Emir, too, is clearly allied with his grandmother (most especially) and, though he has a complicated stance on his own identity, the path of least resistance for him, and the place where he gets most affirmation, is also as a Bosnian Muslim, as a Bosniak. Milka has the most “marked” or troublesome status, simultaneously an insider and an outsider in this family, as indeed she is in Sarajevo at this point in time. With her mother dead, her father and brother living in Pale, and other relatives and close friends scattered in Croatia and beyond, Milka is relatively isolated. It might also be significant that Milka’s daughter, Danijela—who shares some of her mother’s ambivalent positioning as not only “other” but also in speaking of herself as Serb—is actually *physically* gone, having left to work on a ship.

Belief, conversion, and the threat of betrayal

In a brief piece on Hindu-Muslim intermarriage in India, Veena Das (2010) explores the shifts in subjectivity that take place within a Hindu family as it comes to incorporate a young Muslim daughter-in-law. In India, at least as much as in Bosnia, histories and threats of inter-communal violence make intermarriage remarkable—even while the routine intermingling of Hindu and Muslim lives makes it possible in the first place. Das observes that the new husband, Kuldip, and his bride, Saba, each venture readily into the other’s faith tradition: he expresses a fascination with Islam and considers converting formally, learning prayers and verses of the Kur’an from his wife, while she learns Hindu prayers and rituals in the context of her new household. Yet even the other family members, Kuldip’s parents and grandparents, who are initially thrown into consternation by the marriage, also make accommodations over time, not

only to the fact of the marriage itself, but in their own orientation to belief, ritual practice, and identity.

Das argues that “there isn’t one single conversion as a turning away from a previous mode of life but rather a slow flowering of the discovery of how Saba might become the daughter by marriage of a home in which the identities Hindu and Muslim are in an unstable relation to one another” (Das 2010:396). In part, this process depends on and reveals already-existing openness to Islam within this family, particularly in the person of Kuldip’s grandfather, a Hindu mystic who maintains the shrine of a local Muslim saint and says he receives power from this saint to cure ailments (Das 2010:386). But Das emphasizes how this marriage creates something *new* and challenges family members to make innovations in practices and aspects of the self that are fundamental to their understanding of who they are in their neighborhood, family, and community.

Milka and Hamid’s family life shows some similarities to this situation; certainly, Milka’s readiness to prepare an iftar meal for her in-laws can be seen as experimentation with the rituals and affiliations of the other. Still, their situation seems different in important ways. Their story is not a straightforward matter of two clearly-defined representatives of distinct ethno-religious communities who meet each other in the middle against all odds—people who *start out* with an overwhelming sense of their difference and find a way to establish a shared life together. Milka and Hamid each grew up in Sarajevo, in homes that emphasized Yugoslav patriotism and distanced themselves from religious practice and teaching. Both of them talk about their ignorance of religious customs, and their strong conviction that religion is all right as a private matter of personal faith, but not when it becomes a public show of piety or a marker of political

affiliation.⁶⁷ Both Milka and Hamid were brought up with an “urban” sensibility, with opportunities to travel around Yugoslavia, or (in Hamid’s case) as far away as Iraq, where the engineering firm he worked for was constructing specialized infrastructure. They married in 1985, without fear of their families’ disapproval, established a household independent from either of their parents’, and had two small children before the war started. Their family, like Senad’s or Vera’s, could be thought of as one that *became* mixed in the course of events, as the meanings of ethnic belonging, religion, and mixing itself shifted profoundly, and as individual family members responded differently to the currents of change. The process of negotiating identities continues even now, twenty years after the war, within an environment of instability in which arguments over the nature of Bosnia’s communities and their relationships to one another remain unsettled.

Milka and Hamid share a wariness about religion that is born out of personal experience. In our conversations they spoke of the way religion has been misused for the purposes of nationalist politics in the former Yugoslavia. “In this society religion *really* divides people,” Milka complains. “Because it is abused,” Hamid agrees. There is no doubt that religious leaders and institutions were flagrantly involved in the violence of the 1990s and remain tightly enmeshed in nationalist projects. The Serb Orthodox and Catholic churches, in particular, lent powerful support to genocidal Serb and Croat actors by promoting belief in the “chosenness” or divinely-ordained specialness of their own groups (cf Pawlikowski 1992, Sells 1998, Skrbiš 2005) and the treacherous danger represented by “race traitors” who had betrayed them by accepting Islam during the time of Ottoman occupation (cf Sells 1998, Doja 2008). Serb

⁶⁷ This was a stance that was encouraged by the Communist party’s general disapproval of religion. Both Sorabji (dissertation) and Bringa (1995) describe the way people moved between the religiously-marked household (or neighborhood) and the public, “Yugoslav” space of the town or city, making modifications in dress and other public markers of identity such as the greetings they used. In the public or Yugoslav domain, people used secular greetings and often did not know the ethno-religious categorization of the people they interacted with.

nationalism also recalled the horrors of the fascist (Croat) Ustashe regime, which not only killed many Serbs in brutal concentration camps, but also forced conversions to Catholicism during the Second World War (Denich 1994, Iveković 2002). During the war, wholesale destruction of religious sanctuaries accompanied massacres and “ethnic cleansing,” and in the postwar period, the building of churches, mosques, and religious monuments has been a common means of marking or contesting ownership of particular territories (Hayden 2002, Iveković 2002). Although Islamic leaders came late to the nationalist party and primarily assumed a defensive posture with respect to chauvinist Serb and Croat ideologies, they, too, have become vigorous proponents of religious nation-building (Bringa 1995, Henig 2012).

Though Hamid, Milka, and their two children are deeply critical of nationalist politics and the overt ties between religion and political parties, when they talk about the use and abuse of religion they primarily speak on a more personal level, focusing on the interactions they have had with ordinary believers or with religious institutions. They describe the negotiations of religious affiliation that took place during the war, as people simply looked for ways to stay alive. “In wartime,” Milka says, conversion is a matter of “whether there’s food, whether there’s a way out.” She and Hamid talk about a couple they knew, another mixed couple, a Muslim woman married to a Serb man. They started going to a Catholic church, so they could get Croatian passports and safe passage out of the city.⁶⁸ Now they live in Australia. Milka, who spent the war with the children living next door to Hamid’s parents, describes her own encounters with humanitarian agencies:

Milka: Meni je i (.) pop katolički rekao
The Catholic (.) priest said to me
da bi ja dobila pomoći od Caritasa
that I could get help from Caritas [but]

⁶⁸ See Maček 2009 for similar stories and further information about Croatian citizenship and the Catholic church in Sarajevo during the war.

da bi ja trebala djecu učlaniti u crkvu,
 that I would have to make the children members of the church,
 da idu na vjeronauku i da budu (.) (x) katolici.
 to go to religious education and to become (.) (xx) Catholics.
 Džamija (.) mene nije onaj, priznavala, ni Danijelu, po
 imenu.
 The mosque (.) they didn't recognize me, nor Danijela, because of our names.
 Davala pomoći njima dvojica, nije meni davala.
 They gave help to the two guys, didn't give help to me.
 Srpsko humanitarno društvo je davala nama svima
 The Serb humanitarian society gave to all of us
 ja sam sve navela redom,
 I listed all of us one after the other,
 ali oni su malo imali, malo davali.
 but they had little, and gave little.
 Caritas je najviše imao.
 Caritas had the most.

The partisan distribution of humanitarian aid seems a cynical ploy on the part of religious actors, blackmailing needy people into professing belief and deepening divides by giving only to their own—even if this means giving to only half a family. What is the meaning of a conversion under such circumstances? What is the worth of a religious community if it offers you only physical safety at the expense of your own sense of integrity? Religion seems to be gutted, bereft of any meaningful and life-enriching value, when it is so tightly connected to personal and political agendas.

Milka and Hamid resisted sending their children to Catholic Sunday school classes, and they also intervened against the efforts of Hamid's mother to send the children to the mosque for Islamic education. "I came into conflict with my mother over that," Hamid tells me. Milka jumps in to explain, "My mother-in-law became a big believer after the war. Before then, I hardly knew she was a believer." Hamid's parents were not observant as he grew up, and did not pass on religious teachings. But, says Milka, toward the end of the war Safija tried to dictate who the children should play with, and get them to go to the mosque. "She tried, but she didn't succeed!" Milka declares.

Milka: Ali nije to preda mnom, već,
But it wasn't in front of me, but rather,
nema nas, i djecu da soli pamet,
we're not there, and she tells the children what to think,
da ih usmje:rava.
to give them direction.

Hamid thinks that his mother's actions were motivated by good intentions—he believes his mother was worried that the children would be isolated and left out because of the massive shifts that were taking place in society. “However, given the way both Milka and I think, we didn't allow it,” he tells me,

Hamid: što (.) se mi ne slažemo sa tim.
because (.) we don't agree with that.
Ja ne volim da mi dijete neko trpa u nekakav tor.
I don't like anybody to force my child into any kind of corral.

Like Milka, Hamid perceives religion primarily as a divisive force, one that categorizes people and creates conflict between them. They also describe a sense that the demands of religious orthodoxy make nearly any kind of disagreement or independent thought impossible. “If you want to be a believer you have to accept it all without questioning how, why, or what for,” Hamid says. This is not the type of upbringing they wanted for their children.

Hamid and Milka present a united front against the meddling of Hamid's mother; he identifies himself as the one who ultimately confronted her to tell her to stop. But Milka is clearly the protagonist, the one in front of whom Safija would not dare instruct the children in Islamic prayers. Milka is the woman whose father is Serb, whose parents left Sarajevo when the war started and went to live in Serb-controlled Pale. Milka is the mother who refuses to teach the children any religious customs, even her own. She is the one who stands to be offended by Safija's attempts to convert the children, to bring the children up as Muslims who know Muslim ways.

Danijela, who wasn't present for this conversation, independently tells me about the same events. She describes a child's life of playing out in the street with other neighborhood children, most of whom did go to the mosque for religious education. She and Emir often stayed with their grandmother, as they were living next door to her. "She would tell us stories," Danijela remembers, especially one story called "Grandma goes along the river."

Daniela: Onda kad završi 'Baka ide uz rijeke' ona počne, znaš,
Then when she finished "Grandma goes along the river," she'd start, you know,
"E- bi trebalo-
((whining voice)) "Eh- we should-
"hajmo- da te naučim(.) bismillah ir-rahman ir-rahim." hh
"let's- let me teach you (.) *bismillah ir-rahman ir-rahim.*" hh
(xx) hhh i tako nešto h h
(xx) hhh and things like that, h . h

The way Danijela voices it, her grandmother sounds almost malevolent, the wicked witch of a children's fairy tale saying in a sickly-sweet voice, "Come along child, now let's feel your brother's finger to see if he's grown fat enough." Danijela titters nervously as she recites the Arabic words her grandmother taught her. She was quite young, only seven or eight years old at most, and innocent of her parents' disapproval. Indeed, she not only learned prayers from her grandmother, but actually did accompany her friends to the mosque on more than one occasion. "The *hodža* would ask me, 'Whose child are you?'" she recalls.

D: Sreće moje pa na vrijeme odustadoh(.) od tog svega.
Lucky for me that I gave up (.) all of that in time.
Mislim ono, kad je mama saznala(.) da idem sa ovom djecom,
I mean, like, when Mama found out (.) that I was going with those children,
bilo je- (.) (xx) h:h
it was- (.) (xx) h:h
Al' eto, onda me je ona zabranila da idem sa njima, (.)
But anyway, then she forbade me from going with them, (.)
K: Hmm
Hmm
D: Al' neka je, meni je drago. (da jeste) [xx
But it's good she did, I'm glad. (that she did) [(xx)

K: [A jesi li htjela da ideš?
[But did you want to go?

D: Pa joj nije da sam ja to htjela
Well it isn't that I wanted it
nego, znaš, ti mali, djeca sva idu
but, you know, you're little, the kids are all going
Šta ti znaš šta je [vjera, kako se- ko (xx)
What do you know about what [religion is, how- who (xx)

K: [Ma ja, svi idu i-
[Well yeah, everybody is going and-

D: i slične stvari. ...
and things like that. ...
Ne znam kako je mama saznala gdje idem,
I don't know how Mama found out where I was going,
možda je brat rekao pošto on nije išao.
maybe my brother told her because he didn't go.

Danijela's story, with its overtones of embarrassment or even shame, seems to fit like a puzzle piece with Emir's memories of childhood during the war, though he speaks not of the seduction of Islam, but, instead, of the taunts of schoolmates and the surreptitious whispers of neighbors, "old neurotic women," as Emir describes them. One year older than Danijela, he was perhaps more aware of the events of the war and the players involved, and he felt a sense of unwelcome attached to his family, but one that he could not easily understand, or even ask about. He remembers coming home from school and asking his mother who the Chetniks were. What did she say? "Nothing; she ignored it," Emir says. He also remembers Danijela asking their father, home for a visit from the front lines, how many Chetniks he had killed. "One does not ask that," their mother told her. These questions were not answerable—in fact, they were not askable. Being Serb, being Chetnik, being Muslim—being mixed—was an unresolvable dilemma, fraught with the possibility of betrayal and, indeed, the shame of knowing that one *had*, in an obscure way, betrayed one's mother, one's grandmother, perhaps one's self. Well might the *hodža* at the mosque ask, "Whose child *are* you?"

Achieving the everyday

Despite the small betrayals of the past, the heartfelt differences in orientation to religion, and the heavy symbolic baggage loaded onto lifeways and customs, Milka and her family achieve an atmosphere not just of strained tolerance, but of warmth and respect. The everyday “holds,” is elastic enough to contain moments of tension without collapsing. There seems to be an orientation toward positive relationship such that most of the evening *is* positive and “ordinary,” held lightly and interpreted as a good time. This might be thought of as a commitment to the everyday itself, as Das (2007, 2010) writes of it, a commitment that turns attention away from “poisonous knowledge” and prevents it from seeping into the sociality of everyday life. Although I have focused here on a “dangerous moment,” this is not meant to illustrate the tenor of the whole evening, but rather, to suggest that the ordinary is actively secured through intersubjective work, through ethical choices to emphasize goodwill and overlook possible insults.

The bulk of this labor is accomplished by the two women, Milka and Safija. Both of them seem to be cognizant of the dangers inherent in this meal, or the fact that trying to prepare and serve an authentic Bosnian Muslim meal could potentially be a face-threatening task for Milka. They seem interested in equalizing investment in the religious aspects of the meal: Milka works hard to scrupulously conform to expectations and carry out a proper iftar meal, whereas Safija admits she did not actually fast during the day, and tells Milka she need not worry about serving the dishes in the proper order. When Refik starts to expound on “real” Bosnian okra, the two of them work to re-figure his comment, downplaying its insulting overtones and transforming the moment of danger into a moment in which they ally with one another on the basis of their common identity as women.

If the two women work to create moments of intimacy, and if they give more priority to their similarity than their differences, they also sustain a type of formal distance, that of guest and host. I remarked earlier on the self-conscious, performance-like quality of the evening and on Milka's dramatic, even ostentatious hosting.⁶⁹ One of the aspects of the evening that surprised me most, at the time, was indeed the sense that Safija and Refik were guests received with formal attention in the home of their own son and daughter-in-law. Finding a place for Safija's purse, when she first came in, was a matter that required attention from both Milka and Emir. Milka refused to sit down during the meal and waited to eat until the rest of us had finished. She declined Safija's offer of help to clear the table. It seemed to me at first that this formality could be a reflection of awkwardness between Milka and her in-laws, or a way of preventing conflict. On the other hand, it seems possible to me that this formality, perhaps combined with my outsider presence, may also have been Milka's attempt to express the respect or honor that she feels for her in-laws. She indicated that the meal was partially an effort to show *me* something significant about being Bosnian, about being a mixed family, but it was also certainly an act that carried meaning directed at others besides me. Perhaps it is difficult to show love and honor, or to receive those from someone else, without taking a slightly more formal stance, even a slightly ironic or joking stance (cf Stasch 2002).

That is, after all, how Safija compliments Milka, partway through the meal. Milka is in the kitchen when Safija says, "Everything is good, excellent." Then, as Milka comes to the doorway and she catches her attention, Safija adopts a flowery, archaic-sounding phrase that she says she learned from a popular Turkish soap opera, "May your hands be golden!"

⁶⁹ I was reminded of the visit I made to the family's home for Danijela's birthday, when Danijela hosted me and two or three close friends and served us coffee and special sweets. On that occasion the young women teased Danijela about being a "real hostess" (*prava domaćica*) and about being ready to get married because she had proven her worth (or not). All of them, including Danijela, seemed to move back and forth between the roles of friend and self-conscious hostess/guest.

S: <i>Sve je dobro, odlično. Kako kažu u onoj turskoj seriji - ruke ti se pozlatile! (laughter)</i>	Safija: Everything is good, excellent. As they say in that Turkish soap opera – may your hands be golden! ((laughter from the 3 women; Hamid smiles at M))
M: <i>(xx) pozlatile Živa bila i zdrava</i>	Milka: (xx) be golden May you live long and be healthy
S: <i>Mmhm živa bila i zdrava</i>	Safija: Mmhm live long and be healthy
M: <i>Ruke ti se- sad ja ih gledam, (bože je li stvarno tako razmišljaju)</i>	Milka: May your hands- I watch them, (God, do they really think like that)
S: <i>(Ma valjda) je običaj ko će ih znati</i>	Safija: (Well I guess) that's the custom who knows

This is a particularly warm moment, a moment in which Safija thanks Milka for her hard work and tells her that the food is tasty. She finds a way to do this that simultaneously positions them together in opposition to the Turkish people on TV, and upholds the formality of their guest/host relationship. Her turn of phrase elicits laughter from Milka and me, and Hamid smiles as he looks at Milka.

It seems, then, that one of the ways Milka and her family achieve ordinariness in their relations is by drawing on cultural repertoires of neighborliness, hospitality, and exchange, practices that allow certain forms of intimacy while also acknowledging *and sustaining* a degree of separation. The iftar meal prepared by Milka for her in-laws—this family gathering which is at once ordinary and extraordinary—crystallizes or gives insight into the dynamic pattern of relationship characteristic of Bosnian sociality, in which contrasts between self and other are not necessarily barriers but can be resources in forging and honoring bonds between people.

Conclusion

The film *Days and Hours*⁷⁰ (Žalica 2004) opens with movement, the suggestion of a journey from one side of Sarajevo to the other. The film's main character moves in his decrepit VW Golf from the concrete skyscrapers of the new city, along the valley, and up into the steep, winding alleyways of a quaint neighborhood tucked among the hills above the Old Town. He is going to visit his aging uncle and aunt. They receive him with quiet joy, serve him coffee and cakes, insist that he watch a grainy video of their young granddaughter performing in a school musical event. He examines a broken water heater and plans to return with a new part. When his car refuses to start, the brief visit turns into an impromptu overnight stay.

The film moves slowly, unfolding only partly through dialogue or happening. Gradually, obliquely, we become aware of a grievous rift in the family: the old couple's son is dead, killed in the war, and his widow has recently become involved with another man. The old man has taken this to heart as an unforgivable betrayal of his son, and has refused to have contact with his daughter-in-law. But this means he and his wife are also cut off from their beloved granddaughter. The old couple are trapped in this unbearable dilemma, but the coming of their nephew is like the fall of a pebble that sets other pebbles rolling, until finally it dislodges an entire hillside. The film observes the pain of loss and of skeptical doubt, the pent-up sadness and anger that eats at the old man and worries the old woman. It follows the process through which this pain and anger is brought to consciousness (but not necessarily into explicit discussion) for the individual characters, and how it is problematized in the context of their relationships with

⁷⁰ This is the film's official English title. A more faithful translation of the film's original title, *Kod amidže Idriza*, would be something like "At Uncle Idriz's House."

one another and with others in the neighborhood. Finally, the film dramatizes small moments of choice, a turn away from doubt, toward the redemption of relationship, or toward the re-inhabitation of a life in which one's own control over events is uncertain.

Žalica's film is situated squarely in the mundane spaces of everyday life—the spaces of ordinary household tasks, cooking, cleaning, repairing, serving food, hosting guests. It turns attention, as I hope to have done in this dissertation, to the basic issue of how people find ethical ways of being and relating, how people strive in the midst of the everyday to live in ways that are good, and courageous, and honorable. It shows what is at stake in the social world, the ever-present risks of doubt and betrayal, themes that I explored especially through Vera's and Senad's stories. The old man and woman find themselves caught between competing goods: remaining loyal to the memory of their son, or embracing his wife and daughter within the flow of time and change. The film examines the small adjustments that can make all the difference between doubt and trust, between alienation and recognition. Indeed, it illustrates the possibility that the ordinary can be a “moral laboratory” (Mattingly 2012, 2014), that experimentation and transformation take place in the emergent uncertainty of everyday life rather than only at moments of crisis or departure from the ordinary. As a fictionalized dramatization of family relationships, the film reaches a sort of closure that is unavailable to the ethnographer because it is unavailable to human beings in the midst of living their lives. Yet it holds up a vision of what could be possible, if only imperfectly and momentarily, and accounts for it by minutely tracing the contingencies and ethical choices present within the most prosaic of scenes.

In a recent article reflecting on the purposes and trajectory of anthropological research, Robbins (2013) calls for an “anthropology of the good,” an anthropology that seeks a critical perspective on our own society by comparing it with deeply other ways of life, and investigates

how people in diverse societies work to bring about the good in their lives. As part of a burgeoning movement toward this type of work, he identifies studies of morality, of well-being, empathy, and care, studies that take seriously possibilities for change and ways that people sustain hope, even in circumstances of suffering. Mattingly's work (2012, 2014) certainly falls within this "anthropology of the good," as does the work of Das (2007, 2010). I would also add Ring (2006), whose study of "everyday peace" in a Karachi apartment building emphasizes the effortful emotional and relational labor of women who find ways to neighbor with strangers.

I, too, have tried to trace the achievement of an everyday peace that arises in daily, even moment-to-moment, ethical choices to turn toward the other and to act in ways that make relations possible for oneself and for others in one's family. I have held up moments of failure, and moments in which people grappled with their own incapacity to change the course of events or even imagine any other viable course that events might take. I have explored the pain and the richness of difference, as people in mixed families balance between feelings of exclusion and a sense that they can "see both sides." Above all, I have tried to represent people *as people*, as individuals whose lives resist causal explanations and theories. I have tried to be true to the human condition of ambivalence and un-knowing, to show how people in mixed-ethnicity families take many different paths as they look for wholeness for themselves and their relationships. I hope that, by doing this, I have opened up new ways for Bosnians to see themselves, and for others to recognize and critique their own concerns.

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