

Tobias Greiff

Violent Places

**Everyday Politics and Public Lives
in Post-Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina**



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Tectum Verlag

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For Jacquie

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In the end, of course, this study is solely my learning process, full of detours, accidental discoveries, and subjective interpretations. I therefore take the full responsibility for every mistake and misrepresentation of local realities that might have occurred.

Elmwood, 2018

Tobias Greiff

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1 Introduction

*"Sow hunger, reap anger"**

In spring of 2014 a wave of protests rolled through Bosnia and Herzegovina.¹ Vandalized government buildings and burning police cars soon became the images of what later would be remembered as either 'Acts of Terror' or 'The Bosnian Spring.'² While the protests spread within days, mobilizing people from all walks of life and ethnicities, the energy the protests were able to unleash had been bottled up over years of political and economic stagnation. For many Bosnian citizens the first sign that the peace process, and with it the promised economic reforms leading to increased prosperity and a better life, had gone off track was when, in 2006, a constitution reform failed to obtain the needed majority in parliament by two votes.³

Since then, the major political powers on national, entity, cantonal, and municipal levels have developed more and more exclusive concepts of Bosnia's future, maneuvering the political debates from deadlock into deadlock, while the Bosnian economy continues to struggle with the course set by privatization and rampant corruption. This growing polarization of Post-Dayton politics was further catalyzed by external events; with the global financial crisis, the cash flow of international aid, which

* Slogan sprayed on the wall of the Sarajevo Canton Government building during the Bosnian Spring protests in 2014.

1 In the following, the term Bosnia or BiH will be used as a short version of Bosnia and Herzegovina and only refers to the state formed in 1992. Former legal or traditional bodies that used the same name will be noted as such. In the same sense, Yugoslavia will be used as a synonym for the Federal Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia. All former as well as later state bodies inhering the name Yugoslavia will be marked with their full name.

2 Balkanist, "Protests across Bosnia are a "Collective Nervous Breakdown"," accessed February 11, 2014, <http://balkanist.net/protests-across-bosnia-a-collective-nervous-breakdown/>.

3 Bruce Hitchner and Edward Joseph, "How to Finally End the War in Bosnia," accessed February 12, 2013, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/how-to-finally-end-the-war-in-bosnia>.

had already shifted to countries considered more vulnerable by donors, ebbed drastically, at the same time as Kosovo's declaration of independence started to fuel nationalist propaganda on all sides in Bosnia once again.⁴ Bosnia's local (municipal) elections in the fall of 2008 demonstrated the impact political power games had had on the part of constituents. Driven by fears and dissolution, the public elected more and more nationalist hardliners into low-profile, but therefore maybe even more powerful, municipal positions in a highly decentralized political system. The immediate result was not only a political stalemate on decisions vitally important for Bosnia's future, but also an epidemic loss of trust in the new democratic political institutions and values.⁵ Together with wide-spread economic poverty, the level of aggression manufactured by political elites has become visible once more on the streets of several small towns and villages outside of international consciousness. Hand-grenades thrown in shopping centers, drive-by shootings at police stations, notorious attacks on vulnerable returnee populations and violent riots after public events were only the more prominent examples of open aggression.⁶ Beyond this, dissatisfaction and enmity have very often been expressed in far more subtle ways, like the besmirching, desecrating or simply destroying of objects with high symbolic value for opposing sides, such as graveyards, monuments or similar symbols of cultural importance.⁷

In 2010, however, the situation deteriorated further, bringing Bosnia's central political body, as well as the entity government of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the larger of the two political entities, to

4 The focus of this study is the social dynamics that shape everyday life in Bosnia after the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina was signed in Paris on December 14th 1995. With this agreement being negotiated at the Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton Ohio, the names Dayton Peace Agreement, or Dayton Accords became common synonyms. The term "Post-Dayton" in this sense refers to the period after the peace agreement was implemented.

5 International Crisis Group, "Bosnia's incomplete transition: Between Dayton and Europe," *Europe Report* 9. Mach, no. 198 (2009): pp. 1-5.

6 The Sydney Morning Herald, "Muslim church guard slain in Bosnia," accessed June 28, 2014, <http://www.smh.com.au/world/muslim-church-guard-slain-in-bosnia-20130101-2c3sb.html>.

7 The central role of symbols as political tools in Bosnia's peace process has been examined in a previous study. See: Tobias Greiff, *Identität und Anspruch: Die Funktionen von Symbolen im Friedensprozess in Bosnien und Herzegowina* (Marburg: Tectum, 2011).

the brink of collapse.⁸ A splintered party system made the formation of a coalition government unavoidable – unfortunately, nationalist claims had eroded the two dominant parties at each of their more radical wings so far that no majority could be found. Alarmed by this major crisis, the international community, represented through the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina – an office created in Annex X of the Dayton Peace accords and equipped with far reaching powers – felt the urgent need to intervene. After months without a functional government and only days left to agree on a monetary plan securing the survival of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a political body that was by many perceived as ‘illegitimate’ was pushed into power.⁹ This imposed coalition, however, broke apart only five months later, and was followed by a new coalition, including a political party with dubious connections to criminal elites organizing the underworld of drugs and human trafficking in the Balkans.¹⁰

The somehow helpless interference of the Office of the High Representative (OHR), trying to stabilize the political system, once more stands symbolically for the perplexity, disillusionment and apathy of the international community involved in Bosnia.¹¹ At the same time, the nation’s three constituent groups, bolstered by more and more radical voices from new and old elites, seem to be even more enthusiastically running in opposite directions than ever before, leading the war-torn state of Bosnia and Herzegovina into a new crisis, while it is still struggling to overcome the historical obstacles related to the ethno-national violence of the 1990s.¹² Serb nationalists strategically playing with the idea of calling a

8 International Crisis Group, “Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina: A parallel crisis,” *Europe Report* 28. September, no. 209 (2010): pp. 1–29.

9 This is one of many examples in which the international community attempted to “democratize Bosnia and Herzegovina by undemocratic means”. Thorsten Gromes, “Democracy, Diversity, and Conflict: Containing the Dangers of Democratization: A Record of Peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina,” *Cornell University Peace Studies Program: Occasional Paper*, no. 30 (2006): p. 15.

10 International Crisis Group, “Bosnia’s Gordian Knot: Constitution Reform,” *Policy Briefing: Europe Briefing* 12. July, no. 68 (2012): p. 1.

11 International Crisis Group, “Bosnia’s Future,” *Europe Report* 10. July, no. 232 (2010): p. 5.

12 International Crisis Group, “Bosnia: State Institutions under Attack,” *Policy Briefing: Europe Briefing* 6. May, no. 62 (2011): pp. 1–12.

referendum on the Dayton Peace Agreement, Croat nationalists demanding the creation of a third autonomous entity, and Bosniak nationalists claiming the need for a new constitution reducing the decentralizing momentum, represent major risks for a new outbreak of violence.¹³ New radical and old nationalist movements are growing stronger from day to day, further splintering communities and jeopardizing Bosnia's move towards European Union membership.

With all this happening, many politically moderate Bosnians feel once more betrayed and abandoned by the international community. Fears for their own well-being now lead many to leave the country; and those that cannot or do not want to leave are often left with only one option: trying to find stability and support within their own families and ethnic, national, religious, or local communities and networks. The growing importance of differences – the need for being identifiable as a member of a certain group – is a phenomenon that can be observed all over Bosnia today, cultivating emotions and histories that are potentially paving the way for more radical and exclusionary claims to come.¹⁴ In the end, the

13 The term 'Bosniak' is a recently reestablished term, which in the 19th century originated as an Austro-Hungarian-German term referring to the residents of the Condominium of Bosnia and Herzegovina under the Austro-Hungarian administration. In 1992, the Congress of Bosnian Muslim/Bosniak Intellectuals promoted the use of the term Bosniak above the, at this time more common term, Muslimani, as the national identifier for the 'group' of Bosnian Muslims. This term, also highly politicized by nationalist discourses, and problematic in many other ways, is now widely established, as its use in international agreements, such as the Washington Agreement of 1994, or the General Framework Agreement on Peace, demonstrates. It is important to distinguish the term 'Bosniak' from 'Bosnian', with the latter referring to a citizen of Bosnia and Herzegovina. For a good introduction to the political debate and its impact on social relations, see: Fran Markowitz, *Sarajevo: A Bosnian Kaleidoscope* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), p. 60–64.

14 It is worth noting that 'need' in this circumstance means that there is no escape from being identified – whether by choice or not – as Dusan Kecmanovic notes; and groups in Bosnia, as Paula Pickering highlights, do not only refer to the three major ethnic communities of Bosniaks, Bosnian Croats, and Bosnian Serbs but also to Croats, Serbs, 'Internationals', Bosnian Jews, Roma, Yugoslavs, atheists, veterans, victims, returnees, and many others defined by concepts of ethnicity, nationality, class, gender, generation, profession, beliefs and life-style. See: Dusan Kecmanovic, *Ethnic Times: Exploring Ethnonationalism in the Former Yugoslavia* (Westport: Praeger, 2002), pp. 176–172; Paula M. Pickering, *Peacebuilding in the Balkans: The View from the Ground Floor* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), pp. 51–84.

future of Bosnia as a stable democratic society based on peaceful multi-ethnic coexistence is more insecure today than it seemed just five years ago.¹⁵ But how did things get so far off track – right under the eyes of the international community?¹⁶

Questions

Why did nearly twenty years of international presence – with the largest international investment per capita in rebuilding a post-conflict society the world has seen so far – fail to reconcile the former conflicting parties and install a sense of Bosnia as a democratic nation that could endure moments of crisis?¹⁷ Why have the nation- and state-building efforts, the infrastructure and economy support measurements, and all the integration, reconciliation, and justice projects designed to reduce intergroup differences failed to prevent group membership once again becoming a political and economic necessity; if not even a guarantor for security? Have we in the end failed to address the right differences? Was there truth to assumptions that differences in Bosnia are too ancient and unable to ever change? Or, have we failed to understand what difference means, and what role differences play in local interactions, in the first place?

I fear the latter is the case; that while trying to understand what Serbs, Bosniaks and Croats are disagreeing about, we have missed what being a Serb, Bosniak, or Croat means to individuals on the ground and not to us – we have missed what being a Serb, Bosniak, or Croat means in different local settings and in different contexts, and finally we have missed or underestimated how those local meanings create and influence local political agencies and therefore define the peace process at its core.¹⁸ We

15 International Crisis Group, "Bosnia's Future," p. i-ii.

16 Christopher S. Chivvis and Harum Đogo, "Getting Back on Track in Bosnia-Herzegovina," *The Washington Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (2010): pp. 103–118.

17 With an estimated \$14 billion of international aid, the per capita basis of reconstruction investments in Bosnia exceeds the WW II reconstruction efforts in both Germany and Japan. See: Patrice C. McMahon and Jon Western, "The Death of Dayton: How to Stop Bosnia From Falling Apart," *Foreign Affairs* 88, no. 5 (2009): pp. 69–70.

18 For a more general critique on elementary shortcomings of top-down liberal peace driven international interventions, as well as on the importance of understanding local involvement in shaping and transforming – hybridization – exactly these

simply haven't asked if being a Bosniak means the same in Mostar as it does in Sarajevo, before trying to forcefully integrate Bosniak school children into multi-ethnic schools in both places. We have not considered that a Serb city-dweller who fled Sarajevo during the war might have different fears or aspirations than a Bosniak farmer who arrived in Sarajevo at the same time, when it comes to issues of return and relocation. And we must therefore assume that we also continue to miss even smaller, but elementary differences important to individual survival; in the same way that being associated with one ethnic group, or being labeled an IDP, means something different in each setting, so do all the other groupings defining everyday life and politics.

So instead of wondering why, after so much international effort to bring security, stability, prosperity and democracy to Bosnia, the tensions are increasing and intergroup differences are gaining more and more weight, it might be better to ask what differences have to do with conflict in Bosnia to begin with?

I assume that understanding social conflict in Bosnia in terms of ethnic, religious, political, economic, or any other kind of essential differences is not enough to understand the current social dynamics shaping everyday life and politics in Bosnia today.¹⁹ I go further even than this, and suspect that the old concepts of ethnic differences as causes of violence, concepts deeply ingrained in the Western concept of the 'Balkans as the powder keg of Europe', actually limit our ability to understand and efficiently respond to the current tensions. Maybe it is not apathy, but instead our expectations about Bosnia and conflict – our expectation that history is repeating itself in the form of extreme ethnic violence – that make us blind to the current challenges and risks.²⁰

international concepts see: Oliver P. Richmond, "The dilemmas of a hybrid peace: Negative or positive?," *Cooperation and Conflict* 50, no. 1 (2015): pp. 50–68; Oliver P. Richmond and Audra Mitchell, "Peacebuilding and Critical Forms of Agency: From Resistance to Subsistence," *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 36, no. 4 (2011): pp. 326–344; Oliver P. Richmond, "Resistance and the Post-liberal Peace," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 38, no. 3 (2010): pp. 665–692.

19 A good overview over the main reasons debated as causes of the violent breakup of Yugoslavia and the wars in Bosnia can be found in: Sabrina P. Ramet, *Thinking about Yugoslavia: Scholarly Debates about the Yugoslav Breakup and the Wars in Bosnia and Kosovo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

20 Book titles like "Balkan Ghosts", "Exit into History", "Return to Diversity", "The Rebirth of History" or "Haunted Land" demonstrate this very common notion of

Therefore, I believe it is crucial to critically engage with our knowledge – and its limitations – about Bosnia, if we want to succeed in understanding the phenomenon of social conflict in the country today. Chapter 2, in the form of a critical literature review, serves as a first attempt in this direction; deconstructing our current pictures of conflict in Bosnia finally suggests that local differences are far more complex, dynamic, and situational than our theoretical concepts and interpretations based on pre-existing knowledge might make us think. Based on the hope that deciphering differentiation processes, through making their implicit dynamics explicit, might help in determining responses to the rising tensions, the following assumption was formulated to guide this study on the everyday social relations and conflict potentials in Bosnia.

It is not difference, but the current differentiation processes – the current local processes of constructing, maintaining and challenging group positions – that create high inter-group tensions in post-Dayton Bosnia.

Before any kind of systematic analysis of social interaction can be carried out, however, a reliable and responsible pathway into the social realm of Bosnia has to be found – ‘reliable’ in the sense of allowing significant insights into local meanings prescribed to the different positions influencing social interactions, while at the same time ‘responsible’ for not producing further harm for the communities in Bosnia through the investigation and its findings. The method chosen is what I call a learning process: A process of continuous exposure to Bosnia, through observing, reflecting, theorizing, and starting all over again.²¹

repeating history in the Balkans as Dušan Djordjevich notes. Dušan J. Djordjevich, “Clio amid the Ruins. Yugoslavia and Its Predecessors in Recent Historiography,” in *Yugoslavia and Its Historians. Understanding the Balkan Wars of the 1990s*, ed. Norman M. Naimark and Holly Case (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 3.

- 21 The underlying ethnographic mindset of this study is inspired by several contemporary anthropological works on the Balkan region; in particular by the recent studies of Ivo Žanić, Marko Živković, and Robert M. Hayden. Ivo Žanić, *Flag on the Mountain: A Political Anthropology of War in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, 1990–1995* (London: Saqi, 2007); Marko Živković, *Serbian Dreambook* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011); Robert M. Hayden, *From Yugoslavia to the Western Balkans: Studies of a European Disunion, 1991–2011* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

Learning process

This overall highly complex process will be opened up in chapter 3, through an intensive discussion of its preliminary findings, which serves as another step of reflecting and theorizing before our next engagement with Bosnia in the later chapters. Over the course of my learning experience with Bosnia, several important observations have been made, each of them influencing the trajectory and scope of this project. One of the most important insights was that the meaning people ascribe to actions depends to some degree on the locality, the setting, in which that interaction takes place. Driving a tank over a parade ground means something different than driving the same tank over the main square of a town. It is the local meaning, the local rules and conventions, of a place that can help to make an action into a threatening behavior, or a moment of national celebration.

This, on the flip side, suggests that we may be able to learn what interactions mean in the local realm through understanding the meaning locals ascribe to the very places of their interaction. Therefore, the central task for the coming engagement will be to try to decipher what places mean to those interacting upon them, in order to understand what the positions created through their interactions mean to the individuals involved, rather than to outside observers. In order to bridge the gap between my outside understanding and these local, alien, concepts of particular places of interaction I try to study, I will introduce a concept of learning local meanings through understanding how places are used as political tools in intergroup processes in chapter 4. Using central places as starting points for the coming observation will help us to find answers to the questions of what larger communal spaces such as Sarajevo, Mostar, or Banja Luka mean for those who live there, and how these meanings, these current interpretations, position different groups in their everyday interactions.

Learning from the ground, however, is not only understood as a reliable way of getting to local meanings but also as a responsible means of engaging with other communities in times of high social distress. Governed by the ideal of not creating further harm while trying to understand current social tensions, opening up the learning process, by

showing its underlying motivations, subjective assumptions and accidental discoveries, can only be a first step toward reducing any potentially harmful authority this research project might create. It is at least equally important to find a responsible method to represent the findings of this study.²² Here again the learning process itself offers a solution, suggesting a continuation of learning instead of attempting to create any kind of finalities. Therefore, the act of writing the main chapters of this study was designed as another visit to Bosnia: just another road trip, trying to make some of the hidden power dynamics that are shaping the lives of many Bosnians today explicit. Driving, as the modern version of walking through Bosnia, in other words becomes a way of creating meaning; not only for me, but also for my audience.²³

This collective learning experience, through traveling from place to place in Bosnia, is designed as a method through which both author and reader may create a sense of the situation on the ground, and by doing so – this is my hope – becomes a journey that may come across solutions for reducing the high level of distrust and tension highlighted at the start of this introduction.²⁴ Finally, being on a road-trip should be a permanent reminder that this project does not see itself ending through the final step of fixing the data to paper – but instead comes alive in that very moment, raising new questions, offering new insights and begging its audience for future dedication.

Visiting Bosnia

With the unfolding of the official map drawn in the Dayton negotiations, the journey into the discursive web of group narratives and symbols surrounding central places in Bosnia can begin (chapters 5 to 8).²⁵ This

22 Elizabeth Dauphineé's reflections on her experience with research on violence and war in Bosnia have been influential in designing how the findings of this study are represented. Elizabeth Dauphineé, *The ethics of researching war: Looking for Bosnia* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

23 Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 97–99.

24 The idea of the journey as a form of representation is inspired by the recent aesthetic turn, see: Roland Bleiker, *Aesthetics and World Politics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 18–47.

25 Figure 1.1 at the end of this chapter shows the latest version of the political map of Bosnia and Herzegovina as drawn by the United Nations in March of 2007. Figure 1.2 highlights the route this research project is going to take on that very map.

fairly solid map, with all its mutual entity lines and other official symbols of political power, is the crystallized result of difference making.²⁶ However, these newly constructed boundaries are just another version in the history of Bosnia's geo-political representations, and as such are not stable and undisputed. Making maps is highly political in Bosnia; hence they continually shape the face of the country, through shaping how we envision it from a far removed standpoint.²⁷ Zooming into the map, however, we see many of its abstract symbols turning into complex social structures, streets, places, and train stations, while others simply disappear. There is no red-line colored on the mountains as a marker dividing both entities, in the same second as out of the dark grey-green nothingness of the map, suddenly small mountain roads, settlements and mine fields start appearing. The closer we get to Bosnia, the more inaccurate our initial map turns out to be; the spatial knowledge highly important for the daily life is different to the kind of spatial knowledge represented on the Dayton map. And it is this local spatial knowledge that will attract our attention from the very first moment we enter Bosnia.

Our journey into Bosnia will begin at the same place where many left the country during the war: at the bottleneck at the Adriatic coast, where border issues still today remain unsolved. From there on, the way will lead us through Herzegovina, a historic region, towards its well known, semi-official capital, the city of Mostar with its even more well-known Stari Most (Old Bridge) over the Neretva river in its center. This

26 Defining the entity-line that divides the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina today into two political entities – the Federation on Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republika Srpska – was a central issue during the peace negotiations. Various changes to the initial map were achieved through either negotiations at the table or force on the ground. Several of these early maps are discussed by Steven L. Burg and Paul S. Shoup. Steven L. Burg and Paul S. Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Ethnic Conflict and International Intervention* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1999), pp. 189–316.

27 The power behind the act of making maps is very well highlighted by several of John B. Harley's articles: John B. Harley, "Silence and secrecy: The hidden agenda of cartography in early modern Europe," *Imago Mundi* 40 (2009): pp. 57–76; John B. Harley, "Maps, knowledge and power," in *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments*, ed. Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 283–298. A particular example of a time in which making maps caused political controversies is documented in: Guy M. Robinson, Sten Engelstoft, and Alma Pobric, "Remaking Sarajevo: Bosnian nationalism after the Dayton Accord," *Political Geography* 20 (2001): pp. 972–973.

bridge will be the first central place under observation. While asking how its presence influences the current dynamics of Mostar, how the decision to re-build it after the war continues to influence daily life, we will come across several story lines of what Mostar itself means for those living and working there. Branching off from the bridge by following these stories throughout the community, through observing how the bridge is connected to other symbols and discourses, several powerful interpretations of Mostar appear. These will in the end let us question if building bridges, in both the meta- and the concrete sense, can ever bring peace to Mostar, or if the process only leads to further shifts in the conflict dynamics. Maybe the current tensions in Mostar can no longer be understood as ethnically driven quarrels of Westside versus Eastside of the river, but as a conflict of the new elites from both sides, who profit heavily through the growing tourism around the bridge, versus the excluded and deprived youth of both sides. Is it possible that the violence we observe in the soccer derbies, the dissatisfaction we see in the graffiti or demolished memorials, are indicators of new conflict parties and new conflict dynamics, catalyzed by the international peace initiative?

From Mostar we will travel eastwards through the countryside of Herzegovina to the city of Sarajevo, passing several important places in Bosnia's intergroup history on the way. Entering the city through its 'new' suburbs, which still are heavily marked from shell explosions and bullet holes, driving along the famous Sniper Alley, we will finally arrive at the Old Market in Sarajevo. This market will start off our observations as a central place in Sarajevo. Our observations will soon allow us to see that only a small amount of the groups acting on the market really possess the right to publically interpret its meaning. Following these actors throughout the nation's capital, visiting graveyards and shopping centers, the meaning of Sarajevo given by the current elite will step by step be re-constructed. In the end we will start understanding that the 'Little Jerusalem of the Balkans' is today a highly competitive place of money and power. Claims to the golden place of opportunities by those declaring themselves as entrepreneurs, as survivors, as old and therefore the only real Sarajevoans, sheds a first light on what it means to live in this city for those who are currently positioned as perpetrators, as lacking powerful networks, or simply as new-Sarajevoans. Maybe the resistance towards changing the constitution and finally allowing all

Bosnian citizens to run for the highest offices can be understood after seeing what Sarajevo means for those in power?

Leaving the disputed center of Bosnia behind us, Goražde will be the next destination. This former regional center, strongly connected to the cities of Foča and Višegrad, today stands separated from them through the inter-entity-line, only connected with the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina through a narrow corridor. After an adventurous drive along the Drina river on streets the UN convoys were taking while supplying the former UN safe area, the first and most obvious central place in Goražde is right in front of the brand new Kayseri mosque. Through our traveling, we are already used to bombastic religious buildings where sometimes minarets and church towers look as if they are competing in size to justify their existence. And yet, we may start wondering why this mosque looks so different compared to many others we have seen before. As we step closer, a little plaque in front of it tells us that the mosque was a gift from Turkey, and so is, as we discover on our walk, the university and hospital; while the EU just funded a large business zone. What brings Turkey, the EU, and other international powers now, after they had ignored the enclave on the Interentity Boundary Line (IEBL) for almost two decades, to Goražde? And what does this rise in engagement and competition do to the intergroup relations in Goražde? What we soon will see is that this surge in international interest is not driven by an increased need for support in Goražde. Quite to the contrary, Goražde has done well on its own, and its success has radiated out beyond the city into the Drina Valley. And it is this success that attracts international attention and brings with it not only fresh funds but also the attention of Bosniak and Serb elites from Sarajevo and Banja Luka, who now see in this regional enclave new opportunities to manifest and expand their power. How this heightened competition between regional and federal elites, catalyzed by international interests and money, will change the intergroup relations, remains to be discovered. For people in Goražde, the question becomes, will being in the focus of elites again make the old front lines reappear?

Finally crossing over this front line into the Republika Srpska, we will enter Banja Luka, the capital of the RS. The strong contrast between city and rural areas and between lowlands and highlands we can see on the way there will sensitize us to the explosive powers of today's urban-rural prejudices, which have an interesting generational component. Bosnia's

youth is pulled towards the promises of the larger cities, and Banja Luka, the nation's second capital, is more than just a city – it is another central knot in Bosnia's narrative landscape – especially since it forms a kind of antipode to Sarajevo. The tension between the Federation of Bosnia and the Republika Srpska becomes graspable just by observing the recent amendments to both the social and political focal points. Both cities host National Museums and National Operas, as well as many other symbols that attempt to justify historical claims and current politics. Therefore the new government building, whose construction was overshadowed by corruption investigations, will be the first central space from which the meaning of Banja Luka will be unveiled. This imposing symbol of power is by no means the only recently erected public monument, giving the impression that interpreting the space of Banja Luka has high political importance for several powerful agents from within the Bosnian Serb community of Banja Luka. In the same moment, this leaves very little space for the majority of people on the street to create their own interpretations. But, how do those powerful ethno-national narratives affect Bosniaks in Banja Luka? Is there a difference in their positioning compared to the positioning of Serbs in Sarajevo? And finally, is this positioning game the prelude to the secession of Republika Srpska?

Leaving Banja Luka in a Southern direction, and returning toward Sarajevo once more, we must now ask again, for those living in the current social realm of Bosnia: what does Bosnia mean – and is there just one Bosnia – or is there just one Bosnia *possible* today?



Figure 1.2: Route of “Violent Places: Everyday politics and public lives in post-Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina” (numbers indicate the corresponding chapters)

2 Stories of Violence

Overview

The following chapter is a critical literature review and aims to highlight the directions others have ventured while trying to explain the intersection of violence and difference in Bosnia as well as to raise awareness for the danger of being misguided by accepting these dominant narratives as objective truths about Bosnia's social dynamics. In other words, the task ahead is to show what 'we' know about violence and difference and what 'we' miss because of exactly that knowledge. The reason why this review has to be more than an evaluation of established knowledge – in order to identify gaps and justify one's own engagement thereafter – lies in the suppressive nature of 'western', 'common', or 'widely shared' understandings guiding many accounts on violence in Bosnia. Not reflecting on the hidden powers of such common causalities means excluding or underestimating other stories and may even lead to an enforcement of dynamics supporting social destruction. After critically assessing the current debates it will become clear that it is prudent to abandon the paths these causalities have left on the surface of 'our' Bosnia and instead take a fresh approach reflecting on current dynamics on the ground. Doing so is more than providing a needed addition to the debate, but is also understood as an ethical choice.

Limits

The classic trajectory of a literature review is to assess what we know in order to highlight what we don't know yet – in other words to legitimize our engagement with a certain topic because the current status of the debate has not deciphered an underlying problem in all its depth or beauty. In order to be able to see the underlying connection between violence and difference in Bosnia, however, I argue that we have to start by asking a different kind of question. Instead of starting off with summarizing what we know, it will be beneficial to ask: Why don't we

know what we don't know about a certain problem? Or, what limits us from understanding the current situation in Bosnia?

These questions are founded on the assumption that in problems related to particular social interactions that occurred less than a generation ago, like the intergroup conflicts in Bosnia in the early 1990s, there is no 'what we all don't know' about a certain incident, but only 'what we as a certain group don't know' about it. The implications of this seemingly small shift of emphasis on the legitimization and direction of research, however, are rather significant.

First, taking this shift seriously means that research cannot any longer be legitimized on behalf of an unsolved problem, but only on behalf of the interests in the problem by a certain group of 'not-knowers'. Investing in such research necessitates finding answers to some challenging questions like: Is such a one-sided engagement prone to producing disadvantages, nourishing asymmetries, or even creating potential sources of further conflict? In other words, how does asking and researching a question, which already is perceived as being solved or understood by one group, affect the relationship between both knowing and non-knowing groups? Could the group of 'knowers' see such an engagement as an attempt to challenge their very truth, to reposition them in the social realm? And second, the task of research under the premises that knowledge about a specific social interaction is already there cannot be any longer to uncover the un-known but to overcome the limitations of the known – to tackle the questions of why and how limitations are established, maintained and transformed.

Where the first set of questions about the legitimization of what we are doing is truly important, especially while studying ongoing social conflict dynamics in Bosnia, and therefore will accompany many of the following thoughts in the next chapters, the question concerning the limitations of our knowledge about a certain problem will be at the heart of this rather unconventional literature review.

Two possible factors putting limitations on our knowledge, as long as we can be nearly certain that knowing a particular social problem related to human interaction is generally possible, which means that it is not kept secret by higher powers nor that it is un-witnessable in its final dimension – both 'un-natural' limitations of knowledge might have occurred for example in prison camps in Bosnia during the war – remain

to be acknowledged:¹ First, limitations are caused by the form of what lies at the heart of social interactions, in other words by the very nature of words and stories, as well as second, by the specific relationship of stories to each other, or by the authority of certain accounts over others and the resulting exclusion or negligence.

Where the first limitation is universal, the second appears universally but its boundaries are socially constructed in specific contexts. Although focusing on socially constructed limitations might be a more enlightening undertaking for unveiling the current boundaries to our knowledge about Bosnia, starting with discussing the characteristics of what is generally known as a 'story' will be helpful in order to see where limitations can be expected, as well as allowing the introduction of some important concepts often used in studies on violence in Bosnia, such as narratives, theories, discourses, myths and many more.

Stories

Ethnic narratives, inter-group conflict theories, stories of violence, witness reports, political myths, security discourses, news footage, interviews, blog entries, folk tales, histories and much more contribute to our knowledge about Bosnia – and by doing so affect it in many ways. Claims, orders, hopes and wishes expressed through these different but still similar and somehow strangely related sources, which I will generally call stories, do not only lead to certain actions based on their explicit content, which the main part of this review will focus on, but also due to their very own nature and the ways they are used in social interaction, which the following paragraphs intend to show.

First of all, calling theories, myths or even discourses simply stories might be seen as a bit daring and is rightfully contestable in different ways; the decision to do so therefore requires some explanation. After all, neither oversimplifying these concepts nor referring to the myriad of often contradicting definitions coming from fields ranging from literature studies to clinical psychology, nor pointing at the ambiguity or carelessness of their use in many studies on Bosnia, can be an excuse

1 The un-witnessability of the final dimension of suffering is highlighted by Giorgio Agambens figure of the "Muselmann", standing inseparable in-between humanity and inhumanity. See: Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The witness and the archive*, 4th ed. (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2008).