A Search for Understanding

Untangling Bosnia and Hercegovina

by Gale A. Kirking

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To my parents.

I will be as honest as I can be, as honest as anyone ever could be, for I have begun to doubt that sincerity and honesty are one and the same. Sincerity is the certainty that we speak the truth (and who can be certain of that?), but there are many kinds of honesty, and they do not always agree with one another.

— Ahmed Nuruddin
(from *Death and the Dervish* by Meša Selimoviæ)

A journey is a person in itself; no two are alike. And all plans, safeguards, policing, and coercion are fruitless. We find after years of struggle that we do not take a trip; a trip takes us...In this a journey is like marriage. The certain way to be wrong is to think you control it.

— John Steinbeck
(from *Travels with Charley*)

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Acknowledgments

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Undoubtedly, there were some well-intended suggestions and criticisms by which I did not abide out of plain stubbornness but which, had I done so, would have improved the text. I am wholly responsible for all defects and errors of fact, grammar or style which may have found their way into this book, as I am for any views which might be regarded as controversial.

Much of this book was written at Pine Knoll Farm, the Wisconsin family farm of my upbringing and where my parents continue to reside. During the weeks I spent working there, my mother and father were extraordinarily supportive in innumerable ways.

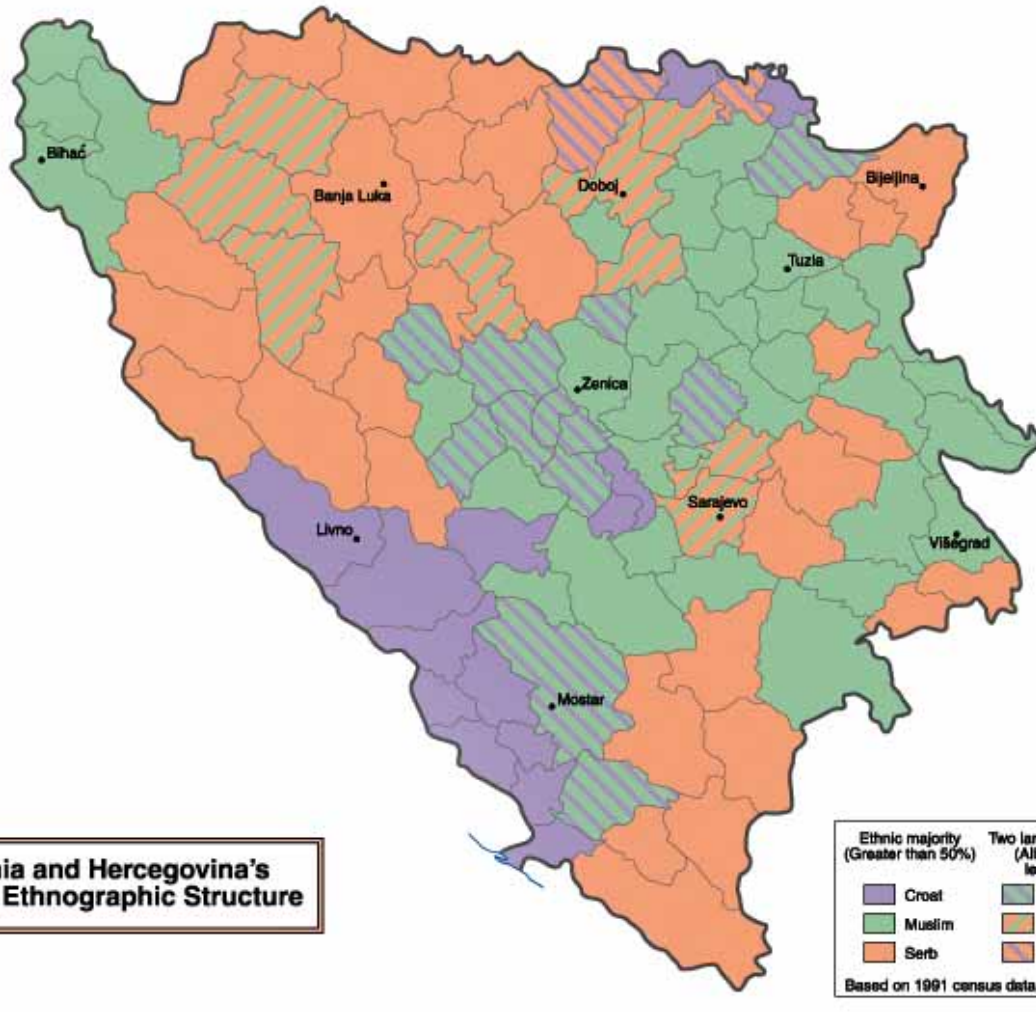
This project would never have come to pass were it not for the several years of inspired and inspiring teaching from which I benefited while a history student at the University of Wisconsin–Madison under the late Michael Boro Petrovich. Professor Petrovich's love of learning and appreciation for the mélange of the world's peoples and cultures will remain an essential influence throughout my life.


Formerly Yugoslavia
International boundary
Provincial boundary
ZAGORJE Names of regions
Serbia Constituent parts of Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
AUSTRIA
Graz
Klagenfurt
STYRIA
Maribor
HUNGARY
PANNONIA
Sava R.
Ljubljana
Krapina
Kumrovec
ZAGORJE
Zagreb
SLOVENIA
CROATIA
Karlovac
KRAJINA
KORDUN
BANIJA
SLAVONIA
POSAVINA
BARANJA
Vojvodina
ROMANIA
Novi Sad
SRIJEM
Belgrade
Danube R.
BOSNIA AND HERCEGOVINA
LIKA
DALMATIA
Sarajevo
PODRINJE
Serbia
FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF YUGOSLAVIA
SANDŽAK
Montenegro
Priština
Kosovo-Metohija
BULGARIA
Podgorica
Adriatic Sea
ITALY
Skopje
MACEDONIA
ALBANIA
GREECE
0 50 100 miles
0 50 100 kilometers
Bosnia and Hercegovina within Southeastern Europe

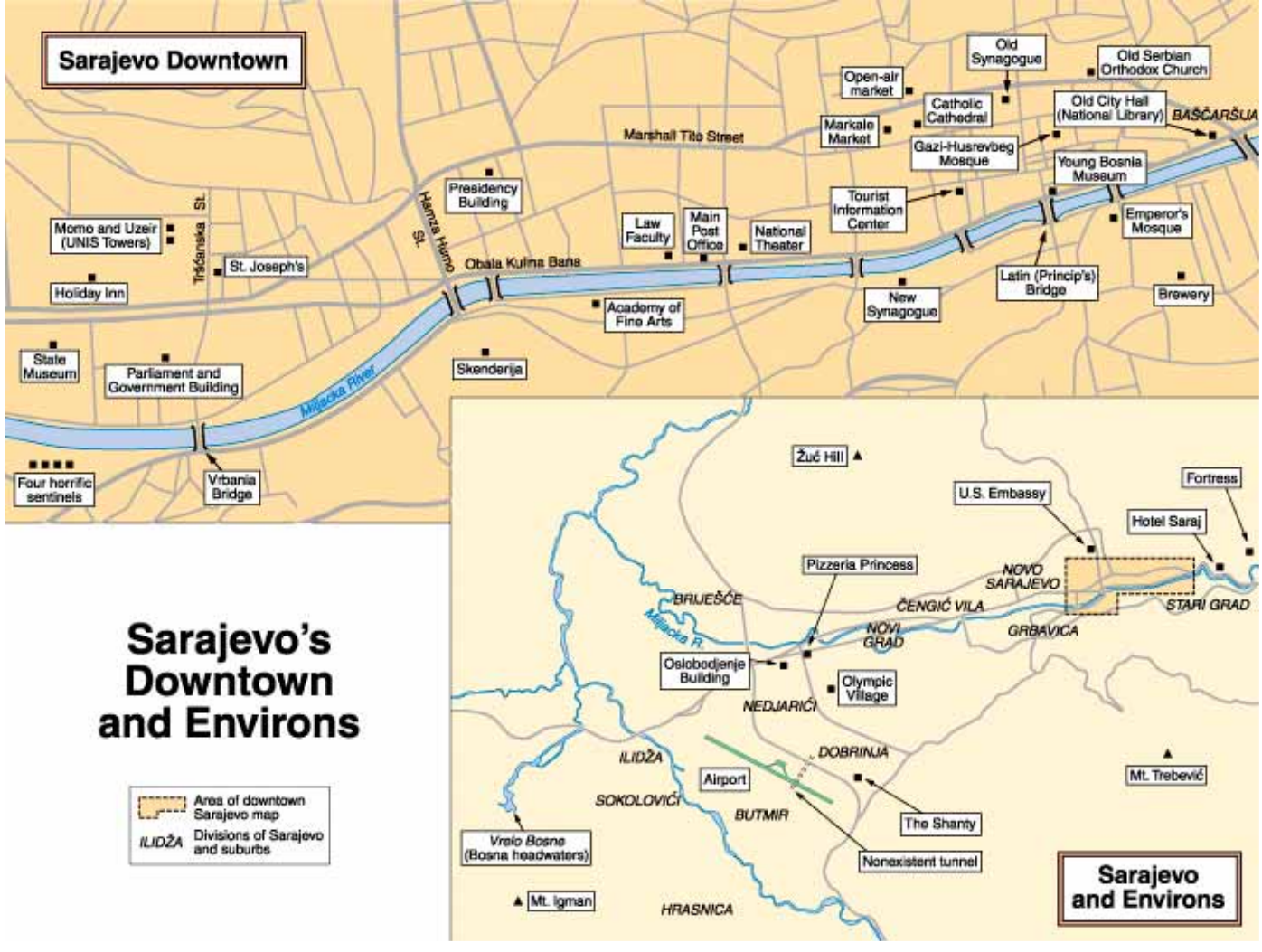

Vojvodina
Orašje
Brčko
Bihać
Banja Luka
Doboj
Bijeljina
Bosanski Petrovac
Ključ
CROATIA
Mrkonjić Grad
Maglaj
Tuzla
Žepče
Zvornik
Drvar
Jajce
US Operational Zone
UK Operational Zone
Travnik
Vlasenica
Vitez
Vareš
Olovo
Novi Travnik
Srebrenica
Glamoč
Visoko
Serbia
Kiseljak
Žepa
Sarajevo
Pale
Višegrad
Goražde
Konjic
Jablanica
Foča
French Operational Zone
Mostar
Nevesinje
Adriatic Sea
Neum
Montenegro
Inter-Entity Boundary Line (IEBL)
SFOR Operational Zone boundary
Militarily and politically dominant ethinonational group
Croat
Muslim/Bosnjāk
Serb
0 25 50 miles
0 25 50 kilometers
Post-Dayton Zones of Control
Local and International Forces

xvii

Bosnia and Hercegovina in Selected Detail



Bosnia and Hercegovina's Former Ethnographic Structure



Sarajevo's Downtown and Environs

Area of downtown Sarajevo map

ILIDŽA Divisions of Sarajevo and suburbs

Note to viewer of this extract: The maps are produced in black and white in the printed version only and are not included into the Kindle book.

Prologue:

Innocence Abroad

Preface

Bosnia and Hercegovina is a beautiful, fascinating and, of course, extraordinarily tragic place.[1] It is today also quite mysterious. The country exists in a moral twilight that is neither the darkness of war nor the full light of peace. Truth, goodness and fairness are sometimes not easily distinguished in such duskiness from falsehood, evil and injustice. This setting gives rise to unfortunate and complicating effects upon otherwise normal people and upon their relations with one another. The results are sadly intriguing to observe.

Over the past year, my mind scarcely has known a waking moment when it was not occupied by the puzzle that is Bosnia and Hercegovina. This state of affairs was of my own making, for I had fixed upon an objective to reach a personal understanding of the country. *Untangling Bosnia and Hercegovina* reflects that effort.

Nearly three years after the Dayton peace accord had ended the wars in Bosnia and Hercegovina, I was interested to see how the people and country were getting on. I traveled there intending to learn what I could of day-to-day realities and about prospects for the future. I wanted to formulate opinions that would be based on real understanding.

I gathered the core material for this book while traveling in Bosnia and Hercegovina during two momentous periods. The first occasion, in September of 1998, was at the time of the final campaign, voting and aftermath of a general election. This was only the second such election since the Dayton peace had been negotiated in late-1995. An earlier general election, in 1996, had been a cobbled-together affair that by no stretch of the imagination could have been called free and fair. The 1998 vote was an important test to see if democratic institutions could function. It was also a measure of public support for the nationalist parties, which, arguably, have taken positions and actions disastrous for the country.

My next visit, in March 1999, was at a time when Serb nationalists were all astir. The international community's leading official in Bosnia and Hercegovina had just fired the president of the country's Serb entity who had been democratically elected in September. Furthermore, an

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[1] I should comment about the name of the country that is the subject of this book. Its full name is (Republic of) Bosnia and Hercegovina. I have resisted the temptation simply to call it "Bosnia," as that, after all, is not the country's name. The hyphenated form—Bosnia-Hercegovina—is commonly seen but is not technically correct. I have reserved this hyphenated form for: 1) references to the former Yugoslav republic that lay within the same boundaries as does today's independent country of Bosnia and Hercegovina, and 2) earlier historical references to that same geographic territory.

international arbitrator had just stripped Serb officials of control over a key city. Croat nationalists, too, were worked up at that time. They were pressing to create their own Croat ministate within Bosnia and Hercegovina, and one of their leading officials was mortally wounded in a car-bomb attack while I was in the country. Meanwhile, there was concern about a deteriorating situation in nearby Kosovo. One week after that follow-up visit NATO began bombing Serbian targets and Serb forces launched a vicious ethnic-cleansing campaign in Kosovo.

From the outset, I was determined that I would speak in Bosnia and Hercegovina first and foremost with ordinary people rather than to seek out journalists' usual fare of politicians, diplomats, aid workers and assorted experts. I felt that such an approach would result in a more authentic reflection of reality. Actual experience confirmed that this grassroots focus was indeed appropriate.

Although I tried during my journeys to speak with something like a cross-section of regular people in different parts of the country, I do not pretend that the conversations summarized here constitute a wholly representative sample of views in Bosnia and Hercegovina. It is much easier, for example, to speak with the more open, tolerant and peaceable members of society than with those citizens characterized less by those attributes. Despite my efforts to do so, I frankly found it fairly difficult to approach the most intolerant and energetically hateful people. Fortunately, a few of them found me.

Any individual's observations and conclusions are unique. I do not claim a monopoly on the truth. Indeed, in Bosnia and Hercegovina there are many variants of truth. If you read what I have written and reach different conclusions, I will not be disappointed.

Untangling Bosnia and Hercegovina is not intended to be a book about the wars of Yugoslav succession. It is not primarily an analysis of the breakdown of what once was Yugoslavia. Neither is this a history book. Nevertheless, there is some description of the wars. I discuss somewhat the breakdown of Yugoslavia. A fair bit of history is woven in here and there. One cannot comprehend Bosnia and Hercegovina today by examining it completely outside the context of its past.

This is not journalism. I am a former journalist, though, so my method and style undoubtedly reflect that. As in my journalism days, I try to make sure that the things presented as facts are indeed factual. What I do in *Untangling Bosnia and Hercegovina* that I did not do as a journalist is to include my intuitive perceptions and opinions. It was important to use all of my senses—including the sixth one that is intuition—in order fully to absorb and communicate the situation in Bosnia and Hercegovina.

This is not a scholarly study. I endeavor to minimize my use of footnotes, adding these only when I feel source attribution particularly important or when something needs to be said but could distract the reader from the flow of the main text were it included there. The book is not structured as a formal analysis, and it is targeted especially to the general reader.

Finally, I have not aimed to fit *Untangling Bosnia and Hercegovina* into the travelogue genre (if such a thing exists) or any other particular category. It is what it is.

That said, the main body of the book is nonetheless a narrative based upon two journeys. This narrative is preceded by a substantial introductory section, which I call "Thinking about Bosnia and Hercegovina." The several short introductory chapters lay out some basic facts and explanations that will help the reader better to appreciate the narrative that follows. I thought arranging this material at the front of the book was a more reasonable approach than to try and work all of that background into the main text. Depending upon your prior knowledge and disposition, you might just choose initially to skip over this introductory material, coming back to it as you feel it necessary or desirable to do so.

To write a book about current events is to take aim at a moving target. At some point, one must draw a line and say, "My story stops here." I am doing so today. Change is coming but terribly slowly to Bosnia and Hercegovina. Many of the stories and observations that I share here will remain relevant for a long time. Some are timeless and even speak to us of things that are fundamental to our species. With respect to my objective, I feel that I now can hold opinions about Bosnia and Hercegovina that are founded in reasonable understanding. I hope *Untangling Bosnia and Hercegovina* helps you also to comprehend better this sometimes enigmatic but always important country and its region.

Gale A. Kirking
30 July 1999

The Shanty by the Minefield

The Shanty sits on the edge of Sarajevo and at the boundary between the Federation and Republika Srpska. It is typical of the sort of thrown-together coffee joints and snack bars one sees along roadsides and at intersections all over this part of the world. The Shanty has two tables inside and two more outside. The Dobrinja I taxi stand is right out front, at the intersection of a seemingly nameless avenue and the road that runs past the airport and out of town. A half dozen taxis are lined up there, and most of their drivers are hanging out inside and about. SFOR vehicles roll back and forth on the airport road.

A double line of yellow warning tapes runs up the avenue, enclosing the narrow median strip with their fluttering message: MINES! MINES! MINES! MINES! MINES! On the Shanty's side of the avenue, laundry on the balconies shows that a few families are living in the damaged low-rise apartment blocks. There certainly are no signs of habitation on the other side of the avenue. The blown-out and abandoned apartment buildings there are surrounded with the MINES! tape. A large sign proclaims that a Norwegian mine-clearing project is under way.

The Norwegians seem to be the mine-clearing specialists in these parts. I saw on television that they have just cleared the Jewish cemetery in town of mines and unexploded ordinance. They removed 68 mines and 358 other undetonated munitions. During the siege, the Jewish burial ground was on the line between territories held by Serb and Muslim/Government forces. Hundreds of thousands of mines are still in the ground in Bosnia and Hercegovina. Thousands of minefields have been identified, and the clearing work is inching forward. A dozen or more mine casualties commonly still occur in any given month. This work will not be completed for several more years.

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Mido, a Muslim, and his friend Mišo, a Serb, are sitting at a window table inside the Shanty. Actually, both tables are by windows, but they have the one with sunshine. Mido and Mišo are taxi drivers, and they are just starting in to devour a small table of food. Hearty, round paunches overhang each of their belts. This is not the first good meal they have eaten together. I almost think the middle-aged buddies are in a friendly competition to see who can develop the roundest and best-sculpted abdomen. If times were lean for Mido and Mišo during the war and siege, their physical recovery would appear now to be complete.

As is true of taxi drivers everywhere, it does not take much to get these two talking. "The Shanty" is not the formal name for this bistro, they tell us, but that is what everybody calls it. Mido is from the Federation side of town. Mišo is from the Republika Srpska side. Mišo and Mido point out that they were friends before the wars and that they still are friends. They are eating chicken, peppers and other vegetables from a single platter.

"Trust is important," Mišo says, as several other drivers gather in the small room. The day after the Dayton agreement was signed, he recalls, all the city's taxi drivers seemed to be working and there were no disputes between them. Mišo tells Zijo it is good that he, Zijo, had stayed in Sarajevo through the siege. Even though Zijo was not in the army (he had worked for IFOR and the Red Cross), at least he did not abandon his country and run off to Germany or someplace else.

Mido visited Germany a couple years ago to buy a car. Bosnians there, he says, were getting the message from Izetbegoviæ already then that they should return home. Of course, that was nonsense, points out the Muslim driver, because most of these people did not have houses to which they could return. They still do not.

"There is a future," Mido comments, "but only if all these national parties become history." Mišo nods in agreement with his colleague. If he and Mido did not see eye to eye with one another, he stresses, they could not be sitting together and eating from the same platter. "We know how it was before there were the nationalist parties," Mido says.

The Muslim gestures toward the burned-out and battered apartment buildings. Those, he suggests, are evidence enough of what nationalism and corruption continue to do to their country. The men seem to regard nationalist politics and administrative theft to be two sides of the same coin. It is impossible to prove what has happened to it, Mišo comments, but a lot of aid has come in to help repair those apartments, and much of it simply has disappeared. It has been more than two years (actually, close to three) since Dayton was signed, Mido adds, noting that should be enough time to rebuild all of Dobrinja.

And why, Mido asks, rhetorically, does not some of this aid money go toward building a factory? If one factory were opened to employ 500 people, that would take care of 500 families. Everything will be better when the people have jobs, the friends agree, and there is a lot of work that needs to be done.

Paradise Ravished: Stupni Do

At the edge of Vareš, we turn left at a signless intersection. We go through the dark viaduct beneath the railroad tracks, then turn right onto a dirt road that goes around back of the machine-parts factory. The road gets even smaller and cuts through a couple farmyards.

"Is this the way to Stupni Do?" I ask, through my window to a group of people by a house that sits right up next to the road.

"Yes," says the man, "but there are no people there. It was destroyed in 1993."

We know, Zijo explains, but we want to go there anyway. Three women who are with the man ask for a ride. They, too, are going up the hill to Stupni Do. The women pile into the back seat.

I drive on a bit, the road makes a bend, and all at once we are peering through the entry to a thick evergreen forest. Several gray, cone-shaped haystacks stand guard over the forest entrance. We start up the hill and through the woods. The women explain that they are going to Stupni Do to collect food from their gardens. They live in Vareš, and each is from a different family. Virtually all the survivors of Stupni Do live in Vareš, they say. The women, who seem dully to cast an emotional numbness, come up here just about every day and try to make the best of what they have left in this world.

The road climbs another mile and a half, occasionally switching back across the hillside. It is a rough road, much like the one leading up Mount Igman. I drive slowly. No one is in a hurry to get to Stupni Do. As the road levels off, we encounter an old military truck that is parked on the narrow road. Several men are loading firewood from a pile. They guide us, and we squeeze around the truck. We pass the first house on the edge of Stupni Do. Nine people were killed and burned in that house, one of the women says quietly.

Growing up to Grass and Weeds

Many people, it seems, would like just to forget about Stupni Do. One would be hard-pressed to find a road map with a dot for Stupni Do. There are no signs pointing the way to Stupni Do. When one manages to find what remains of this village buried in the hills, there is no welcoming sign. Stupni Do is either too remote and its story too horrible even for international relief workers to take on, or local officials, at some level,

either want to forget about it or have other reasons of their own for preventing aid from getting through.

It now has been five years since hell was visited upon the little corner of paradise known as Stupni Do. Not much has changed since. The grass and weeds grow up a little higher and thicker each year. A memorial has been constructed to the 38 people who were murdered here on the night of 23 October 1993 by a band of Croats, some of whom almost certainly were the longtime neighbors of the dead and dispossessed. A handful of people are trying to move back, but they have poor prospects for doing so without aid. There is little to suggest that assistance is forthcoming.

Laura Silber and Allan Little describe how Stupni Do was ravished:

> (A)fter a day of unrelenting bombardment...Croat militiamen wearing balaclava masks, or with their faces painted, entered the village and dynamited, or torched, every house. Those villagers unable to flee were shot, or had their throats cut. Some were burned alive in their homes...Some bodies were thrown on to bonfires in the gardens of the homes in which they fell. By the end of the killing spree, the village lay littered with bodies and every house was in flames...Some of the bodies were never recovered.[1]

I stop the car, and our passengers disappear down a path. Save for the babble of a nearby but hidden brook trickling down the hillside, this place is quiet like death. Stupni Do is a collection of ruined houses set into a horseshoe-shaped bowl of a valley that is hewn into the upper reaches of these hills. A few more ruined houses stand at the top of the ridge, facing out over the others

The bowl-shaped clearing is surrounded by green forest. In addition to the wrecked houses, only a few of which show signs of attempted repair, the clearing is marked by orchards, a few gardens, meadows for grazing and for haymaking. Small haystacks poke up here and there, but there is not another human being in sight. Were it not for the violence implied in the scattered ruins, this would be just about as peaceful and unspoiled a place as one might ever wish to find.

Stupni Do is a lovely name for an idyllic setting. "*Do*" is a diminutive form for the noun *dolina*, which means "valley" or, more poetically, "dale." "*Stupni*" is an adjective, and almost certainly in this

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[1]Silber and Little, pp. 301.

usage has an archaic meaning. It conveys to me a sense of "stairway" or "stair step." Loosely translated, then, I would call this village "Stairway Valley."

One year ago, on the fourth anniversary of the slaughter, Vareš municipality, to which Stupni Do administratively belongs, dedicated a monument to those who died here. The memorial is in the form of a *sebilje*, which is a kind of large fountain at which Muslim men wash their hands and feet and heads before their prayers. It is hexagonal and with an inscribed black-granite tablet on each side at eye level.

Five of the stone plaques are engraved with the names and birth dates of the 38 people slaughtered in Stupni Do. Thirty-three of the victims are named Likić. Below each of the tablets is a waterspout. When, and if, the *sebilje* ever is made functional, and if there ever is a population in Stupni Do to make use of it, those who perform their ablutions at this fountain will do so while bowing towards the names of the villagers who died in the Stupni Do massacre.

The sixth granite plaque's inscription says: "In memory of the victims of the genocide that was carried out 23 October 1993 by the criminals of the HVO." There is an inscription, too, from the *Koran*: "And never say for the people who died on Allah's road that they are dead. No, they are still alive, but you do not know it."

As I am reading names on the memorial, I am startled by the voice of a child. A little boy has come out of a tiny, patched-up house that is just down the hill from me. I later will see two people who I assume are his parents, working around the house. Just then, a car comes up the hill and stops beside the *sebilje*.

"Peace" Is across the Valley

The driver's name is Vejsil Mahmutović. Vejsil is from Stupni Do, but his wife and children now live in Vareš. He formerly had a good job in town. Now he is a shepherd. Vejsil's 50 sheep are pastured above Stupni Do. His hope is to get a loan so that he can rebuild his house and move his family back here before they are finally expelled from their temporary place in town. Vejsil's hope against hope is that he can somehow borrow a little more, perhaps 20,000 deutschemarks (about $12,000), so that he can build up his sheep operation.

Seeing our interest in the memorial, Vejsil walks with us around the *sebilje*. Pressing his finger against each inscribed name, he tells us who

they were: four members of this family, four members of another family, an entire family of seven (ranging from grandparents to grandson), two from this family, three from that family, a mentally ill old woman, a visitor from Dubrovnik, and on and on. Many of these people were like family to him, he says. In fact, Vejsil will tell us only later, his mother's maiden name was Likić, and he lost a brother and nephew in the carnage of Stupni Do.

Vejsil has been luckier than the others to get some international assistance, albeit small. A Spanish agency arranged for him and one other man each to receive 10 sheep. That, he says, is the only aid that has come to Stupni Do. Several people have visited the decimated village and hinted of possible future aid, but nothing has materialized. I self-consciously feel that he sees in us another weak glimmer of hope.

It almost is hard to say what makes Vejsil more angry, the atrocities that were committed against his family and neighbors or the fact that the municipality, his country, and the world at large have done almost nothing to help Stupni Do's struggling and homeless survivors to rebuild their lives and village. It seems impossible, he notes, even to get the road to the village properly maintained so that people readily and safely can get here.

As is true all over the war-torn communities of what once was Yugoslavia, there exists here great jealousy and suspicion. There are rumors that funding has been arranged to rebuild another village, a Croatian one, just over the hill in the next valley. Vejsil bristles at the thought. Croats from that village, named "Mir" (which means "Peace"), were recognized by people here among the participants in the Stupni Do massacre. It is possible that the men of Mir were provoked or even compelled by HVO extremists either to destroy their neighbors or to risk losing their own homes. But that excuse will carry no weight with Vejsil, nor, one can be sure, with most of his longtime former neighbors.

In my travels around Bosnia and Hercegovina, I will encounter a number of angry and strongly nationalistic individuals. The worst of these, in fact, have such vicious auras about them that one is hesitant even to provoke them by conversation. Vejsil does not strike me as such a man. Nevertheless, he is angry, and one guesses there are others from the village who are even more enraged. Vejsil wants us to see the village of Mir, and, if we wish, he will take us to the top of the ridge from where it is visible. We join him.

Vejsil points his car up the steep, brown-clay lane leading to the top of the valley. This is a go-for-it road. Once the clutch comes up, there is no backing off. If one were to try and make the climb too slowly, his car would not make it. Maneuvering through and among axle-breaking ruts, rocks and gravel washes, Vejsil scrambles to the top of the valley's rim. As we bounce about in the car and skirt the dangerous edge of what is more a cow path cut into the hill than a roadway, I am glad that Vejsil (and not I) is driving and that it is in his (and not my) car.

As the incline levels off, the road ends and spreads out into a narrow, grassy meadow that is the top of the rim. Vejsil's uncle has a house at the rim's inside edge. In what remains of that building, they have fixed up a room or two sufficiently that Vejsil can sleep there in order to be close to the flock at night.

Standing at the hill's edge, looking down into Stupni Do and beyond, I realize that there was a genuine military objective in capturing Stupni Do. From the top of this ridge, one peers down into Vareš from about a 40-degree angle. The district center is distant, but the view is clear and the distance is easily within artillery range. From the main part of the village, below, Vareš had not even been visible. I am reminded of Žuć, that hill with the birds-eye of Sarajevo, which was held at the cost of so many Muslim lives.

Looking the other direction, and from the very yard of the uncle's house, we gaze across another valley to another village, itself partially destroyed. This is Mir. Immediately below us, meanwhile, are the vacant remains of three stuccoed-block, white houses that formerly were occupied by Croats. These homes, like most houses and barns in Bosnia and Hercegovina, were built too solidly to be demolished by mere fire. Unless thoroughly blasted with explosives, structures here do not burn to the ground and disappear. Either they stand as lasting, ghastly memorials or they are reconstructed and reoccupied. In some cases, the new residents could even be those who had killed the former owners

These three houses stand stark and symmetrically. They are equally spaced from one another, in a perfect row. It is like three friends or brothers had agreed to work together and to build each of their houses in the same way. In the softening light of approaching dusk, these look like stage props constructed of matte-finish white cardboard and spray-painted with black splotches of smoke and flame damage. The roofs are gone, as are the door and window frames. I peer down and into them. They are

empty boxes, roofless dollhouses. All the toy furnishings have been put away before bedtime.

Before the wars, Vejsil recalls, there were 218 Muslims and 40 Serbs in Stupni Do. "We had good relations with the Serbs and with these Croats," he says, gesturing broadly toward the surreal row of empty boxes and the more distant village of Mir. The Serbs already were long gone by the time Stupni Do was destroyed. Vejsil recalls how the Serbs had cried when they were ordered to leave.

In retribution for what was done to Stupni Do, of course, Muslims burned the houses of Mir. If Mir is rebuilt and Stupni Do is not, it is easy to imagine that Mir one day will burn again. Or vice versa. Meanwhile, those living in rebuilt homes will lie in their beds at night and wonder when and how it might all start up once more. Perhaps the only thing that would keep some of the most bitter from killing their neighbors or burning their houses is the fear of mutual assured destruction. Once it starts, there may be no stopping the circle of violence. If some trust is not built up, along with some houses and lives on both sides, even an accidental fire could set off a murderous cyclone.

Only at the end of our conversation does Vejsil's voice begin to break and tears come to his eyes. I do not sense that this is from grief. My feeling is that the former residents of Stupni Do cannot grieve any longer. They are numb from anguish, but their frustration continues to grow day by day. All he needs is a loan that will allow him to buy a few more sheep, to build some proper facilities for their care, and to set up a small cheese-making operation. If he could get that, Vejsil says, he could rebuild his house, feed his family, and work to build a future. He would not need to ask anything for free.

We say goodbye to Vejsil and walk down the rutted road and back toward my car. I look up and see several sheep come over the hilltop. They line up abreast of one another atop the ridge—above us and above what remains of Stupni Do. They are watching us leave. The sheep stare at me intensely, angrily, and eye to eye. I look away, shiver, and pull my collar up around my neck.

Up in these hills, it gets chilly quickly as the sun goes down.

On the Drina

Zijo's mother is crying when he leaves the house this morning. She is frightened about the trip he is taking with me today. We are going to Republika Srpska. It does not help matters that it is a miserably cold and rainy morning. Since the wars, Zijo traveled once to Pale and to Mostar to interpret for a visiting western businessman. Other than that, he has not been outside of Sarajevo and, certainly, not in this part of his country since Serb nationalists consolidated their hold, killed or expelled the non-Serbs, and began to create a state within a state.

In anticipation of our travels to Republika Srpska, I had proposed to Zijo that perhaps we should bring along a Serb. My thinking had been that might make it easier for us to establish trust with the other Serbs we would meet and to facilitate conversation. My suggestion had hurt Zijo's feelings a bit, but he asked around some anyway.

As the two of us drive out of town, Zijo explains that he was not able to find any Serb in Sarajevo willing to make this trip. A Serb living in Sarajevo, he had been told, might not be well received in Republika Srpska. Such a Serb, who is living willingly among Muslims, might be regarded as a traitor to his or her nation. They also do not like Americans and journalists out in those parts, he adds. It almost can go without saying that some of the folks out there probably are not going to be too fond either of a Muslim from Sarajevo who is traveling with an American writer.

Oh well, we will be careful. We assure one another that we will get along fine.

Just east of Sarajevo's city limits, we pass a road sign, printed in Cyrillic, welcoming us to "Srpsko Sarajevo." We already have crossed the IEBL. This "Serb Sarajevo" is one of six new political regions created within Republika Srpska. Within Srpsko Sarajevo are 11 *opštinas*, one of which is called New Sarajevo. New Sarajevo is where some Serbs envision they will build their own Sarajevo. They have not started yet.

Bosnian Serb nationalists want to have a Sarajevo of their own. Early in the Bosnian Serb offensive, Karadži had planned to split Sarajevo into Serb and non-Serb parts. During the siege, of course, Serb forces had held Grbavica and Ilidža. At Dayton, Krajišnik was still pushing for partition of the city.

Unable to obtain their Sarajevo by military or diplomatic means, Serb nationalists may try to build it. In any case, they have good reason to pay the concept lip service. We will visit Pale a few days from now; reports are that many of Sarajevo's Serbs are crowded into that small city, a few miles up the Miljacka River from Sarajevo. After Dayton was signed, Serb-nationalist leaders had commanded Serbs in Grbavica and Ilidža to abandon their homes in Sarajevo and to set them ablaze on the way out the door. Unless life in Pale is a lot more prosperous than I expect to find it, there presumably are many people there who are unhappy about abandoning their Sarajevo.

Just a quarter mile into Serb Sarajevo, I see an OSCE caravan stopped along the road. There are soldiers and a sort of checkpoint there, but our car is not waved over. There had been very little fighting in this area during the war. Serb forces had taken the territory between Pale and Sarajevo early and had held onto it. That is not to say, of course, there had not been ethnic cleansing. We pass through a village named Zumbulovac, which I guess must once have been a Muslim settlement. The name has a Turkish root, and the sign announcing the village's name is still written in the Latin alphabet.

For several miles, we pass through green and rolling countryside. Then the road turns steeply upward and climbs into the rain and clouds of Mount Romanija. Nowhere in Bosnia and Hercegovina can one travel very far without climbing into and over hills or mountains. As we come down off Romanija, we cross a high plain. The soil is thin and rocky, showing the wear from centuries of hard overgrazing. The land in Bosnia and Hercegovina is ungenerous. Life here always has been a hard struggle for the common people and their livestock. Each generation wears down the thin soil a bit more before passing it on to the next.

During 1990 and 1991, Serbs living on and about Romanija had been secretly armed from Yugoslav army stocks. The area had been declared a Serb autonomous region before the Serb offensive began in Bosnia and Hercegovina in spring 1992. The Yugoslav army, which by that time was well on its way toward becoming an essentially Serbian force, was well established here when war broke out in Bosnia and Hercegovina.

A policeman waves us down just outside Stjenice, a village whose name, perhaps appropriately enough, alludes to a stony place but nevertheless sounds to me like the word for bedbug. This is a standard checkpoint and there is nothing special about our being pulled over. I

dig out from the glove box an international driver's license, which, just to be on the safe side, I had obtained right before this trip but had never yet used. We are on our way again in not much more than a minute. The anxiety with which we had begun the day's journey dissipates in our first brief encounter with the policeman. We roll on down the road to and through Rogatica.

Rogatica is situated in the green valley of the Rakitnica River. Zijo notes that eastern Bosnia begins at Rogatica. Ethnically, eastern Bosnia means predominantly (and until recently) mixed Serb and Muslim. There also had been thriving Jewish and Gypsy communities at Rogatica before World War II. These were destroyed in that war.[1] This is not traditionally a strong Croat area, and Zijo points out that, since World War II, there have been virtually no local-origin Croats in this part of Bosnia. Rogatica *opština* was roughly two-fifths Muslim and three-fifths Serb in 1991. There must be very few Muslims here now.

We are on the western fringe, too, of a region known as Podrinje, which name refers to the land along the Drina River. As we pass through Rogatica, I begin to watch out for people selling *šljivovica*. Podrinje, Ramiz had told me this morning before I left, is where the best plum brandy is produced. The small farmers here distill it themselves, and I should see them selling it along the road. Ramiz asked me to pick up two or three liters. Probably, it has been a long time since my landlord has had the real stuff from Podrinje.

Outside Rogatica are the ruins of scattered houses and a destroyed Muslim village. The road leaves the Rakitnica valley and leads us back up into the hills. In a few minutes, we enter the Prača River valley. The road ducks frequently in and out of dark tunnels as we follow the Prača valley downstream toward the Drina. We reach the Drina at Ustiprača, a wide spot in the road whose name, very prosaically, means "mouth of the Prača." Ustiprača once was a Muslim town. Almost all its houses are destroyed.

At Ustiprača, the traveler faces a choice. The main road goes up the river toward Goražde and Foča. It also tracks downriver to Višegrad and then continues on to Serbia. Goražde is best known as one of the UN's three infamously declared "safe areas" in eastern Bosnia. It has the distinction, though, of being the only one of the three that did not

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[1]Noel Malcom, *Bosnia: A Short History*, *paperback* (London: Macmillan, 1994; Papermac, 1994) pp. 113, 118.

fall to the Serb aggressors. Foča, meanwhile, is remembered as the site of one of the worst Serb massacres of Muslims during World War II. In the 1941–1942 period, thousands of Muslims were killed in that area. Today, Foča is said to be a safe haven for indicted Serb war criminals and assorted riffraff.

We turn north, toward Višegrad. The road follows the Drina through verdant, mountainous terrain. The scenery is marred here and there by the crumbling remains of "cleansed" Muslim villages and a string of damp and unlit tunnels. Nobody is selling *šljivovica*, although there are a few men along the way offering fish they had just caught in the river below.

Setting for an Ethnic-Cleansing Drama

Višegrad is the setting of *The Bridge on the Drina* by Yugoslav author Ivo Andrić. When Andrić was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1961, this novel was cited as one of the major reasons for his receiving the honor. The bridge at Višegrad, with its 11 arches and some four centuries old, is the main character in Andrić's novel. The bridge is a witness to centuries of uneasy coexistence between Slavic Muslims and Orthodox Slavs as well as of struggle between the Ottoman Turks and a ruptured Christian world. As a literary device, a bridge naturally lends itself to symbolizing a link between people, ideas or principles otherwise divided. That is not the case for Andrić's Višegrad bridge.

The literature-inspiring bridge at Višegrad is a rugged and massive structure, thus it is quite different from the delicate and graceful arch that was destroyed in Mostar. The Drina bridge was built in the 16th century on the order of Mehmed Pasha Sokullu. Mehmed Pasha had been born a Christian here in eastern Bosnia. As a boy, he was carted off to the Ottoman Empire and brought up to serve the Islamic Turkish world. His bridge would witness horrendous bloodshed over the centuries—up to and including the late-20th.

The Bridge on the Drina tells us a lot about the relations between Serbs and Muslims in eastern Bosnia. They have lived together for centuries, but their relations were not always warm. Andrić must have had a deep understanding of Bosnian history in the context of the competing imperial and nationalist forces. Born a Bosnian Serb, he grew up among Serbs, Muslims and Croats, then earned a doctorate in history in Roman Catholic Graz.

Although Andrić was no Serb nationalist, his novel is not a favorite work of literature among Bosnia and Hercegovina's Muslims. They object to the fact that he refers to the Muslim Slavs as "Turks," regarding that as a derogatory term. The term was not, though, necessarily derogatory as used in the local vernacular at the time when the novel is set. Andrić's book does not paint a particularly positive picture of society under Ottoman rule. Some Bosnian Muslims would regard Meša Selimović and his novel *Death and the Dervish* to be more representative of their literature. Selimović, though, also presents an altogether unflattering portrait of life in Ottoman and Islamic Bosnia.

This Land Is Our Land, This Land Is My Land

Travnik's old fortress squats on the hillside across the valley from our makeshift pension. Just beyond is Mount Vlašiæ. The morning is still cool and damp and quiet. The sun's rays have not yet found their way directly into this hollow. I count five mosques around and about the citadel. Their white minarets sprout up from the hillside, like new shoots reaching for the early spring sun. Had I time, I would enjoy this morning to walk about this scenic town, to visit the museum in the center, and to search out Andriæ's house. Unfortunately, we have a long day ahead and no time for tourism.

As there is no coffee here, I drive down the hill, following the owner of the house, to a coffee shop near the central marketplace. Our host formerly was a special forces soldier in the Yugoslav army. Now, his primary occupation is to run a private detective agency. These days, he tells us over coffee, there is plenty of work for him. He specializes in providing protection and in potentially dangerous investigations. This is work for a young man, which he certainly still is. But one needs also to have a plan for the longer term. That is why he is turning the house where he has his detective agency into a bed and breakfast.

The detective's long-range plan makes sense. If peace holds, and Bosnia and Hercegovina is rebuilt within its existing borders (an outcome which today is by no means assured), then Travnik will one day be an important tourist destination. Zijo is surprised to hear me say so, and I am puzzled that he does not see the touristic potential in this scenic former seat of the viziers. Travnik is historically very important, has literary associations, is reasonably safe, and was not physically destroyed in the fighting. After Sarajevo, it is today probably the most interesting city in the country for tourists. That distinction perhaps once belonged to Mostar, but no longer.

Make No Mistake: HDZ Owns Jajce

From Travnik, there are two roads to Banja Luka. The shortest route to the Republika Srpska capital goes over Mount Vlašiæ. On the map, it is a fine red line. I decide to opt for the longer, bold red line and a route that I already know. This is the road that I had driven in September and which follows the Vrbas River north from Jajce.

We stop for lunch in Jajce, last capital of the medieval Bosnian Kingdom, before continuing on to Banja Luka. Jajce is within Federation territory but near the IEBL. There is no mistaking that Jajce is today a purely Croat city. The fact that the flag of another country, Croatia, flies over Jajce's imposing castle makes a clear statement. We

park on the outskirts of the walled old town and walk into the center in search of a pizzeria.

The first restaurant we pass is called *Oluja 95*. The name, meaning "storm" or "tempest," refers to the Croat military operation in summer 1995. That was a ferocious—and very successful—campaign in which Croat forces took huge areas of Bosnia and of Croatia that Serb forces had conquered early in the wars. Tens of thousands of Serbs had been driven both from their ancestral villages and from homes they previously had commandeered from Croats and Muslims. The *Oluja* operation was an important factor forcing Serb nationalists to negotiate in Dayton and ultimately to sign the peace agreement. Be that as it may, only a Croat nationalist could regard *Oluja 95* as a pleasant name for an eating establishment. A hundred years from now, maybe, but not while the memories are still fresh.

The gate leading into Jajce's old town and many of the buildings along this main thoroughfare are prominently tagged with the stenciled initials "HDZ." Also to mark Croat territory, in Jajce's main square there is an impressive, new monument to Croats who died fighting Serbs and Muslims. Constructed as a fountain and in black granite, the memorial is topped by a *šahovnica* carved into the stone.[1] The names of Croat war heroes are cut into the granite, as are the words "He will live forever who has died with honor."

All countries have war memorials. That is normal. The US, too, has even its Civil War monuments. This one in Jajce might well be appropriate were it constructed in Croatia. Its presence, though, is incongruous with Dayton's objectives and the specific local situation. This is a district in which the prewar population was just 14% Croat. The warring parties—including Croat leaders—committed themselves at Dayton to allowing displaced persons to return to their prewar homes and to live without harassment.

Not all is nationalism and bellicosity in Jajce, of course. I am surprised to see that the newsstands here have *Oslobodjenje* on sale. Then, too, the women who serve us pizza in Croatia Grill (actually spelled in English) are friendly enough.

Zijo and I are alone in the small restaurant at first. When a couple more customers come in, we lower our voices and speak less in

[1] I will learn later that this monument is constructed across the street from the site where Jajce's mosque used to be. That site is now an empty lot. As occurred in many other cities, the mosque was destroyed during the time that Jajce was under Serb control.

English. We do so not out of fear but from politeness. One of the other customers, a young man, leaves without finishing his meal. I hear the waitress comment to the cook about this odd behavior. If our presence destroyed his appetite, I figure that is his problem.

Banja Luka: An Unexpected Rally

The US State Department has advised Americans to avoid Republika Srpska just now. But I have a meeting planned with an *Oslobodjenje* journalist in Banja Luka, and it is important for me to go there. I do not mean to stay long, and I do intend to keep a low profile.

I arrive to find that loudspeakers have been set up on Banja Luka's main square. These are blaring Serb pop songs. Everywhere are plastered large posters announcing a public rally, set for 2 p.m. today, "For the Defense of Republika Srpska." A similar rally was held in Serb-dominated Doboj a few days ego. Unbeknownst to me just now (as was this planned rally), several other such demonstrations are set today for other cities in Republika Srpska.

We are looking for *Oslobodjenje's* Banja Luka correspondent, Gordana Katana. We find her at the International Press Club, where a press conference called by representatives of the international community is just ending. "We can't cooperate with a government which is consistently sabotaging the peace process," a representative of the international community is saying in response to a question. A NATO spokesperson—the last to speak today—then comments briefly. His message is to welcome Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic (whose admission has just become official) as full members of NATO. He notes, too, that this will be his last press conference in Banja Luka (as he apparently has been reassigned) and wishes this country "a peaceful and prosperous future."

As the press conference breaks up, we locate Katana. She has only a few minutes to speak with us, as she will attend the rally just taking shape down the street. Katana is a Serb. She is married to a Muslim, who also is a journalist. Katana says she and her husband are "floaters," people who, as a practical matter, cannot live in their own houses. A court ruling says they can return to the home from which they earlier had been pushed, but the police can do nothing to enforce that decision.

I ask about ethnically mixed marriages, noting that Mesud, the Travnik taxi driver, had said these had generally survived in his town.

In this area, too, Katana says, few mixed marriages dissolved over war pressures, but many of those families have gone abroad to live.

In just a half hour's time, Katana tells me, I will see firsthand what is the political situation in this country. If less than 10,000 people attend today's rally, she says, "then the national option is finished." A low turnout would demonstrate that the nationalist forces are rapidly exhausting their influence. Pressures to pit Serbs against other ethnonational groups would be diminishing.

Today's rally is to protest the Brèko decision, Poplašen's firing, and Republika Srpska's "occupation" by foreign forces. All these are related issues. In the Serb nationalist's mind, to lose Brèko is to see Republika Srpska broken and divided. Poplašen is a uniting force. The foreign occupiers (who, by the way, bring not only military might but also economic aid) are seen as the force that would destroy Republika Srpska.

I have seen that this country's people—be they Serb, Muslim, Croat or ethnically undeclared—generally are sick and tired of war, poverty and international opprobrium. Be that as it may, if the pull of Serb nationalism is stronger than is the exhaustion from struggle, then Katana fears that the international community will cut off aid to Republika Srpska. After Poplašen was elected, assistance for economic development to the Serb half of Bosnia and Hercegovina was reduced. But aid for social programs continued, Katana says. That, too, might now be terminated.

There can be no peace here, Katana remarks, until refugees are allowed to return to their homes. Annex 7 of the Dayton accord promises displaced people the right to return home safely and either to regain lost property or to obtain just compensation. It states, too, that all persons have the right to move freely throughout the country, without harassment or discrimination.

Reality is something else. None of the powerful political parties in Banja Luka support the right for refugees to return to their homes, Katana explains. On the contrary, all are agreed that there will be no returns. When the international community threw its support behind the likes of Plavšiæ, perhaps there was an expectation that progress would be made on resettlement. If so, that belief was not well founded. Nor has SFOR done much to facilitate resettlement, Katana observes.

Unless and until SFOR flexes its muscles to enforce Annex 7, and until greater pressure is brought to bear on political leaders in Bosnia

and Hercegovina, Annex 7 will remain the same farce that it has been over the first three years since Dayton implementation began.

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The rally is just beginning as we pick our way through the crowd assembled on Krajina Square. Many people appear to be here more as spectators than as active participants. A good bit of the crowd is just milling around on an extended fringe. Most of the enthusiasts—and enthusiasm—seem to be up front and near the television cameras. Probably, passions will intensify as the rally continues. Poplašen is to address the crowd at the very end. I will be in another town by that time. In her reporting tomorrow, Katana will estimate attendance at today's rally at 12,000. One western media report will say 7,000. My guess is that the higher figure is closer to the mark.

No One Is at Home in Drvar

Titov Drvar was a celebrated city in communist times. During World War II, Tito at one point had been holed up here (quite literally so, as he was hiding in a cave) with his Partisan forces. In May 1944, the German command had launched an air attack on the city, and Tito had barely (and, one must assume, heroically) escaped. Today, the Croats who control this town within the Federation have dropped the earlier name's reference to Tito. They call it simply Drvar, which means "woodcutter" or "lumberjack."

Sitting in an isolated valley in western Bosnia and on the Unac River, Drvar is boxed in by tall mountains. It today has the look of a near ghost town, although several thousand Croats—including a couple thousand HVO army troops—live in and around Drvar. Mine is about the only car on the streets of this city, which once had a population of some 17,000 people. No more than half the buildings on the main strip of the town are inhabitable and inhabited by businesses. Most of the apartment buildings in the flat river bottom that is the main part of Drvar still stand empty and spoiled but not totally destroyed. Single-family houses cover much of the lower hillsides on the west side of town. There is more activity there.

By whatever name, (Titov) Drvar stands high on the list of the most uninviting places that I have visited in Bosnia and Hercegovina. Perhaps that should not be too surprising. After all, this probably does not seem much like home, either, to most of the people who live in and around Drvar. When the last prewar census was made in 1991, Drvar and its surrounding district were more than 90% populated by

Serbs (97% in the city proper). They are gone now, having been driven out in the Croat offensive for which Jajce's *Oluja 95* restaurant is named. There must have been more of Drvar's Serbs at today's rally in Banja Luka than there are here this evening.

Drvar, like Jajce, is a Croat town. Several Croatian flags fly on the main street. In Bosnia and Hercegovina, the Croatian flag is more than just a symbol of civic pride. It is flown and displayed as a message of hatred and intimidation. That flag declares as it waves: "Muslims and Serbs, you are not welcome here." After visiting Drvar, I now realize that it also declares to foreigners of all other stripes that they are not appreciated either.

Feeling Drvar's Threat

This visit to Drvar represents a case where I will learn a lot more about the town after I return home and do a bit more research. I know already that there is a small political party, based in Banja Luka, which is called the Party of Drvar Residents. I am aware of no other city in Bosnia and Hercegovina whose displaced residents are so politically well organized in order to return to their homes as are Drvar's Serbs. In the September 1997 municipal elections, Drvar's displaced Serbs won theoretical absolute power over Drvar. Today, though, there is no more democracy in Drvar than there are Serbs. Croat nationalists run Drvar. An HVO military threat substitutes for politics. Neither the OSCE, SFOR nor any other part of the international community has been willing or able to implement the 1997 municipal election outcome here.

Drvar has the distinction of making the Brèko arbitrator's list of Federation municipalities where Croat or (in other locations) Bošnjak army forces are most threatening to potentially returning Serbs. Jajce is on that list, too. The arbitrator's decision emphasizes that resettling Brèko hinges upon moving Serbs displaced to Brèko back to their original homes in such places as Drvar. An incident in spring 1997 demonstrates why Drvar made the list. On that occasion, an international mediator had come to Drvar to discuss returning displaced Serbs. His welcome was less than warm and the meetings unproductive. During that and the following evening, some 25 Serb-owned houses in and around Drvar were set ablaze. A similar message by vandalism had been delivered several months earlier. On that occasion, 35 Serb houses were torched when Serbs attempted to begin returning to Drvar.

A few days after the 1997 arson offensive, Drvar's Croat police chief had joined Federation Deputy Minister for Police, Jozo Leutar, in attempting to play down and to put some political spin on the incident. "The violation of the right to return to one's own house is not only happening in Drvar," Leutar, also a Croat, had stated. "There is not much difference between the burning of homes in Drvar and refusing Croats who have proper documents to return to their apartments in Sarajevo. I guarantee that there are more human rights abuses in Sarajevo than in Drvar."[2]

In absolute numbers, Leutar may very well have been right in his Drvar-Sarajevo comparison. The unease is more palpable and all-embracing, though, in Drvar. If one imagines a town out of a *Mad Max* movie that is run by the Ku Klux Klan, that gives a pretty good sense of what Drvar is today.

An Unpleasant Meal

As I say, I do not know quite all of this about Drvar when I arrive. Neither, as it turns out, does Zijo. Indeed, we will find that a lack of proper information is a general problem this evening. I drive over a mountain and into Drvar in search of a village which I later will figure out really is not near Drvar at all. It is about 40 miles away. That mislocated village is home to an *Oslobodjenje* correspondent.

We ride around a good bit looking for a restaurant and an accessible public telephone. We pass the Croat military installation that has been set up within the town. Several times we stop and ask people on the street about the village for which we are searching. The blank stares are not purely out of rudeness. The people here all are refugees from other parts of the country, after all, and they would be unlikely to know. One kind man, who is leading a small child by the hand down the street, wants to be sure we understand that he would help us if he could, but he really is quite sure that no such village lies near Drvar.

There are two public telephones on Drvar's main street. These accept only payment cards for the Croatian national phone company. It strikes me as queer that the state-owned telecom of a neighboring country should provide the only public phones in this corner of Bosnia and Hercegovina. On the other hand, were it not for the Croatian company, there might be no public phone here at all. For our purposes, as we have only Bosnia and Hercegovina telephone cards,

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[2]International Crisis Group, *House Burnings: Obstruction of the Right to Return to Drvar* (Brussels and Washington: International Crisis Group, 9 June 1997).

the result is the same. We give up on telephoning and walk down the street to the first place we see presenting itself as a pizzeria.

By the looks of the predominantly male clientele, this establishment caters especially to the local military population. The waitress tells us there actually is no pizza served here, only coffee and other drinks. In a manner curt but not overtly rude, she recommends we go down the street a couple blocks to another pizzeria, which, she assures us, does sell pizza. This young woman is Miss Congeniality relative to the boorish brute of a waitress we encounter at Pizzeria Rimini.

I guess they do not often get out-of-town guests here (and probably not a lot of repeat business from those who do stop in). Apparently, that suits everybody just fine. Well, it turns out they do not have any pizza here at Pizzeria Rimini, either. Rather than to discuss our ideas about why the management might wish to change the name of its restaurant, we just order something else from the menu. We do so, that is, once our waitress has served those who came in after us, smoked a cigarette, made a phone call, and spent some time flirting with several thuggish-looking types who perhaps have come around to create atmosphere.

Zijo is quite upset. He cannot completely conceal this fact, because he feels his unhappiness and unease so strongly. Naturally, Zijo is more sensitive to the looks and remarks of the other customers and hangers-out than I am. I try to do as much of the talking with the waitress as I can and to overcompensate with politeness. I am treated just as rudely as he is. I am determined, though, that we will eat in this restaurant. We do, and, in the end, we get a good meal.

Our original plan had been to spend the night in Drvar. We now decide, though, to drive back over the mountain to Bosanski Petrovac, which we expect will be more hospitable.

As I drive, Zijo tells me about some of what was making him so uncomfortable back in Pizzeria Rimini. In contrast to some of our other trips, he explains, this time he has not tried to adjust his Sarajevo speech to local dialects. The waitress and others, Zijo figures, had responded negatively to that fact. Also, he had observed that people in Drvar seemed to speak quite unnaturally, as if they were trying very hard to modify their own language in order to speak as they perceive that Croats should speak.

Zijo remarks, too, that he overheard several people in the restaurant talking about a bomb attack that took place today in

Sarajevo. There is some confusion in that regard. The talk seemed to be about an attack on a prominent and politically active Roman Catholic priest. In fact, as we will learn in the morning, it is a Croat member of the central government who was severely injured today by a car bomb. The wounded official is the very Jozo Leutar, who in 1997 had compared the human-rights situation in Drvar to that in Sarajevo.

Warm Hospitality in Rainy Bosanski Petrovac

Bosanski Petrovac lies just off the main road running from Bihaæ in the northwest to Sarajevo in the central part of the country. Spread out on a high plain that is otherwise only sparsely populated, there is a remote, Route-66 feel about the town and its environs. Darkness has fallen and a light rain is coming down by the time we enter Bosanski Petrovac. Unlit streets cause the town to seem much emptier than it in fact is. We roll gropingly around the streets until I find what we think must be the center of town. I park in the rain and the darkness. We get out and walk, looking for a warm and dry place.

We are drawn to a pale blotch of light that a small shop selling mixed goods is casting into the general murkiness. Across the street, a coffee shop emits its own weak light and muffled but lively music into the glow. Inside the coffee shop, two young, Muslim waiters are tonight conducting a good but not bustling business. The ambience is that of a small-town corner tavern somewhere in the American Midwest, except that everyone is drinking strong, sweet coffee instead of weak beer and the odd shot. The white-shirted waiters are a gregarious pair. We stand at the bar, smoking, sipping coffee, and chatting with the waiter who is spooning sugar from a bucket into tiny porcelain cups and working the coffeemaker. The second fellow, who is waiting tables, joins the conversation when he sporadically comes by for more drinks.

I have driven past Bosanski Petrovac on several occasions previously. My first impression—a gut feeling—had been that this was a Serb city. Subsequently, I noticed a couple minarets poking up from the town, which would not be very normal where Serbs are in control. The reality, in fact, is somewhere in between. Serbs came back to vote in the September elections or voted by absentee ballot, the waiter tells us, as he scoops sugar in a fluid motion. That has created the curious situation wherein Bosanski Petrovac has a Serb mayor and generally Serb-dominated local administration even though the majority of the population today is Muslim.

There formerly were more mosques than the couple that I have seen from the road. Serb nationalists destroyed the others. The waiter says, though, that Muslims did not destroy the Orthodox churches in retribution.

Before the wars, the district of Bosanski Petrovac had been populated 75% by Serbs and 21% by Muslims. Croats were few and far between in these parts. Until the *Oluja* offensive, this area had been under Serb military control from 1992 into summer of 1995. It was during that time, the waiter tells us, that several mosques were wiped away. Although Bosnia and Hercegovina's Croats and Muslims were formally united into their Federation at the time of *Oluja*, that had been primarily a Croat operation. Driving the Serbs from the Drvar-Bosanski Petrovac area in 1995 had created conditions for Croats and Muslims to grapple over the spoils. In the end, the Croats had gotten Drvar and the Muslims had taken a weak grip on Bosanski Petrovac.

Considering the prewar population distribution, it is not surprising that absentee voting could put Serbs in control of Bosanski Petrovac's administration. In fact, that is approximately the way Dayton is supposed to work. Foreign observers generally hope, though, that voting and local administration will not be driven by ethnonational considerations. There has been precious little in actual fact to support that hope. As Drvar exemplifies, and perhaps Bosanski Petrovac does, too, elections are one thing and day-to-day life another.

The waiters ask about Sarajevo. It seems they do not get a lot of news out this way about goings-on in the capital. They have not yet heard, for example, about the assassination attempt in Sarajevo today. People from a friendly cluster of other locals join in the conversation from time to time. We talk also about America, about politics and about the upcoming privatization. I tell them about the privatizations that I have experienced in the Czech Republic and Ukraine. The general view seems to be that people here are more concerned about jobs than they are about who owns the enterprises that create those jobs. Zijo asks about accommodations, and we are advised to spend the night at the Motel 9 that is out on the highway.

After a day of potentially hostile environments, it is a pleasure to chat over coffee in a friendly café. Were we Serbs or Croats, though, rather than a Muslim from Sarajevo and an American, I suppose we would not have been welcomed here so warmly.

About the Author

Gale A. Kirking, a Wisconsin native, moved to Czechoslovakia in 1992, immediately after completing a Master's Degree in International Management at the American Graduate School of International Management (Thunderbird). He has worked several years in central and eastern Europe's emerging capital markets as an investment analyst and director of research for a stock brokerage firm.

Untangling Bosnia and Hercegovina was conceived, researched and written during a yearlong personal sabbatical. Kirking, who is single and describes himself as a mediocre but hopelessly devoted student of foreign languages, presently divides his time between Europe and the US.

On the Cover

The cover's blue and yellow background is from the official flag of Bosnia and Hercegovina. Flags have been a source of abundant controversy in the post-Dayton period. As there seemed no other way to resolve a symbolic stalemate, the international community's High Representative ultimately commissioned a design for the theoretically unified country's flag. He aimed to find something that would not offend any ethnonational group. Also shown on the front (in center) is the flag of the Federation. It is flanked by the Croatian (at left) and Republika Srpska (at right) flags. This flag of neighboring Croatia is commonly flown in Croat-controlled areas within the Federation. The Republika Srpska flag, which is a simple Yugoslav tricolor, is used throughout Republika Srpska.

The back cover photo is from Ahmiæi, a Muslim village in central Bosnia that was systematically decimated in spring 1993. Shown is the toppled minaret from one of the village's two mosques. Photo from Ahmiæi by the author. Photo of the author by Monika Whalley. Cover design by Gary Cox.

Seeking to understand tragic but beautiful Bosnia and Hercegovina, Gale A. Kirking drove down from his home in the Czech Republic to take a good look around. *Untangling Bosnia and Hercegovina* details his travels and conversations with shopkeepers, pensioners, taxi drivers, common soldiers, farmers, policemen and refugees. Oftentimes these Serbs, Croats and Muslims rode right along in the car. Kirking, a Wisconsin native, visited during the momentous 1998 general election. He returned in early 1999, a time of growing but contained unrest just prior to the NATO bombing campaign against Serbia.

Untangling Bosnia and Hercegovina shares a vision of a country that remains deeply troubled. The narrative provides insights into ordinary people living in a moral twilight that is neither the darkness of war nor the full light of peace, where truth, goodness and fairness are not easily distinguished from falsehood, evil and injustice.

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