

CHAPTER 5

A “Lucky Escape”

Ethnic Cleansing and What Happens When International Humanitarianism Fails

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It is ironic, on the one hand, that I, who cannot find my way out of a paper bag, should find myself a student of international migration. On the other hand, it is entirely logical because one of my chief questions concerns how migrating people avoid getting lost or stuck amid all the obstacles that mark their journey. Relatedly, I was very late arriving to Esad and Refika’s apartment on the dark and rainy February night that I interviewed them because, in the pre-GPS era, I kept getting lost on the way.¹ Overwhelmed and, at one point, ready to give up, I phoned from my car to reschedule the interview.² Esad persuaded me to persevere, telling me that no matter how long it took, he would wait for me. He really wanted to tell me his story. It is a compelling story about how a refugee found his way to saving himself and his family from genocide in Bosnia by taking advantage of luck when the international humanitarian regime failed.

Until the moment of his lucky escape, Esad’s place in deteriorating former Yugoslavia looked pretty grim: Slovenia, Croatia, and Macedonia had already proclaimed their independence by summer 1991 and had been internationally recognized. The former Yugoslav National Army (JNA) together with Serb paramilitaries had seized one-third of Croatia’s territory, and both the Serb and Croatian presidents had designs on multiethnic Bosnia and Herzegovina (or Bosnia) to further their national territorial ambitions. In January 1992, the Bosnian Serb nationalist party proclaimed a sovereign “Republika Srpska” (Serb Republic or RS) with the intention of merging Bosnian “Serb Autonomous Regions”—which were ethnically mixed—and preventing Bosnia from

becoming independent with its multiethnic territory intact.³ The writing was already on the wall when, in order to fulfill European Community conditions for recognizing Bosnia, the referendum on Bosnian independence was organized in March 1992. As the last, most multiethnic, and thus most contentious republic to declare its sovereignty, violence in Bosnia was predictable. Indeed, attacks on civilians and fighting over territory started in different parts of the country almost immediately. On 5 April 1992, only a few days before Esad escaped the massacre in Zvornik, peace activists called for an antiwar demonstration in Sarajevo, and more than one hundred thousand people of all ethnicities turned out. Bosnian Serb snipers fired on the crowd, killing six people.

On 6 April the United States and the European Community recognized Bosnia as an independent state, and on 22 May it was admitted into the United Nations. Thus, although Bosnia had achieved early international recognition at both the diplomatic and humanitarian levels, luck proved more valuable to individuals. Despite formal recognition, the vulnerability of Bosnian Muslim civilians especially in border towns and villages was seriously underestimated, if not entirely disregarded. Many individuals, like Esad, survived by virtue of transforming luck into opportunity. Through his own agency, efforts, ingenuity, skills, and determination—but especially in combination with his personal relationships—Esad escaped the carnage in Zvornik and brought his family to safety. Two additional stories of flight—that of Meliha, a teenage girl, and Mirza, a young army recruit—illustrate similar themes but also variations based on context and positionality. Common to all three stories, however, and to most stories of forced displacement since then, is how luck fills the gap when international humanitarian protection is absent by either default or design.

The siege of Sarajevo, the concentration camps of Prijedor, and the Srebrenica genocide have come to symbolize the war on civilians in Bosnia. But ethnic cleansing, or “the violent expulsion of certain populations in order to create ethnically homogeneous territories,” exemplified the objectives, long-term consequences, and brutal practices of paramilitary and former Yugoslav National Army troops.⁴ Approximately 2.2 million Bosnians, or half of the pre-war population, were expelled from their homes. Of these, 1.2 million settled in European or other countries, including more than 140,000 in the United States, and 1 million remained internally displaced in Bosnia.⁵ As the war’s atrocities exploded onto the media and the magnitude of the refugees crossing European borders grew, the crisis became difficult for states to ignore. A Bosnian graduate student in Austria at the start of the ethnic cleansing campaign in early April 1992 told me how the streets in his Vienna neighborhood began to fill up with shell-shocked and dazed refugee families looking for help. From the open windows of his apartment one day, the wails of forsaken refugees drew his attention to the pavement below, and that was his first recognition of one of the consequences of ethnic cleansing.

By the end of July 1992, the UNHCR called an international meeting on humanitarian aid for the already hundreds of thousands of displaced victims of the war in the former Yugoslavia.⁶ Ironically, the meeting signaled the beginning of the end of the golden age for Geneva Convention refugees. Forcibly displaced people were encouraged to stay in their countries of origin, and humanitarian aid was promised to be provided in the midst of conflict zones to selected internationally protected “safe havens” and “security corridors.” The shameful failure of the “safe area” measure, cynically referred to as “the right to die in one’s country” after the genocide in Srebrenica or as “the negation of the right to seek asylum” led to the focus on a new strategy of last resort for host countries bordering the former Yugoslavia.⁷ Bypassing the Geneva Convention, the concept of temporary protection (TP) was born. If, in accordance with international law, a state could not *refoul*, or force refugees and asylum seekers to return to a region where they are likely to face persecution, the new UN-endorsed TP status made it legal to accept them for only a very limited time, with very few social rights (no family reunification, employment, education, travel documents, and identity cards in many cases), so as to preclude integration and then send them home as soon as possible. Until this point, the interpretation and implementation of the UN Refugee Convention in Europe comprised permanent residence and integration.⁸ When the war ended with the Dayton Peace Accords in 1995 and the UNHCR officially lifted temporary protection in December 1996, many refugees could not return safely to their ethnically cleansed former places of residence. I return now to the story of Esad, Refika, and their family, ethnically cleansed from Zvornik at the start of the war, temporarily protected in Germany, and then interviewed by me after resettling as refugees in the United States. Seemingly a paradox, their story of luck occurs in tandem with the erosion of international humanitarian protection.

Esad and Refika’s Lucky Escape

Esad, a Bosnian Muslim man, in his early sixties when I interviewed him, escaped the Zvornik massacre and subsequent ethnic cleansing campaign very early in the 1992–95 Bosnian war. Zvornik, a border town between Bosnia and Serbia on the Drina River, was the second major city in the war ethnically cleansed and seized by Serb forces. Before the war, the city was composed of 61 percent Bosnian Muslims and 29 percent Bosnian Serbs. By the end of June 1992, the city was nearly completely Bosnian Serb.⁹ Today, it is part of the Serb Republic.

Luck, both good and bad, played an oversized role in Esad’s memories of escaping the massacre when it began on 8 April 1992 and eventually finding safety outside of Bosnia. Working in the communications industry at the time,

he attributed "luck" to his "knowing more than an average person in [my] city [about the coming violence] because [of] the pieces of information that came to [my] office" about the military buildup that had begun on both sides of the Drina around the time of the referendum for Bosnian independence in February or March. At the time of the massacre, he was lucky when a younger Bosnian Serb colleague yelled down at him from an office window to run away because paramilitary soldiers were looking for him. Esad had at that moment returned to his office building to warn the others, but his Serb colleague screamed: "Forget about us. Just get lost," meaning, "Do not let the Bosnian Serb paramilitary forces find you." It was common practice, according to many of my informants, for the Serb civilian population in many towns to be warned to leave before ethnic cleansing campaigns got started. Zvornik was no exception.¹⁰ When the massacre was over, the Serb population returned. While some of my informants were helped by Bosnian Serb colleagues who warned them to leave before attacks, others were exploited or robbed by their Bosnian Serb neighbors who told them to run away but leave their house key and belongings for them.

Esad's luck continued after his colleague warned him away from the office. Eventually, he found his way home to his family in the city that evening, but not yet to safety.

I also heard from other people that by night—when we were not supposed to leave our houses—that groups of people are coming and taking people out of the houses and that they were disappearing. Then I decided to try to leave by myself with my family, without anybody's help, though I knew that there were barricades and checkpoints every ten or twenty kilometers on the road. . . . It was very dangerous to drive on those roads because there were very many little villages and towns on the roads, and the *Chebnyks* [Bosnian Serb paramilitary troops] literally—as we would say in our language—they were growing there like mushrooms after the rain. I was lucky in the whole situation. I remembered something that I had in the trunk of my car. Actually, I purchased a new car maybe a month before the war started—a pretty new car from a guy from Serbia with license plates from Serbia . . . and I didn't return those plates, though I had the new ones. I already had the new ones on my car, so I decided to again put back the old license plates from Serbia. Then I put my wife and the kids in the car, and the license plates were really very helpful on all of the checkpoints.

When I asked Esad if the license plates for Serbia were sufficient to get him through Bosnian Serb paramilitary checkpoints, he told me the ingenious cover story he and Refika contrived. "I said that 'my wife is sick, she has hepatitis and I'm taking her to the hospital in Belgrade, because they were not able to help her in our little town,' so that they wouldn't be willing to open the car, ask us for our documents, and to check them hard, because, you know, the disease was contagious." I was "lucky," Esad concluded. Refika echoed his conclusion: "It was luck," she repeated.

Yet, as Esad continued with the story of his family's journey out of Bosnia, it became apparent to me that luck was a more complicated concept than I had initially assumed. He had help skirting around dangerous checkpoints on the road from an acquaintance, a Bosnian Muslim refugee who was already hiding at the home of a Bosnian Serb on the other side, in Serbia. When Esad phoned this "semi-friend," he provided detailed driving instructions. Esad's luck and safety thus far was based not only on his resourcefulness and ingenious storytelling but especially on his use of personal relationships—his Bosnian Serb colleague and then another Bosnian Muslim refugee.

From Serbia, Esad, Refika, and their two young children continued on to Germany. The kindness of German train attendants helped them enter the country. "We didn't have any visas for Germany. Germans let us through . . . I believe they knew that we were refugees. The train attendants . . . were waving us, and they said, 'We'll see each other soon. Good luck.'"

Though Esad had many experiences with luck, good and bad, during his journey to safety, the most revealing to me was the story about when he and his family found themselves living illegally in the Hamburg Botanical Gardens for more than a week. Pretending to be a tourist, Esad lit a cigarette and was approached by a German citizen for a match. "She noticed that my German is not that good, and she asked me where I was from. I told her who I was, and I told her that I'm nobody and nothing now. . . . She said, 'You know, I'm a member of a humanitarian organization that is helping Bosnian refugees. And recently I received a call from a guy who said that he might be willing to accept a family.'"

Esad's point in telling me this good luck story was not to make a statement about being rescued by a humanitarian organization. Quite the contrary. Esad used the chance encounter to make his own good luck. "Please give me his phone number," Esad told the German citizen in the park. "She said I'll give it to you tomorrow." Then Esad replied, "I can't wait until tomorrow. Give me the phone number now." When the German with space in his apartment told him on the phone, "It doesn't work that fast. I have to see who you are and then I will decide," Esad replied, "I'm waiting for you on the street, and I'm giving you half an hour. You can decide to help me or not." The man came right away and picked the whole family up and took them to the apartment. "We changed our luck," Esad declared. Esad, Refika, and their two children lived in Germany with a temporary visa for the next six years, until the end of the war in 1995.

But renewing temporary protection after one, three, or six months was "humiliating for us," Esad asserted. "We had to go on the street at 2 AM to stand in line and wait until 9 AM to hand over our applications for the visa. . . . I think that they were doing that intentionally, just to put pressure on us to find another solution and to leave Germany. . . . That was the worst thing that happened to me, I mean except for the war, that I had to wait so long in those lines [sometimes controlled by policemen with dogs] just to get one stamp in my

passport." With the German government expelling Bosnians, even those who had been subject to ethnic cleansing in what had become the Serb Republic, Esad and his family were becoming desperate. At one point, Esad stated that they contemplated a collective suicide by burning themselves in the middle of Hamburg. Luckily, they heard one day from some other Bosnians that the Evangelical Church was preparing documents for refugees to apply for the United States. At the end of the interview at the American Consulate in Frankfurt, they were finally informed that they would eventually become citizens of the United States.

Refugee luck is activated by the agency of refugees. It involves tenaciously making use of the right people miraculously showing up at the right time in order to obtain help. Luck is important when international diplomacy fails and when there is no organized humanitarian protection system or when that system has been eroded, constrained, and limited by gaps. For Bosnian refugees and asylum seekers like Esad, the attribution of luck to their survival signifies their determination to use an unexpected, unplanned, or chance encounter with a stranger, colleague, distant acquaintance, fellow refugee, or old friend to meet their needs when international humanitarianism fails.

Esad and Refika's luck, as well as their sons', was contingent on their supportive relationship to each other. If Esad had been alone at the paramilitary checkpoint, and if Refika had not acted to protect him and their sons with her fake illness, it's unclear if any of them would have survived. At the same time, their luck derived in large part from Esad's professional status, the knowledge he derived from it and how he deployed it strategically along their journey to safety. In other words, Esad's luck was also a function of the agency his gender, family status, age, and class conferred upon him. But a Bosnian Muslim refugee need not have been a family man or a middle-aged professional to have a lucky escape.

The Story of Meliha's Tenacity

Meliha (who asked to be called "Micky") was a fifteen-year-old Bosnian Muslim girl from an affluent family who left her hometown in northern Bosnia alone shortly after the war started. I interviewed Micky in the United States when she was in her early twenties. Micky's luck was similarly mediated by her gender, age, and class—but these demographic variables intersected to make the circumstances of her lucky escape very different. Though she derived no less agency from her gender, age, and class, her relationships, experiences, and deployment of that agency diverged considerably from Esad. Clearly, her age and gender made her more vulnerable in wartime. Yet, Micky declared, "Destiny, I don't believe in it at all. . . . My grandmother would say, if it's destined

for you, then it's going to happen. I think it was because I was an eccentric kid, I would say 'You and your destiny!' It's going to happen if I decide it will happen."

It could have been a typical argument between mother and teenage daughter over housecleaning that prompted Micky to leave home in Tešanj for the weekend and stay with her cousins in Dobož, which was part of the RS after 1995. However, the context for the row was Micky's frustration with the seemingly endless surge of recently displaced and hungry refugees her mother kept inviting to eat at their home. With international aid organizations not in evidence, it was up to Bosnians to help other Bosnians. The very weekend Micky arrived at her cousin's apartment, the city of Dobož was occupied by Serb paramilitary units and the Serb-dominated Yugoslav National Army.

I go there for a weekend thinking nothing would happen. It was Friday night, and we were watching a movie, as we are sitting right now. And suddenly army trucks were coming in. A long line of them, never ending. Huge convoy of trucks. They parked and kept jumping out of the trucks. . . . They were calling on the speaker phone saying that the town is occupied, we are freed by the Yugoslav National Army and that we are going to be protected by them. It was so well organized. They knew exactly where they were going. They had lists of paper of each apartment building, the names of non-Serbs. . . . They asked who I was because I wasn't on their list. . . . They went, trust me, through every single apartment. . . . Making us wear white ribbon around the arm so we could be recognized.

Micky lived under Serb occupation with her cousins for roughly four months. Every night soldiers came "door to door to door, the doors that need to be visited—the non-Serbs." According to the UN, Serb authorities in Dobož municipality detained Muslim and Croat civilians in thirty-three detention centers under inhumane conditions, while Serb paramilitaries terrorized the population. Muslim and Croat monuments were deliberately damaged or destroyed through shelling or explosives. The takeover of Dobož and the threats and intimidation toward Bosnian Muslims prompted many thousands who were able to leave to go to the town of Tešanj.¹¹ While in 1991 Bosnian Muslims comprised 30 percent of the population, by 1997 they had been reduced to 0.6 percent, the result of murder and forced displacement.¹² When I asked Micky if the International Red Cross provided any assistance during this time, she responded scornfully: "Are you kidding me?! The Red Cross showed up a year and a half later, after the whole genocide was done in Bosnia, in Dobož."

Although Serb authorities severely restricted the mobility of non-Serbs, one day when the cousins ran out of food, Micky decided to go out to buy bread without the white ribbon on her arm. She was severely beaten and remembers waking up in a Serbian hospital. Luck entered in the form of a Bosnian Serb doctor who was an old friend of her father's. Immediately upon recognizing her, the doctor gave her a Serbian pseudonym and instructed her not to speak

at all while she was in the hospital, no matter what, fearful that specific Bosnian language words and even minor pronunciation differences would give away her identity. He promised to get her out of occupied Doboj. And so, for months Micky held onto her silence. The doctor, "an educated man who grew up in Bosnia and had Muslim friends," had himself been beaten for "refusing to do certain things for the Yugoslav army." He was part of "a little group of Bosnian Serbs from Doboj who were organizing people to try to escape. He released me from the hospital to this Serbian guy who took me to this house." From there, Micky was able to get back to her mother in Tešanj.

As if this were not lucky enough, once back in Tešanj Micky's mother used the family's money to buy a seat for her daughter on one of the last UNHCR-arranged convoys leaving the city for refuge in Split, Croatia. The convoy "was only for pregnant women or women with small kids. . . . My mother bribed them." Micky's mother sewed DM into the jeans Micky wore for the trip.

Depending on which border we would hit I would either be sitting or under the seat. At the checkpoint, the guys come on the bus and check who is on the bus. We were accompanied by UN soldiers. Except when we went on one Serbian border there was no UN and they forced us all out of the bus. . . . We were really scared and wondering if we were going to pass that border, but finally we passed. It was a long trip, over twenty hours from Tešanj to Split [with many detours]. . . . The Serbs were bombing Karlovac, and we were driving through the whole thing. It was really scary. We survived amazingly.

How does luck operate in Micky's experience? Micky considers herself lucky in the same way many Bosnian refugees I've interviewed view luck. "I thank my God I was lucky and this [what I went through] is nothing. And to somebody here [in the United States] that seems abnormal to say, but I have gone through nothing compared to what some other people in Bosnia went through." Micky's survival in Doboj was a function of a chance encounter with a family friend in a hospital and his relationship to an informal local group rescuing Bosnian Muslims. No other organized international humanitarian organization appears in the story of Micky's journey until the UN convoy is ready to leave Tešanj for Croatia. And, as a fifteen-year-old girl, she accessed the convoy only through her mother, her family's wealth, and their connections. Like Esad and Refika, Micky's luck was dependent on her own inner resolve and active use of local relationships and family connections.

Mirza's Circuitous Journey

Unlike Esad, Refika, and Micky, Mirza's journey began in a predominantly Bosnian Muslim city, Visoko, that remained part of central Bosnia both during and

after the war. But the fight to prevent ethnic cleansing was fierce, and when he was eighteen and ready to join the Bosnian army, Mirza was shot in the hip by snipers while crossing the street. “I received a note to go for recruitment, but I got shot. It was kind of lucky. If I had stayed, who knows what would have happened.”

After surgery in a makeshift hospital, Mirza was discharged to his parents’ home, close to the front lines. “Bombshells were falling everywhere. I thought I was going to die.” At that point, early in 1995, his parents procured travel documents for Mirza to join his aunt in Croatia, and from there the plan was for him to travel through Hungary and onward to safety at his uncle’s in Sweden. The problem was that “in Hungary, the Hungarian officials questioned me and saw I didn’t have a visa to go to Europe, so they took me off the train and sent me back to Croatia and all the money I had was left on the train above my head. I didn’t think about it because I was stressed.”

Mirza found himself in Zagreb again, alone and limping. As luck would have it, a Bosnian Croat overheard him asking for help in the train station. He offered to give Mirza shelter. “He asked me where I was from . . . and then he told me his name. I was kind of skeptical why he would help me—plus I’m Muslim. I was kind of scared. But I was tired, exhausted, and injured. I said okay. I’ll be prepared. Whatever happens, happens. I just want to lay down and sleep. And when I woke up the next morning, he cooked me breakfast.” Interestingly, the man’s wife was Serb, and their son was in the Serbian army. Both had left him, and he was alone. Mirza stayed for three days, until the man told him about a refugee center for Bosnians on the island of Obonjan, off the coast of Croatia. He remained in the refugee camp for thirteen months, applying for refugee status first in Canada, then New Zealand, and then Australia. Finally, after a series of denials, Mirza was accepted as a refugee in the United States, his last choice country.

Mirza’s story revisits and highlights important themes in a war refugee’s path to safety. First, the need to actively improvise during a tortuous journey across war zones, checkpoints, and multiple border crossings. Second, the act of transforming relationships with family, colleagues, and even strangers into luck when humanitarian organizations were absent. Finally, the curious participation of other nationalities (even “enemy” nationalities) in providing protection or giving sanctuary along the journey. Though these themes were also present in the stories of Esad, Refika, and Meliha, their personal characteristics and contexts produced distinct experiences.

The Significance of Luck in a War Refugee’s Journey to Safety

An account of people’s lived experiences of escaping the violence of the war in Bosnia has much to contribute to the sparse literature on the refugee journey as

a unit of study in itself because of its significance to the process of "becoming" and "being a refugee."¹³ Among the universe of themes, I focus primarily on one—luck. For each case examined here, I ask about the international humanitarian context for the emergence of luck. When and why does luck intervene on the journey? What function does luck perform in a refugee's telling of their story of escape? What is the relationship of luck to agency? Is *luck* just another word for *fate*? What role does luck play in the random surreal chaos of war when customary expectations of others are suspended for who knows how long? Luck is a window into refugees' subjective understandings and explanations of how they experienced the process of forced migration as organized humanitarianism failed and "the architecture of protection" once provided by the international refugee regime shifted to an "architecture of repulsion."¹⁴

How did Bosnian refugees experience the post-Cold War shift in the international refugee regime to a strategy of containment in place during wartime? What were the implications for the forcibly displaced when the humanitarian relief operations of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in Bosnia concentrated on the strategy of sending convoys of food and medicines to "safe areas" like Srebrenica or reopening the Sarajevo airport for airlifted supplies rather than protecting or evacuating civilians under attack? Although, according to the UNHCR's chief of operations in Sarajevo during the war, UNPROFOR made attempts to transfer "vulnerable citizens across front-lines. . . UN Security Council resolutions relating to Bosnia failed to explicitly address the issue of civilian movements, focusing largely on calls for unimpeded access for the delivery of 'humanitarian supplies' and the creation of 'safe areas.'"¹⁵ From Micky's perspective, ethnic cleansing in Dobojo and genocide in Bosnia were completed before the International Red Cross showed up. An even more cynical view was expressed by Kada Hotic, one of the founders of the Mothers of Srebrenica organization for relatives of genocide victims, when I interviewed her at the NGO's Sarajevo headquarters in 2006: "We were deceived and betrayed by the international community and the UN who was there but did not do anything to help us," she declared. At various points in their forced displacement predicament, Bosnian refugees came to recognize that they had been abandoned and were alone. As agents of their own lives, it was up to them to figure out how to make their own luck and save themselves.

The notion of refugee agency is part of theory but remains relatively unexamined because refugee voices describing their everyday subjective responses to wartime displacement have been scarce. Because the individual refugee is virtually the only source of information about the actual experience of escaping to safety, the telling of the journey story exposes agency, even and especially if constrained by barriers. Refugee stories of flight cut through pernicious stereotypes of refugees as passive, dependent, and immobilized by trauma and suffering. However, when the story is told only from the point of view of the

international refugee regime or international humanitarian organizations, the resourcefulness, motivation, and tenacity that is needed to escape and find safety remains invisible. Maneuvering through haphazard journeys, refugees like Esad, Refika, Micky, and Mirza exerted themselves as active agents by strategizing and making judgments and calculations about preserving their safety. In wartime, when little was under their control, luck appeared in the form of opportunities to take advantage of.

Lucky opportunities always appeared in the form of connections to other people. We could perhaps term this a form of refugee social capital. Luck was activated by Esad when he used information and resources provided by colleagues, friends, and strangers to bring his family to safety on the dangerous journey out of Zvornik to Germany. Micky was lucky when, because she had decided not to wear the white ribbon on her arm identifying her as Bosnian Muslim, she was brought to a Bosnian Serb hospital in Doboj. There, she determinedly complied with a Serbian doctor friend of her father's to keep her silence for months until she was healthy enough to be smuggled into a safer region. Finally, using her mother's wealth and connections, she hid in one of the few UN civilian convoys to cross active war zones and made it out of the country. After being shot, Mirza refused to stay in the country and attempted to use both close and distant family connections to leave. Unwilling to give up after losing his money and facing barriers of artillery and proper papers, he luckily found himself in the position to take advantage of a stranger's generosity until he could locate relatively more stable shelter. Bosnian refugees acted as agents in charge of their own safety as they made use of lucky connections during their complicated journeys across and out of war zones.

Refugee Voices and Refugee-Centered Humanitarianism

As the post-Cold War international humanitarian regime moves evermore in the direction of the containment or repulsion of refugees, particularly non-Western, Middle Eastern, or Muslim refugees, luck seems likely to assume an increasingly important role.

Analysis of the journeys in which refugees discuss their resourcefulness and lucky escapes can contribute to the emergence of paradigm-shifting representations of refugees and disrupt their stereotyped portrayals as helpless immobilized victims. Bosnian war refugees learned the hard way that they needed to rely on their own agency. When international humanitarian organizations did not show up as they had expected, they were driven to invent their own solutions. Importantly, because luck is activated by way of connections to others, the magnitude of strictly individual agency cannot be romanticized. Instead, the supportive role of family, friends, colleagues, neighbors, strangers, and even

other "enemy" nationalities¹⁶ stands out in refugee stories of their lucky journeys to safety. Moreover, depending on the degree of protractedness of the refugee situations, new or emerging humanitarian actors, such as other refugees, or local faith-based or diaspora organizations may step in to fill in the gaps in international assistance.

Most importantly, a focus on the lived experience of lucky escapes also helps to build a critique of humanitarianism during wartime. In an era of increasingly eroding humanitarian protection for refugees, the provision of safe corridors and temporary protection will not be enough to close the gap in protection that the violently displaced experience during the most perilous parts of their journeys to safety. In practice, they may actually introduce additional insecurity and precarity to refugees if they are offered instead of conflict prevention or peacekeeping and instead of ordinary Geneva Convention refugee status.

The refugee voices highlighted here contribute to what may be conceptualized as a refugee-centered humanitarianism, amplifying the strategies refugees employ to address their emergency needs and daily concerns while displaced. For Bosnian refugees in the 1990s, as well as for many other war refugees of the global South, the toolkit in a refugee-centered humanitarianism might include these tactics among others: the early prevention of moves toward ethnic cleansing in rhetoric and practice; provisions for safe legal travel across checkpoints and borders; encouragement and material support for refugee-centered networks throughout the journey; and access to UN Convention refugee rights and status for all forcibly displaced persons rather than mere temporary protection. A refugee-centered humanitarianism would go far in ensuring that refugees and asylum seekers will not need to assign their survival to a lucky escape.

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Notes

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2. Materials in this chapter are part of a book in progress, *The Afterlife of Ethnic Cleansing: How Refugees Redefine Citizenship and Belonging*. The study is based on nearly one hundred interviews with Bosnian refugees from the 1992–95 war and their U.S.-born adult descendants. Interview collection was covered by two IRB approvals: #22333 and #42934. The great majority of interviews were with Bosniak/Bosnian-Muslim or mixed-nationality Bosnian refugees (Muslim-Serb; Muslim-Croat; Croat-Serb), since these were the groups most likely to become forcibly displaced and admitted as refugees to the United States. Whenever informants wanted and for whatever reason, I employed the services of a Bosnian refugee who provided simultaneous translations back and forth between Bosnian and English. Interviews, which lasted between one to four hours each, primarily took place in the Pacific Northwest in informants' homes, coffeehouses, or my university office. The project has been funded in part by a UW Royalty Research grant and the UW Simpson Center.
3. Baker, *Yugoslav Wars*, 57.
4. Bougarel et al., *New Bosnian Mosaic*, 5.
5. Franz, *Uprooted*, 14; Mišković, "Home," 223.
6. Joly, "Temporary Protection," 48.
7. Joly, "Temporary Protection," 69.
8. Joly, "Temporary Protection," 54.
9. Tretter et al., "Ethnic Cleansing," 8.
10. Goetze, "Witness Says."
11. United Nations, *International Tribunal*.
12. International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia.
13. BenEzer and Zetter, "Searching," 299.
14. Fitzgerald, *Refuge*, 6.
15. Cutts, "Humanitarian Operation."
16. Broz, *Good People*.

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