

## ∫ Introduction ∫

# The Journey through Bosnian War-torn Communities

The Universe sent darkness to our humble home  
which is gone now. The letter and every single book,  
and dear things: they all burned like Rome.

Ferida Duraković, 'A War Letter',<sup>1</sup> *Heart of Darkness*, p. 92

It is a straightforward enough question: what is the relationship between forced displacement, popular memory and trans-local identities? In striving to answer it, we discover that it is anything but straightforward. Places – unless simply understood as geographically situated social networks – do not move, remember or create their identities. People do. Hence, displacement, memory and identity are embodied experiences of real people and the communities they belong to. These experiences are remembered, (re)constructed and enacted in diasporic spaces and in the original homeland as well as in cyber space, creating an in-between space, which is sometimes both *here* ('where I live') and *there* ('where I come from') and sometimes neither completely *here* nor *there* ('I am only here temporarily until I'm able to go back home'). However, the sheer magnitude of the forced displacement of 2.2 million men, women and children during the 1992–95 Bosnian war<sup>2</sup> and its aftermath renders any generalisation problematic. The spectre of genocide – or the more sanitised 'ethnic cleansing' as it was euphemistically described – cries out for a visceral as much as analytical response, especially as many people I knew and loved perished or were displaced as part of the violent campaigns. Popular memory – encompassing the private and local memories of the survivors, collective narratives and all performative actions such as memorialisation, commemoration and funerals – is reconceptualised on a daily basis and is often the only form of resistance survivors have at their disposal. Similarly, identity – or more accurately identities – is never fixed, but is constantly (re)imagined and (re)imaged, (re)constructed and (re)embodied, narrated and remembered, locally embedded and collectively enacted.<sup>3</sup> It is anything but a straightforward question.

But it is a question that needs to be asked. It is a question – notwithstanding all the objections and qualifiers and caveats implied above – that demands an answer. Not just because of the tragedy of the 1992–95 Bosnian war, the scope and the intensity of the destruction, the scale of the displacement and the long-lasting consequences of the conflict. There are other, more significant and morally informed reasons why is it a question that needs to be asked.

Before elaborating some of these reasons, let me first broadly define the common Bosnian labels and describe who my informants are. ‘Bosnia’, ‘Bosnia-Herzegovina’, ‘Bosnia and Herzegovina’ and ‘BiH’ are all the terms that are interchangeably used when referring to Bosnia and Herzegovina (in its full and official name) as a country with distinct geography, history, politics and culture(s). Unlike any other country in the region, the country’s name does not directly relate to a single ethnic group but to the river Bosna, which rises from a spring (Vrelo Bosne) near Sarajevo and flows across a large part of the country, merging with the River Sava, Bosnia’s border river to the north, at the city of Bosanski Šamac.

The terms ‘Bosnian’ and ‘Bosnians’ are generally used to describe all people who live(d) in Bosnia-Herzegovina regardless of their ethnic, religious or regional identities, and that’s how I use these terms here. In terms of ethnic identities, Bosnians are made up of three ‘constitutive peoples’: Bosniaks (also known as Bosnian Muslims), Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Serbs. Each ethnic group has a separate religious identity: Bosniaks are Muslims, Croats are Catholics and Serbs are Orthodox Christians. However, there are many Bosnians who do not identify with any of the ethnic and religious identities, as well as those who regard ‘their’ religion as a lesser part of their ethnic identity. Thus, many people in/from BiH prefer to see themselves only as Bosnians, a more civic and inclusive identification without ethnic connotations. There are also members of Bosnian minority ethnic groups such as Albanians, Jews, Roma, Ukrainians and Yugoslavs, who do not have the status of constitutive peoples, but are nonetheless regarded as Bosnians. Those writing about Bosnian identities, however, often ignore the fact that beyond – or below – the broader ethnic identities there are also at least four distinct regional non-ethnic identities representing people from different parts of the country – like *Hercegovci* (those from Herzegovina), *Podrinjci* (those from the region of Podrinje along the river Drina in eastern Bosnia), *Posavci* (those from Posavina, along the river Sava in northern Bosnia), and *Krajišnici* (people from Bosanska Krajina in western Bosnia). In addition to these, there are numerous identities expressed through identifications with specific local places where people live(d) or claimed provenance (Halilovich 2011b).

In post-war BiH, many of these different identities – especially the ethnic identities of the constitutive peoples Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats – have become exclusive political identities. During the war and in the post-war period, the ethnic identities solidified, with each ethnic polity becoming monopolised by its own ethno-nationalist politics and politicians. As a consequence of this politics of ethnicisation, each of the three ethnic nationalisms has promoted their particular ethnic concept of homeland(s) in relation to Bosnia. Often in antagonistic relationship, these concepts, while competing for a shared homeland, often invoke the idea of ‘external homelands’ (Brubaker 1996). While many Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Serbs regard their external homelands to be Croatia and Serbia respectively – and have, over the last two decades, embraced the citizenship and political identities of their external homelands – Bosniaks do not have an external homeland to refer to (Filandra 2012). This has been one of the main qualitative differences between Bosniak and the other two ethnic nationalisms in BiH. Some Bosniak nationalists have used this to argue that, by turning to their external homelands, Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Serbs have betrayed their ‘first homeland’ and become ‘lesser Bosnians’, with Bosniaks remaining the most authentic (if not the only) Bosnian people loyal to Bosnia and Herzegovina (Ibrahimagić 2003). Of course, there is also an inclusive civic (i.e., non-ethnic) form of Bosnian nationalism appealing to many people – especially to many urban intellectuals – who continue to reject the idea that political subjects are inherently ethnic subjects.

While the ideas of external homelands continue to be contested and seen as incompatible with the idea of Bosnia as a multicultural homeland for all the Bosnian peoples and citizens (cf. Mahmutćehajić 2000), Barrington, Herron and Silver argue that ‘an individual or group can have several possible homelands’ (2003: 293). In addition to the external homeland, these include, as they outline, such forms as ‘internal homeland’, ‘mixed homeland’ and ‘state of residence’ (Barrington, Herron and Silver 2003). All these different understandings of and relationships with homeland(s) can be found among Bosnians in BiH and in diaspora.

After the war many Bosnian Serbs developed a strong sense of identification with Republika Srpska (RS), their internal national homeland within BiH. Similarly, but much less territorially defined, Bosniaks and Croats regard parts of the Federation of BiH (Federacija) as their internal homelands. The difference between Serbs, Bosniaks and Croats in relation to their internal homelands can be explained by the fact that RS – a direct product of ethnic cleansing – was created as an exclusive *Lebensraum* for Serbs during the 1992–95 war, while Federacija was a more or less imposed peace agreement accepted by Bosniak and Bosnian Croat political representatives in March 1994 (Hoare 2004). This means that Bosniaks and Bos-

nian Croats have not completely defined their separate internal homelands even though there is a high degree of such division between the two ethnic groups in western Herzegovina and calls by Bosnian Croat nationalists for the establishment of a third – i.e., Croat – entity in BiH (Barbir-Mladinović 2009). As Barrington, Herron and Silver (2003: 292) argue, ‘an ethnic group becomes “national” when it recognises a particular territory as one that it has a right to control politically’. Nationalist politics in RS, which continues to exercise political control over the ethnically cleansed territories as described in the book, regard Bosnian Serbs in RS as a national group, while defining RS as an exclusive Serb (home)land. However, as RS, together with Federacija, is an *entitet* (entity, constitutive unit) of the post-Dayton<sup>4</sup> state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, attitudes of many Bosnians towards their first homeland could be best described as what Barrington, Herron and Silver (2003) call, a ‘mixed (internal–external) homeland’.

There is also an additional type of homeland these authors refer to: ‘state of residence’. State of residence – referring to a less affectionate and less political relationship citizens have towards the state in which they live – is often reserved for the category of ‘national minorities’ (Barrington, Herron and Silver 2003: 294). While, for different reasons, many Bosnians of different ethnic backgrounds may regard parts of BiH, or the state of BiH, only as their state of residence, this category may be even more applicable to many of the 1.6 million Bosnians living in diaspora.

While Bosnia and the Bosnian war have come to symbolise ethnic violence and ethnic cleansing, the war in their multicultural homeland was the last possibility that many Bosnians expected. In 1991, even after the armed conflict had erupted in Slovenia and spread to Croatia, many Bosnians still believed that their multicultural, multi-confessional and ethnically intermixed way of life would prevent a similar conflict in their immediate homeland and communities.<sup>5</sup> The policy of Yugoslav brotherhood and unity might have been seen as an outdated artificial creation and an integral part of the communist ideology – as the various nationalist parties claimed at the time – but most ordinary Bosnians wanted to believe that there was something more authentic and more organic about the shared culture, history and mentality of fellow Bosnians of different ethno-religious backgrounds (Mahmutćehajić 2000, 2003; Banac 2002; and Džaja 2002). Sadly, precisely because of the organic multicultural<sup>6</sup> fabric of Bosnian society – and the political objectives of the war to create zones of ethnic exclusion – the war in Bosnia was much more brutal and tragic than in other parts of the former Yugoslavia.<sup>7</sup> However, it would be wrong to suggest that Bosnian cultural diversity was the source of the conflict, as some have implied.<sup>8</sup> Cultural diversity was, rather, the target of carefully orchestrated ethnic violence aimed at the ‘ethnic unmixing’ of Bosnians. As Anthony

Oberschall (2000) points out, in most cases ethnic cleansing involved military and militias against civilians rather than neighbour against neighbour, as is sometimes believed. Thus, this book is both a homage to and celebration of that multicultural Bosnia – or the ideal of such a Bosnia – where neighbours do not kill each other but rather see themselves reflected in the differences of those around them. That Bosnia, the one I personally remember and continue to believe in, deserves a chance – even though the current socio-political realities in BiH are far from that ideal.

But Bosnia and the survival of its multicultural way of life matters not only to Bosnians of any or no ethno-religious background. Bosnia is also a test case for the ideals of the EU and our increasingly globalised world (Mahmutćehajić 2000). It is not just rhetoric anymore to say that local and global are interconnected, that local events have larger regional and global effects, and the other way around. Even here, Bosnia may be a case in point: in a tragic way, the last century started and ended in Bosnia. The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo in 1914 sparked the Great War that took the lives of millions of people and reshaped the political map of the world. At the end of the twentieth century, Bosnia's local conflict involved many regional and global players, often polarising diplomatic relationships between them (Cigar 1995: 139–65; Power 2002: 247–58). As Slavoj Žižek (1994) pointed out, the Bosnian conflict revealed many hypocrisies of the so-called international community and the West, hesitant to defend some of its core values and principles enshrined in conventions and constitutions of the UN member states, the principles of basic human rights, of sovereignty and the prevention of genocide.

## Writing about the Displacement of Bosnians

In addition to the systematic destruction of cultural heritage, large-scale human rights abuses and the immense loss of human life, culminating in the 1995 Srebrenica genocide, the war in Bosnia also resulted in unprecedented displacement from and within the country. It created the largest refugee crisis in Europe since the Second World War (Hitchcock 2003: 380–409). While close to a million Bosnians were turned into internally displaced persons (IDPs), a further 1.3 million people became refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in many countries, predominantly in Europe, Northern America and Australia (Bosnia and Herzegovina Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees 2008). Most of those displaced never returned – at least not permanently – to their original homes, and most who did return were transformed into 'ethnic minorities' (Halilovich 2008, 2011a; Stefansson 2006; Toal and Dahlman 2006, 2011).

Researchers have investigated aspects of the Bosnian question. Anthropologists and some political geographers in particular have focused extensively on in-country studies.<sup>9</sup> There have been studies dealing with settlement issues and other aspects of (dis)placement of Bosnians in receiving countries. Marita Eastmond (1998, 2005, 2006), Maja Povrzanovic Frykman (2009, 2011) and Zoran Slavnić (2011) have written about the settlement issues, interethnic relations and transnational practices of Bosnians in Sweden, where close to 100,000 Bosnian refugees have settled since 1992.<sup>10</sup> Barbara Franz (2000, 2003, 2005, 2011), Urlike Davy (1995) and Hariz Halilovich (2011a) have written about the experiences of Bosnians in Austria. Germany – the country which, with some 350,000 Bosnian refugees, at one stage was host to the largest refugee group from Bosnia – has been the focus of half a dozen researchers: Bagshaw (1997), Davy (1995), Dimova (2006, 2007), Graf (1999), Koser (2001) and Luebben (2003). Laura Huttunen (2005) has written about the situation in Finland; Bosnians settling in Norway have been researched by Marko Valenta (2009) and Valenta and Strabac (2011). In Denmark research has been carried out by Hervik (2006), Dmitruk, Hadzic and Sherman (2005); in Switzerland by Behloul (2007); in the U.K. by Esterhuizen (2006), Kelly (2003) and V. Robinson (2000). The 350,000 displaced Bosnians who have settled in the U.S.A. over the last eighteen years have been researched by Coughlan (2005, 2011), Coughlan and Owens-Manley (2006), Hansen (2001), Oakes (2002), Ives (2005), Kent (2008), Matsuo (2005), McCarthy (2000) and Mišković (2011). For Bosnians in Canada there are George and Tsang (2000); for New Zealand, Madjar and Humpage (2000). Bosnians in Australia have been the focus of R. Adams (2006, 2008), Colic-Peisker (2003, 2005), Halilovich (2005a, 2006b, 2011b, 2012b), Haverić (2009), Kokanovic and Stone (2010), Markovic and Manderson (2002), Voloder (2008), Vujcich (2007) and Waxman (1999, 2001).

Some studies have compared the experiences of displaced Bosnians in two or more countries, such as the Netherlands and Italy (Korac 2003), the Netherlands and the U.K. (Al-Ali 2002, 2003; Al-Ali, Black and Koser 2001a, 2001b), Austria and the U.S.A. (Franz 2003, 2005, 2011), Germany and Austria (Davy 1995), Germany and Australia (Halilovich 2006b), the Netherlands, U.K. and Australia (Jansen 2008), the Scandinavian countries (Brochmann 1997) and Denmark and the U.S.A. (Ives 2005). Kalčić and Gombač (2011) have considered the situation of Bosnian refugees in Slovenia. Markowitz (1996) has described them in Israel. Hozic (2001) has dealt with Bosnians who moved beyond real space, constituting a 'digital diaspora'.

But none of these researchers has addressed the question that this book seeks to answer, which requires us to go beyond the established research trajectory and treatment of the Bosnian refugee diaspora and the IDPs in BiH as two completely separate(d) groups. The book explores the meaning

and significance of forced displacement in relation to memory and identity (re)construction in war-torn communities from and within Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). The key themes – place, memory and identity, or places, memories and identities – understood as experiential and performative actions that are situational, relational and self-perpetuating, have been explored in a variety of socio-cultural settings both in the worldwide Bosnian diaspora – particularly in Austria, Australia, Sweden and the U.S.A. – and within BiH, as well as, to a lesser extent, in cyber space. In line with Tuan’s analysis of place and space, these different spaces become places; for they are remembered, embodied, experienced and performed through social networks (Tuan 1977). And through these very processes, especially as they are carried out by displaced people, they transcend increasingly their very geographical roots. While displacement implies one-way movement, the book describes how that movement, physical and metaphorical, real and imagined, is in most cases multidirectional. The book itself can be seen as a multidirectional movement, a journey – not merely because of the extensive travel undertaken during the fieldwork – which starts with Chapter 1 and the reunion of survivors from Klotjevica, an ethnically cleansed village in eastern Bosnia near Srebrenica, and continues, back and forth, throughout the following chapters. Through ethnographically documented reunions of survivors – as well as through symbolic reunions with their perished relatives and friends, visits to their destroyed homes, and encounters with fellow Bosnians and non-Bosnians alike – the book describes how such contacts and events form the basis of what it means to be a survivor, a displaced person, a member of the Bosnian diaspora and a person belonging to a specific (trans-)local community or *zavičaj*.

By exploring forced displacement, migration and ‘emplacement’ of Bosnians both at home and abroad, I demonstrate that these different forms and experiences of displacement and emplacement are often impossible to disentangle and dichotomise. Rather, they can be seen as parts of the complex process of displacement and a (re)constructed web of vibrant trans-local social networks (Halilovich 2011b, 2012b). The present study is the largest to date of displaced Bosnians. But it is not a global survey of the Bosnian diaspora, a catalogue of Bosnian clubs, pubs and associations worldwide, a precise demographic breakdown of displaced Bosnians. By going beyond – and below – demographic and statistical categories, it provides deeper understanding of the reality of displacement and post-war Bosnian identity and memory, combining narratives with Geertzian thick description and ethnographic vignettes from the sites, places, networks and events that constitute the diaspora. It can also be seen as a collection of previously untold stories that deserve to be written down, passed on and explored. Including such stories brings them – and not just symbolically – from the margins to

the centre, from the private into the public domain. Even if it is only partly answerable, the question ‘What is the relationship between forced displacement, popular memory and trans-local identities in Bosnian war-torn communities?’ draws attention to these interrelated issues.

### Practical Challenges

Before embarking on any physical journey into the field, I had to confront the practical issue of how and where to look for answers to the research question. Eventually, I decided to include both groups of the displaced – the IDPs in BiH and the refugees in what came to be known as the Bosnian diaspora. Within BiH I focused on the eastern Bosnian region along the river Drina known as Podrinje, and the Prijedor region in western Bosnia. Both regions were emblematic of large-scale forced displacement and the systematic use of violence, ranging from concentration camps and torture to summary executions and genocide. However, Podrinje and Prijedor cannot be seen outside the broader context of Bosnia – and the Bosnian diaspora – so my research expanded to include other parts of BiH, such as Mostar and Sarajevo, and many places in the Bosnian diaspora. I soon realised that it would be almost impossible to include every single country and every place where displaced Bosnians have settled over the last eighteen years. In the end I chose the countries with the largest Bosnian diasporic communities: the U.S.A, Austria, Sweden and Australia. In the U.S. I conducted my fieldwork in St. Louis, the ‘Little Sarajevo’ as it is sometimes called, home to some 70,000 Bosnians. During my stay in Sweden I focused on Bosnians who had settled in and around Stockholm, Eskilstuna and Karlskrona. Most of my data in Austria comes from Vienna and Styer. In Australia, where I live, my primary research site was Melbourne. In addition to the actual physical sites, I also explored how social networks between these different sites are constructed and maintained. This took me on a different type of journey in the realm of cyber space and digital ethnography. However, I did not collect my data in cyber space – in terms of interviewing people, using blogs, Facebook or chat rooms. Rather, I was interested to learn how displaced Bosnians re-imagined and re-imaged their local identities and memories on the numerous websites dedicated to very specific places and social networks.

In some cases I traced and followed members of war-torn communities from Bosnia, like the village of Klotjevac (Chapter 1), to distant places like St. Louis, Stockholm, Vienna and Melbourne. In other instances I made multiple visits to their original villages and towns, such as the ethnically cleansed village of Hegići (Chapters 2 and 3), and the town of Brčko (Chap-



ter 4), after discovering members of these communities in the Bosnian diaspora, in Vienna and Melbourne respectively. I also made repeated visits to the sites of suffering – Omarska, Keraterm, Trnopolje and Potočari, where large-scale war crimes and genocide were committed during the 1992–95 war in Bosnia – and visited mass grave sites. I attempted ethnography of mass events, such as the annual commemorations and collective funerals of genocide victims in Srebrenica and in Prijedor, as well as the replicas of these events in the Bosnian diaspora. When exploring different types of memory in post-war Bosnia, I also visited new ‘sites of memory’ – in Prijedor, Mostar, Sarajevo and Srebrenica – looking for patterns and the meanings of new public memories, how they have been constructed and interpreted. During this time I had many encounters and in-depth conversations with several prominent survivor-activists, like Kemal Pervanić, Rezak Hukanović, Muharem Murselović, Hasan Nuhanović, Munira Subašić and Fata Orlović, as well as with many ordinary survivors keeping a low profile – whose names have been changed or not mentioned.

## Theoretical Challenges

When dealing with the major theoretical frameworks and debates around displacement and identity, I aimed to avoid being pulled into either the sedentarist or the anti-sedentarist camps – the first promoting the idea of rootedness, and suggesting almost a natural link between people’s sense of belonging and territory, the latter arguing that, especially in the age of globalisation, place becomes somehow outdated and identities increasingly detached from territory. From a variety of different perspectives, these views continue to be debated and contested by a number of prominent, contemporary anthropologists.<sup>11</sup> In practice, however, the dichotomy seems to be more important and meaningful to academics than to (dis)placed people: as my research findings and personal experience suggest, regardless of the level of their (im)mobility, people can develop and maintain multiple attachments to different places as well as construct their identities in the absence of an actual place. While identity is a life-long work-in-progress, this book shows that people who experience forced displacement do not remain in a stage of permanent liminality. Their migration into new identities, even if these identities are only transitory – from refugees to IDPs, to migrants, to citizens of new countries, or returnees – is often founded on the remnants of their earlier place-based identities and locally embedded social networks.<sup>12</sup> Even when it is reduced down – or elevated – to the level of an idea(l), the *place called home* remains a ‘symbolic anchor’, a metaphor around which narratives of belonging and memories of

home are constructed and performed (Gupta and Ferguson 1992: 11). The attachment to the idea of the old place as home, as Ghassan Hage (1997) argues, should not be seen as a hindering factor for migrants and refugees in their new places of settlement. Rather, it provides them with a 'sense of possibility' to (re)create their new home constructed around '[the] desire to promote the feeling of being there *here*' (Hage 1997: 102–08). In practical terms this means that displacement leads to a new placement, which is in line with Deleuze's and Guattari's claim that 'there is no deterritorialisation without an effort for reterritorialisation' and reterritorialisation inevitably 'produces a new territoriality' (Deleuze and Guattari 1980: 214).<sup>13</sup> For many people who experienced forced displacement, the original place is not located in space anymore, but in time which has passed – in memories, narratives and performative enactments of local identities (Ahmed et al. 2003). Thus, rootedness after forced displacement does not necessarily equal sedentarism; it is rather an emotional attachment that transcends geography, or, as Leslie Van Gelder (2008: 58) puts it, 'people in diasporas do not root in place, but in each other'.

Another popular approach that was of limited value to my research was transnational theory, which over the last two decades has been viewed in many quarters as the dominant theoretical framework in migration studies.<sup>14</sup> While some scholars of transnationalism, such as Luis E. Guarnizo and Michael P. Smith (1998), do write about 'transnationalism from below', recognising the importance of locally embedded identities and social networks within the transnational process, it is more often the case, as Vered Amit (2002: 21) argues, that transnational process and practices are understood 'to first and foremost involve the production of ethnic [and national] collectivities that straddle state borders.' What I found, and what this book describes, is that displaced groups from BiH primarily follow the patterns that are local – or *zavičaj*-based<sup>15</sup> – rather than national, transnational or even ethnic and religious.

The 1992–95 war in Bosnia-Herzegovina and its consequences have become synonymous with ethnic violence, ethnic cleansing and the 'ethnicisation' of political discourse. While killings and the expulsion of the 'ethnic other' from places and strategic territories, that were remade into exclusive ethnic homelands, were a key feature of the conflict in BiH, the emphasis on ethnicity as a natural and political group identity of Bosnians has come at the expense of shared place-based local identities – defined by local geography, cultural norms, dialect, kinship, neighbourliness, a common way of life and embodied relationship with the place and social networks – or *zavičaj*, a term encompassing the wholeness of person-in-place and place-in-person (R. Adams and Halilovich 2010). Sometimes translated as 'local homeland', *zavičaj* goes beyond both the strictly private domain and

the public sphere of identification with group categories like family, kin, religion or ethnicity. With its use of toponyms and nicknames it unites landscape and people. With its emphasis on shared local dialect, cultural practices and social networks, it encourages the accommodation of difference that can attach to religion and ethnicity. In this way *zavičaj* both reflected and contributed to the multicultural and multi-ethnic pattern of life that was so characteristic of Bosnia right up to the 1990s. In countless villages and towns across the country it was for many the most powerful point of reference for their sense of belonging – more powerful by far than the exclusivist claims of religion and ethnicity.

The sociological concept of *Gemeinschaft*, as opposed to *Gesellschaft* (Tönnies 2001), comes close to *zavičaj*'s sense of community, social network and home. In this sense, *zavičaj* is a social reality, a lived experience for discrete groups, and also a metaphor for modalities that go beyond conventional state or party-based modes of social organisation.

While for many people in Bosnia and other Yugoslav successor states – especially those who were forcibly displaced – the term *zavičaj* evokes deep feelings of belonging to and nostalgia for a place that is or was the intimate and ultimate home, for ethno-nationalist political elites it was fashionable to regard *zavičaj* as an outdated pre-modern concept of home, incompatible with the ideas of greater ethnic homelands and exclusive nation states. The orchestrated violent campaigns of ethnic cleansing and ethnic unmixing that took place during the 1992–95 war, in which whole areas were depopulated and many local places erased from the map as human settlements, can be seen as part of a much longer campaign to unmake *zavičaj* in Bosnia. However, as I argue in this book, for those whose identity remains embedded and embodied in the idea of a distinct locale, the *zavičaj* continues to coexist as an experiential reality despite its physical destruction and forced displacement.

## Methodological Challenges

While relying on and drawing from many different disciplines, such as history, political science, sociology, psychology and literature, my research – and this book – is theoretically and methodologically situated in social anthropology. In particular I have been influenced by George Marcus's writing on multi-sited ethnography, and his claim that 'multi-sited research is designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some literal, physical presence, with an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites that in fact defines the argument of the ethnography' (Marcus 1995:

105). In line with Marcus's view of multi-sited ethnography – applying a variety of roles as a researcher, such as completely participant, completely observer, observer as participant and marginal native – I have followed the people, the metaphors, the plots, the stories, the biographies and the conflict. As such, my exploration goes beyond real and imagined fixities and certainties of place and cannot be seen in isolation or disentangled from the life stories and experiences of my informants.

This is not to say that the life stories somehow exist outside the concept of place. As Van Gelder (2008: 4) puts it, 'We are always somewhere, and it is through place that we are able to root our sense of story and our sense of self. Our stories make places important to us, and places become vessels for holding and keeping our stories.' However, the relationship between stories and place – especially after experiences of forced displacement – also works the other way round. Stories become vessels for holding and keeping places. We are able to root our sense of place and our sense of self through story, for 'it is through the activity of narration that we create meaning to our lives' (Andrews 2000: 77).

Using the narrative method proved to be highly appropriate and engaging – as well as personally difficult at times – as it enabled my informants to reconstruct, reinterpret and relive their memories and experiences of people, places and events by being active parties in the process of data collection rather than dismissing their reflections on the social world (Bryman 2001: 277). In line with a Foucauldian approach to narratives – based on the interrelationships between narrative, subjectivity and power (cf. Tamboukou 2008) – the stories of survivors of ethnic cleansing and genocide described in this book represent more than just personal stories and testimonials. They are part of a fragmented collective knowledge, or what Michel Foucault (1975, 1977) termed 'popular memory,' the memory of those who do not have access to publishing houses, film studios or political and cultural institutions. Following Foucault's recognition of popular memory as a political force against official discourse – a form of resistance (Foucault 1975: 25) – the popular memory narrated and performed by my informants might be viewed as the only form of defiance and resistance possible against the dominant nationalist discourses that have been behind their forced displacement.

When selecting participants I started with my pre-existing social and research networks and let them unfold across my participants' families, friends, *zavičaj* associations, localities and continents – literally, across their personal human geographies, often defying the logics of space and time. The result was that many of the stories – and people who told them – became, in one way or another, connected with each other. Many of these stories are of horrific experiences of loss, forced displacement and survival.

Nonetheless, I avoid using the word ‘trauma’ when describing and referring to such experiences, memories and narratives. In my view – based not only on an extensive literature review and research experience with Bosnian refugees, but also on my professional role as a former counsellor and mental health worker working with a range of refugee and asylum seeker groups in Australia and Germany<sup>16</sup> – the overuse of the term ‘trauma’ has led to the medicalisation and pathologising of human suffering, and in particular of memories and experiences of refugees and survivors of violence (Lambert, Haasen and Halilovic 1998; Summerfield 2004; Kokanovic and Stone 2010).

I do not argue that people go unchanged through difficult, life-changing experiences. Clearly there were invisible injuries of soul in many of my informants, but I did not treat them as psychopathological and clinical conditions that needed to be or could be corrected. I saw them instead as normal, human responses – coping mechanisms – to the extraordinary situations and experiences these people had gone through. Therefore, I do not label and stigmatise my informants and their memories as PTSD and trauma, and do not see symptoms like ‘obsessive reliving of the traumatic experience’ in their need to (re)tell me their stories (J. Herman 1992; Kenny 1996). Inspired and encouraged by Claude Lanzmann’s (1985) monumental work with survivors of the Holocaust, my role was more as a witness to their testimonials than someone who would look for symptoms of psychopathology in what they told me.

What the testimonies revealed is that, just as forced displacement is not something that happens in a linear, orderly way, so memories and narratives of displacement are not (re)collected in a coherent, (chrono)logical order. They are most often made up of fragments, where gaps, silences, sighs and body language tell as much as spoken words. When conveying these narratives in written text, I have used different writing styles, techniques, and different voices, connecting many different fragments and supplementing them with my own observations and participation.

### *Reflexive Ethnography*

This brings me to me. As sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann recognised forty years ago, ‘Reality is socially defined. But the definitions are always *embodied*, that is, concrete individuals and groups of individuals serve as definers of reality’ (Berger and Luckmann 1967: 134). In this context it is important to acknowledge my positioning and my subjectivities not only in relation to my informants but also in relation to the broader context of the question I am attempting to answer. In her book *Reflexive Ethnography*, Charlotte Aull Davies argues, ‘all researchers are to some degree connected to, or part of, the object of their research’ (2008: 3). Or, as

Friedrich Nietzsche put it more bluntly, ‘... however far man may extend himself with his knowledge, however objective he may appear to himself – ultimately he reaps nothing but his own biography’ (1994: 238). There can be no denying my passion for researching forced displacement, memory and trans-local identities in Bosnian war-torn communities. Beyond an academic inquisitiveness and the epistemological relevance of the topic, my research has been driven by a search for answers to ontological questions that affect me at a deep personal level.

Even if I wanted to, I could not claim historical, personal or simply human distance from the issues of forced displacement, ethnic cleansing and genocide in Bosnia. My family is part of the displaced. In fact, we may well represent the quintessential ‘made-in-transit’ family, having been born in three different countries – in Bosnia, Slovenia and Germany – and now living in a fourth country, Australia.

In 1993 my girlfriend Zerina and I – in a dramatic turn of events – exchanged our student lives at the University of Sarajevo for the ‘careers’ of refugees, the displaced and immigrants, firstly in Europe and later in Australia. In 1997, in Hamburg, three years after we reunited, our son Suad was born. Born to refugee parents: the first official letter that baby Suad received stated that he would not be allowed to claim any residency rights based on the fact that he was born in Germany. He was *de facto* born in transit and classified as a refugee at birth. Being parents to our son, born as a displaced person in a ‘united Europe’ at the end of the twentieth century, we felt responsible for providing him with a future, a place where he would not be classified and discriminated against because of his and his parents’ place of birth and refugee background. That is why we migrated to Australia in 1998.

While neither Zerina nor Suad have maintained or developed a strong sense of belonging to the place of their birth, in the last twenty years my place of birth has become an important identity mark – more a scar than a mark – that I am often identified by. Upon learning about my place of birth, I know what kind of questions to expect from people. Spread across the first page of my Australian passport, ‘S r e b r e n i c a’ almost reads like my name and like my name travels with me wherever I go. Although I left Srebrenica at the age of fourteen and was not there during the 1992–95 war, the Srebrenica genocide – which claimed more than a hundred of my extended family – has had a profound impact on my life.

This impact is reflected in my research. But this book should not be read as an autoethnography. I have dealt with my personal experiences of displacement through both works of fiction and academic, non-fiction genres elsewhere.<sup>17</sup> This book is about other people, places and memories, and neither I nor members of my family have been involved in it as informants. Having said this, I fully acknowledge my double role: as a cultural insider

born and socialised in Bosnia (and Yugoslavia), and a professional outsider, an anthropological scholar living in Australia. My ethnographic approach is a mix of both *emic* and *etic* perspectives. It also comes close to 'ethnology of the proximate', where 'research is a continual blend of personal experience and the creation of anthropological knowledge' (Čapo Žmegač, Gulin Zrnić and Šantek 2006: 287). Sometimes, in the field and when describing the events, interactions and stories I engaged with during my research, I let the me fade from the picture, let my presence and autobiographical elements disappear between the lines, to focus on the exchange between the participants I observe (Chapters 1, 3 and 5). At other times (Chapters 2, 4 and the Conclusion) I acknowledge my presence by using first person voice or through reflexive vignettes of my own thoughts, feelings, assumptions and role as a researcher in a given situation.

### Ethics and Politics of the Research

Being a cultural insider – a person speaking the relevant languages and having experienced displacement myself – has definitely been an advantage in understanding the issues, gaining access to prospective participants and establishing trusting relationships with them. Being seen and accepted as an insider has provided access to information that is off limits to outside researchers (T. Hermann 2001). Certainly, insider status at times complicated my role as a researcher and even became a source of potential risk – including physical danger and personal safety issues. There were times when my loyalties were questioned when identified as the 'ethnic other', and I was accused of taking sides. Bizarrely, I felt safer when suspected of being a spy – I was asked by a local official what Western intelligence service I was working for – as officials seemed to have more respect for spies than for pestering anthropologists visiting ethnically cleansed villages and talking to survivors.

Once in the field(s) there was no easy way out of the ethnographer-activist role, nor was I looking for an easy escape. Instead, I learned that doing multi-sited ethnography of forced displacement inevitably leads into researching and dealing with the harsh realities of causes and consequences. The forced displacement executed through the policy of ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and Herzegovina between 1992 and 1995 was carried out through the systematic violation of human rights, the complete disregard for the lives and dignity of others, and war crimes that culminated in the 1995 Srebrenica genocide.<sup>18</sup> Therefore any average Bosnian story of displacement has to include dispossession, personal loss, dramatic flights and homelessness. This book is full of 'average' stories, of persecution, ethnic cleansing

and genocide. For me, these stories represent some of the most profound and cathartic experiences I have had – as a researcher and a person. The academic genre can demand (over)theorised and detached scholarly (scientific) accounts of stories of which I have become a part in the course of my research, and – if it was not for the feeling of indebtedness to my informants – I might have left out some powerful and moving narratives.

The stories described in this book have become my stories and I have become part of the stories of those who opened their hearts and their homes to me. I followed and carried their stories across the globe and, in some cases I went back with my storytellers to their destroyed homes and places that are no more. In this way I was able to visualise their stories by linking them to the material evidence of their past lives. I was invited to their wedding celebrations, the first birthdays of their children, and the mass graves and funerals of their loved ones who perished in the war.

A cluster of storytellers came from the ethnically cleansed village of Klotjevac near Srebrenica, my birth village, which naturally has special meaning for me. Confronted with the magnitude of the loss of human lives and the continuing institutional discrimination against the handful of survivors who returned to their decimated village ten years after they fled, the advocacy and activism, which I see as part of the researcher's ethical responsibility, has been more pronounced here than in other parts of Bosnia. In addition to public speaking, presenting papers at international conferences and seminars, speaking on radio and TV, participating in documentaries and publishing articles and interviews, in July 2007 I led a group of twenty-two Australian students to Klotjevac. The 'Bosnian Study Tour' (BST), was planned in advance with the locals of the village and was designed as a fully accredited university subject involving both theoretical and practical learning aspects. The study tour's objective was to explore and to learn firsthand about the effects of genocide and ethnic cleansing on local communities in BiH by directly engaging with members of such communities, as well as to identify ways in which these devastated communities could be supported (Halilovich 2008).

The students' visit had a profound impact on the villagers who, for the first time in a long time, felt that they were not completely abandoned and that someone does care about them. Their village was again the destination for friendly foreigners. After being destroyed, depopulated and written off by almost everyone apart from a handful of survivors, the students' visit made Klotjevac visible again (Halilovich and Adams 2011). Memories of genocide, invasion, destruction and continuing occupation were suspended. What was remembered (and reminisced about) were the summers of visitors, the occasions of celebration, the forging of new contacts on their own terms with outsiders. In addition to these sentimental and symbolic



benefits, the local community also gained some modest economic benefit from hosting a group of twenty-five people for ten days. Facilitating a positive change in the village by BST members has included various other acts of advocacy and activism. Dissemination of information about the village and the living conditions of returnees resulted in the village being put back on the map (literally!) and its residents being provided with material aid in the form of livestock, a tractor and agricultural machinery by international NGOs assisting returnees. Inspired by the BST, other researchers, journalists and human rights activists from Bosnia, the region and faraway places flocked to the village to take up the issues of discrimination and the marginalisation of the villagers by the institutions and the government of Republika Srpska (RS).

Returning to Australia the students founded the association, Friends of Klotjevac, its mission being the advancement of the human rights cause of the villagers, advocacy and the provision of practical support for their sustainable return. One of the first major projects involved working together with the villagers – both returnees and those displaced, now living in Australia and fifteen other countries across the globe – to collect funds for building a monument to the 108 villagers who perished in the war. Less than two years later three of the students and more than 200 displaced Klotjevac villagers and their friends participated in the unveiling ceremony of the monument in the heart of the village still lying in ruins. The Klotjevac survivors insisted on the Australian students being acknowledged on the monument. The monument to the dead also represents a monument to the friendly foreigners from a distant country who injected new optimism in those who returned or are planning to return to their devastated village. The monument project not only acknowledged and commemorated the victims, but it also helped the locals to reclaim and transform their collective past. To the idyllic pre-war past and the tragic war past, was added a newer past – a new narrative told by Klotjevac returnees of ‘that hot summer when Australian students visited us’. It is to these three parts of Klotjevac – the idyllic, the tragic and the optimistic – that we now turn.

## NOTES

1. Translated from Bosnian by Amela Simic and Zoran Mutic.
2. The 1992–95 war in Bosnia–Herzegovina (BiH) was the longest and the most brutal in a series of the Yugoslav wars of succession. The war started in March 1992 when the BiH government followed the examples of Slovenia and Croatia and – after holding a referendum (boycotted by the Serb Democratic Party [SDS], the main political party of Bosnian Serbs at the time) – declared independence from the Yugoslav Federation. In late March and early April 1992 the

Serbian government-controlled militias invaded the eastern Bosnian border towns of Bijeljina, Brčko and Zvornik, killing non-Serb civilians. By mid April 1992 there was all-out war in the country between the SDS militias (later Army of Republika Srpska or VRS) and the Yugoslav National Army (JNA) on the one side and on the other, the BiH government-controlled police and territorial defence (later Army of BiH) and Croatian Defence Council (HVO), the armed wing of the Croat Democratic Union (HDZ), the nationalist party of Bosnian Croats. However, within the main war (simplified as Serbs versus Bosniaks and Croats), at different times different armed groups fought together and against each other. Between 1992 and 1993 rival groups of Bosnian Croats, HVO and HOS (Croatian Armed Forces) fought a brief but bitter war for monopoly control in Croat-dominated parts of the country (western Herzegovina). By early 1993 war had broken out between HVO units and the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ARBiH) in central Bosnia and Mostar, followed by further fratricide between Bosniak troops in western Bosnia, when Fikret Abdić's troops (Autonomaši) fought against ARBiH. Four years of bloodshed in the country left 100,000 to 150,000 people killed, about 2 million forcibly displaced, between 20,000 and 50,000 women raped, 35,000 missing, tens of thousands of people imprisoned and tortured, more than 800,000 homes destroyed ... The war ended in December 1995, with the country divided in two semi-autonomous political entities: Republika Srpska (Serb Republic or RS) and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with a special status given to District Brčko. For more information on wars in Bosnia and ex-Yugoslavia see Cigar (1995), Glenny (1996), Lampe (2000), Silber and Little (1996), Hoare (2004) and Halpern and Kideckel (2000).

3. Throughout the book I use the term 'identity' to include belonging, memory, identification, label, narrative and embodiment. Some of the main relational, situational, experiential and existential identity categories with(in) which my participants are described include: place, culture, ethnicity, nationality, community, diaspora, gender, survivor, war widow, refugee, IDP, old dweller, newcomer and guest worker. Thus, identity is understood and explored in its multiplicity of meanings as being always a work in progress that can never be completely fixed or encompassed by a single definition.
4. Dayton refers to the 1995 Dayton Peace Accords (DPA) that ended the war in BiH and defined the state of BiH as a federation made up of Republika Srpska (49 per cent of the territory) and the Bosniak-Croat Federation (51 per cent).
5. According to the 1991 Census of Population the ethnic composition of Bosnia and Herzegovina included 43.5 per cent Muslims (Bosniaks), 31.2 Serbs and 17.4 Croats. The fourth largest group was 'Yugoslavs' (5.6 per cent), those who did not identify themselves in ethnic terms. (See <http://www.fzs.ba/Dem/Popis/NacStanB.htm>)
6. By 'organic' multiculturalism I understand 'diversity from below' – a way of life made up of different cultural influences, and negotiation of differences on a daily basis, as it existed in Bosnia (four faiths, shared language, two scripts, no segregated ethnic quarters, etc.) – rather than 'multiculturalism from above', which is result of a deliberate state policy (like in Australia, for instance).

7. See, for instance, Cushman and Meštrović (1996), Denich (1993), Halpern and Kideckel (2000) and Ramet (2002, 2005).
8. Hayden (1996, 2000), Bakic-Hayden (1995) and Huntington (1996: 272).
9. Bax (1997a, 1997b, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c), Black (2001, 2002), Bougarel (2007), Campbell (1998, 1999), Cushman (2004), Dahlman (2004), Dahlman and Ó Tuathail (2005a, 2005b, 2006), Duijzings (2007), Helms (2007, 2008), Hunt (2005), Ito (2001), Jansen (1998, 2008), Maček (2001, 2007), Toal and Dahlman (2006, 2011) and Stefansson (2004a, 2004b, 2006, 2007).
10. I am using various estimates – those from BiH Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees, UNHCR, World Bank, official reports and published articles – about the actual number of Bosnians in different countries, as there are no completely reliable statistics on the exact numbers of Bosnians in most countries in which they have settled. There are many reasons for the lack of precise data of Bosnian refugees and migrants in these countries: many Bosnian refugees arrived in these countries without valid Bosnian documents, while others did so on former Yugoslav passports and many were classified ‘stateless’. Many Bosnians were classified as economic migrants, guest workers and family reunion migrations rather than refugees. Over the years many Bosnian refugees and migrants have opted to obtain the citizenship of their adoptive countries – becoming Swedes, Austrians, Germans, Americans, Australians, Serbians, Croatians and so on – and their ‘Bosnianess’ regularly escapes the official statistics, as they are now officially regarded as nationals of these countries. The World Bank (2005) estimates that the number of Bosnians living outside the country is close to 1.5 million (1,471,594), or 37.7 per cent of the pre-war country’s population.
11. Brun (2001), Escobar (2001), Feld and Basso (1996), Gupta and Ferguson (1992, 1997), Jansen and Löfving (2009), Kibreab (1999), Lovell (1998), Malkki (1992, 1995), Povrzanovic Frykman (2002, 2004, 2009, 2011), Rapport and Dawson (1998) and Rodman (1992).
12. See Božić-Vrbančić (2008), Čapo Žmegač (2003), Gow (2002), Nolin (2006) and Olwig (1998).
13. See also Boutang and Pamart (1995), cited in Fortier (2000: 13).
14. See Friedman (1998), Glick Schiller et al. (1992, 1995, 1999), Hannerz (1996), Kearney (1995), Koopmans and Statham (2001), Levitt and Glick Schiller (2007), Mahler (1998), Olwig (2003), Ong (1999), Portes et al. (1999), W. Robinson (1998) and Vertovec (1999, 2001, 2004, 2007).
15. The word *zavičaj* (plural: *zavičaji*) in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian refers to a specific local or regional homeland.
16. Between 2001 and 2005 I worked as a counsellor advocate at the Melbourne-based Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture. Between 1995 and 1998 I was involved as a research assistant and mental health worker in the project *Psychiatric Disorders in Migrants*.
17. See, for instance, Halilovich (2005b, 2007, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2011c, 2011d and 2012a).
18. As R. Cohen (1995) commented in *The New York Times*, a CIA report on Bosnia blames Serbs for 90 per cent of the war crimes committed in the country between 1992 and 1995.