

woman told me in 1994: “The double citizenship was attractive. With a *krštenica* [a baptism certificate valid as a birth certificate] you could get double citizenship, which means a Croatian passport with which you could enter Croatia without any problem. . . . [It] meant that you would not be thrown out of Croatia as a Bosnian refugee. A lot of Muslims went over in that way. It is the church that is doing it now, too.”

But the process was not as easy as it sounded. A young Croat whom I met hoped to get help to leave the town, but he did not have the nerve to ask for it outright, so he never got a straightforward answer or help with leaving:

I got to know this janitor of the church. A very fine man, nice. . . . He explained to me that they were starting this illegal organization. Illegal [smiling]. To make the long story short, it was to be a humanitarian organization, to help people, with food and other things. . . . I liked the idea because they mentioned going out of Sarajevo. And I forced my friend, who calls himself Orthodox, to come along. He argued that he is a Serb, but I told him not to worry. The first time we went there, we were ninety people in a corridor. . . . A man explained what it was about and then they distributed tin cans to everyone. I don't remember what was in the cans, but I was hungry and we were so happy. But when the talking was over, we had to pray. . . . I looked at the people around me. I had no idea what to do. I stood up, but I didn't know how to pray. To begin with I didn't know how to hold my hands. So I followed with one eye what others did and mumbled something. I turned around and I saw that my friend also mumbled something. A man standing beside us was so loud that he covered us. Afterward we agreed that it was embarrassing so we decided to say that we didn't know what to do, because they said that they were going to teach those who didn't know. So we did it, and I even got a rosary (*krunica*) because the janitor liked me. And I liked him. I told him that I was an atheist. . . . I wanted to be honest. But it simply didn't work. . . . Everywhere I found some peace, but here I was always tense.

The Catholic Church faced a dilemma between gaining more members and losing people by letting them leave the town.

The changes that ethnonational politics wrought in public space also had consequences for Sarajevans' daily interactions. We now turn to how social relations changed because of growing ethnonational and ethnoreligious divisions.

Chapter 8

Reorienting Social Relationships

The most significant shift in the ways Sarajevans related to one another was their war-induced concern with national affiliation. Before the war, whatever concern they had with identifying others' ethnoreligious background and ethnonational identity was aimed mainly at being respectful of differences. During the war, however, it became vital for people to identify one another's position—their ethnonational identity, their feelings about other groups, and their opinions about nationalism itself and who was responsible for the war—in order to know whether a reliable relationship could be established or maintained. In this painful and contradictory process, Sarajevans both assumed and resisted the creation of new meanings for their national identities. They tended to generalize about ethnonational groups, but they also realized that individuals varied. When relating to people they knew well, Sarajevans did not generally let national animosities take over their interactions. At the same time, they held general ideas about members of their own and other national groups that assumed or asserted such marked differences among them that mutual understanding and respect often seemed inconceivable.

The experience of victimization by the war, which Sarajevans as well as other people throughout Bosnia felt acutely, opened the ideological space for identification and condemnation of the enemy “other” in nationalist terms. Nationalistic elites were able to use this sense of victimization to propagate a degree of national differentiation that otherwise would not have gained so much ground. Biases against other national groups, especially when generalizing about “others,” were not a result of existing or “primordial” animosities among Bosnian nationalities, but were strongly influenced by the war itself. The national enemy that was condemned depended on the military situation at a given time. Muslims who felt like victims of Serbian aggression condemned Serbs, while Serbs and Croats who felt like victims of the Muslim-dominated Sarajevo regime condemned Muslims. Muslim ambivalence toward Croats in Sarajevo reflected the fact that Croats were both allies and

enemies during different periods of the war. Muslim-Croat relations were good until late 1992, when fighting began between the two national armies, and improved again after the Bosnian Federation was established in 1994. Relations between Serbs and Croats in Sarajevo were relatively good, as Serb and Croat military forces never fought in a significant way in this part of Bosnia and Herzegovina.¹ In this way, national identification positioned people morally and politically during the war.

A joke that circulated in Sarajevo commented on the relative importance of national belonging: How do people manage to leave Sarajevo? When they pass Croatian snipers they raise two fingers (which is the Catholic way to cross oneself), when they pass Serbian snipers they raise three fingers (the Orthodox way to cross oneself), when they pass Muslim snipers they raise five fingers, the whole hand (the Muslim way of praying), and when they finally get out they raise one finger, the middle one (an expletive gesture). In practice, the attention that had to be paid to various armed groups was mostly a matter of paying money and making sure that they had received it. The joke made a poignant connection between national identities, religion, and war profiteering, while celebrating the primacy of life.

Over the course of the war, Sarajevans started to interpret some of their everyday experiences and social relations in terms of ethnonational identities. This process of national identification was by no means a one-way street to a homogenous nationalism, however. Some people struggled to resist the rising tide of nationalist feelings, even as they had to cope with the world that was shifting around them.

One evening in September 1994, my hosts watched an old serial about the life of Vuk Karadžić, the nineteenth-century Serbian linguist who reformed South Slavic writing rules² after participating in a failed uprising against the Ottoman Empire. In this program, shown on Serbian television, the Turks were the bad guys and the Serbs the good guys. When the program was made several decades earlier, “Turks” were the Ottomans, the invaders who ruled over the South Slavs—the people whose rebellions led eventually to the formation of Yugoslavia. In the context of the ongoing war, however, “Turk” took on different meanings. Serbian media often called Bosnian Muslims “Turks,” positioning them as the enemy and picturing them as villains. Showing this old serial on television was surely no coincidence; its implicit purpose was to support the historical truth of the current Serbian nationalist ideology. In the popular imagery, “Turks” were seen as foreigners, with lesser rights to the land, or as Slavs who had converted and were of lesser

moral standing because of their disloyalty to their Slavic roots and brethren. “Turks” were portrayed as a brutal people, but also as spineless opportunists.

The Muslim-dominated Bosnian government reversed the imagery: the enemy and villains were Serbs, who were often called Chetniks (Četnici, sing. Četnik). A Chetnik was imagined as primitive, untidy, long-haired, and bearded. Serbian troops in this war referred to themselves as Chetniks, making a historical connection to the Serbian royalist soldiers who fought for the Serbian and Yugoslav king and the former kingdom of Yugoslavia, as well as to the Chetniks of the Second World War who fought against both the Nazis and Tito’s partisans. In Sarajevo the term Chetnik was increasingly used as a synonym for “the enemy soldier” in order to distinguish between “Serbs,” who could also be good, decent, normal people, *raja*, and those who joined the other side in the war. The word was loaded with moral condemnation. Chetniks fought unfairly, their behavior was inhuman, they slaughtered women and children, and they destroyed everything people had. In short, a Chetnik was an immoral, bad person. This shorthand could occasionally take paradoxical turns as national terms in daily use lost their national meaning and assumed a purely moral one. A friend of mine told me that he once saw a *bula*—a woman who taught in an Islamic school and always dressed in Muslim clothes with a veil—hit her son in the backyard of a multistoried house. The neighbors thought that she was too brutal, so one of them started screaming: “Stop the Chetnik woman (*četnikuša*)! She’ll kill the child!” To call a *bula* a Chetnik could be seen as a contradiction in terms, but in Sarajevo during the war it made perfect sense.

In socialist Yugoslavia Chetniks, along with other nationalist military forces such as Croatian Ustashas (Ustaše, sing. Ustaša), were condemned as nationalists and traitors to the People’s Liberation Struggle (*Narodnooslobodilačka borba* [NOB]) and the “brotherhood and unity” (*bratstvo i jedinstvo*) of Yugoslav peoples, because they were allies of the German invaders and fought against partisans during the Second World War. The extreme Croat nationalists implied continuity with the Second World War by referring to themselves as Ustashas. A person judged to be a Croatian nationalist could also be called Ustasha, while the nationally most neutral and thus most moral label for Croats during the war was Katolik (Catholic), probably because it referred only to ethnoreligious identity and not to a politicized national identity.

Because of my Croatian background, I heard mostly derogatory terms used by Muslims referring to Serbs, and by Croats referring to Muslims. The

old derogatory labels for Croats, Šokac or Latin,³ were never used in front of me, and I only heard a variant of Latin once in 1995, when a secularized Muslim woman with whom I developed a war friendship was irritated with Croats who obstructed the Croat-Muslim Federation and exclaimed: "I'm sick and tired of this *latinluk!*" An older derogatory term for a Serb was Vlah,⁴ while a relatively positive label was Pravoslavac (Orthodox), probably for the same reasons as Katolik (Catholic) was the most positive label for Croats. The older derogatory word for a Muslim was Baliija. These older derogatory names for members of different religious groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina were revived during the war and sometimes acquired new meanings.

Because of the changes in the political and ideological situation during the war, people from the same ethnoreligious background perceived changes in different ways, and labels appeared that marked the heterogeneity within each national group. The most important distinction that Sarajevans made, even when talking about national identities, was between good and bad members of a national group.

For example, Sarajevans distinguished between various types of Muslims. "Real Muslims" were the old believers, and "April Muslims" were those who discovered their Muslim identity at the beginning of the war (in April 1992) and became newly committed to religion or converted to nationalist ideology. While everyone respected the "old Muslims," opinions about "April Muslims" were mixed. Some looked upon them with contempt and also called them "newly composed" (*novokomponovani*) Muslims, alluding to the kitschy folk music that was popular among "less cultivated people." Others saw the popularization of religiosity as a natural consequence of war and Serbian aggression. Croats could be classified as Catholic believers (*Katolici*), nonbelievers, Sarajevan and Central Bosnian Croats (who were seen as loyal to Bosnia), and Herzegovinian Croats (*Hercegovci*), who were seen as more extreme nationalists and separatists. Sarajevans also divided Serbs into "good Serbs" and "bad Serbs" or just "Serbs." The "good Serbs" were the "Orthodox," who often did not want to be associated with Serbian nationalism, but also included the Serbs who stayed in the town and showed their loyalty to the Bosnian government either by openly condemning Serbian politics or by joining the ABiH. "Good Serbs" could also be prewar friends, colleagues, and neighbors who said that they were leaving and somehow kept in touch during the war. "Bad Serbs" were those suspected of knowing that the war was coming, and who suddenly left the town without telling anybody and without making contact afterward. Those who stayed in the town but never

openly condemned the Serbian side were also suspected of knowing about the war and just waiting for the Serbian troops to enter the town, and were thus perceived as "bad Serbs."

People of all nationalities, although most often those who before the war had identified themselves nationally as Yugoslavs, who held to the prewar ideology of "brotherhood and unity" and criticized the government for dismantling it, were now labeled *jugonostalgičari* (Yugonostalgists). Like many other concepts, nostalgia in this context had a double meaning: on the one hand, it implied a sentimental attachment to political ideals that were already irrecoverably lost, and a denial of or refusal to come to terms with present reality; on the other hand, it was understood as the only way of preserving a thread of connection to the political organization of society that was good and viable. In this sense, Yugonostalgia was a part of the Sarajevan "imitation of life."

The ascription of these national labels to individuals depended on the situation. National identification was a process that happened over time, and the same person could be classified differently in different situations. Similarly, with time and experience, a person could change his or her own notion of belonging to a certain national category.

Muslim Perspectives on Ethnonational Identity

In the early 1980s, Ernest Gellner perceptively observed that "nowadays, to be a Bosnian Muslim you need not believe that there is no God but God and that Mohamed is his Prophet, but you do need to have lost that faith" (1992:72). During the siege of Sarajevo, being a Muslim meant that you rediscovered that faith and were forced to see for yourself what it meant in the new situation. Would you start going to the mosque regularly, pray five times a day, observe the Ramadan fast, attend *iftari* in the evenings, and celebrate Bairams? Or was it enough if you simply continued to take off your shoes when you came inside, drank your coffee out of a *fldžan*, and ate *pita* or *baklava*? Were you a Muslim if you blamed Karadžić and Mladić for the war and cursed the soldiers' "Chetnik mother" when the shells exploded? What did it mean if you covered your head with a shawl, or wore a dark beret, and went to Merhamet and IGASA for help with food and work? Did the ABiH under the Sarajevo government's control protect your interests? Were these the military forces you should join? While for some people being a Muslim

meant being religiously observant and identifying with Bosnian nationalism politically, other Muslims did not perceive these as characteristic of themselves. But Sarajevan Muslims had this predicament in common: throughout the processes of national division and homogenization that started with the breakup of the former Yugoslavia, were intensified by the war, and continued after the peace agreement, everyone had to come to terms with the revival of all of these aspects of their ethnoreligious and national identity. To be a Muslim in Sarajevo meant remembering that faith and reconsidering what it meant in everyday life, where its meaning never was only religious, but increasingly political.

Sarajevan Muslims generally saw themselves as mild, tolerant, and politically naive people, different from the Muslims who moved from rural villages to Sarajevo during the war. Ideas about their specifically Bosnian variant of Islam and the lifestyle characterized as being between East and West became central issues of identity. What it meant to be Muslim was defined in political terms by nationalist leaders and figured in political debates among ordinary Sarajevans.

The late Alija Izetbegović, who served as the first president of Bosnia and Herzegovina, articulated the idea of a distinctly “European Muslim” identity: “I personally feel most comfortable when I say that I am a European Muslim, because that’s what I am. When I go to the East, some things there disturb me; some things disturb me also when I go to the West. I feel best here, in Bosnia. Probably because it is East and West, and the good that exists on both sides” (Izetbegović 1996:43–44, my translation). While characterizing Bosnian Muslims as combining the best of two worlds along the “Great Border” between the Ottoman Empire and Europe, his formulation acknowledges some tensions and contradictions: “By our faith we are Easterners, by our education Europeans. With our heart we belong to one world, with our brain to the other. . . . Each of us who is honest has to admit that he asks himself often: who is he, to which world does he belong” (Izetbegović 1995:137, my translation).

Izetbegović characterized the Bosnian spirit in terms similar to many Sarajevans: “The line of friction between two worlds, East and West, moved across Bosnia over several hundreds of years and it created what we call Bosnian spirit. The basic characteristic of that spirit is tolerance, the capability of living with someone different from you” (Izetbegović 1996:125, my translation). Most Sarajevans could probably identify with being the people of the Great Border (an idea that also figured in prewar Yugoslav ideology⁵): tolerant, used to living with differences, forgiving, and morally good. But

when East was defined as Islamic faith and West as education, the identification as Bosnians of the Great Border became problematic for those who neither were religious Muslims nor came from a Muslim family. As a result, the feeling of genuine Bosnian belonging was evoked only in people of Muslim ancestry, and the identification as people of the Great Border became an essential characteristic of the newly defined Muslim identity. Making ethnoreligious identification into an essential characteristic of the border identity was a process that many people found troubling.

Even more controversially, Izetbegović promoted the merger of faith and politics, which was one of the cornerstones of Islam, in an Islamic state. When he had first expressed this opinion in his (in)famous *Islamska Deklaracija* (The Islamic Declaration, 1970), he was convicted of “associating with intention of hostile activity” and making a “counter-revolutionary threat to the social order of SFRY [the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia]” (Okružni sud u Sarajevu K.212/83 od 20.8.1983 godine [The District Court in Sarajevo K.212/83 of August 20, 1983]).⁶ At the same time, he was aware that this agenda might lead to factional strife within the SDA and conflict with other Bosnians (1996:125) When translated into political terms, Izetbegović’s notion of balancing between East and West became problematic and self-contradictory, which did not pass unnoticed by Sarajevans.

Secularized Sarajevan Muslims, contrary to their president, stressed their weak religiosity and European way of living. As a well-educated woman put it: “Most of the Muslims were not so religious; even today when many fast and bow in prayer (*klanjati*), they don’t know how to say a prayer (*učiti*). Me, too. . . . I have never said that I was anything else but Muslim. I can be Yugoslav and Muslim . . . but, I didn’t go to the mosque, or pray to Allah (*klanjati*).” In Sarajevo, the expression “European Muslim” meant anything between a wish to merge politics with religion in an Islamic state to a longing for a Western capitalist, prosperous, and democratic society enriched by Eastern customs and the centuries-old Bosnian ethos of coexistence. Those who identified themselves, or were identified by others, as Muslims chose those meanings of their new identity that they perceived as relevant to themselves.

Muslims’ Attitudes Toward Serbs and Croats

As Muslims and Serbs were the largest national groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina, members of these groups were in frequent, close contact and often intermarried. Muslims recognized a shared historical destiny with Serbs.

Izetbegović put it succinctly: “If we talk about the Bosnian mentality, we could say that it is closer to the Serbian. Because we lived for a long time together under the Turks” (1996:126, my translation). Some Sarajevan Muslims continued to believe that ethnonational identity was not an important characteristic of individuals and to affirm family bonds with Serbs. A young secularized Muslim woman thought that the prevailing enthusiasm for national divisions had been carried too far. “Everyone is tired of it. . . . Especially in Sarajevo, it is impossible to carry out such a division. . . . My sister’s husband is a Serb. My mother’s sister is married to a Serb. My father’s brother is married to a Serbian woman. So we are mixed. We get along well. . . . I can’t imagine living in a homogeneous national milieu and it seems to me that, if I had to live in such a milieu, I would rather go to another country. . . .” Even mentioning leaving Sarajevo for a place where ethnically mixed families would be welcome bespeaks deep alienation from the current climate.

Other Muslims tried to explain the inexplicable event of war between Serbs and Muslims by seeking to find some difference between these two groups that might have gone unnoticed earlier. One secularized woman observed that the Serbs had a more collectivist mentality: “The mass psychology is slightly stronger in a Serb than in a Muslim. We have never felt a strong national or group belonging.” This abstraction projected nationalist sentiments on the other and defined Muslims as the more tolerant people. It was probably adopted from current Muslim nationalist propaganda. But when it came to individual Serbs, the woman thought that their personalities were more important; her notion of collectivism either did not apply or was forgotten. On the concrete level, Serbs became a heterogeneous group, and being able to establish that a Serb in question was not among those who shelled and shot at the town was essential for the Muslims who were hypothetically willing to reestablish relations with Serbs. This woman explained that there were no problems with “the Serbs who were here the whole war, and we know what they were doing and that they suffered the same as we did.” But “a Serb who returns, you don’t know where he has been, whether he was up on Trebević and shot at you.”

The guilt of shelling Sarajevo could also be generalized to apply to all Serbs. I remember once talking in a café to two sisters in their forties, both secularized Muslims. Both had been married to Serbs, and each had one child. One of the women had divorced long before the war and now lived with a secularized Muslim, while her sister had been widowed long before the war and remained single. Neither had cared much about the national identity of her husband before the war. During the war, both women worked for

the ABiH. The widowed sister suddenly said that she could never again fall in love with a Serb. She was very categorical and slightly chauvinistic, and I anticipated an explanation that presumed Serbs were immoral and inferior to Muslims. I wondered how she could know that a man she was falling in love with was a Serb or not. Would it show? But her answer was not what I expected. Rather, it was very rational; I perceived it as somewhat cold-blooded and almost macabre. All right, she admitted, she might fall in love with a man not knowing that he was a Serb, but as soon as she found out it would be impossible to continue. I asked why. Because you could never know whether he was up there shooting at your child, wounding and killing so many others, she answered. She worked as a nurse on the front line, so she knew what she was talking about. Chills went up my spine. And even if he himself had not been a shooter, she continued, she could never be sure about someone from his family, his blood.

A secularized Muslim woman who divorced her Serb husband during the war expressed general notions about the contrast between militantly nationalistic Serbs and tolerant, non-nationalistic Muslims. Serbs were to blame for the war; they were obsessed with a dream of Greater Serbia and by an irrational hatred and desire for vengeance fueled by the centuries under Turkish rule:

Yugoslavia suited them because they were the majority national group (*nacija*). . . .⁷ Serbs left the town, ran away, at the beginning of the war in April; they thought they would come back after fifteen days. [Serbian extremists] would attack, scare us, slaughter, kill everyone they could. . . . They thought that the mild Muslims would get quiet. The army [JNA] would . . . come in between to settle the conflict, and there would again be Yugoslavia as they wanted it. But we all knew that it was no longer Yugoslavia, that it was Greater Serbia. Because with those *četnik* signs, it was clear that there was nothing good awaiting the Muslims. They slaughtered earlier too, and from the stories and what happened in the territories that they conquered they killed people just because they were Muslims. . . . They could have got Muslims on their side if only they had not slaughtered and killed. The majority of Muslims in Sarajevo thought that the army [JNA] had good intentions. . . . I never realized that they have in fact always hated us so much, secretly, that it is their vengeance, from the Turkish times when they probably suffered because they were oppressed. . . . But I don’t understand why they mixed so much. Why marry a Muslim woman?

This woman’s own experience contradicted her general viewpoint enough to raise this final question, yet she could not see that the hatred she projected onto the past had arisen during the war.

Another common attitude was that the Serbs believed in the “lies” on

their radio station (SRNA). According to the same woman, at the beginning of the war, the Serbian radio was “lying so that the hair rose on your head . . . almost as if we were throwing shells on ourselves.⁸ What soldier would leave his house and go to the front line to shell the town? If he doesn’t kill his child he’ll kill some relative. But, no. The majority of them believed in it.” Any Serb who did not condemn the other side was suspected of sympathizing with the enemy and condemned as sharing responsibility for the siege of Sarajevo. “Naturally, we also have nationalism,” this woman conceded, but she did not seem to think that this was the major reason why Serbs who stayed in Sarajevo “felt under pressure” and were not trusted.

In the spring of 1996, the exodus of Serbs from the parts of Sarajevo that were to be reintegrated with the main body of the town under the Bosnian government’s control could be seen on the television daily. Sarajevans were stunned by this evidence that the enemy also had its tragedies and share of suffering. Those who had the generosity to feel sorry for Serbs in endless refugee queues on the roads out of town often said that they pitied Serbs for being so easily seduced by inhuman leaders like Karadžić, Milošević, and Mladić.

The Serbs who were perceived as good were those who demonstrated, as well as repeatedly stated, that they were ashamed of their people and leaders because of what they were doing. The same woman described one “good Serb”: “There is for instance a man who is married to a Muslim woman, he has a son here. He was expelled from Trebinje. He works with us as a judge. He was supposed to be a federal judge. . . . And he says, ‘I weighed eighty-six kilograms and I fell to sixtyish. I have been eaten away, I have melted because of the shame. But people are treating me like a drop of water in their palm.’ I am really happy that there are people like him; that means that not all of them are like that [the nationalists].”

The process of ethnonational identification of oneself and others and the reevaluation of mutual relations across ethnonational lines is ongoing in Sarajevo. The woman whose views I have explored had started to identify herself as a Muslim and her husband as a Serb, and because they had two children she was forced to make sense of relations between Serbs and Muslims. Such people, with personal bonds and interests, had a special need to understand each other. In this case, contact with her former husband was maintained through their children, who were in contact with both. Direct information about the “other” was the ground for a constant reevaluation of political discourse and about people’s own ideas and actions.

I met some Sarajevan Croats through my Muslim friends and acquaintances who seemed to be eager that I meet “good, normal” Croats who had stayed and had no nationalistic tendencies. The same secularized Muslim friend who uttered her irritation over *latinluk* wanted me to talk to her colleague: “I have introduced you to him on purpose, because he is a Croat, and because he is Sarajevan *raja*.” It was March 1995, and the three of us were sitting in her office. During the conversation it turned out that he ranked as Sarajevan *raja* because he did not leave Sarajevo, because he had a sense of humor, and, in spite of being born in Herzegovina, was not harsh and nationalistic as Herzegovinians supposedly were. So, a “good Croat” was equal to a “good person,” *raja*; it did not matter where you were born as long as you showed your loyalty to Sarajevo.

When it came to more general ideas, Croats were perceived as more religious than other ethnonational groups. Croats were regarded as more inclined toward the West; they had ties to Croatia, through Catholicism to Rome, and were through history and culture influenced by the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Their European orientation meant that they were seen as snobbish people who thought themselves superior to Muslims. This stereotype mirrored the Croats’ attitudes toward Muslims: slightly arrogant questioning of Muslims’ religiosity and their claim of a separate national identity.

During my work in Sarajevo, I often heard people who identified as Muslims say: “We can forgive, but we shan’t forget.” I found this outlook disturbing. First, it identified Muslims as the victims and Serbs as the perpetrators, the Muslims as those who were morally entitled to confer forgiveness and the Serbs as those who had to repent. The second part was equally disturbing because it said that the Serbs would never again be trusted, even if they were to share life with Muslims in the future. Some men in refugee families I became acquainted with, who previously had no special interest in weapons, declared that after the experience of Serbs coming into their villages and destroying everything Muslim, carrying out “ethnic cleansing,” they were going to make sure that their sons knew who they were—Muslims—and knew how to handle a weapon.

The doubleness of this formulation reflects the ambivalence of Muslims’ interpretation of their relations to Serbs: on the one hand, a wish to be tolerant, peaceful, and forgiving, as opposed to Serbian selfishness and aggressiveness; and on the other hand, putting all of the blame on the Serbs and being unable to trust them ever again. This view fitted perfectly with the contemporary image of Muslims as naive innocents and Serbs as violent

aggressors and with the lesson that Muslims have learned in the war: they never should have trusted the Serbs in the first place. Despite its pretensions, this sentiment has nothing to do with a possible solution or a better future. Perhaps, for Muslims, it was also a way of forgiving themselves: the Serbs forced them to kill and destroy, committing acts that they always found unacceptable, against their nature. Perhaps, too, it was a way of making sense of their experiences in the war and an attempt to ensure that war would not happen again, or at least to protect their children from similar experiences.

Although this attitude was not often openly expressed by people who had lived in Sarajevo before the war, such statements arouse concern about the fragile state of social relations between the town's Serbs and Muslims, which were painful for all of them. The hope lay in Sarajevans' capacity to reevaluate their opinions of each other, which I witnessed so often during my fieldwork.

Serb Perspectives on Ethnonational Identity

While Sarajevan Muslims felt like the victims of Serbian aggression, Sarajevan Serbs felt victimized by the newly established Muslim regime and what they perceived as its anti-Serbian ideology. It was difficult to tell how many Serbs stayed in Sarajevo, but Sarajevans thought that many had left at the beginning of the war. Sooner or later it turned out that most of my friends and acquaintances knew some Serbs who had remained. I was seldom introduced to them, in part because I am Croat but primarily because Serbs in Sarajevo kept a low profile, which their non-Serb friends respected. Although I respected their discretion, I wanted to hear about their experiences and attitudes. In the end, I had to ask to be introduced to a Serb, which felt awkward. One of the Serbs with whom I could talk was the caretaker of the Old Orthodox Church (Stara Crkva), whom I contacted at work in April 1996. We had several friendly and fairly open conversations before we recorded a loosely structured interview, but I did not get to know him better. From what I have heard from other Sarajevan Serbs whom I met, his experiences and opinions were shared by others, which is why I discuss his way of describing these common issues.

The caretaker was a widower in his sixties, with two grown daughters who each had a son. They fled at the beginning of the war to Spain, but he decided to stay to take care of his sick sister. He lived alone near Marindvor in an apartment house that had been abandoned by Serbs and taken over by

Muslims who held high positions. His home was searched twelve times, and he felt the pressure of being a Serb and Orthodox believer. His family was old Sarajevan Orthodox and he felt strongly rooted in Bosnia. He suffered greatly from the loss of social networks and security that the war created, but he found a refuge in the remains of the Orthodox Church and his faith, as did many other religious Sarajevans. He was supportive of the city's religious pluralism and multiethnic society but was disillusioned as to the possibility of reestablishing it.

The caretaker and many Sarajevan Serbs felt ostracized by the treatment they received from the authorities, at their workplaces, in their neighborhoods, and from their friends. As the caretaker related:

My brother was fired, for example. He was an engineer. . . . He was told, "You have an ugly name and surname. We shall pension you." . . . Then in the municipality where I live, when they were distributing the little food they had—biscuits, milk—I was not on the list. When they gave shoes, I was not on the list. Then they gave winter jackets; I was not on the list. So as a result, you started to feel uneasy. But what offended me the most was this. I am a generous man, I like people, I like to joke, laugh. Muslims were 90 percent of my friends, really, and I honestly liked and loved them. I had many girlfriends who were Muslims, because I really loved them. I was never nationally indoctrinated. . . . But now, do you know what happened? For a long time my best friends turned their heads away from me. Now as peace comes closer some of them say, "How are you?" . . . I said, "Now I don't know you. Why did you turn away your heads from me? Please, what did I do to you?"

When I suggested that his former friends might have avoided him because they were afraid to be seen with him, or perhaps even suspected him, he replied that they wanted to humiliate him.

I have heard several cases of Sarajevan Serbs being forced into early retirement, and they were all convinced that it was done in order to cleanse the workplace of Serbs and employ Muslims instead. Sarajevan Serbs generally depended on the civil courage of their prewar colleagues, neighbors, and friends. I had met non-Serbs who retained their personal bonds to Serbs they knew and did not ostracize them, but the very fact that it took a lot of courage to do so bears witness to the general anti-Serbian atmosphere.

The caretaker believed that the ostracism he and people close to him experienced during the war was entirely because of their Serb nationality. As a result, this national identification became important to him in a way that it had not been earlier: "Now they are taking away our right to say that we are Serbs; instead they insist that we should say that we are Bosnians." Being Bosnian "is one thing, but my choice of national belonging (*opredelenje*) is

Serbian and it will never be possible to wipe it out, in the same way that the Orthodox religion shall never be possible to wipe out.”

Fear of Muslim Newcomers

Most Sarajevans had problems with their new Muslim neighbors. These “internally displaced persons” from villages in rural Bosnia were seen as a threat to the secularized urban culture of Sarajevo. From my observations, Sarajevan Muslims established neighborly relations with refugee Muslims, while “mixed” families and non-Muslims had almost no contact with the newcomers. The gap between native Sarajevans and newcomers was widest for Serbs, especially in neighborhoods that had been predominantly Serbian; after most of the Serbs left the town, many newcomers settled there, a circumstance that only exacerbated divisions. Serbs, and non-Muslims generally, who remained in neighborhoods where most of the people stayed had support from their longtime Muslim neighbors. The remaining Serbs often made a very clear distinction between old Sarajevan Muslims, with whom they shared the notion of Sarajevanness, and the newcomers, whom they saw as a threat. The caretaker clearly identified the Muslim newcomers as responsible for the changes that were taking place, especially the disappearance of the pluralist, non-nationalistic Sarajevan milieu that he identified with:

You have the native Muslims, who were born here. They didn't change a lot. . . . But, the strangers came, terribly many Šiptari [Yugoslav Albanians], terribly many of those from Sandžak, that is horrible. I think that they make 60 percent now in Sarajevo.⁹ They have completely taken over everything. And they are a very rough folk, very difficult folk, who also committed crimes against the Serbian folk.¹⁰ And now we have this kind of folk. Here, we had a nice culture; this was the crossroads between West and East. People lived here. Whoever came to Sarajevo before the war could live here; he could find his place.

The caretaker described the tolerant culture of Sarajevo as at the crossroads between East and West, similarly to the description of President Izetbegović. Although Izetbegović defined this culture as a part of Bosnian Muslim identity, making it easy for Muslim Sarajevans to accept his definition of their identity, Sarajevan Serbs did not give up the notion that this culture was theirs as well and that it had thrived in multiethnic Sarajevo. However, the

caretaker did not identify the Muslim newcomers with this same culture. He described his old neighborhood in positive terms and lamented the sudden departure of his neighbors:

I lived in a new apartment house. It just so happened that we were all Serbs.¹¹ The others were not believers but atheists. The house had eight apartments, a wonderful house, it felt like one's own home. Now there are no Serbs except me in this house. Seven have left. The apartments were beautiful. But they left over night. They left such fortunes that I was simply surprised. . . . They just said, “Tomorrow we shall not be here.” One family is in the Czech Republic, one in Germany, one in Belgrade, and one even in Canada. They left; they couldn't live here any longer. They were insulted.

He regarded his new Muslim neighbors as illegitimate residents and feared their apparent monopoly of political and social power: “I hear them in the evenings saying: ‘We should get rid of this one too, so that we can be alone.’ Imagine when you hear that. And from a university professor, but he is from Sandžak. In the apartment above is the police chief of one part of the town. [In] two [other apartments there are] Muslim officers.”

Because of the war in Croatia, where Tudjman's regime effectively “ethnically cleansed” most Serbs, it could be expected that Serbs' general feelings toward Croats were not especially positive. However, I never heard any such comment. After the Muslim-Croat conflict in 1992–94, Sarajevan Serbs described Sarajevan Croats primarily as fellow victims of the Muslim authorities. “Croats have also felt it here in Sarajevo. I have many friends who are Croats. They fired two of them without any reason,” the caretaker told me. The idea that the only way to live normal lives in future was within a religiously and ethnonationally pluralist society where all citizens enjoyed equal status was common among Sarajevan Serbs.

It is interesting to compare Muslim accusations against Serbs with the Serbian point of view. The facts about the war were seldom disputed, but interpretations of those facts became informed by nationalist viewpoints. Muslims generally accused Serbs of wanting to integrate Bosnia and Herzegovina into Greater Serbia, a state with a Serbian majority in which Serbian culture and religion would be dominant. One of the phrases that was taken as a sign of Greater Serbian ideology was the Serbian claim that wherever there was a Serbian grave, it was Serbian land. In that respect, the caretaker could be classified as a Serbian nationalist: “We thought that we would live in Bosnia and Herzegovina where we were born, where our graves are. I have over thirty-six

graves of my own. Do you know what that means? That is a bond." But from his perspective, by naming the graves that tied him to the Sarajevan soil, he was just affirming his right to remain in his home as a rightful citizen. At the same time, he blamed Muslims for wanting to make a greater Muslim state: "If this continues here in Sarajevo, it won't be good. Then it is not the multinational state, not the multireligious, multiethnic state. No, that is a multi-Muslim state, to tell you the truth. Alija Izetbegović is not leading us the good way. He took us the wrong way. . . . We imagined [something else], that is why we stayed here." By calling it a "multi-Muslim" state he was ironic about Muslim politicians' frequent use of the prefix "multi," as they characterized Bosnia as a multireligious, multiethnic, and multinational state. He regarded their talk about pluralism as a cover for their actual intentions—to establish a Muslim state.

Some Serbian Sarajevans shared the caretaker's opinion that non-Muslims were left alive only because of the government's interests in maintaining its image in the West: "Muslims need us here. To support their position of a multireligious, multiethnic [state] . . . we are practically in service to the Muslim authorities. . . . So that they can say that Serbs are free, they live well, do they lack anything? But we lack everything, absolutely everything." Others took it as a sign from the authorities that it was still possible for people of all ethnonational identities to live in Sarajevo, continuing the prewar Sarajevan spirit.

People who perceived the former Yugoslavia as a home of all ethnonational groups where each group was represented on equal terms, and who regarded the federal Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina as the republic in which this principle was most important and functioned best, took the fall of this state by a war waged among these ethnonational groups as an evidence that it was impossible to live together in the future. They saw an administrative division between nationalities as the only way to prevent the same war from recurring. The caretaker explained:

I would say that we got along, and we got along very well. But on some levels they invented stupidities. And here is what we got. A bloody war never before seen in history. And it will last for a long time. So long as the questions are not solved. One people cannot command the others. . . . Here Muslims want to command the Croats and Serbs. It won't work; it won't work. The blood shall run until we extinguish each other. Make entities, so that no one can interfere. . . . To travel, to walk freely [is all right], but here is the Croatian authority and it shall be so as long as there is history. Here is Muslim authority, and here is Serbian. And that is Bosnia and Herzegovina, there you are, live there. Whoever doesn't like it can go somewhere else.

This type of solution appealed to non-Muslims because it was a way of escaping the Muslim dominance that many feared.

Croat Perspectives on Ethnonational Identity

Croats had always been a national minority in Sarajevo. During the war, the Croatian community had a strong center in the Catholic Church and its humanitarian organization, Caritas. As non-Croats were attracted by the help the Catholic community was providing for Sarajevans, the community grew in numbers and importance. Many of the newly recruited Catholics were not religious, and they came from families with mixed ethnoreligious backgrounds, which enabled them to adapt to the shifting political situation. A young Croat described this practice as opportunistic: "I don't know if you can find anyone who can honestly say that he is pure Croat. Because people who are half-Croats are going to say that they are Croats, although their mother is Serb, on the account of their father being Croat. . . . People always choose what is better. If your mother is Muslim, when [there are tensions between Croats and Muslims] you'll stress that. Now, when the relations are okay, then he is a big Croat."

Croats, like Serbs, felt threatened by the increasing presence of Islam in public life, because they interpreted it as a threat to the ethnonationally blended nature of their hometown. They felt ostracized by Muslim authorities who showed little trust, especially at the beginning of the war when Croats suddenly were forbidden to go to their prewar jobs, their apartments were searched, and some were even interrogated. Sarajevan Croats kept the notion of being Sarajevans in the first place, and the fact that many young Croat men joined the defense forces at the beginning of the war was often pointed out as evidence of Croatian loyalty and love for Sarajevo. As they were an obvious national minority, Sarajevan Croats often interpreted the events of the war as supporting the picture of Sarajevo as an ethnonational melting pot: "You know," a young woman told me, "people say that multicultural, multireligious Sarajevo is just an empty phrase. But, for us who live here, it is not an empty phrase."

Some resolved to stay and believed that such a society was going to prevail in the end, because that was the only choice they seemed to have. They were strongly opposed to Croatian nationalist politics, especially coming from Herzegovina's Croatian leadership, which sought to separate Herzegovina

from Bosnia and make it ethnically pure. A young Croat declared his allegiance to Sarajevo as his hometown and his ideal: "Don't you have your apartment here [in Sarajevo]? So how can you support those who want to drag you there [to Herzegovina]? . . . I don't know what is hidden behind the words, but if it is said that the town is shared, that it is multi, as Divić said, I am going to support it as long it is that way. . . . That is what we have to fight for. To stay here, on these territories. Be here! Live here! Save this!"

Other Sarajevan Croats lost their belief in the possibility of a society free from the domination of one nationality over others. They saw the national division of Bosnia and Herzegovina as the only solution, and consequently they left the town. A young man explained that this trend affected everyone: "There is not a single person today whose national feelings are not at least a bit awakened, and who is not moving closer toward her or his national group. Absolutely none." For some people, identifying themselves as Croat and/or Catholic was not important, while others felt this was their basic identity. However, in both cases the importance of being a Sarajevan was crucial, because it gave them the legitimacy to stay in their homes and live with full civil rights.

At the beginning of the war, Croats held Serbs responsible for starting a war based on national separatism. They accused Serbs of knowing that the war was coming and for the unnecessary and provocative expressions of Serbian national belonging. The animosity was congruent with the political and military situation between Croatia and Serbia, which had been at war since 1991. In Sarajevo, however, as the war went on, Serbs and Croats did not feel threatened by the other nation's troops or politics, but rather by the local pro-Muslim regime. As Sarajevan Serbs became a minority during the war, Sarajevan Croats began to feel greater compassion toward them. Even the Serbs who had left during the war, and who were generally seen as traitors to pluralistic Sarajevo, were seen by Sarajevan Croats as a necessary part of the town if the life they were used to was to be reestablished. Portraying Serbs as decent and moral people unjustly ostracized by their Muslim neighbors was understandable because this was how Croats themselves increasingly felt. This perception of Serbs said more about the identification of Croats with their threatened existence than about their actual relations with Serbs.

Sarajevan Croats often reacted to the threat they felt from Muslims' increasing power by expressing their contempt for and superiority over Muslims. Most of the examples focused not on Sarajevan Muslims, but rather on Muslim influences from outside: the Arab world, and the Muslim newcomers who had been displaced from eastern Bosnian villages.

However often they portrayed Muslim newcomers as "primitive," Croats kept up their private contacts with Muslim neighbors and friends, which made them realize that even Muslims were having a hard time because of the increased importance of Islam and ethnonational identities. Croats were aware that Muslims did not like the visible presence of Islam in public life either, and that its growing power over their private lives was a humiliating experience. They also knew that, although it was generally easier to live in Sarajevo if a person had a Muslim name and origin, it took much more courage for a Muslim to express his or her discontent with the regime.

But in general terms, Croats arrogantly regarded Muslims as not genuinely religious and not a legitimate nationality because the group had emerged later in history than the Croatian Catholics and the Serbian Orthodox. A typically Croat narrative sounded like this: "Four generations ago, there were no Muslims. . . . They were either Serbs or Croats who during the Turkish Empire in these territories changed their religion for some reason or the other. Some in order to survive, others in order to live in comfort. . . . Actually, they are the only people who acquired their nationality because of their religion." When I objected that Muslims nevertheless existed for many centuries and had many old traditions, the answer was: "They don't really feel it. And I understand them; it is hard to pray to God in an unintelligible language."

Croatian arrogance toward Muslims included a component of pity because of the isolation from the Western world that Muslims were forced into by their government's pro-Islamic politics. A young man drew some interesting conclusions:

It is obvious that only Muslims are interested in this abortion of the federation [between Muslims and Croats]. Because without the federation they will be isolated from the rest of the world, which is against them having some kind of a state here. . . . I am really irritated by the United States because as soon as some sort of agreement is in sight they say that they will remove the embargo [on selling weapons to the Bosnian government]. . . . This gives them [Muslims] a reason to start military offensives and get killed. It seems to me that the interest of the West here is to exterminate as many of them as possible.

In this view, Muslims were acting under the delusion that the West would sympathize with them as the victims of genocide and the proponents of a multinational state.

Croats had a different picture of the war from Muslims, and their national identification was also political and moral. While Croats felt that this

was a civil war between the peoples of one and the same country, and often saw it as a war waged by the rural population against the townspeople, Muslims stressed the nature of the war as a Serbian “aggression” of which they were the prime victims. A young Croatian man told me that this was the reason why Sarajevans increasingly socialized with people of the same nationality during the war. One evening he invited me to dinner with a young Muslim man who became his friend at the university. “We can talk to each other,” he said, “but we don’t agree. We don’t have similar opinions, but that is probably normal. No, no, it *is* normal!” He acknowledged that this difference influenced their relationship: “I don’t keep anything to myself. Perhaps I should. While he keeps quite a lot to himself. But we have a different view of this war. He thinks that it is exclusively an aggression, and I think that it is a civil war.” When we discussed what a civil war meant, he concluded that this was not a typical civil war, since three nations were involved. “It is definitely a national war,” he concluded. This sentiment struck me as yet another demonstration that the opinions expressed during the war were grounded in the speaker’s affiliation and the moral stance he or she was taking. These two friends could probably agree that the war was a “national war,” but they were using different national terminology and ascribed the guilt and suffering in different ways, which made any discussion morally sensitive and difficult.

From Yugoslavs to Sarajevans

In the political atmosphere that forced everyone to declare their national identity as Muslim, Serb, or Croat, many Sarajevans found themselves at a loss. These people had either declared themselves nationally as Yugoslavs before the war—according to the last prewar census, this group comprised approximately 10 percent of the city’s residents—and lost that option with the breakup of Yugoslavia or refused to strengthen the division of people along national lines. Many Sarajevans accepted the idea of Yugoslav nationality as a way of marking that they belonged together with the members of their families, friends, colleagues, and neighbors who happened to have different ethnoreligious backgrounds.

During the war this ideology was still strongly held and expressed. When they spoke in general terms, Sarajevans identified differences between national groups in fairly essentialist ways. But when it came to Sarajevans and people they knew personally, the tendency was to stress their common Sarajevan culture, where differences in national identity and ethnoreligious



Figure 22. An “Absolut Vodka” ad redesigned by Trio stands as a symbol of the ideology of the “fourth nation.” The label reads: “Absolute Sarajevo is made from Authentic Bosnian citizens: Muslims, Serbs, Croats, Jewish and Special blends, born in rich Country of Bosnia. The Spirit of togetherness in an age-old Bosnian tradition dating back more than 800 years. Sarajevo has been sold under the name Absolute Since 1992.” Bought in Sarajevo, March 1995; reproduced courtesy of Trio.

background were not important. Moreover, this shared culture valued the experience of living in a religiously, ethnically, and nationally blended milieu and knowing how to negotiate differences in a sociable manner. A Sarajevan journalist called the people who did not identify with one of the three major national groups the “‘fourth nation,’ the people who simply experience life in Bosnia, the real and multiethnic one, not used for the perfidious purposes of the ruling clique in federation, in their minds and hearts” (Karlaš 1998:31, my translation).

Sarajevans who could be identified as “the fourth nation” stressed that they still did not care about the nationality of a person, but rather about other human qualities. Even those who began to reevaluate their sense of national belonging and would describe essential differences between ethnonational groups still reasoned that it was hard to find a person who could claim a homogenous background. They stressed the importance of the Bosnian tradition of respecting, learning about, and socializing across ethnoreligious differences, which they considered their normal way of life. A secularized Muslim woman articulated how she developed this perspective through her own experiences:

I have lived in a mixed marriage, and I think that I grew by seeing their [Serb Orthodox] customs, going to their family patron saint feasts (*slave*). . . . God is one for all, but some call him in the Arabic language, while others call him differently. And I know that each of these religions supports the basic human values. . . . We want to live normally, to mix; after all, the whole world is mixing. I don't understand what religion and nation have to do with it. And if love exists in the world, if there is humanity, are you going to look to see whether someone is a Croat or a Muslim if you like him, if he is nice toward you, if he is a man, educated, everything that you look for and are attracted by?

In the former Yugoslavia people could signal that they belonged together despite their different ethnoreligious backgrounds by identifying nationally as Yugoslav, and during the war identifying as a Sarajevan filled the same function. But as this notion was threatened by war and the promotion of nationalistic politics, in order to protect their identity Sarajevans soon assumed an arrogant, superior stance toward non-Sarajevans. They often blamed the Muslim newcomers to Sarajevo, whom they considered primitive and condemned for supporting nationalist parties before and during the war. “This is the conflict between rural and urban. . . . This is not a war. This is the Peasant Rebellion (*Seljačka Buna*). . . . We Sarajevans, no matter who

and what we are, Muslims, Serbs, or Croats, feel a need to organize because we are Sarajevans,” a young woman told me.

The resentment that secularized Sarajevan citizens felt toward the newcomers is epitomized by a story I was told in 1995 by another highly educated woman from Sarajevo. A refugee who occupied a deserted apartment in one of the skyscrapers noticed a strange door on his floor of the building one day. When he opened it he saw that there was a small room, completely empty. He was very happy because he could store all his reserves of wood and food there. But one day recently, when the electricity came back to Sarajevo, his storeroom disappeared. There was only a hole left. He was desperate and ran to the police, shouting that his storeroom was stolen. The policeman smiled at him and asked understandingly, trying to calm the refugee down, “You mean, your storeroom was plundered?” “No! Not plundered! The whole room is stolen,” cried the refugee. It turned out that the empty room the refugee had found was the elevator, which, when the electricity came on, was called to another floor in the building.

Being Sarajevan was considered to be morally and culturally superior to being Bosnian, so many non-Muslims, as this young man from a mixed Christian background, preferred to define themselves as Sarajevans (*Sarajlije*): “I lost the state to which I belonged where I always wrote: citizenship SFRY, nationality Yugoslav. Now, when this happened I went by my father's nationality. Of course, I would never renounce my mother's origin either. . . . I was born in Sarajevo, but I wouldn't say that I am a Bosnian. Although I am. I would say that I am a Sarajevan (*Sarajlija*), of Croatian nationality, but I would never say that I am a Bosnian.” When I asked him why not, he smiled uncomfortably and said, “I cannot say that I don't love Bosnia. But I think that by my education and my upbringing I am above Bosnia. Above what has always been a general notion here.”

Even native Sarajevans and good friends were becoming nationalists during the war, a trend that was much more threatening than the nationalism of the “primitive, rural” other. Perhaps Sarajevans projected the responsibility for nationalism outside of the city in order to cope with the bitter fact that longtime residents were also changing. For Sarajevans who were strongly committed to the former Yugoslav ideology of “brotherhood and unity” as the only moral way of relating between people of different Bosnian and Herzegovinian national identities, the shock of discovering that a friend had become a nationalist was much more disturbing than their shared indignation with “newcomers.”

A middle-aged man told me a sad story:

I lost one friend, a real friend from childhood who simply went mad. . . . When I meet him on the street, I run away to another street. . . . We hadn't seen each other for four months when the war had started, and when there was heavy shelling I hurried to his place. So I went to him, and he opened the door, and we hugged and kissed heartily, how are you, where are you, and so on. And then he started to talk. That was no longer the man who had been my friend. These were not his opinions. . . . He began to hate one nation [*narod*] to the degree that he would kill them. Just because they are members of that nation. I can't understand that. I mean, I can't socialize with such people. . . . I was telling my story, trying to bring him to some sense, and I cried as I bid him farewell, mourning that friendship with these tears that poured in front of him, which could have been because of my story, but these tears were only meant for this farewell; at that moment I lost a friend. I like to say that I have lost two teeth and one friend in the war. I haven't been able to mend either the teeth or the friendship. That is a terrible feeling. To lose a friend you had known for a long time.

While most Sarajevans who began to identify with their ethnonational group saw the political solution to the atrocities as dividing the country into three nationally homogenous entities, the "fourth nation" was eager to promote a heterogeneous, multinational, and multireligious state where all citizens would be treated equally. As the possibility of a pluralistic state became more and more unrealistic, they reoriented their hopes toward local life in Sarajevo. But, if the Sarajevan prewar identity of an urban ethnoreligiously and nationally blended milieu is to survive in its full richness, it has to be recognized and promoted politically. Sarajevo still lives in the power struggle between nationalistic politics and local traditions of national blending, which has now been intensified by the exigencies of war-induced trauma and poverty.

Chapter 9

Reconceptualizing War

Government wars aren't my wars; they've got nowt to do with me, because my own war's all that I'll ever be bothered about.

—The protagonist in Alan Sillitoe's *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (1959)

Conventional European ideas of war as an ordered, potentially just means of pursuing national ends simply do not hold when confronted with a real situation on the ground. Our concepts of soldiers fighting on the front lines while civilians work to sustain the war effort are of little use, as I found out during the siege of Sarajevo. The distinction between civilians and soldiers dissolved when civilians were constantly shelled and shot at by snipers and soldiers spent two-thirds of their time at home doing civilian chores. The concept of enemy was equally elusive. In Bosnia, the identity of the enemy shifted over time as alliances and antipathies among national groups and military forces changed; the enemy was produced by the war, not the other way round. In just war theory, the legitimate cause for state violence is defense against actual or imminent attack. But who was defending what against whom, when the war in the former Yugoslavia created the differences between national groups and the conflicts between their interests, rather than being caused by them? Nationalist solidarities and oppositions were generated by war itself, not vice versa; this war was a means of creating new states with exclusive ethnonational claims.

In this situation, people who did not share the nationalist views of political elites and military leaders might refuse to fight without being regarded as traitors. The negative connotations of desertion were turned to general acceptance, or even approval, when men left combat units not because they were afraid or disloyal to their countrymen but rather when they gathered enough courage to be loyal to them and stop carrying out acts of violence

against those they did not see as their enemies. Many Sarajevans thought of nationalistic politicians as dishonest, pursuing their own power by pitting former friends against one another, and they realized that the war led only to mutual destruction rather than to victory or national security. The futility of war itself became as apparent to Sarajevan soldiers as to civilians under siege. Sarajevans were forced to make personal choices during the war. In deciding whether to go to or remain at the front lines, and in choosing to maintain or sever their relationships with people who might be seen as belonging to the enemy group, they were forced to take a personal stand. The ways in which they legitimated these choices by nationalist discourse is the key to understanding how the personal was intertwined with the collective, in this case nationalistic political ideologies and power relations.

The choices people made in specific situations were often contradictory, and the effort to rationalize his or her decisions made each individual in Sarajevo express divergent and contradictory opinions based on his or her experiences. Situations of war tend to cause this type of cognitive dissonance because of the profoundly disruptive changes that involvement in armed conflict inflicts on people's lives.¹ This psychological condition, which arises from the unavoidable conflicts between people's expectations and norms and the conduct they observe and in which they participate, is intolerable for very long. The disorientation and discomfort it creates must be resolved in order to sustain any sense of personal identity, much less integrity. What I have described as the process of changes of normality is one way of capturing people's struggle to restore a modicum of cognitive consistency.

How did Sarajevans attempt to make sense of the contradictory positions in which they found themselves in relation to the war? Sarajevans held three different conceptualizations of war that they struggled to integrate, which represent divergent stances in relation to the siege and the nationalist conflict that any individual could occupy simultaneously, depending on his or her choices and thoughts in specific situations. I call these three different modes civilian, soldier, and deserter, but in the Sarajevan situation they do not carry the common meanings and connotations of these terms. Rather, these are understandings of what was at stake in the war, ways of positioning the self in relation to the conflict, and ultimately modes of rationalizing what people themselves did. The profound lack of clarity within this framework about what power of choice people had and what responsibility they bear for their actions is inherent in the wartime situation as Sarajevans experienced it. Yet careful analysis reveals some patterns in Sarajevans' changing perceptions of war. After defining these three stances, this chapter traces them

through time, places them in relation to people's understandings of social order, and scrutinizes the ways they legitimated their actions through political ideology that transformed their personal sense of national identity during wartime.

The civilian mode of thinking about war is characterized by a perception of war as opposed to peace. Peace is considered normal, a civilized, moral way of living with juridical routines for dealing with manslaughter and material destruction in such a way that criminals are punished and violence is contained. War is a disruption, an interval of time that is abnormal and generally impossible for "us" to experience. War is something that "others" experience, whether it is "others" in time, such as our predecessors, or "others" in space, people somewhere else around the globe. Sarajevans themselves began with this view: they often recounted how they watched the war going on in neighboring Croatia, yet were still taken aback when Sarajevo was hit (Softić 1994:6). A young woman told me in 1994: "War in Dubrovnik. We watched it on the television; they said that there was no water for seven days. That was incomprehensible to us, that you could live without water. Or, that there was nothing to be bought in the stores. I couldn't understand that. But, when the war started here, when I experienced it, . . . then you understood what you had been watching on the television."

When civilians are subjected to war-related violence, the civilian mode becomes impossible to maintain, but it does not disappear. People feel so helpless in the face of an incomprehensible situation that they are at a loss for how to sustain their existence, much less act effectively. So a new mode is added, the soldier mode. The power of this way of understanding lies in its cognitive organization of war: it makes war comprehensible as a social phenomenon that can be controlled by human beings and thus renders it acceptable. War has a legitimate cause and aims, and it presumes clearly differentiated political entities that are engaged in armed conflict. In this mode, warfare has its own set of rules that differ from peacetime norms. These rules legitimate what would otherwise be socially and morally unacceptable, such as killing other humans and wreaking havoc on a city. In the soldier mode, these actions are clearly differentiated from what would have happened in normal circumstances, so the murderous or destructive actions a person takes do not make him or her into a different person. It is understood that this abnormal mode of living will end when the war does.

However, what we do in wartime and the choices we must make under abnormal circumstances do change us and our perceptions of ourselves, or at least make us constantly reconsider what is acceptable and what is not.

Even though political ideologies that legitimate those actions help us come to terms with many changes, for most people killing or ostracizing those who yesterday were their friends and neighbors and taking or destroying their homes are discomfiting acts, and in the long run they are difficult to rationalize through any political ideology. At some point, people realize that these violent circumstances are an unavoidable part of daily existence and that they must come to terms with the changes that have transformed their lives, from their means of subsistence through their relationships with others to their political ideology, in this case involving mainly their sense of ethno-religious and national identities. This cognitive change does not substitute for the civilian and soldier modes of perceiving war, as it does not take away the civilian's feelings of helplessness or the soldier's need for moral impunity. Rather, it adds to them a new deserter mode, in which people feel personally and morally responsible for their own deeds, despite their powerlessness in conditions of war, and increasingly strive to make their own choices regardless of the military and political forces that previously had determined their actions. What is more, in this mode of thinking, the differences between war and peace become blurred; the two states increasingly resemble each other.

As I sought to explore what Sarajevans thought about these issues, I found that those who were or had been soldiers kept a low profile. Even those Muslims who had been involved in the military defense of Sarajevo on the side of the Bosnian government were reluctant to be identified as soldiers. In this respect, they resembled the Serbs who had remained in the besieged city but worried that their loyalties might be suspect. Being or having been a soldier was not an identity that people wanted to affirm publicly. Although looking for soldiers or ex-soldiers to interview felt uncomfortable, I was determined to talk with some of them because I realized that their voices and viewpoints were an essential dimension of the wartime experience. All Sarajevans had to make choices in relation to the war, and the extremity of their situation was best captured in the situation of those who had chosen to bear arms. People did not point out that someone was or had been a soldier, however. It seemed to be something that men had to do, which many tried to avoid, and some managed to evade or escape, but not many seemed proud of their time in the military. I had a feeling that some soldiers were haunted by frontline trauma, such as watching the deaths of their comrades in arms, while a sense of shame hovered over the whole group, as if they had been complicit in extending a conflict from which Sarajevans suffered. They knew that they had shot at people, and even if some were not sure, most knew that

they probably also wounded and killed people. Things they did and experienced were best forgotten, because these things were at the same time traumatic and shameful.² None of these subtle hints of discomfort was explicitly acknowledged. Rather, the whole subject was surrounded with an implicit "Do not unravel" sign. The fear that I might be identified as a sensation-seeker also inhibited my inquiries.

Eventually, I had to ask one of my war friends, whom I call Emir, for an interview. Emir was a man in his forties from a Muslim ethno-religious background with whom I became acquainted in the spring of 1995. Since he and his wife were fairly young and modern, with two teenage children, we found many common interests; I especially appreciated their sense of humor and their sense of the absurd. I spent quite a few late evenings at their apartment, eating, drinking, and chatting. Although they knew about my research, in this private, social setting, we never really discussed it, just as we never discussed Emir's attitudes, choices, and experiences as a soldier. I only knew that he voluntarily joined the ABiH at the beginning of the war but was no longer at the front. When I asked him if he was willing to talk to me about his experiences and thoughts about the war, he agreed. He described the choices he made: from a civilian, turning into a soldier, and then finding ways of avoiding the armed service. In the analysis that follows, I situate Emir's first-person account as much as possible in the context of situations and experiences that Sarajevans shared.

The Official Story and Individual Views of War

When the electricity started coming back in 1996 and Sarajevans spent more time watching television, a series of programs about the beginnings of war caught my attention. Suddenly I realized that people's chaotic and opaque experiences were being formed into a coherent story. These were no longer private experiences and opinions, with each person's views as valid as any other's. The story was now becoming official and shared. While we all recognized its components, it failed to capture many of our own experiences and it posited some "facts" that we did not recognize. A schoolbook presented what became a generally accepted account:

After the independence of Slovenia and Croatia, following the logic of political events Bosnia and Herzegovina also had to go the same way. At the referendum held on

February 29, 1992, the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina opted for a self-sustained, independent, and sovereign state. The European Community recognized the national and legal existence of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina exactly on the date of the beginning of the Serbian-Montenegrin aggression against Bosnia and Herzegovina, April 6, 1992. Finally, on May 21, 1992, the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina was accepted as a member of the United Nations. (Imamović and Pelešić 1994:121, my translation)

April 6, 1992, was identified as the official beginning of the war in Sarajevo media, as well as in Western accounts. On that day snipers on the roof of the Holiday Inn opened fire on thousands of people demonstrating in front of Bosnia and Herzegovina's Parliament in Sarajevo, in a direct reaction to the recognition by the European Union and the United States of Bosnia and Herzegovina as an independent state. The referendum on independence, held some weeks earlier, was boycotted by the Serbian population, while most of the Muslim and Croat population participated. The leading Serbian party, the Srpska demokratska stranka (Serb Democratic Party, SDS), which stood behind the Serbian boycott of the referendum, took international recognition as a threat to Serbian people and initiated an armed conflict by shooting at the demonstrators. Such an account is given by Gutman (1993:xxvii), Imamović and Bošnjak (1994:17), Imamović and Pelešić (1994:121), Vulliamy (1994:73ff), Gjelten (1995:24), and Ramet (1996:246f). Other authors pick different events (Glenny 1992:167) or are less specific (Owen 1996:2; Rieff 1996:17; Woodward 1995a:1; Zimmermann 1996:186), but they still try to link the beginning of the war to some violent event filled with political significance. The problem with this effort to establish the onset of violence and thus the political significance of war is that the choice of events depends entirely on the author, and authors chose dates and events that correspond to their overall political interpretation of the war.³ Consequently, the more political power behind an account, the more valid it is assumed to be and the more generally accepted it becomes, so the official story of the war will of necessity be the story of the politically empowered.

From the very start, political leaders interpreted events in terms of conflict between national groups. Consider, for example, the Bosnian government's identification of the first victim of the war: Suada Dilberović, a twenty-four-year-old student. In 1996, Vrbanja Bridge, where she was killed on April 6, 1992, was renamed Suada Dilberović's Bridge, and her death was commemorated with a plaque and flowers. By then, when the siege of Sarajevo was being lifted, it became clear that this young woman symbolized all the losses that occurred during the war, especially the civilians who had been



Figure 23. A plaque and flowers on Suada Dilberović's Bridge, commemorating her death as the first victim of war. Sarajevo, April 1996. Photo by author.

killed by random shelling or sniper fire. That the first official victim of the war was a young female student with a Muslim name was hardly coincidental. A man would have been a potential soldier, and an old person would not have represented the destruction of the future so poignantly. A student was a symbol of education, the cultivation of intelligence, something that was good for the prosperity of every nation-state. In the simplified division of the world into good and evil, which is characteristic of wars seen in the soldier mode, a student represents the ideal good and is opposed to the primitive, uneducated, uncivilized other—Serbs, IDPs, and the war itself. Muslims were positioned as *the* victims in this war, especially by the official interpretation of the Sarajevo government, although it was generally accepted that other groups also had their share of suffering and losses.⁴ Only a week after her death, Suada Dilberović was referred to as “the first heroine of Sarajevo's defense” (*Preporod* 1992). According to Hedetoft, a “hero” represents a “cluster of national meanings” (1993, quoted in Jabri 1996:140). The transformation of a participant in an anti-nationalist protest demonstration into a nationalist

hero is an ironic indication of the construction of a Muslim national consciousness that took place during the war.

Most of the Western accounts of the war (which sometimes refer to it in the plural) organize it into major phases: the war in Slovenia, "the Serb-Croat war," and the "war between Bosnia-Herzegovina government forces and the Bosnian Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina" (for example, Owen 1996:2). Even those who concentrate on Bosnia and Herzegovina divide it into phases. For example, Magnusson (1993:23–24) defines three phases: a Serbian "blitzkrieg" from May until July 1992; the consolidation of Serbian and Croatian positions during the autumn and winter of 1992; and the war between Muslims and Croats that escalated starting in the summer of 1993. These periods had only indirect significance for people in Sarajevo. Still operating in the civilian mode, they perceived the wars in Slovenia and Croatia as unbelievable or as happening to someone else. The Serbian offensive in eastern Bosnia was felt only afterward, when Sarajevo came under siege and the town was flooded by refugees and residents heard dreadful stories of what could happen if the Bosnian Serbs' troops were to enter Sarajevo.

The periodizations imposed by historians are not useful for comprehending what war was like for the people who lived it. Sarajevans had heterogeneous understandings of when war began, and their views were place specific and context dependent. Indeed, the official account is counterproductive, since it implies that only one viewpoint is valid. What these generalizations demonstrate, rather, is the drive to provide clarity and structure to war itself, typical of the soldier mode. The "thickness" of concrete experiences, by contrast, leaves space for different ways of remembering war—a fact that becomes strikingly obvious in the versions that the conflicting parties usually promote. Over time, the opaque reality of war as experienced by individuals becomes organized into a narrative with fixed and symbolically pregnant dates and events. Finally, the social memory of war becomes politically biased by those who have the power of turning it into history.

For Sarajevans, the war began on whatever day they were first subjected to heavy shelling. A letter written by a young woman in Sarajevo to her sister in Zagreb on April 6, 1994, recalls these disparate moments of realization.⁵

Do you remember how nonplussed the neighbors in Radićeva were when, immediately after we arrived, we asked them to tell us what their cellar was like and even to show it to us? Funny, on that April 7, '92 the war had not yet seriously started for them, because no shell had yet fallen in their courtyard. But we, who lived only twenty or so minutes further away, had already had the experience of spending forty

hours in a cold cellar crowded with neighbors, from babies to seventy-year-olds. (Softić 1994:11–12, my translation)

The disruptions of peacetime life occurred one after another, but so insidiously that people did not add them up. Emir described interruptions in transportation that interfered with his work, but at that time, he said, "I had no idea (pause), I couldn't even imagine this sort of war happening. . . . I continued going to my firm, but you didn't really know whether to go or not. Trams were not working, and some people came while others didn't. You came to work, but you didn't have anything to do. Total chaos." Then, suddenly, a moment came when people realized that circumstances had changed so drastically that the situation could no longer be perceived as peace. Only then was it possible to look back at the previous disruptions of normal life and decide which of them was most significant. In this sense, war arrived only in retrospect, as people made sense of the past in relation to recent events.⁶ At that point the civilian mode characteristic of peacetime existence lost its power and the soldier mode became dominant.

Many Sarajevans experienced the course of the war as a flow of time filled with a constant struggle for survival and a helpless waiting for the siege to end. During the first year, the dates for the next negotiations, both hoped for and dreaded, were temporal points that organized life into bearable periods. Whenever a negotiation and a ceasefire failed, a new date was set. People hoped that if they only endured the intervening weeks or months everything would return to normal. By the time I arrived in Sarajevo in 1994, people were aware of this little time-trick that they played and invariably found themselves cheated by. In September 1994, a ceasefire that had lasted over six months was being brought to an end by the gradual escalation of random shelling and sniper activity.⁷ By that time few people cared about negotiation dates, because after the tenth or twentieth projected or actual negotiation date passed and whatever talks were or were not held failed to change the situation, the prospect of the war ending became unreal. Sarajevans organized their lives in accordance with the state of war in the way that is characteristic of the deserter mode. As people left behind any notion of victory or defeat, the date that hostilities began, too, lost its significance. Time itself acquired a fluid character. Sarajevans' orientation in time became distorted as a part of the general derangement of any predictable order and the futility of their own actions. Tone Brंगा encountered a similar distortion of time when she talked to villagers among whom she had done anthropological fieldwork before the war, but who were now refugees.⁸ Her

informants mixed tenses after they had been expelled from their village by violent means. "They were living in a time, a dramatically and constantly changing time, which was neither in the past, the present, nor the future," she explained (1995:xvii).

While Sarajevans looked toward possible negotiations to restore the peace, the international media and authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina singled out particular instances of violence as especially significant. The events that received the most exposure, even political exploitation, were the two shelling of the central Markale market and the shelling of a bread line in the shopping street Vaso Miskin on May 27, 1992. The chronicler of *Sarajevo War Drama* wrote:

Shock! Stress! Swallow fastened in the throat! Stupor. Television cameras informed the civilized world about the massacre in Vaso Miskin Street. Serbian medieval forest-people aimed at and hit the people waiting in the queue for their daily bread. Body parts thrown around, blood, dead, wounded, tears, cries. God, is there a proper punishment for these crimes? Shelling the innocent people. . . . "Serbian people show by their conduct that they do not belong to civilization," proclaimed the American statesman John Baker. (Miličević 1993:15–16, my translation)

A Sarajevo chronicler and an American statesman express here attitudes that exemplify the simplistic bifurcation characteristic of the soldier point of view, in this case into good, innocent, civilized Sarajevans and evil, "savage" Serbs. The ascription of responsibility indiscriminately to all of the "Serbian people" by a representative of the most powerful military force in the world was especially unfortunate because it fueled the imposed ethnonational divisions and attitudes hostile to reconciliation. Sadly, this type of statement is characteristic of diplomatic interventions that supposedly aim at achieving peace.

Eventually, the dramatic nature of events forced those who observed them from afar to feel compelled to act. While in 1992 an international diplomatic statement was an achievement, the shelling of the Markale market on February 5, 1994, led to an international intervention that forced the Bosnian Serbs' Army to withdraw heavy artillery twenty kilometers from the center of the town and marked the start of the first long ceasefire. The second massacre at the Markale market on August 28, 1995, triggered the long-awaited NATO bombing of Bosnian Serbs' artillery positions on the mountains surrounding the town and eventually led to the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords.

For the vast majority of Sarajevans, the massacres that outsiders found so appalling that they changed the course of political, diplomatic, and mili-

tary activity were not the most significant events they experienced during the war. People pointed out that there were so many violent acts against civilians in Sarajevo during the war that it was ironic that the international community needed the media's overexposure of an event where between twenty and seventy people lost their lives in order to decide to do something effective.⁹ The shelling of civilians standing in line to buy bread aroused public outrage because the civilians represented the essence of innocents struggling for bare subsistence. Indeed, the last two massacres were so effective in provoking intervention that many people felt a certain doubt as to whether the Bosnian Serbs had been the ones who fired. Perhaps the shelling came from the Bosnian government's side in a calculated effort to draw international attention to the unsustainable character of the situation, as the Bosnian Serbs suggested (cf. Owen 1996:274, 357; Zimmermann 1996:156). The fact that international and UN observers must have been able to locate the positions from which the shells were fired but never announced it made the shelling seem like a political ploy. These massacres became a powerful public symbol for the character of the siege of Sarajevo: Serbian savages' war against the civilized world. Sarajevans' skepticism about the official version of these events paralleled the divergence between their own experiences and public representations of the conflict. The darkest days were those on which people suffered personal losses, which were often not accompanied by massive casualties but occurred with an incomprehensible randomness. For the people I met in Sarajevo, the massacres became important mostly as points of orientation in remembering the character of the preceding and following phases of the war. More important were the cold and foodless winter that followed the shelling of 1992, which marked the hardening of the siege, and the reopening of the tram traffic in March 1994 after the February massacre, which gave the first hope that the war might really end.

During the spring of 1995 most of the people dreaded May 1, when the 1994 ceasefire was to end. Nothing happened in Sarajevo that month; instead, "ethnic cleansing" took place in Srpska Krajina in Croatia. The much-feared shelling of Sarajevo came in June and continued almost unabated until NATO bombed Bosnian Serbs' positions around Sarajevo in August 1995. Sarajevans welcomed the bombings and perceived this intervention as a turning point that signaled the West's decision to stop the war. Although the "peace process" that followed can be divided into stages, Sarajevans took nothing for granted until it produced concrete results: the Dayton Peace Accords, the lifting of the siege of Sarajevo, the gradual reintegration of the sections of the city held by Bosnian Serbs throughout the war, postwar

elections monitored by the international community, international aid for restoration of the town, and a return to the peacetime routines of life. The signing of the Dayton Peace Accords in December 1995 brought a sense of relief, but significant change occurred only when people could walk in the streets knowing that there were no more snipers aiming at them almost a half a year later. The first time they walked through the reintegrated parts of the town, it was hard to believe that only a few days before it had seemed the most impossible thing in the world. The cognitive gap between immediate threat to life and its absence was so wide as to preclude building conceptual bridges between them.

The terrible disappointment with peace came later, when people realized that, although they were not being shot at any more, which was by no means a small thing, no other major changes had taken place in their lives. Apartments were damaged; gas and electricity were not always available. People were out of work and still had to depend on humanitarian relief. Along with the physical and economic fabric of their lives, their social networks had been destroyed. Although some people were coming back from their places of refuge abroad, those closest to them often did not. One woman voiced a common sentiment: "The worst thing that happened in this war is the peace. There is no enthusiasm. After the Second World War we all went and built the country with our bare hands, volunteering. But now, people are so disillusioned." Through the imitation of life, people had kept an idea of peace in the back of their minds. But the war did not stop in a clear-cut way, and the ending of the war was marked by same type of fluidity as its beginning and its course. Peace, when it came, did not restore the prewar life people remembered but required them to continue struggling with many of the aspects of war they had found most distressing.

The conventional idea of war held by civilians, as an anomalous situation confined to a limited period of time, arises from a need to impose some order on the otherwise confusing phenomenon of war, where even the linear organization of time is unattainable. For Sarajevans, as for many people in the aftermath of war, the need to put the events of war behind them without forgetting what happened laid the groundwork for a retrospective simplification of the war's complexities and the eventual ritualizing of events, which is typical of the soldier mode. Shared memories of war generate social cohesion. They are ritualized around specific dates and events that have collective significance, but these events are chosen and their meanings inscribed by those in power in order to validate their position in the new, nationalistic social order.¹⁰ Because of this, the individual experience and perception of war

always differs from the politically empowered, official version. The victorious side enshrines its soldier viewpoint, while the deserter mode in which increasing numbers of people operated through the duration of the war is set aside.¹¹

Ordering War

Many accounts describe this war as "unimaginable" (Morokvasić 1998:66) and unprecedented in its cruelty (Vuković 1992:14–15; Imamović and Bošnjak 1994:17; Kubert 1996:141). As Isaković put it: "I do not know whether this is war. The word war does not encompass everything that is happening. War has some rules. This is something unprecedented. Unprecedented and not previously experienced forms of evildoings and dirtiness of these evildoings" (Isaković 1994:13, my translation). Such extreme characterizations bespeak the writers' inability to assimilate the appalling facts of this war to their idealized conceptions of European history. The supposed uniqueness of the experience of this particular war points to a common characteristic in these accounts: people's inability to let go of their perceptions of the normal peacetime order of things. Similar accounts exist also for other wars and genocides.¹² It is as if a refusal to realize the possible consequences of what is happening around them can protect people from what they fear.

In Sarajevo, people continued to go to work even though everything was collapsing around them. Information about what was going on was indirect and unclear, and signs of divisions and groupings along ethnonational lines began to appear. Nationalist politics and national interests started to take over the joint Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina, leading to the SDS boycott and eventually the demise of civilian political institutions. In March the town was blocked by barricades, set up by masked people who later were identified as Serbs, especially Serbs from outside of Sarajevo, the villagers, the uncivilized, primitive "others." A Serbian wedding party was shot at, apparently for an aggressive display of Serbian symbols in the city center. Some thought that national signs were unnecessary and silly, while others tried to do something to stop the division of society. But not many thought that these disruptions were significant or going to last. Even when they started referring to "the war," people thought that it would not last long and that the prewar order would soon be reestablished. Those who felt that life was not sustainable in these conditions fled the town with their families, as Emir's Serbian neighbor did: "That man was scared. He was terrified. Of what would

happen to him. He came to our apartment once, casually, to have coffee. Afterward, when I replayed the scene in my mind I had the feeling that he came to investigate the situation, to feel the terrain, whether he was in danger, and to see what mood the neighbors were in. But he was a totally scared man. So I wasn't at all surprised when he left." Only in retrospect, though, could Emir understand how endangered his Serbian neighbor felt.

Most Sarajevans applied the term "war" to the situation after they had been shelled. Experiencing life-threatening circumstances on an unprecedented and unimaginable scale made it imperative for them to find some way of understanding and dealing with the situation and stimulated their adoption of the soldier mode. The schoolbooks used in areas under the control of the Bosnian government illustrate the conceptual organization of war by identifying opposing sides. In 1994, in the midst of the conflict, new books offered a sweeping account of Serbian aggression:

Their intent was to . . . accomplish the ancient dream of the Serbian nationalists to make a so-called Greater Serbia. . . . The attack started on April 6, 1992. The former Yugoslav People's Army and domestic Chetniks armed to the teeth started to attack the unprotected settlements and the unarmed people with the most lethal weapons. . . . [The people] showed a fierce resistance. With hunting guns and hand-made weapons Bosnian and Herzegovinian fighters confronted the tanks, cannons, and airplanes of the aggressor. . . . Then the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina was formed. In a short time it became an organized power that took a stand before its people in order to protect them from the crimes of Serbo-Montenegrin aggressors and domestic Chetniks. . . . The intention of the aggressor was to clear the Bosnian and Herzegovinian territories of the non-Serbian people, in the first place of Bosniacs, in order to create an ethnically cleansed Serbian territory. . . . The unprecedented crimes followed. Women, children and old people were slaughtered, there were rapes, plundering, and burning. Villages, schools, factories, mosques, old monuments, all that was Bosniac and Muslim, was disappearing in flames. (Imamović and Bošnjak 1994:17–18, my translation)

The narrative of unarmed civilians ruthlessly attacked by a powerful enemy army, the victims whose valiant resistance becomes embodied in their own army, is well known from narratives of the Second World War and the partisan resistance against Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. The difference here is that "the people," Bosnian Muslims, are called Bosniacs.¹³

What Emir called "the centers of power" framed the war in the nationalist idiom from the very start. The identification and consolidation of the enemy, united in its assumed interests and goals, assigned responsibility for causing the war as well as guilt for whatever happened during its prosecu-

tion. It turned the otherwise appalling immorality of destruction into an organized and understandable phenomenon, an acceptable reality. It is more reassuring to perceive war as a continuation of politics by other means, as Clausewitz's (in)famous definition put it in 1832, than to face its chaotic and horrific nature (see Clausewitz 1997). The legitimate nationalist explanation characteristic of the soldier mode of thinking eased the helpless desperation of the civilian mode of thinking when people were confronted with the atrocities of war.

The organization of war into sides with political aims is the mode of thinking characteristic of states. It is often strongly infused with moral judgments, because from the perspective of each side in the war, the enemy is the evil, self-interested aggressor while "our guys" are the defenders of basic human rights and universal values. This dynamic produces conflicting interpretations of war, and the "winner" usually gets to establish its interpretation as the sole true one, making war understandable and coherent. During the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, moral positioning permeated all aspects of life, starting with the label used for the violence occurring there. By choosing one of the existing labels—war, civil war, aggression, or genocide—you automatically positioned yourself as supporting either the Croat, the Serb, or the Muslim side. Generally speaking, the Serbian side wanted to define the war as a civil war in order to prevent international intervention. For the same reason, the term also suited international observers. "Aggression" was used mostly by the Bosnian government to blame the Serbs for the war. The Bosnian government used "genocide" to assert that Muslims were being slaughtered solely because of their ethnoreligious identity and to characterize ethnic cleansing as among the worst crimes in human history. Some foreign journalists and intellectuals used "genocide" to point to the unacceptable conduct of the war: that innocent civilians were being murdered in violation of international law. I have chosen to use the term "war" to describe these events and situations because that was the term most commonly used internationally as well as locally. It also admits of multiple sides and does not assign blame automatically. However, it is important to be aware that anthropological research in such a politically sensitive field is by necessity positioned.

Sooner or later, the experiences of war create situations in which the disruption of life can no longer be justified or understood by any rules or logic of war. Emir recounted one incident that for him emptied the war of meaning:

In my old unit there was a boy from the orphanage near our headquarters. In the orphanage he had a younger brother and sister. A fine boy. Good person. Scared and

young. He had just turned eighteen years of age. After I changed units I heard that he got killed, somewhere in Vogošća.¹⁴ They were going, naively, over a field, and an anti-aircraft cannon was shooting at them. He got hit in the groin. They couldn't evacuate him so they hid for some time, and he bled to death. There was a comrade with him who tried to help him; they had bread with them so the comrade tried to stop the bleeding by pressing the bread against the wound. But he died. What hurts is that the brother and sister he was taking care of—he was their mother and father—they lost him.

The crucial point with this account is that Emir sees the young man in the first place as a person in relationship to others, not as a soldier. He identifies with the siblings' loss, not with the national cause. The young man's death felt so unjust that no cause could be seen as worth it (see Morokvasić 1998:66). The longer a war goes on, the more likely people are to have experiences that make the war seem senseless; the soldier mode of thinking does not hold. At this point, when nationalist justifications fail, the deserter mode begins to emerge.

As the war continued, the distinction between civilians and soldiers faded for men in the hills as well as for the dwellers in the town below. Emir found surviving in Sarajevo more of a challenge than serving in the military:

We went to the lines of separation [front lines] in shifts, five days on the line and ten days rest [at home]. . . . Coming home was chaos. You came from terrible hygienic conditions, sleeping for five days in a half-destroyed, deserted, and filthy house, making fire in ovens that were falling apart, digging trenches but not being able to wash yourself. . . . So, when you came home your first thought was to take a bath. [But] there was no electricity, and no gas to warm the water. You had a bit of wood. . . . I always took off all my clothes immediately in the hall, and went into the bathroom, which was freezing in wintertime. You washed yourself quickly. Then all the domestic activities were waiting for you. . . . The first thing I would do after coming from the front was to fetch water. I needed a whole day for this. And the same before leaving for the front. . . . There was always a crowd waiting for water. People were nervous, there was shelling. It was interesting when a shell would fall, you didn't leave the queue, because if you had already waited for two hours, what then? You had to have water. . . . That was really the worst, bringing the water.

In Emir's account, the distinction between soldiers' and civilians' experiences of war is blurred. His life was threatened in both places, but being shelled while fetching water as a civilian was worse. He found more sociability as a soldier, as men found ways of passing the time together. At home, he did not go to neighborhood gatherings, where mostly women went. "In five days [on the front lines] you had time to talk enough, to change the flow

of thoughts in your head," he explained. "So I'd stay at home and listen to the news, meditate in the dark, pointlessly."

Moral Choices and Political Legitimation

Nationalist accounts of April 6, 1992 avoid mentioning the fact that the demonstration in front of the Parliament in Sarajevo that day was civilians' last attempt to resist the violent imposition of national separatism. The anti-nationalist demonstration gathered at least twenty thousand participants on the streets.¹⁵ In the former Yugoslavia, all demonstrations were organized by the state. Now, the people were answering the dissolving state with the same message that had been imposed on them for so many years: brotherhood and unity. One speaker said, "Let all the Serb chauvinists go to Serbia and let the Croat chauvinists go to Croatia. We want to remain here together. We want to keep Bosnia as one" (report by Michael Montgomery, *Daily Telegraph*, April 7, 1992, quoted in Malcolm 1994:235). Officials of the government of Bosnia and Herzegovina came in for criticism when they advanced the idea of separation. Many Sarajevans resisted national divisions wherever they appeared. In his firm, Emir heard "a rumor that a Serb branch had been formed" and was upset that others seemed to be going along: "How could they be destroying" what existed in Sarajevo? "In the beginning we had even secret meetings, younger people, we wanted to pursue our own line, we wouldn't allow the division, we were against national firms."

Even after the protests failed and national separation increased, many Sarajevans refused to believe that further escalation of violence was possible and that war would be fought between Bosnian nations. When Emir joined the defense forces, he explained, "I still didn't understand the situation. I asked whether all [nationalities] were represented in these units. They showed me the list and I saw that there were Croats, Serbs, and Muslims on it. Naturally, since we lived in a mixed part of the town. So I volunteered." This mixed group met in a public building in May 1992. The defense forces were as chaotic as the situation in the town. "Shells were already falling, bullets whistling, front lines were established. It was more or less already known which territory belonged to whom. . . . Sometimes we went to the lines of separation [front lines], although these lines were protected in the first place by the people living there. They protected their hearths. There was still no consciousness formed in people." In this account, Emir retrospectively described the initial civilian ways of acting and emphasized the powerlessness

of that position. When Emir referred to his naiveté and lack of consciousness, he was speaking from a soldier stance: it was naive not to realize that there was a war going on, that the antagonistic sides were different national groups, and that he belonged to the Muslim side represented by the Bosnian government. He regarded his attempts to maintain unity at work in much the same way: "Today you see how all that was naive. You thought you could do something, but you could do absolutely nothing. The centers of power where decisions were made were detached from our institution, and we were totally out of touch with those centers."

In peacetime, citizens have power; in war, they are powerless. Emir's civilian mode of thinking became overtaken by the soldier mode. The decision to shift from a mixed military unit to an almost purely Muslim one, which consisted of men from the quarter of town where he had spent his childhood, followed logically. The fact that he was personally acquainted with everyone, including the Serbs, who served in this unit made them worthy of trust. At the time that Emir gave me this soldierly explanation, he knew that the decision involved deserter logic: you go where you feel most safe, and that is with people you know well. But his explanation was still in the soldier mode, which is why he needed to explain why he could trust the Serbs in this unit. In this way of thinking, fellow Muslims were by definition trustworthy.

In *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry describes the process of polarization that takes place in wartime:

In the opening moments of war [there are] no longer the diffuse . . . persons, projects, and concerns that existed immediately prior to war's opening, because those . . . separate identities have suddenly crystallized into two discrete identities. . . . The distinction between "friend" and "enemy"—identified by Carl Schmitt as the fundamental distinction in politics equivalent to good and evil in moral philosophy and beautiful and ugly in aesthetics¹⁶—is in war converted to an absolute polarity . . . registered in some version of us-them idiom. (Scarry 1985:88)

War has a propensity to enforce both an antagonistic division between groups and homogeneity within groups. As Vivienne Jabri has observed, nationalism legitimizes war, while "war is a constitutive element of collective identity" (1996:139–40). In Sarajevo, the war was indeed the constitutive element of ethnonational groups, and nationalism indeed legitimized the war. War enforced both division and homogenization along ethnonational lines, and thus *created* antagonistic national groups, contrary to a widespread misconception that the war was *caused by* nationalistic antagonisms.¹⁷

Accepting the war entailed accepting its aim: the division of the population into national groups and territories. For Emir, seeing the situation in the soldier mode meant choosing to identify with the Muslim side. Emir's wife articulated this process concisely, using an argument strikingly similar to that promoted by the government in Sarajevo:

Serbs made a mistake when they went into Bijeljina and made a bloody fight, because it was the Arkanovci¹⁸ who found the unprepared, unarmed folk. And they made bloody slaughters. Tremendous obstinacy, defiance, and the wish to survive were awakened in the people, and they realized on the basis of this event that we were something different. There, I never knew that I was a Muslim, but now I know that I am something different [from the Serbs] because somebody is slaughtering me. . . . And then the people . . . arrayed themselves without weapons; without anything they defended themselves.

The reciprocal logic of war—discovering difference in the process of conflict—is audible in this account. In this logic lies the power of war to define false truths: discovering difference becomes a way of explaining the violence.

Identification with the national cause was implicit in war terminology. Thus far Emir had referred to the front lines as "lines of separation" marking the divisions between the three Bosnian nations. Further on in his account Emir used another term, "the line of responsibility." Each military unit was assigned responsibility for a specific part of the front line that surrounded the city. Using "responsibility" to denominate what soldiers were doing at the front line—bearing weapons and shooting at the enemy—turned the abstract and collective nature of soldiers' tasks into an individual moral act. For an adult male in Sarajevo, it was easy to associate this responsibility for the front line with his responsibility for his own family. Both the family and the front line needed to be "protected," and when acts of war are defined as defense, this identification works even more easily. As duty to the nation was translated into responsibility for the family, the social roles of soldier and father, brother, or son became interchangeable.

By the fall of 1994, Emir and many other Sarajevans had realized that the unity and defense of the nation in whose name they were fighting were just words in the mouths of politicians who were not sacrificing themselves for the cause but benefiting from the conflict. They began to understand people who were not willing to fight for any cause and to see that the enemy soldiers were probably in a situation similar to their own. Emir questioned the neat division into a Serbian and a Muslim side and the guilt of all Serbs; being a

soldier lost its meaning. In his account, he identified the initial cause of the war as the split along national lines for which the Serbs were to blame, reflecting the official interpretation of the government he lived under. When he described the defense of his own hearth as the reason for joining the army and his fear of unreliable Serbs in the mixed military unit, he was operating within the same explanatory framework. But when it came to his neighbors and his fellow combatants, his account was full of understanding for the reasons behind their fear, their refusal to take up weapons, and their decision to leave the town. Here, the war stopped making sense, and the soldier mode did not apply. Emir explained the situation of a Serbian neighbor:

The man simply didn't want to go to the army, so they said, very well, you won't carry a gun but then you'll dig trenches. He probably didn't like it so he left. . . . The digging of trenches was worse for people who were not soldiers. . . . When I was on the line of responsibility I knew when I was sheltered and when I was visible. . . . But these people came from outside and they didn't know the terrain. The ones guarding the line didn't tell them what they needed to know. You know, they exposed themselves, and got hit by a sniper or a grenade. . . . There were these units of Civilian Defense . . . they came for one day to dig. . . . When an antitank shell hit my apartment, this Serb neighbor was the first one to come and help, to clean it up. A fine man. Not because he helped me; I also thought highly of him before. He knew how to fix many things. . . . He had tools, so when I needed something I went to him, and if I didn't know how to do it he would show me. And he was always ready to help.

Another man who served in a trench-digging unit explained why soldiers on the line did not help those who dug: most of them were Serbs. In his unit, the soldiers provoked the trench diggers by saying that the Serbs on the other side were their own people, so they would not hurt them and they had nothing to fear. Trench diggers often felt that they were exposed to the fire from both sides.

In his account of another Serb neighbor, Emir not only showed human understanding of the man's decision to leave but also acknowledged for a moment that his own decision to join the ABiH was wrong:

They left by the end of the summer of 1992, so they were here for some time. It is strange, but he wasn't mobilized anywhere. But I don't know, these were the subjects that you couldn't openly ask people about, because there were many people hiding from the army, not only Serbs but also Muslims. Smart people, really. Smart, not smart, I don't know. Yes, they are smart, now. From today's perspective, when you add all things up, when you see that most of the politicians talk about one thing and do something else. All the politicians hid their sons or placed them abroad, or had them



Figure 24. The holes in the ground are entrances into a system of trenches and tunnels on the front line in Dobrinja that was dug by people who did not want to bear weapons. This task was more hazardous than fighting; enemy soldiers could hide in the buildings just across the street. Dobrinja, spring 1996. Photo by author.

employed somewhere where they were far away from, from [pause] dangers. So it was not only characteristic of Serbs. The majority, well, not a majority but a large number of people, tried to avoid the gun [armed service], of course, in order to protect themselves. Especially in the beginning, because they couldn't grasp the whole of the situation. Because what happens if you wait, rely on someone else? Who is that "someone"? I mean, if you don't join the forces and resist, your destiny is clear. He'll come to your house, into your apartment. Besides all the moral dilemmas.

Here Emir wrestled with his moral dilemmas and the burden of his own choices. After describing the impossibility of sustaining the national cause and the righteousness of the decision to avoid military service, he once again used the soldier mode of thinking in order to justify having become a soldier. This moral pendulum, swinging back and forth between the deserter and soldier viewpoints, is characteristic of accounts by people existentially involved in war.

Personal choices in war are perceived to be of existential importance: any decision can be a decision between life and death, although amid the chaos of war it is most often impossible to predict which act might be the one that will save you. Collective ideology legitimates individual choices, endowing them with a sense of moral righteousness, while the collective depends on the loyalty of individuals. The historian Eric Hobsbawm elucidates this characteristic of nation-states: "As modern war illustrates, state interests now depended on the participation of the ordinary citizen to an extent not previously envisaged. . . . The degree of sacrifice which could be imposed on civilians had to enter the plans of strategists. . . . The question of the 'nation,' and the citizen's feelings towards whatever he regarded as his 'nation,' 'nationality' or other centre of loyalty, [was placed] at the top of [the] political agenda" (Hobsbawm 1990:83). War depends on the mobilization of public opinion and of citizen-soldiers.¹⁹

In adopting the soldier mentality, Emir identified as a Muslim and supported the Muslim cause and the government in Sarajevo. But the inconsistencies between the national doctrine and his experiences led him to conclude that those who avoided military service did the right thing. At that point Emir had deserted the soldier cause. Eventually he managed to act in accordance with this realization: "Until 1994 I was on these lines of separation. After that I continued in the same unit but not in the fighting formation. I went over to the command, to finances, as an accountant; I did some programming. Basically I saved my ass. I got myself out of the way." Emir's disappointment in the national cause meant giving up making moral judgments of people around him based exclusively on their nationality. Serbs could be good, trustworthy people, while Muslims could be bad and cheat others. Emir's departure from

the armed service was the consequence of his dissent from the national cause and its soldier mentality.

The inconsistencies in accounts of war appeared when the conversation came to the personal level of experiences and relationships, in much the same way that consistencies in ideas about another group's national character disappeared when it came to other people whom Sarajevans knew personally and stayed in contact with. On the concrete, experiential level, uncertainty about what was right or wrong and why all this was happening prevailed, and people attempted to understand others' choices even though they were different from their own. It is possible that nationalist explanations lost their power over people in Sarajevo as the war went on because people got used to danger and were not terrified any more. In the beginning of the war, nationalism helped to quiet people's existential fear about what was going to happen. It offered a solution and made it possible for people to act, even in a situation that made them feel completely powerless. As people learned how to survive in the midst of war, nationalism lost its soothing power. Fear receded into the background as something that people had to live with.

Nationalism also lost its power because the choices people made no longer needed moral legitimation. When Emir decided to depart from the armed forces in 1994, any action that offered a prospect of making a person's life better was seen as natural and moral. Just as some soldiers shifted into the deserter mode, Sarajevans no longer judged others by the soldier standard. In both Sarajevo and Croatia, I noticed that the fiercest nationalists were those who avoided military service and those who gained economic and/or political power while the majority of the population lost it. Those who benefited from war needed to legitimize their position, and nationalism was the perfect way of doing it in these political circumstances. The men who served at the front lines, who were exposed to the dangers of war, were often the least nationalistic. They had the courage, as well as the moral capital, to question the righteousness of the grand national cause. So, contrary to the common assumption that personal experiences of violence and loss make people into nationalists, in the beginning of the war in the former Yugoslavia fear and the threat of violence and loss made people incline toward nationalistic ideology and, over time, personal experiences of war tended to move them away from it. Many people who suffered personal losses because of the war used nationalist rhetoric to make some sense of their loss. Nationalism has profited from mourning, as people seek some redeeming value in what would otherwise be random personal tragedies. The rationalizing power of nationalism and

soldier logic should not be underestimated, for people living in the war as well as for the observers.

The Transformation of Trust

Changes in people's attitudes toward war began with the shocking realization that war was possible. The normal order of civilian life was shaken. Daily shelling was a constant threat to life. The media continuously reported on massacres of entire families in villages and small towns across Bosnia. Every day the incidents were closer and closer to Sarajevo. The encompassing existential threat that informed Sarajevans' lives made people doubt that their prewar sociocultural and political norms were still valid. Gradually, more and more segments of the old society ceased to function, and new normalities had to be established.

In this situation, the political call for national solidarity based on the distinction between "them" and "us" was answered. The group to be protected expanded from the family to the nation. The bewilderment characteristic of the civilian mode of thought was replaced by an acceptance of the war and nationalist explanations for its causes. In the soldier mode of thought, the dominant model for explaining the war was the nationalist paradigm of the ruling political-military elites, and every Sarajevan found her- or himself testing it in everyday situations. Emir described the process by which he adopted a nationalist viewpoint after he joined the armed forces:

They took us to a location, the first encounter, with a real front. You came and saw bloody uniforms thrown around. The people you met were retelling the stories, how someone was wounded, how someone got killed. . . . Only then did you understand the situation and what was going on. And you saw yourself in a situation of real danger. Danger to life. . . . But you didn't have any other choice. My decision to join was not in the first place because of national feelings. . . . It was difficult and risky to leave the town, so what next? Your own decision became simply imposed on you, the decision to defend yourself, and nothing else.

As time went by, more and more Serbs were leaving. Suddenly someone would not come for several days. When you sent men to see what was going on, it turned out that he had left. You know, it was war. You went with them [Serbs] to the front line and you asked yourself with whom were you actually serving? How safe were you from that same fellow soldier? So I went over to a unit with mostly people from Vratnik,²⁰ where I was born. . . . These were the guys whom I more or less knew, and here were our [local] Serbs from the Muslim quarters of town (*mahale*) also. It is interesting that there were no cases of someone turning his back on you or running

away. It might be because they knew who they were with and were not feeling threatened or afraid. Because those who ran away must have been as scared of me as I was scared of them. It was because we didn't know each other. But here [in the new unit] the situation was different. If you had a Serb with you, you knew for sure who he was.

While mistrust on the grounds of national identity disrupts relationships when people move from the civilian mode to the soldier mode, trust can be restored among familiar friends when they move toward the deserter mode.

Emir realized that in a war he had to join the collective defense. Perceiving the war in the soldier mode, he lost his individuality and started to identify himself as interchangeable with any other person in the same uniform, fighting for the same government and for the same national cause. He was no longer personally responsible for the consequences. His choice was imposed on him by the situation.

The vital importance of group solidarity is apparent in Emir's decision to change units in order to feel safe among men he knew, Muslims and a few Serbs from the neighborhood where he spent his childhood, not the anonymous Serbs who, he felt, could have betrayed him at any time. The exception he made for Serbs he knew personally is one indication of his modification of the nationalist ideology. After the war became a way of living, Sarajevans began to notice more discrepancies in the nationalist ideology. All Serbs were not the same. Moreover, Emir knew that the unreliable Serbs felt the same mistrust he did; he perceived them as similar to himself rather than as members of the other group. The soldier logic of homogenous and mutually exclusive groups endowed with opposite moral and immoral characteristics was called into question when people realized that not all members of the enemy nation were bad and immoral and that not all of their own national brethren could be trusted. The deserter mode began when people were no longer willing to offer their lives for the sake of a national cause. Those who experienced war atrocities most directly were most aware of the shallowness of its legitimation. As people shifted out of the soldier mode, they reaffirmed their identification as Sarajevans.

Although the process of developing civilian, soldier, and deserter perceptions of war had a chronological dimension, after some time people in Sarajevo incorporated all three modes of thought and switched between them, depending on the social occasion, the point they were making, and the complexity of their experience. Generally, the more public the occasion, the more ideological the statement. During the war in Sarajevo people publicly

expressed the necessity of defending themselves, their fellow citizens, and their country by using weapons against the aggressor. They legitimized violence from their side and found evidence to lay guilt on and often demonize the other side. They talked about the rules of war to show how the other side was breaking them. Privately, it was harder to maintain clear definitions of national causes; categorizations of friends, neighbors, and family members into “us” and antagonistic “others”; notions of just and unjust violence; and concepts that neatly divided war and peace. War experience blurred borders into a continuum of social relationships that shifted over time and depended upon context.

This interpretation of experiences of war in Sarajevo is applicable more generally. The actors and discourses on the official political and diplomatic level, international as well as national, generally adopt the soldier mode of thinking. In wartime, this military mode tends to monopolize public discourse through the media. Without firsthand war experience, most people tend to combine the civilian and soldier modes of thinking. Faced with the horrors of war, some struggle to retain the civilian mode, which positions them ideologically as pacifists, as was the case with some journalists who wrote about the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. While the civilian mode might seem naive and even dangerous, the soldier mode of reasoning and its extension beyond the boundaries between civilians and the armed forces makes genocides possible. In situations of socioeconomic crisis, the division into moral “us” and immoral “them” together with rationalizations that remove the moral responsibility for violence and promise a utopian future for “our” purified nation—especially if the world does not seem eager to intervene²¹—make people able to commit atrocities that we normally find unacceptable and would never have been able to commit without the emotional tricks of legitimation.

Only firsthand experience of war seems to give rise to the deserter perspective. Coming to terms with the utter insecurity of existence, accepting war as a part of life without approving of it, and blurring such basic categories as war and peace, civilians and soldiers, justice and inhumanity, winners and losers makes talking and writing about war as an experience extremely difficult. It is often impossible, or at least risks sounding illogical to the peace-minded listener. Most of the people with firsthand experience mix all three modes, either in speaking, as in Emir’s account and other examples from Sarajevo, or in text, as in many a story collection or diary published by Sarajevans during the war.²²

This analysis, which is by its nature a reflection on war experiences, faces

the same problem of communicating the incommunicable. The most difficult challenge in writing about the siege of Sarajevo is explaining the deserter perception of war to people who have no personal experience of organized violence on a massive scale. The prevailing modes of thought among observers are the stances of civilian and soldier. In Sarajevo, as in other instances in which armed conflict erases the distinctions between civilians and soldiers and undermines the neat nationalist explanations that justify systematic violence, the deserter mode may arise, not as a means of evading moral responsibility for individual actions or as a refusal of social solidarity, but precisely as a form of dissent from rationalizations that excuse atrocities and as an affirmation of the multifarious connections among people on which civil societies are based.