ABSTRACT

DISPATCHES FROM THE BOSNIAN VALLEY OF THE KINGS
OR HOW BOSNIANS CREATED A FICTIONALIZED
NATIONAL HISTORY

Last year, claims concerning an unprecedented discovery in Bosnia were made. A complex of pyramids, complete with an access plateau and a network of tunnels has been claimed to exist, creating frenzy throughout the country. Chapter 1 creates a background to the story, offering an overview of the claims. Chapter 2 outlines the problem of truth that has always been associated with history in Bosnia, as the truth here lies in the eye of beholder. Chapter 3 deals with the Bosnian war and genocide. Chapter 4 discusses the language as a vehicle of trauma, examining the rhetoric and humor about Bosnians and the ways in which the language was used to justify the war, damage the national identity, and undermine the concept of truth altogether. Chapter 5 concludes with postulating that pyramid fictional national narrative is created to overcome the pain and suffering, and to heal.

Lejla Tricic
December 2007

DISPATCHES FROM THE BOSNIAN VALLEY OF THE KINGS OR HOW BOSNIANS CREATED A FICTIONALIZED NATIONAL HISTORY

by

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Chapter 1

VISOČICA PLATEAU: A BOSNIAN VALLEY OF KINGS

There I was in Fresno, California, last May, preparing to finish a semester. As an English teacher, my life is now forever connected to the resolute change of semesters: Fall and Spring, Fall or Spring, Fall then Spring: just like the ancient Aztecs who watched the sky ravenously, measuring the shadows and angles of the sun's rays, bleeding their bodies to please the mystical spirit of the universe, I do too, only with a gradebook. As soon as the semester ended, I planned to travel to my native Bosnia. The highlight of my trip: a visit to the recently uncovered stone slabs declared to be blocks of an ancient pyramidal complex, nestled in the hills of Central Bosnia, twenty miles from my family house. An ancient pyramidal complex! How excited I was, browsing the websites, looking at the photographs of artifacts, reading reports, opinions, forums and website guest-books. After many years of bad luck brought on by broken mirrors and spilled salt in the bombarded neighborhoods of my native country, there was a chance. A hope. Something was in the air.

I don't remember exactly how my family found out about the pyramid excavation, but I believe it was December of 2005. My husband might have received the newsletter, and told me. My mother-in-law might have seen it on the evening news in Bosnia and called us up. My brother-in-law might have heard it talked about among diaspora in Atlanta: from his grocer, or butcher, perhaps. But I do remember the way it spread among the native Bosnians and those scattered around the world: like a

breath, instantaneous and life saving. Here was a rehabilitation our country needed to recover, the first thing that unified us, ever: a glorious Bosnian pyramid rising from the navel of our country—a promise reinforced by the site's discoverer, Semir Osmanagic, an amateur archeologist and a construction subcontractor.

The hill Visočica, which Osmanagic visited in 2005 during his first visit to Visoko, has geometrical features that *do* remind one of a pyramid. Its sides are identical in size and aligned with the four cardinal points of the compass. In front of one side, there is even a flat area that looks like an access plateau. The top is flat, and has been declared a historical heritage site. In the 1200s, this site supported a castle built by the first rulers of Bosnia, and a Roman post occupied this site long before that. Thermal scanning, rumored to be first used in Bosnia by the American forces searching for Serb weapon magazines during the war, shows that the hill, as well as a couple of others around it, cools faster than the other hills in the same area, indicating a hollow structure.

The analysis of the other hills in the area revealed that the distance between the tops of them and the hill Visočica created an equilateral triangle, whose sides are 365 meters, indicative of 365 days in a year. A savvy businessman, Osmanagic soon formed the Foundation of the Bosnian Pyramid of Sun, whose primary goal was to explore the valley for archeological remains and publish the findings to the public. He invited all of the archeologists from Bosnia and many from the world to join and become a part of it.

The foundation issued a statement naming the hill Visočica a Pyramid of the Sun, the somewhat smaller neighboring hill Pljesevica the

Pyramid of the Moon, and the third hill, the Pyramid of the Bosnian Dragon (Discovery Pyramid of the Sun). The reasoning provided was that in Osmanagic's experience in Latin America, the main, largest pyramid was always titled the Pyramid of Sun, as it likely represented the main temple dedicated to the Sun god and the smaller one to the Moon god. The Pyramid of the Bosnian Dragon was given to celebrate Bosnian medieval tradition and the symbolic dragon found in the epics of the day, epics comparable to Beowulf. Since these hills surrounded the Visoko Valley, as hills often do in turbulent Bosnian landscape, the rest of the hills completing the circle were examined and found to have some anomalies themselves, earning names like Temple of the Earth, celebrating nature, and the Pyramid of Love, on which couples started holding wedding ceremonies.

Osmanagic didn't waste time. After obtaining the proper permits, he formed a crew and started excavating what he called "preliminary sounds" or test pits. Everywhere he dug, and he made sure to dig everywhere, sampling from all sides of the Pyramid of Sun, Pyramid of Moon, and the access plateau, he found the same thing: at the depth of two to three feet, there was a uniform layer of stone slabs, very flat and apparently polished. The connection between the blocks was very puzzling: it looked like a type of primitive mortar. The examination of geologists established that Breccia, the type of limestone that the slabs were made of, is not a native species of stone, and that the mortar between was most certainly human made. Osmanagic soon brought two Egyptologists to take a look, and after spending weeks in examination, they (to different degrees) pronounced the findings to be human-made

and modified, and the pyramids real. Furthermore, the excavations of the access plateau resulted in a discovery of tile-like stones, which fit into each other perfectly. The foundation proposed that this plateau was a place where the ceremonies of the pyramid builders had been held, and where most likely the village life occurred. Osmanagic issued a plan for massive excavations. I was going to witness them first hand.

Bosnian archeologists, however, now decided to oppose Osmanagic, declaring that the idea of ancient culture of pyramid builders here was ridiculous, and that the tiles were gravestones of the medieval necropolis. They implored Osmanagic not to dig and destroy this historical heritage through unprofessional handling of the artifacts. They refused to come visit or lead excavations, and petitioned government to interfere.

Osmanagic continued to dig, with a government permit, as there was no historic indication of a cemetery ever existing here, and because skeletal remains were not found. Soon, Osmanagic discovered a network of tunnels under the Pyramid of Sun, which led toward the other pyramids. The tunnels intersect at 90 degrees, and although buried to some degree, still were so well supported that entering them was not seen as dangerous. Also, they seemed to have air ducts built in at equal intervals allowing for the ventilation. Miners from the nearby coal mine came to explore, confirming that these tunnels were man-made, and not natural. The scientists responded that the tunnels were either medieval mines (although there is no evidence that any substance was ever mined here) or that they were dug during WWII to serve as a shelter in the fight against Germans, for what, again, there is no historic record. Osmanagic

challenged them to come up with proof: they ignored the requests, feeling that due to Osmanagic's extraterrestrial theories and resulting poor standing in the scientific community, they simply had no reason to.

Osmanagic, born in 1960 in Bosnia, owns a metal works business. His customers are numerous: B L Technology, Carver Custom Construction, Comanche Contractors, and some more familiar names, like Holiday Inn, China Garden Restaurant, CiCi's Pizza. His educational background is a blur: he admits to being trained in political science and economy, and to "reading sociology." There are rumors that he has a graduate degree in International Economics and that he is pursuing a PhD in Mayan Civilization in Sarajevo. He has traveled extensively, financing his interests in archeology, visiting cities in Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Peru, hands-on research that provided him with enough knowledge about these ancient civilizations to recognize, while observing the Central Bosnian landscape from the top of the 2300-foot high Visočica Hill, that he was standing smack on top of an ancient city, older and bigger than any of those he had visited or read about.

Feeling what he termed the pyramid "vibe," Osmanagic proposed that these pyramids were connected with the most famous ones: the pyramids of Egypt and Mexico. They were all inspired by the same people, the mega-builders, who in turn were inspired by the members of the advanced civilization of Atlantis, who originally arrived from outer space. It's all here, he felt, the energy network of past and present, of distant galaxies and macrocosms. It is here that we humans routinely levitated and moved effortlessly enormous stone blocks, traveled to

unimaginable dimensions, and traversed time and space. The Romans who built their observer post on the top of the Visočica Hill, and the Bans or rulers of Middle Ages who replaced the Roman structure with their own, could feel it, could tap into the sacredness of it all.

As a researcher trained in proper techniques of obtaining information, I tried to learn as much as possible about Osmanagic. In his online-published work called "The World of Mayas," writing more like a guru or a leader of some ancestor-worshipping cult, Osmanagic claims

> Geometry is the language of the universe. And the Maya, for this reason, left their messages in the form of sacred geometry on the walls of their temples and pyramids.
>
> The Maya are creatures of the light. And the cosmic expressed through sacred codes in geometry, color, musical notes, and alphabet.
>
> When we are able to understand the messages of the Maya we will make one more step towards becoming ourselves one with the light. (Osmanagic pars. 22-24)

He goes on to establish claims that the Mayas are survivors of Atlantis, who in turn are descendants of a civilization that arrived from the Pleiades constellation. Apparently, they arrived on Earth with the ancient powers of telepathy, the ability to move rocks through the air, and other miraculous technological advances superior to ours. In Bosnia, the only remains of their presence are archeological, but they can still be found living on Earth, or rather *under* its surface: they are still living under California's Mt. Shasta, in comfort that only the center of the

Earth can provide. Just ask dolphins, Osmanagic says, the only creatures that still know the secret origins of humans.

The more I researched, the more Osmanagic sounded like a bad acid trip. He was, of course, not the first one to come with such theories: as a child, I read Erich von Dänikan's widely popular book, Chariots of the Gods about the mysteries of the universe, and other paleocontact theories. But I am thirty-three now, and the theories just don't pack the same punch any more. I have lived too long in the establishment, I guess.

So, why such widespread excitement concerning the discovery, then, if the discoverer had such poor credibility?

First of all, Semir Osmanagic was a great speaker. Even though he weaved together all of the alternative and conspiracy theories ever told by a human into one unified explanation of our extraterrestrial origins, he still managed to sound credible in the numerous interviews he was giving. Heck, the guy didn't even blink or stumble when confronted by academics or anybody else. Always very eloquent, in English and Bosnian, he never changed his tone: slow but persistent, repeating the list of the proofs again and again, until the audience repeated his chant. Second, Osmanagic wasn't digging alone. Amer Smailbegovic, a holder of a real PhD, a real geophysicist, a senior scientist employed at SpecTIR Corporation in Reno, Nevada, provided Remote Sensing Analysis as evidence for hollowness of the hills, adding a voice of established academia to the alternative side. Nadjija Nukic, a Bosnian geologist with a lifetime of experience on Bosnian rocks and hills, weighed in, putting her career in jeopardy. "Given that the observed rock structure is

classified as water-lain, fine-grained sediments," she wrote in her "Report on a Geological Survey of 'Visočica' Elevation in Visoko, Bosnia and Herzegovina," "it would be unlikely that a natural structure would form in such a regular, geometric shape" (Nukic 8). In supporting this claim, she used the following facts. Observing the slope of the hill, she found that steep rising slopes were followed by eight-foot wide flat plateaus, forming a repeating pattern all the way to the top; that the drainage can be found on the edges and not haphazardly strewn around; and that "the results of core drilling, test-well sinking and limited trenching have confirmed prior observations and also revealed that the surface of the mound is comprised of layered sandstone blocks, which appear to have been manually processed, cut to fit the required dimensions" (Nukic 9), and connected with primitive mortar. Mining engineers arrived at the tunnels, examined them, and confirmed their artificial nature, declining to speculate their age.

But the greatest support came from the local people. We knew it all along, they claimed. Osmanagic just voiced what they were aware of. Digging the foundations for their houses, they'd found the same slabs in abundance and used them to line their sidewalks, press their sauerkraut, or level the terrain. They reported the stories of residents unable to sleep, bothered by the construction noise coming from neighbors at the other side of the hill. Of playing, in their youth, hide-and-seek in the tunnels under the pyramids, traveling underground, exiting through the hallways miles apart from where they entered.

I couldn't wait to see it for myself. I carefully examined photographs, discarding those showing foreign diplomats and

businessmen, government representatives, school children on a field trip to the pyramid, and focusing on those showing excavations and slabs. I followed the lines of the blocks to see whether they were really fitting into each other. Along with the whole country, I held my breath when, due to rain, the construction had to be stopped for a day or two. It was essential to dig faster and faster, to uncover the secrets, to find out who we are.

And photos of the cobblestone sidewalks, with closely fitted pieces, started to appear on the websites. The holes of perfectly square contours, lined with “ancient bricks,” which Osmanagic explained as the dried-up wells. Massive straight walls supporting plateau-like flat areas on the pyramid. More and more underground tunnel intersections at 90 or 45-degree angles, leading to other pyramids. Volunteers bussed in to dig and help archeologists on the scene. Camera crews and media arrived from all over the world. The schools brought their students here for field trips—the valley was bustling with excitement.

Stories of other discoveries started pouring in: perfectly round stone spheres, identical to those found in Costa Rican and Guatemalan jungles, were found all over the country. They ranged in size from less than a foot to five feet. Regardless the size, they were always perfectly round. Scientists offered only silence. Round metal rings, similar to those used for tying boats to the concrete docks, were found high in the mountains, embedded in the rocks and cliffs. Again, scientists were silent. Excavations were reported daily on the numerous websites, with web cameras installed so the world could watch as the Bosnian ancient civilization emerged from under the forgotten hills.

On one hand, I was happy and proud. My country finally had something good going for it, and it was badly in need of a miracle. Bosnia's economy was in shambles, with the unemployment rate of 40%. Most households lived below the poverty line. The economy needed a boost, wages needed to increase, and people needed to work, even if it was digging out hills. On the other hand, I was angry and afraid. Why was it that, between the war and the pyramid, the real lives of Bosnians never made a headline? Was it only drama that mattered? And what if there is no pyramid, and we look like a nation of idiots because we had even suggested investigation?

I needed to be there, to witness the frenzy, to join the crowds. I needed to bite into a slice of pyramid-shaped pizza, served on a triangular plate. I needed to buy a T-shirt announcing that from now on, Egyptians could pursue their birth certificates in Visoko. I wanted a mug with a picture of Mayan Teotihuacan on one side and Visočica Hill on the other, something to show to my children, born in California, and thus filled with American wonder. Something good, for a change.

My family almost traveled on the same flight as Osmanagic, who had spent two weeks in Houston, due to business operations. By that time he had become an icon: Indiana Jones hat and shirt, a pair of boots. I would have recognized him in an instant. I would probably have approached him and introduced myself. Is it true? I'd ask him, forcing the truth out of him by my presence. I needed to tell him that my people, *our* people, have suffered too much to be made fools out of. But he wasn't there.

He wasn't there when we went to see the pyramid either, vacationing instead in neighboring Croatia. Exiting Sarajevo on a narrow, one-line highway interchange, I drove too close to the dusty Volkswagens in front of me, trying to speed up the column, against all odds. Hundreds of vehicles, mostly old and weathered, interspersed with a Mercedes or two, crawled around me at fifteen miles per hour. When we finally reached the highway, it was late afternoon, and I stepped on the gas. Out of town is where Bosnia becomes immensely beautiful. Green meadows surround the road, crisscrossed by the River Bosnia. Picturesque houses, complete with gardens filled with tomato, pepper, and green beans, basked in the sun. And hills—so many of them!—round and triangular, solo and in cohorts. Among them, every once in a while, you pass a burned remainder of the war: a house with no windows or doors, with black holes in its façade, with half fallen walls. But I was in a hurry, and both the beauty and the recent history could wait.

Fifteen minutes into the drive, I could clearly see the hill on my left side, towering above the road. It looked pyramidal. I hadn't expected Visočica to be this tall or impressive: my doubts came back. Who could carry the blocks or material or equipment up this steep hill? And why? I turned off the highway and followed the signs to the downtown, counting on the billboards for directions. Or, if not billboards, then any other signs of the pyramid. According to my research, that wouldn't be very hard. ABC, CNN, BBC, and other media reported on residents cashing in on the pyramid craze, selling souvenirs and trinkets shaped like pyramids, and I figured that with tourists all over the city, new signs would be posted to guide them. But no pyramidal signs greeted us.

When I realized that the businesses were becoming more and more rare and stretches of meadows longer and longer, I turned around, stopped at a nearby gas station, and asked. A man in his twenties, visibly proud of my attention toward his tiny town, explained how to get there. He seemed to dislike my somewhat derisive attitude as I spoke of the hill (as a real scientist, I, as well, had to be skeptical!), but he didn't say anything, just pointed to the hill on the other side of the road.

I climbed straight up, my car pushing itself up a steep incline. I drove through the narrow streets along which houses rose higher and higher, following the contours of the hill below. Even from the car, I could see through the thin curtains of windows at the lives of the residents. Small rooms, furnished around eighteen-inch TVs, fitted with a sofa and maybe a loveseat, coffee table, and a small entertainment center. I wondered if, now that the pyramid was discovered, they felt any different toward their houses hanging off the cliffs, grasping for the land below, a land that housed *something*, at least. What would the exposure of it mean for these fragile houses, steep streets—prosperity or loss? Battling against gravity, I circled the hill until I got to the highest houses, above which there was only the ancient structure itself. I parked by another red car in a person's front yard, and paid a $1.50 to a young boy keeping watch over other cars: a red Audi, a white Toyota Tercel, a small red Golf. Instead of fearing burglars and thieves, ever present in Bosnia, I worried that the car would roll downtown, not following the path we came up but instead going directly, passing through the houses, wrecking a new path for itself.

We walked up the dusty road, bypassing a unit of German UN soldiers touring the pyramid on their day off, a little souvenir stand selling miniature models of Mexican Teotihuacan pyramids labeled “From Bosnia with Love!” and little Gypsy children, dressed in their best and cleanest clothes, asking if I could hire them as guides. The road ended suddenly, without ado. The only possibility: climbing the staircase so steep that steps seemed vertical, like a ladder. It was carved into the hill itself, and I wondered how it handled the rain, constantly falling even during summer, soaking the dirt until it became a pliable mud.

There was no rail—nothing to grasp for. I could easily imagine my whole little group: myself, my husband, and my two kids stumbling, rolling, and then finding ourselves back, next to the car. But we had come too far to allow that. We climbed and climbed, occasionally stepping aside to let those in better shape or with better stamina pass by. Once or twice, I had to sit and rest for a while, breathing heavily, my lungs constricting in the spasmodic rhythm of the asthma attack, my heart in desperate rebellion against my not-stopping body and mind, egging it on.

And then, we were in the forest, approaching the excavated pits. The sight was unbelievable. Encircled by the “Warning! Do not Cross! Mines!” yellow police tape, the pits reclined under our curious gazes. Not deeper than two or three feet, they exhibited stone surfaces of varying width and length, ranging from the size of a twin mattress to a bus, but always of consistent depth of two to three feet. It was obvious they stretched far under the remaining dirt. The slabs glistened wherever the sun could reach them through the thick branches. Some of the blocks

were enormous, fitting perfectly into each other, smooth as glass. Some were smaller and seemed to not fit in, as if they were accidentally dropped onto the perfectly constructed stone surfaces. We looked around for the authorities, and not seeing any, we jumped in. I leaned in close and looked for the thin line connecting them, the mortar. It was very thin but visible, like a headphones' cable, meandering across the surface in a nearly straight line. It was also obvious that whatever this was, it covered the entire edge of the stones, serving as glue between the blocks. The cool unearthed stone provided comfort, and I sat in an excavation pit, a grave, and a makeshift cradle at the same time.

If this were a man-made structure, the construction would have been of epic dimensions. First, the hill would have to have been shaped into a pyramidal contour. The sandstone that it is made of had to be polished and smoothed, and mega blocks cut into six- to eight-foot strips. Every new row of megaliths was placed to construct a stair-like structure to create a slope. The terraces of six feet were interspersed with ninety-foot staircases, in a pattern, asserted Osmanagic, almost identical to the Teotihuacan pyramids. Then the primitive concrete was poured to congeal it together, holding a giant structure in one piece, 365 meters on each of the three sides, corresponding with the numbers of days in the year. Later, during Biblical floods and centuries of neglect, the structure sank under three to six feet of dirt, brush, and trees, hiding the earliest and largest civilization in the Balkans, and in all of Europe.

Osmanagic suggests that the structures were built by descendants of his Atlantids, the historical Pre-Illyrians, which were one of the oldest tribal groups on European continent. The construction would have to

have happened before the Ice Age, due to weather markers on the structure. But why? Again, Osmanagic has an answer: after the continents of Atlantis and Lemuria sank, survivors searched for a place that would resemble what they left behind. Coming upon the Adriatic Sea, they found Bosnia, flooded to some degree, but still a good place to live. From here, all other civilizations developed.

I knew that the Atlantis and Lemuria claims were ludicrous. But could the rest have been the truth? Was I sitting on a prehistoric structure made by the Pre-Illyrian tribes, who roamed this area, according to the official historical findings, for the last 100,000 years? Was this structure, as Osmanagic suggested, filled with underground rooms, hallways, and maybe even treasures? Was it, as he claimed, the largest, the oldest pyramid, and the "mother of all other ones"? Where is my place in the history of humanity?

And how to explain evidence that Osmanagic presented, such as long, winding tunnels under the access platform and the hill, complete with equally spaced ventilation openings, comparable to the most modern techniques of today? Tunnels that no historical period of Bosnia has claimed? Or the stone balls, similar to the one chasing Osmanagic's look-a-like, Indiana Jones, out of the Forbidden Temple, varying in size but never in their perfectly spherical contours? To him, they provide a connection between these regions and South America, where numerous similar spheres, supposedly offerings to gods, are found. Where are the alternative explanations about this phenomenon? Or the structures found at some locations that are reminiscent of wells, where the smaller blocks are arranged so they fit and merge into one another?

And what did I feel at the moment? It was impossible to not be excited, watching dozens of men, women, and children climbing up the steep earth stairs to grasp for a realm beyond their reality. To wonder as a child does about the universe and our place in the cosmic book of destinies. To look beyond the pain of everyday life. But the doubt crept in, slowly at first, an almost impalpable nuisance, growing bigger and bigger, feeding off the emotional frenzy around me, deflating my excitement until it dwindled to a smallest brush of hope. This was not the same place that I saw on the websites, when, glued to the Internet, I checked out every morning, getting the scoop on the past day's activities. This was a much larger, much steeper place. I felt very small here, and the idea that a pyramid really existed overwhelmed me. The photos of the slabs that I saw on the Internet were enlarged to draw the focus to them, concealing how small the areas were in comparison with the size of Visočica. I picked up a piece somewhat bigger than my hand, flat and cold, and put it in my backpack. The slabs around me were very puzzling, but they in no way reminded me of glamour of Gizzah or Teotihuacan. But I could not know for sure until I visited them as well, and I promised myself I'd know. I had to.

Shrouded by the branches relieving me of a hot day, I imagined the process as Osmanagic describes it. Here were my ancestors, whose DNA my children carry, walking through the cold valley, filled with snow and ice. It is the Ice Age, and they need a shelter in which to carry a deer caught in the oak forest at the entrance of the valley. It's getting dark, and the dark hills around the valley huddle to keep the warmth in, to stand up to the primeval dusk that envelops them. My ancestors walk to

the entrance of the underground tunnels and disappear inside, touching their way in the dark. The tunnels echo with their laughter and song, and the frosty air filters through the ventilation openings they built into the passageways. The tunnels lead to different rooms, and I imagine that families live in neighboring quarters. There must have been a central room where the cooking was done, where the people gathered to celebrate their unity, voice their disagreement, resolve conflicts, come to insights about themselves.

Sitting here, on the top of this shadowy hill, Neolithic and even Paleolithic eras are as real as my own high-tech twenty-first century. Regardless of my own feelings about it, my moment will last less than an accidental millisecond energy twitch of the great cosmic clock. Before I know it, it will be over: kids grown up, kids' kids grown up. I wonder if they thought about it as I do. If they wondered where their next meal would come from, where to find the medication they'd need for the colds that sweep these regions every winter, for allergies that tortured me as a kid.

I wonder if they had a premonition about the cultures that would come after them, building layer upon layer of civilization on the top of their remains. If they knew of the suffering and pain. Of rivers flowing red with blood. Of towers built out of human skulls. Of gold and palaces, the exposure and hatred, and embargos and barbed wire. Of American depleted uranium bombs and leukemia.

Separated by tens of thousands of years, unimaginable voids in time, we are one. The uterus of this hill, the moss on the cracked tree bark, and the pieces of sky I see breaking in through the clearings have

not changed. The city in the valley below me, its chimneys and the parking lots, might be a recent addition to the landscape. The ants, however, the crickets that under the rising temperature of the summer day play louder and faster, have been here all along. They have all the answers: I can only ponder.

This is my search for my origins. For the truth as I feel it, deep in my bones. There is no other place to find it but inside, in what feels right and just and honest. The artifacts are long gone and the primary sources tainted, written and rewritten. I believe it exists, the raw emotional truth that may be different for me than others. I am prepared for the risk, for the exposure.

I am prepared to look for the megalithic monument if it will bring peace to the dead eavesdropping on our debates, as they have been for centuries. They are listening now, as I speak: my ancestors, welcome.

Chapter 2

A TRUTH OF BOSNIAN EXISTENCE AND A HISTORY OF DENIAL

At the First International Conference of Bosnian Scientists, a meeting organized to counter a brain drain of Bosnian scientists into the powerful Western economies, a well-meaning academic pronounced that Bosnia is "a land with too much history, and not enough future." I sat there, surrounded by the country's intelligentsia, next to a couple of physicists working at Emory University and a psychologist teaching at a university in Morocco, and listened. Bosnia, we were told during a six-hour presentation, is the poorest country in the whole of Europe. Even Albania, which to us before the war was a Balkan wilderness in the same sense we now are to others, has long surpassed Bosnia. The statistics show that of every thousand scientists within the country, there are 1.3 scientific papers produced yearly. Only half of Bosnia's academics have ever presented a paper at a conference. The reason? No suitable projects.

"Bring us projects to work on," scientists appealed. From the West.

Did they know, I wondered, that everything I ever conjured, every idea, every powerful thought or creative appropriation that I ever claimed came exactly from the place they were? That the West only allowed me an access to the microphone, rented me a soapbox on which to stand and voice my Balkan frustrations? Did these people believe that I dreamed in English, that my subconscious was able to escape the essential powers of blood and reason? That I somehow found a string distinct enough and a

scissors brave enough to cut it and free myself from the mud that constructed me in the first place? I left the meeting confused.

What truth did they seek? Wasn't the history they were consciously seeking to ignore many times more important to this country than what the West on its own could offer?

The rainy day allowed me to wander around the empty streets, and on an impulse, I ended up in front of the yellow building I knew well from my adolescence: the National Museum of Sarajevo.

The building stands on the main artery that transverses Sarajevo from East to West, in the part of the city that is less populated than others, simply because of the other structures that surround it: another museum, in communist times a Museum of Revolution, now a Museum of Sarajevo; a high school; an army base; a college of mathematics. Just before the war, drug addicts or some unknown pranksters would hide in the dilapidated house just behind the National Museum and scare passers-by with inarticulate screams.

I climbed the smooth wide stairs to the main entrance, situated at the center of the long building that once upon a time had reminded me of a castle with its rounded gothic windows, classic columns, and turrets. It was locked—Sunday is a resting day. I turned around. Time had touched the Roman and Bogumil monuments reclining in front—shiny and white in my youth, they were now cracked, fallen into the grass and splotched with dark spots. During the fifteen years of difficult war and the post-war period, fifteen-hundred-year-old monuments had melted into ground. Just like our people: life expectancy in Bosnia fell from the mid-seventies

to the early sixties, according to World Health Organization. Leading cause of deaths: heart attacks and strokes.

The museum has played a big role in my life. It was my secret hiding place, a spot where no one could find me if I didn't want to be found. When I was a teenager, I used to spend my "brooding" hours here, alone. Its marble hallways gave me solitude and the quietness I craved. The reasons for its formation in 1888, as the Museum administration defines them, are curiously similar to the debate raging in Bosnia at the moment: after the shift of power from Ottoman to Austro-Hungarian, European scientists, fascinated by their newly acquired, unexplored country, set out to investigate. "At the same time," the museum's website suggests, the institution "also attracted the attention of quasi-scientists, which in the very first years of occupation resulted in their taking away of the monuments of culture from the region" (The National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina par. 2). With this tradition, one would expect the curators to be in the forefront of preserving our cultural heritage. But it is Osmanagic's voice I hear.

I'd walk through the galleries, silence ringing with glorious hymns to the national treasures housed within: Neolithic pottery of very ugly colors and shapes, Roman money, medieval jewelry and books, all situated in three halls. I'd observe the two prehistoric skeletons displayed in their glass cases, completely decked out in the jewelry found in their tombs. They were dark gray, and somehow didn't relate to me—I never looked at them as potential family members, but as exotic strangers there to amuse us, in the same way a painting or a sculpture should. I don't think I even thought of them as humans, as people who were born

in the cold caves south of my house, people who hunted the bears and deer, who picked fruits and sat around the fire and watched the same fog I knew well roll over the valley.

They lived in fertile valleys around rivers, of which Balkan has plenty. The oldest remains are dated 100,000 years ago, but consistent habitation began around 40,000 years back, during the last glacialization. The small communities of ten to fifteen lived in caves together, feeding on the diverse plants of the region they gathered, and hunting large herbivores such as giant deer, wild horses, and cattle, until the last Ice Age when the population dwindled. Not much is known until the first settlements, based on the crude urban planning, were established in the seventh millennium BC. But once the settlements began, they blossomed. Many of the characteristics of civilization such as private property, social hierarchy, religion, and art appeared.

As Douglass Bailey suggests,

> [b]y the end of the fifth millennium BC, the Balkans was a vibrant place to be; perhaps the most dynamic part of Europe at this time. Monumental villages [. . .] were increasingly filling many landscapes, marking out and anchoring communities to particular places. Houses and households were increasingly important centres of activities and social interaction. In several regions extramural cemeteries were attached to these villages. (Bailey 5)

Despite the importance of Bosnian findings for European, as well as the worldwide understanding of prehistory and early human society, not much attention was ever directed to the excavation or maintenance

of Bosnian archeological sites, either by the government or the scientific community. I grew up knowing about the existence of the early cultures close to the city airport, but I've never been at the site, nor would I know how to find it. In fourth grade, we studied Sarajevo's history but this historical period was even not in the textbook.

Why did Bosnia not popularize these findings to bring in tourists and place itself on UNESCO's list of protected heritage sites? Why are there artifacts, such as perfectly round stone balls of all dimensions strewn all around, with villagers breaking them up to fill unused wells? Could it be that, as our representative of the Ivory Tower has put it, we have too much history, so we can dispense with five thousand graves of Glasinac, chockfull of weapons, jewelry, tools, and other materials? Or a necropolis of level graves in Sanski Most? These are the questions Osmanagic asks, and as of yet, nobody has an answer.

Although we are talking about the oldest period of history, it is exactly here that there exists a consensus on land belonging to this marginalized culture. There was no split into ethnic groups in the Stone Age, and thus, the group's nationality is coherent. The truth is not easy to know due to thick fog of past centuries, but it doesn't shift according to the ethnic lines. This situation, however, changes rapidly in the Bronze Age, when the pattern of domination and invasion that is still dominant today was first established. Around 1400 BC, northern tribes well equipped with metal products, especially weapons, arrived on the scene. This shifted the ethnic structure of the region, enabling the creation of the Tracan and Illyrian tribes, the oldest officially recognized people of Bosnia. Once the gateway was opened, it could not be closed,

and so Kimeran, Dardanina, Goths, and even Celts appeared, mixing with the indigenous population. The movement continued, although somewhat slower after the birth of Christ, when Romans conquered the land. Their strong hand kept the region peaceful.

If we consider the land area of over two million square miles that the Roman Empire claimed at its zenith around 100 AD, we have to wonder why they came to Visočica's isolated valley. After all, their building in the area of the capital, Sarajevo, is understandable, considering that Sarajevo is situated on a large flat meadow, dissected by two mountain rivers, and surrounded first by foothills and then by mountains. It would make sense to build bridges and aqueducts, and they did. It would even make sense to conquer small valleys around Visočica segmented by mountain ranges but connected by rivers. But the construction of the Roman fortress on the top of Visočica is beyond understanding. Why carry materials more than half a mile up the steep incline of the hill's sides? Why brave the unkind Balkan storms that batter the summit, why build on a spot that lacks an easy access to food or water? For the breathtaking beauty of the valley?

The fall of the Roman Empire had a profound effect on Bosnia—the disappearance of quiet, peaceful life. Upon the arrival of the Avar and Sloven tribes, the cities, once silent, echoed with screams of burned and pillaged victims, a misfortune that was not to stop for many centuries.

I wonder how the Slovenes, arriving in this primeval land, saw it for the first time. Did they, like the Englishman Thomas Morton arriving on the American continent for the first time, see the beauty of the wild forests and cold, snow-filled rivers? Did they feel an excitement looking

over the valleys, the rush of my country's wind as they rode their horses over the Drina river, crossing the border, never to leave the confines of these mountains? Or did they, like the Puritan John Winthrop, see the devil dancing between the branches, ready to be exorcised by fire and sword?

The answer to this question is not unanimous, but depends on the ethnic group to which one belongs. And here is where the history divides, like a tree hit by lightning and split into three unequal but strong and vital branches. And here is where the roots of the last massacre belong, the one I lived through: fourteen hundred years ago, foreign tribes came to make their home here.

The three ethnic groups, Muslims, Serbs, and Croats, that live, confront each other, and die here in the twentieth century all claim a different genesis story from this point fourteen centuries ago. Muslims claim that the land belonged to the original people, the Illyrian tribes that settled and worked the fields many thousands of years before the arrival of the Slovenes. As proof of Illyrian influence, Muslims point out a crucial part of any culture: religion. Even while conquered by Rome, Bosnians never fully accepted Catholicism. The tribes inhabiting the areas close to the Adriatic did, retaining the religion until today, and therefore, defining themselves less as Bosnians, but more as Croats, similar to nationals of Croatia. Instead, Muslims insist, the indigenous population turned to the Church of Bosnia, a heretic church denounced by both the Vatican and Byzantium, that is supposed to have similar characteristics to Islam, although again, the agreement or disagreement lies across ethnic fault lines.

The same argument is used to support Serbs' claims, who argue that, since Slovene tribes accepted Byzantium as their seat of power, and along with it the official Byzantine religion of Orthodox Christianity, this land belongs to Serbs. The supporters of this ideology even go so far as to state that a country where even *one* Serb lives is Serbian, defining nationality completely in terms of the identity of the inhabitants.

The problem becomes even more complicated if invasions from both Serb states, in the eighth and ninth centuries, and from the Croat state, in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries, are considered. Did the armies invade and conquer parts of a sovereign neighboring country? Or were they only patrolling what was legally theirs? It is this exact question that is being considered right now, at the International Tribunal on War Crimes in Hague, in regards to the bloody conflict between same states in the early 1990s.

Some hundred and thirty years spent under the Hungarians introduced new concepts into the little country. For one, Bosnia adopted the system of "*Banovina*" as a system of government and *Ban* as a ruler, and kept them for the next two hundred years, which suggested that ideas outside of the three ethnic groups infiltrated the culture.

When Bosnia was finally recognized as an independent national unit in the 1200s, it included somewhat less than a million inhabitants. The question now became what to do with those who under the influence of the Hungarians or the Catholic or Orthodox churches wed their identity to the schools of thought external to the Bosnian borders?

The answer to this question seems to depend solely on the national identity of the historian. Croatian historians imply that the majority of

the population during this period was Catholic, with Serbian Orthodox ideology affecting the residents of the eastern border with Serbia. They also propose that all the Bosnian rulers were Catholics, citing the example of Kotoromanic family, while allowing that some rulers, such as Hrvoje Vukčić Hrvatinić and Stjepan Vukčić Kosača, were either Orthodox or members of the Christian Church of Bosnia.

Serbian historians contend that according to the writings of the Byzantine Czar Constantine the VII, Bosnia was inhabited by Serbs, and ruled by Serbian dynasties whose noble regard for justice and democracy enlightened the society. The process of conversion to Orthodox faith, they propose, went beyond the pirate tribes situated around the River Neretva, implying that the rest of the Bosnian population accepted this religion unanimously.

Bosnian historians, however, argue that although these ideologies had a strong influence on the population, they were never accepted beyond in more than the outskirts of the region. Instead, they rely on the following assumptions to show that their origin is not to be intertwined with the origin of Croats or Serbs that both sides insist on:

1. The religious center of the Bosnian Church was placed near Visoko (and its hill Visočica), where the first church was founded, and monumental tombstones called Steci were built; 2. That besides religious dogmas, the reasons for founding of the Bosnian Church were political and involved resistance to the Hungarian government; 3. That several Bosnian rulers were followers the Bosnian Church, rejecting Catholicism and Christianity, which provoked an Inquisition, during which bishops called for a Crusade against Bosnians for what they deemed dangerous

heresy: gnostic beliefs of the Church and denial of the Trinity and the cross; 4. That because of the persecution from both Rome and Bysanth, members of the Bosnian Church accounted for the majority of converts to Islam.

How much of this is truth? All of the sides agree on the most important names and claim the same Bosnian rulers: Matej Ninoslav, Ban Boric, Kulin Ban, Tvrtko. And based on today's definitions of what it means to be a Croat, Serb, or Bosnian, is it possible to classify these old rulers as one nationality or the other? And especially when they bore the most loyalty to the crown that appointed them to rule Bosnia, which was Hungarian? And most importantly, can this division happen, considering that Balkanization, a division of national identity into smaller subgroups tightly based on tribal affiliations, is a process not to occur for the next eight or so centuries?

Here is what I think matters: the bans, with more or less success, worked to establish peace, and when necessary wage war that would protect the borders of the country. Kulin Ban made a document known as a birth certificate of the Bosnian nationality, defining the present borders: from the Drina River in the East to the Sava River in the North, and to the Una River in the West. He gave Bosnia just what it needed: a unified throne that served as the center of an organized and civilized Bosnian system.

Is it a coincidence that the seat of the Bosnian state, the capital, would be raised on the top of Visočica, replacing the Illyrian settlements and Roman forts? What is it about this hill that attracts history to it? I wonder if the knights of the Middle Ages, who strategically placed the

castle of the Ban of Bosnia, naming this particular hill the center of this country and thus the most important place in the whole region, did know any “pyramidal” secrets? Could they, as Osmanagic did, feel the “vibe,” the echo of the songs of people long gone arising from the intestines of this strange hill?

Is it the energy that can be felt, as Osmanagic suggests, left by the ancient space travelers that made Visočica their oldest home on Earth, a predecessor culture from which the whole human civilization is to unfold? Or is it some angry, violent feeling of frustration that vibrates from this mound, located in the geographic center of Bosnia? A deep, dark frustration about the meaningless feuds that swallow the young generations and stunt the growth and development of the whole country. A frustration of disappointment, for failing to see what it is we have here. A frustration of cultures disappeared from our history because of our focus on their name, their gene pool, when they left behind so much more. Instead of realizing that we are real culprits, we could blame the Turks.

No part of Bosnia’s very complicated history is more controversial than the Turkish conquest. If the emotions about the other epochs were running high, here is where they get out of control, causing despair, hatred, and anger. The feeling of being victimized is felt universally across ethnic lines, and the descendants of witnesses of occupation seem to suffer as much as those who witnessed it first hand. Time, in this case, has not healed wounds. Instead, it has allowed them to fester, a rancid smell rising from the putrid bandages. Time, here, has contributed to the problem: every year, every decade, spent under the

burden of the five-hundred-year-old conquest weighs heavier on the people of Bosnia, with no signs of easing. The economy, the politics, education: they are all affected more than they were that cold spring of 1465, when the Ottoman army entered Bosnia from the South; not in some abstract sense, involving ideology or social hierarchy (although off course those are affected as well), but rather in very concrete sense, affecting prices of bread in different stores, or availability of profession for the youngsters after their graduating from elementary schools. Countless options were predetermined five hundred years ago, and we live with the consequences, because we don't know how to let go.

History, again, splits according to ethnic divisions. Between Croats, Serbs, and Bosnians, it is the date that is agreed on—Bosnia was conquered without too much difficulty in the middle of the fifteenth century, at the height of Ottoman power, under Sultan Mehmed the II, or as he was popularly dubbed "Fatih," meaning the conqueror. But everything else is open for discussion.

Serb historians tend to fall in two camps. The first camp argues that, although the breath of the Ottoman empire could be felt breathing down on the free and powerful Bosnian state, the Serbian kings of Bosnia could not focus on the danger due to their preoccupation over personal desires and political intrigues. Ban Tvrtko the Second's governance had been challenged by Stefan Ostoja, followed by his first son Stefan Ostojic, and then second son Ostojin Radivoj. These internal struggles weakened the country so that Ottoman incursions had not been responded to and the warning signs had been ignored. The second camp proposes that the Turkish takeover can be blamed on the local

population, both Croat and Bosnian, that Turks invaded due to the constant pressure of Croats to convert to Catholicism and abandon the Bosnian Church, and the Bosnian nobles' open invitation to Ottomans, with hopes that once a take-over happens, their social standing would not only be protected but also advanced.

The consequences, Serbian historians insist, were terrible: ruthless taxation of the agrarian population, religious persecution and forced conversion, the introduction of the "*kolac*," an instrument of impalement, as a punishment, and "*blood danak*" or the forced collection of the youngest children from the conquered families in order to send them to Turkey to be schooled and trained in the military arts, to return as the Sultan's vassals to Bosnia.

Croat historians, on the other hand, suggest that Bosnia was doomed to fail. After all, with war being genetically engraved into Turkish soldiers, who as nomads once roamed the Mongolian plains and pillaged its villages, Bosnia had no chance. The primeval aggression could not be stopped, especially considering the huge military apparatus that could have not been kept at bay. Encouraged by the Muslim holy book, Qur'an, which according to Croatian historians advocated violence against non-believers, the Turks stormed through the Balkans, changing the ethnic landscape forever. Thus, they suggest, as the war had an inescapable religious component and was defined as a tenet of Islam (which is really not the case), the Muslim empire inevitably grew until it spread from Asia to Western Europe, affecting the "Croat lands" of Balkans.

Like the others, Bosnian historians tend to be influenced by their beliefs, and they pick their influences: the Islamic world, the West, and

Russia. Rediscovering their history in the same way they are rediscovering their identity, Bosnians look far into the past, attempting to, by the process of elimination, categorize who they are. They look at the evidence presented to them, most of it painting their ancestors as undeveloped savages, as traitors for succumbing to the seductive Turkish governance.

And every time they reach back, they are judged and re-judged by historical narratives based on the implicit assumptions and conclusions: as sell-outs, converts, lowlifes. Can then Bosnians be laughed at for trying to reach so far back in history, long before the Turks, or Hungarians or Slovenes, or Romans or Goths or Illyrians, all the way to the simple and uncomplicated days of the Neolithic, where the gene pool wasn't a soup cooked until the ingredients became unrecognizable congealed lumps, all the way back to a civilization that created such ambitious monuments. Could a pyramid be a perfect resolution to our nightmares?

Again, there are some facts that any historian can accept, which might provide some objectivity on the accusations of Serbs and Croats.

The fact is that the Turkish Sultan Mehmed II, born in 1432, was a great politician and military leader, well versed in literature, arts and architecture, philosophy and science. The fact is that after his ascension to the throne in his twentieth year, he conquered Constantinople, and renamed it Islambul, a City of Faith, and himself Fatih. That he countered oppressive tax policies of the Byzantine king with tolerant and nurturing care for his people regardless of their religion, even limiting entirely the influx of Muslims into non-Muslim areas, and translating

Christian books into Turkish. That he resurrected a court in the conquered city, inviting the Italian artists, Greek scholars, and Muslim scientists to gather. Could this be the same man who sent savage, bloodthirsty armies to conquer Bosnia?

On April 19th, 1999, the Turkish Historical Society and the Turkish Society for History of Science, supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, organized an international congress on Learning and Education in the Ottoman World to celebrate the seven-hundredth anniversary of the Ottoman state. Grabbing the attention of important officials including the President of Turkey, 175 scholars and researchers from twenty-eight countries participated. The highlight of the proceedings was the publication of the "*Ahdnama*" or Oath, a decree issued by Sultan Fatih on the conquest of Bosnia to Jesuits of the local Franciscan church near the capital. What follows is a widely circulated translation of an unknown translator:

AHDNAMA

> Mehmet The Son Of Murat Khan, Always Victorious! The command of the honorable, sublime sultan's sign and shining seal of the conqueror of the world is as follows:
>
> I, The Sultan Mehmet - Khan inform all the world that the ones who possess this imperial edict, the Bosnian Franciscans, have got into my good graces, so I command:

Let nobody bother or disturb those who are mentioned, not their churches. Let them dwell in peace in my empire. And let those who have become refugees be safe. Let them return and let them settle down their monasteries without fear in all the countries of my empire.

Neither my royal highness, nor my viziers or employees, nor my servants, nor any of the citizens of my empire shall insult or disturb them. Let nobody attack, insult or endanger neither their life or their property or the property of their church. Even if they bring somebody from abroad into my country, they are allowed to do so.

As, thus, I have graciously issued this imperial edict, hereby take my great oath.

In the name of the creator of the earth and heaven, the one who feeds all creatures, and in the name of the seven Mustafas and our great messenger, and in the name of the sword I put, nobody shall do contrary to what has been written, as long as they are obedient and faithful to my command. (Proceedings of the International Congress on Learning and Education in the Ottoman World on the Occasion of the 700th Anniversary of the Foundation of the Ottoman State pars. 3-9)

The original edict is still kept in the monastery, as an important document guaranteeing the followers independence and tolerance. It is the oldest document that confirms human rights ever, preceding the International Human Rights Declaration by 485 years. In the light of Bosnian's schizophrenic identities, this document serves as an important window into the past, and a promise for the present.

Were there nevertheless impalements under Ottoman rule? As a person living 550 years after the conquest, I do not know. Would it make a difference concerning how I feel if I found out it was the truth? I don't think so. The Ottoman Empire developed Bosnia, pouring money into mosques, bathhouses, and castles. It brought along indoor plumbing and the first university (Handzic 23). As a popular folk song puts it, out of the village a country was made. This aspect of the Ottoman takeover has generally been ignored. Lingering hatred deprived them of any credit or recognition for this work.

One of the policies that Ottomans brought to Bosnia, necessary for running a successful kingdom, was record keeping. The first taxation records of 1468 show that the demographics had not changed. In contrast, in 1520, the number of Muslims had surpassed 45% of the total number of citizens. By 1624, the number climbed to 450,000, overshadowing 150,000 Catholics and 75,000 Orthodox (Malcom 56). Even though Ottomans had empowered them in for the first time in their history, Bosnian Muslims did not connect their identity to the Ottoman empire. Instead, many times, especially as the corruption of the disintegrating Ottoman society manifested itself through the shady authority figures, Bosnians struggled for their independence. It is exactly

because of the commonplace revolutions and their bloody consequences that at the Berlin Congress of 1878, European powers suggested to the Austro-Hungarian Empire to conquer Bosnia. One more time, Hungarian influences came to the land. Unlike the Ottoman Empire's peaceful entrance into Bosnia, this empire was greeted with gunfire on arrival, especially around the capital.

Although Austria's dominance lasted only forty years, its influence on the country was significant. New institutions were established: museums like the National Museum, libraries, and ministries. Massive buildings still bear witness to this period, expanding the neighborhoods that Ottomans first built. The cobble-stoned streets of the Turkish period, complete with small shops filled with crafts of different trades, were replaced by pastel-colored buildings, with gargoyles and other European ornamentations.

Regardless of the good deeds of Austria, however, the ethnic tribulations continued to multiply. While the Croats felt privileged, considering themselves a group that shares their origin with the Austrians, both Serbs and Muslims complained of abuses of power. Although Austria appealed to a shared Bosnian identity and a Bosnian history as the glue that keeps it together, Serbs refused to become a part of that idea and argued that the Austrians were trying to dispose of Serbian national consciousness by preventing Serbian organizations and societies from gathering freely or having freedom of the press.

For the first time in history, Bosnia was not considered a crossroads between East and West, but potentially a part of Europe, and with Europe's ideologies, politics, and strategies. In order to fully

integrate into Europe, the Bosnian people needed to adopt a single narrative that could be used as a foundation and passed down to future generations. And Austria, to her credit, encouraged that idea, although in less aggressive format than the communist government that would follow the Austrians within thirty years. In schools, the Bosnian language was taught. Bosnian organizations flourished, while Croatian and Serbian organizations were banned and dismantled. Muslims who missed the Ottoman rule were allowed to pack their belongings and move to Turkey, and it is estimated that up to 200,000 did. However, the Croats and Serbs refused to leave Bosnia, although Croatia and Serbia were much closer geographically than Turkey. To them, with the changes of government taken into consideration, it was easier to hope that the surrounding countries would step across the borders and take the land over, integrating it into their own territories once for all.

Gauging (mistakenly) that if a group's religious identity was allowed to mix with the political one, Austria allowed formation of national parties that would represent the people's interests. The readiness of the population to discard their unified Bosnian identity and return to the splintered groups defined by their religion signified that Bosnians were in no way ready to exist as a nation at that time. Serbian politicians went even further: arguing that Bosnian Muslims and Croats were actually historically Serbs, they moved for the designation of Bosnia as a Serb state, spreading the unrest across the land. Drafting a plan of confrontation with Austria, Serbia exploited the anxiety of the Serbian population and planned to destroy the idea of unification once and for all.

On June 27, 1914, a young member of the terrorist organization "Black Hand" started his journey from Serbia. He traveled on the train with two friends, carrying an assortment of weapons. The group's goal: the murder of the Austrian Prince Ferdinand, an heir to the throne during his visit to Sarajevo. Eighteen-year-old Gavrilo Princip succeeded in murdering the Prince in the central part of the city, managing at the same time to shoot Princess Sophia, and a bit later, himself. Understanding the political participations of Serbia in the murder, Austria asked for permission to investigate. Serbia refused.

And so Bosnia provided a cause for another shifting of the world powers, and realigning territories that they claimed. The conflict between Austria and Serbia spread within days, and soon became the Great War, World War I. After four years of brutal war and 300,000 Bosnians dead, Austria withdrew, collapsing in the process. The remnants of Bosnia provided flesh for a new Balkan state, now including neighboring states. The name is very telling of Bosnian's negligible access to power within it: The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenians.

Amid nationalist passions running as high as always, this political structure was not any more stable than the previous ones. Constant intrigues between Croats and Serbs were the central characteristic of this period. With rigged elections on both sides, the votes did not match the actual demographics. Serbs had taken advantage of their presence in the army and in regional politics and attempted to replace the identity of other relevant segments of society by their own. Shootings in parliament, the murders of significant representatives of both sides, and other crimes, weakened the country throughout the 1930s and made the

region less stable than ever before. Thus, when, as a part of the Nazi expansion, German soldiers arrived in Bosnia, it took two weeks for the country to collapse. In the tradition of its shaky history, Bosnia became a part of the Third Reich. Almost from the beginning, some Muslim and Croat paramilitary troops united as "*Ustase,"* while many Serbs united as *"Chetnics."* The two groups clashed with each other, and while Ustase cooperated with Nazi forces, Chetnics slaughtered the local populations.

After communist resistance led by Tito failed to gain any hold in Chetnic-occupied Serbia, it moved into Bosnia, struggling not only against the Nazi forces, but also against domestic nationalists. Some statistics indicate that Tito's army actually achieved diversification: 44% were Serb, 30% Croat, 10% Slovenian, and a small number of Muslims (Meier 55). But the usual problem plagues this period: who has correct statistics? Who might have utilized the war to act on the same ancient racial and cultural disputes, and who was the victim?

In December of 1943, in a small Bosnian town of Jajce, Tito's government met to decide the destiny of the country. Supported by Russia, the communists declared their right to wield power over the whole country and decided on the new government format. Six federal republics and two autonomous provinces were united in a coherent body called Yugoslavia, a land of Southern Slavs. Here, Bosnia was to be a republic, keeping its borders as defined by Kulin Ban. The country consisted of all three ethnic grups, although Serbs and Croats were privileged this time: Bosnians were to be called Muslims, reduced now only to their religion as an identifier of the culture.

Instead of focusing on the tribally enfused national politics, Tito focused outside of the country. At first, Tito strengthened the communist connections with the USSR, but, finding out in 1948 that they were impeding Yugoslavian interests, he broke off and turned to the West. In time, Tito would also align the country's interests with the Coalition of Neutral Powers, where Muslim nations held a majority. This outward focus, supported by a strong push toward silencing any individual identities of the republics, promoted peace, although the price was eventually to be paid by my generation, in blood.

In the forty years of the existance of Yugoslavia, Tito groomed a class of elite politicians, mainly Serbs, who controlled political power and oversaw the actions of workers. His two close colleagues and mentees were Slobodan Milosevic and Franjo Tudman, who would later play a pivotal role in the break up of Yugoslavia. Tito created a strong and modern army, the fourth most powerful in Europe in terms of technology and organization, where according to some sources, Serbs held 77% of the commanding positions. He built cramped concrete buildings with little luxury and a lot to be desired, with two-bedroom apartments the size of average American living rooms. He propagated the anti-religious ideology of communism, where any candidate for a government position was monitored for his or her involvement with religious entities. I will never forget when my grandpa died and my uncle, his son, a director of one of the most important Bosnian energy companies, arranged for a business trip in order to not be at the funeral, and thus be associated with religious rites—even burial ceremonies were discouraged and

frowned upon by the Communist government. He could have lost his job and state-assigned apartment by attending.

In time, all three ethnic groups would disassociate themselves from Tito and claim victimization. The Croats, to whom Tito belongs by birth and ethnicity, claimed that they suffered a mass genocide, when Tito allegedly disposed of about fifty thousand Croatian soldiers who were on the Hitler's side during World War II. The high rates of Croatian immigration into the United States and Canada during this time were attributed to Tito's persecution, but also to the lack of government subsidies to Croats, as well as the constant suspicion concerning their intents.

The Serbs, who surrounded Tito and comprised the top eschalons of government in all departments, argued that Tito, being Croat, persecuted the Serbs, claiming over half a million dead during and after the war, and their supressed national identity. The Serbian dream of Greater Serbia, a country encompassing all or as many Serbs as possible, also came to a halt under Tito. Many consider, though, that Serbs had been heavily compensated for this—due to the centralized economy and government finances, Serbia was the most prosperous republic in Yugoslavia, whose people were the most educated: it was the only republic whose capital would develop into a mega-city.

Whether Tito's identity had something to do with the perceived victimization is hard to tell. Even Tito's identity remains a mystery: was he a Croat, born in Kumrovec, a small village in Northern Croatia, seventh of fifteen children in an extremely poor family? Or did he see himself as a Serb, privileging the Serb elite and allowing their high

positioning within the army? Tito was, after all, buried in Belgrade, the Serbian capital. Or was he Yugoslavian, a mixture of all the tribes that once roamed the Eastern Balkans, looking for an ancestral home to claim, a patriot who knew that one day soon after his death, the fields, the rivers of his country, would be blood-soaked and strewn with bones, that these mountains would be mined forever with the same weapons he carefully invested in, attempting to *secure borders*?

Osmanagic proposed that he was neither. He was a Russian. His proof: the story told by a great-grandmother of his close friend. Apparently, when Tito was wounded in World War I, battling, as an Austro-Hungarian solder, units of the Serb army, he was replaced by a Russian to assure that the Russian brand of communism would spread through the Balkans. After all, Tito's first wife, whom he divorced, was a Russian. According to Osmanagic, the strange lilt in his speech that Tito claimed was his attempt to distance himself from the strong *Kajkavica*, a Croatian dialect, and speak like Serbs, had been a consequence of learning Bosnian as a second language. Osmanagic and Tito seem connected in a peculiar way—the scientists who oppose Osmanagic's pyramid theory are mostly Serbs, professors who gained their place at the universities as a result of Tito's strategic support of Serbs. In a strange twist of the story, these scientists propose that the tunnels under the pyramid had been dug by Tito's army in WWII as a temporary shelter from the German bombardment and frontal attacks. They were relics of guerilla warfare, they suggest—no records for this exist.

Instead of indulging the pyramid lunacy, the scientists propose, let Bosnians take a DNA test. The genetic exploration of the 6,500-year-old

bones shows, tracing the y-chromosome, which tribes existed in which regions. Analyzing the dust of our ancestors, the scientists suggest that it is very easy to trace one's national and historical origin. But wouldn't genetic studies conducted to uncover where the Bosnian gene types arise, despite such complex historical obstacles at every stage of their development, be madness also? To propose to study the Bosnian identity based on the traces of y-chromosome in ancient Neolithic bone remains in order to establish who has precedence over this land, with Bosnian complex history, is at least irresponsible. Why, then, not allow Bosnians to create their own investigation into the history, even if it may be fictional? For isn't basing to whom this land belongs, based on the shards of 6,500-year-old bones, fiction in itself?

And they also suggest that Osmanagic, as well as the Bosnian nation, instead of telling all those fairy-tale fantasies, ought to finally learn the truth.

Chapter 3

LANGUAGE THROUGH THE WAR AND THE WAR THROUGH LANGUAGE

The ever-escaping truth of a "historical narrative," a text supposed to describe a sequence of real events, stares me in the face daily. I am invited to tell, over and over again, to be storyteller and a teacher.

I will be grocery shopping, discussing my preference of yellow peaches versus white peaches, and will be asked about my strange accent and where I come from, unavoidably leading to the clerk's recollection of some aspect of war (usually mixed up), and to my narration of how it really happened. Or I will be depositing my paycheck at the bank, and will be asked about my family, resulting in a lengthy explanation of how I left them behind and arrived in America. I will go to a parent-teacher conference at the beginning of a school year and hear about my American-born child's essays dealing with trauma of war, or once even an episode during which my son refused to speak in anything but his grammatically problem-ridden Bosnian. At my husband's karate dojo, at my mortgage lender's office, in my classrooms, I meet people who are married or best friends with Serbian men and women. The conversation, inevitably, becomes epistemological, as I am placed in position of a storyteller who has to, in brief but interesting fashion, guide my listeners first through the geography of my home country and then through the history of the events of 1990s. I patiently describe the position of Bosnia in Southern Europe: the little triangle across from the Italian "boot," south of Austria and Hungary, north of Greece, enclosed

by Croatia and Serbia. The country the size of West Virginia, with less than a ten-mile stretch of life-saving access to the sea.

I organize my story in a linear fashion, although I am a strong believer in Walter Fisher's Narrative Paradigm. Fisher claimed that instead of "organizing data as facts in logical relationships," the storytellers should focus it on anecdotal narratives based on characters, plots, motives, and actions, as people are most likely to remember stories laid out in such a way (Fisher 20). It is not as easy as it seems to tell in this way: the characters I have known are real people, and their sufferings and pain still hurt as if the war happened yesterday. To complete strangers: to clerks, bank tellers, even teachers, I cannot expose that pain so easily. Instead, I answer the simple questions: Why did the war happen? Didn't the culture of Bosnia encourage outright slaughter on all sides for thousands of years? Wouldn't it still be going on if we, Americans, didn't stop it? I want to tell all, to secure the attention my native country deserves. I want to get people to act. To offer some counseling to my country. To offer an apology for letting it happen. To help us to move on.

My writing dreams are haunted by Bosnian images.

I write things like this: "The night that my husband was blinded, I kissed him goodbye standing at the door, looking straight into his green eyes until he turned his back and left. A new moon was just starting to show, but even with the obscure light, a snow cover lighted the way. I stood for a long time shaking, long after his uniform became one with the immense dark night enveloping us both." And I can never get it right.

I'd love to have a happy tone. Or write about sunny days. I just don't know how to. And there is a horrible, freezing fear that I will mess the facts up, convolute the meaning. And besides, I will never convey what exquisite web they make in my life, or how intricately they make my experience a whole—a frost pattern etched on the glass pane.

We are damaged. We are all damaged. All four million of us who survived will never be the same. I, for one, never take a walk alone, even in my supremely suburban neighborhood. I never let myself come remotely close to running out of food, especially canned. Never ever enjoy the blast of the Fourth of July fireworks. To say that my life will never be exactly ordinary is not a far-fetched prophecy. It is also crystal clear that we, as a nation, will never be completely normal again. Should I write about that? Why should a history of a nation rest on my shoulders? I do not know how to write.

I am not a good storyteller. I do not know how to unravel the stories. The beginning is simple enough: Once there was a girl who loved to read and write. Then, one day, she woke up at three a.m. and saw on TV the men with socks on their heads and guns on their shoulders putting up the barricades throughout the city. The ending, however, is not easy to find. If this was my story, I could end it here, in the beautiful Golden State. But it's not. A Bosnian is not the story of those who lived, but of those who died. And that's why it's not a happy story. And that's why it's not an easy story either: which of the deaths to choose from? Which story to follow?

I do not know how to translate what happened to us into English words. There is no frame of cultural reference, no cane I can use to guide

you and me through the translation. You don't understand what *Chetnik*, a Serb soldier-with-the-bushy-beard-and-long-hair-turned-into-vampire-in-this-and-Nazi-helper-with-the-like-strategies-in-Second-World-War means to us. Or *jetim*, a child-whose-both-parents-were-killed. Or *front lines*, not-somewhere-in-a-distant-country-but-down-the-block. How shall I tell you these stories? And sometimes, nothing I remember fits into words, not English, not Bosnian. Not into any words at all.

The day before the war broke out, April 5, 1992, the students in my class hugged and kissed and said their goodbyes. A month before our graduation, we knew that it was the end of our road there. The tickets were bought already for those leaving the country: Croats traveling to Croatia, Serbs to Serbia. I had nowhere to go: Bosnia was my only home.

The situation in Bosnia had been tense for years before that moment. When Tito died in 1980, he left a vacuum. Who was great enough to replace a man who possessed airplanes and trains, and even his own island, inhabited by wild animals? Who was powerful enough to substitute for a man about whom many songs were sung and whose name became an adjective preceding names of the cities: Titov Drvar, Titograd, Titova Mitrovica? Nobody.

Instead, small provincial politicians stepped up, each biased and not ashamed to hide it. The resources were in question: Serbia was receiving more than its share. Following the first multi-party election results, in the autumn of 1990, the republics of Slovenia and Croatia proposed transforming Yugoslavia into a loose confederation of six republics. However, Milosevic rejected all such proposals. Arguing that inquiries into the spending practices of Yugoslavia constituted an attack

against Serbia, Milosevic, an elected president, called for a stronger nationalist party “to resist these attacks.” This growth was immediately followed by the intensified abuse against human rights of the people of Kosovo, one of Yugoslavia’s two autonomous regions. As an answer to these repressive techniques, Slovenia and Croatia promised a struggle for independence: the break up had begun. On June 25, 1991, Slovenia and Croatia became the first republics to declare independence from Yugoslavia.

The Yugoslav National Army, acting under commands of Serbian leaders, attacked these westernmost republics, utilizing the cruelest techniques against the civilians. Slovenia was attacked a day after it announced its independence. The war lasted ten days during which the casualties on both sides were minimal. After successful negotiations, the Yugoslav army pulled out of Slovenia.

In Croatia, the situation was different. The army units already stationed there were helped by the arriving units from Slovenia. One month after the declaration of independence, Serbian forces, obviously superior with weapons and equipment, overtook about a quarter of the country, mostly those with a predominantly ethnic Serbian population. The military strategy of the Serbian forces consisted of extensive shelling, at times irrespective of civilians. As the war progressed, the cities of Dubrovnik, Šibenik, Zadar, Karlovac, Sisak, Slavonski Brod, Osijek, Vinkovci, and Vukovar all came under heavy attacks by the Serbian forces. Although Croat nationalists were responsible for participating in spreading of ethnic tensions, it was the army forces that launched a savage military response to Croat independence, capturing and

"cleansing" a third of Croatia, including eastern and western Slavonia, and the Krajina region adjacent to Bosnia. The city of Vukovar was completely razed soon after Serb occupation, leaving it looking like Hiroshima. Burned corpses littered the streets of the city, with animals trampling over them, images constantly shown in the Bosnian news.

Although Bosnians feared the same destiny as the Croatians, they feared even more remaining a part of the union in which Serbs were almost 90% of the population. In March 1992, advised by the European Union, the government called for a referendum for Bosnian independence. Fierce propaganda from Serbia depicting Muslims as extreme Islamic fundamentalists, caused many Bosnian Serbs to support Milosevic's plan for ethnic cleansing as a means of creating Greater Serbia. As a consequence, the voting was boycotted by the great majority of Bosnian Serbs. The turnout was 63.7%, out of which 99.4% citizens voted for independence (Malcom 34). Although this number was slightly below the required two-thirds, the results were accepted by the European Union, which recognized Bosnia as an independent state on May 7, 1992. The United Nations accepted Bosnia on May 22, 1992 into its membership.

The first territories to suffer conquest in the Fall of 1991 were lands along the border with Croatia. During the early hours on March 1, 1992, the streets of Sarajevo were blocked and the capital paralyzed by masked men dressed in black uniforms. Resolute that the war would not happen in their city, residents of Sarajevo came out to mass peace protests in front of government buildings. One person was killed, but the barricades were removed and normal life continued. This, however, was a

strategic action on a part of the Serbs to show that the city could be overtaken in one night and completely put under control, and to scare Bosnians into submission.

The result was the opposite: understanding the danger they were in, and deciding that something had to be done, people awoke. A wave of signing up for the new paramilitary unit named the Territorial Defense swept through the city, and the nation as well. Many male residents signed up, regardless of age. Parents and children, and in some cases, grandparents and grandchildren, stood in line together. They provided their names and ages to the people in uniforms, people who seemed as unreal as the panic that was setting in.

Since the Bosnian Serbs did not occupy a specific region in Bosnia and lived alongside Muslims and Croats, war throughout the whole country couldn't be prevented. The grim news that arrived from the parts of the country showed people being taken, houses burning, the world confounded. The men who signed up spent their nights outside, guarding the intersections in their neighborhoods, looking inside into their houses, where their families watched back at them in the dark. They oversaw the all-night bakeries, the stray dogs, and an occasional drunk, whom they would admonish for not knowing that it was almost war.

Although the traffic still moved in and out of the city, traveling became very dangerous—people were taken off the trains, buses, and cars and taken to unknown destinations. Still, the mass exodus from the city continued: sensing the danger in the air, hundreds of thousands of people left it behind, many never to return again. Countless families were broken that month—leaving their husbands to take care of the property,

women emigrated to countries of Western Europe, where after years of waiting, some married new men, sending divorce papers to those left behind; some came only to visit the graves once the war was over. Some came back to demolished houses, to empty and cold apartments they were allocated, to households devastated and husbands mentally disturbed.

Those who stayed soon faced dire conditions: on April 6, 1992, the units of the Yugoslav army supported by Bosnian Serb paramilitary units began their siege of Sarajevo. Muslim, Croat, and a small percentage of Serb residents opposed to a Greater Serbia were cut off from food, utilities, and communication. Ironically, the day coincided with the date of liberation of Sarajevo from Nazis in WWII, and with Eid al Adha, a Muslim holiday celebrating and reenacting Abraham's famous sacrifice. The official beginning, somewhere around eleven in the morning, gripped the land suddenly; the way thunder seizes a summer day. My mother was frying eggs, and all three of us kids hung around the kitchen, taking in the scent, hungry, waiting for the food to be done. Then, as a marker of evil, an air siren pierced the otherwise plain Sunday, and there it was. Running to the shelter, I watched the grocery stores broken into; the food carried out in a panicked rush to secure what could still be secured. There it was, turning the respectable citizens into small thieves and robbers, in its first hours. In the months to come, I would see it all: poverty and hunger, death and blood, bravery and nobility; the way war's ugly head peeked into every house, and filled it with the stench of misery and despair.

The bombs cracked through the sky daily, plastering the streets of a darkened city. Serb artillery always gave us a pretty show before they shot, parachuting the lighting grenades from above, exposing our nakedness. The city was immobile and uncovered, and we had nowhere to go.

The Territorial Defense units were organized according to neighborhoods. The schools, childcare centers, and community centers were turned into makeshift military camps and bomb shelters. The weapons existed in abundance in Yugoslavian army bases, three of which were in the middle of the city, and on the mountains surrounding the city, all facing the valley below. Bosnians looked for their weapons elsewhere: kitchen knives and household chemicals were gathered in every household as weapons of last resort, if Serbs were to break into the city. A few had real weapons: there were three men for every gun. Some of the guns were a danger to the owners because they were hunting relics or antiques passed through generations as souvenirs. Food was rationed, water collected, candles prepared, medicines saved—expiration dates ceased having a meaning. An air of expectation floated through the city.

The goal of the Yugoslav army was to break up Bosnia into small, easily controlled enclaves that were cut off from each other and the world. The strategy worked very well. Bosnians, furiously believing that the real war could not, would not, happen, mostly waited for the international community to act, in the meantime guarding the perimeters of enclaves. The world, however, simply watched, reacting to the stream of Bosnian atrocities with proposal of an arms embargo. To Serbs, who could cross the border with Serbia without any obstacles, or Croats who

found themselves in the same situation with Croatia, the embargo didn't mean much—the weapons could easily be imported. But to the surrounded Bosnians, there was no way in; for them, the embargo worked. Considering the inequality that already existed because Serbs had inherited weapons from the Yugoslavian Army units, Bosnians were outraged at the embargo.

Under constant shelling and sniper fire, without electricity, Bosnians lacked the news about the population in different parts of the country. Somehow, the news still arrived, shocking in its wake already numb people, yet again.

> May 27, 1992: a mortar shell fired from a Serb position in the hills of Sarajevo kills 16 people waiting in line for bread, inducing UN to impose sanctions on Yugoslavia.

> Summer, 1992: reports of "ethnic cleansing," a policy of slaughtering Muslim inhabitants of towns or driving them away, in order to create an ethnically pure region, confirm the fears of Bosnians. Men and women are separated, with many of the men detained in the camps. Bosnian houses and apartments are systematically ransacked or burned down, Bosniak civilians are rounded up, and tortured by being beaten with iron bars and wooden poles, being skinned or burned alive, or taken into a room full of corpses and forced to tramp on the dead bodies. The corpses are disposed of in mass graves, throwing them into nearby rivers, burning

them or burying them in the waste material of factories or garbage dumps. Witnesses claim that the bodies of those killed were butchered, with nose, ears, genitals cut off, or crosses being cut into them. The women are kept in various detention centers where they are mistreated in many ways including being raped repeatedly by Serb soldiers, policemen or villagers (United Nations).

August, 1992: the first of many shocking pictures of emaciated Muslims being held in Bosnian Serb prison camps made it out to the media.

Winter, 1992/1993: all of the utilities are disconnected in Sarajevo, and all UN humanitarian convoys blocked by Serb forces leading to acute shortages of food, fuel, and medicine in an attempt to starve Bosnians to death. Reports come out of Sarajevans losing about 30 pounds per person on a diet subsisting of weeds, pigeons, and cats, rice and flour.

December 14, 1992: my husband is shot and loses his eyes.

January 8, 1993: the Serbs kill the deputy prime minister of Bosnia, Hakija Turajlić, after stopping the UN convoy taking him from the airport.

April, 1993: the U.N. Security Council declares six “safe areas” for Bosnian Muslims: Sarajevo, Tuzla, Bihac, Srebrenica, Zepa, and Gorazde.

Spring, 1993: The tensions and regional conflict between Muslims and Croats heightens: much of Mostar’s historic city is destroyed by Croats’ shelling, including the famous Stari Most bridge.

January, 1994: Bernard-Henri Levi, a French philosopher, forms a party “Europe Begins at Sarajevo” for the elections for the European Parliament. The party’s only platform is that Europe’s humanity and civility is challenged by its inactivity in the Bosnia crisis.

February 5, 1994: Markale Massacre I. A mortar explodes in Sarajevo’s central market, killing 68 people and injuring 144.

February 23, 1994: the war between Croats and Bosnians officially ends. A U.S.-sponsored agreement, the Washington Agreement, was then signed to officially ally Bosnia and Croatia against the Serb forces.

May 31, 1994: my husband’s army unit, made out of all my neighbors and school friends, is decimated. Only eight survive.

Summer, 1994: the alliance's army advances across the country, recapturing some of the territory in the Northeast.

March 9, 1995: a CIA report concludes that 90% of the acts of "ethnic cleansing" was carried out by Serbs and that leading Serbian politicians almost certainly played a role in the crimes. The report is believed to be the most comprehensive United States assessment of the atrocities in Bosnia (Cohen).

July 11, 1995: Serbs seize Srebrenica, slaughtering over eight thousand people in a systematic fashion and burying them in mass graves.

July 25, 1995: Serbs seize Zepa, expelling thousands of refugees toward Srebrenica.

August, 1995: The Bosniak-Croat forces threaten the Bosnian Serb capital Banja Luka with a direct ground attack.

August 28, 1995: Markale Massacre II occurs. The mortar attack kills thirty seven (my grandma included) and injures ninety people. As a result, NATO warplanes begin a fierce air

> campaign against Serb positions around Sarajevo. Serbs hold their ground until September 20, 1995.
>
> September 8, 1995: foreign ministers of Bosnia, Croatia, and Serbia agree to the division of Bosnia into Serb and Muslim-Croat entities.
>
> December 14, 1995: a peace agreement, signed between the Bosnians, Croats, and Serbs in Paris, ends a nearly four-year war. Between 100,000 and 200,000 are dead, millions are displaced, and damage to the economy is incomprehensible. The government is left to the hands of an international administration.

The skeleton of the events can be transcribed in a matter of pages. The horror left after them, however, is here to stay. I can't but wonder why and how. Why would a human being feel such a need to hurt another human being, to kill him with a screwdriver, or rape a child in front of her mother? How can a human being, a neighbor, a coworker, rip a kidney out of a person and force him to walk? How can somebody's father stand up to his knees in human blood, in pits dug to conceal the mass killings, and cut throats? How can a son lock somebody's parents inside, pour gasoline on the house, and throw a lighted match? How can a devoted Christian, a man with firm belief in God, make his prisoners consume human waste, cigarette butts, or human flesh? What mental agony transforms a human being so that he or she ceases to be one? If I

am damaged by witnessing such acts, how damaged are the perpetrators? If my people are damaged by living through it, personally or vicariously, hearing about it from highly reputable sources like United Nations' commissions and Human Rights Watch agencies, or seeing it on TV on daily news in the same way other, luckier nations hear about rainfall or the price of milk, how damaged are the perpetrators?

The Serbs' main argument is that it is an "eye for an eye" situation: five hundred years ago, Turks came through this land, torturing, pillaging and burning in their wake. It's high time to pay them back. With interest. I know that our post-traumatic stress disorder will last for generations—our rates of suicide have grown to unprecedented rates. Could it be that the Serbs' has lasted all this time? That ever since the arrival of Turks in sixteenth century, they have been suffering from trauma? Their literature points in that direction. From the folk epic poems sung accompanied by a small string instrument called "*gusle*," through the modern schizophrenic novels, one always finds a variation of the same theme: an outside attack, heroic resistance, and noble death of the main character.

I can't take any blame for what happened five centuries before my birth. I would be willing to discuss and consider. But in order to discuss, you have to have somebody to discuss with.

Even today, once the beautiful Drina River, a threshold of Serbia, is crossed, the history of the Bosnian war evolves into a different story altogether. All of a sudden, there are foreign "*mujahedin*" involved: ruthless, vicious Islamic warriors who will not rest until Serbs are exterminated from these regions. There are domestic Muslims and Croats

intending to minimize opportunities for Serb children. There are Western powers that will not put up with Serbs due to suspicion of Serb connections with the Communist Russia and a world that for some reason hates Serbs. There are innocent Serbs who were mercilessly killed, and Bosnian and Croat victims who are invented by the international community who "have it in" for the poor Serbs.

And the mass slaughter? The torture, the rape, the sadism of the worst kind? According to most Serbs, it never happened. All invented. More than 12,000 Sarajevans, out of them 1,500 children, are only ghosts traversing the Balkan hills, searching their justice.

Out of the original 700,000 pre-war Sarajevans, only some 450,000 remain, the rest displaced or gone forever. Out of 150,000 Serbs who once called this city home, about a third remain. Chased by the guilt or hatred, or the complete destruction of infrastructure and lack of economic opportunities, they moved on to other parts of the country or world. As a result, Serbian populations, which immigrated after the Nazis lost to cities like Toronto, Canada, or Fresno, California, have swollen. But the numbers of missing are abused, and missing Serbs presented as killed. Pero Bukajlovic, a Serbian representative, claimed just five years ago that the size of the Bosnian genocide was miniscule next to the size of the claimed genocide over Sarajevo's Serbs, 12,000 versus 150,000. The evidence against such claims is staggering: governmental birth and death records, International Red Cross, Human Rights Watch, the United Nations. The only military commander who ever involved himself with the slaughter of Serbs in Sarajevo (242 Serbs were, in fact, killed), the only public figure to succumb to the pressure of constant fear and cold, of

engulfing starvation, and the icy stench of death floating through the decimated city enough to go after innocent Serb civilians, was shot like a rabid dog by the Bosnian government on the streets of Sarajevo in 1993. Hundreds of mosques across the country were demolished; not a single orthodox church can claim the same. Where are the proofs for the implied genocide of Serbs?

For months into the war, Bosnians spent time and energy trailing the journalists, media personnel, and foreign politicians touring the country and persuading them to report the real situation on the ground. They are killing us off, Bosnians kept repeating, offering their wounds to the lenses of international TV stations, bringing their crippled babies and dying elders to show the damage. People, once very proud, showed their festering stumps eagerly, reminding me of the film I once saw of Indian rape victims. These old, dry women who were raped by soldiers, found guilty of sexual conduct and then fined for their crime, protested the verdict that rendered them guilty by baring all. They stood naked holding protest signs, their desiccated breasts evidence of their innocence. That's what the Bosnians tried to do—exposed their wounds to media. The spilt blood was photographed and taped, the executions recorded, the screams made out: *Look what happened to us. It is not our fault. Please help.* But nothing worked.

The records remain. They are compiled and carefully checked against the databases. The names are matched to the faces. Some families possess a video record of their loved ones' brutal deaths. Some are still waiting for the DNA-matched remains dug out of the mass

graves. Even the bones might not be enough, however, for the deniers of this tragedy.

Take the Srebrenica massacre, for example. Until a gruesome videotape surfaced in 2005, the Serbian government claimed innocence. On September 2, 2002, the head of the Bosnian Serb government's bureau produced the report "in the interests of truth and reconciliation," pronounced that the slaughter never happened ("BBC Outrage over Srebrenica 'Denial'"). It was just a big misunderstanding: Muslim soldiers fleeing in exhaustion probably mistook military clashes for a massacre, which never really happened. This Pandora's box needn't be opened.

But in May of 2005, the tape found its way to television, forcing the Serbian government to react. The recording's shock is not in the actions of the characters. Basically, an Orthodox priest blesses a dozen Serbian soldiers to make their acts accepted by God. The group leads six men of different ages, all in civilian clothing, hands bound, off the truck, making them lie with their faces down. After verbal abuse and terrorizing, men are ordered to get up and are dragged to the side of the road where four are executed point blank, shot in the back of their heads. The remaining two victims drag the bodies to a nearby shack, where they are executed as well. The tape was made into a souvenir of war—the participants received it to keep for posterity and show their bravery in the fight against the "Turks." It floated through the community—at some point, even being rented out at local video shops. The attention to it happened accidentally: at the trial for a different set of murders, the members of the group ratted out each other, mentioning the tape as a proof. A head of local Humanitarian Law Center tracked it down and made it available

to prosecutors, The Hague tribunal, and Serb TV, receiving death threats and public outcry for doing so.

And there are many others: tapes of Bosnians in Srebrenica, in July of 1995, just before it fell, crowding the United Nations buildings and crying for help and protection from the advancing Serbs, women and children pressed tightly into each other so thousands could fit into the tiny space; recordings of Serbs coming into the protected enclave and drinking Johnny Walker with Dutch troops, giving chocolates to the children and hugging the elderly; recordings of the UN pullout and the separation of men and women "for investigative purposes"; recordings of crying women and husbands, fathers, brothers, sons, left behind; recordings of mass marches of men to locations unknown, to places from which there was no return; recordings of small groups of armed men who break through the Serb lines and through the forests and over the mountains intending to march to the free territory.

There are films showing cat and mouse games through the forests.

A father, captured by Serbs as he unsuccessfully navigated the forest, under the threat of immediate slaughter, calls out to his sons looking at him powerless, hiding behind the green firs. "Come out, surrender, they won't harm us," he yells, horror-struck, as he senses the end is near. Driven out of his mind, he lacks the reasoning that he should perhaps sacrifice himself for the lives of his sons. Driven out of their minds by seeing their father led by the soldiers, the sons come out and drop their guns, unable to tear themselves away from the certain deaths that follow swiftly.

The games repeated over and over, interrupted only by the barrage fires and shelling of the forest. The Srebrenicans had to cross through treacherous hilly terrain and blockades at the major mountains of the region: Kamenica Hill, Mount Udrc, Mount Velja, Baljkovica Hill. Some kept moving on, regardless, disregarding their dying neighbors and cousins littering the forests. I've heard of a father holding the hand of his little son crossing slowly through the treacherous mountains of death, putting one foot in front of the other, telling fairy tales to his son, until they cross the frontline into safety. I imagine holding on to my children's hands, and leading them through these mountains of dead, through the heaps of dead bodies and decaying body parts, for weeks and months. I imagine feeding them with grass or mushrooms or bugs, or making them drink their own urine. I imagine hiding during the day, and traveling at night so we wouldn't be caught, or be a clear target.

The ones who made it through the mountains were immediately shot with tranquilizers, from a distance if possible, because they were dangerous to themselves and everybody around. Some, in the state of shock, hallucinating, opened fire on Bosnian paramedics collecting the collapsing men as they appeared. Some, dressed in rags and emaciated, blasted their own brains. Some, delirious, ripped off their clothes and pulled out their hair. Those were the lucky ones.

The satellite images publicized the genocide around the world as it was happening. I watched the news 24/7 in Fresno, California, devastated at the size of the disaster and my powerlessness. The gray-scale images showed the mounds of freshly dug earth, growing bigger by the hour. Bosnians didn't need interpretation, or the rumbling speeches

of reporters and politicians who claimed not to know what was going on. We had seen it before: recordings of Serb soldiers covered in blood, standing in huge craters, receiving the bound victims led down the ladder or pushed inside, and slaughtered, or mounds of bodies pushed by bulldozers and buried. We knew exactly what the gray fuzzy images stood for, and why the earth was dug up. To us they were blood red. But the world needed more proof. While the satellite images grew, the conferences and speeches on all aspects of the Bosnian arms embargo were held, the issues examined from all possible perspectives. The decision to lift it was never made.

The United Nations' soldiers, researchers, and reporters would enter the vile forests in 1996 and find the hard bony evidence. The forensic investigators would for decades sort the bones excavated from the pits and sort them into bodies, matching the DNA to samples taken from living relatives. There would be mass funerals every year, on the anniversary of the slaughter, held at the memorial graveyard dedicated by Bill Clinton. My Bosnian neighbor would live to bury two close relatives each year, three in good years, when foreign experts identified more bodies than usual.

But all the photographs, recordings, satellite images, and witnesses, all the misplaced bodies in the Bosnian forests would not be enough to convict the perpetrators, or even establish a narrative of what happened in Srebrenica. The Serbian government fights hard to contest the evidence presented to the world by the world's scientists. All the data are collected: 8,731 dead or missing; 25,803 participants; 64 mass graves (Weinberg); 7,000 bone-filled bags still awaiting identification

("Mass Grave Yields over 1,000 Body Parts"). Although segments of the Serbian government and population still deny allegations of wrongdoing and offer numerous unlikely scenarios for the genocide, the committee of the Government of Republika Srpska's findings prompted an apology from Bosnian Serbs. This was major progress. But the main culprit, the Serbian government, a government that provided volunteers, funds, and political backing to the Bosnian Serbs, remains not responsible. Not responsible! Even though when President Clinton chose a signatory for the peace-guaranteeing Dayton Agreement, he asked nobody else but the Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic to sign for Bosnian Serbs.

And it is this flat, hopeless denial of any wrongdoing in the face of surmounting evidence that allows Bosnian trauma to flourish and grow and engulf the body and heart, stunting any development. It possesses our national body as evil as terminal cancer, draining any happiness or good until the Bosnian people buckle under pressure, collapse to their knees, and let go of their tortured, maimed souls. The cold fingers of psychological trauma untangle memories and detach them. They unravel childhoods, dig deep into fears, and squeeze out first loves as the stubborn zits. No wonder the leading cause of death in Bosnia is heart attack: for fifteen long years now, this heart has been clawed into.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, what David Satcher calls "a severe and ongoing emotional reaction to an extreme psychological trauma" (par. 39), has been a companion to solders during any war, or to anybody else who has experienced a damage to the psyche as a result of a traumatic event. In WWII, it was called "combat fatigue." In WWI, it was called a "shell shock," and a "railway spine" in the nineteenth century.

But I prefer a name given to it in Civil War: “a soldier’s heart.” Whether induced by a single or repeated experience, a soldier’s heart prevents an individual from recovering from the stress and coping with the resulting emotions. It can hunt its victims down immediately, or appear years later, in moments of immediate, real or perceived life-threatening danger, where a person finally experiences hopelessness, becoming extremely confused and insecure, and often feeling betrayed.

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, the causes of trauma are many, and can be related to physical suffering. Abuse in early childhood, whether physical, emotional or sexual, or a prolonged or extreme neglect, or witnessing of such an abuse inflicted upon another person, will most likely result in a trauma, as will experiences of continual “psychological ‘attacks’; for example a continual perception of psychological force, invalidation or annihilation” (Jaffe, Segal, and Dumke). But the event most likely to produce psychological trauma is experiencing or witnessing violent physical assaults or surviving or witnessing such an event, including torture; adult experiences of sexual assault; warfare; violent, life-threatening natural disasters; and incarceration. Even exposure to extreme poverty or milder forms of abuse—for example, verbal—can be traumatic.

That Bosnians have gone through these experiences is without a doubt. Children, like my sister-in-law’s brother, who were captured along with their parents, incarcerated and beaten up, or witnessed their parents beaten up and annihilated. They have been sexually abused, or watched as their mothers, sisters, and even grandmothers were raped into oblivion. They have been starved or fed feces, or other taboo matters,

which Kristeva calls “abject” objects (Kristeva 22). Although small and innocent, they have acquired a soldier’s heart, with all its weight and bitterness. Are these children our future? Or the adults who made it through this torture?

Of course, not all the residents of Bosnia went through the forty four concentration camps. The miracle of the twentieth century was that the same media that recorded the plight of Bosnia as evidence of genocide played out these horrific crimes on national TV day after day, informing Bosnian residents who were not brutalized, but also infecting them with fear, anxiety, and panic. Sarajevans who sat in their homes still suffered very similar conditions: incarcerated through the blockade of the city, raped by the constant barrage of grenades and their shrapnel, mortar shells, rockets, and sniper fire, eating only bread, rice, and pasta cooked in water dragged from wells and public fountains, cooked in yards on the fragments of tables, bookcases and wood floors. They were aware of the ever present danger of Serb army units infiltrating the crumbling defenses of the city. Annihilation became more than a possibility during those lonely, cold months: youths from every street were killed daily, the angry red stains on the dirty streets and wooden grave markers with their names and dates the only reminder of their earthly lives. Add to that the world’s failure to recognize their afflictions as real. To think that a nation would not be psychologically traumatized is a bizarre joke played on these overly tired people.

The addiction of Bosnians to alcohol and, more recently, drugs, if disheartening, cannot be surprising, as these are convenient means of escaping a dark reality. They bring in their wake other social disorders,

such as prostitution, crime and gangs, even cults. Intense feelings and anger spill out of people in the form of road rage, domestic violence, elder abuse. Danger seems always present: the stories of ruthless robbers and home intruders, the stories about mysterious preying violent viruses, of unexploded murderous devices left all around, build on each other, each neighbor competing to tell a scarier story of an event that could not have possibly have happened. Each thunderstorm is bigger than the previous one, each piece of hail a malignant growth out to kill, destroy, level. Hopelessness prevails.

Whether flashbacks or nightmares manifest themselves in the population is hard to tell: insomnia occurs most often, as vigilantes, drenched in lurking fears and insecurities, spend their nights as window fixtures, keeping posts to prevent, perhaps, more violence. The exhaustion they eventually come to feel leads to distraction and lack of clear thinking: out of extreme tiredness, the locking of doors is forgotten, houses are robbed, and fear returns, only more powerful, more strong, and more permanent.

Some people choose to exclude themselves from such society of terrified, insomniac neighbors, preferring an emotional detachment or numbness to over-excitement. Numbing all emotions, neighborhoods watch as a neighborhood wife-abuser showers his wife with punches and kicks her, until she cannot move. The policy is simple but challenging at the same time: ignore the sick, the collapsing, the cancer or heart-attack stricken; disregard the number of funerals each day and the full graveyards; turn a blind eye to leukemia-paralyzed children. The sufferers are distant and less important than the latest episode of “All My

Children." Fifteen years latter, living without a treatment has resulted in permanent damage. Faith in a better tomorrow is all but dead, and the air is full of despair, loss of self-esteem and depression.

It is in this atmosphere that Osmanagic's ancient pyramid is discovered: since important aspects of the person's self and world understanding have been violated, their own identity is called into question. Osmanagic offers an answer.

To be powerless and impotent is difficult. To be slaughtered as an animal, without a chance for resistance, is horrible. To bury your children, as many of my neighbors did, or to lose parents due to lack of medication or medical care, without being able to protect them is too much. The recovery treatment has to be equal to the wound caused through the violence.

The Valley of Bosnian Pyramids, with its many structures—Pyramids of the Sun, of the Moon, of the Dragon, of Love, of Earth, the tunnels, the plateau—in its ancient grandiosity is a magnificent dream: the biggest, the oldest, the most complex structure in the history of humankind, which unites all cultures across the globe throughout the entire history of the human race and beyond. It is large enough to wash away the stain of shame from the collective national body. Shame from the inability to defend the country's borders and preserve them from occupation. Shame for failure to save from harm millions of Bosnians and preserve their lives and property. Shame from being so exposed and vulnerable that the international community can rule the country on its whim, without the rights and benefits of the Bosnian people in mind.

Shame for the tragically enormous brain drain, or the loss of its most productive, most educated citizens who could have made an impact on the country's progress.

To counter such shame, to recover national pride, extreme measures must be taken.

Digging out the stone blocks feels primordial and pure. It preempts the question of who was first in these regions, to whom this land belongs. Having world-famous media stations around while going through the discovery of the "true" history and regeneration of self-worth doubles the power: Bosnia makes it to the TVs and minds of Europeans, seven years before it is even allowed to fill out the application for membership in European Union. And for the first time in recent history, Bosnian pyramids take the country to the West in a positive way, not as a bleeding, maimed beggar without limbs who asks for the leftovers and crumbles. Not as a daily segment of the never-ceasing caseload for the Hague judges.

My uncle went to The Hague last year. Most people don't know about the significance of this city. That is, people who do not have ties to my country. For Bosnians, The Hague is the center of the world, a place where the planes of past and future meet. It is a city that hosts The International Tribunal for Crimes Against Humanity. The Tribunal is an international court that receives the most notorious murderers, criminals that in a true fashion of the Dark Age's barbarians pillaged my country and my people for three long years. They come for seven-day periods with their translators, usually deny their charges, listen to the prosecutions' evidence, wait for their punishment of ten to twenty years in Hague

prison, and go home to await the call to come and serve their sentence. The Tribunal cannot give a death or a life sentence, unfortunately. It's been twelve years since the war had started; the Tribunal is still working at full steam as the line of murderers is very, very long. It has become our habit to tune into Hague proceedings daily, catch up on news, and make sure that all is well. To show the world that this was a "war" rather than a "genocide" and therefore shift the responsibility for not reacting sooner, European prosecutors bring in Bosnian generals too. That's where my uncle had to go—to testify against one of our own generals, for as a soldier, my uncle was aware of the operations and orders.

"We'll wrap up in 2010," the lawyers announce. I probably will not.

Fifteen years after this bloody genocide is over, we still turn our faces towards The Hague, like we turn them to Mecca at prayer time, five times a day, seven days a week, and pray for a resolution.

The world lives on. Bosnia does too. Prostitution and drugs, controlled by the mafia, claim Sarajevo's "*carsija"* and its antique stone shops. Bosnian children have a different childhood than I had. Some of them are growing up without their extended families, in countries their parents dreamed up. Some of them are dying from leukemia from depleted-uranium American bombs thrown at Serbs in the final days of war. Or they are hyper aware of the full makeshift graveyards (Olympic stadiums and parks in some other life), or missing parents who cannot provide the Western fashions other children, like mine, wear.

In my American suburbia, I don't have to remember. I could easily just re-envision myself (I am a writer, after all, and that's what writers do). I could cross the border and become a full-fledged American. Detach

myself from the mass graves of Srebrenica, which grow in numbers exponentially—the investigators are just barely finished with digging one out, and three more are located. I could forget about the wars. Or evil. Or pain. I could, that is, if I had not been damaged, too.

Instead, I close my eyes and see myself as an LP, an old-fashioned vinyl record. I am inscribed all over. Tracks of information run around my center. There is a scratch straight through the middle. A deep groove. That's where the needle gets stuck each time. Every time I write. There are many tracks, many feelings, many memories to write about. But it is the groove that attracts the needle. And so I start over each time: "Hi, my name is Lejla, and I have been damaged. Let me tell you the story of my people."

In America, I have a voice. It is not, by any means, a perfect voice. It is not always understandable. Sometimes, it is not even believable. But I use it to translate what happened, to make sense out of it. To fashion the text in the linear fashion. Karadzic, a Serb leader and a mastermind of genocide, is doing the same, publishing a book. It is my word against his.

Did it all really happen? Can such an evil occur? Or is it all imagined? Is *this* the reality—California sunshine, Hollywood smiles? Writing in English? Or is it the bones, and the blood, and the headless ghosts of concentration camps that I, encountering a blank page, stare into being? Am I a witness?

I testify that these people really existed. I testify that they died an ugly death. I testify that that this hurt us. And that it still does. And I

think that when you understand this, I will finally be ready to put it all to sleep, and the pyramid will be needed no more.

Chapter 4

MUJO, A CRO-MAGNON-LIKE HUMAN, HIS FAMILY, AND THE TOOLS OF TRAUMA

The second-rate trickster, the clunky thug, the flagrant adulterer, the uncouth drunk, Mujo is bigger than life. No Bosnian joke can be made without him presiding over it, starring in a one-two-punch line theater. By the etymology of his name, Mujo—short for Mustafa—is a Bosnian Muslim, but he's as far away from practicing Islam as Bosnia is from becoming a world superpower. Even though he is the "chosen one" (what Mustafa means in Arabic), Mujo is in no way related to the man the name originally points to: the Muslim prophet Mohammed. Instead, he is a character chosen to represent all Bosnians, and jokes even imply (tongue-in-cheek, of course) that all Muslims are like Mujo as well.

Mujo, by all means, is not hot-looking—a major makeover should be in order. He is a man of average height, and he is substantially overweight: when Mujo went to the movie theater, he suggested to the kids behind him that since they can't see the movie, they should watch him instead, and laugh when he laughs. Besides being big, he is also gifted with a large beer belly. No wonder he has one: when Mujo's wife gave birth to twins, he gave them the same name so when he yells for a beer, the two kids would each bring him a bottle.

His hair is untidy, as is his beard: Mujo is not a fan of shaving, or hygiene in general. When he was a soldier, the officer asked him why his hair is a mess, to which Mujo responded that he combed it, but as he is

just a grunt, the hair refused to stay at attention. Out of all sports, his favorite is running up the tree to hide from bears, husbands, or to hunt small rodents. His feet smell so much that he can kill thousands of flies by taking off his socks. He has many diseases, but most often STDs, which he carries on his sleeve as victory trophies. Mujo's IQ is so low that the generations of his descendants are affected. Instead of being placed in a nursery for the gifted, the average intelligent, or the mentally challenged babies, Mujo's newborn son is placed in "Mujo's Children" nursery. His extremely low intelligence requires creation of the new designation.

But make no mistake: Mujo is a caring father: when he worries that he won't hear his baby falling out of the crib, he puts him to sleep at the top of the bookshelves so he will hear the fall. He is so cheap that when his wife asked for alligator boots, instead of buying them, Mujo decided to go hunt the alligators. After catching over fifty, he had to stop—none of them were wearing the boots. Lack of presents for the wife is not the worst part. Mujo is also jealous, suspicious, and unaware of any norms of civilized behavior. Yet, somehow, he overcomes.

How does Mujo defeat the world? Let me count the ways.

While others are sleeping, Mujo parties. He's not crazy enough to waste away the nights he could be drinking. Under the influence, he says to a woman that he's never seen an uglier woman in his life, to which she responds that she's never seen a pig more drunk than he is.

"Yes," he says, "but I'll have a hang over and be fine tomorrow."

Socially, Mujo is ignorant. But sometimes, Mujo does go to more cultured settings. Once, in January, he spent a whole day looking for a swimsuit: his wife was taking him to the “Swan Lake” ballet. And yes, he was bored, but the effort to keep awake paid off: at the exit, they were giving out coats, and he took three.

While others are working, Mujo sleeps. Next to his bed, he keeps a chair, just in case he is tired when he wakes up and he needs a rest. On the chair, he keeps two glasses of water, one full, and one empty, because he might be thirsty when he wakes up, and might not.

While others stand still, Mujo gets around. Once he was sent with three dogs into outer space. The first dog’s job was to check the atmospheric pressure, the fuel gauges, and measure the speed of the ship. The second dog’s job was to measure the outside temperature, and measure the radioactivity. The third dog’s job was to record all the planets and satellites, and observe the Sun. Mujo’s job was to feed the dogs, and not touch anything.

At least, in this case, there was no harm done. Unlike in Africa, during Mujo’s safari. He killed three lions, two leopards, one elephant, and ten “nopleez.” When asked what the “nopleez” is, Mujo answered:

“I don’t know either: it is small and black and yells: No Pleez, No Pleez!”

While others are romancing, Mujo…well, doesn’t.

Mujo is by no means alone. He has friends and girlfriends. The most commonly mentioned are Suljo, Haso or Huso, and Fata. These names are as embedded in Islam as is Mujo: Sulejman—King Solomon—is another religious prophet, Hasan and Hussein are the names of

Mohammed's grandsons. Their mother's name: Fatima. Not a single cultural or political event in Bosnia or the world can go by without Mujo and his companions commenting on it, and putting in their two cents worth, while at the same time drawing attention to their ignorance and perversity.

During a music class, Mujo is called on.

"Do you know," asks teacher, "who is Bach?"

"Nope," says Mujo.

"And do you know who Beethoven is?"

"Have no clue," says Mujo.

"And Mozart?"

"Who cares?" replies he, to which the teacher, of course, gives him an F.

" And do you know, teacher," says Mujo, "who Suljo is?"

"No."

"And Haso?"

"Not in the least."

"And Huso?"

"No."

"And why would I know," says Mujo, "your gang if you don't know mine?!"

Suljo is a loyal and honest friend to Mujo, and will do anything to help his friend out, even if that means getting stuck in some of Mujo's hilarious situations, or suffering for his less-intelligent pal, even if sometimes he gets the other end of the stick. Once, the two of them went to steal firewood. Mujo went ahead, not knowing that the owner was

waiting in dark. As he stuck out his arm, the owner smashed him with the piece of wood across the mouth. Mujo ran away, sending Suljo to try, under the excuse that he couldn't do it because he felt like laughing. Or when the two of them worked on the installation of a wireless phone system: Mujo digging the trench, and Suljo going behind him filling it up immediately. Haso and Huso are Suljo-like comrades, although sometimes they are Mujo's sons with his wife Fata.

The relationship between Mujo and Fata mirrors those shown on the *Jerry Springer Show*: there is nothing these two have not tried, with each other or somebody else. The only shortcoming of good-friend Suljo is his adultery with Mujo's wife, although most of the times, Suljo tries to be discrete. Once, when Mujo suddenly returned home, sure that Suljo and Fata were again at it, he searched through the whole house and died of shock—no Suljo in sight. On his arrival to heaven, he meets Suljo. Surprised to see him, Mujo explains how he had a heart attack when he couldn't find Suljo in the house, to which the other one answers:

"I wish you had looked into the freezer—we would both be alive now!"

But Suljo is not the only one Fata is fooling around with when Mujo is not looking—there are many others. Sometimes, to earn some money, Fata engages in prostitution as well. Sometimes, Mujo beats her up for it, and sometimes he just takes the money.

Mujo and his gang are not a lonely example of Bosnian humor.

Back in the 1972, a book called Popular Humor and Wisdom of Muslims came out in Communist Yugoslavia. The only known anthology of Bosnian folk literature, the book became immensely popular in

Muslim households, for it brought the forgotten past, the past filled by stories about "*Beys"* and Sultans, and rose-scented handkerchiefs given as a pledge of love, fruit compotes, and pipe smoke. Numerous stories and anecdotes, poems and songs, legends, fairy tales and fables, riddles, sayings and quotes, about just about any occupation, class or city, carry just what the anthology promises: humor and wisdom. In the most difficult parts of Bosnian history, during outbreaks of plague or rebellions against the Ottoman Empire's occupation, Bosnians spun incredibly tall tales, created heroes, and related love pangs. Undoubtedly, the inspiration was always drawn from the emotion, from irony, sadness, or anger provoked by the everyday events and political happenings in the homeland.

Just like Muslim architecture, with its minarets, mosques, houses, and graveyards, or the Muslim lifestyle, with its clothes, foods, and customs, stand out, making it easy to recognize, so is the Muslim literature, with its voice, tone, and content. It speaks of deep anxieties and satisfactions of living in these spaces, of the unique and substantial experiences on which humor and wisdom rely, in order to become a marker of a nation's creativity and spirit, and complex relationships between the peoples of different ethnicities coexisting together.

Out of the sea of heroic knights, beautiful dames, dirty beggars, and busy judges, one figure stands out from the rest. Mujo's great-great grandfather, Nasrudin Hodza, ruled the comic realms hundreds of years before Mujo. Although a very popular character in Bosnian anecdotes, Nasrudin is not a native: he was born somewhere in the national imaginations of Persians and Afghanis. He came to Bosnia along with

Ottoman Turks during the occupation in the Middle Ages, and has hung around ever since, the stories bequeathed and transferred from parents to children through the numerous oral traditions.

The stories about Nasrudin usually involve him and his trusted donkey placing themselves or being placed in a situation where they have to reason their way out of it.

Once, Nasrudin was riding his donkey through a village, when a dog, barking like mad, jumped out behind the fence and went straight for them. Nasrudin jumped down, pulled an ax, and struck the dog straight in the middle of the forehead, killing him instantly. To the complaining owner, who kept questioning why Nasrudin didn't hit the dog with the handle of the ax instead of blade, Nasrudin proposed that if the dog went to bite him with his tail, he would have hit him with the handle. Once, he was asked to help divide the ten rams robbed by nine Serbian rebels.

"No problem," said Nasrudin, "nine of you and one ram is ten, one of me and nine rams are also ten" (Nasrudin and the Hajduks).

Although appearing foolish and somewhat less intelligent than average, Nasrudin exposes other people's faults at the same time he regains composure through the wisdom he employs to get out of the situation. He is often standing up to the authorities and showing them as average humans, with their own set of failures, shortcomings and inferiorities, or showcasing Islam as practiced by mystic Sufi orders, pointing out the inequalities in the society, as well as other negative aspects of human nature: laziness, incompetence, cowardice, and egoism. As Nafisa Abdelsadek proposes, "a wide spectrum is covered by

these tales; from children's jokes to religious meditation to revolutionary rebellion" (97).

But with time, Nasrudin was forgotten and replaced by other kinds of humor. Communist Yugoslavia provided a fertile soil for development of the Mujo phenomena, although Mujo of pre-war years was a much more benign figure politically, as well as sexually and in any other senses as well. He seemed a natural extension of Nasrudin: more modern, up-to-date technologically and culturally, but still, with some norms of moral behavior as a guide. The weakening of the Communist party seems to coincide with Mujo's "stupification" progress: between WWII and now, he goes from below average, to mentally undeveloped, to demented, to imbecilic.

It's not an accident that the degradation of Mujo and the demise of previously strong communist party happened simultaneously. In fact, the death of Tito and the strengthening of the national parties brought out a completely new style of joking: political satire underlined with ethnic animosities.

A very popular theatrical performance from the 1980s in Yugoslavia called "Chauvinist Farce" was based on the bar conversation between two academics, a Serb and a Croat. Due to their drunkenness, two of them could honestly and truthfully, for the first time in fifty years of Tito, say things that they always wanted to say but couldn't for fear of political persecution. They could argue the ancient question: who was the first in these spaces. The drunken Serb character, protesting Croat's claims, slurring:

"Yes, sure, why not: first there were Croats, then Amoebas…"

To offset the lack of a Bosnian voice in this popular comedy, and to resolve some of Bosnian ethnic frustrations, a generation of young Bosnian actors engaged in the exploration of a movement known as New Primitivism.

Unlike the New Primitivism that spread through the United States in 1970s as a response to the rapid development of technology and its introduction into human lives disguised as a "great liberator" and into the military in order to help win the weapons race, Bosnian New Primitivism was not a hippie movement, or the "reorientation, meaning and self-understanding in a therapeutic or cathartic revitalization" (Geertz 54). Instead of thriving naturalism and devotion to religions seen as "New Age" philosophies, Bosnian New Primitivism was a humorous, but deeply political movement that proposed the rhetoric of the cultural underground as privileged over the intelligencia and civilized, cultured discourse in music and literature. Thus, instead of the proper language, it is slang that is privileged, as well as jargon filled with "Turcisms"—vocabulary based on Turkish words modified and adopted into Bosnian, traditionally seen as inferior and substandard but heavily utilized among Muslims. The ordinariness of the characters: neighborhood musicians, retirees, school teachers, alternative medicine healers, and villagers, together with the absurd situations they are put in, resonates like absurd theater plays crossed with the satire of traditional: the uncouthness of Lucky in Waiting for Godot crossed with surrealism of *Monty Python's Flying Circus*.

The most popular of the art forms produced in the movement was a weekly TV comedy titled "Top Chart of Surrealists," which originally

started as a segment on a radio show, but due to its popularity grew into TV series in 1984. The show was made up of sketches, in which ten men took on different roles, male and female. Some characters were repeated through episodes, in regular segments, like the alternative medicine healer or a chief in the cooking segment. Many dealt with the declining political situation, predicting the implications of political decisions that were being made, going even so far to suggest that the war was imminent.

Many episodes proved to be prophetic. In one famous episode, the multi-ethnic parliament is voting on the new anthem. The Croat representative comes out and sings a nationalist Croat song, during which he gets booed off the stage, chased with paper balls and other items the representatives are throwing at him. A Muslim comes out next, receiving the same treatment. A worker from the metal works factory comes out playing heavy metal music, again with the same result. Finally, a guy comes out and plays a nationalist Serb music on their traditional instrument "*gusle*," singing a Chetnic hymn—a song describing the mass slaughter of Muslims in WWII. The parliament, where Serbs are a majority, breaks out into applause—even the president of the country joins in. That provokes a mass fight between the representatives. A villager dressed in lamb skin comes into the building, carrying a good-sized log. Talking to the camera, he explains that he has invented a machine that causes peace and brotherhood in times of conflict. He presses the button on the log and everybody falls to the ground, and then rises up, hugging and kissing people around—clearly, the "*hepek*" worked well.

Other popular sketches involve Sarajevo, the capital, being divided into different states, a single family split into two clans and warring over control of rooms in the apartment, UN soldiers‘ presence adding fuel to the conflict. At different times, Surrealists warn that “peace may break out and ruin Bosnia’s harmonious war” or give alarming instructions about how the public should act in case of “peace” (Top Lista Nadrealista).

The show continued during the war, although the original performers had split according to the ethnic lines, with Serb performers emigrating to Serbia and becoming heavily involved with ultra-nationalist movements, and supporting the genocide, and Muslim and Croat performers remaining in besieged Sarajevo and continuing the production. Continuously making fun of the horrible conditions under which Sarajevans lived brought residents relief and moral support, helping them survive by motivating survival even when people lost their will to live.

Living through the hell of genocide and ethnic cleansing didn’t diminish a sense of humor in Bosnians, although the subject shifted. Instead of happy-go-lucky Mujo of former days, preoccupied with drink and women, there was a different character now: survival, at its basic level, was what mattered. Mujo’s wisdom now focused on how to get some good food, how to wheedle money and cigarettes out of the crews of foreign journalists constantly coming into the city to tour and observe the exotic environment of war.

Because a draft was instituted for all eligible males during war, Mujo spent most of his time on the frontlines. Once, Suljo caught a glimpse of a Fata's dentures in Mujo's bag.

"To make sure," answered Mujo, "that she doesn't eat all of the humanitarian aid before I come home."

He also visited playgrounds caught in the notorious Sarajevo's sniper alley, swinging high to "get on snipers' nerves."

Mujo was injured multiple times. Once, talking to Suljo, Mujo got hit by a sniper bullet—it took off his ear. Mujo leaned down and started searching on the ground. While Suljo was pulling Mujo toward safety, asking Mujo to forget about the ear, Mujo, frustrated, yells:

"Forget the ear, I had a Marlborough stuck behind it!"

Suljo, however, is not so collected when injured. When he was shot in the leg, he screamed and yelled so much that the whole hospital couldn't sleep. Mujo came over to calm him down:

"What's wrong with you, man, to yell so much, only shot by a bullet—look at the guy over there: shot by a grenade but quiet as a mouse!"

When Mujo lost his hand, Suljo came to visit him as well, asking what happened.

"Well, I had a stupid commander," said Mujo. "He told us to pull the trigger and throw the hand grenade on three. I pulled and it exploded, even though my watch only showed 2:15."

But the war jokes go further, in the same way the war trauma goes deeper than just being in constant danger from snipers and grenades, or being hungry and unable to satisfy even the basic needs of yourself or

the family. The slaughter, rape, and torture provided a different material for the humor, bloody and foreign but feeling right at the moment.

Once, Mujo and Suljo were traveling back to their village after the war. They were walking through some bushes, when Suljo spots a human head lying by the road.

"Hey Mujo, there's someone's head!"

"Really?"

"Yeah, it's someone's head… wait a minute, it's our neighbor Haso!"

Suljo picked it up to see better. "See, it's Haso's head. Poor Haso."

Mujo looked carefully and said, "No, it can't be him, he wasn't so tall!"

The golden fish and three wishes joke in Bosnia gets a new interpretation: when Serbs invaded a Muslim village, they slaughtered everybody and burned all the houses. Mujo, seeing the tragedy, runs through the back door and into the forest. Serbs run after him. Mujo sees a forest spring and jumps in. Serbs surround him and drag him out. As they are carrying him, Mujo pleads:

"Don't shoot: I'll grant you three wishes!"

In the finals of the Paralympic Games, Olympics for the disabled, all the gold medals since 1995 have been taken by the Bosnian team. After so much success, Mujo, the trainer, spoke, thanking all the sponsors, friends, and supporters. Out of the stands, a Serb yells:

"And what about thanking us? It was us that made you disabled in the first place!"

In the twelve years since the end of the war, humor in Bosnia has continued to evolve. The modern jokes are nothing like those that have been told through Bosnian history. Mujo is now not just a womanizer: he is very often bisexual, and fornicates with animals as well. Fata now doesn't have to hide the fact that she gets around: very often, she comments on Mujo's lack of skill as compared to others she is with. Mujo doesn't just drink anymore: he has become a drug addict as well. Since he is still dirt poor (you can't expect everything to change!), he inhales to get high: glue, chemicals, paint. As these drugs have a direct effect on the brain cells, Mujo is even more stupid. And Suljo? Suljo's moved to America, Germany, Australia, or some other, better, lighter place.

The humor, which comes out of people as a kind of modern oral narrative, has paralleled the consciousness of Bosnian national identity.

The image of Mujo as a perpetual Cro-Magnon humanoid is rooted deep in Orientalism, which had a strong impact on social discourse in Europe. The uncouthness of Mujo, the rawness of his image, the overly excessive attention devoted to the bodily pleasures and the reptilian brain he possesses that doesn't require more processing power than what is necessary to satisfy physical urges and Id-like impulses, comes from traditional association of such stereotypes with Muslims and Islam, as Edward Said has pointed out in his Orientalism.

From medieval assumptions that those who live in hotter climates are lazy and child-like, to beliefs that Muslims are pagans who should be converted or otherwise dealt with, the background of negative attitudes toward Bosnian Muslims can be traced back to the beginning of Islam, in 620AD. The numerous crusades led by Christian European knights

didn't pass through this land without leaving a trace. The Ottoman Turks who brought Islam to European soil were stopped at Vienna, Austria, which means that Bosnia was the last frontier for the empire. Bosnian conversion to Islam established the last bastion of Islam in Western Christian lands. For this perceived injury, Bosnian Muslims have been titled Poturice, Balije, and Turkish Bastards, implying treason and ultimate faithlessness.

Edward Said, the scholar who first postulated that Orientalism is a Western device used for conquering the East, implies that the East was not only conquered politically, but that Western scholars have appropriated the East's languages, history, and culture, constructing Muslim identities according to perception of Muslim as an inscrutable, exotic deviation from the "norm" that the West represents. Said claimed that the perception of the East as feminized, weak, and morally subjective and fallible, opens the door for political subjugation and replacement of cultural values of irrational and weak-minded East with the values of the rational, strong, and masculine West (3). The rhetoric of Mujo is a prime example of Orientalism in action: through every joke, Mujo and the rest of his humanoid tribe go through the deconstruction of their normalcy and reconstruction of their identity as weaker, stupider, and less moral than before.

The language of humor can, as we've seen, define the idea of national identity, and cause detachment and embarrassment. Language in general, being a tool for knowing, can help create or destroy an identity. For example, during the years of Communist Yugoslavia, the official language of the country was Serbo-Croatian. How and why these

two nationalities were chosen over the others is unclear. But what is clear is that the proponents of Yugoslavia still claim that the Bosnian language has no grounds for its existence, implying that the differences in the pronunciation, vocabulary and different uses of grammar are minor and do not warrant consideration as a completely separate language. This is unfortunate: in the middle ages, Bosnia relied on two distinct scripts, Bosancica, which came from Serbia but was adapted from use in official documents, and Arabica, a modification of the Arabic alphabet that was in popular use until the twentieth century. To say that a country that is so immersed in the study of language—even after the war, Bosnian children are still learning Serb-privileged Cyrillic script alongside the Latin alphabet—does not have a language of its own, is a travesty. What should we say we speak? Serbian? Croatian? Slovenian?

The division runs so deep that there is confusion about the term "Bosnian." Since a population of Bosnia that is neither of Serbian nor Croatian ancestry, which has some connection with Islam, definitely exists, it is not a stretch of one's imagination to grant that the population needs to have a name. The name employed since 1976 is Bosnian Muslims. However, this name has been disputed as it implies that there is not a distinct culture with its traditions and customs here, only religious affiliation, which is not true. It also implies that all who belong to the group practice Islam, which is also not true: there are other religions within the country. There are even those who are affiliated with Islam culturally, but do not practice it or consider themselves believers. Recently, terms such as Bosnian, Bosniak, Bosnjanin, and Bosnian

Muslims are used interchangeably, in a constant attempt to define precisely the identity of Bosnians.

Being invalidated by language or humor, or annihilated in a sense of identity, perpetuate the psychological trauma resulting in continual perception of psychological violence. The scab that grows over the wound is peeled again and again, not allowing healing. The wound festers, boiling over with the infected rhetoric, and a cancerous growth expands out: fertile soil for fundamentalism and extremist ideologies.

Edward de Bono, a Maltese psychologist and physician, suggested that the way a joke works is the mind is matching patterns that it knows of from the prior experience (15). When a new link is added to the already existing body of familiar connections via different route than the expected based on the experience, laughter occurs. This theory explains why the jokes are not funny after the first time, as well as why jokes need elaborate set up mechanisms, like repetitions, and why jokes rely on stereotypes—reducing the time needed to establish the pattern in the brain.

The sheer size of the body of humor about Mujo suggests that the patterns of Mujo's primitivism and lack of culture are strongly established. Although around only for the last fifty years, brought into existence during the Communist era, it is not likely that this stereotype will disappear from society soon, even if the consequence of propagating this stereotype is damage to the self-esteem of Bosnians and a resulting sense of worthlessness. This is not an unheard of experience: other ethnic jokes exist, some racially tainted and most equally offensive. Irish are also stupid and drunk in jokes, Blacks are incompetent, Jews are

tight wads, Catholics naïve and overly trusting, blondes are dumb, the French promiscuous.

Although generally funny, ethnic jokes that affront or demean someone are by definition an insult. As the assaults are actions that injure the physical body, so are insults actions that injure the mental "body" of a person—in medical terminology, the assault and insult are synonyms. Under United Kingdom law, compensation can be sought for emotional injury as damages for the unlawful act of bullying and discrimination. If there is sufficient evidence that the discrimination was strong enough to cause the injury, that the injured person was aware of the discrimination and that injury can be proven by showing the resulting anger or emotional distress over the insult, the damages are awarded to the sufferer (United Kingdom).

When I was growing up, I lived in a Muslim quarter where Serbs were rare and Croats non-existent. All was familiar: the scents, the foods, the customs. Pork, due to Muslim religious dietary laws, was unavailable in our neighborhood, and it never crossed my mind to check an ingredient list on a food package. My neighbors shared a life: we all got up early on our holiday Eid and went to prayers; we all reenacted Ibrahim's plight by sacrificing the lamb and sharing the meat. The New Year's tree, a deep green fir decorated by garlands, candy, and lights, went up on the 26th of December and came down on the 5th of January, dodging the Serb and Croat Christmases. Although some of my teachers were Serbs, because they and their Muslim counterparts tortured us in the same ways, I never really considered their treatment special or unusual.

But in the high school, I found myself part of a minority. I was an outsider in more ways than one. My parents were middle-class people, not working for communist government, but for themselves: small business owners. Although my father had a college degree in Arts, we couldn't measure up to the other parents: doctors, executives, and professors. On top of that, I was a one of six Muslims in a thirty eight student-classroom. To compensate for my minority status, I started smoking.

It wasn't until the ethnic tensions arose during my senior year of high school that I connected any attempts of intimidation to my ethnicity. My math teacher's wicked pleasure in giving me bad grades, my Latin teacher's ambivalence as if I couldn't do better when I got my usual and much hated B's. But worst of all were teachers who came from a Muslim background: they desperately privileged Serbs and Croats over us, apologizing in a way for their assigned identity. They called on us when they were sure we weren't ready and made fun of us every time they could.

"Today, Lejla's having baklavas instead of her lunch," my Muslim English teacher would laugh, stretching my name on purpose. "You brought some for me?"

I would sink in my desk, the laughter heavy as lead on my shoulders, sensing another D in English coming my way.

The point is, out of an all-A student, a valedictorian active in the school orchestra and forensics in elementary school, my teachers encouraged me to tune myself out completely in high school. And this

happened many times over to Muslim students in Bosnia: a process of natural selection.

But not all of the Mujo jokes are written by those with a vested interest in preserving the sense of inferiority that jokes created. Many jokes, especially those modern ones that have pushed Mujo into the realms of drugs, prostitution, and bestiality, are thought of and written by Bosnian Muslims themselves. In her acclaimed book Powers of Horror, Julia Kristeva defines a very interesting concept, "abject," as an object that provokes extreme human reaction to a breakdown of the meaning, such as Bosnian war, and its "loss of distinction between subject and object or between self and other" (24). The typical example is a reaction to a corpse or products of the human body, reminding us of its organic, and thus perishable, mortal structure.

Living through war, where the open wound, brain and bone materials, shit, sewage, vomit, and blood, are constantly seen exposed as "normal" artifacts to be encountered when leaving home, some of it often one's own, as Kristeva puts it, "draws…. To the place where the meaning collapses" (2). The archaic memories of the existence before separation from another body and the trauma of birth have to be pushed back through the "primal repression" that abject represents.

Theoretically, faced with the reality of war, the memories of abject come back. Remembrance of our own mortality which we pushed in subconscious in order to be able to live, reconstructs the border between the animal and human, between pre-culture and culture. The disturbance of the abject in terms of "identity, system, order" includes crimes like Auschwitz, or Srebrenica, drawing attention to the "fragility of

law" (4). The experience of mortality becomes real, and the position in the world we constructed is questioned. The borders of acceptable and human are stretched, jokes rewritten, discourse changed:

> A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not *signify* death. In the presence of signified death—a flat encephalograph, for instance—I would understand, react, or accept. No, as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. (3)

Modern jokes reflect this movement, as does the post-war literature and art of Bosnia. To repair such a wound and reestablish the borders of Real, to re-impose the Symbolic Order or the social hierarchy of traditional society, Bosnians desperately need the pyramid.

And that is exactly why the response to Osmanagic's claims has been so strong. I've seen grandmothers baking pies and bringing them to the excavations sites, as an offering to the workers, businesses donating sodas and soft drinks for workers, government officials coming to visit and have a tour, encouraging the people to go on. There have been thousands of visitors to the site, some of them Bosnian scientists at famous international institutions. There have been foreign visitors, coming to Bosnia out of curiosity, hoping to figure out what is going on in this very small country. There have been thousands gazing through cyberspace, wishing to be there, defending the guestbooks of the

pyramid-dedicated websites, with all the fury that the language can muster, fighting the opposition. And the opposition: oh, yes. A dirty fight, again on the national basis. Plugging into Mujo stereotypes, the opposition insists that a nation so backward and stagnant, so ignorant and deluded, could have never built something positive.

Two mummies come out of the Pyramid in Visoko to take a walk. One asks the other: “Hey dude, did the time here run backwards or forward?”

Why are the Bosnian pyramids older from those in Egypt? Because while people in Bosnia built, those in Egypt waited for the building permit!

Mujo is sitting on the top of a pyramid.

“What are you doing?” asks Suljo.

“I’m selling drugs.”

A little later Haso is smashing his head with a rock.

“What’s wrong with you?!”

“I’m getting stoned!”

When the construction was finished on the Cheops pyramid, the great pharaoh came to witness the grandeur of his eternal home. The first thing he said: “Oh, shit: Mujo’s is bigger!”

In the face of being called liars, drunks, pyramidiots, and drunks, Bosnians struggle to persevere. Patiently or not, then, they point out the possible evidence, repeat the chant of possibilities: mortar, tunnels, tiles, shapes. They call on the experts in the field to come and explain the mortar, tunnels, tiles, shapes, and to prove either way, to end the debate that they are losing, under the burden of thousands of years of

stereotypes. The odds are against them. If you love our country the way we do, they imply, you will understand the power that this remote possibility has for us, the way it galvanizes and motivates and brings us into a national being, for the first time in our history. Mortar, tunnels, tiles, shapes.

Mortar, tunnels, tiles, shapes.

Mortar, tunnels, tiles, shapes.

Hogwash, declare archeologists around the world. There simply is no evidence that pyramids in Bosnia can be real. There are no archeological traces of a culture that could produce such monuments on these sites. Curtis Runnels, a professor of the prehistory of the Balkans at Boston University, paints a picture very different than the one I nostalgically imagine. He writes, "between 27,000 and 12,000 years ago, the Balkans were locked in the last glacial maximum," so the civilization couldn't take hold here, in the dry and cold mountains of my youth (Rose). Such a setting didn't favor humanity, but rather beasts—prehistoric wolves and bears, and they ruled over frozen glaciers until the Bronze Age. The only occupants of prehistoric Bosnia, Upper Paleolithic hunters and gatherers, "left behind open-air camp sites and traces of occupation in caves….consist[ing] of simple stone tools, hearths, and remains of animals and plants that were consumed for food" (Rose). No ancient kings or glamorous queens here, only frozen tundra of Balkan pre-dawn.

Professor Anthony Harding, a man with an impressive education and scientific references: a prehistorian, with the pedigree—MA, PhD, FSA, FBA. A professor at Exeter University. A president of the European

Association of Archaeologists. A Trustee of Antiquity; a Fellow of the British Academy. A specialist in the European Bronze Age, a leading archeologist on excavations all over the Balkans: the Czech Republic, Poland, Romania. Never Bosnia, though. No need: "a manned landing on the (non-)planet Pluto in the next 20 years is more likely," writes Harding in the British Archeology journal (3). And just like that, with one sentence of the honorable professor, the hope for rehabilitation is gone.

There is nothing there, just the mines, trash, and the bodies of dead Bosnian boys, whose graves have yet to soften into the dark Bosnian hills.

Harding and the other stars of the archeological world refused to play Osmanagic's game and visit the site, even if only to refute the ideas floating through cyberspace. Finally, after being pressured by media frenzy across Europe, Harding, according to the locals, drove by the hill at sunset without even stopping the car or coming close to the dig. No need: he can tell that the stone blocks are Breccia. Science wins: these slabs are possibly the remains of a dry prehistoric lakebed that had been uplifted during tectonic movements. Whatever it is, Harding says, it is certainly not created by human hands.

For the locals, this adds salt to the bleeding wound. Are the Bosnian hills so easily dismissed as possible grounds for anything of importance, that even entertaining a possibility is merely laughable? Would Dr. Harding's reputation have been irrevocably destroyed if he'd decided to stop his moving vehicle and mingle with the diggers, even for fifteen measly minutes? What have we done to deserve the contempt of

the world, instead of the help to heal, which we desperately need to survive? Won't you help us find the truth?

The truth.

The truth, it has been proposed, is this: there is no simple definition of truth.

In Plato's theory of truth, there would be some objective truth where statements, historical or otherwise, would correspond to the actual state of affairs. In Bosnia, this theory can be safely discarded, for a state of affairs can't even be guessed, let alone known, in the concrete sense Plato requires. And the same with Leibnitz's coherence theories: the story of Bosnia is simply not coherent. The discrepancies are so vast that language loses its value completely, and a million is no different than one. The only coherent truth in Bosnia is the landscape: the mystique of the spring rain, the snow-heavy winter storms, the early morning dawn, the steep, pyramidally-shaped hills. In Bosnia, Habermas reads as fiction: there is no social consensus at all concerning what is accepted and what is not, unless the society is represented by an individual. And here is the true heart of Balkanization: it is not about the divided land or each family as its own tribe, it's about dividing the truth. Once a single soul becomes a keeper of its own national truth, its beliefs, and values, the unreconcilable split has been achieved.

Hegel and Marx make me more optimistic: the truth is constructed by society, they imply. And yes, immediately, all Bosnian truths come to life, as if enchanted; they float to the sky, crowding the horizon. It is man made, all of it: gender, race, sexuality, history.

Put it in practice, says Charles Pierce. If you find proofs that pragmatically support your claims, you have found the truth. But how can we possibly impose this on Bosnia, where excavations unaffected by any ethnic bias would be unimaginable? Between the Western scientists, who are accused of taking the Croat side, Middle-Eastern, who are immediately suspected of helping the Bosnians, or the Russians helping the Serbian side associated with communism, even the conceptualization is too hard. That is why a country defined as "having too much history" can nevertheless be utterly unexplored and unstudied: its ancient forts steadily disappearing, as did the medieval court of Bans, as did the Ottoman palaces and their glory.

To escape all these problems, we could adopt a minimalist truth theory as our national motto: to assert that a statement is true is equivalent to the action of asserting. Or a performative truth theory, where the act of implying the truth is considered the truth of agreeing with the implied statement. Thus, when Osmanagic says that the pyramids exist, the truth is that he agrees that they do. Should we leave it at that? Nietzsche would certainly approve, because the untruth that doesn't harm any one is better than the truth that harms people, that starts revolutions and violent uprisings. It is life enhancement that needs to be sought, not an affirmation of anyone's claims. As Nietzsche wrote in Beyond Good and Evil, "The falseness of a judgment is to us not necessarily an objection to a judgment... The question is to what extent it is life-advancing, life-preserving, species-preserving, perhaps even species-breeding..." (Nietzsche 47). It is the search that has power and that affirms. And we should be proud we are seeking, even if the

possibility is as far-fetched as a “manned landing on Pluto,” or as objective as magic realism of a fantastic pyramid narrative.

The truth.

Always an evanescent, ephemeral creature, in Bosnia it is invisible. It is a friend of Vile, the beautiful magical maidens of cruel nature that any unlucky traveller will find in Bosnian thickets at night, dancing folk dances and holding hands, screaming joyfully in a trance, while their hair shimmers in the dark. The traveller beware—especially around waterways where they gather, for their vicious beauty will be used to drown an unsuspecting male, to guide him seductively into the murkiest lake, into the thickest foliage, until he steps off the invisible cliff. To reach such elusive creatures, to catch and unravel their gosammer robes, we have to have tools. We have to know exactly what we are looking for. In order to excavate the truth, we have to start digging.

Chapter 5

HEALING POWER OF A STORY: A FICTIONALIZED NATIONAL NARRATIVE

In a sleepy desert in Egypt, the complex of pyramids stands exposed. About 4,500 years ago, the largest one, the Great Pyramid of Cheops, rose 481 feet in height. History suggests its sloping walls, pointing precisely to the cardinal points, enclosed the tomb of an Egyptian ruler. The two million blocks of stone that comprise the walls weigh an unimaginable millions of tons, stacked up in a way that allows corridors, galleries, and chambers inside. But for what? Why such an expanse of stone, such a mute statement of power and pride in the middle of that quiet world? Osmanagic proposed that just like a Bosnian pyramid, the Great Pyramid has served as a part of the energy grid of the world through which ancient people communicated and employed their technology. He sees no difference between them.

Here, in the Bosnian forest, sitting in a pit on a sandstone slab, I try to see them through his eyes but without success. I was coming to the conclusion that his greatest evidence is actually the lack of evidence. Osmanagic's premise is based on the inability of modern science to explain how the Gizzah structures were built. How could the stone megaliths be brought and elevated to this height with the technology of the day? How could they be placed with such a precision that a card cannot fit between the blocks?

The archeological evidence points out that the Great Pyramid had been built over a twenty-year period. Numerous slaves and workers had, under supervision, leveled a site utilizing water systems: they would flood an area and level the protruding foothills it until nothing protruded and the water was gone. This system resulted in a margin of error of 0.1% on the entire thirteen acres that pyramid covers (Lehner 69). After such preparation, the blocks were cut and then transported to the site and put into place. Although we don't know how exactly, there are a few theories. One involves a ramp, raised along the walls, covered with mud and water to ease handling of blocks. The other suggests that the blocks were moved by the use of long levers and placed into their spots. But none of these methods would apply to the Bosnian pyramid; even Osmanagic realized that there was a problem with accessibility here—even if the ramps were built for the foundation, they simply could not grow to this height. Not to mention the lack of evidence for any quarries around Visočica.

The pyramids of Teotihuacan, however, are the result of a completely different cultural phenomenon. The largest city in the Americas during the first half of first millennium, it was made up of many pyramids. The Pyramid of the Sun, the largest one of them, was placed in the main avenue of this city, with a base of 645 by 645 feet. It is ironic that this name, which Osmanagic explains is traditionally given to the largest pyramid structure, is not given by builders at all, but by Aztecs who came to know the structure centuries after it was abandoned, not knowing themselves its purpose or role. Its height of 246 feet makes

it third largest in the world, but in terms of antiquity it cannot compete with the Cheops' pyramid: it is about 2,500 years younger.

Osmanagic suggests that like the Mexican pyramid, the Bosnian Pyramid of the Sun had a temple on the top that was used for religious purposes. It follows, then, that we should find similar markers of human presence there: children's skeletons placed in corners of the structure to bless it and keep it safe, figurines that mark a human presence, murals on the walls depicting religious figures. If we could find the jars filled with preserved interior organs, saved for the next life, tightly wrapped bodies or heavy golden jewelry, or weapons, or pottery, or anything else, Bosnians would get their wish. The existence of any of these items would answer all questions. The existence of chambers inside, then, could not be questioned.

In Teotihuacan, the tunnels under the building *are* man made, archeologists assure us. The tunnels lead to a cave thought to contain a royal tomb. Is that why the tunnels under Visočica exist? Are there ancient Bosnian royalties sleeping somewhere deep in the Earth's entrails? And why are they important today, in the twenty-first century?

It turns out that they are extremely important. They are more important now than the living people of flesh and blood, climbing these steep slopes, leaning over the precipices right here, right now. It is the ancient past that plays a role in the modern affairs of Bosnia, and will in fact determine our future.

How?

Foreign media encourage the idea that there is money to be made by the local residents plunging into a tourism industry. The London Independent reports moneymaking schemes in article after article:

> There is a new sign hanging above Visoko's shabby hotel …. the Pyramid of the Sun. Across the road at the local restaurant the hungry can tuck into pyramid pizza. It is served, of course, on triangular wooden platters. And for those who have yet to get the point, the local market is offering allegedly homemade brandy. It comes in pyramid-shaped bottles. (Peric-Zimonjic)

Add to this keychains and slippers, T-shirts, and wooden plates incised with a pyramid. To the locals, small tokens that they can make to escape time strewn with boredom and emptiness, of life filled with misery and remembrances of war, a hope for teenagers and young adults, 60% of whom, according to recent polls, expressed a desire to leave this wretched corner of the earth and never look back again. To the first world, these are the signs that the pyramid is fake: here is financial gain! All those keychain-buying tourists playing into the scheming hands of the people who are, as the story goes, going to get rich overnight.

That there would be some financial gain is predictable: Osmanagic reports 200,000 visitors in this year alone. They stop, as we did, at the middle of the steep stairs on their way back down the hill at the café cut into the hill in layers to enjoy the cold Pepsi and an awesome view of the valley, enclosed by the ribcage of the surrounding mountains. Our waiter runs to put pads on the benches made from the trees cut right there on the spot and shaped to support tired travelers. He asks where we come

from, and nods in understanding, not surprised that we crossed 10,000 miles in order to climb this hill and find out the secret it holds. And the conversation—as it is inevitable in Bosnia—shifts to the war. He shows me the front lines, where the Serbs closed them off from the world during the war. “Eighty boys died,” he announces, “but Visoko never fell. Visoko never falls into anybody’s hands.” His wife works for the government in some bureaucratic office. He doesn’t work. Her salary, $300 a month, feeds a family of four, and pays for one daughter’s tuition at a local college. But what about the other daughter, he asks. He needs to educate them both, and he does what he can. I think of the 200-foot climb he takes on every morning, carrying the soda and snacks on his back, careful not to tip over and roll down the unforgiving incline. Is it a sin for me to pay him 70 cents for a can of soda?

I ask him about Osmanagic, whether or not he really believes him. No doubt, he says. Semir doesn’t lie. Apparently, Osmanagic passes by every day, leading tourists and potential sponsors on tours, trying to get funded—so far, he has paid all costs from his own pocket. But today he is not here—we missed him again. I keep insisting, asking the man what will happen to Visoko if none of these claims come true. He insists back that that cannot happen, that it must not happen. His eyes draw my attention—I can see all the pain of this world condensed there: daughters who can’t go to school, wives who overwork themselves to provide for the family, men without means to take care of their loved ones. Of course it’s real, I quickly agree. It must be. I pay and get up, gathering my children, and leave before we fall down and crash.

We move on quickly to Pljesevica hill, or “Pyramid of the Moon.” This hill doesn’t support a pyramidal shape at all. It rather looks like a two-story cake. Again, I park in a person’s back yard and pay $1.50. The pits on this hill are different. They are smaller in size and are spread around the steep sides. The stone slabs are also small, reminding me of the tiles you could get at Home Depot, but neatly connected into large paved sidewalks and platforms. The mosaics are breathtaking—the spacing between the tiles seems filled with grout, reminding me of Turkish cobble-stoned roads across the city. The views are spectacular: I remember the vivid green of my childhood, a time before I knew anything else but my home.

“You can’t go to the top—there is a secret find there,” warns my new car guard in another yard.

“A secret?” I ask, hungry for more details.

“Yes, a discovery more important than all the others. He is keeping it for a special announcement, strategically.”

What is actually on the top is not a secret, but is as important as life itself: the top of Pljesevica had been mined by Serbs during war. The picture of Gypsy children guides from the first pyramid comes back to me, and I wonder if this pyramid is a curse or a blessing. Children earn a couple of quarters a day, but do they go to the mined top? Has any child died up there? Isn’t this the real story: exposed, accessible, and real dangers of Bosnian mountains, littered with mines? Can our ancestors help us from beyond the grave by showcasing to the world how difficult it is to live still buried in an aftermath?

There are other things that a discovery of a pyramid would bring to Bosnia. Recognition, first of all. Recognition that we, the Bosnians, are worth something. That besides all the violence we are accused of, once upon a time, we gave birth to something magnificent.

"The Pyramid of the Sun will change history as we know it," foretells Osmanagic. He envisions scientists coming to a sudden realization or a slow, strong conviction that Bosnian civilization existed in the dawn of history. Bosnia is a cradle—here is where the cultures arrived, where voyages from distant lands led. Through Jungian communal consciousness, Bosnians remember, through the dark of thousands of years, where the ports were: in high mountains, as the sea covered the lower regions, they point to where anchors used to be, remembering them clearly: iron bars, shaped into circles and built into the rock, to anchor the boats, missing now, but present in our collective memories.

And wouldn't that be an irony! All those posh European cities, all the countries of the developed Western world, all the places where a Bosnian cannot now even get a transit visa to pass through, but instead must sleep on the airport benches while waiting for an airplane to take them to more forgiving places, all the ancestors of the elegant Parisians and Londoners, rowdy Berliners and Dubliners, came out of the unfortunate Balkan mountains, itself a symbol of backwardness; presented as an abode of perpetual savages. See how much we are a part of your blood-stream, you trendy Europeans!

It is not the money—it is the pride we are claiming. National, yes, to some degree, but more: a human pride, pride of Brontë's Gypsy boy,

Ratcliff, when he learns how to read and write in the kitchen, among the servants. This is a fierce pride, an ecstasy. We, the Bosnians, have challenged and taken on the history of humanity. And it only makes sense that the nation so blatantly accused by the world of having history filled with centuries of hatred, of constant wars and tribal feuds, that we, the Bosnians, question the accepted notions of conventional historical narratives, that we seek clearer answers. We are the champions of modern post-national, post-historical narrative.

After all, we were the ones who modeled and gave a name to Balkanization as a phenomenon of the twentieth century. When Yugoslavia, following the lead of other communist countries of the peninsula, crumbled into Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, Montenegro, Serbia, Macedonia, and Kosovo in the midst of the furious war over the control of resources, Bosnia became a stereotype of what happens when people cannot live together or without one another. What would happen in the collective consciousness of the modern global villagers if we now create a friendly and powerful community of builders to replace the disbanded, powerless, violated crowd?

There was something important in this valley, and that is the history of greatness, of importance, of humanity. There was a civilization built on these spaces. There was presence here. And that is the truth that we can all agree on.

Would imagined distant history be enough to heal the wounds and raise us to a higher status? Would pyramid work where the rest of our country's achievements, like a literacy rate of 99%, fluency in two alphabets, seven universities, two Nobel prizes (one for literature and one

for chemistry), a Golden Globe winning movie and a sea of galleries, publishing houses, jazz manifestations, and folk dance concerts have not done to proclaim our sophistication?

My people must have been hurt badly, if the pyramid's size matches their pain.

Instead of ignoring the items contributing to ever-increasing anxiety and neurosis surrounding the pyramids, Bosnians need hard-core science, with solid proofs that the pyramids do or do not exist. They need a comforting parent or an understanding therapist to come and guide us out of our injuries. We need our national identity to be rehabilitated, so we wouldn't, as even Dr. Harding recognizes, have to reach for a fictionalized histories to restore some value to who we are as people.

And it is possible. Traumatic experiences can lead to growth, according to research done by Calhoun and Tedeschi, professors at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. They state that it would be possible for a trauma patient to have

> …improved relationships, new possibilities for one's life, a greater appreciation for life, a greater sense of personal strength and spiritual development. There appears to be a basic paradox apprehended by trauma survivors who report these aspects of posttraumatic growth: Their losses have produced valuable gains …They also may find themselves becoming more comfortable with intimacy and having a greater sense of compassion for others who experience life difficulties. (4)

The professors admit that posttraumatic growth doesn't always happen, and point out that survivors deserve sympathy for what they went through. It shouldn't also be assumed that everybody will experience this kind of growth. But the healing has to be attempted in whatever possible way.

The first step in this process is to allow the possibility of the existence of a potential for civilization on these spaces, even if only to disprove it later on.

What is a civilization in the first place? That is not such an easy question to answer, as the usage of the term has changed through history. New shades of meaning now grace the concept and different measures of political correctness are embedded in this once purely colonial prospect. It applies at once to "complex" societies that rely on agriculture, form cities and structure their societies hierarchically; and humanity in general. Although the word itself originates in a Latin word denoting what we today would define as "a city-dweller," the meaning would remain tightly connected to the civic law practitioners until 1722, when according to Webster's Dictionary, it becomes the opposite of "barbaric" (226) taking on the meaning it would keep through the scientific advances and conquests of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. By implying that there was a need to "bring civilization to the savages," Victorians justified their imperial expansions. Indeed, civilization has spread like a fire: through invasion, conversion, and trade, indigenous cultures have been slowly replaced by the imported values and concepts of the conquerors. Most of the time, they

ended up neither more advanced nor better off than what they originally started out with before being civilized.

Bosnia has seen her share of "civilizations" march by: Illyrian, German, Roman, Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, and Russian civilizations invaded, converted, and traded in this land, leaving footprints inscribed in this soil. Today, it is the Western multinational corporations that roam the land, leaving slave wages and outrageous prices: a civilization with its symbols and markers, buildings and graveyards. Is it so incredible to believe that before this collage of civilizations, there existed a lonely group of human beings in this valley, dreaming of magnificent temples and cities? Is this soil so infertile that it never could have given birth to children with the potential to be great? Is it only because we lack evidence that these people pillaged and raped, converted and dissuaded, sold and stole, that we know that they didn't exist? And if that is our measure, what kind of beings are we?

Not all scientists agree with the definition of civilization that I used. Samuel P. Huntington, the famous political scientist from Harvard, for example, defines a civilization as "the highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity people have short of that which distinguishes humans from other species" (41), emphasizing cultural identity rather than other parameters. But the idea of culture also developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, emphasizing, again, a supremacy of one group over the other, and supposing that there are such groups that do not exhibit characteristics of culture at all. For Arnoldian critics, culture is tied to higher levels of sophistication. In these Balkan hills of mine, sophistication is a relative concept even

today, when we lack organized waste pick-up in much of the capital, let alone the provinces. We lack asphalt roads, so our shoes are always muddy. Is it this lack of resources that makes us a "primitive" culture today? Was it then, in the dawn of human existence?

Even if we replace Victorian ideas with modern ones, we are still in the dark when pondering the possibility of a pyramid-building civilization in ancient Bosnia. According to the multilineal evolution theories of twentieth century, the idea of civilization needs to move away from the examination of primitive versus sophisticated societies, and focus on society's use of energy. According to Leslie White, those societies that are successfully using our planet to satisfy their needs are more civilized (89). Kardashev's algorithm represents our present, past, and future, as it allows a scientific approach to understanding of our development:

$$K = \frac{\log_{10} W - 6}{10}$$

which calculates current Western civilization to be at 0.7 according to Kardashev's system of rating (Kardashev). Although mathematical in nature, and thus looking modern and sophisticated, this formula really relies on Darwin's principle of the adaptation of species to the environment. Based on this principle, the more modern a culture is, the more it can harness energy, and so it is more civilized. But, given that the ancient Egyptians harnessed their own energy in order to move and lift huge blocks of limestone, making the wheel, the pully system, and the engine unecessary and irrelevant, isn't their Kardashev's rating irrelevant to their civilization?

Without an official archeological analysis, I am, just like any average Bosnian, Osmanagic included, forced to become an amateur archeologist myself. I have to wonder that, if none of these definitions of civilization satisfy me, what would a culture need to build a mega-structure? What would be the necessities that if met would create my ancestors out of shadows, and reveal the real origin of my people? What would clarify once and for all whose bones this soil is nurtured by?

Three things, most likely: people, supplies, and desire.

That people have lived on these spaces is a fact. Zilka Kujundzic Vejzagic, a specialist in prehistory of Bosnia and a staff member at the National Museum of Bosnia, has claimed that human presence in Balkans reaches 100,000 years back, albeit it is manifested through remains of small camps of hunters and gatherers. The oldest explored settlements in these regions are nine to seven thousand year-old Starcevo and eight to six thousand year-old Vinca, located in Serbia along the Danube. People obviously existed here.

The supplies are a bit more difficult to locate. If this is, as Osmanagic suggests, a modified hill, then stone was found and shaped right on site. The tools needed for this, however, have not been found anywhere, and that is a problem. The ancient Egyptians used copper chisels, saws, and drills to cut and shape the stone. Even they, though, needed stronger tools occasionally, so they used granite dolerite rock balls and wooden mallets to pound the rock and split it. If this was the case with the earliest Bosnian, we wouldn't necessarily find the tools—rock balls could be mixed into the rest of the rubble lying around, and mallets have long disintegrated. We're short on evidence.

That leaves desire.

A Bosnian soul is a strange concoction. At times, sweet as a bee's spring song, it rises high through poetry and art, as a defiant chorus of sacramental voices filled with nostalgia and, at times, even majesty. At once crude as a three-legged stool and elegant as a saw buzzing, its rambunctious braying raises into a red sunset, filling the air with raw whims and danger. But the Bosnian soul never lacks a desire. The desire to be great. Respected. Noticed. If our ancestors had only a drop of our blood in them, their insides burned with a desire to prove themselves worthy, to overcome. After all, we have survived and overcome numerous usurpations and occupations, survived genocides and floods, earthquakes and fires. These plagues purified us and cleared the clutter we had grown into, only to push us ever further, beyond our borders, beyond ourselves. What is, in comparison to these calamities and triumphs, a colossal prehistoric structure, truly, for us?

The Bosnian soul *is* desire.

I don't think that Harding and other nay-saying archeologists have considered this, maybe the most important piece of evidence: the Bosnian soul. Maybe the pyramidal complex of never before seen proportions, older than the Earth herself, complete with the underground network of tunnels, can only be discovered with some serious soul searching. The poetry has to be listened to. The paintings analyzed. The landscape felt through the bones.

Then, after the indigo green forests hold no more secrets, and all the caves reveal their treasures, can desires to uncover the womb of the Bosnian hill be understood. Only when the official history and the truth

amenably cease their attempts at reconciliation, and give each other the right to exist; only when the slimy, slippery quality of language stops being used for cutting into our national identity, only when humor is not used as a claw holding fast to our pride, causing more bruising and constant trauma; only then can it be discovered whether the pyramid mysteries are a sign of a collective madness or the clarity of the subaltern, subjugated into subservience for much too long.

Only then will progress in this land be made.

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