

Srebrenica: a 'safe' area

Appendix IV

History and Reminders in East Bosnia

Contents

Introduction.....	3
Chapter 1 Serbs and ‘Turks’ – The Ottoman Heritage.....	7
The first Serbian uprising (1804-1813).....	7
The Drina River: a frontier	12
Rising Serb-Muslim antagonism.....	15
Chapter 2 The Austro-Hungarian Period And World War One.....	20
Under Austro-Hungarian Rule.....	20
The Balkan Wars and World War One.....	23
Land Reforms between the two World Wars	27
Chapter 3 World War Two, 1941–1945	29
The onset of the war and of Ustashe terror	29
Partisans and Chetniks organise the resistance.....	33
Chetnik terror against Muslim villages.....	36
Ustashe extermination campaigns against the Serb population	40
Chapter 4 Under Communist Rule	47
Srebrenica in Tito’s time	47
Economic decline during the 1980s	57
Eastern Bosnia becomes a ‘second Kosovo’.....	61
Chapter 5 The Nationalist Take-Over.....	70
Election year 1990.....	70
Nationalist parties in power.....	80
SDA hardliners govern Srebrenica	83
The Kravica killing.....	90
Chapter 6 War In Eastern Bosnia	97
Recognition of Bosnia’s independence and fights in Bijeljina.....	97
The Drina valley campaign	101
Srebrenica on the brink of war.....	104
Bratunac and Srebrenica are taken by Serbs.....	110
Ethnic cleansing by Serbs and first acts of Muslim resistance	113
Chapter 7 The Rise of the Muslim Enclave of Srebrenica	118
The assassination of Goran Zekic	118
First wave of coordinated Muslim attacks on Serb villages	122
The Muslim territory expands	125
Bratunac comes under Muslim threat	130
Final Remarks.....	136

Introduction

“If people in Bosnia cannot reach consensus on how to remember the past, the country will have no right to exist. In fifty years time, there will be either one Bosnia or no Bosnia”.

Jakob Finci, President of the Jewish Community of Bosnia-Herzegovina, NIOD interview 24/10/2000

“If the identity of a nation lies upon its memory, then the memory that makes the foundations of the Bosniak people is made of the chain of genocides and innumerable crimes committed against it”.

Smail Ćekić, History of genocide against Bosniacs, p.47

On the eleventh of July 1995 the Bosnian Serb Army conquered Srebrenica, a Muslim enclave in Serb-held eastern Bosnia which had been proclaimed a ‘safe area’ by the United Nations two years before. When the Serbs marched into Srebrenica’s town centre, general Ratko Mladic, who led the operation, gave a brief statement in front of a Bosnian Serb television camera: “Here we are in Srebrenica on the eleventh of July 1995, on the eve of yet another great Serbian holiday. We present this city to the Serbian people as a gift. Finally, after the rebellion against the *dahis*, the time has come to take revenge on the ‘Turks in this region’”.¹ The events that followed are all too well-known: under the eyes of Dutch UN peace-keepers, hundreds of Muslim men were separated from their women (at the Dutchbat base in Potočari), while thousands of others decided to try to escape through the forests to Bosnian-held Tuzla. Most of them disappeared: they died or were executed by the Serbs in the aftermath of the fall of the Srebrenica enclave.

From Mladic’s statement – he was referring to events two centuries ago – it is clear that history played a prominent role in the Bosnian war, in a way that was often hard to accept for outside observers, and often led to reactions of sheer disbelief and exasperation on their part. One can still hear the complaints of Western journalists, diplomats and UN personnel, who had to listen to endless ‘history lessons’ presented to them by politicians, intellectuals, soldiers, and ordinary peasants, about battles that took place centuries ago and the ultimate wrongs their nation had suffered in a recent or more distant past. As Nena Tromp notes in her contribution (see appendix), history was used extensively at the negotiation table, not only to justify political demands, but also to outmanoeuvre foreign diplomats who had no grasp of the region’s complicated history. For some the surplus of history that seems to exist in the region became an obstacle to peace: in the final stages of the Bosnian war, US envoy Richard Holbrooke, for instance, refused to attach special importance to historical claims, which he thought obstructed any attempt to come to a settlement of the conflict. In his memoirs he writes that he put the Bosnian Serbs one important condition for negotiations: “(...) they must not give us a lot of historical bullshit, as they have with everyone else. They must be ready for serious discussions”.²

It is clear that ‘history’, or rather the various strands of national histories, were conducive to the wars in the former Yugoslavia, and it is therefore understandable that Holbrooke refused to take them into account in his attempts to find a settlement to the Bosnian conflict. His objective was not to grasp

¹ David Rohde describes this episode in his book *A safe area. Srebrenica: Europe’s worst massacre since the Second World War* (p.167). See also Stover and Peress, *The graves*, p.122. The televised images of Mladic’s entry into Srebrenica were included in the British tv documentary *A cry from the grave* (1999). The holiday Mladic is referring to is Petrovdan, the Serbian-Orthodox St Peter’s Day (12 July), which the Serbs have now proclaimed the town’s official patron saint’s day.

² Holbrooke, *To end a war*, p.148

the historical ramifications of the conflict but to bring an end to it in a swift and pragmatic manner. Our aim here is quite different, i.e. to develop a deeper understanding of the conflict and its specific characteristics, and the starting point is that we cannot fully understand the war, and particular events such as the Srebrenica massacre, if we leave history aside, or more particularly, if we ignore the living historical memories and *perceptions* of history that exist among local players.³ In Bosnia and other parts of the former Yugoslavia, some historical episodes are ‘remembered’ as if they happened yesterday, and people often refer to them if they try to justify their actions. Thus, it is not just the past itself but current visions of the past which are important for an understanding. The word ‘history’ itself reflects this duality, meaning both the past and stories about the past, representations and what is represented.⁴ Historical narratives shape people’s cognition and perception, and as a result help to motivate, justify or contextualise action.⁵ Sudetic’s account of events in eastern Bosnia and Srebrenica offers an excellent illustration of this. He points out –and demonstrates throughout his book– that there is more to the story of the Srebrenica massacre than just the naked sequence of events in July 1995. His informants told him many stories, which went far back in time, to the time of other wars, invasions and rebellions. The stories he heard “began with memories of a time long before the war, memories of fistfights, funerals, and feasts, of great-great-grandfathers who struggled to be free of feudalism, of great-grandfathers who helped ignite a world war, and of grandfathers who fought to survive Fascist butchery, who exacted blood vengeance to appease their dead, and who suffered defeat and buried their guns for another day”.⁶

It should be clear from the outset that it is not my main intention here to provide a full and comprehensive history of eastern Bosnia and Srebrenica. I will focus on those historical episodes which present-day actors actively remember and point at when they explain their motives, aims and actions (the revolutionary wars of the nineteenth century, the Balkan wars, the First and Second World Wars). It is quite obvious that what many Bosnians tend to talk about are the more turbulent episodes of their history, i.e. those events which drastically changed realities on the ground and left deep traces in collective memory. It is striking to see how the much longer periods of relative peace and coexistence have almost become ‘blank spaces’ in collective memory and official historiography (even though they have not become completely obsolete in people’s private narratives). It is clear that this present-day obsession with wars, violence and ethnic conflict, inevitably leads to simplifications and distortions which I will try to correct by keeping my eyes open for the nuances and complexities of these events, as well as by giving attention to the fact that people in this region have also managed to live together peacefully for considerable periods of time. I have decided not to try to historically represent all these periods of relative peace and coexistence (which is an almost impossible task seen the lack of good local source material), but instead to focus on the communist period which is still fresh in people’s minds. As a corollary, I have invested much effort in trying to describe the process of transformation from the relatively peaceful conditions under socialism to the outbreak of ethno-nationalist violence in the 1990s. Although I will describe this process in its wider Yugoslav context, I will primarily focus on

³ Several journalists and academics who were interviewed for this report have stressed the importance of historical memories for an understanding of the war events in eastern Bosnia. Most often reference is made to the violence in World War Two, which was particularly ruthless in these parts of the former Yugoslavia, and has left deep traces in personal and collective memories. Interviews and conversations with Endre Bojtar 28/05/1997, Zoran Kusovac 01-11-1997, Uros Komlenovic 06-11-1997, Bratislav Grubačić 06/11/1997, and Momčilo Mitrović 07/11/1997.

⁴ With regard to my (anthropological) approach to ‘history’ and ‘memory’, I am indebted to the work of E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Anthropology and history*; Peter Burke ‘History of events and the revival of narrative’; Emiko Ohnuki-Thierney, ‘The historicization of anthropology’; Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of history*; and Anton Blok, ‘Reflections on “making history”’.

⁵ It is the influential article “Theory in anthropology since the sixties” by Sherry Ortner (1984), which has become paradigmatic for this idea of a culturally structured praxis. See also John Davis, who formulates this idea in historical terms: “Thought about the past is a cultural activity which varies from place to place and from time to time, and it is a consequential activity: when people take decisions, one of the things they consider is the past” (Davis, ‘History and the people without Europe’, p.14).

⁶ Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, p.XXXVII.

the micro-level: my narrative will include those local events that led to the outbreak of the war (in April 1992), as well as those in the first year of the war until Srebrenica was declared a 'safe area' by the United Nations (April 1993).⁷

All of this is not an easy task. 'History' in the former Yugoslavia has been very much subject to revision and manipulation by historians, intellectuals, journalists, and nationalist politicians. Historical narratives and myths have been used as vehicles for political messages, and the politics of memory also imply that rival factions may compete for historical truth: some claims on the past have obtained recognition, while others have been marginalized, and this is an ongoing process which has brought previously silenced discourses to the surface again. This is visible at the individual and personal level as well. Due to the things that happen in people's lives, they may change their perspective on the present as well as the past (in some cases even quite radically). Let me quote from David Rohde's book *A Safe Area* (1997), where this is illustrated by one of the main characters of this book, Zoran Radic (a pseudonym), a Serb policeman who participated in the attack on Srebrenica in July 1995:

"Like so many other people in Bosnia, he had joked with his Muslim and Croat friends as Yugoslavia disintegrated and believed that war would never come. But a book he read during 1992 in a Serb trench around Sarajevo had answered many questions for him. Entitled *Bloody Hands of Islam*, it described atrocities carried out around Srebrenica by Muslim and Croat Fascists allied with Hitler during World War II. The book had been banned by Tito's government. Forty Serbs had been executed in Zalazje, a village just outside Srebrenica. Radic could see that history was repeating itself. Roughly fifty years later, on July 12, 1992 – the Serb Orthodox holiday of St. Peter's Day – Naser Oric's men killed 120 people in the same town. As time passed Radic decided the war was a good thing. The Serbs needed to live separately from the Muslims for their own protection."⁸

This small passage describes the change of perspective of an ordinary Serb who first genuinely believed, like many other Bosnians, that war was impossible in his country because he had powerful memories of a common and shared existence, and then is forced to reconsider –or literally reread– history in the light of his war experiences. Under these new circumstances, communist views of 'brotherhood and unity' become obsolete and the old nationalist narratives are recovered to explain what is happening. These narratives, which were silenced and censored away during the communist period, come to the surface again and start to function as a vehicle for understanding and guideline for further action. However, what this example also shows is that memory is multi-layered and contains certain contradictions. As such, cultural praxis –of which the work of memory is part– can often be described as mixed, fragmented and incoherent, at least from the point of view of national and religious orthodoxies. Thus, elements of conflict and coexistence may be part of the same person's sense of social existence and identity.

Any attempt to come to grip with the history of the region is therefore hampered by the existing multiplicity of 'histories' and 'memories', which are often at odds with one another, within the same community or even within the same individual: there is the former communist historiography which in recent years has been replaced by various nationalist representations of the past, and underneath the official histories there is a reservoir of collective folk and personal and individual

⁷ My description of subsequent events, and of conditions in and around the Srebrenica 'safe area', are included in the main NIOD report.

⁸ Rohde, *A safe area*, p.14. The book mentioned by Radic (*Bloody hands of Islam*) is probably Momir Krsmanovic's historical novel *Krvave ruke Islama* which was also translated into English: *The blood-stained hands of Islam*. The book was also mentioned in conversations with other local Serbs.

memories which are often hidden and contradictory.⁹ In the case of Srebrenica this is exemplified by the different perspectives that exist about what happened during recent years, perspectives which seem to be wholly incompatible: although similar in style and rethorics, the ‘official’ Muslim and Serbian accounts of the war tell completely different stories, which are difficult to match, even if they dovetail on the level of particular events, specific dates, places and actors.¹⁰ In addition, there are many individual narratives which do not fit into these larger schemes. Although I do not claim that there is only one historical truth, I still believe that out of these divergent and often mutually exclusive histories it is possible to shape a more inclusive and ‘truthful’ version of events, the challenge of which I will take up here.

A major undercurrent of my account is that there is no historical inevitability in the way the recent conflict developed. I subscribe to the idea formulated by the British social anthropologist Evans-Pritchard that we should not mistake the irreversible for the inevitable.¹¹ In the case of Srebrenica, it might be tempting to write a kind of ‘culminatory history’, explaining the end of the story, the fall of Srebrenica and the massacre of Muslim men, as the final and inescapable outcome of what has gone before. Although this view seems compelling when we look all at the evidence of repeated violence and brutality in the region –which two of the most astute observers have recently called “the most bitterly contested area in Bosnia-Herzegovina”¹²– I think that history is never completely decided in advance. Similarly, I would like to argue that it is too easy to say, as some Bosnians did in the midst of the war, that ‘history is repeating itself’: people are not only the objects of the forces of history, i.e. the passive recipients of social, economic, political, and cultural legacies inherited from the past, they are also its subjects. My approach is based on the fundamental presumption that people ‘make’ history in two related ways: 1. by imagining and constructing a past, which is relevant for the present, and 2. by the way they choose to act, taking –among other things– their visions of the past into account. This kind of approach has certain implications: instead of accepting the view that the brutalities of the Bosnian war were the result of ‘ancient ethnic hatreds’, i.e. the product of irrational and almost impersonal historical forces which are beyond everybody’s control, I would rather adhere to the idea that there is always a clear element of personal choice, agency and responsibility in the ways people decide to act or not. It underscores that history is the work of people, who act and interact with different motives and interests in mind, the chemistry of which leads to results that are often unintended in their final outcome.

⁹ One could add here a variety of discourses about the Balkans and the Yugoslav crisis in western sources. It is far beyond the scope of this report to address this issue. It is dealt with in Nena Tromp’s and Bruno Naarden’s contributions (see annexes....). See also: Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*; Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania*; Kent, ‘Writing the Yugoslav wars’; Stokes et al, ‘Instant history’; Gow, ‘After the flood’; Campbell, ‘MetaBosnia’.

¹⁰ The main Serb sources are Ivanisevic, *Hronika naseg groblja*; and Miljanovic, *Krvavi Bosic sela Kravice*. The main Muslim ones are Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*; Masic, *Srebrenica*; and Oric, *Srebrenica svjedoči i optužuje*.

¹¹ See Davis, ‘History and the people without Europe’, p.16.

¹² Burg and Shoup, *The war in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, p.25.

Chapter 1

Serbs and ‘Turks’ – The Ottoman Heritage



Title page of the war edition of the local Serb newspaper, *Nasa Rijec* (Bratunac, March 1994) on the occasion of the 190th anniversary of the start of the first Serbian uprising. The upper right corner features a picture of the leader of the uprising, Karadjordje, against the background of the Drina River. Below it is a quote from a well-known Serbian epic poem:

“Drina water, O thou noble barrier, Thou that partest Bosnia from Serbia! Soon the day will dawn, O Drina water, Soon will dawn the day when I shall cross thee, Pass through all the noble land of Bosnia.”¹³

The first Serbian uprising (1804-1813)

Let us return to the eleventh of July 1995. Mladic’s reference to the first Serbian uprising (1804-1813) is a good starting point in our discussion, for more than one reason. Apart from the apparent role the uprising played in Mladic’s mindset –at the time he was attacking the Srebrenica Safe Area – it is the first major event in modern Serbian history to have a direct impact on eastern Bosnia, leaving clear traces in local collective memory and history writing. As Mladic’s statement demonstrates, the event is central to Serb nationalist thought, as it ties together two of its most important themes: the long period of suffering under the ‘Turks’, and the struggle to liberate the Serbs from the Muslim yoke. The stories and imagery connected to the first Serbian uprising have a strong thematic link to the Kosovo myth that has become so central to Serbian nationalist thought. The uprising was the first attempt to put an end to the long period of Ottoman rule, which started after the Serbs lost their mediaeval empire during the famous Battle of Kosovo (1389). Moreover, it symbolises their efforts to avenge the humiliation and injustices inflicted upon them by the ‘Turks’, comprised both of the Ottomans and the

¹³ Translation taken from Morison, *The revolt of the Serbs*, pp.72-73.

Bosnian *poturice* (members of the indigenous population who ‘became Turks’, i.e. converted to Islam and ‘betrayed’ their Serb brethren).

Let us take a closer look at the events themselves. The first Serbian uprising began in 1804 as a rebellion against the Turkish *dahis* (local military or janissary leaders). It occurred at a time when the Ottoman Empire was losing control over its Balkan provinces. Its rule was undermined by rebellions, both by unruly Muslim elements who opposed the centralising policies of the Sublime Porte, and the Christian subject populations who wanted to free themselves from Ottoman rule.¹⁴ These centrifugal tendencies were visible throughout the Balkan provinces. They explain in part why the Great Powers (Austria and Russia, in particular) were able to shift the borders of the Ottoman Empire to the south.¹⁵ Aside from relinquishing territory to its European rivals, the Ottoman Empire was also disintegrating from within; it failed to maintain peace and security in what remained of its provinces in southeastern Europe. Life had been made increasingly difficult, particularly in the countryside, by (legal or illegal) armed bands. In addition, local centres of power had sprung up throughout the empire, filling the political vacuum caused by its decline.

It was, however, the ever-growing unrest and revolts among the Christian populations that posed the most serious threat to Ottoman rule in these parts. The first Serbian uprising was the earliest major example, followed by the Greek revolution (1821-1829). Although in Serbian collective memory, it is seen as the first attempt at liberation from Ottoman rule, it did not start in this way. The immediate cause of the uprising was another rebellion, that of a group of unruly local janissary commanders who had been expelled from Belgrade, but who had managed to re-assert themselves against the will of the Ottoman establishment (the government officials, merchants and landlords) and the Serbian population.¹⁶ Initially, the Ottoman establishment and the Serbian insurgents formed a common front, but both remained powerless in the face of janissary terror.¹⁷ Among those ‘Turks’ supporting the uprising were Hasan-pasha from Srebrenica, who at the time of its outbreak was district governor of Zvornik, as well as Hadzi-Salihbeg (or Hadzibeg), the local governor of Srebrenica.¹⁸

Even as early as 1801, the janissaries assassinated Mustafa Pasha, the Ottoman governor of Belgrade whose benevolent attitude towards the Christian population was resented. In 1802, four *dahis* (high-ranking janissary officers) took full territorial control of the Belgrade pashalik.¹⁹ Serbian peasants set up armed resistance units, and in the spring of 1804, their leader, Karadjordje Petrovic, a prosperous livestock trader, organised them into an army of thirty thousand men ready to fight. When the *dahis* learned of these clandestine activities they started liquidating Serb leaders. This finally triggered the revolt against the *dahis*. Initially, the Sultan and most other Ottoman officials supported the Serbs in

¹⁴ Srebrenica was also the scene of clashes between local autonomous forces and the Ottoman centre. In 1820, Ottoman forces attacked the town. See Malcolm, *Bosnia*, p.120.

¹⁵ Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, Vol.1, pp.62-72. The siege of Vienna by the Ottoman army (1683) is seen as the beginning of the end of Ottoman rule in the Balkans. It ended in failure, after which Austria and its Catholic allies launched successful (but devastating) military campaigns into Ottoman territory. This had severe repercussions, among other things, for the position of Roman Catholics in the Ottoman Empire, which was one of the factors that also put an end to their centuries-old presence in Srebrenica. In 1686, the Turks set the town on fire, burning down the Franciscan monastery, which had been a main centre of Catholic activity in Bosnia. The Catholics, who formed a substantial part of the town’s population, if not the majority, fled over the Sava River into Austrian territory. For Srebrenica’s past, see in particular the articles by Jusuf Hasic, Zivan Jovanovic and Bosko Milovanovic in *Srebreničke Novine*.

¹⁶ The janissaries formed the backbone of the Ottoman army, at least starting in the fifteenth century. At the end of the eighteenth century, the Sultan tried to abolish them, as they had become a state within the state, a force that the Ottoman centre was unable to control. They were finally suppressed in 1826.

¹⁷ Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, Vol.1, pp.193-204. Local historians claim that Ottomans and Serbs fought side by side. See, for instance, Jovanovic ‘Posljednje decenije turske vlasti’ [2].

¹⁸ Both later participated in military actions against the insurgents. Jovanovic ‘Posljednje decenije turske vlasti’ [1]. The story is that Hadzibeg was friends with the Serbs, providing them with information after he was mobilised into the Ottoman army. Because of his Serb sympathies, he was killed in 1827 by order of the Sultan (Deroka, *Geografsko-turistička monografija*, p.248).

¹⁹ Pantelic, ‘Dahije’.

their efforts to overthrow the *dahis*. However, after the insurgents achieved an important series of military successes, and threatened to become an uncontrollable force, the Sultan decided to suppress the movement in the summer of 1805. At this point, the uprising developed into a direct confrontation between Serb and Ottoman (including Bosnian) forces, in which the Serbs' main objective became outright independence. From the start, some of the major battles were fought near the Drina. It was at this stage that the Drina valley became a frontier between lands under Serbian and those under Ottoman control. By early 1804, Muslim refugees began to cross the Drina from Serbia into eastern Bosnia.

As eastern Bosnia was in a state of anarchy, local reactions to the uprising varied widely. Some Ottoman officials (like Hadzibeg) sympathised with the Serbian insurgents, while others (such as Mehmed *kapetan* of Zvornik) sided with the *dahis*, although they showed little willingness to come to their rescue. Among the Orthodox population of eastern Bosnia, however, there was an outburst of enthusiasm for the uprising, at least according to historian, Vaso Èubrilovic, who produced an interesting, though romanticised, account of the events.²⁰ He writes that during the summer of 1804, local Serbs were singing epic songs about Karadjordje, hoping that he would come to liberate them from the Turkish yoke. In spring 1805, the uprising spread to western Serbia: insurgents attacked towns such as Karanovac, Soko, and Uzice. As a result, the Serbs and Muslims in eastern Bosnia became increasingly embroiled in the conflict. The friendly relations between the Serbian insurgents and local Muslim leaders in eastern Bosnia started to deteriorate, especially after the former won a series of important victories against the Ottomans. As readiness among Bosnian Serbs to join the uprising grew, Bosnian Muslim leaders realised that the uprising could endanger their position. Relations also deteriorated when Muslim leaders from eastern Bosnia joined in military operations to suppress the Serbian uprising. By autumn 1805, Bosnian units crossed over into Serbia, and suffered their first major defeats.²¹ Muslim leaders from Srebrenica also shared this fate. In February 1806, for instance, Hasan-pasha from Srebrenica was defeated, after which Serbian forces burned Muslim villages along the Drina. A few months later, Hadzibeg from Srebrenica lost a battle near Valjevo. The most humiliating defeat for the Ottoman forces was the famous battle at Misar, which was won by Karadjordje.²² Despite these military defeats, Bosnian forces managed at this stage to prevent the uprising from spreading into Bosnia.

These constant battles on the Serbian side of the Drina affected conditions in eastern Bosnia. The Serb population suffered from marauding Ottoman (Bosnian) troops who pillaged Orthodox villages on their way to Serbia, and later, back home. In addition, Serbs were forced to supply the Ottoman troops. In some cases, they were recruited into the army to fight the insurgents in Serbia, for instance, by Hasan-pasha of Srebrenica. Serbs became increasingly restless, preparing themselves for an uprising and forming small, armed bands of *hajduk* irregulars. Muslim leaders believed these bands had been sent by Karadjordje to cause trouble in Bosnia. Finally, in 1807, the uprising spilled over into Bosnian territory. On late March of that year, the Serbian insurgents started a major offensive westward and reached the town of Loznica. By early May, troops crossed over into Bosnian territory. Major battles were fought between Zvornik and Bijeljina, and some Serbian troops managed to reach the outskirts of Tuzla. In June, however, Bosnian forces drove the Serbs back into Serbia, forcing many local Serbs who had joined the fighting to flee as well. During the summer and autumn, Ottoman and Serbian units engaged in constant battles along the Drina, raiding each other's territories, and burning

²⁰ Èubrilovic, 'Bosansko Podrinje i prvi srpski ustanak (1804-1813)'. Vasa Èubrilovic is one of several well-known Bosnian Serb historians who were direct participants in events that led to the establishment of Yugoslavia after World War One. During his youth he had been a member of *Mlada Bosna*, a socialist youth organisation that advocated South Slav union and the liberation of Bosnia from Austrian rule. As such, he was involved in the assassination of Arch Duke Franz Ferdinand and his wife in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914. The attack was carried out by members of this organisation and triggered off World War One.

²¹ See also Imamovic, *Historija Bosnjaka*, p.328.

²² Novakovic, *Die Wiedergeburt des serbischen Staates*, pp. 40-41; Jovanovic, 'Posljednje decenije turske vlasti' [1].

and looting enemy villages. In October 1807, serious clashes occurred, including near Srebrenica: Serbian units entered Bosnian territory, scorching Muslim villages and returning home with large booties. Turkish troops had to rush in to rescue Muslim houses and property.²³ It was through Russian mediation that this cycle of mutual violence was brought to a halt. However, as Èubrilošvić writes, Serbian units still found it difficult to give up the habit of pillaging Muslim villages in eastern Bosnia.

One of Karadjordje's major objectives was to extend his control to the Bosnian Krajina, where most of the Bosnian Serb population was concentrated. Eastern Bosnia, with its large non-Serb population, formed a kind of 'Muslim' wedge and was, therefore, crucial to the Serbs' ability to break the enemy's resistance (especially around Tuzla). In spring 1809, the revolt spread again across the Drina into eastern Bosnia. Serbian forces besieged Bijeljina in the north and attacked Muslim strongholds near Srebrenica in the south. Èubrilošvić claims that local Serbs massively joined the uprising, sending their wives and children to Serbia. In the end, however, the Serb uprising in Bosnia resulted in huge disappointment. Though many had expected it would take only one last effort and a little luck to free Bosnia from Ottoman rule, they faced serious defeats in June, including near Srebrenica. In the north, the Serbian forces were also pushed back over the Drina. A substantial portion of the Serb population fled into Serbia and settled on the other side of the Drina, in villages abandoned by the 'Turks'. The Drina River remained the border between Serbia and Ottoman Bosnia. As the Serbian revolution was now on the decline, and Russian support for the insurgents was diminishing, the Sultan finally managed to suppress it. In October 1813, Karadjordje was forced to flee to Austrian territory.²⁴

The uprising was remembered in oral tradition, including in Srebrenica, particularly in the legendary figure of Karamarko ('Black Marko'), a local Serb hero who fought on Karadjordje's side.²⁵ But more importantly, it became a major source of inspiration for the nineteenth-century Serbian national movement and later generations of Serbian nationalists (of whom Mladic is the most recent example). The revolt was remembered in the form of epic songs, sung, among others, by Filip Visnjic, the most celebrated epic singer in Serbia's history. As a native of eastern Bosnia, Visnjic had witnessed these events, and in 1809 he had fled together with many other Serbs from eastern Bosnia to Serbia. Visnjic's songs were included in Vuk Karadzic's famous collection of epic poetry.²⁶ One of his songs, *Poèetak bune protiv dahija* ('The beginning of the revolt against the *dahis*?'), was to become particularly famous.²⁷ It presents the revolt as a Holy War of the Christian Serbs against Islam, as the first opportunity to avenge the forebears who had suffered under Ottoman rule, and to take back Serbian lands on the other side of the Drina in Bosnia. It contains the famous lines which have since become part of Serb nationalist folklore, including in eastern Bosnia (see the vignette at the beginning of this chapter): "Thus spoke Djordje to the Drina water – Drina water, O thou noble barrier – Thou that partest

²³ Novaković, *Die Wiedergeburt des serbischen Staates*, pp.64-65.

²⁴ Morison, *The revolt of the Serbs*, pp.XV-XXVII.

²⁵ Marko was a smith who lived near the settlement of Crvica (along the Drina). According to local tradition, Karadjordje gave him an army and ordered him to conquer the region of Osat, which he did. As he was left without gunpowder, he was forced to flee to Serbia, where he manufactured mighty ('shaking') guns for the Serb insurgents (Beatović, *Bratunac i okolina*, pp.18-19; see also Sudetić, *Blood and vengeance*, p.140). Other local participants who are remembered in songs are Birëanin Ilija, who was one of the first leaders of the uprising, and Hadzi-Melentije Stevanović, the abbot of a Serb-Orthodox monastery on the Serbian side of the Drina. A third figure, whom we encountered earlier, is the Muslim local governor, Hadzibeg. He was killed by order of the Sultan because he provided assistance to the Serbs (Deroka, *Geografsko-turistička monografija*, p.248; Deroka, *Kajakom i splavom niz Drinu*, p.81).

²⁶ Vuk Karadžić was a pivotal figure in this formative period of the Serbian national movement. He was responsible for the standardisation of the Serbian vernacular language and the development of the Serbian Cyrillic script, both key steps in the process of Serbian nation-building. He also published a well-known collection of folksongs, *Srpske narodne pjesme*, which became the classic anthology of traditional Serb oral poetry. He himself was a native from the Podrinje area, born in the village of Trsic, near Loznica on the Serbian side of the Drina in 1787.

²⁷ See, for instance, Corović, 'Historiska vrednost'. Other well-known epic songs about the first Serbian uprising by Visnjic are 'The Battle of Misar' and 'The Battle of Loznica' (for a translation of the former, see: Morison, *The revolt of the Serbs*, p.74-87).

Bosnia from Serbia! – Soon the day will dawn, O Drina water – Soon will dawn the day when I shall cross thee – Pass through all the noble land of Bosnia”.²⁸

Interestingly enough, this famous epic song also makes references to the *dahis*’ plans to kill all male Serbs above the age of seven. This shows a striking parallel between the old ‘epic’ history of the first Serbian uprising and the new ‘real’ history of events in July 1995, one being the mirror image of the other.²⁹ It would be far too simplistic on our part to draw a clear line of causation between the cultural images contained in an epic song and real historical events. Yet looking at the images contained in songs can be helpful in understanding the ideological context behind the massacre of Muslim men in 1995, and the mentality in at least some of those who orchestrated and committed these crimes. We can only speculate as to whether Mladic had this particular song in mind in his reference to the revolt at that crucial point in time when he took the Srebrenica enclave. However, it is indeed plausible that his general outlook was permeated by this complex of national Serbian epics about the fight against the ‘Turks’, especially the Kosovo songs, the songs about the first Serbian uprising, and Njegos’s ‘Mountain Wreath’ (a classic in Serbian literature that celebrates the massacre of Montenegrin converts to Islam as a revenge for the defeat suffered in Kosovo).³⁰ It is abundantly clear that these epic elements were part and parcel of the discursive patterns that Serb nationalists and populists employed to ‘explain’ recent and more distant events and to justify certain decisions and actions.³¹ Since Mladic saw his take-over of Srebrenica as revenge for the defeat suffered against the *dahis*, he may very well have seen the massacre of Muslim men as a legitimate historical act from the perspective of these national epics.³²

From the very beginning of the Bosnian war, the Kosovo mythology was among the things that played a key legitimising role, presenting Serbian war efforts in Bosnia as an attempt to avenge Kosovo and turn back the clock in history. The Bosnian Muslims were persistently labelled as ‘Turks’, the direct descendants of the Turkish oppressors, while the conflict was continuously understood in terms of a battle between Christianity and Islam. The importance of the Kosovo myth as a legitimiser in Republika Srpska was expressed most poignantly in the adoption of *Vidovdan* as the Bosnian Serb Army’s official holiday and patron’s day at the very beginning of the war (1992). It is also reflected in the fact that many Bosnian Serbs saw Mladic as a modern-day Lazar (the Serbian army leader during the Battle of Kosovo), a kind of epic hero who was fighting a new Holy War against the ‘Turks’.³³ The clearest manifestation of the ideological significance of the Kosovo myth for the events in Srebrenica occurred on 28 June 1995, just a few days before the Bosnian Serb army opened the attack on the Muslim enclave. On that day, Mladic made direct allusions to the myth in a speech to his soldiers, who had gathered at the annual Vidovdan ceremony of the Bosnian Serbian Army in Bijeljina. Speaking of the importance of the Battle of Kosovo, he told them, “Prince Lazar gave his army the Communion, and bowed for the Heavenly Empire, defending fatherland, faith, freedom and the honour of the Serbian people. We have understood the essence of his sacrifice and have drawn the historical message from it. Today we make a winning army, we do not want to convert Lazar’s offering into a blinding myth of sacrifice”.³⁴

²⁸ Morison, *The revolt of the Serbs*, pp.72-73.

²⁹ Morison provides a translation of the relevant lines: “We will slaughter all the Serbian knezes, All the knezes, all the Serbian leaders, All the kmets who are a danger to us, All the village priests, those Serbian teachers; Only will we spare the helpless children, Children weak of seven years and under; Then the Serbs in truth will be a rayah, Truly will they serve their Turkish masters.” (Morison, *The revolt of the Serbs*, p.46-49)

³⁰ See Duijzings, *Religion and the Politics of Identity*, p.188. Some authors have presented this work as a blueprint for genocide and ethnic cleansing (see, in particular, Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed*, p.51).

³¹ See, in particular, the work of Ivan Eolovic, *Bordel ratnika* (1993), *Pucanje od zdravlje* (1994), *Jedno s drugim* (1995), *Politička simbola* (1997).

³² That there was an undeniable link between the epic mindset of Bosnian Serb peasants and politicians and the violence committed against the Muslim population (for instance, during the siege of Sarajevo at the beginning of the war) was also demonstrated in the documentary film *Serbian epics* made by Paul Pawlikowski and first broadcasted by the BBC (Bookmark, BBC 2, 16 December 1992).

³³ See, for instance, Block, ‘The Madness of General Mladic’.

³⁴ Bulatovic, *General Mladic*, p.154 (my own translation).

As I have explained elsewhere, an important aspect of this myth is its a-historical or pan-chronic nature. It tends to be timeless. It fuses past and present, and locates the actual events above historical time, fitting them into an all-encompassing cosmological order. In times of crisis and war, myths can help to give meaning to the kind of historical events that cause intense distress and chaos in the lives of those directly affected by them. If the events seem to be similar to those remembered in epic songs, myths can impose themselves once again as their most adequate representation. Regardless of the actual social, political, and economic circumstances that led to the conflict, and the active role present-day politicians and (para)military played in bringing about war, it was clear to many Bosnian Serbs that history was repeating itself. And indeed, there were clear parallels with earlier events, such as the first Serbian uprising, at least –and this is important – in the ways Serbs have remembered these events through various genres of historical folk tradition. What has been remembered is how the Serbs fought for their freedom, how the Ottomans suppressed the uprising and how Turks and Bosnian Muslims retaliated against the rebels by plundering Serb villages, enslaving Serb women and children, torturing and executing Serb leaders, and in some places by murdering all males capable of carrying guns.³⁵ Even if we were to adopt the view that ‘history’ is not an objective reality, but is always mediated through forms of historical representation, the parallels between the first Serbian uprising and the latest conflict are striking indeed, at least as regards eastern Bosnia. During the recent conflict, Serbs took up arms again against the Muslims or ‘Turks.’ And again, the Drina became the frontier between them. The actual battlegrounds were often the same (Tuzla, Bijeljina, Srebrenica). Warfare was equally brutal (as reflected by the burning and looting of villages along the Drina). Political goals, at least on the Serb side, were also identical and the overall geopolitical and military configuration was similar. Muslim-inhabited eastern Bosnia was, once again, perceived as an obstacle to the unification of Serb territories in Bosnia with motherland Serbia, a Muslim wedge that ran deep into Serb lands and was the product of historical injustices that needed to be undone.

The Drina River: a frontier

“The Drina River has long – one may say for centuries – been the border between the Serbian state (...) and the states that succeeded one another during various periods of occupation (...) of the territory of present-day Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Drina was long the frontier between Serbia and the Turkish Empire. Then it formed the border with the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and during World War Two, with Hitler’s and Pavelić’s Independent State of Croatia. Each of these occupiers aimed at removing the Bosnian Serbs from this border region with Serbia, which has led to large-scale expulsions of the Serb people. As a consequence, the national structure of the population has changed, leaving the Serbs with an ever-smaller share in the total population. Today, one can find the traces of our centuries-old presence only in destroyed churches, the names of certain settlements and other toponyms, but, unfortunately, not in the population of these settlements, where no Serb elements are left”.

Milivoje Ivanisevic, *Hronika naseg groblja*, p.1

“Oh, you Serb, do not worry

There will be no border at the Drina”

³⁵ See also Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, p.15.

Turbofolk star Baja-mali Knindza, in the song *Neće biti granica na Drini* (There will be no border at the Drina), on the tape *Pobedice istina* (Truth will win), 1994

In interviews, local Serb nationalists point out that eastern Bosnia was always Serb territory even though Muslims have managed, in more recent times, to outnumber the Serbs demographically. Many explanations have been given for this Muslim demographic dominance, one of which is the higher birth rate in eastern Bosnia's Muslim population. As in Kosovo, this is seen as one of the elements of a deliberate policy to reduce the Serb element in previously held Serb lands. Much effort has been invested in demonstrating that until quite recently, eastern Bosnia had a predominantly Serb population. In fact, the more extreme nationalists try to convince ignorant outsiders that this was the case even up until the 1970s and 1980s. I will deal with the more extreme claims later on in this discussion. At this point, however, we can gain greater insight by focusing more closely on the late Ottoman period. It was during this period that eastern Bosnia became a kind of permanent frontier between Serbia and Ottoman Bosnia, resulting in a very clear change in the region's demographic make-up. I will demonstrate that these changes were not merely the result of some Muslim 'master plan' to make eastern Bosnia Islamic territory. Rather, the changes were also produced by nineteenth-century Serbian policies that made Serbia's small Muslim population flee into Bosnia.

Although the first Serbian uprising failed, the second uprising, which started in April 1815 under the leadership of Milos Obrenovic (a rival of Karadjordje), finally put Serbia on the road to independent statehood. Within a few months, the insurgents liberated several towns in central Serbia, after which Obrenovic struck a political deal with the Ottomans consolidating his military successes. Serbia acquired a limited degree of autonomy, while Obrenovic was recognized as the prince of Serbia, who was to pay tribute to the sultan. In the years that followed, he managed to further reduce Ottoman influence in Serbia's internal affairs. He also strengthened his own position by securing the Sultan's recognition of his title on a hereditary basis. In July 1817, Obrenovic also struck hard against his major internal rival. When Karadjordje returned to Serbia, he was immediately executed and Obrenovic had his head sent to the Sultan.³⁶

One of the consequences of creating an autonomous Serbia was that the Drina, as already mentioned, became a permanent frontier between Ottoman and Serbian territories. Initially, only the lower reaches of the Drina river formed the border. However, with Serbia's southward expansion in 1833, the border was also stretched to include the areas near Srebrenica. This border, now an international border, remained in place until the establishment of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1918. Throughout the nineteenth century, massive population 'exchanges' occurred at this border, bringing about important demographic changes on both sides. The general trend was for Muslims (from Serbia) to cross the Drina into Bosnia, and for Serbs (from Bosnia) to migrate to the liberated territories in Serbia. The first trend was by far predominant, as it was the official policy of Serbia's successive rulers to expel all 'Turks' from Serbian soil. Bosnian Muslim authors today present this as the first episode in a long and continuous Serbian campaign of ethnic cleansing of the Muslim population in Serbia (and Bosnia).³⁷

Supported by Russia, Milos Obrenovic first negotiated the expulsion of Muslim landowners and peasants with the Ottoman government. In a firman or imperial decree (the *Hatiserif* of 3 August 1830), the Sultan summoned all of them to leave Serbia, except for the urban 'Turkish' population of the six garrison towns that remained under Ottoman control.³⁸ Bajina Basta, at the border near Srebrenica,

³⁶ Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, Vol.1, pp. 203, 207, and 238-240.

³⁷ See, for instance, Oric, *Srebrenica svjedoči i optužuje*, pp.9-10; Ćekić, *Historija genocida*, pp.56-58.

³⁸ It is important to note that during Ottoman times, towns such as Belgrade, Valjevo, SSabac, and Uzice were garrison towns with a considerable Muslim population. Serbs formed only a minority there. In addition, the Serbian side of the Drina river was lined by many Muslim villages (Dedijer et al, *History of Yugoslavia*, p.263). The Bosnian historian, Mustafa

drove out its Muslim population in 1832, while Muslims of other nearby villages like Perucac and Ljubovije left in 1834. Many of these Muslim peasants resettled in the Osat region southeast of Srebrenica. The few thousand Muslims who were still left in Serbia, mainly consisting of urban Muslims living in Turkish garrison towns, were expelled in the 1860s by Milos Obrenovic's son, Mihailo. Under a protocol that he signed with the Ottoman empire in 1862, all Muslims from Uzice, the most important 'Turkish' town in western Serbia, and Soko, a fortress near Zvornik, were forced to leave. Finally, in 1867, the Ottomans agreed to withdraw the four remaining Turkish garrisons (Belgrade, Sabac, Smederevo, and Kladovo).³⁹ Among this last wave of Muslim refugees were the ancestors of Alija Izetbegovic, who had been living in Belgrade as merchants.⁴⁰

Many of these Muslim refugees resettled in eastern Bosnia. Yet, the first wave of rural Muslim immigrants in the 1830s was much less of a problem for the Bosnian authorities than was the urban exodus of the 1860s. As the Bosnian historian Hodzic writes, the former group was less demanding. Aside from that, there was sufficient land for them to resettle, which guaranteed them a means of subsistence. The urban Muslim immigrants of the 1860s had a much higher living standard. They were also much more embittered and were also less inclined to accept the resettlement options that the Bosnian authorities proposed to them. Thus, their integration into Bosnian society, i.e. their resettlement into towns such as Zvornik, Srebrenica, Vlasenica, Tuzla, and Bijeljina was a much more painful process.⁴¹

In terms of numbers, there were 297 refugee households (approximately 1,770 people) living in the district of Srebrenica in 1864. Most of these were from the villages on the Serbian side of the Drina. However, some were from the towns of Uzice and Belgrade. In the Zvornik *sandžak*, the number of immigrants exceeded the 5,000 mark (1,037 households). Clearly, this influx of Muslim refugees drastically changed the ethno-demographic balance, causing a rapid increase in Muslim-dominated settlements.⁴² Relations also changed, not only in quantitative, but also in qualitative terms. Muslim refugees, particularly those from towns, harboured intense animosity towards Serbs, which contributed to the rise of Muslim radicalism and fanaticism in the second half of the nineteenth century. Probably, this was also one of the factors that prompted local Serbs from eastern Bosnia to emigrate to 'liberated' Serbia.⁴³

The ethno-demographic changes in the area of Srebrenica, i.e. the regions of Osat (southeast of the town of Srebrenica) and Ludmer (northwest), have been studied in some detail by Nikolic, who has compared data collected by Vuk Karadzic in 1860 with those of the Austrian period. These data seem to indicate that the majority of the rural population was still Serb in 1860. At that time, thirty-three out of a total of sixty-five settlements, were predominantly 'Christian' (i.e. Serb-Orthodox). Twenty-eight were mixed, and only three were entirely Muslim.⁴⁴ The comparison with the Austrian data suggests that the mixed villages soon became predominantly Muslim or were divided into Serb and Muslim sections. Although most Serb villages remained (almost) exclusively Serb throughout the period, a few

Imamovic, puts the number of Muslim Slavs (Bosnjaci) living in Serbia before the first Serbian uprising at about 20,000 (Imamovic, *Historija Bosnjaka*, p.328-329).

³⁹ Hodzic, 'Migracije muslimanskog stanovništva', pp.65-66. Imamovic, *Historija Bosnjaka*, pp.329-31; Jovanovic, 'Kraj turske vlasti u Bosni'.

⁴⁰ Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, p.82. These measures did not pertain to Muslim Gypsies, who were allowed to stay. Muslim Gypsies, as well as Muslims who adopted a Gypsy identity, continued to stay in Serbia, mostly in the towns. In 1874, the Muslim community in Serbia counted 6,176 members (Imamovic, *Historija Bosnjaka*, p.331).

⁴¹ Hodzic, 'Migracije muslimanskog stanovništva', p.76. Hodzic provides some data for Srebrenica on the basis of Ottoman documents: twenty-two Muslim households had come from Uzice in 1862, of which roughly half were Gypsies. The same families were still living in Srebrenica at the time of Hodzic's research. See Hodzic, 'Migracije muslimanskog stanovništva', pp.134-36.

⁴² Nikolic, 'Jedno interesovanje Vuka Karadzica'; see also Kulenovic, *Etnologija sjeveroistočne Bosne*, p.189.

⁴³ See: Malcolm, *Bosnia*, p.105-106.

⁴⁴ For a detailed list of villages and the ethnicity of their inhabitants, see: Nikolic, 'Jedno interesovanje Vuka Karadzica', pp.145-47.

Serb villages became mixed as well.⁴⁵ The three villages Dobrak, Osatica, and Osmace, which had been the only three entirely Muslim villages in 1860, remained Muslim (until the 1990s).

In short, the number of Muslim settlements soared in the second half of the nineteenth century. Mixed villages became almost exclusively Muslim, and as a consequence, the number of mixed settlements (almost half of all settlements in 1860) fell drastically. The end result was a geographic pattern of juxtaposition of ethnically 'pure' Muslim and Serb villages, a situation that continued until the Bosnian war. Only the town of Srebrenica, and later, the town of Bratunac, retained a mixed population. The relatively small size of the settlements has also characterized the situation over the long term. Until the 1980s, villages usually contained no more than a few hundred inhabitants (and rarely more than 500). As will be demonstrated later, these ethno-demographic factors in the countryside may explain in part the ethnic mobilisation and nationalist voting patterns in the countryside before and during the elections of November 1990. They also explain why it was very easy to discriminate between villages on the basis of ethnic criteria during the waves of attacks (and counter-attacks) on both Muslim and Serb villages during the first year of the Bosnian war. Even before the war, everybody knew which village was Muslim and which village, Serb.⁴⁶ As there were hardly any mixed villages, the danger of inflicting damage on members of their own group was negligible. Moreover, because of the small size of rural settlements and the inability to organise an effective defence, 'enemy' villages were usually easy targets for armed groups on both sides.

Rising Serb-Muslim antagonism

“Q: Do you think that the Muslims should get something?”

A: They can get something in Iran or Iraq if these countries are willing to give them their own state. Let them pursue their Jihad and state there if they wish. There is no place for them in Europe. They are Serb martyrs, but they do not understand they are Serbs. These are Serbs who have become Turks and adopted the Islamic faith.”

“Q: Where did you get such a [martial] talent from?”

A: I am from a warrior house. I have an ancestor, Jokelj Raznjatovic, who once, during the Serbo-Turkish war, cut off seventeen Turkish heads and seized two Turkish banners.”

Zeljko Raznjatovic 'Arkan' in an interview with journalist Dusica Milanovic, November 1992⁴⁷

All of the factors discussed earlier (i.e. memories of bloodshed during the first Serbian uprising, the creation of a Serb-Ottoman frontier at the Drina, and the ensuing population exchanges and ethno-demographic changes) contributed to the growing antagonism between Orthodox Serbs and Muslims

⁴⁵ It should be noted here that there were no villages with a homogenous or largely Serb population (in 1860) that became predominantly Muslim in the twentieth century, except for the village of Blazijevici. This village southeast of Srebrenica, which was mixed throughout the period, was initially predominantly Serb and then predominantly Muslim. Of course, some villages had already been Islamicised or abandoned by their Christian inhabitants long before the nineteenth century. The village of Sase is an example: it was abandoned by its Catholic (Saxon) population during the early Ottoman period, and is said to have remained uninhabited for about three centuries. It became Muslim during the nineteenth century when 'Turks' from Valjevo settled in the village (Deroka, *Kajakom i splavom niz Drinu*, p.87).

⁴⁶ Interview Mitko and Mevla Kadric 17/01/1998.

⁴⁷ Milanovic, 'Arkanov srpski san'

during the nineteenth century. The Muslims perceived the creation of an independent Serbian state on the other side of the Drina as an immediate threat to their own privileged position. The Bosnian Serbs, in turn, saw in it a promise of liberation from the Ottoman yoke and inclusion into that new autonomous state. Among the Bosnian Muslims, national feelings, in the modern sense of the word, were largely absent: because of the religious supremacy of Islam and the privileged position Muslims enjoyed within Ottoman society, their sense of group identity was primarily confessional, rather than ethnic. Even during most of the twentieth century, when Bosnia became part of Yugoslavia, the Bosnian Muslims retained an ambiguous sense of ethnic identity. Some considered themselves to be Serbs, Croats, or Yugoslavs, and others as Bosnians or 'Turks' loyal to the Sultan.⁴⁸

It may be helpful here to examine the structural organisation of the Ottoman empire, since it explains the specific forms that Serb-Muslim antagonism took, as a clash between two sides: 1. a conservative and confessionally defined Muslim community and 2. a modern, though also religiously inspired, ethno-nationalist movement on the Serb side. The Ottoman state had always assigned a crucial role to religious affiliation as the main means of defining communal identities. Regardless of their ethnic origin, Muslims formed the privileged strata of society. However, what was termed the *millet* system allowed non-Muslim religious communities (Christians and Jews) to enjoy a high degree of autonomy, which guaranteed their continued existence and protected them against attempts at religious assimilation. For the Serb populations, it was the Orthodox *millet*, especially the lower clergy that played a crucial role in preserving their separate identity vis-à-vis the dominant Muslim layer of society. Although differences were religiously defined (making no formal difference between Greek, Serb, and Bulgarian believers within the Orthodox millet), the fact that ordinary priests shared a common language and ethnic background with their flock guaranteed closely intertwined religious and ethnic affiliations on the grassroots level. Not surprisingly, therefore, religious ideas and doctrines became crucial in articulating nationalist discourse when modern concepts of nationhood developed in the nineteenth century. This merging of national and religious identity was reinforced by the creation of several autonomous and autocephalous ('national') Orthodox churches in the newly established Balkan national states.

In the case of Serbia, religion (or rather the religious imagery and symbolism of Serbian Orthodoxy) became an important element of Serbian national identity. This development took place even though many early nineteenth-century national ideologists, (such as Vuk Karadzic), advocated a language-based definition of Serbian identity, which was designed to justify Great-Serbian claims to Bosnia, Slavonia, Dalmatia and Croatia and to assimilate the non-Orthodox Catholic Croats and Muslims into a future Serb or South-Slav state.⁴⁹ Even so, social, political, and church pressures always remained strong to identify 'serbianness' closely with Orthodoxy, rendering non-Orthodox Serbs as potentially 'anomalous' or 'ambiguous', or as 'not really' Serb. This idea was particularly prevalent among the more powerful traditionalist and conservative nationalist circles linked to the clergy. Thus, it is not surprising that the Serbian state and Orthodox church developed a relation of close co-operation and symbiosis from the very beginning. Even as early on as the first Serbian uprising, Serb Orthodox priests were actively involved in the armed struggle against the Turks.⁵⁰

On the ideological level, the Kosovo myth, with its strong religious or Christian overtones, moved to the centre of Serbian nationalist discourse. It served as a source of inspiration to avenge the loss of Kosovo, to stand up against the Ottoman empire, to resurrect the Serbian nation and to recover the national homeland at the expense of the Muslim oppressor and his indigenous collaborators. During Ottoman times, the Kosovo tragedy was kept alive in the popular epic songs. Performed by

⁴⁸ The most salient example is perhaps the Bosnian Muslim leader, Alija Izetbegovic, who admitted during an interview to have once declared himself a Serb. See: Lazovic, 'Nekad sam se pisao kao Srbin'.

⁴⁹ Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, p.80. See, for instance, Vuk Karadzic's text 'srbi svi i svuda' (1849) in which he writes that there are five million Serbs belonging to three different religions: Orthodoxy, Islam and Catholicism. A French translation ('serbes, tous et partout') can be found in: Grmek, Gjidara and Simac, *La nettoyage ethnique*, pp.42-53.

⁵⁰ Petrovich 'Religion and ethnicity in Eastern Europe', p.399. An example already mentioned is Hadzi-Melentije Stevanovic, who was the abbot of the monastery of Rača near Bajina Basta on the Serbian side of the Drina.

folk singers, these songs retold the tragic events in Kosovo and hailed contemporary heroes and battles with the Turks, such as those in the first Serbian uprising.⁵¹ Vuk Karadzic compiled a particularly large collection of these songs from Serbian popular tradition. He pieced them together into one literary body, thus 'canonising' the Kosovo myth and providing Serbian national ideology with its mythical cornerstone. In drawing on folk songs as his source, he also bridged much of the gap between the nationalist intelligentsia and the peasant masses.⁵²

These steps towards building a nation in Serbia had an effect on the Bosnian Serbs as well. Aside from the spill-over effects of the first Serbian uprising and the lofty example that the autonomous Serbian state held up to Bosnian Serbs, the growth of national consciousness was further intensified by the establishment of Serb schools, which were administered by the Serbian Orthodox church. Instead of viewing this process of national 'awakening' merely in terms of a reaction against an increasingly oppressive Ottoman regime, as Serbian historiography usually does, I would propose a different perspective: the opportunities for national mobilisation within the Ottoman empire (for instance through the establishment of schools) were growing as a result of the new conditions created during the period of Ottoman reforms, a period commonly referred to as the *Tanzimat* or 'Reordering' (1839-1876). The primary goal of this Ottoman 'Perestroika' was to save and revitalise the Ottoman Empire by introducing European standards of organisation and administration. In part, this was the result of growing interference from European powers, which were pressing for the equal status of the Christian populations living in the empire.

The reforms started with the imperial edict of the *Gülhane* (Rose Garden). This was a declaration of the Ottoman government's intentions to establish security of life, honour, and property, to introduce a fair and effective taxation system, to create a regular army based on conscription, and to establish equality of all subjects irrespective of religious affiliation. In 1840, a revised penal code was introduced, which recognised legal equality for Muslims and non-Muslims. In practice, however, the success of these reforms was hampered by conservative opposition from the *ulema* and the majority of Ottoman officials. Many ordinary Muslim believers resented the doctrine of religious equality for Christians, seeing it as against the natural order of things.⁵³ Conservative Muslim elites became increasingly suspicious of Christians, whom they feared would invite foreign powers to interfere in their affairs. The reforms were particularly sabotaged in the provinces, where they were yet to be implemented even decades after their introduction. High-ranking local officials refused to comply with measures that would inevitably bring an end to their almost absolute power and would introduce a great degree of intervention from the Ottoman centre. Resistance against these reforms also grew in eastern Bosnia, especially against the new conscription (*nizam*) system. When Omer-pasha Latas, the new Bosnian governor, started to implement this system in the fall of 1850, high-ranking eastern Bosnian Muslim officials took up arms. In November 1850, the *muselim* of Srebrenica Hadzi Rustembeg and a group of volunteers from Srebrenica joined the uprising, but they were defeated near Kladanj. Hadzi Rustembeg, who was initially one of the Sultan's supporters in Bosnia, was killed.⁵⁴

It was only in the 1850s, under the enlightened Bosnian governor, Topal Osman-pasha, that the Ottomans started modernising Bosnian society. Under his rule, schools, roads and railways were built, as was the first public hospital in Bosnia (in Sarajevo).⁵⁵ During the 1860s, measures were taken to

⁵¹ The heartland of this tradition of epic singing was the mountainous terrain of Bosnia, the Sandzak, Montenegro and northern Albania. One of the major functions of these songs was to keep the memory of important historical events alive and to spread news about contemporary events among an illiterate population. Ugresic has aptly called it 'gusle journalism' (Ugresic 'Balkan blues').

⁵² Ekmečić, 'The emergence of St. Vitus Day', p.335.

⁵³ Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman empire*, p.43; Zürcher, *Turkey*, p.53; Malcolm, *Bosnia*, p.122-23.

⁵⁴ Jovanovic, 'Otpor Hatiserifu'.

⁵⁵ See: Malcolm, *Bosnia*, p.127-28. In 1851, Topal Osman-pasha also organized the first census, according to which Bosnia had 964,095 inhabitants. The Orthodox formed the largest category with 45.3% of the total population, while Muslims and Roman-Catholics comprised 39.9%, and 14.1% of the population, respectively. The Srebrenica district had 31,422

improve the economy and reduce illiteracy. For the first time, the Ottomans opened secular (secondary) state schools, called the *ruždija*-s, which were attended by pupils of all religious backgrounds.. There, they were prepared for official positions in local administrations. Nonetheless, these reforms did little to change the enormous percentage (97%) of illiteracy in Bosnia.⁵⁶ They did, however, improve the legal position of the Christians communities. During this period, many new churches and schools were built, which contributed to a revival of Serbian Orthodox church life and the development of an indigenous and nationally minded intellectual elite. In addition, a class of wealthy Christian merchants emerged, who were able to finance much of these activities. This educational and economic advancement provided the Christians with a renewed sense of superiority. At the same time, it deepened their resentment of the conservative Muslim elite who tried to block them from political power.

School teachers did much to stimulate national feelings among the peasant population. They even travelled to villages to encourage peasants to call themselves Serbs instead of *briscani* (Christians).⁵⁷ The Ottoman authorities viewed such activities with suspicion and tried to slow down the process. Despite their efforts, trade and community schools soon began to flourish in towns with active and wealthy populations. The first schools, run by the clergy, were often fairly primitive. However, new teaching methods and the rise of a class of qualified teachers introduced a growing trend towards professionalism in education. Support also came from Serbia proper, especially in the 1860s, when the Serbian government supplied teachers with textbooks.⁵⁸ In Srebrenica, the first Serbian school was established before 1850, and schoolbooks were smuggled in from Serbia by builders from the Osat region.⁵⁹ Some years later, during the final years of Ottoman rule, another school was built in the Serb stronghold of Kravica, next to the Serbian Orthodox church.⁶⁰ Some wealthy local Serb peasants sent the priest's son away to Belgrade to study there, and he later became the school's first teacher. It was one of the very few boarding schools in eastern Bosnia, attracting pupils from Srebrenica, Vlasenica, Han Pijesak, and other nearby Serb villages.⁶¹ Kravica soon became one of the most important - if not the main - centre of Serb nationalist activity in the region. Many Serbs from Kravica participated as volunteers in the wars that Serbia fought against the Ottoman Empire during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Vaso Eric (born 1844) became the Serbs' first important leader in Kravica.⁶²

inhabitants, 15,272 of which were Muslims (48.6%) and 15,182 Orthodox Christians (48.3%). There was also a relatively large community of Gypsies. Jovanovic, 'Kraj turkse vlasti u Bosni'.

⁵⁶ Curic, 'sSkolstvo u sjeveroistočnoj Bosni', p.149.

⁵⁷ Malcolm, *Bosnia*, p.126.

⁵⁸ Curic, 'sSkolstvo u sjeveroistočnoj Bosni', p.150, 153.

⁵⁹ Serbs from the Osat region made a living as *dundjeri* (carpenters), who went to Serbia during the summer season to look for work. They were much in demand for their wooden house constructions. As travelling artisans, they had their own secret language (the so-called *banalački jezik*), which they used among themselves and which contained numerous Albanian words. See: Beatovic, *Bratunac i okolina*, p.17-18; Jovanovic, 'srebrenica kroz vijekove (5)'; Milovanovic, 'Neki zanati u Srebrenici'.

⁶⁰ Kravica is the centre of a cluster of Serb villages and hamlets that all gravitate towards the local Serb Orthodox church, which stands on a hill. The present church was built in 1910, near an old church that had been built during Turkish times. As it always was the only church in this region, it formed an important gathering place for the whole Serb community. Kravica belongs to the region of Ludmer, which until the 1970s, was a relatively isolated stretch of territory because of poor road connections (Miljanovic, *Krvari Božić sela Kravice*, p.11; Nikolic, 'Kravica u proslosti', p.19). Local oral tradition has it that the entire region experienced a constant influx of Montenegrins and Hercegovinians from the end of the seventeenth until the middle of the nineteenth century. These people fled for various reasons, including to escape epidemics, poverty, and hunger, and to find refuge from blood feuds (see Jovanovic, 'Kraj turske vlasti u Bosni'). Thus, the majority of the Serb Orthodox population in and around Srebrenica is said to be of Montenegrin and Hercegovinian origin. See Hasic 'Porijeklo prezimena' [1].

⁶¹ Nikolic, 'Kravica u proslosti', p.18-19. After the Serb schools in Srebrenica and Kravica were established, Muslims in Srebrenica also decided to form a school. In the 1860s, they collected money and established a medresa, which continued to function for a considerable period of time. See: Curic, 'sSkolstvo u sjeveroistočnoj Bosni', p.184.

⁶² Nikolic, 'Kravica u proslosti', p.15-17; M.Dj., 'Uprkos carskoj zabrani'; Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, p.140-141.

Class also played a clear role in the growing Serb antagonism towards the Muslims. The majority of the Serb peasant population belonged to the class of *kmets* (serfs), whereas Muslims largely belonged to the class of landlords and free peasants. This Serb peasant population enjoyed few – if any – benefits from the Ottoman reforms and only saw their taxes raised. It was primarily towards the late 1850s that peasant unrest started to surface. Initially, it was directed against the tax collectors and not so much against Muslim landowners. The first peasant uprisings occurred in 1857 and 1858 in eastern Hercegovina. Later, in 1862, the tobacco planters in the Srebrenica district also revolted.⁶³ In some cases, Muslim peasants participated in these protests, which shows the cause of the dissatisfaction to be primarily economic rather than religious or ethnic.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, Serbs were disproportionately affected by deteriorating conditions in the countryside, as they comprised the bulk of the most deprived rural class of *kmets* (serfs). The growing unrest among the Serb peasant masses was thus increasingly directed against the Muslim landowning classes and conservative elites. They, in their turn, developed anti-Christian sentiments, which contributed to the ever-increasing Serb-Muslim divide.

Thus, the large Bosnian peasant uprising of 1875 quickly evolved into an uprising of the Serb peasant masses, which wanted to join Serbia and be liberated from their oppression in the Bosnian countryside. Serb peasants attacked Muslim landowners, who retaliated by mobilising Muslim irregulars, burning hundreds of Serb villages and killing several thousand peasants.⁶⁵ When the uprising was still in full swing, public pressure mounted in Serbia to come to the rescue of the Bosnian Serbs. As a result of that pressure, Serbia (and Montenegro) declared war on the Ottoman Empire in June 1876, and many Serbs from Kravica went to Serbia to fight as volunteers in the Serbian army.⁶⁶ As Serbia was still unprepared for war, it suffered almost immediate defeat, and was forced to sign a truce with the Ottoman Empire in November 1876. Yet its objectives remained unchanged throughout this period: to push the Ottomans out of the Balkan peninsula, and to liberate and unite all Serbs into a Greater Serbian state. It was primarily Ilija Garasanin, the Serbian prime minister and minister of foreign affairs in the 1860s, who put the *reconquista* of Ottoman territories and the unification of all Serbian territories at the heart of Serbia's foreign policy. In a secret document entitled *Načertanije* ('Outline', 1844) he justified the annexation of Bosnia and Kosovo. This document also sought to bring about a union with Montenegro, and to secure an outlet to the Adriatic sea.⁶⁷ Bosnian Muslims usually see him as the spiritual father of the Greater Serbian Idea, and one of the evil masterminds behind Serb plans to cleanse Muslims from Bosnia. It should be noted here, however, that Garasanin was primarily inspired by Vuk Karadzic's linguistic nationalism, which aimed at assimilating the non-Orthodox 'serbs' into a Serbian state. Although he was critical of defining Serbian national identity exclusively in religious terms, most of his contemporaries favoured a much cruder version of these Greater Serbian claims, pairing Serbianness to Orthodoxy and showing open hostility towards Muslims. The Bosnian Muslims were depicted as traitors, who had collaborated with the Turks since the Battle of Kosovo. The liberation of 'Christian' territories under 'Muslim' control became a kind of sacred duty, an obligation to avenge and reverse the injustices of Kosovo.

⁶³ Jovanovic, 'Kraj turske vlasti u Bosni'.

⁶⁴ See Malcolm, *Bosnia*, p.130.

⁶⁵ Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, p.16.

⁶⁶ Nikolic, 'Kravica u proslosti', p.16.

⁶⁷ Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, Vol.1, p.331.

Chapter 2

The Austro-Hungarian Period And World War One

“My motive in collecting these paintings is my admiration for these Serb warriors, these soldiers from 1916 and 1917, when the Serbian army showed the most tremendous endurance and bravery until today. I admire these Serbian soldiers and can look at these paintings endlessly”.

Zeljko Raznjatovic ‘Arkan’ talking about his hobby of collecting World War One paintings, in an interview with journalist, Dusica Milanovic, November 1992⁶⁸

Under Austro-Hungarian Rule

It took several decades, until the Balkan Wars and World War One, before Serbia achieved its primary objectives of annexing Kosovo and Bosnia, and of unifying all Serbs into one state. Until then, Kosovo and Macedonia remained in Ottoman hands. At the Congress of Berlin (1878), Vienna was given the right to occupy and administer Bosnia-Herzegovina, though the Ottomans retained sovereignty over the region. While the Ottoman empire was falling apart, the Balkans were being divided into an Austrian and Russian sphere of influence, which placed Serbia’s ambitions in Bosnia in jeopardy. Serbia’s only gain from what was called the Eastern Crisis was full independence. In Bosnia proper, both Muslims and Serbs were angered by the news that Austria-Hungary was going to occupy the country, although for different reasons. Muslims thought that it would put an end to the privileges they had enjoyed living in an Islamic empire, while most Serbs feared that Austrian rule would postpone unification with Serbia indefinitely. In eastern Bosnia, particularly in Tuzla, Muslims took up arms en masse to resist the Austrians. In Srebrenica, Muslim landlords encouraged peasants to join the resistance.⁶⁹ Even so, it took the Austrians just a few weeks to crush resistance, though they were forced to call in numerous reinforcements to do so. They soon took control of major towns, such as Sarajevo and Tuzla. Even Srebrenica fell into Austrian hands.⁷⁰ Rebellions continued during the first years of the Habsburg occupation. In 1881 and 1882, for instance, the introduction of universal conscription by the Austrians provoked a Serb insurrection in Herzegovina, which also had support from the Muslim population. The insurrection rapidly spread over the country, but was soon suppressed by Austrian forces.⁷¹ Not very eager to live under Christian rule, Muslims – not only the Turkish elite, but also a huge number of indigenous Islamicized Slavs – immigrated to the territories still in Ottoman hands. According to Muslim historians, approximately 150,000 Muslims left Bosnia between 1878 and 1914. This led to a decline in their number in the general population: from 38.7% in 1879 to 32.3% in 1910.⁷²

⁶⁸ Milanovic, ‘Arkanov srpski san’, p.48.

⁶⁹ Burg and Shoup, *The war in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, p.35; Zulfikarpasic, *The Bosniaks*, p.23.

⁷⁰ Jovanovic, ‘Kraj turske vlasti u Bosni’.

⁷¹ Batakovic, *The Serbs of Bosnia*, p.64.

⁷² Èekic, *Historija genocida*, p.58; Musovic,, p.454.

Bosnia-Hercegovina fell under the governance of the Common Ministry of Finance of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In 1882, Benjámín Kállay, a Hungarian nobleman who had spent some years in Belgrade as the Austrian consul, was appointed governor. He was familiar with the situation in this part of the Balkans and developed a policy aimed at reducing Muslim resistance and countering Serb nationalist and irredentist ambitions. As he noticed the widespread appeal that independent Serbia held for Bosnian Serbs, he tried to bring about a rapprochement between the Muslims and Catholics. This was his attempt to isolate the Serbs in their endeavours to join Serbia, the *Piedmont* of a new and expanding southern Slav state on the Balkans.⁷³ He tried to achieve this by appeasing the *agas* and *begs*, who owned most of the land, and whose ownership titles he left untouched. Another important element in this policy was that of promoting a separate Bosnian nation, into which all three ethno-confessional groups were intended to merge.

Kállay's attempts to construct a separate Bosnian identity were paired with measures aimed at severing economic ties with neighbouring Serbia and Montenegro, and strengthening those with the Habsburg empire. During those years, trade between Bosnia and Serbia declined dramatically, a trend that continued for decades.⁷⁴ Austrian policies in Bosnia led to growing tensions with Serbia, which deeply resented the fact that Austria was keeping Serbia out of Bosnia and was blocking Serbia's access to the Adriatic. Yet in many ways, the Austrian period had also positive effects on the economic development and industrialisation of Bosnia, although much of these development activities were basically tailored to exploit the rich natural resources of the country.⁷⁵ The Austrians built roads and railways, for example, between Sarajevo and Visegrad in eastern Bosnia, where forestry was the most important growth industry. They also took the first steps towards developing a mining industry, particularly in eastern Bosnia. During the 1880s and following decades, Austrian geologists and mining experts mapped out the area to see whether its mineral resources could be turned into profit. Srebrenica was one of the areas explored for mineral reserves. And indeed, the Austrians did discover substantial reserves of bauxite there at the onset of the twentieth century.⁷⁶

These Austrian geological explorations also led to the discovery of the ancient Roman history of Srebrenica. The Austrians already knew that Srebrenica had been a mining town in mediaeval times. They also suspected that the town was the site of the ancient Roman toponym 'Argentaria'.⁷⁷ With that in mind, they tried to discover all sites where mining had taken place in the past. As a result, mining expert, Ludwig Pogatschnig, discovered a Roman settlement in Gradina (near Sase) in 1883. An Austrian mining company called 'Bosnia' then launched archaeological excavations that uncovered the remains of the Roman *municipium* (town) of Domavia, a town that, until then, had been known only from written sources.⁷⁸ It became clear that during mining Roman times had been an important economic activity around Srebrenica: the area had contained the most important silver and lead mines

⁷³ According to the first census the Austrians held in 1879, the total number of inhabitants in Bosnia was 1.2 million. Serbs formed the largest group (42.9%). In parts of eastern Bosnia, Serbs formed an absolute majority, such as in the districts of Vlasenica (64.4%), Zvornik (54.8%), and Bijeljina (70.6%). See: Batakovic, *The Serbs of Bosnia*, p.64.

⁷⁴ Batakovic, *The Serbs of Bosnia*, p.66. For a more detailed historical study of Kállay's rule in Bosnia-Hercegovina, see: Kraljačić, *Kalajev režim*.

⁷⁵ Sugar, *Industrialization of Bosnia-Herzegovina*, pp.....

⁷⁶ See: Milovanovic, 'O rudarenju u Srebrenici'; Dukic et al, *Dvadeset pet godina rada*, p.12.

⁷⁷ The work of Austrian historian, Konstatin Jireček, particularly his book, *Die Handelsstrassen und Bergwerke von Serbien und Bosnien während des Mittelalters: historisch-geografische Studien* (1879), was instrumental in this respect. As the names Srebrenica and Argentaria are both derived from the word 'silver' (i.e. 'srebro' in Serbian and 'argentum' in Latin), it was assumed that the two toponyms were different historical designations for the same area. For accounts of Srebrenica's history as a mining town see: Jovanovic, 'srebrenica kroz vijekove (1-4)'; Jovanovic, 'Gradska uprava i vlasti'; Jovanovic, 'Trgovina u Srebrenici'; Jovanovic, 'Zanatstvo u Srebrenici'; Hasic, 'Privredno stanje Srebrenice i njene okoline 1906. godine'; Hasic, 'Privredno stanje Srebrenice i okoline (1906-1926)'; Hasic, 'Dubrovačke zanatlije u Srebrenici'; Hasic, 'Dubrovačke zanatlije u srednjovjekovnoj Srebrenici'.

⁷⁸ Ibisevic, 'Bosnien-Herzegowina', p.15; Munro, *Rambles and studies*, pp.348-350. For a local account of the discovery of Argentaria see: Milovanovic, 'Traganje za Argentarijom'; Milovanovic, 'Argentarija je otkrivena'; Milovanovic, 'Iskopine Argentarije'; Milovanovic, 'Život i običaji'.

of the western parts of the Balkans.⁷⁹ Further excavations during the 1890s, financed by the Austrian *Landesregierung* of Bosnia, led to a more complete picture of the Roman settlement of Gradina.

The Austrians themselves never opened mines in the area of Srebrenica. However, their explorations prepared the way for the mining activities that developed there later, during Tito's time (particularly bauxite, silver, lead, and zinc mining). Until the 1990s, the exploitation of these resources was based on the original drawings and plans of Austrian geologists and engineers, which still existed at the beginning of the war (in the archives of the local museum of Srebrenica). Austrian economic activity remained confined to the exploitation of the Crni Guber mineral water source. The Heinrich Mattoni company built a small bottle factory, mainly using a local female work force, which produced 20,000 bottles of mineral water a day for export. The demand seems to have been highest during World War One, when the water was used to treat wounds of injured soldiers. The Austrians also built a paved road from Srebrenica to the Crni Guber source, with the intention of developing it into a spa. However, these plans were foiled by the outbreak of World War One. In addition, the Austrians built an ochre plant in a suburb of Srebrenica, which produced the yellow pigment that was used to paint houses and buildings throughout the Habsburg empire. This plant was closed down when the Austrians left in 1918.⁸⁰ The Austrians did much to improve the local infrastructure. Apart from the paved road to Crni Guber, they also built macadam roads between Srebrenica and Bratunac. Between Srebrenica and Milici, they built a road that passed by a Muslim cluster of villages around Suceška.⁸¹ They also built schools (in Srebrenica as well as Skelani), a hospital, and several other public utility buildings, most of which were still in use in that capacity at the onset of the Bosnian war. One of the most beautiful Austrian buildings in Srebrenica is the old *konak* or hotel, built in 1906, which later became the seat of the municipal council. Along the Drina, several Austrian military and police posts were set up to defend the border against Serbian incursions. Around this time, the town had approximately two thousand inhabitants.

After Kállay's death in 1903, his policy of suppressing ethnic divisions by promoting a 'Bosniac' identity was abandoned. New policies were introduced, allowing ethno-national cultural associations to be established among the three main communities. In 1905, for instance, the Bosnian Serbs received ecclesiastical and educational autonomy, which the Austrian authorities hoped would bring a halt to rising Serb nationalism and irredentism. Yet a new generation of young and educated Serb politicians emerged. And they made much more radical demands than had their predecessors (who had always shown more willingness to compromise with the Austrians).⁸² This was the formative period of ethnic politics in Bosnia. Between 1905 and 1910, Muslims, Serbs and Croats established the first political parties along confessional or ethnic lines. The first Muslim party was the Muslim National Organisation (*Muslimanska Narodna Organizacija* - MNO) created in 1906. The first Serb party was the Serb National Organisation (*Srpska Narodna Organizacija* - SNO) established in 1907. The Croats, in their turn, set up the Croat National Union (*Hrvatska Narodna Zajednica* - HNZ) in 1908. The first inter-confessional party was the Social Democrat Party established in 1909 (*Socijaldemokratska stranka BiH*).⁸³

As a result, ethnic divisions and rivalries very much affected political life in Bosnia, even more so as relations between Austria and Serbia deteriorated. Austria-Hungary's sudden annexation of

⁷⁹ From the third century AC on, Domavia was the seat of the Roman prokurator metalorum (the mining administrator) for the two Roman provinces of Pannonia and Dalmatia. At that time, it was the most important urban centre in the territory of present-day Bosnia-Herzegovina (Kulenovic *Etnologija sjeveroistočne Bosne*, p.184). Other Roman settlements in this area were found in Voljavica and Skelani (Municipium Malvesiatium). The latter was a Roman garrison, from which the Roman armies organized their campaigns on the eastern borders of their empire. When the Western Roman Empire collapsed, Domavium's mines closed, and the town was destroyed (Renner, *Durch Bosnien*, p.182).

⁸⁰ Ibisevic, 'Bosnien-Herzegowina', p.15-16; Renner, *Durch Bosnien*, p.184-85.

⁸¹ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica (1987-1992)*, p.X. The Muslim inhabitants of Suceška later always complained that the Austrian road was never repaired during the seventy years of Yugoslavia's existence. To them, this was a clear sign that the Serb and Communist authorities were never interested in developing this remote Muslim area (Ibisevic, 'Bosnien-Herzegowina', p.16).

⁸² Corovic, *Političke prilike*, p.38.

⁸³ Arnautovic, *Izbori u Bosni*, pp.26-27.

Bosnia-Herzegovina in October 1908 only fuelled these tensions. In Belgrade, this led to a huge public outcry. Nationalist associations sprung up, such as *Narodna Odbrana* (National Defence), which recruited volunteers to cross into Bosnia and help to organise resistance against Austrian rule. This organisation was also active in Kravica, through the farmers' cooperation.⁸⁴ Another group was formed by junior officers from the Serbian army, who rallied around the powerful and charismatic figure of Dragutin Dimitrijevic 'Apis' ('The Bull'). They established the secret organisation 'Unification or Death!' (also called Black Hand), which saw Serbia as the heart of a new South Slav national state, and propagated an armed revolutionary struggle in order to liberate and unite all Serbs. Later, in 1911, on the eve of the Balkan Wars, the 'Black Hand' organisation became an instrument of the Serbian government's foreign policy in its preparations for war. From its ranks, a network of secret agents was created, which was active in Habsburg and Ottoman territories, and whose main goal was to wrest these regions from Austrian and Turkish control.⁸⁵

The Balkan Wars and World War One



'Rest in peace, you immortal heroes of the immortal and brave leader,
Major Kosta.
You sacrificed your lives for our freedom Brave avengers of Kosovo
rest in peace.
Because better times have now come to us.
Sunnays of freedom warm us from all sides.
The painful wounds of Kosovo are no more.'

Text on a plaque commemorating Major Kosta Todorovic and his
soldiers, who fought in eastern Bosnia at the start of World War One
and fell in battle near Srebrenica.

Serbia grew increasingly confident after its military victories during the two Balkan Wars (1912-1913), as it had doubled in size by taking control over Kosovo and Macedonia. The annexation of the Serb inhabited regions of the Habsburg Empire seemed within reach, and the Serb population in Bosnia thought that their liberation from 'the Ottoman yoke' was imminent. Many young Bosnian Serbs,

⁸⁴ Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, p.141.

⁸⁵ Dragutin Dimitrijevic Apis was a high Serbian army officer, who played an important role in Serbian political life in the first two decades of the twentieth century. See MacKenzie, 'Dragutin Dimitrijevic-Apis'.

including from the Srebrenica and Bratunac area, crossed over the Drina into Serbia to join the Serbian army as volunteers. Some were arrested by the Austrians at the border, who tried to prevent them from joining the Serbian forces.⁸⁶ As the ideology of these young insurgents was an ambiguous mixture of socialist, South Slav and Serbian ideals, some Muslims also went to Serbia to join the Serbian army. Austria became increasingly nervous and started to strengthen its military presence along the border. In 1913, the Austrians imposed martial law, introducing various repressive measures against the Serb population.⁸⁷

These events were just the prologue to World War One, which was triggered by the assassination of Austria's heir to the throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, and his wife on their visit to Sarajevo on 28 June 1914. The assassins, a group of Bosnian youths (five Serbs and one Muslim), were all members of the youth socialist organisation, *Mlada Bosna* (Young Bosnia), which advocated South Slav union and the liberation of Bosnia from Austrian rule. They had received assistance from Dragutin Dimitrijevic Apis, Chief of Military Intelligence of Serbia at the time, who supervised a network of secret agents operating inside Bosnia. Although his role has never been clarified, he probably supplied the group with weapons without informing the Serbian government.⁸⁸ These arms were then smuggled into eastern Bosnia, which was an important chain in the conspiracy network. According to the local chronicler of these events, Djordje Beatovic, young Serbs from villages along the Drina and even Gypsy musicians were involved in carrying out certain tasks. The person who coordinated these activities from Serbia was army officer and border guard captain, Kosta Todorovic, who was stationed in Loznica on the Serbian side of the Drina. Later, when Austria declared war on Serbia, he led military operations in and around Srebrenica.

On this particular Sunday in June, Serbs in eastern Bosnia were commemorating Vidovdan, which is celebrated as the anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo. According to the description of events in Bratunac on that day, people had gathered in the yard of the Serbian Orthodox church to celebrate with music and dance. Around noon, something terrible happened in Sarajevo, after which people went home immediately. In the afternoon, at about five, the Austrian authorities announced a curfew and established a drumhead trial. Army and police units patrolled the empty streets of Bratunac.⁸⁹ Throughout Bosnia, the murder caused an immediate outburst of anti-Serb sentiment. The very same day, demonstrations were organised in all major Bosnian towns, as well as in Zagreb, where Croatian nationalists called for revenge on the Serbs. As one speaker there said: "Vidovdan is the day of Serb vengeance, and from this day onwards let it be the day of our revenge as well, because he who does not avenge himself will not live in honour [...]. We will avenge the death of the Croatian Crown Prince, we will take revenge for Croatia!"⁹⁰ All over Bosnia, anti-Serb pogroms began, against which the Austrian authorities undertook little, if any, action. For several days, Croats and Muslims looted Orthodox churches and Serb shops, and in Sarajevo, criminals were released from prison to participate.

The Austro-Hungarian Empire sent an immediate ultimatum to Serbia. When the Serbian government refused to comply, the Austrians declared war on the country on 25 July 1914. They recruited Bosnian Croats and Muslims into special auxiliary militia, the so-called *Schutzkorpsen*, which were assigned the task of paralysing Serb resistance and intimidating the Serb population. All over Bosnia, they exerted a reign of terror and fear.⁹¹ Thousands of Serbs, particularly intellectuals, teachers, merchants, and priests, were arrested and put in prisons and concentration camps. Nineteen Serbs from

⁸⁶ Beatovic, *Bratunac i okolina*, pp.6-7. This source mentions 239 names of local Serbs, from the Bratunac and Srebrenica area, who joined the Serbian army during the 'wars of liberation', i.e. from the Serbian-Turkish wars of 1876-1878 until the end of World War One (pp.57-59). Another source says that more than fifty Serbs from the Kravica area fought as volunteers in the Serbian army during World War One (Nikolic, 'Kravica u prošlosti', p.17).

⁸⁷ Corovic, *Političke prilike*, pp.46-48.

⁸⁸ Batakovic, *The Serbs of Bosnia*, p.84-87; MacKenzie, 'Dragutin Dimitrijevic-Apis', pp.71-73, 78-82; Ljubibratic, *Mlada Bosna*, pp.153-64.

⁸⁹ Beatovic, *Bratunac i okolina*, p.28-29.

⁹⁰ Corovic, *Crna knjiga*, p.31 (translation mine).

⁹¹ Corovic, *Crna knjiga*, p.32; Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, p.149.

the Srebrenica district were also arrested and spent the rest of the war years in Austrian prisons.⁹² In some cases (as in Foča), Serbs were taken hostage and kept as human shields at strategically important places, such as bridges.⁹³ In Srebrenica and elsewhere in Bosnia, Serbs were 'mobilised' into the Austrian army in order to keep them under close surveillance. They were also forced to dig trenches and carry out hard labour. Their treatment was harsh. Many suffered from hunger and disease, while others were killed in retaliation, particularly at times when the Serbian army achieved major military successes. (In fact, this is how a dozen Serbs from villages near Srebrenica died).⁹⁴

When the war started, the Serbian-Austrian border along the Drina River was one of the main lines of confrontation, where clashes occurred almost immediately. During the first months of the war the Austrian forces invaded Serbia three times crossing the Danube, Sava and Drina rivers. But the Serbs – battle-hardened as they were from the two Balkan wars – managed to drive the Austrians back. Serb forces intruded into eastern Bosnia, forcing thousands of Muslims from the Visegrad area to flee.⁹⁵ Major battles were also fought near Srebrenica, between Austro-Hungarian forces and a unit of Serb volunteers commanded by Kosta Todorovic.⁹⁶ Todorovic's unit first crossed into Bosnia on 1 August 1914, taking up positions along the Drina. In reaction, Hungarian soldiers – helped by *Schutzkorpsen* and local Muslims – plundered Serb houses and shops in Srebrenica and some nearby villages, also killing a number of Serbs.⁹⁷ A Muslim priest from Srebrenica, a member of the *Schutzkorpsen*, is reported to have participated in killing three Serbs on a hill near Srebrenica. At the end of the month, local Austrian police forces and *Schutzkorpsen* burned the Serb village of Podravanje after they killed four inhabitants and looted the village. A number of Serb peasants from Podravanje were hanged in the town of Srebrenica.⁹⁸

Todorovic was ordered to give up his positions along the Drina, after which he returned to Bajina Basta. Almost three weeks later, he renewed his attacks on Bosnian territory. On 18 September, his unit of some 150 well-armed volunteers managed to take Srebrenica and Bratunac, but they were soon forced back by the Austrian army. During the clashes that followed, near Brezani and Zeleni Jadar, fifty of Todorovic's volunteers died. Todorovic himself was heavily wounded, and the story goes that the Austrians took him to Srebrenica, where they burned him alive together with one of his soldiers, on 27 September 1914.⁹⁹ In reaction to Todorovic's actions, the Austrian army and Muslim and Croat *Schutzkorpsen* retaliated against the local Serb population. They rounded up its leaders, particularly priests who were seen as the disseminators of Serb nationalist propaganda. Between August and October 1914, nine Serbs from Srebrenica were accused of 'crimes against the army.' They received the death sentence and were subsequently shot or hanged. In Vlasenica, revenge was carried out by Muslim and Croat *legionasi*, or volunteers, who killed local Serbs on a hill above the town by decapitation.¹⁰⁰ According to Serb historians, Srebrenica was among the districts that suffered most from Austrian reprisals during the war, due to its proximity to the border and Todorovic's actions at the beginning of the war.

⁹² Beatovic, *Bratunac i okolina*, p.34.

⁹³ Corovic, *Crna knjiga*, p.50.

⁹⁴ See Corovic, *Crna knjiga*, p.83.

⁹⁵ Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, p.21. One of the participants in these clashes at the Drina front was Josip Broz Tito, who, as a young conscript, had been recruited into a Croat infantry unit of the Austro-Hungarian army. See: West, *Tito*, pp.40-41; Pavlowitch, *Tito*, pp.10-11.

⁹⁶ Some volunteers were Serb émigrés, who had come back from the US, Canada and Australia to join the fighting. Also several Yugoslav-minded Croats and Muslims were part of these units. For instance at least half a dozen of Bosnian Muslims from villages at the border near Skelani joined the Uzice corps (Beatovic, *Bratunac i okolina*, pp.48-50).

⁹⁷ Beatovic, *Bratunac i okolina*, p.39.

⁹⁸ Corovic, *Crna knjiga*, p.84.

⁹⁹ For Kosta Todorovic see: *Vojna enciklopedija*, vol.10, 1975, p.12; Beatovic, *Bratunac i okolina*, p.42-43; Ljubibratic, *Mlada Bosna*, p.218; Deroka, *Geografsko-turistička monografija*, p.247.

¹⁰⁰ Corovic, *Crna knjiga*, p.210; see also Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, p.142. Beatovic provides all the names of local Serbs from Srebrenica and Bratunac who were hanged (18 persons) or executed (102 persons), or who went missing or died in Bosnian prisons or in concentration camps (111 persons) (Beatovic, *Bratunac i okolina*, p.54-59).

After World War One, major Kosta Todorovic remained a hero in the eyes of local Serbs and still is today. In September 1924, on the tenth anniversary of his death, a monument was erected in Srebrenica's town centre, commemorating Todorovic and the members of his unit who perished.¹⁰¹ The monument remained there until the beginning of World War Two, when Ustashe forced local Serbs to remove and destroy it. The Serbs, however, kept the monument somewhere, 'hiding' it for the next five decades: it turned up again after they took Srebrenica in July 1995. It is perhaps one of the clearest local examples of how official 'history' and 'memory' are subject to revision and manipulation, and how claims on the past that have been silenced can be revived.¹⁰² The two stone plaques, one with a short biography of Todorovic and the other containing a poem referring to the Battle of Kosovo, now stand in the park in Srebrenica's centre. (See the photo at the beginning of this section). While Serbs revere him as a hero, who avenged Kosovo and who helped to liberate Bosnia, Muslims regard him as a war criminal. The local historian and SDA leader, Besim Ibisevic writes, for instance, that Kosta Todorovic killed "hundreds of Bosniacs of the district of Srebrenica" during "terrorist" actions in 1914. In other recent Muslim publications, such as the books of Naser Oric and Nijaz Masic, Todorovic is said to have pillaged and burned numerous Muslim homes and to have killed many Muslims.¹⁰³

It is worth mentioning that from the Serb nationalist perspective, World War One is just one episode in the long history of local Serb victimisation at the hands of foreign occupiers and their Muslim and Croat collaborators. As the chronicler of Serb suffering in Srebrenica and Bratunac, Milivoje Ivanisevic, writes that "they" (the Turks, the Muslims, the Austrians, the Ustashe and the Germans) have persistently tried to exterminate the Serbs from this region. He claims that during World War One, the Serb population in the districts of present-day Srebrenica, Bratunac and Skelani, was reduced by half, the underlying message being that Srebrenica became predominantly Muslim because of the 'genocide' committed against the Serbs.¹⁰⁴ This, he says, is a recurrent crime against the Serbs in this region, even up to the present day. The one case he presents to illustrate his point can serve as an icon of local Serb suffering throughout twentieth-century history. Milan Petkovic, an Orthodox priest from Srebrenica, spent World War One in an Austrian labour camp. During World War Two, he was arrested by the Germans and died in Dachau. His only mistake, Ivanisevic writes, was that of being a Serb. Throughout his book, Ivanisevic draws one straight historical line from these events to the present. The same thing is recurring time and again, he says, and the perpetrators are basically the same people: the Austrians and/or the Germans, and their local servants, the Muslims (who sometimes belong even to the same families).¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Beatovic, *Bratunac i okolina*, p.49. There have also been songs about Kosta Todorovic's death (see for instance Beatovic, *Bratunac i okolina*, p.43). During the 1990s the primary school in Skelani, which was named after the Bosnian Partisan hero Slavisa Vajner, was renamed into the Kosta Todorovic primary school (Ibisevic, *Srebrenica (1987-1992)*, p.72). For Todorovic see also Oric, *Srebrenica svjedoči i optužuje*, p.9-10.

¹⁰² The first attempts to revive the memory of Kosta Todorovic occurred in the late 1980s. Besim Ibisevic, the then custodian of the Museum of Srebrenica, was approached by a Serb from a village near Skelani, who told him that he possessed Todorovic's monument. The Serb offered the marble plaques to the museum, but Ibisevic refused to accept them. He also remembers that the town's mayor, Salih Sehomerovic, asked for advice in this matter. Serbs had asked for permission to re-erect the monument in the park of Srebrenica. Ibisevic told him not to grant permission because "Todorovic had been a Chetnik" (conversation Ibisevic 01-06-2001).

¹⁰³ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica (1987-1992)*, p.X; Oric, *Srebrenica svjedoči i optužuje*, p.9; Masic, *Srebrenica*, p.15. For Serb actions against the Muslim population in southeastern Bosnia in general, at the start of World War One, see also Èekic, *Historija genocida*, p.60; and Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, p.142. Ibisevic claims to have seen a document written by a member of the District's Council of Srebrenica, containing 233 names of Muslims killed in Serb actions in 1913-1914. They were murdered by Serbian *komita*, who crossed the border from Serbia into Bosnia and attacked Muslim villages. Massacres were for instance committed in Suceška and Tokoljaci. Conversation with Besim Ibisevic 01-06-2001.

¹⁰⁴ Ivanisevic, *Hronika naseg groblja*, p.15.

¹⁰⁵ Ivanisevic, *Hronika naseg groblja*, p.13.

Land Reforms between the two World Wars

“The land that was taken from Muslims was given to Serbian *kmets* and their relatives, so they can now boast in Geneva that no less than 64% of Bosnian land, according to the cadastre, belongs to them”.

Naser Oric, *Srebrenica svjedoči i optužuje*, p.10

In the anarchy ensuing Austrian withdrawal from Bosnia towards the end of World War One, Serb peasants attacked Muslim landlords. War veterans also harassed and killed other Muslims in retaliation for Serb casualties during the war.¹⁰⁶ During the years that followed, Muslims remained at the receiving end of violent and drastic measures meant to eliminate the social, cultural and political legacies of the Ottoman past. The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, which was created in 1918 from the remnants of the Habsburg and Ottoman empires, introduced land reforms at the expense of Muslim landowners, who, though compensated, were often reduced to poverty and economic hardship. In describing their experiences of national suffering and victimisation, Muslims often refer to this particular period in their history. This was when Bosnia became part of a non-Muslim state which transformed them into second-rate citizens and took away most of their land. According to Adil Zulfikarpasic, a well-known Muslim intellectual and member of a dispossessed Muslim family, the land reform was a “calculated move to impoverish the Muslim population in Yugoslavia”.¹⁰⁷ This issue of land reforms between the two world wars has had far-reaching implications even during the recent years. Bosnian Serb politicians have claimed more than fifty percent of the land based on ownership rights that were partly acquired during the land reforms in the aftermath of World War One.¹⁰⁸ Muslims, on the other hand, have pointed out that Serbs acquired this land at their expense, claiming that most of the land had initially been Muslim property.

Agrarian reform started in 1919, and was seen by those who introduced it as a revolutionary undertaking aimed at abolishing the feudal estates, which, in Bosnia, were owned primarily by Muslims. The plan was to redistribute the land among the former tenants of these estates. The reforms were meant to redress the inequalities on the Bosnian countryside, where a small class of large and wealthy Muslim landowners possessed the land, while Christian *kmets*, the class of serfs or customary tenants to which the bulk of Serbian peasants belonged, cultivated it.¹⁰⁹ Clearly, the land reforms had a political aspect in that they were intended to weaken the position of the old Muslim elite and ‘break’ them economically and politically. Although the reforms formally applied to other regions in Yugoslavia as well, in practice, they were carried out only in Muslim-dominated areas, such as Bosnia and Kosovo, in a final attempt to settle accounts with the ‘Turks’. Only Muslim landowners were targeted, whereas

¹⁰⁶ Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, p.22.

¹⁰⁷ Zulfikarpasic, *The Bosniaks*, p.13.

¹⁰⁸ This issue of who historically owns the land is highly contested, which explains the hugely varying figures given by Muslim and Serb sources concerning landownership in eastern Bosnia. According to Muslim sources, Muslims have held most of the land in the municipalities of eastern Bosnia until the start of the recent war. In Srebrenica, Muslims are said to have owned 79,4% of the land, while Serbs are said to have held only 20,6%. According to the same source, Muslims also owned most of the land in the Bratunac (71,8%), Vlasenica (61,8%), and Zvornik (75,1%) municipalities (*Ratni zločin*, pp.32-3). A Serb source, however, provides us with quite opposite figures: in the four municipalities of Srebrenica, Bratunac, Milici and Skelani together, Serbs are said to have held 52% of the land, and Muslims only 29%, while the rest was state owned (Ivanisevic, *Hronika naseg groblja*, p.6). It seems that already during Communist times land ownership titles were highly contested; in Srebrenica, for instance, the Communist authorities registered around 2.000 legal requests for the return of land usurped before April 1941. It is not clear whether these cases also included land taken from Muslims and given to Serbs (*Delegatski bilten* (Srebrenica), no.11, 06/06/1977, p.10-11).

¹⁰⁹ Almost all landowners whose land was cultivated by *kmets* were Muslims, while the great majority of *kmets* were Serbs. There were hardly any Muslim *kmets*. Most Muslim peasants were smallholders, who had full ownership rights over their land, although this usually did not mean that life was much better for them. It is clear from these figures that the agrarian question in Bosnia had a strong confessional or ethnic dimension (Eric, *Agrarna reforma*, pp.72-73).

Serb landowners in Serbia and Bosnia were usually exempted. In Bosnia, several large Serb landowners increased their property at the expense of the former Muslim elite.¹¹⁰ The compensation offered to Muslim landowners for confiscated land was insufficient, while they were only allowed to keep a limited amount of land under the condition that they would work it themselves.¹¹¹ Muslim authors usually point out that Muslim smallholders and peasants lost their land as well.

In eastern Bosnia, the well-known Zulfikarpasic-Èengic family was among the Muslim nobility seriously affected by these reforms. The family was based in Foča, but also owned large tracks of land around Srebrenica. As Adil Zulfikarpasic relates in his conversations with Milovan Djilas, his relatives lost almost all of their possessions. Although he is usually known for his liberal and moderate views, Adil Zulfikarpasic is uncompromising when it comes to the land reforms: “Agrarian reform in Bosnia was in effect the theft of estates, and conducted with a brutality that can only be called genocidal”.¹¹² State owned and communal lands were also confiscated. In the Srebrenica district, common pasturelands and forests were given to so-called *Solunci*, Serbian World War One veterans who had fought at the Thessaloniki front.¹¹³ It seems, however, that although local Serbs, especially World War One veterans, benefited from the land reforms, the advantages they took from it were modest. They often received land of inferior quality, or in remote areas, such as in Srem, Slavonia or the Banat, where they often did not want to settle.¹¹⁴ Agriculture remained primitive, on plots of land that were too small and fragmented to produce crops beyond a subsistence level.

The economic crisis of the 1930s made life even more difficult for the Serb peasant population. Yet politically, the Serbs had the upper hand. Quite a number of World War One veterans became leading members of the local branch of the Agrarian Party, which supported radical agrarian reforms. Among them were Jovan Nikolic and Pero Djukanovic, who were both from Kravica. Nikolic was appointed president of the newly established municipality of Kravica. Muslims, on the other hand, feeling deeply threatened by these ‘revolutionary’ political designs and by Serb supremacy, rallied massively behind the JMO (the Yugoslav Muslim Organisation).¹¹⁵ Many others left Bosnia for Turkey, reducing the Muslim segment of the population and making the Serbs by far the largest ethnic group in Bosnia. In November 1939, at the eve of World War Two, Bosnia had 2.75 million inhabitants, 44.8% of whom were Orthodox (Serbs), 31.2% Muslim, and 22.8% Catholic (Croats).¹¹⁶ Although Serbs did not possess the absolute majority, they were the most numerous and politically the most influential group in the Bosnian population, a position reinforced by Serb political hegemony in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia as a whole. This continued to fuel existing rivalries and nationalist tendencies among the other groups, particularly the Croats. With the growing threat of the Axis powers, this finally resulted in the Cvetkovic-Maček agreement or *Sporazum* (August 1939), which was meant to appease the nationalist Croat demands for autonomy. For the sake of the preservation of Yugoslavia, the idea of a unitary state was abandoned in favour of a dualist Yugoslav state, including the Banovina of Croatia. One of the results of the agreement was that Bosnia was partitioned between Serbia and Croatia, without the faintest regard for Muslim interests. Most of eastern Bosnia was included into what was in effect a reduced Yugoslavia or Greater Serbia. During the early 1990s, the Cvetkovic-Maček agreement formed the source of inspiration for the Tudjman and Milosevic regimes to launch new talks about dividing Bosnia between Croatia and Serbia.

¹¹⁰ Eric, *Agrarna reforma*, p.175.

¹¹¹ Eric, *Agrarna reforma*, pp.440-41.

¹¹² Zulfikarpasic, *The Bosniak*, p.14.

¹¹³ Oric, *Srebrenica svjedoči i optužuje*, p.10.

¹¹⁴ Nikolic, ‘Kravica u prošlosti’, p.20.

¹¹⁵ Nikolic, ‘Kravica u prošlosti’, p.21-22.

¹¹⁶ Radovanovic, ‘Evolucija verskih odnosa’, p.482. These figures are almost identical to the census results of 1931, when the Orthodox population made up 44.6% of the population, Muslims 31.2% and Catholics 21.7%. Radojevic, ‘Bosna i Hercegovina u raspravama’, p.32.

Chapter 3

World War Two, 1941–1945¹¹⁷

“This war is the continuation of World War Two; the same criminals from the same criminal hordes are, once again, exterminating the same Serb families in the very same villages; and they are all lined up under the same banner, using exactly the same fascist rhetoric”.

Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic, in an interview with Pogledi, 11 December 1992.¹¹⁸

“In Karadzic’s mind, the need to avenge Serb deaths during World War II would justify anything his people might do. In his mind, the blood on the hands of the Serbs during the war had been justified by the Ustase genocide. ‘The Serbs are endangered again,’ Karadzic warned. [...] ‘This nation remembers well the genocide. The memory of those events is still a living memory, a terrible living memory. The terror has survived fifty years. The feeling is present still because they won’t allow us to bury the dead’”.

Excerpts from a conversation New York Times journalist Chuck Sudetic had with Radovan Karadzic in September 1990.¹¹⁹

“We are back again in 1946 - World War Two never finished here.”

Ljubisav Simic, SDS leader and President of the Municipality of Bratunac, in an interview with *Nasa Riječ*, 23 October 1992.¹²⁰

The onset of the war and of Ustashe terror

Yugoslavia did not enter the war until April 1941. On 25 March, after months of German pressure, the Yugoslav government joined the Axis powers. Only two days later, however, it was overthrown by an army putch, which was backed up by huge mass demonstrations in Belgrade and other towns in Serbia,

¹¹⁷ For this chapter, I have made use of various sources, which describe the same events from different perspectives. In the former Yugoslavia, there was a great diversity in (pseudo-) historiographic genres dealing with World War Two. On the one hand, there is a tradition of scholarly works, most of which were written during the socialist period. Although this body of work is serious, it usually suffers, at least to some extent, from ideological constraints imposed by the communists. These works are supplemented by many other works of a more mundane or autobiographic nature, which can be characterised as ‘Partisan’ historiography. In addition, two new developments emerged during the 1980s: scholars began to tackle themes that had been taboo during communism, while popular works began to disseminate revisionist views, replacing old communist stereotypes with new nationalist ones. As far as events in Srebrenica are concerned, I relied mostly on scholarly works and Partisan sources from the communist period. Muslim or Chetnik accounts are practically non-existent. I did, however, draw on a historical novel by Momir Krsmanovic, *The blood-stained hands of Islam*, which sums up the events in eastern Bosnia at the beginning of the war from a Chetnik perspective. It is based on numerous interviews, which the author conducted with local Serbs who participated in these events.

¹¹⁸ Jankovic, ‘Primorani smo na nove uspehe’, p.16.

¹¹⁹ Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, p.84.

¹²⁰ Anonymous, ‘Ima zaista, mnogo teskih izazova’.

Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Prince Paul was removed from power and the 17-year-old King Peter II was installed on the throne. Although the new government tried to ward off German intervention by offering declarations of loyalty, Germany responded by attacking Yugoslavia and bombing Belgrade on 6 April. Almost at the same time, German, Italian, Hungarian and Bulgarian forces entered the country. They defeated the Yugoslav defence within days. King Peter hastily fled the country, passing through eastern Bosnia to Niksic airport, from where he escaped to Greece. In the eastern Bosnian town of Vlasenica, as the story goes, local Muslims tried to stop the king and his following by strewing nails over the road, presumably in an attempt to kill him.¹²¹

Most Croats and Muslims, unlike the Serbs, welcomed the Germans, whom they thought would put an end to Serbian hegemony as it had existed during the interwar period. Nationalist Croats hoped that Nazi Germany would enable them to create an independent Croatia, which they could only achieve with German support. The conservative Muslims elite in Bosnia hoped that the Germans would give them back control over the land they had lost during the agrarian reforms of the 1920s. Before long, the Axis forces carved up Yugoslavia. Serbia was occupied by the German army, which installed a puppet government under general Milan Nedic. Bosnia became part of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH), a fascist puppet state, which was headed by Ante Pavelic, the leader of the fascist Ustashe organisation. The Drina was seen as the historical border of this Greater Croatia. Bosnian Muslims were proclaimed to be 'the flower of the Croatian nation' in a deliberate attempt to define the NDH as inhabited by a Croat majority.¹²² Although most of the Bosnian Muslim political and cultural elite was sceptical of the NDH and Ustashe rule – they preferred an autonomous Bosnia under German tutelage – others soon joined the Ustashe movement. The movement was to swell from a few thousand followers at the beginning of the war to a 100,000 members in May 1941, many of whom belonged to the less educated classes and the rural poor.¹²³ Eastern Bosnia was one of the regions where non-Catholics joined the Ustashe in substantial numbers.¹²⁴ One of the ways in which Muslims were induced to join the Ustashe was by promising them the return of land that was taken from them during the land reforms in the 1920s.¹²⁵

The new regime was fanatically anti-Serb, and was determined to get rid of the large Orthodox community that lived within the borders of the NDH (about one third of the total population). This caused an almost immediate upheaval among the Serbs living in the NDH. That upheaval was later to evolve into a complex civil war in which the major fault lines ran along different ethno-religious and political lines. Bosnia became one of the central stages of this civil war. There, aside from the occupying German and Italian forces and various Croat and Muslim militia, two other parties were involved: the communist Partisans (comprised of Serbs as well as a growing number of Muslims) and the royalist and Serb nationalist Chetniks. In most regions, such as eastern Bosnia, the situation was complicated even more, as local 'Chetnik' and 'Ustashe' militia acted independently of the leaders of the movements to which they belonged, at least nominally. Throughout the war, alliances often shifted, depending on local circumstances, and people switched (sometimes *en masse*) from one side to the other. The Ustashe and Chetnik forces, in particular, committed numerous massacres in eastern Bosnia. According to post-war communist sources, 2,267 people from the territory of the district of Srebrenica were killed, died in concentration camps, or disappeared during the war.¹²⁶ Srebrenica changed hands several times, which led to mutual acts of revenge, regularly causing large groups of people to flee.

¹²¹ Krsmanovic, *The blood-stained hands*, p.19.

¹²² Goldstein, *Croatia*, p.135-6; Galic, *Veze narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta*, p.36.

¹²³ Redzic, *Muslimansko Autonomastvo*; Tomasevich, *The Chetniks*, p.105. Goldstein, *Croatia*, pp.133-4.

¹²⁴ Karchmar, *Draža Mihailovic*, p.459.

¹²⁵ Tuzla Archive, document 48/2214.

¹²⁶ Lazarevic, 'Napad partizana', p.85. Other sources mention only 1,200 to 1,280 'victims of Fascist terror' in the municipality of Srebrenica. See for instance: *Privredni pregled*, 4(2), 1986, p.1; *Srebreničke novine* 4(33), 1981, p.1. This figure may not take into account all victims on the Muslim or 'Ustashe' side. Recent Muslim estimates vary between 1,000 to 1,500 people for the Srebrenica district. (See for instance: Ibisevic, *Srebrenica (1987-1992)*, p.XI).

Once the Ustashe installed their government, they soon proved to be extremely intolerant of Serbs, Jews and Gypsies. Within a few weeks, the Pavelic regime adopted discriminatory laws that were more extreme in some respects than those of Nazi Germany. The Serbs were a primary target: one third were to be expelled, one third were to be exterminated, and the rest converted to Catholicism. Ustashe forces, consisting mainly of volunteers, committed innumerable crimes and became notorious for their brutality.¹²⁷ Aside from the Ustashe forces, the NDH also possessed a regular army, the Home Guardists (*Domobrani*), consisting of Croat and Muslim recruits. They were not as extreme as the Ustashe, and proved to be a somewhat unreliable force from the Ustashe perspective.¹²⁸ In eastern Bosnia, Ustashe formed the backbone of NDH rule. They controlled major towns and roads, while the interior was in the hands of various other forces (Chetniks, Partisans, local Muslim militia, etc.). German and Italian forces only appeared in this region at the beginning of the war, and later, during major offensives against the Chetniks or Partisans.

The Germans first appeared in Srebrenica at the start of the war, when three German soldiers entered the town on motorbikes and left again. Soon a small German unit was stationed in Srebrenica, while civil administration was taken over by officials of the NDH, Croats as well as Muslims. Some local Muslim notables and religious leaders, such as the mayor of Bratunac, Jusuf Verlasevic, welcomed them as liberators from twenty years of 'slavery' under Yugoslav rule. The Ustashe started recruiting local Muslims into their ranks, which was particularly successful in the villages.¹²⁹ In the town of Srebrenica, many Muslims remained sceptical of the Ustashe extremists. They tried to mitigate the consequences of Ustashe terror for the Serb population, partly out of fear of possible Chetnik reprisals in the future. The newly established head of the Srebrenica district, Salih Redzepovic, a Muslim who was married to a Serb, was among those who did his best to offer protection to local Serbs. Others included Pavao Petrovic (a Catholic Croat who became head of the district court) and Asim Èemerlic (a Muslim doctor).¹³⁰ Some of these moderate Muslims were killed by the Ustashe later during the war. Even up to the present day, many people recall the acts of mutual help and solidarity between Serb and Muslim neighbours during World War Two. It seems that efforts to protect each other from the violence of 'outsiders' (Chetniks as well as Ustashe) were much more common then than during the recent war.¹³¹

Because of the positive role of moderate Muslims, the urban Serb population in towns such as Srebrenica initially suffered less from Ustashe terror than those in the villages of eastern Bosnia. There, as Karchmar writes, the Ustashe militia "applied their anti-Serb measures with such lack of discretion and disregard for sequence as to cause tens of thousands of frightened Serbs to flee across the Drina River into German-occupied Serbia".¹³² Ustashe searched and plundered Serb houses under the pretext

¹²⁷ Ustashe units were normally located in administrative centres, small towns and villages. The smallest units, the so-called *tabor-s* (of twenty to forty men) were stationed in larger village settlements. At the district level, they were labelled *logor-s* (consisting of fifty to one hundred men), placed in towns or administrative centres. The regional Ustashe headquarters was called *stožer*, which in eastern Bosnia, was located in Tuzla. See Kovačević, 'Partisan and enemy forces in the Tuzla region', p.462.

¹²⁸ Goldstein, *Croatia*, p.135-6; Tomasevich, *The Chetniks*, p.108. The number of Home Guardists peaked at the end of 1943 (130,000), but dropped dramatically in 1944. The Ustashe (volunteer) units simultaneously increased their numbers to 76,000 (Goldstein, *Croatia*, p.149). The *Domobrani* often performed poorly in combat. Increasingly demoralized, they frequently surrendered large quantities of materials to the Partisan forces. The Ustashe referred to them as the 'Partisan supply units'. See Trew, *Britain, Mihailovic and the Chetniks*, p.275.

¹²⁹ Nikolic, 'Kravica u proslosti', p.22; Hodzic, *Hronika*, p.6.

¹³⁰ See the two documents published in Ivanisevic, *Hronika naseg groblja*, p. 237-238 and 229-233. Ivanisevic has provided the NIOD research team with copies of the original documents. Muslims of high rank and status in other parts of Bosnia (judges, teachers, professors, businessmen, religious leaders) also protested against the Ustashe massacres, which they feared would provoke Serb reprisals against the Muslim population. See Banac, 'Introduction', p.XII; Zulfikarpasic, *The Bosniak*, p.62-63.

¹³¹ Interviews and conversation with Damir Skaler 06/02/1998, Becir Hasanovic 17/05/1998, Hasa Selmanagic 07/08/1997, Branko Filipovic 14/11/1998, Mitko and Mevla Kadric 17/01/1998, and Mehmed Malagic 14/06/1998.

¹³² Karchmar, *Draža Mihailovic*, p.438.

of weapon searches. They were also reported to have raped Serb women. Some Serbs were arrested and imprisoned, for instance in Kravica, which was a Serb nationalist stronghold.¹³³ Churches were closed down and religious services were prohibited, while priests were forced to leave Bosnia. Dragoljub Jolovic, for example, an Orthodox priest from Srebrenica, received an ultimatum: he was to leave town within three days, which he did. The new parish house (built in 1937) was transformed into the local Ustashe headquarters. Later that summer, a number of Serb village priests were arrested (for instance in Kravica, Fakovici, Vlasenica, Milici, and Han Pijesak). Some of them were killed or taken to concentration camps.¹³⁴ Kravica's priest was detained in Drinjača, in the building of the local peasant association, where Ustashe tortured Serb prisoners to death.¹³⁵ The persecution of Serbs only intensified when, at the end of July 1941, the German troops left Srebrenica and the Ustashe forces took control. The very same day, forty-five Serbs from Srebrenica were arrested and put in jail, where some were to stay for the next two months and be subjected to terrible treatment from local Muslim guards.¹³⁶ As an ultimate humiliation, the Ustashe ordered the Serbs from Srebrenica to remove and destroy the monument of Kosta Todorovic. As mentioned earlier, the monument went into 'hiding', only to turn up again after the Serb take-over of Srebrenica in July 1995, when it was remounted in a park in the town's centre.

Among the crimes most shocking to the Serbs in this part of eastern Bosnia were the massacres in the village of Rasica Gaj, near Vlasenica, which occurred after the German army left the town on 21 June 1941. Even today, local Serbs refer to these events as one of the worst Ustashe crimes in the region at the beginning of the war.¹³⁷ The local Ustashe commander, Mutevelic, a carpet salesman who had regularly visited Vlasenica before the war, reigned by terror. Daily, black uniformed Ustashe rounded up prominent local Serbs, transported them to a makeshift prison in Vlasenica and killed them there or executed them in Rasica Gaj. During those massacres, which continued for several weeks, at least seventy Serbs were killed, although other sources list death tolls as high as two hundred.¹³⁸ Historical novelist, Krsmanovic, presents an almost 'epic' description of these massacres in his book, *The blood-stained hands of Islam*. In it, he condenses the massacres into a single event that takes place early one morning. The Ustashe round up all Serbs living in Vlasenica and force them to shout, "Long live Pavelic!" as they are taken to prison. Next, the Ustashe form a column of two hundred Serbs, who, tied to each other, are forced to walk to Rasic's grove, where they are ordered to undress and are then slaughtered with knives and thrown into an abyss. According to this account, only two Serbs escaped the massacre.¹³⁹ He also writes that the 'Turks' of Vlasenica planned these massacres well in advance. Before the start of the war a local Muslim official who joined the Ustashe drew up a list containing the names of over two hundred Serbs who were to be killed.¹⁴⁰ As we have already seen, Krsmanovic's fictionalised account seems to have had a clear impact on the views of local Serbs in eastern Bosnia during the last war. It also strikes the reader, not only with the amount of open and explicit brutality in its descriptions, but also for very different reasons. In July 1995, for instance, Rasica Gaj was one of the

¹³³ See for instance Nikolic, 'Kravica u proslosti', p.22-23.

¹³⁴ See for instance Ivanisevic, *Hronika naseg groblja*, p.226.

¹³⁵ For these events in Drinjača see: Ivanisevic, *Hronika naseg groblja* pp.228-229; Antonic, *Zapisi Pere Djukanovica*, p.65-66; Nikolic, 'Kravica u proslosti', p.23. According to the latter source, more than a hundred Serbs were killed in Drinjača by 12 August 1941. Ivanisevic claims that the basket full of eyes from Serbs came from Drinjača. This basket was found by Italian war journalist, Curzio Malaparte, at Ante Pavelic's desk during a late-summer visit to Zagreb in 1941, (an episode which he described in his autobiographical war novel *Kaputt*). The Ustashe had sent these as a 'present' to their leader (Ivanisevic, *Hronika naseg groblja*, p.23). See Malaparte, *Kaputt*, pp.221-28.

¹³⁶ Ivanisevic, *Hronika naseg groblja*, pp.229-33, 237-38.

¹³⁷ Interview: Rajko Dukic 14/06/2000. Ivanisevic's book contains several eyewitness accounts of the events in Vlasenica and Rasica Gaj. See Ivanisevic, *Hronika naseg groblja*, pp. 238-246 and 249-255.

¹³⁸ See for instance: Ivanisevic, *Hronika naseg groblja*, p.241-242; Jaksic, 'Activity of the Communist Party', p.382.

¹³⁹ See especially: Krsmanovic, *The blood-stained hands*, pp.54-56. The same author writes that the Ustashe killed several dozens of local Jews in a similar way: they cut their throats and threw them into a cave (p.74).

¹⁴⁰ Krsmanovic, *The blood-stained hands*, p.16. This is corroborated by another (Partisan) source. See: Jaksic, 'Activity of the Communist Party', p.382.

sites where Muslim captives from the safe area of Srebrenica were executed by Mladic's forces, a choice of location that may have been more than mere coincidence. At least 21 Muslims were killed here.¹⁴¹

Partisans and Chetniks organise the resistance

These Ustashe massacres and the brutality with which they conducted their actions against the Serb population of the NDH shocked even the Germans, who feared that this could provoke armed Serb resistance. Indeed, already in June 1941, Serbs started a rebellion in Hercegovina, which was the first in a long series of uprisings that erupted throughout the NDH as the summer went on. Two forces appeared: the royalist and nationalist Chetniks, headed by the Yugoslav army colonel Draza Mihailovic, and the communist Partisans, led by Josip Broz Tito. Throughout most of 1941, the two movements cooperated, burying their ideological differences and gaining control over most of eastern Bosnia. At the local level, it was very difficult to distinguish the two because they both had the same recruitment base: the Serb peasant masses who felt threatened with extinction. The Partisans, many of whom had fought in the Spanish Civil War before, kept a low ideological profile, presenting their struggle as a war of liberation from fascist occupation. On this 'patriotic' basis, they managed to rally segments of the traditional and apolitical peasant masses to their side, segments that were more inclined to support the nationalist Chetniks.¹⁴² As Banac writes, at this early stage of the war, it was Communist policy to appease Serb nationalism, and not to punish the Chetnik assaults on the Muslim population if the Serb perpetrators showed signs of willingness to join the partisans.¹⁴³ Yet the communists remained determined to put an end to Chetnik attacks on Muslim villages and the massacres of Muslims in eastern Bosnia during 1941. They even created special Partisan units whose exclusive task it was to protect Muslim villages against these Chetnik attacks.¹⁴⁴

It was clear that the political aims and ideological orientations of the Chetniks and Partisans were very different. The Partisans aimed at a common and united struggle of all nations and ethnic groups to liberate the country from fascism, a struggle in which they never lost sight of their plans to take power after the war. The Chetniks' mission, by contrast, was to create an ethnically homogenous Greater Serbia as an answer to very similar Ustashe objectives to engineer an ethnically homogenous Greater Croatia. Inevitably, therefore, the two movements were later to become very fierce opponents.¹⁴⁵ In eastern Bosnia, the Partisans had very little initial support from the Serb peasant population (except in Sekovici which became their main stronghold in the region). Many of them came from elsewhere, particularly from the region of Srem (the southern part of the Pannonian plain), which bordered on eastern Bosnia and had been included in the NDH.¹⁴⁶ The resistance against Ustashe rule developed mainly along the lines of a traditional peasant *ustanak* or rebellion, in a spontaneous and disorganised manner. Entire adult male populations of villages would take up arms, organise themselves into local armed village bands, and begin fighting without any clear purpose beyond making life difficult for the enemy.¹⁴⁷ They were often under the command of prominent local peasant leaders and World War One veterans.

¹⁴¹ International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), Transcripts of proceedings for Krstic trial (case IT-98-33), 24 March 2000, p.1295 <<http://www.un.org/icty/transe33/000324ed.htm>>. The executions in Rasica Gaj were first reported by David Rohde in *The Christian Science Monitor*, 2 October 1995.

¹⁴² Goldstein, *Croatia*, p.142.

¹⁴³ Banac, 'Introduction', p.X. Zulfikarpasic writes that Muslims who joined the partisan units (such as Zulfikarpasic himself) received Serb noms de guerre, ostensibly to protect them from Serbs who were still not well educated in socialist dogma (Zulfikarpasic, *The Bosniaks*, p.71-72).

¹⁴⁴ See for instance: Novakovic, 'Legendarna Romanija', pp.727-728.

¹⁴⁵ For these political and ideological clefs between Partisans and Chetniks, see in particular: Antonic, *Ustanak u istoènoj i centralnoj Bosni*, pp.417-486. See also Antonic and Peric, *Biraè u Narodnooslobodilaèkoj borbi*.

¹⁴⁶ Galic, *Veæe narodnooslobodilaèkog pokreta*.

¹⁴⁷ Karchmar, *Dražica Mihailovic*, p.440-41.

According to most Serb narratives, the resistance started on the eve of *Vidovdan*, the anniversary of the Kosovo Battle, when the Ustashe began arresting large numbers of Serbs out of fear that the Serbs would launch an uprising on that particular date. Many Serb peasants left their families, took up their weapons and went off to the hills and forests. One of the main Chetnik figures in the Srebrenica and Vlasenica area was *vojvoda* Acim Babic, a well-to-do landowner and trader from a village near Han Pijesak, who led the revolt in the area between Han Pijesak and the Drina River.¹⁴⁸ According to Krsmanovic, Babic's first speech to his men was about Kosovo:

“On the first day of the uprising, brothers, over one hundred men have gathered here to form the proud četnik army. May the St. Vitus's day of so long ago and Prince Lazar's curse on those Serbs who did not come to fight in the Battle of Kosovo be ever present in our minds, inspiring us to defend our people and our homes from the blood-thirsty Croats and Turks. They want to wipe the Orthodox Serbian nation from the face of the earth”.¹⁴⁹

In early August 1941, Chetnik forces carried out their first successful attacks on Ustashe positions in eastern Bosnia. Babic took control of Han Pijesak, while Rajko 'Eelonja' Eelonjic (a peasant from a village near Vlasenica) entered Derventa near Milici. There they established their joint Chetnik headquarters, which became one of the main Serb strongholds in eastern Bosnia.¹⁵⁰ In Kravica and surrounding villages, the uprising started on 8 August 1941 with the tolling of the church bell. There the uprising was led by World War One veterans Jovan Nikolic and Pero Djukanovic. Within a few days, they brought most Serb villages under their control, and between 15 and 19 August they also liberated Drinjača, Bratunac, and Srebrenica.¹⁵¹ On 5 August 1941, Partisans took control of Sekovici, which was singled out as the most suitable base for their operations in the region. Throughout the war, it remained a Partisan stronghold, even though initially, the Partisans only had the support of the Communist youth.¹⁵²

Even as early on as this stage, Chetniks and Partisans were struggling for control over the uprising. Frequent clashes occurred, for instance, regarding the question of who was to be credited most for certain military successes. One example was the take-over of Vlasenica on 10 August 1941. Both sides claim to have led and carried out the attack, with either very limited or no assistance at all from the other side. Partisan commander, Cvijetin Mijatovic, writes that he took control of the town, while Babic's Chetniks only showed their faces after the job was done.¹⁵³ In Krsmanovic's narrative, by contrast, it was not the Partisans but Babic who organised the attack on Vlasenica soon after he taken control of Han Pijesak. The 'communists' rushed to the scene from Sekovici to join the fighting and to prevent Acim Babic from claiming victory.¹⁵⁴ After Vlasenica was liberated, Partisan and Chetnik commanders continued to quarrel about who was to exert authority over the town, as well as about the

¹⁴⁸ Zekic, 'The uprising in Birač', p.344-5; Karchmar, *Draža Mihailovic*, p.461; Ivanisevic, *Hronika naseg groblja*, p.252. Babic had been a Serbian army commander during World War One, and had fought at the Salonica front (Krsmanovic, *The blood-stained hands*, p.15; Ivanisevic, *Hronika naseg groblja*, p.252). According to Krsmanovic's account, he started to organise the resistance after he escaped from Ustashe captivity in June 1941 (Krsmanovic, *The blood-stained hands*, p.44-49).

¹⁴⁹ Krsmanovic, *The blood-stained hands*, p.64.

¹⁵⁰ Partisan sources claim that the headquarters in Derventa was initially shared by all insurgent groups, Chetniks as well as Partisans (Mijatovic, 'Memories', p.332-333).

¹⁵¹ Antonic, *Zapisi Pere Djukanovica*, p.14 and 52-55; Nikolic, 'Kravica u prošlosti', p.23-24; Galic, *Veze narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta*, p.45; see also Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, p.143. For Pero Djukanovic, see: Milivojevic, 'Dobrovoljac sa Soluna'.

¹⁵² Jaksic, 'Activity of the Communist Party', p.382; Mijatovic, 'Memories', p.328-9. Sekovici was suitable as the Partisan regional headquarters because of its isolated location in the mountains. From there, it was easy to maintain contacts with other areas both in Bosnia and Serbia (Zekic, 'The uprising in Birač', p.341).

¹⁵³ Mijatovic, 'Memories', p.337. Chetniks are reported to have been unreliable as partners in battles with the enemy on other occasions as well. See for instance: Zekic, 'The uprising in Birač', p.344-6.

¹⁵⁴ Krsmanovic, *The blood-stained hands*, p.68-70.

distribution of arms and ammunition seized from the enemy.¹⁵⁵ According to Karchmar, the fact that the Chetniks alone governed the town after it was taken probably shows that the capture was mostly their doing.¹⁵⁶

As Partisan leader Mijatovic Chetniks writes, the Partisans had very different ideas regarding who was the enemy. He describes his first encounter with Babic's men, just before the attack on Vlasenica:

"They had beards, black fur caps with some kind of ribbons on them. Right away, they started asking who I was, where I came from, what my name was, was I a Serb and so on. They wanted to know if there were any 'Turks' in our group. I answered that there were some Moslems with us and that they were fine comrades and fighters. The men from the 'Planina' group stopped talking freely with us and wanted to leave right away. 'Are we going to make plans for attack?' I asked them. 'We don't know anything!' they answered and prepared to leave. On their way back, they told the messengers who were accompanying them, 'We don't want any Turks in this'".¹⁵⁷

The Chetnik-Partisan divide was perhaps the most crucial one, but there were also many internal divisions within the Chetnik forces, which were usually locally based and loosely organised. The label 'Chetnik' was widely used by various armed Serb bands throughout Yugoslavia, many of whom had little to do with Mihailovic except by a formal declaration of allegiance to his movement.¹⁵⁸ Mihailovic's forces operated from Ravna Gora, just across the border in Serbia. They were poorly organised, however, and had little contact with Chetnik groups in Bosnia, which often ignored Mihailovic's orders.¹⁵⁹ Mihailovic's Chetnik movement was never anything more than a loosely organised conglomerate of Serb nationalist bands, which usually followed their own course and carried out numerous crimes against Muslim civilians, particularly in eastern Bosnia. It is clear that Mihailovic never dissociated himself from their actions (claiming after the war that he did not know at the time), and that he tried to establish his authority over them. He sent Jezdimir Dangic into eastern Bosnia to bring the Chetnik resistance more under his control. Dangic, a Yugoslav army officer, was born in Bratunac and was also the son of a local Serbian Orthodox priest.¹⁶⁰

Apparently, local Chetnik leaders did not particularly welcome Dangic as their new commander-in-chief.¹⁶¹ On his arrival at the Chetnik headquarters in Derventa, Dangic was informed immediately that the Èelonjic brothers, who led the Srebrenica brigade, had no intention to submit themselves to his command: "Rajko's Srebrenica brigade is independent. With his army, he liberated the entire district of Srebrenica, and he deserves to have the command his own way".¹⁶² Krsmanovic's description of the first meeting between Dangic and Babic in Han Pijesak also clearly shows that Acim Babic claimed the leadership of the uprising for himself. Nonetheless, Dangic showed him the authorisation he received from Mihailovic to take command over the Chetnik units in eastern Bosnia. Babic seems to have

¹⁵⁵ Zekic, 'The uprising in Biraè', p.345-6; Mijatovic, 'Memories', p.337.

¹⁵⁶ Karchmar, *Dražža Mihailovic*, p.516. Nonetheless, a document in the Tuzla Archive states that a [Partisan] unit from Sekovici (led by Mijatovic) took the northern part of the town at 7:00 PM, while a [Chetnik] unit from Milici captured the eastern part at 8:00 PM. At that point, only the army barracks remained under Ustashe control, which were finally taken by the Partisans (Tuzla Archive, Document 5294).

¹⁵⁷ Mijatovic, 'Memories', p.334.

¹⁵⁸ Trew, *Britain, Mihailovic and the Chetniks*, p.8-9; Karchmar, *Dražža Mihailovic*, p.444.

¹⁵⁹ Tomasevich, *The Chetniks*, p.156; Trew, *Britain, Mihailovic and the Chetniks*, p.191-195; Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, p.26.

¹⁶⁰ Tomasevich, *The Chetniks*, p. 157; Djuric, *Novi prilozi*, p.6-7; Ivanisevic, *Hronika naseg groblja*, pp. 229-33. Major Dangic had been the commander of the Royal Gendarmerie, who had organised King Peter's retreat to Niksic airport at the start of the war. See: Karchmar, *Dražža Mihailovic*, p.515; Djuric, *Novi prilozi*, p.5; Krsmanovic, *The blood-stained hands*, p.24.

¹⁶¹ See for instance, Antonic, *Zapisi Pere Djukanovica*, p.142.

¹⁶² Krsmanovic, *The blood-stained hands*, p.87.

reluctantly accepted Dangic as his chief-of-staff, apparently under a condition of some form of shared power.¹⁶³ Even though he was appointed by Mihailovic, Dangic exhibited a large degree of independence in his actions. In November 1941, after the Chetnik attack on Tito's stronghold in Uzice ended in disaster, he completely ignored a desperate plea for assistance from Mihailovic.¹⁶⁴ Dangic developed good contacts with Nedic's government in Serbia. Through Nedic, he tried to persuade the Germans to remove their Ustashe protégés from eastern Bosnia, with a view to ending the Ustashe brutalities against the local Serb population.¹⁶⁵ In Partisan historiography, Dangic is presented as a tough nationalist, who called on the Serbs to take vengeance against the 'Turks' and who should be held responsible for the Serb massacres of the Muslim population.¹⁶⁶

Chetnik terror against Muslim villages

"Draza Mihailovic's Chetniks killed about ten thousand Bosniacs in south-eastern Bosnia and Sandzak; they plundered and burnt down thousands of houses; they completely exterminated the Bosnian population in some places and destroyed their settlements; they expelled hundreds of thousands of Bosniacs from their homes, etc. South-eastern Bosnia and Sandzak, especially the river Drina, are the biggest Bosnian cemetery from the Second World War [sic]".

Smail Èekic, *History of genocide against Bosniacs*, p.69.

As the recently published memoirs of Pero Djukanovic, a local Serb leader from Kravica, demonstrate, the situation on the ground was extremely complex, especially during the first year of the war, as well as later. At the start of the war, the divisions between Chetniks and Partisans had still not crystallised. There was also a certain degree of cooperation between moderate Muslims and Serbs vis-à-vis the Ustashe.¹⁶⁷ Even though local Serbs and Muslims belonged to different camps and militia, people in villages were much less afraid of their immediate neighbours, whom they usually knew well, than they were of outsiders.¹⁶⁸ Older people from Srebrenica and Bratunac, who had experienced World War Two, often point out that that war was not as brutal and inhumane as was the recent conflict. Muslims offered assistance and protection to their Serb neighbours in the event of an Ustashe attack, and Serbs offered shelter to Muslims when attacked by Chetnik forces. In Kravica, for instance, Muslims from a neighbouring village intervened to prevent the Ustashe from massacring local Serbs.¹⁶⁹ Nevertheless, the fear resulting from brutal and indiscriminate violence of both Ustashe and Chetnik extremists drove a wedge between moderates on both sides. They were hardly in a position to exert control over these unruly forces and even risked being killed by them if accused of 'collaboration' with the enemy. In the

¹⁶³ Krsmanovic, *The blood-stained hands*, p.90. It is not exactly clear what kind of deal was made. Krsmanovic writes that Dangic appointed Babic as his first deputy (p.91). Another source claims that Babic was appointed as head of the so-called national liberation government of eastern Bosnia, leaving command over the armed forces in the hands of Dangic. (Statement by Muharem Djozic, undated; Collection Ivanisevic). See also Jaksic, 'Activity of the Communist Party', p.383; Karchmar, *Draža Mihailovic*, p.464.

¹⁶⁴ Karchmar, *Draža Mihailovic*, p.478; Trew, *Britain, Mihailovic and the Chetniks*, p.76, 210; Djuric, *Novi prilozi*, p.16-17; Antonic, *Zapisi Pere Djukanovica*, p.138.

¹⁶⁵ Karchmar, *Draža Mihailovic*, p.467; Trew, *Britain, Mihailovic and the Chetniks*, p.257-8.

¹⁶⁶ Jaksic, 'Activity of the Communist Party', p.385. For Dangic, see also Zulfikarpasic, *The Bosniak*, p.71; Miletic, 'O saradnji komandanta'.

¹⁶⁷ See, for instance, Antonic, *Zapisi Pere Djukanovica*, p.39-50 passim, and 57-58.

¹⁶⁸ Hodzic, *Hronika*, p.10.

¹⁶⁹ Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, p.143.

eyes of some, Chetniks and Ustashe actually cooperated in trying to eliminate the moderate voices in their own camp before assaulting the other side.¹⁷⁰

After the Ustashe had terrorized Serb villages at the beginning of the war, Serb 'Chetnik' bands started to do the same in Muslim villages during autumn 1941. As Karchmar writes, local peasant leaders "never succeeded in establishing effective control over their followers, nor did they, on the whole, make any conspicuous effort in that direction. Worse than that, from their original self-defence against the Ustashe, they soon progressed to attacks on Muslim villages, to the accompaniment of widespread looting, in which some of the commanders, unfortunately, were the bellwethers and principal beneficiaries".¹⁷¹ The groups led by Acim Babic and Rajko 'Ėelonja' Ėelonjic (from Derventa) were particularly notorious in the area around Srebrenica. Their main activity was to roam the countryside and plunder Muslim villages under the pretext of weapon searches. During such attacks, the Muslims inhabitants of such villages were frequently killed.¹⁷² Other Chetnik leaders, such as Pere Djukanovic from Kravica, condemned these activities and did their best to prevent them.¹⁷³

In one such raid in the village of Sebiočina, over thirty Muslims, including women and children, were killed.¹⁷⁴ The Serb take-over of Srebrenica on 18 August 1941 was also carried out with a great deal of violence against the Muslim inhabitants of the town and its surrounding villages. Approximately four hundred Chetniks, some of them armed with guns and others carrying axes and clubs, entered the town. They confiscated all arms and ammunition from soldiers, policemen and other officials, and immediately installed their authority in the town. They plundered Muslim shops, requisitioned food from the population, seized small and large cattle, and forced Muslims to work for them.¹⁷⁵ In Muslim accounts published after the Bosnian war, the Chetnik forces are said to have terrorised the Muslim population for about ten days after taking Srebrenica. As time passed, their actions became more ruthless. While the majority of the Muslim population went into hiding in the forests, Muslim villages were burned to the ground and the Muslims who remained behind were killed. One example mentioned is the village of Abdulici (or Zanjevo) near Fakovici, which was burned to ashes. Almost all Muslim inhabitants were liquidated by the Chetniks.¹⁷⁶ From Serbia, groups of Chetniks crossed the Drina River to participate in the plundering of Muslim villages; the booty was transported over the border into Serbia. Chetniks are also said to have searched Muslim houses for Ustashe hiding in them, some of whom were shot and "sent tumbling down the cliffs into the Drina".¹⁷⁷

Aside from antagonising the Muslim population, Chetnik actions led to growing tensions with the Partisans, who increasingly condemned the brutality of these actions and asked Chetnik commanders, such as Dangic, to stop them. Nevertheless, Partisan-Chetnik cooperation still continued at this stage: at their meeting in Drinjača, on 1 October 1941, Partisan and Chetnik leaders reached a formal agreement and the Chetniks promised to stop attacking the Muslim and Croat population.¹⁷⁸ A unified Partisan-Chetnik operational headquarters was established for eastern Bosnia, and joint civil administration bodies, the so-called People's Liberation Committees (*Narodno-oslobodilački odbori*), were set up in most of the liberated areas (Sekovici, Vlasenica, Srebrenica, Bratunac, Milici, Fakovici, and Skelani).¹⁷⁹ Men who enjoyed wide respect among the population were elected as members of the

¹⁷⁰ See, for instance, Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*.

¹⁷¹ Karchmar, *Draž Mibailovic*, p.462.

¹⁷² Hodzic, *Hronika*, pp.10-16. One of those killed by 'Ėelonja' was Jusuf Verlasevic, Bratunac's mayor at the start of World War Two. His son has claimed that during the first year of the war Ėelonja killed some four hundred Muslims, mostly wealthy people, in the districts of Bratunac and Srebrenica. Interview: Ibro Verlasevic 01/06/1998.

¹⁷³ Antonic, *Zapisi Pere Djukanovica*, p.113; Galic, *Veze narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta*, p.73.

¹⁷⁴ Antonic, *Zapisi Pere Djukanovica*, p.113.

¹⁷⁵ Dedijer and Miletic. *Genocid nad Muslimanima*, pp.122-124.

¹⁷⁶ Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, p.55.

¹⁷⁷ Krsmanovic, *The blood-stained hands*, p.79.

¹⁷⁸ Djuric, *Novi prilozi*, p.15; Karchmar, *Draž Mibailovic*, p.471; Galic, *Veze narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta*, p.67.

¹⁷⁹ Tomasevich, *The Chetniks*, p.157. In October 1941, well-known local Partisans and Chetniks, such as Rodoljub Ėolakovic, Rade Jaksic, and Pero Djukanovic, organised meetings in Sebnica, Fakovici, and Skelani, to set up local People's

committees at public meetings. The committees played an important role in administration, the coordination of agricultural activities and the distribution of agricultural products among the people and the armed forces.¹⁸⁰ Due to growing Chetnik-Partisan rivalry, however, some of these committees did not survive. The most active committee was the one in the Partisan stronghold, Sekovici. However, in Srebrenica and other places, such as Milici, these committees died a slow death because of Chetnik obstruction.¹⁸¹

The rift between the Chetniks and Partisans deepened in November 1941, when Mihailovic attacked the main Partisan stronghold of Uzice, signalling the beginning of the civil war in Serbia.¹⁸² Although this did not put an immediate end to their cooperation in eastern Bosnia (where the two movements worked more closely together and were also harder to distinguish from one another than in Serbia), relations between Chetniks and Partisans also became increasingly hostile there, which is reflected both in Chetnik, as well as Partisan, historiography. Both sides accused each other of undermining their cooperation, of sabotaging their activities, of plotting against the other and of attempting to infiltrate the other's forces. On 16 November, during a joint meeting in Vlasenica, Chetniks and Partisans were unable to put their mutual disagreements to rest, and formal cooperation was abandoned. The Chetniks established a separate command for eastern Bosnia, which was hesitantly joined by some Chetnik leaders, such as Pero Djukanovic, who was much more in favour of continuing the cooperation.¹⁸³ Unruly bands of armed Chetniks, joined by the Serb population, continued looting Muslim villages and committing atrocities against the Muslim population in revenge for Ustashe atrocities at the beginning of the war.¹⁸⁴ As Karchmar writes:

“Units marching to attack Ustasa strongholds were accompanied by columns of peasants, including women and children, who busily stripped the captured towns of everything portable and threw themselves upon the surrounding Moslem villages like a plague of locusts. The looting was accompanied by small and large massacres of the Moslem population, in which the armed Četniks competed in inventing barbarous ways to dispatch the hated ‘Turks’. In this, they only modelled themselves on the earlier Ustasa treatment of the Serbs; but their indiscriminate persecution threw even those Moslems who were still politically uncommitted into the arms of the Ustase.”¹⁸⁵

The leader of the Chetnik forces in eastern Bosnia, Dangic, complained repeatedly about the cowardice and lack of discipline among peasants. He violently denounced the looting, saying that Bosnian Serb peasants “had become the most accomplished robbers in the world, so that he was ashamed to call himself a Serb”.¹⁸⁶ But he could do nothing to stop it. Chetnik forces also continued to carry out such

Liberation Committees (see Milivojevic, ‘Bio nam je drag gost’; for Srebrenica, see Document 5289, Tuzla Archive 5289). By mid September, the Communists had already established a party cell in Srebrenica (Tuzla Archive, Document 5288).

¹⁸⁰ Savic, ‘First people’s liberation committees’, p.398. According to Partisan sources, there were some 6,000 Partisan and 4,000 Chetnik forces in eastern Bosnia at the time. See: Eolakov, *Zapisi*, p.268; Zekic, ‘The uprising in Birač’, p.350.

¹⁸¹ Savic, ‘First people’s liberation committees’, p.400.

¹⁸² For the start of the civil war in Serbia, see: Petranovic, *Srbija u drugom svetskom ratu*, pp.262-289.

¹⁸³ Karchmar, *Družina Mihailovic*, p.479-80; Tomasevich, *The Chetniks*, p.157; Miletic ‘O saradnji komandanta’, p.136; Djuric, *Novi prilozi*, p...; Galic, *Veze narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta*, p.82-83.

¹⁸⁴ This occurred especially in the zone under Italian command (for instance in Visegrad, Gorazde, Foča), where the Chetniks started to massacre the Muslim population after they took power under the auspices of the Italians (Galic, *Veze narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta*, p.86). In Foča, thousands of Muslims were killed during World War Two, even though only a few Muslims in the Foča district joined the Ustashe (Zulfikarpasic, *The Bosniak*, p.57-62). For the most detailed treatment of Chetnik massacres against the Muslim population during World War Two, see Dedijer and Miletic, *Genocid nad Muslimanima*. For Chetnik massacres of Muslim civilians in the Visegrad and Mount Zvijezda area, see Kljun, *Visegrad*, p.67-233; Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, p.24-35.

¹⁸⁵ Karchmar, *Družina Mihailovic*, p.473.

¹⁸⁶ Karchmar, *Družina Mihailovic*, p.517.

actions in the Srebrenica area. In December 1941, Chetniks from Kravica, for instance, carried out a huge massacre in Sopotnik (near Drinjača), in which eighty-six Muslims were either shot dead or beaten and knifed to death.¹⁸⁷ In the beginning of January 1942, Rajko Ćelonjić's forces raided Muslim villages and plundered Muslim houses and shops in and around Srebrenica. As a result, eleven Muslims were killed in the town and an additional number in the surrounding villages. The Muslim population of Srebrenica fled into the forests and stayed there until the German army entered the town.¹⁸⁸ According to one Partisan source, the Partisans tried to prevent these Chetnik actions. Their efforts, however were futile as "[m]any Serbs regarded the Croats and Muslims all as Ustashe and threatened to kill them, and thus to avenge the victims of Rasica Gaj and other massacres".¹⁸⁹

Due to growing dissatisfaction with the Ustashe, whose actions had provoked Chetnik reprisals against the civilian population, increasing numbers of Muslims joined the much more disciplined Partisans. The Chetniks, in turn, perceived this as a form of Ustashe-Partisan cooperation.¹⁹⁰ The Chetniks tried to draw the Germans, and later the Italians, to their side in their fight against the Ustashe and the Partisans. Chetnik collaboration with the occupying forces in Bosnia was motivated primarily by the continuous pressure of the Nedic government on the Germans to incorporate the seventeen eastern Bosnian districts into Serbia. As a result, Dangić, commander of Chetnik forces in eastern Bosnia, aligned himself with the Germans and Nedić. The inevitable breakdown of relations between Partisans and Chetniks found its apotheosis in the Chetnik offensive against the Partisan stronghold of Sekovici.¹⁹¹ At this stage, many Serb peasants who had initially been organised in Partisan units went over to the Chetniks. This switch was prompted by rumours that the implementation of the 'seventeen districts' plan was imminent and that continued resistance to the Germans would jeopardise it. Only Serbs with a high degree of political consciousness remained with the Partisans. The number of Partisans in eastern Bosnia dropped from 6,000 to 1,000. The only area that remained in Partisan hands was a small pocket around Sekovici.¹⁹² In March 1942, the Partisans tried to re-gain some of their influence by creating the Volunteer Army of Yugoslavia (*Dobrovoljačka vojska Jugoslavije*), intended mainly to attract Chetniks and to draw them back under Partisan command. These attempts failed, however.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁷ Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, p.143; Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, p.12; Antonić, *Zapisi Pere Djukanovica*, p.146-47. After the war, Tito's secret police arrested some of the perpetrators, who, in the meantime, had become Partisans. See Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, p.144.

¹⁸⁸ Dedijer and Miletić. *Genocid nad Muslimanima*, pp.122-124; Hodžić, *Hronika*, p.17-20.

¹⁸⁹ Jaksic, 'Activity of the Communist Party', p.382.

¹⁹⁰ See: Trew, *Britain, Mihailović and the Chetniks*, p.257-8; Milazzo, ..., pp.62-73; Karchmar, *Dražica Mihailović*, pp.457-502; Miletić, 'O saradnji komandanta'; Tomasević, *The Chetniks*, pp.159-161 and 206-209. In Krsmanović's account, Partisan-Ustashe cooperation is exemplified by the defeat of Rajko Ćelonjić's Srebrenica brigade in the attack on Zljebovi on 2 March 1942. He writes that Ćelonjić was betrayed by the Partisans, who enabled the Ustashe to attack the Chetniks from the rear. The forces of Ćelonjić were crushed, leaving 128 dead and 29 wounded. Krsmanović writes that this day was a black day for Ćelonjić's Chetnik army (Krsmanović, *The blood-stained hands*, pp.129-131).

¹⁹¹ Ostojić, 'Reflections and memories', p.405.

¹⁹² Savić, 'First people's liberation committees'; Karchmar, *Dražica Mihailović*, p.476-77, Galić, *Veze narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta*, p.87.

¹⁹³ Galić, *Veze narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta*, p.95-97.

Ustashe extermination campaigns against the Serb population



Ustashe iconography depicting the Drina as the unconquerable border of the Independent State of Croatia
(<http://cro.ustasa.net/images/drina2.jpg>)

During the first few months of 1942, the Germans attempted to pacify eastern Bosnia, which had become one of the main refuges and strongholds of the insurgent forces. Chetnik-Partisan rivalry and continued Serb attacks on Muslim villages in this region had also produced an extremely volatile situation, which was detrimental to German interests in the region as a whole. In mid January, German and Croat forces launched an offensive, (also termed the ‘Second Enemy Offensive’ in Partisan historiography), which aimed at destroying various insurgent forces in eastern Bosnia. Dangic ordered his units not to resist German troops. He even offered the Germans his cooperation in combating the Partisans. But the Germans were also intent on neutralising the Chetnik forces, which they deemed to be unreliable because of their previous cooperation with the Partisans and uncontrollable because of their continuous attacks on the Muslim population. Thanks to Dangic’s declarations of loyalty, however, the German forces were instructed not to kill the Chetniks, but to treat them as prisoners of war. Some Chetnik forces took refuge in the mountains, while others surrendered to the Germans without offering any resistance at all.¹⁹⁴ The Germans disarmed and arrested several hundred Serbs from the region of Kravica, Bratunac and Srebrenica, who were transported to a camp in Sabac. From there, they were sent to work camps in Germany.¹⁹⁵ Others fled to Serbia, including Dangic, who continued trying to convince the Germans to evict the Ustashe from eastern Bosnia in order to end the assaults on the Serb population. He proposed that the Germans place the area under his (i.e. Dangic’s) administration, and also offered to put his forces under German command to fight the Partisans. Although the German command in Belgrade entered into negotiations with Dangic, these proposals were unacceptable to the NDH and senior German officials, who favoured preserving the integrity of the NDH up to the Drina.¹⁹⁶

During the offensive, the Ustashe killed a number of Serbs in Srebrenica. When the Germans entered the town, local Muslims urged them to stay in order to protect them against possible Chetnik

¹⁹⁴ Djuric, *Novi prilozi*, p.38-40; Karchmar, *Dražica Mihailovic*, p.488-489.

¹⁹⁵ Nikolic, ‘Kravica u prošlosti’, p.25; Antonic, *Zapisi Pere Djukanovica*, p.16-17.

¹⁹⁶ Karchmar, *Dražica Mihailovic*, pp.475-76, 492-493; Tomasevich, *The Chetniks*, pp.160, 206-209; Djuric, *Novi prilozi*, pp.44-54; Miletic, ‘O saradnji komandanta’; Redzic, *Muslimansko Autonomastvo*, pp.41-46. After negotiations with the Germans failed, Dangic turned to the Italians for help, which was one reason why the Germans arrested him in April 1942. The Italians hoped to occupy eastern Bosnia through Dangic and to include it in their zone of interest at the expense of the Germans. The Germans deported Dangic to Germany. See Tomasevich, *The Chetniks*, p. 208; Djuric, *Novi prilozi*, p.55-56; Karchmar, *Dražica Mihailovic*, p.501. After the war, he received the death sentence from a Partisan military court in Sarajevo. He was accused of cooperating with the Germans, Mihailovic and Nedic, of fighting the Partisans and of bearing responsibility for the massacres against the Muslim population in eastern Bosnia (Djuric, *Novi prilozi*, p. 69-74; Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, p.11).

reprisals. The Germans refused, claiming that the Croatian army would soon replace them, and left again after four days. As the Croat forces did not show up, many Muslim inhabitants followed the German forces to Zvornik. After they left, the Chetniks took control of the town again and ousted the Ustashe who had remained behind.¹⁹⁷ The same happened in several other towns in eastern Bosnia, such as Vlasenica and Bratunac.¹⁹⁸ This clearly shows that although the Germans had weakened the Partisan and Chetnik presence in eastern Bosnia, they did not succeed in eliminating them. Most of the insurgents took refuge in the mountains, or went to Serbia for the duration of the offensive, only to return and reorganise themselves afterwards. Thus, the Germans' objectives remained largely unfulfilled. Partisan elite forces were soon to resume their attacks on the Chetniks in eastern Bosnia, which led to serious defeats of the latter.¹⁹⁹ Vlasenica, Bratunac and Drinjača were taken by the Partisans. On 18 March, the Partisans entered Srebrenica. They soon left again for Sekovici, after which the Chetniks burned Muslim villages and carried out massacres against the Muslim population, especially in the Derventa region.²⁰⁰

All the same, the Chetniks were seriously weakened by the Partisan attacks. As a result, they were helpless against the subsequent Ustashe and German offensives that took place in April 1942 (called 'Operation Trio' or 'Third Enemy Offensive' in Partisan historiography). Ahead of the German army, were the forces of Jure Francetić's *Crna Legija* or Black Legion, which was an Ustashe combat unit similar to the German SS and notorious for its brutality. They first took Vlasenica, and then advanced in the direction of the Drina valley, plundering one Serb village after another. On their way to Bratunac and Srebrenica, villages were set afire, and several dozen Serbs were killed.²⁰¹ Fearing possible Serb reprisals, Muslims from the Sućeska area took refuge in Srebrenica, where some of them joined the Ustashe for protection.²⁰² Some Serb settlements, such as those in Podravanje, Brezani, and Kravica, were largely destroyed, and all Serbs found there by the Ustashe were killed.²⁰³ Thousands of Serbs were driven to the Drina. There, in the few days before and after 9 April 1942, they were either shot and slaughtered en masse by the Ustashe, or drowned while trying to swim across the Drina to Serbia. There were only a few boats and rafts, and those who had money to pay to the rafters made it across first to the Serbian side of the river. These massacres, carried out near Polom, Tegare, Fakovici, and Skelani, among other places, are deeply etched in collective memory. They have also been commemorated and described in recent Serb publications, such as in Ivanisević's book and in Pero Djukanović's memoirs.²⁰⁴ Krsmanović sketches the Ustashe atrocities, such as rapes and throat cutting, in brutal detail, using almost 'epic' strokes that do not fail to have an impact on the reader:

“Like rounding up cattle, the seven thousand Ustasha of Jure Francetić formed a huge semicircle and drove towards the Drina ten thousand Serbs, refugees from Eastern Bosnia. The columns of refugees, along with animal-drawn carts, cattle, horses, and sheep, pressed on to Milosevici and Stari Brod along the left bank of the Drina, where the boats plied all day and night, ferrying the Serbs to

¹⁹⁷ This passage is based on unpublished local documents from World War Two in the Ivanisević's collection (Statement by Muharem Džozic, undated; another document entitled *Srež Srebrenica*, undated) and on similar documents of the same collection published in Ivanisević, *Hronika naseg groblja*, pp.229-233. See also a document on Srebrenica published in Dedijer and Miletic, *Genocid nad Muslimanima*, pp.122-124.

¹⁹⁸ Karchmar, *Družina Mihailović*, p.490.

¹⁹⁹ Djurić, *Novi prilozi*, p.58-59; Antonić, *Zapisi Pere Djukanovića*, p.18.

²⁰⁰ Hodžić, *Hronika*, p.20-27.

²⁰¹ Antonić, *Zapisi Pere Djukanovića*, p.18-19. Zulfikarpasić, *The Bosniaks*, p.83. Ostojic, 'Reflections and memories', p. 404. Nikolić, 'Kravica u prošlosti', p.25-26; Galic, *Veze narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta*, p.105-106.

²⁰² Hodžić, *Hronika*, p.28-29.

²⁰³ In and around Srebrenica, these crimes were committed mainly by the Black Legion's commander, Arpadžić, who was a tax inspector in Srebrenica before the war. Ivanisević claims that some 270 people died in Podravanje during World War Two (Ivanisević, *Hronika naseg groblja*, p.301)

²⁰⁴ Ivanisević, *Hronika naseg groblja*, p.22. Antonić, *Zapisi Pere Djukanovića*, p.19,175-80,196-97. See also Lazarević, 'Napad partizana na Srebrenicu'. Conversations Božo Jovanović 20/06/1998, Dobrišav Kočević 14/11/1998.

the right bank of the Drina. People jostled one another in panic as they moved ever closer to the banks of the swollen, murky Drina river. The Ustashe were catching up with the stragglers and butchering them, coming closer and closer to the Drina. Mounted on his white horse, Jure Francetic observed the position of Milosevici and the vast multitude of people who were being killed by his ustashe and thrown into the Drina. The throng was being pushed onto the very banks of the river, near the ferry. Thousands of Ustashe swarmed over the crowd and, brandishing their knives, wrested the children out of the arms of their mothers and threw them into the river, slit the throats of the elderly, and took all the jewellery and gold they could find from the women and children before killing them and casting their bodies into the fast-running river, swollen from the recent rains and melting snow”.²⁰⁵

When the Germans arrived at the scene, steering course down the Drina in rubber boats, they were appalled by the atrocities committed by the Ustasha. As Krsmanovic writes, they went over to Francetic, and told him to stop it.²⁰⁶ At the end of this massacre, several thousand Serb corpses were left on the banks of the river. Some of the women and children who had survived the Ustashe atrocities returned to their destroyed villages under German protection.

The terror of the Ustashe, which had now reached its climax, continued during the summer, with incessant attacks on Serb villages and killing of Serbs. In the village of Zedanjsko, for example, almost everyone in the entire extended Spasojevic family (about forty people) were murdered in June 1942.²⁰⁷ Three thousand Serbs from the district of Srebrenica were arrested and interned in barracks near the hospital of Srebrenica. Pits were already prepared to bury the corpses. However, thanks to local Muslims, who intervened with the Ustashe authorities, all of these people's lives were spared.²⁰⁸ A high-ranking NDH police officer issued a critical report about the situation in Srebrenica in October 1942. In it, the local Ustashe leader, Kurelac, was blamed for indiscriminate arrests and internment of Serbs from the region. The report also noted that, while women and older people were released, the men were forced into hard labour with no compensation. Their properties were plundered, in spite of regulations prohibiting such acts. This same officer asked Kurelac to release the men in order to quiet down the situation and give the population a basic sense of order and security. Among the interesting passages in the report are those referring to the three to four hundred Serb refugees who returned to their homes after the summer. Although the police officially agreed that they should be expelled on the shortest route to Serbia, he felt this was not feasible because only the Ustashe were in a position to carry this out. They were more likely to kill these refugees than to expel them, which, as the police officer wrote, would certainly have negative repercussions for 'our people'. The report is critical about the lack of discipline among the Ustashe, and proposes the establishment of units of local volunteers, who are much more familiar with the region and 'know how to fight the outlaws'.²⁰⁹ Indeed, towards the end of 1942, organised local village militia, or the so-called 'legion' forces, were becoming more and more common in eastern Bosnia. They were based on the idea of local Muslim self-defence, offering a

²⁰⁵ Krsmanovic, *The blood-stained hands*, p. 157.

²⁰⁶ Krsmanovic, *The blood-stained hands*, p.161; see also Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, p.33; Ivanisevic, *Hronika naseg groblja*, pp. 229-233.

²⁰⁷ Hodzic, *Hronika*, p.30-34. One of the hotspots was the strategically important village of Jezestica, which was attacked three times during 1942 by Muslims from the nearby village of Eizmici. The first attack occurred in May (on the Serb holiday of Spasovdan), followed by an attack on 12 July (on Petrovdan), and finally one on 21 September (on Mala Gospojina). During these attacks 144 Serbs were killed. See Nikolic, 'Kravica u proslosti', p.26; Miljanovic, *Krvavi Božić sela Kravice*, p.55; Antonic, *Zapisi Pere Djukanovica*, pp.193-94; Ivanisevic, *Hronika naseg groblja*, pp.292-294.

²⁰⁸ Lazarevic, 'Napad partizana na Srebrenicu'. Interview: Boban Vasic 15/07/1998.

²⁰⁹ The document was published in: Ivanisevic, *Hronika naseg groblja*, 340-342. A copy of the original document was obtained from Milivoje Ivanisevic.

much more effective protection than the Ustashe rule of indiscriminate terror. Muslims lived under constant fear that the Ustashe assaults on the Serb population would provoke Chetnik reprisals.

This NDH police report also criticises the Ustashe for requisitioning food and other possessions, even from Muslims, without offering compensation. According to the report, this led to bitterness among Muslim peasants, who threatened to burn the wheat and 'to look for protection on the other [Partisan] side'. Muslims were also forced to harvest the fields in Serb villages, which they did reluctantly out of fear of possible Serb attacks. The report stated that the local Ustashe needed to stop this type of exploitative behaviour, and proposed raising the matter with the higher Ustashe command. On the whole, however, the security situation was considered satisfactory since there were no large groups of active insurgents in the area. Nonetheless, the number of Ustashe (some 1,200 to 1,300 at the time) and police officers was considered insufficient should a serious Partisan or Chetnik attack occur.²¹⁰

During spring 1943, fierce fighting broke out between Partisan units and the occupying and quisling forces. This led, among other things, to a huge Ustashe massacre of Serbs in the villages of Fakovici and Bjelovac during April.²¹¹ The Partisans succeeded nonetheless in destroying many Ustashe strongholds all over eastern Bosnia, and the entire defence system, which the Ustashe had set up in the spring of 1942, was crushed. The Partisans took control of certain areas, and Muslims joined the Partisan forces in increasing numbers.²¹² In early June, the Ustashe began a counter-offensive and managed to oust the Partisans from Sekovici, the most important centre of Partisan resistance.²¹³ The Partisans then simulated an attack on Vlasenica, in order to trick the Ustashe and carry out a surprise attack on Srebrenica, where they expected to find a large booty, especially of ammunition. The objective was not to take permanent control of Srebrenica.²¹⁴ Although these Partisan actions were successful, they also provoked a brutal reaction from the Ustashe. That led to the largest single massacre in Srebrenica during the war, in which many Serbs and several Muslims were killed. The entire Serb population of the village of Zalazje, a few kilometres from Srebrenica, were also butchered, which is still remembered as one of the worst crimes committed during the war. Recently, the 1943 massacre in Zalazje acquired enormous symbolic significance for Serbs of this region when Naser Oric's forces killed a large number of Serbs (about forty people) in the very same village during an attack in July 1992. Serbs view the occurrence of massacres against them on the very same sites of previous massacres as history repeating itself. From their perspective, it is as if nothing has really changed.²¹⁵

The Partisan surprise attack on Srebrenica started on 11 June 1943.²¹⁶ Many Ustashe, including, local commander, Kurelac, were fighting near Sekovici. When Kurelac received news of the pending attack, he returned immediately and arrived in Bratunac at the end of the day, where the fighting had already raged for several hours. Without delay, he sent auxiliary forces to Srebrenica, but only one Ustashe unit managed to get through. The fighting soon shifted to the centre of town, where the Ustashe occupied the main buildings, including the Orthodox church. The Partisans took these buildings the next day, while the Ustashe retreated in the direction of Bratunac. They were ambushed near the Srebrenica hospital, where many of them were shot by the Partisans. One of them was the younger brother of Kurelac, the Ustashe district commander of Srebrenica. He was still a boy at the time. A few hundred Partisans then plundered shops, took medical equipment and medicines from the hospital, and set fire to the district office and police station. In addition, they took considerable

²¹⁰ Ivanisevic, *Hronika naseg groblja*, pp.340-342. Hodzic, *Hronika*, p.34.

²¹¹ Ivanisevic, *Hronika naseg groblja*, pp.22-23.

²¹² Ostojic, 'Reflections and memories', pp.406-407.

²¹³ Galic, *Veze narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta*, p.208.

²¹⁴ Lazarevic 'Napad partizana na Srebrenicu'.

²¹⁵ Interviews and conversations, Momčilo Cvjetinovic, 10/06/1998, 11/06/1998, 14-15/09/1999; Luka Bogdanovic 15/09/1999; Mile Stanojevic 15-16/09/1999.

²¹⁶ Lazarevic, 'Napad partizana na Srebrenicu'; Ivanisevic, *Hronika naseg groblja*, pp.234-237; statement by Ivan Pavlovic about situation in Srebrenica, Tuzla, 16 June 1943 (collection Ivanisevic).

amounts of arms and ammunition, some 800,000 cigarettes, two wagons full of flour, substantial amounts of sugar, food and groceries found in shops. Because of the large amounts of booty, the Partisans were unable to transport everything out of Srebrenica; some of the booty was given to the local population.

During the night of 13 June 1943, the Partisans withdrew from Srebrenica. At this stage, local Muslims panicked when rumours spread that the Chetniks would enter the town soon after the Partisan retreat. However, it was the Ustashe, on their way from Bratunac, who reappeared on the scene the very same day. Wishing to avenge his brother's death, Kurelac ordered his troops to kill every Serb that they came across. One of his units passed through the village of Zalazje, where the Serb inhabitants were totally unprepared for the massacre that would follow. One platoon, consisting of some local Muslims, went into the village, while another positioned itself on the surrounding hills in order to prevent the inhabitants from escaping. Jusuf Djozic, the Ustashe commander of Srebrenica, told the Serbs to stay in their houses and not to worry. After the advance party left and continued for Srebrenica, thirty-two Ustashe entered the village, going from house to house and killing all inhabitants. Only a few people survived, hiding silently under the pile of dead bodies of their relatives, until the Ustashe had left. Those who tried to flee were killed. This massacre took the lives of ninety-six inhabitants of Zalazje (including some forty children). Some families, such as the Rakic-s, were almost completely exterminated.²¹⁷

The massacres continued in Srebrenica, during which some local Muslims were also murdered. The first victims in town were two Muslim nurses, who were killed near the hospital. The Muslim inhabitants of Srebrenica were shocked. Some local notables found the courage to approach the Ustashe in an attempt to stop them, but they showed no sign of remorse. They went on to kill local Serbs, some of whom had been waiting quietly outside on the street, in the naive hope that their lives would be spared in that way. One Jewish family was butchered with axes. The Ustashe also murdered local judge, Muhamed Aganovic (who had had the courage to approach the Ustashe after they murdered the two Muslim nurses), together with his wife and three children. Another local Muslim, Dzemal Pliska, a postman, was killed because he tried to protect some local Serbs.²¹⁸ Several Serb women survived thanks to Muslim families who provided them with shelter and Muslim clothes. But all other Serbs present in Srebrenica on that day were killed. The Ustashe ordered local people to dig a hole near the former Austrian army barracks to bury the dead. The same day, another group of Serb captives from Brezani were executed and buried in the same mass grave. It is estimated that these events in Srebrenica and Zalazje left some 200-250 people dead.²¹⁹

The massacre stirred a great deal of commotion, provoking widespread disgust with the Ustashe reign of terror in eastern Bosnia. Even several Ustashe officials in Srebrenica stepped down from their posts and left the movement out of protest. The Croatian army started an investigation into the massacre, and tried to arrest and convict the Ustashe perpetrators in order to quieten the situation. The case was dropped, however, in September 1943. The move was justified by the argument that the Ustashe had acted in rage because of the deaths of their comrades. It was also said that local Muslims had sympathised with the Partisans, disclosing local Ustashe to them. Judge Aganovic was also said to be a Partisan sympathiser. In the meantime, a delegation of Muslims from Srebrenica went to Tuzla to

²¹⁷ Interviews: Ljubo Rakic 09/06/98, Momčilo Cvjetinovic 10/06/1998, Ilija Miladinovic 10/06/1998, Boban Vasic 15/07/1998.

²¹⁸ Krsmanovic, *The blood-stained hands*, pp.252-253; Tuzla Archive, Document 5291. Interview: Boban Vasic 15/07/1998.

²¹⁹ The number of victims in Srebrenica was at least seventy-eight. One week after the massacre, on 20 June 1943, seventy-eight bodies were exhumed. Most of these victims had been shot or knifed to death (Milivojevic, 'Srebrenica u junu 1943. godine'). A document in the Tuzla Archive presents the following figures: 95 victims in Zalazje, 106 victims in Srebrenica, and another 22 who were captured in Brezani, and later killed in Srebrenica (Tuzla Archive, Document 5291). One informant claims that there were between 120 to 130 victims in the town of Srebrenica, 27 of whom were members of his own family. Interview: Boban Vasic, 15/07/1998. Pero Djukanovic mentions 307 dead (Antonic, *Zapisi Pere Djukanovica*, p.196).

demand protection against Chetnik reprisals, or resettlement of the entire Muslim population of Srebrenica if protection could not be provided.

At this stage of the war, however, the Chetnik forces were in serious decline. The Partisans, by contrast, had managed to strengthen their positions and increase their influence among both Serb and Muslim peasant populations. They gained control over most of eastern Bosnia, and on 25-26 June, they launched new attacks on Srebrenica, Bratunac, and Vlasenica, driving out all remaining Ustashe and Croatian gendarmes. The Muslim population of the Srebrenica district, still fearing possible Serb reprisals, fled to Zvornik.²²⁰ On their retreat to the north, the Ustashe set Serb villages alight, killing at least one hundred Serbs in Kravica in early July. Approximately half of them burned to death hiding in houses.²²¹ The Ustashe tried to halt the Partisan advance at Drinjača, but failed. On 5 July 1943, the Partisans took Zvornik, the most important Ustashe stronghold in eastern Bosnia. This was a terrible defeat for the Ustashe, and they lost between four and five hundred people. Because of the Partisan successes, a German SS division, Ustashe forces, and Croatian army forces started a counterattack in an attempt to destroy the Partisan forces. They managed to recover some of the lost territories, but only Zvornik was retaken permanently.²²²

At this point, the tide of the war was clearly changing in favour of the Partisans. On 9 September 1943, Italy surrendered to the Allies, and Germany was losing terrain. In Yugoslavia, the Allies shifted support to Tito's Partisans. They formed a much more effective and disciplined force than Mihailovic's Chetniks, who continued to commit huge atrocities against the Muslim population, including in the Visegrad area.²²³ In addition, after the Italian surrender, the Partisans acquired huge amounts of weapons, food, and equipment from various disarmed Italian units. This was one of the main factors contributing to the shift in the balance of power.²²⁴ The Partisans were superior in weaponry and in manpower. Moreover, increasing numbers of Chetniks began joining their ranks, especially after Britain ended cooperation with Mihailovic's Chetnik resistance. On 2 October 1943, the Partisans achieved one of their largest military successes in eastern Bosnia with the liberation of the strategically important town of Tuzla, the first major town in the region.²²⁵ On 9 October 1943, the Srebrenica Partisan Detachment was created, incorporating Pero Djukanovic's (Chetnik) forces from Kravica and a Partisan unit from Fakovici, which had been established some time before.²²⁶ They set up the National Liberation Committee for Kravica, of which Jovan Nikolic, the pre-war mayor of Kravica, became the president.²²⁷

From December 1943 until the end of the war in May 1945, eastern Bosnia was a constant battlefield between Partisan and German and Ustashe forces. Srebrenica changed hands several times during this period. In December 1943, German SS forces (the 13th 'Handzar' and 7th 'Prince Eugen' SS divisions) began operation *Kugelblitz*, in an attempt to destroy the Partisans in the regions of Rogatica, Srebrenica, and Vlasenica. That operation ended on 16 December without much success, leaving the Birač region and Srebrenica still in Partisan hands.²²⁸ Nevertheless, the 13th 'Handzar' SS Division

²²⁰ Hodzic, *Hronika*, pp.43-44. During World War Two, the Muslim population of Srebrenica fled three times en masse—in large convoys or columns of people, animals and animal-drawn vehicles—to Zvornik. On their way, they usually suffered huge losses due to enemy attacks. Ibisevic, *Srebrenica (1987-1992)*, p.XI.

²²¹ Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, p.144; Nikolic, 'Kravica u prošlosti', p.27.

²²² Lazarevic, 'Napad partizana na Srebrenicu'.

²²³ Kljun, *Visegrad*, pp.102-106; Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, pp.34-35; Ćekić, *Historija genocida*, p.68.

²²⁴ Goldstein, *Croatia*, p.149.

²²⁵ Galic, *Veze narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta*, p.233.

²²⁶ Antonic, *Zapisi Pere Djukanovica*, p.24; Hodzic and Milivojevic, 'Značajna vojna i politička uloga'; Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, p.144. From Krsmanovic's point of view, Djukanovic betrayed the Chetnik army by crossing over to the Partisans (Krsmanovic, *The blood-stained hands*, p.207). The well-known post-war Bosnian writer, Mesa Selimovic, was appointed as political commissar of the Srebrenica Partisan Detachment (Hodzic and Milivojevic, 'Značajna vojna i politička uloga'). See also Selimovic's memoirs, *Sjećanja*, pp.126-32.

²²⁷ Nikolic, 'Kravica u prošlosti', p.26.

²²⁸ Galic, *Veze narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta*, p.238.

became notorious for the brutality of its actions in eastern Bosnia during 1943 and 1944. It consisted of Bosnian Muslim volunteers who were trained in France before they were sent off to Bosnia in late 1943. The fact that the Germans created this Muslim SS division reflected growing German influence in the NDH. The Germans tried to establish closer ties with the Bosnian Muslim elite, who wanted autonomy for Bosnia within the Third Reich at the expense of the NDH.²²⁹ The Handzar SS division acted as an occupying force, carrying out punitive expeditions against the Serb population and taking over civil administration from the NDH. During spring 1944, they organised frequent attacks on Partisan territory in eastern Bosnian. They did this together with the 'Prince Eugen' SS division, and other Ustashe and German units, as well as Chetnik forces from Serbia. All of them were joining forces in an attempt to eliminate the Partisans. The brutality of their actions, particularly against the Serb population, caused general dismay and fear among the Muslims in eastern Bosnia, many of whom either joined the local Muslim village militia or the Partisans.²³⁰

In May 1944, Ustashe forces took Srebrenica once again and began mobilising the Muslim population. The Partisans retreated towards the Kraljeva Gora mountain range near Han Pijesak.²³¹ Until the end of the war, Srebrenica remained firmly in Ustashe hands, in spite of frequent Partisan attacks on Ustashe positions west of Srebrenica (such as in Viogor, Zedanjsko, and Suceška). Many Muslim villages were controlled by local Muslim village militia, the so-called 'legion' forces or 'Green cadres'. These militia forces often cooperated with the Ustashe and carried out attacks on Partisan and Chetnik units that frequently roamed the area. The region around Srebrenica became a refuge for Ustashe and other Muslim legion elements that had fled from areas that had come under Partisan control.²³² Although neighbouring areas were in Partisan hands, Partisan attempts to retake Srebrenica remained largely unsuccessful. However, intermittent fighting did lead to continuous shifts in control over certain localities.²³³ Srebrenica was liberated on 11 March 1945, five months after Bratunac (and Belgrade) were liberated.²³⁴ It took several months to eliminate the last remnants of the 'enemy' forces. Local Chetniks and Ustashe and Muslim militia leaders were still hiding in the mountains, for instance, in villages near Bratunac and Skelani, where they were arrested by Tito's secret police in the months and years that followed.²³⁵

²²⁹ In March 1943, the Germans put up recruitment posters for the 'Handzar' division in villages around Srebrenica, including in Suceška. Muslims who joined the 'Handzar' division were promised a bonus of 3,000 kuna and large plots of land after the war. Several local Muslims joined the Handzar division (Hodžić, *Hronika*, p.39). See also Redžić, *Muslimansko Autonomastvo*, p.81; Galic, *Veze narodno-oslobodilačkog pokreta*, p.202. The Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Amin el-Huseini, who was an important Muslim ally of Nazi Germany, played a crucial role in establishing the Bosnian Muslim Handzar division (see Lebl, *Jerusalimski muftija*, pp.89-96).

²³⁰ Redžić, *Muslimansko Autonomastvo*, p.172, 184.

²³¹ Hodžić, *Hronika*, pp.68-70.

²³² Hodžić, *Hronika*, pp.46-81 passim. Well-known local Muslim 'Ustashe' militia leaders included Muradif Hreljić (who was based in the village of Bostahovina near Suceška), Jusuf Džović (who lived in Srebrenica), and Omer Mustafić and Kadrija Softić (both active in the region of Osat). The main organiser of these village militia was Meho Arapdžić from Zvornik (Hodžić, *Hronika*, p. 46-48,49,77). Mustafić and Softić received weapons from the Germans, and had about eight hundred men under their command. Softić worked for the Gestapo. Both were from Dobrak near Skelani, which acquired a reputation for being a Ustashe stronghold. Interview: Ibisević 24/05/1998. Ibisević writes that after the war, local Muslims regarded Mustafić and Kadrić as their heroes, while Serbs saw them as war criminals (*Srebrenica (1987-1992)*, pp.4-5). See also Antonić, *Zapisi Pere Đukanović*, p.196.

²³³ Hodžić, *Hronika*, p.70.

²³⁴ Nada Ostojić, 'Kako je Srebrenica oslobođena'.

²³⁵ See, for instance, Kršmanović, *The blood-stained hands*, p.330; Ibisević, *Srebrenica (1987-1992)*, pp.4-5. Interview: Boban Vasić 15/07/1998. Omer Mustafić was caught by the secret police (OZNA) in January 1946. He shot himself as the police discovered his hideout. As Ibisević writes, his body was brought to Skelani, where Serbs danced around his deformed corpse. Kadrija Softić tried to escape with his unit to Germany, but failed. He was last seen at the Slovene-Austrian border in May 1945. See Ibisević, *Srebrenica (1987-1992)*, pp.4-5; Hodžić, *Hronika*, p.81. Well-known Chetnik leader, Rajko Ećlonjić, from Derventa near Milici, managed to elude the secret police until 1947, when he was killed with other members of his group (Hodžić, *Hronika*, pp.9,83).

Chapter 4

Under Communist Rule



Part of a World War Two monument in Zalazje, commemorating the massacre that occurred there in June 1943, listing the names of Serb victims.

Srebrenica in Tito's time

After the war, monuments for 'the victims of Fascism' were the only clear reminders of a brutal civil war, in which Muslims and Serbs, Ustashe, Chetniks and Partisans had fought each another. These monuments were erected throughout Tito's period, and even after his death. In Srebrenica, a huge white marble monument was built in the 1960s, on the slope of a hill near the centre of the town. The monument consisted of a relief representing the terror and killing of civilians and Partisans by Fascist forces. Apart from this monument, two plaques were placed in the Serbian Orthodox church, commemorating the victims of the massacre committed by the Ustashe in the town of Srebrenica on 14 June 1943. Other monuments were erected in Serb villages, such as Fakovici, Kravica, Jezestica, Zalazje, Banjevici, and Zlijebac. The majority of these were situated in the municipality of Bratunac.²³⁶ Most monuments listed the names of all the victims, while the perpetrators remained unnamed. Although the monuments did not explicitly mention the ethnic background of the victims, it was clear to everybody that these victims were Serbs, except for a small number of Muslims who had joined the Partisans and had also been killed. Monuments for the numerous Muslim victims of the war were non-existent. Although many had never joined the Ustashe, and had just been innocent civilians killed by local Chetnik bands, their names never appeared on any of these monuments.

Muslims who survived the atrocities, or had lost family members during the war, were unhappy with this silence, as recent criticism on these monuments plainly shows. The subtext of these monuments was clear: Serb victims were being commemorated because most Partisans had been Serbs (even though many had started out as Chetniks and only joined the Partisans in 1943). Muslim victims were silenced because the Muslim population had been the Ustashe's main base of support and

²³⁶ One of the last local World War Two monuments to be erected was the one in Zlijebac (municipality of Bratunac). Raised in 1983, it marked the fortieth anniversary of the creation of the Srebrenica Partisan unit (*Srebreničke novine*, 6(57), 1983, p.1). Many of these monuments were damaged or destroyed during the Bosnian war.

recruitment. Nonetheless, even the Serbs did not feel that the monuments told the whole truth. They did not like the fact that the Fascist perpetrators had remained unnamed. Nor were they happy about the lack of any mention that these perpetrators had been the same Croats and local Muslims with whom they had been forced to live after the war.²³⁷ Ivanisevic claims that many victims' names did not even appear on these monuments. For instance, the monument in Srebrenica listed only 145 victims, whereas at least 200 Serbs were claimed to have been killed there in June 1943 alone. Other Serb villages, some of which were completely levelled to the ground, contained no reminders of Serb suffering except for graves in Serbian Orthodox burial grounds.²³⁸ In other words, the Communists' approach of reducing the complexities of World War Two to a simple conflict between Fascists and Partisans left both Serbs and Muslims feeling that no real justice had been served.

Yet, this was not a real issue directly after the war, or, more accurately, the Communists did not allow it to become an issue. They wrote the history of the war, and theirs was a history of Partisan resistance against Fascist occupation. The fact that half of Yugoslavia's war casualties were victims of fellow Yugoslavs was glossed over. The dead were passed off as casualties in a war of 'national liberation'. Rebuilding the country and establishing a new socialist order was the main focus. Tito set out to reconstruct Yugoslavia with slogans, such as 'There can be no rest as long as reconstruction continues' and 'Brotherhood and unity'. Although bitterness remained, open expression of nationalist resentment was harshly suppressed, particularly in Bosnia where civil war had ravaged the country. As Chuck Sudetic writes in his wonderful description of post-war Yugoslavia, a deep silence prevailed. Nobody talked about the horrible events during the war, although all knew what had happened, who had been a Chetnik or an Ustashe, who had committed crimes and whose family had been killed. Serb and Muslim children sat next to each other on school benches and played with each other as if nothing had happened.²³⁹ But many painful memories of the war lingered, and they contradicted the Communist version of events in World War Two:

"The war had not just been a liberation struggle against invaders and their quislings. It had been something far more sinister. It had forced people to take sides. It had brought on circumstances that drove them to commit horrible acts and affiliate themselves with men and organizations committed to genocide. It had wounded the Yugoslavs in a thousand different ways, and though the wounds had healed over [...], the scar tissue was thin".²⁴⁰

Stories of fugitive Chetniks and Ustashe, who were said to be hiding in caves and forests, never stopped circulating even long after the war had ended. Although not completely fictional, these tales also symbolised hidden realities that were externalised but never exorcised. Some people stood up to denounce neighbours for killing civilians during the war, but few were ever tried, and fewer still, convicted. Former Chetniks, who had joined the Partisan forces towards the end of the war, now occupied positions in the administration and the police, although it was a public secret that some had killed their Muslim neighbours during the war.²⁴¹ Very occasionally, Tito's secret police caught an Ustasha or Chetnik wartime extremist in his hideout in some village deep inside a forest, and finished him off in ways sometimes reminiscent of wartime brutalities. Milovan Djilas recounted an interesting anecdote in discussing such an event with Nobel-prize winning writer, Ivo Andric (who was born in

²³⁷ Miljanovic writes, for instance, that the World War Two monument in Jezestica made an almost cynically imprecise reference to 'fascist terror'. In his view, this actually helped to cover up Muslim crimes (Miljanovic, *Krnavi Božić sela Kravice*, p.55).

²³⁸ Ivanisevic, *Hronika naseg groblja*, pp.22-23. Interview: Milivoje Ivanisevic 03/02/1998.

²³⁹ Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, p.38.

²⁴⁰ Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, p.57.

²⁴¹ Interview: Mitko and Mevla Kadric, 17/01/1998.

Travnik and grew up in Visegrad). Although Andric himself detests violence, he believes that it was an inevitable part of life in this region. Djilas:

“I once tried to explain to him how the party leadership endeavoured to put behind them those frightful events they could not avoid during the war and revolution. I told him how, in the mountains of eastern Bosnia during the first years after the war, security agents had killed an infamous renegade, a Chetnik. It was a long way for them to carry his body to the city, but they wanted to put it on public display. So they cut off his head and exposed it in the marketplace at Tuzla. When Belgrade was informed, I was talking with Rankovic in his office at the Central Committee. He received the report over the phone with a look of revulsion and gave immediate orders to remove the head and to avoid such displays in the future. Andric’s response was one of wise resignation: ‘You people took it too much to heart – in Bosnia that’s normal’.”²⁴²

Nonetheless, some Chetniks who had joined the Partisans during the war were tried for crimes they committed during the first two years of the war. One of them was Golub Eric from Kravica. In late December 1941, Eric participated in the massacre of Muslims in the village of Sopotnik, in which eighty-six people were killed.²⁴³ He then joined the Partisans, and was appointed after the war as president of the district court in Srebrenica. Five years after the war he was arrested, together with some of his accomplices, and was sentenced to several years in prison.²⁴⁴

As Sudetic illustrates, incidents, small provocations, and fights between former enemies continued into the 1950s in the area around Visegrad. The atrocities of World War Two had not been forgiven and vengefulness lingered: “memories live for a long time. *Kad tad*, sooner or later....”, as one woman told Sudetic.²⁴⁵ Nevertheless, wartime memories did fade. This development facilitated by a regime that suppressed any real discussion of these painful realities, a regime that believed it possible to make a fresh start without reflecting too much on the events of the war. Too many were also prone to believe that forgetting was the only remedy and that rebuilding their lives was the only option they had. Tito’s socialism certainly held the promise of creating a new kind of society, one that would prevent such atrocities from ever recurring. And quite clearly, this prospect found widespread support among the population. Josip Broz Tito became one of the few Communist leaders in Eastern Europe with a genuine popular mandate.

Yet some realities were very hard to change. One was that Serb and Muslim communities in eastern Bosnia continued to live almost separate lives, particularly in the countryside, where most villages were either almost exclusively Serb or Muslim. Segregation remained the dominant pattern despite the communists’ efforts to foster inter-ethnic contact and cooperation. Among these efforts was the establishment of mixed local administrative entities (i.e. communes that usually consisted of a number of Serb and Muslim villages).²⁴⁶ The communists also nurtured a common culture throughout society. In schools, Serb and Muslim children shared the same benches and teaching staff was mixed.

²⁴² Djilas, *Rise and Fall*, pp.55-56.

²⁴³ Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, p.143; Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, p.12; Antonic, *Zapisi Pere Djukanovica*, pp.146-147.

²⁴⁴ Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, pp.11-12; Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, p.144.

²⁴⁵ See Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, pp.43-48.

²⁴⁶ The district of Srebrenica (including Bratunac) was divided into fifteen communes, most of which were ethnically mixed (Bjelovac, Bratunac town, Karaëici, Kravica, Krnjici, Skelani, Srebrenica town, Toplica). Only a few communes in largely Serb (Cravica, Fakovici, Krasanovici, Zljebac) or largely Muslim (Luka, Osatica, Suceška) areas were not mixed (*Konaèni rezultati popisa stanovništva od 15 marta 1948 godine. Knjiga IX: Stanovništvo po narodnosti*. Beograd: Savezni zavod za statistiku, 1954). In the 1950s, the number of communes was reduced to seven, most of which consisted of both Muslim and Serb settlements (Bratunac town, Skelani, Kravica, Srebrenica town, Krnjici), with only one largely Serb (Fakovici) and one largely Muslim commune (Osatica). (*Popis stanovništva 1953. Knjiga XI: Starost, pismenost i narodnost*. Beograd: Savezni zavod za statistiku, 1960, p.498).

Businesses and local government offices employed Serbs as well as Muslims. In the army, men intermingled with members of the other nations and ethnic groups in Yugoslavia, including in far-off places where they had never been, such as Slovenia and Macedonia. The same was true of interaction at party meetings and in sports clubs. Srebrenica for instance, had two mixed football clubs: 'Cinkarna' in Potočari and 'Guber' in Srebrenica. Because of these practices, Bosnia became a model for the rest of Yugoslavia. Although Muslims, Serbs and Croats had fought one another during the war, they also had united in the Partisan struggle. Now, they lived and worked together peacefully, on the basis of equality and mutual respect. Despite this kind of socialist rhetoric, however, these groups led fairly segregated lives, particularly in the countryside. As William Lockwood demonstrated in his anthropological study of the small Bosnian market town of Bugojno, market exchanges were regarded in instrumental terms and did not really produce a sense of identity or community beyond the purely local or ethnic level.²⁴⁷

Although towns and municipal centres were mixed, and intermingling was more common there, in the private sphere, cultural and religious divisions ran deeper than is usually acknowledged. The element of 'mixing' often only applied to the town as a whole: some degree of ethnic separateness was retained, as groups were usually concentrated in particular quarters. During the war statements were commonly made to the effect of "it did not matter at all to us whether someone was a Serb, a Muslim, or a Croat, we did not even know!" Nonetheless, genuine respect and tolerance were paired with ignorance about the other. As Adil Zulfikarpasic said in his conversations with Milovan Djilas: "I would say that even though we lived together, Bosnia suffered and continues to suffer from the fact that we don't know much about each other. The private sphere was taboo. The religious sphere was particularly taboo".²⁴⁸ Even though mixed marriages between Serbs, Muslims and Croats became common in urban areas by the mid-1980s, they rarely came off without comments from family or neighbours. In the villages, these marriages were virtually unthinkable.²⁴⁹ On the other hand, it was common in Bosnian towns to exchange gifts on important religious holidays. In Zulfikarpasic's hometown, Foča, for instance, Serb Orthodox neighbours would send Easter eggs to their Muslim neighbours, while Muslims reciprocated with meat and sweets on Muslim holidays. Before World War Two, the Serbs in the town of Foča never raised pigs out of consideration for their Muslim neighbours. There are similar stories about Srebrenica and Bratunac. Serbs and Muslims exchanged gifts and visited each other on religious holidays, and paid due respect to each other's customs and traditions. Serbs even helped to build and repair mosques, or donated building materials or money for that purpose. Yet, ultimately, these strong reciprocal ties also tended to reinforce mutual differences.²⁵⁰ The well-known and admirable Bosnian notion of *komsiluk*, which stood for good neighbourliness and coexistence, was in fact predicated on ideas of ethnic and cultural difference.²⁵¹

The development of communal feasts in Srebrenica during this period is a good indicator of how the Communists tried to nurture forms of community across ethno-religious boundaries and attempted to replace traditional religious feasts with modern communist ones. Religious feasts – such as the Serb *slava*-s (the patron-saint ceremonies at the family or local church level) and the Muslim *bajram* celebrations – continued to be observed during the Communist period, particularly in the villages. They were usually celebrated as village fairs (called *vasar*-s among Serbs and *teferic*-s among Muslims) and offered ample opportunity for socialising and entertainment. Such fairs were also held in Srebrenica and Bratunac, mostly on Orthodox holidays, and even attracted local Muslims. In Bratunac, the main *vasar* took place on the Orthodox holiday of *Sv. Makaveja* (14 August). Muslims, in turn, celebrated *kurban*

²⁴⁷ Lockwood, *European Moslems*, p.210.

²⁴⁸ Zulfikarpasic, *The Bosniak*, p.49.

²⁴⁹ Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, p.69; see also Bougarel, *Bosnie*, p.87. Interview: Mitko and Mevla Kadric, 17/01/1998.

²⁵⁰ Interview: Mitko and Mevla Kadric 17/01/1998.

²⁵¹ In his excellent analysis of the significance of the concept of *komsiluk* in the Bosnian context, Xavier Bougarel shows that, in its original meaning, it symbolised local and non-territorial forms of daily coexistence. In 1990, the nationalist parties appropriated, and somehow perverted, this idea by turning it into a principle of political and territorial division (Bougarel, *Bosnie*, pp.81-100).

bajram, which evolved into huge mass gatherings on three consecutive days in the villages of Konjevic Polje, Voljavica, and Glogova, especially in the years preceding the war.

The Communists added, as some ironically put it, new ‘state saint’ holidays to the ceremonial calendar that had such great resonance among the population. Aside from official Communist feasts and events, such as International Women’s Day (8 March), the Liberation Day of Srebrenica (11 March), the Youth Relay Race (in April), the First of May celebrations, and the Day of the Partisan Uprising in Bosnia (27 July), the Communists organised popular fairs very similar to the traditional village fairs. Such fairs were held in the villages of Podravanje and Luka (on the anniversaries of the opening of the first local primary schools).²⁵² The main fair, however, was in Jezero, a village located on a plateau above Skelani. This so-called general national, or popular, fair was an event that attracted huge masses. Established in the mid 1950s, it was organised by the association of veterans. It was celebrated each year on 4 July, on Veterans Day, commemorating the start of the Partisan resistance against the fascists. It developed into the largest fair in the municipality of Srebrenica and drew Muslims, Serbs and Gypsies alike. The fair attracted some thirty thousand visitors, and the day usually kicked off with speeches from politicians and Partisan heroes. Events included horse racing, athletics, football competitions, and other sports. According to locals, the horse races were particularly outstanding. They featured the best horses from the area, especially from Krusev Do and Luka (two remote Muslim villages on the way to Zepa), and even horses from Serbia and Bosnia.²⁵³ In this way, the Communists tried to draw people away from the traditional religious fairs, which were felt to reinforce ethnic divisions and sustain backwardness in the countryside.

Aside from their efforts to reduce the role of religious communities and the clergy, the Communists introduced other measures aimed at modernising society and ridding the countryside of its general backwardness. In 1949, they launched a programme to create peasant cooperatives in order to collectivise agriculture. This measure proved extremely unpopular among the rural population. The clearest sign of discontent was the rapid drop in production. The plans to collectivise agriculture were abandoned, although some large agricultural collectives continued to exist, particularly in the lowlands.²⁵⁴ Instead, the communists focused on improving rural infrastructure (such as by constructing roads and introducing electricity and telephones). They also built schools to reduce the staggering illiteracy of the peasant population.²⁵⁵ Despite these initiatives, there were complaints that the communist regime followed a discriminatory policy in this respect. It was claimed that development efforts and investments were withheld from former Chetnik and Ustashe villages to “punish” them. Partisan villages, by contrast, were said to be provided with everything they needed.²⁵⁶ Jobs were also made readily available to them. Local historian and SDA leader, Besim Ibisevic claims, for instance, that it was difficult for Muslims of his native village, Dobrak, a former Ustashe stronghold, to secure jobs in the town of Srebrenica.²⁵⁷ He also claims that Serbs and Montenegrins, who had been the main

²⁵² These fairs were not always very peaceful due to the use of large amounts of alcohol. For example the annual fair in the village of Luka saw frequent fights between the inhabitants of this and other villages in this isolated area along the Drina (part of the Srebrenica municipality). See: *Delegatski bilten* (Srebrenica), no.11, 06/06/1977, p.12.

²⁵³ Interviews and conversations with Momčilo Cvjetinovic 25/06/1998, Dobrisav Koëevic 26/06/1998. See also Masic, *Srebrenica*, pp.113-114. For local reports on the Jezero festivities see: *Srebreničke novine* 1(3), 1966, p.8; 4(37-38), 1981, p.1; 7(62), 1984, p.1.

²⁵⁴ See: Bokovoy ‘Peasants and partisans’.

²⁵⁵ Srebrenica was attached to the electricity network in 1952. Road construction started at the end of the 1950s and continued throughout the next two decades. The first roads were built in the southern part of the municipality (Srebrenica-Zeleni Jadar, and Zeleni Jadar-Kragljivoda-Jezero), mainly to open up the area for forestry. Afterwards the existing macadam roads between Srebrenica, Bratunac, and Konjevic Polje were modernised. See: Milivojevic, ‘Putevi uslov za razvoj’; see also *Srebreničke novine*, 1(3), 1966, p.5; 1(5), 1966, p.3; 6(53), 1983, p.1. Interview Dobrisav Koëevic 10/06/1998.

²⁵⁶ Even towns, such as Ljubovija on the other side of the Drina, felt they suffered from their ‘Chetnik’ reputation, and were punished with underdevelopment for several decades after the war. Interview: Mitko and Mevla Kadric 17/01/1998. By contrast, the village of Kravica, where the Serb population had joined the Partisans in time, received electricity in 1956. Other villages had to wait until the 1970s (Nikolic, ‘Kravica u proslosti’, p.28).

²⁵⁷ Interview: Ibisevic 24/05/1998.

recruitment base for the Partisan movement, took all the important positions in town, while Muslims did the hard, physical jobs. Similar charges were made on the Serb side with regard to former Chetnik villages. Although the protection of parochial interests always seems to be at the heart of such accusations, the former Partisans probably did reap the benefits of having fought on the right side during the war.

Eastern Bosnia's illiteracy rate was enormous, and much higher than in most other parts of Bosnia. During the 1950s, literacy improved, although discrepancies remained high between communes (particularly between towns and villages), between men and women, and even between boys and girls of school age. In 1953, for instance, seventy percent of the population in the district of Srebrenica and Bratunac, did not know to how read and write. (The illiteracy rate for women was over eighty-five percent). The situation was better among the younger age groups. Even so, there were still huge differences between boys and girls: 73.6% of boys aged 10 to 14 could read and write, while the figure for girls was only 34.7%. The general literacy rate was highest (including for females) in the communes of Fakovici and Skelani along the Drina, and lowest in Srebrenica and Kravica. The situation was similar in the neighbouring district of Vlasenica. There were notable differences between the Serb-dominated commune of Han Pijesak (50.9%) on one end of the scale, and the mixed commune of Nova Kasaba (24.9%) and Serb dominated Sekovici (27.4%) on the other.²⁵⁸ In order to improve the situation, the Communists targeted rural areas in particular, building many primary schools there from the 1960s on.²⁵⁹ Yet peasants still refused to send their daughters to school, particularly in the more remote Muslim areas, such as Luka. Some parents were fined for refusing to send their young children to school.²⁶⁰ Aside from primary education for children, the Communist authorities in Srebrenica also tried to improve the level of education among adults through literacy programmes and specialised training for workers.²⁶¹ Even so, the illiteracy rate remained high in these parts. During the 1980s, it still ranged between 22% and 25% in the municipalities of Sekovici, Bratunac, and Srebrenica, whereas in Bosnia as a whole, the percentage had dropped to around 15%.²⁶²

To some extent, economic development helped to improve general social and economic conditions. The 1960s and 1970s saw an increase in wage labour income, and peasants started to work in urban centres as miners, truck drivers, or factory workers. Some went to Serbia, others to Sarajevo, or even abroad, leaving their women behind in the village. Srebrenica saw its first industrial development, which at that stage in time, was mainly confined to primary industries, such as mining (the 'sase' lead and zinc mines) and forestry (the 'Drina' forestry firm). The mines in Sase began regular production in 1961, after several years of research and preparations. The municipality became an important supplier of raw materials (lead, zinc, silver, and timber) as well as of cheap labour, catering for the manufacturing industries in Serbia.²⁶³ Later, Muslims pointed out this fact to underline that Serbia had always exploited the area at the expense of the Muslim population.²⁶⁴ In addition, a bauxite mine was opened in neighbouring Milici, a Serb settlement, which is part of the Vlasenica municipality. Later, that mine was to become the largest of its kind in Europe. In 1981, the 'Boksit Milici' firm expanded its activities to Podravanje, in the territory of the Srebrenica municipality.²⁶⁵ Despite these economic developments, the municipalities of Srebrenica, Bratunac, and Vlasenica continued to be part of the most peripheral and underdeveloped parts of the republic.

²⁵⁸ *Popis stanovništva 1953. Knjiga XI: Starost, pismenost i narodnost*. Beograd: Savezni zavod za statistiku, 1960.

²⁵⁹ In November 1966, a referendum was held in Srebrenica to gauge public opinion about an additional income tax of 1% for the construction of schools in villages. See *Srebreničke novine*, 1(6), pp.1 and 6-7.

²⁶⁰ Interview Hatidza Hren 18/06/1998. See also: *Srebreničke novine* 1(2), 1966, p.4; Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, p.41.

²⁶¹ In the municipality of Srebrenica, these services were provided by the adult education centre 'Zvonimir Subić', which was established in 1960. See: *Narodni univerzitet 'Zvonimir Subić' Srebrenica. 20 godina rada*. Srebrenica: Narodni univerzitet 'Zvonimir Subić' u Srebrenici, 1980.

²⁶² See Smit, 'A regional geography', pp.394-95.

²⁶³ Conversation: Dobrisav Kočević 10/06/1998.

²⁶⁴ See for instance: Oric, *Srebrenica svjedoči i optužuje*, pp.10-11.

²⁶⁵ Rajko Dukic et al. *Dvadeset pet godina rada*. See also: *Srebreničke novine* 4(42), 1981, p.3.

This changed during the late 1970s and the first half of the 1980s, when steps were taken to process locally produced natural resources (timber, zinc, and lead) on site, particularly in the Srebrenica municipality. Huge Bosnian firms, whose headquarters were located in Sarajevo or Tuzla (such as 'sipad' for forestry and 'Energoinvest' for mining and related activities) established manufacturing industries in Srebrenica.²⁶⁶ An industrial zone was created around Potočari. Some of the factories there produced batteries ('Fabrika akumulatora') and car brake systems ('Feros'). Others (such as '11. Mart' and 'Potočari'), processed lead, zinc, silver, tin, and other minerals into final products. Most of these companies were set up by the 'Energoinvest' firm, which also controlled the 'sase' lead and zinc mines. A second industrial zone was created in Zeleni Jadar, at a road junction south of Srebrenica. It included a furniture factory ('Fabrika stolica') and a stonecutting workshop ('srebrenicakamen'). In Skelani, the 'UPP' food chain opened a cannery ('9. Maj'), and in the town of Srebrenica, the Zvornik 'Vezionica' opened a textile factory. Tourism became the main economic activity in the town of Srebrenica. The focal attraction was the 'Banja Guber' spa, which drew thousands of tourists each year. Two hotels were built ('Domavia' and 'Argentarija') to accommodate the tourists, although many visitors found accommodations among the local population.²⁶⁷ The municipality of Srebrenica also boasted one of the best-known hunting grounds in Bosnia, the Susica mountain range south of the town.²⁶⁸

Dutch geographer, Jan Smit has pointed out that it is fairly surprising that a small, isolated municipality, such as Srebrenica, should have such a high concentration of industries. He suggests that this may be attributable to the municipality's wealth of resources, as well as to the strategic importance of its isolated location. One important political element in Yugoslavia's industrialisation policy was to concentrate industries in the mountainous areas least vulnerable to foreign (Soviet) aggression. But, as Smit admits, this assumption is not based on any actual proof. However, Srebrenica - unlike most other parts of Bosnia - had almost no private enterprises. Moreover, official economic and employment figures as well as detailed maps of the area were non-existent. All of this indicates that Yugoslav authorities saw Srebrenica as a zone of special strategic importance. Srebrenica became one of the few places in eastern Bosnia where the local economy was not characterised by dependency, even though it was very similar in other respects to underdeveloped municipalities elsewhere.²⁶⁹

Local Communist officials claimed the credit for Srebrenica's remarkable economic success during the late 1970s and early 1980s. They stressed that it was the result of efforts at the local level to improve Srebrenica economically and culturally. This was done through a deliberate and well-planned shift from primary industries to manufacturing, allowing the town to profit from its own natural resources through the export of finalised products. Previously, others had reaped the benefits from Srebrenica's natural wealth. In addition, much energy was invested in improving the educational level in order to create a well-educated workforce. Srebrenica's secondary school (gymnasium) was one of the best in Bosnia.²⁷⁰ Although I heard this claim mainly from former Serb communist officials, who still

²⁶⁶ Smit, 'A regional geography', p.394. Conversations: Bozo Jovanovic 11/06/1998, Dobrisav Kočević 10/06/1998.

²⁶⁷ Milivojević, 'Četvrt vijeka turizma'.

²⁶⁸ Around the mid 1980s, 7,000 of the 38,000 residents of the Srebrenica municipality were employed. Conversation: Dobrisav Kočević 10/06/1998. For an economic survey, see *Privredni pregled* (special issue on Srebrenica, 4(2), December 1986). Bratunac's economy was based primarily on agriculture, for which good conditions existed in the lower parts of the valley (along the Drina, Jadar, and Kravica rivers). Aside from various agricultural collectives, there were several enterprises, such as the 'Kaolin' tile factory (which also exported tiles to Holland and other European countries), two other ceramic firms, and the 'Kartonaza' cardboard factory, which produced packaging for ceramic products. There was also a timber plant ('9 Oktobar'), a brick factory ('Ciglanja'), a metallurgic construction company ('Metal'), and a tobacco processing plant ('Duhan'). One of the most important enterprises in Bratunac was the 'Vihor' transport company, which facilitated the transportation and distribution of ore and manufactured goods produced in Srebrenica and Bratunac. See: Masić, *Istina o Bratuncu*, pp.7-8. Interview: Mitko and Mevlā Kadrić 17/01/1998.

²⁶⁹ Smit, 'A regional geography', p.397.

²⁷⁰ Interviews: Bozo Jovanovic 11/06/1998, 20/06/1998. See also: *Dogovor o osnovama društvenog plana Opštine Srebrenice za period od 1981. do 1985. godine*. Skupštine Opštine Srebrenice. Izvršni odbor. Srebrenica, 16/02/1981, pp.35-36; *Srebreničke novine* 4(33), 1981, p.1 and 6(53), 1983, p.1. A substantial portion of the investments needed for industrial development in Srebrenica were financed by foreign loans. These loans covered eighty percent of the costs of industrial equipment

take pride in having built up the local economy after World War Two, Muslim authors, such as Masic, claim that is not the Serb, but the Muslim cadres, who are to be credited for Srebrenica's success story. They suggest that the town started to thrive only when Muslims entered into cadre positions.²⁷¹ Although there may be some truth in this, the fact remains that Serbs usually continued to hold general management positions, whereas Muslims occupied the specialised technical cadres. A more accurate claim would be that the economic successes of the early 1980s are attributable to Serb and Muslim cadres alike. Unlike most other towns in the region, Srebrenica developed into a modern, prosperous town, a pleasant place to live.

Yet Srebrenica's prosperity, matched only by the other main mining town in the region, Milici, caused some economic rivalry with neighbouring municipalities, such as Bratunac. Bratunac remained one of the most economically backward and underdeveloped municipalities in the republic. Despite many family ties between the inhabitants of Srebrenica and Bratunac, Srebrenicans looked down on the 'frog catchers' (*žabari*) from Bratunac, a nickname derived from their location in a valley. They considered them less civilised and less educated as well as envious of Srebrenica's wealth. The inhabitants of Bratunac, in turn, called Srebrenicans 'storks' (*rode*), as they found them very arrogant and prone to guard their privileged position against outsiders.²⁷² It was harder for any outsider to get a job in Srebrenica than in Bratunac, they claimed. There was also a certain degree of ethnic rivalry running across these municipal divides. It surfaced more and more during the 1980s, when the economy collapsed and increasingly critical decisions had to be made regarding the distribution of jobs and other benefits.²⁷³ Ethnic rivalry was also fuelled by an undeniable shift in the ethno-demographic balance, increasing the Muslim and reducing the Serb share of the population. This process took place throughout Bosnia, where Muslims became the largest nation by the early 1970s. In eastern Bosnia, this development was visible in all municipalities, although it was expressed most poignantly in Vlasenica, as the following figures show:

Census ²⁷⁴	Srebrenica			Bratunac			Vlasenica		
	inhabitants	M %	S %	inhabitants	M %	S %	inhabitants	M %	S %
1921	27,422	50	49	<i>part of Srebrenica</i>			28,865	33	66
1931	35,210	49	50	"			37,532	32	67
1948	39,954	49	51	"			27,305	17	83
1953	46,647	50	49	"			30,749	25	73

purchased between 1976 and 1980 (*Dogovor o osnovama društvenog plana Opštine Srebrenice za period od 1981. do 1985. godine*. Skupštine Opštine Srebrenice. Izvršni odbor. Srebrenica, 16/02/1981, p.45).

²⁷¹ Masic, *Srebrenica*, pp.15-16.

²⁷² Interview: Boban Vasic 03/09/1998. This rivalry probably explains why the two municipalities of Srebrenica and Bratunac remained two separate entities, despite discussions during the 1960s to join the two for economic reasons. See: *Srebreničke novine*, 1(2), 1966, pp.1-2.

²⁷³ See also Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, p.139.

²⁷⁴ It is important to note that relevant categories during the censuses changed. The main categories in the censuses preceding World War Two were based on religious affiliation (Orthodox, Muslim, and Catholic). In post-war censuses, by contrast, they were ethnically based, which made it difficult to capture the Muslim component of the population, as Muslims were not recognised as a nation. The 1948 census placed them under a category labelled 'undeclared Muslims', and the 1953 census, under 'undeclared Yugoslavs'. In 1961, a new category was created, 'Muslims in the ethnic sense'. This was finally changed during the 1971 census into 'Muslims in the national sense' (Jackson, 'Changes in ethnic populations', p.98).

1961	29,283	50	43	23,149	43	56	23,457	14	60 ²⁷⁵
1971	33,357	63	36	26,513	51	48	26,623	48	50
1981	36,292	69	28	30,333	57	40	30,498	50	44
1991	37,211	75	23	33,575	64	34	33,817	55	42

The ethno-demographic balance between Muslims and Serbs (each comprising approximately half of the population) in Srebrenica and Bratunac throughout most of the twentieth century ceased to exist. By the 1980s, Muslims formed a clear majority in these two municipalities. In Vlasenica, the once strong Serb majority was replaced by a Muslim majority. Between 1981 and 1991, Srebrenica also witnessed a drop in the Serb segment of the population, both in relative (from 28 to 23%) and absolute numbers (from 10,924 to 8,315).²⁷⁶ Parallel to this demographic development was a rise in Muslim cadres in local government and industry, which resulted from the recognition of Bosnian Muslims as a nation (in 1968). As indicated earlier, a growing number of well-educated Muslims entered the cadres, while Serbs, who had almost monopolised them in the past, lost much of their influence in political and economic life. Many Serbs, particularly the younger generations, left for Serbia in search of better opportunities. In absolute terms, the number of Muslims in the Srebrenica municipality increased by more than ten percent between 1981 and 1991. The Serb population, by contrast, decreased by nearly twenty percent during that period. In the town of Srebrenica itself, Muslims increased their numbers by almost fifty percent, and Serbs by a mere sixteen percent.²⁷⁷ These figures also reveal a strong migration trend from villages to urban centres. Kravica, for example, witnessed a drop in the Serb population because young people left their villages to find jobs in towns, especially over the border in Serbia, while parents and grandparents stayed behind.²⁷⁸

Ethno-demographic shifts became even more painful for Serbs as Yugoslavia entered a period of economic and political decentralisation. Power devolved from the federal centre (dominated by Serbia) to the six republics and two autonomous provinces. This process was sealed with the 1974 Constitution, which put an end to Serbia's dominance and strengthened the position of other nations in the federation. A system of ethnic quota was introduced as part of this process. Based on census results, 'ethnic keys' were established, pertaining to all levels of administration. These quotas were used to ensure proportional distribution of key resources, such as jobs, houses, high positions in administration and industry, and scholarships between the various nations and nationalities. In Srebrenica, for example, local Communists established a system in which the eight highest positions in the municipality (including the mayor, chairman of the Executive Board, chief of police, etc.) were divided proportionally among Muslims and Serbs. (Normally, five of these posts went to Muslims and three to Serbs).²⁷⁹ According to Salih 'Tale' Sehomerovic, Srebrenica's mayor in the late 1980s, the Communists adhered strictly to this rule even until the end of the 1980s.²⁸⁰ Although the system of ethnic quota was

²⁷⁵ These figures do not include the people who identified themselves as 'Yugoslavs' during the post-war censuses. This explains the huge drop in percentage for Muslims (and to a lesser extent, also for Serbs) in Vlasenica. The 'Yugoslav' portion of the population, which was normally limited to a few percentage points, was highest during the 1961 census: in Vlasenica 24% of the population identified themselves as such, and in Srebrenica 7% (Bratunac only 1%). The enormous fluctuations in census results in Vlasenica may have been caused by a weak sense of ethnic belonging among local Muslims. Many of them may have listed themselves as Serbs during the 1948 and 1953 censuses, then shifted to the 'Yugoslav' category in 1961, and finally identified themselves under the 'Muslim' category in 1971.

²⁷⁶ *Stanovništvo Bosne i Hercegovine. Narodnosni sastav po naseljima*. Zagreb: Državni zavod za statistiku, 1995, pp.226-27.

²⁷⁷ Smit, 'A regional geography', p.396.

²⁷⁸ Miljanovic, *Krivi Božić sela Kravice*, p.11.

²⁷⁹ The highest administrative official at the municipal level was the President of the Municipal Council, which I will refer to as the 'Mayor' throughout the remainder of this text. The Chairman of the Executive Board of the Municipal Council was a position of almost equal standing, but was formally a subordinate to the Mayor.

²⁸⁰ Milovanovic and Loza, 'Nas niko nije pitao', p.16. A leading local politician and former mayor of Srebrenica, Veselin Stevanovic, stressed in an interview that the ethnic principle was indeed important, but not paramount, in selecting people for positions. According to Stevanovic, it was considered imperative, in principle, that cadres reflect the ethno-national

designed to guarantee fair distribution of resources and to reduce ethnic tensions, it did not always produce these positive effects in underdeveloped regions. In Kosovo, Macedonia, and Bosnia, it kept ethnic rivalries alive. The consequence was the creation (or continuation) of a political arena in which ethnic affiliation was of primary importance. This also led to forms of abuse and nepotism. Many people in key positions developed networks of family and friends, who were given jobs in exchange for loyalty.

Another development that would lead to increased tensions between Serbs and Muslims was the official recognition of the Bosnian Muslims as a nation. This recognition led to increased self-awareness among the Muslim elite, which was expressed in an unprecedented cultural revival. Although this revival was predicated on a secular definition of Bosnian Muslim identity, it was difficult to completely separate this ethnic identity from its religious origins. Thus, the cultural revival also brought about a religious revival. During the 1970s, many new mosques were built, especially in the countryside, which caused concern among the Serb population.²⁸¹ In addition, the Islamic community, though loyal to the Communist regime, set itself up as the main institution representing the Muslim nation within Yugoslavia. Several new Islamic journals were launched, and an Islamic theological faculty was opened in Sarajevo. Opponents of the exclusively secular definition of Bosnian Muslim identity, as propagated by Muslim communists, also became more verbal. Former members of the pre-war Bosnian pan-Islamicist organisation 'Young Muslims' (*Mladi Muslimani*) started to spread such views in journals of the Islamic community, generating support among young and conservative *ulema*, mostly from rural backgrounds. Written in 1970, Izetbegovic's 'Islamic Declaration' became a kind of implicit manifesto for this group.²⁸² The growing importance of the Islamic community in public life also led to a rapprochement between the Muslim clergy and various Bosnian intellectuals linked to the League of Communists.²⁸³

Others, particularly the Serbs, felt that the Muslim cultural and religious revival went too far. At the end of the 1970s, the Bosnian branch of the Yugoslav League of Communists started to campaign against the rise of 'Islamic fundamentalism' and 'Muslim nationalism' in the republic. The Serbian and Croatian press also voiced criticism of fundamentalist tendencies in Bosnia. In 1983, the Bosnian authorities organised a show trial against a group of thirteen Muslim intellectuals, who were accused of counter-revolutionary activities and of disseminating anti-Yugoslav propaganda. Five of them had been members of the group of 'Young Muslims', including Alija Izetbegovic, Omer Behmen, and Hasan Èengic (who later became leaders of the SDA). Twelve of them received long prison sentences. Although they were still marginal in political and intellectual life at that time, they became martyrs when they were released in the second half of the 1980s. It was this group of religiously inspired Muslim intellectuals, who, in the late 1980s, started to question the Islamic community's loyalty to the

structure of the population. However, exceptions were made on occasion for candidates with superior qualifications. Interview: Veselin Stevanovic 23/06/1998.

²⁸¹ Interview: Milivoje Ivanisevic 03/02/1998. At the outbreak of the Bosnian war, there were over 30 mosques in the municipality of Srebrenica, most of which were built after World War Two. Aside from the four mosques in the town itself, there were a large number of new mosques in villages, particularly in the region of Osat (southeast of Srebrenica), but also in Potočari, Sase, Luka, and Suceška. They were all damaged or destroyed during the war. (See the lists of damaged and destroyed religious buildings in: *Ratni žložen*, pp.47-52). Serbian Orthodox churches were far fewer in number, both in the Srebrenica and Bratunac municipalities. However, there were churches in Srebrenica, Crvica, Bratunac, Fakovici, Sase, and Kravica, most of which were built before World War Two.

²⁸² For a discussion of Alija Izetbegovic's 'Islamic Declaration' see Xavier Bougarel, *Islam et politique*, pp.142-148. According to Bougarel, this document is a classic example of an Islamicist text. It contains all the elements of similar texts in other parts of the Muslim world: it is exemplified by its insistence upon the decadence and corruption of Muslim society, due to the loss of influence of Islam in modern and secular societies, and by its call for the restoration of an ethical and political order inspired by Islam. Bougarel stresses that Izetbegovic's pan-Islamic viewpoints, laid out in this text, also imply the rejection of nationalism as an anti-Islamic ideology.

²⁸³ Bougarel, *Islam et politique*, pp.130-150.

Communist regime, and began to advocate a more active role for Islam in society. They later established the SDA.²⁸⁴

Economic decline during the 1980s



OUR COMRADE TITO DIED

‘Comrade Tito, we swear to you that we will not turn off your road.’

Front page of a special issue of Srebreničke novine 3(24), on the occasion of Tito’s death, May 1980

“I am a worker and a peasant, I live in the village
on a small piece of land, here, near town.
Believe me, life would be difficult, my brother
had there been no jobs in the social sector.
At home almost everything is broken,
tractor, combine, and hoes are run-down,
the interest rates still fleece me, however
and they want me to pay this cursed money.
When the wheat grows high, the field calls me,
yet I do not have enough time to work the land.
I never manage, on neither side,
and my doctor says I cannot go on sick leave”

Poem written by peasant worker Mladen Kulic, published in Birac
(Zvornik), December 1988

Growing nationalist tendencies and religious revivalism were rife throughout Yugoslavia after Josip Broz Tito, the country’s undisputed leader after World War Two, died on 4 May 1980. His death marked the beginning of a deep economic, moral and political crisis, which threatened the very fabric

²⁸⁴ Bougarel, *Islam et politique*, pp.161-169. See also Irwin, ‘The Islamic revival’; and Reuter, ‘Islam in Jugoslawien’

of socialist society, the established political order and the unity of the country. Tito, with his charismatic personality, had managed to hold Yugoslavia together. But his death left the federation without a powerful, unifying figure at its centre. Before he died, Tito wanted to make sure that his death would not give any politicians or ethnic groups an opportunity to gain predominance at the expense of others. For that reason, he introduced a rotating presidential system according to which the position of president changed hands every year.

During the 1980s, Yugoslavia was hard hit by the worldwide economic recession. The country was also sliding into a political crisis. This combined economic and political crisis manifested itself in low productivity figures, a growing lack of discipline among the workforce, widespread corruption, and the erosion of social and moral values. The Yugoslav system of workers' self-management proved inadequate in tackling these problems. Large firms fell apart into smaller 'self-managed' units, which started to act on their own, independently of the head offices. Many large firms teetered on the brink bankruptcy, and only survived due to state intervention. Financial scandals, such as the *Agrokomerc* affair (1987), came to light, unveiling the intricate and unhealthy links between the local and regional communist party bosses and the economy. Reforms that could have averted the approaching disaster were systematically blocked by the communist elite, who had no wish to relinquish their tight reins on the economy.²⁸⁵ The authorities began printing money to cover losses and pay the salaries, causing an unprecedented inflation rate. At its height, inflation reduced wages almost overnight and completely wiped out people's savings. Jobs were unavailable to the young and educated, and workers who once assumed they had a job for life suddenly faced the terrifying prospect of unemployment. As Sudetic writes: "Everyone grew anxious to see who would decide which workers would be laid off; who would decide the size of the pay checks, the pensions, and the unemployment benefits; who would inherit the assets of bankrupt factories that belonged to everyone and to no one; who would be the winners; who would be the losers; who would be the scapegoats; who would be the new masters?"²⁸⁶

At the end of the 1980s, when communism collapsed all over eastern Europe, and Yugoslavia's economic crisis had reduced salaries to a fraction of what they once were, communist politicians started to play the nationalist card. In a multi-ethnic state, ethnic rivalry has the potential to make things worse. This was especially true in Yugoslavia, since the communist leaders became defenders of the 'national' interests of their respective republics. Thus, the *Agrokomerc* case quickly acquired a political dimension, offering Serbian politicians an opportunity to attack the Bosnian Muslim communist leadership for having protected the corrupt management of the firm. Some Muslims, on the other hand, regarded the arrest of Fikret Abdic, the director of the firm (who became one of the most popular Muslim politicians in the early 1990s), as an anti-Muslim conspiracy.²⁸⁷ Behind the official façade of 'Brotherhood and Unity', a growing inter-republic rivalry developed, which evolved into outright nationalism by the end of the 1980s. It was Milosevic who opened Pandora's box, bringing these rivalries fully to the surface. He came to power playing on the feelings of existential insecurity among ordinary Serbs, who were afraid of losing their jobs. He knew he could find many who were desperate enough to fight for Serb control over factories, mines, and other economic assets that provided a means of subsistence for the workers, minimal though it was. He also took on and instrumentalised the theme of Serb suffering and victimisation, under the 'Turks' and the Ustashe, and under Tito, feeding widespread popular sentiment that history has always treated Serbs unfairly.

In the early 1980s, before Milosevic's rise to power, Serb suffering was epitomised in the alleged Albanian 'genocide' of Serbs in Kosovo. It was the Serbian Orthodox church that first openly addressed the issue, presenting the conflict in the province as a renewed battle between Christianity and Islam. Albanians were alleged to have embarked on a *Jihad* aimed at ethnically cleansing Kosovo of its Serbian population. Parallels were drawn with World War Two. After years of silence, memories of the

²⁸⁵ Meier, *Yugoslavia*, pp.10-17.

²⁸⁶ Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, p.76.

²⁸⁷ Bougarel, *Islam et politique*, pp.155-56.

war resurfaced with a vengeance. Well-known writers, such as Vojislav Lubarda and Vuk Draskovic, published novels depicting the Ustashe atrocities against Serbs in graphic detail. Lubarda even mentioned the real names of the perpetrators in his hometown of Rogatica (in eastern Bosnia).²⁸⁸ In the second half of the 1980s, these themes of Serb suffering and victimisation became a leitmotif, including in Serbian politics, academic life, and mass media.²⁸⁹ The Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences (1986) became a major ideological landmark in this process. It presented the predicament of the Serbs in Kosovo in almost apocalyptic terms: “The physical, political, legal, and cultural genocide of the Serbian population in Kosovo and Metohija is a worse defeat than any experienced in the liberation wars waged by Serbia from the First Serbian Uprising in 1804 to the uprising in 1941”. It compared the ‘genocide’ in Kosovo to the extermination of Serbs during World War Two. It also claimed that the Serbs were under threat in other parts of Yugoslavia, particularly in Croatia and Bosnia. “Intellectually and politically unmanned, the Serbian nation has had to bear trials and tribulations that are too severe not to leave deep scars in their psyche...”.²⁹⁰

Most importantly, this discourse on Serb victimisation was adopted by Slobodan Milosevic, who soared to power when he stood up to protect the Serbs as a nation against further suffering, making his famous statement, “nobody should dare to beat you ...” during a visit to Kosovo in April 1987. In the years that followed, he launched a political campaign to abolish Kosovo’s autonomy, which was accompanied by a hate campaign against so-called Albanian nationalists and fundamentalists in the state-controlled Serbian media. This campaign was later extended to the Bosnian Muslims and Islam in general.²⁹¹ Attention was focused on Serb suffering – both under the Ottoman Turks and in World War Two. In the years before the outbreak of the war, the images of Ustashe concentration camps and slaughtered Serbs became commonplace on prime time Serbian television. As one Serb analyst writes, counting the dead became a kind of “national hobby”.²⁹² At the same time, nationalist politicians (such as Jovan Raskovic, leader of the Krajina Serbs) started to refer to their nation as “the slaughtered people,” thus lending another, more sinister meaning to the notion of “heavenly Serbia”. The dead bodies of Serbian World War Two victims were exhumed and reburied in ceremonies held by the church and frequented by nationalist politicians.²⁹³ It became normal to refer to Croats as ‘Ustashe’. Bosnian Muslims, in turn, were branded as ‘Muslim fundamentalists’, who were said to want to turn the clock back to Ottoman times. As Milovan Djilas noted in his conversations with Adil Zulfikarpasic: “The Belgrade-based *Politika* newspaper fostered the belief that the Croats were going to slaughter Croatian Serbs. Highly misleading facts and distorted ideas were bandied around in the press and on television (...). An atmosphere of fear was created, which was followed by an atmosphere of hatred, and hatred was followed by ... conflict”.²⁹⁴ It seems that the hate campaign in the Serbian media was a deliberate attempt to prepare people for war and brace them for revenge. The Milosevic regime’s manipulation of the memories of World War Two were thus an important factor in the spiral of violence in the region during the 1990s.²⁹⁵

²⁸⁸ Dragovic Soso, *Between democracy and nationalism*, pp.211-218,

²⁸⁹ Markovic, ‘Nacija, zrtva i osveta’.

²⁹⁰ Mihailovic and Krestic, *Memorandum*, resp. p.128 and 138; see also Dragnich, ‘The rise and fall of Yugoslavia’.

²⁹¹ In academia, political scientist, Miroljub Jevtic, was the most outspoken protagonist of Serbian Albanophobia and Islamophobia. From the late 1980s on, he popularised his ideas on Islam, especially as regarding the Muslim Albanians in Kosovo and the Slavic Muslims in Bosnia. He achieved this by means of numerous articles and interviews in newspapers, such as *Politika*, *Interju*, *Svet* etc. He also published several books expressing his views; see in particular, Jevtic, *Dzihad*; Jevtic, *Od Islamske deklaracije*; Jevtic, *Siptari i Islam*. For a description of contemporary intellectual hostility towards Islam in Serbia, see Cigar, ‘serbia’s Orientalists’; see also Mufaku, ‘The Serbian view of Islam’.

²⁹² Markovic, ‘Nacija, zrtva i osveta’, p.647.

²⁹³ See: Denich, ‘Dismembering Yugoslavia’; Hayden ‘Recounting the dead’; Bax ‘Mass graves’.

²⁹⁴ Zulfikarpasic, *The Bosniak*, p.158.

²⁹⁵ See for instance Bassiouni, *Final report*, p.78. See also a short text in the Serb nationalist journal, *Pogledi*, which criticizes the silence around Serb mass graves in Srebrenica (Vasic, ‘suti se o Srebrenici...’)

Political tensions rose in Bosnia as a result of Milosevic's actions. The Bosnian republican authorities grew increasingly nervous regarding expressions of Serb and Muslim nationalism, which they feared could lead to conflicts such as that in Kosovo. In Srebrenica, for instance, local Serbs, influenced by media propaganda from Serbia, joined the huge mass meetings in solidarity with the Kosovo Serbs in towns across the border in Serbia. This created a great deal of unrest among local Muslims.²⁹⁶ The Bosnian communist authorities tried to suppress these tensions, which were seen as extremely dangerous for multi-ethnic Bosnia, by fiercely repressing all forms of nationalist agitation. This policy was also implemented in eastern Bosnia. There, Serb, as well as Muslim political activists – some of whom later became well-known nationalist leaders – were monitored by the Bosnian state-security (SDB). Among them was Besim Ibisevic, a local historian and Muslim activist who later became mayor of Srebrenica for the SDA after the first democratic elections in Bosnia in 1990. In his political memoirs, he describes how he was arrested by agents of the Zvornik SDB section in January 1987 for sending a letter to the editor of a newspaper called *Oslobodjenje*. The letter contained a warning against renewed Serbian aggression towards Bosnia's Muslim population. The letter had been prompted by an incident at the Drina, where Serbs on the Serbian side of the river allegedly shot at two Muslims on the Bosnian side, injuring one of them. In his letter, Ibisevic wrote that forty years after the atrocities against Muslims during World War Two, Serbs were again firing at them.²⁹⁷ The newspaper did not publish the letter, but forwarded it to the Bosnian state security. Consequently, Ibisevic – as he himself writes with a sense of nationalist pride – acquired a reputation as a big fish, 'the most important nationalist and fundamentalist in the region of Zvornik'.²⁹⁸

As a figure, Ibisevic is interesting since he represents the archetypal village-born intellectual, whose attempts to gain respect from urban people in the *èarsija* (town) of Srebrenica failed, as he remained a 'peasant' in their eyes.²⁹⁹ Like many other village intellectuals, he became a nationalist and started to rally village against town when he – as the custodian of the local museum in Srebrenica after 1987 – paid frequent visits to villages to gather material and stories for the museum. In these villages, as Ibisevic writes in his book, people respected him. He was also able to talk more freely there, far from the earshot of the secret police. By 'lecturing' on local history during his visits to these villages, he claims to have raised Bosniac national consciousness. He also taught these ordinary peasants certain political lessons. One such lesson was that Yugoslavia was an artificial creation that conflicted with their own interests and that the Drina was a border between two different nations, two opposing civilizations. He tried, as he himself states, to convince people not to buy Serbian newspapers, not to support Serbian football teams, and to liberate themselves from the ekavian ('serbian') influences in their dialect. While many village people took his messages to heart, urban people mocked him,

²⁹⁶ Milanovic and Loza, 'Nas niko nije pitao', p.16.

²⁹⁷ Later, Ibisevic was forced to admit that the two Muslims had invented their story as a cover up for illegal fishing activities along the Drina (during which one had injured himself with explosives). Yet apparently, by the late 1980s, such incidents did in fact occur, judging from an article in the Serbian magazine, *Duga*. According to the article, a small fishing war was going on in the Drina canyon towards the end of the 1980s. Inhabitants of Muslim villages west of Skelani built dams and caught huge amounts of fish. The fishers association in Bajina Basta, on the Serbian side of the river, tried, in its turn, to prevent them by destroying these dams. This conflict escalated: Serbian guards shot in the air, while Muslims sabotaged and stoned a vehicle of the association. Muslims allegedly threatened Serbian officials with remarks like "we will cut your heads off and build them into the dams". The writer of the article thus draws a parallel with Ottoman times, stating that Muslims in Srebrenica are building a new skull tower such as the one the Turks erected in Nis, the famous Cele-kula (Elez, 'Cele-kula na Drini').

²⁹⁸ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica (1987-1992)*, pp.5-11; interview Ibisevic 24/05/1998.

²⁹⁹ Besim Ibisevic was born in the village of Dobrak, near Skelani. After primary education, he enrolled in the Gymnasium in Bajina Basta (Serbia), where he was one of a very small number of Bosnian Muslim pupils. He claims having suffered discrimination at the hands of fellow students and Serb teachers. In 1978, he went to Sarajevo to study history, together with his close friend and future SDS activist, Momèilo Cvjetinovic. There he fell into trouble with the SDB, as he claims, for spreading anti-Yugoslav propaganda. He completed his studies in 1982, after which he served in the army. He fell into trouble again and spent some time in an army prison for similar offences. In 1986, he became the first custodian of the local ethnographic and historical museum in Srebrenica (located in the Culture House). Interview: Ibisevic, 24/05/1998.

regarding him as a typical history teacher turned nationalist. As he was born in Dobrak (near Skelani), some called him a *Kadrinovac* (a sympathiser of Kadrija Softic, a local Ustasha leader during World War Two).³⁰⁰

Eastern Bosnia becomes a ‘second Kosovo’

“...the Islamic countries, led by Turkey, and supported by Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan and others, are moving up towards Europe and the other developed countries. They use the demographic bomb, causing a quick rise of the population, while unable to sustain these people on their own territories. Nowadays, Islam and Christianity are competing for control over the Balkan space, which is, according to my own deepest conviction, the centre of the world, at the crossroad of three continents: Africa, Europe, and Asia”.

Ratko Mladic in an interview for *The Canadian Srbobran*, quoted in *Pogledi*, 12 November 1993, p.34

The Agrokomerc scandal was followed by a similar affair, with very similar effects, in eastern Bosnia. Eastern Bosnia also witnessed local tensions rise due to the economic crisis. These tensions manifested themselves in petty jealousy and resentment against ‘others,’ who appeared more prosperous in these times of hardship. Old enmities resurfaced during disputes over who was to get a particular job, apartment, or whose son or daughter would win a scholarship to study in Sarajevo. Some were convinced that certain villages received a larger share of municipal resources due to nepotism and ethnic favouritism on the part of those in power, while other villages were kept backward because they lacked the necessary *veže* (connections).³⁰¹ The fact that villages were either exclusively Serb or Muslim only reinforced a general pattern of thought, which regarded the main lines of division in society in terms of ethnic differences. The ‘haves’ became increasingly anxious to defend their position against incursions from ‘the have-nots’. In and around Srebrenica, these tendencies first manifested themselves most clearly in the neighbouring municipality of Vlasenica.

At the beginning of 1988, conflicts arose between municipal authorities and the community of Milici, a Serb-dominated mining town of several thousand east of Vlasenica. Milici had developed into a major economic centre, because the Vlasenica bauxite mines had concentrated their mining activities there. The firm was established in the late 1950s or early 1960s. Production had seen a rapid increase in the 1960s and 1970s, and since that time, the mines had grown into the largest of their kind in Europe.³⁰² The firm operated mainly in the municipalities of Vlasenica and Srebrenica. It also functioned as a major impetus to local economic and infrastructural development, providing employment for the inhabitants of Vlasenica and other communities, such as Zvornik. In 1979, one of Europe’s largest aluminium plants was opened there. It was the largest single employer in Zvornik. The hydroelectric plants along the Drina River (near Zvornik and Bajina Basta) supplied the huge energy

³⁰⁰ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica (1987-1992)*, pp.15-17. Interview: Ibisevic 24/05/1998.

³⁰¹ Masic claims, for instance, that Serb officials in Bratunac only invested money in roads that connected Serb villages (for instance around Kravica). He also claims that some of these roads were built mainly for military reasons, with the assistance of ‘reliable’ construction companies from Bratunac and Serbia (Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, p.14).

³⁰² The mines accounted for 2.10% of the world’s bauxite production. Production started in 1959, even though the firm was not established until 1962. In 1969, it became part of the ‘Energoinvest’ company based in Sarajevo. In 1981, it opened a new mine in Podravanje in the territory of the Srebrenica municipality (See Dukic et al. *Dvadeset pet godina rada*). In 1990, the firm became a stock-trade company, selling shares to its workers. This was the result of economic reforms introduced by Yugoslav prime-minister, Ante Markovic. At the same time, the firm started to diversify its economic activities, as mining was not a viable long-term option due to limited local bauxite reserves. Interview: Dukic 14/06/2000; Andjelic, ‘Poplasen je bio spreman’.

resources needed to process bauxite. In short, the mines played an enormous role in raising the living standard of the population. This was especially true in Milici where large sums of money were invested in housing, health care, and cultural and sports activities. The mines turned Milici, like Srebrenica, into a booming town, an oasis of prosperity in an otherwise fairly underdeveloped region.

Because of this, tensions arose when Serb leaders in Milici started to discuss the option of separating from Vlasenica and creating their own municipality. That move would entail a return to the situation before 1964, when Milici was included in the municipality of Vlasenica.³⁰³ Muslims from Vlasenica accused Serb leaders of selfish attempts to keep the revenues of the mines in the Milici Township. "While the inhabitants of Milici have turned their settlement into a mini Switzerland, the town of Vlasenica has 2,000 unemployed", said critics in Vlasenica. The greatest target of criticism was Rajko Dukic, the director of the bauxite mine. Although immensely popular among his Serb workers, he was despised by many Muslims, who felt they had no equal share in the wealth and prosperity created by the mine. Most people in Milici saw these attacks on Dukic, a native of their town, as an attack on the community at large. Muslim officials in the municipal committee of Vlasenica drew comparisons with the *Agrokomerc* scandal. They compared Dukic with Fikret Abdic, the Muslim politician who had brought prosperity to the town of Velika Kladusa by means of financial speculation and malversations.³⁰⁴ An article published in *Nasi Dani* (February 1989) repeated these allegations. According to that article, Dukic was responsible for malversations, fraud, and shady investments, and also guilty of nationalist offences. The journalist who wrote the article suggested that the wealth he had accumulated for himself and his community had been acquired illegally.³⁰⁵

Similar conflicts occurred between Dukic and Muslim communist officials from the municipality of Srebrenica. They wanted a clearer say and a larger share of the revenues of the Podravanje mine, which though located on within the Srebrenica municipality, was run by Boksit Milici. The conflicts regarding the Podravanje mine seem to have existed from the outset, i.e. from the early 1980s. It was then that mining authorities authorized the company's commercial use of the bauxite reserves within the municipality of Srebrenica. Their lack of any formal say in matters relating to the mine located on 'their' territory made Srebenican authorities feel that their municipality's interests were neglected. Increasingly, these problems acquired an ethnic dimension. This trend was welcomed by people like Dukic, who used it to divert public attention from their dubious economic activities. Local Muslim politicians, such as Salih Sehomeric, mayor of Srebrenica, began openly describing Milici as a Serb nationalist stronghold. Serbs, in turn, expressed fear that Muslim politicians from Vlasenica and Srebrenica were keen to seize control over 'their' firm.³⁰⁶ According to an article in the Belgrade nationalist bi-weekly *Duga*, Muslims had already successfully taken over the 'sumarstvo' forestry company. All Serb managers had been dismissed. The crucial element contributing to these rising ethnic tensions was the fact that Vlasenica's Serb majority had dwindled into a minority, as explained earlier. During the 1970s, Muslims became numerically predominant in that municipality, and Serbs

³⁰³ Interview: Dukic 14/06/2000; Vukovic and Barjaktarevic, 'Istoèna Bosna'. These Serb aspirations were part of a wider trend. Even in Kosovo, Serbs were trying to carve new 'serb' entities out of Muslim-dominated municipalities in order to secure control over important natural resources. See Roux, *Les Albanais en Yougoslavie*; Hardten, 'Administrative units'. One informant claims that Rajko Dukic offered Muslim villages around Milici schools and even a mosque in return for supporting the creation of the new municipality of Milici. Interview: Hasan Nuhanovic 16/06/1998. On 28 March 1992, on the eve of the outbreak of war, Milici proclaimed itself a separate Serb municipality, independent from 'mixed' Vlasenica (Stamenkovic 'Opet ce se Dukic pitati').

³⁰⁴ Meier, *Yugoslavia*, pp.41-2.

³⁰⁵ See Palameta, 'Dukic - jedan i jedini'. See also the polemics that followed between Dukic and various officials from the Milici mines, as well as between him and Palameta, a journalist, in *Nasi dani*, 17/02/1989 (pp.42-44) and 03/03/1989 (pp.37-38). In 1990 and 1991, accusations of fraud and malversations were also made by various Serb employees, whom Dukic then tried to fire (see B.S. 'Rajko se sveti!'). Dukic later became one of the leading members of the SDS in Bosnia.

³⁰⁶ The bitter conflicts between Sehomeric and Dukic over the Podravanje mines is mentioned as one of the reasons why the former was murdered at the start of the war. Conversation with Boban Vasic 05/05/2001. Another former Muslim director of a Srebenican firm confirmed that there were constant clashes with Rajko Dukic about plans for regional economic development. Interview: Sefkija Hadziarapovic 22/05/1998.

feared this would also lead to Muslim political supremacy. This fear of Muslim domination, in Vlasenica and in Bosnia as a whole, was reinforced in the Belgrade press. Journalists even wrote that Serbs could no longer buy pork in the communal butcheries of Vlasenica.³⁰⁷

In Serbia, nationalist hysteria and anti-Muslim feeling reached a climax during the spring of 1989, when Milosevic's campaign to abolish Kosovo's autonomy went into full swing. The apotheosis of his campaign was the celebration of the six-hundredth anniversary of the Kosovo Battle on 28 June in Gazi Mestan near Prishtina. Milosevic – in tune with his new role as Serbia's modern-day saviour – was flown into the ceremony by helicopter, literally descending from Heaven. His portrait was plastered on thousands of buses, next to images of other Serb heroes from the past. Hundreds of thousands of Serbs, from Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia, as well as from abroad, gathered on the battle site. A number of Serbs from Srebrenica, Bratunac, and Vlasenica also attended the celebrations, and the story goes that one Serb, *vojvoda* from Vlasenica, even went to the celebrations at Gazi Mestan by horse.³⁰⁸ The remains of Serbian army leader, national martyr and saint, Tsar Lazar, were transported to the monastery of Gračаница, near Prishtina, after having toured churches and monasteries in Serbia and eastern Bosnia. The tour, organised by the Serbian Orthodox Church, had started one year before in order to underscore Serbian claims to Kosovo and eastern Bosnia. Lazar's martyrdom also served as a reminder of centuries of suffering among the Serb people. When Lazar's remains entered the diocese of Sabac-Valjevo (western Serbia, near the Drina river), the bishop wrote: "From the times of prince Lazar and Kosovo, Serbs have built Heavenly Serbia, which nowadays has grown into the largest heavenly state. If we only put together all the innocent victims of the last war, millions and millions of Serbian men and women, children and the weak, those killed and tortured in the most appalling pain or thrown into caves by Ustase criminals, then we can comprehend how large the Serbian empire in heaven is".³⁰⁹

For the Serbs, the celebrations marked Milosevic's victory in bringing Kosovo under his control and 'uniting' Serbia; they also showed that the defeat at the Kosovo battlefield six centuries earlier had finally been avenged. Serbia was reborn and Milosevic had a clear message for the other Yugoslav nations: "Six centuries after the battle of Kosovo Polje, we are, once again, embroiled in battles and quarrels. These are not armed battles, but the latter cannot be ruled out yet". As Sudetic writes, this was the moment when Milosevic decided to "drive a ceremonial stake into the heart of Brotherhood and Unity".³¹⁰ Obviously, in Bosnia, the celebrations were seen as a blatant provocation to Yugoslavia's Muslim population, a provocation addressed not only to Albanians, but also to Bosnia's Slavic Muslims. For the first time, Muslims in Bosnia started to show open solidarity with the Albanians. Within the ranks of the Islamic Community, the idea grew that Muslim groups all over Yugoslavia should form a common front against the Serbian Orthodox Christian threat.³¹¹

Milosevic's campaign did not stop at the borders of his new 'united' Serbia, as many politicians in Croatia and Slovenia had hoped. Since he had managed to 'solve' the Kosovo problem, he had a free hand to intensify his assault on Bosnia, which had begun a year before with an anti-Muslim media campaign similar to the campaign against the Kosovo Albanians. During the summer of 1989, Milosevic began in earnest to meddle in Bosnian affairs. This was done by intensifying activity on the part of pro-Milosevic politicians in Bosnia. Even as early as May, Mirko Ostojic, a high Belgrade official (and former partisan from Sekovici who had climbed to the ranks of ambassador in China), started to tour eastern Bosnia. His purpose was to rally public support for Milosevic's policy in Kosovo. On 26 May 1989, Ostojic made an unannounced visit to Srebrenica, where local Communist 'activists' organised a small meeting in the *Culture House*. All municipal officials who attended the meeting were very critical of Ostojic's views and Milosevic's policies in Serbia. They included: Salih Sehomerovic 'Tale' (mayor), Nedžad Selmanagic (municipal secretary for economic affairs), Adib Džozic (president

³⁰⁷ See, for instance, Vukovic and Barjaktarovic, 'Istočna Bosna'.

³⁰⁸ Oric, *Srebrenica svjedoči i optužuje*, p.62.

³⁰⁹ Quoted in Radic 'Crkva i 'srpsko pitanje', p.278.

³¹⁰ Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, p.78.

³¹¹ Bougarel, *Islam et politique*, p.157.

of the municipal Socialist League of the Working People), and Miloje Simic (president of the League of Communists of Srebrenica). Later, they complained that Ostojic had made notes of their names and personal details, as if the reason for his mission, the aim and status of which remained nebulous, had been to gather intelligence for Serbia's secret police.³¹²

During the summer of 1989, rumours started to circulate among Srebrenica's Muslim population that an armed group of so-called Chetniks was conducting military exercises in the hills above the town. As the story went, all respectable local Serbs had joined this organisation, and its leader was Goran Zekic (judge at the district court of Srebrenica).³¹³ Other names mentioned in the press reports were Bosko Milovanovic (director of the Culture House), police officer, Milisav Gavric, Miodrag Jokic 'Zmigo', and Delivoje Sorak. And indeed, some of these individuals did actually become local leaders of the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS) in 1990. According to Muslim sources, some peasants spotted Serbs hunting in the forests around Srebrenica, dressed up in uniforms and singing Chetnik songs. They were alleged to have received arms and uniforms from Belgrade. These were said to have transported to them in vans of the Serbian newspaper, *Politika*, where they were hidden among the early morning newspaper deliveries to Srebrenica.³¹⁴ In response to these rumours, local Muslim thugs started to show their muscles as well. In a café in the village of Glogova, four Muslims announced the formation of a group of Ustashe, and called on local Muslims to join. They were arrested, but released, as they had done this in a state of drunkenness.³¹⁵ The local Srebrenican radio station tried to quieten the situation.³¹⁶

During the autumn of 1989, just two months after the Kosovo celebrations, the Serbian media started talking about the 'ethnic cleansing' of Serbs from eastern Bosnia, particularly in the Bratunac and Srebrenica area. The whole issue became hot news when 'confidential' documents of the State Security of Serbia (SDB), containing information about the alleged expulsion of Serbs from eastern Bosnia, were leaked to the press.³¹⁷ The documents claimed that considerable numbers of Serbs from the Bratunac and Srebrenica area had immigrated to Serbia due to Muslim pressure. It was said that most local businesses and municipal offices were controlled by Muslim 'nationalists' and 'fundamentalists', who favoured their own people at the expense of the Serbs. It was claimed that Serb villages along the Drina still had no roads or telephone connections, while Muslim villages in the much more isolated mountain areas had much better facilities.

The documents also stated that political and economic life in Srebrenica and Bratunac was dominated by a number of old Muslim bey families, who had joined the Ustashe movement during World War Two and now had close ties to the Islamic community. All of them were said to collaborate in the Islamicisation of the region, by building mosques and other religious facilities, with an ultimate view to cleansing the area of its Serb population. They were said to have expressed strong anti-Serbian views and to have supported Albanian separatism. Among the names mentioned in the documents was Ahmed Smajlovic, a well-known Muslim theologian and high official of the Islamic community, who originally came from a village near Skelani. He was said to be the most prominent 'fundamentalist' in

³¹² Milanovic and Loza, 'Nas niko nije pitao'; Ibisevic, 'Ostojic je i mene ispitivao'; Ibisevic, *Srebrenica (1987-1992)*, pp.24-26. S.A. 'Mirkove bosanske turneje'.

³¹³ See Nesic, 'O čemu se telalilo'; Malisic, 'Masovni pojedinačni slučaji'.

³¹⁴ Masic, *Srebrenica*, p.22; Ibisevic, *Srebrenica (1987-1992)*, p.35.

³¹⁵ Reljic, 'Nasi reporteri'.

³¹⁶ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica (1987-1992)*, p.35.

³¹⁷ Excerpts of these documents were first published in the Croatian weekly, *Danas* (Mijovic, 'strogo kontrolirana republika'). During a meeting of the Yugoslav Presidency, Serbian representative, Borisav Jovic, waved these documents in order to pressure Bosnian representative, Bogic Bogicevic, into supporting Milosevic. Bogicevic, who was extremely critical of Milosevic's policies, took copies of them to Bosnia where he gave them to journalists. The full texts of the reports were published in the Bosnian weekly *AS* (Anonymous, 'sta su agenti trazili', Malenica 'sve je to suludo!'). See also, Malenica 'Opet bih isto rekao'; Ibisevic, *Srebrenica (1987-1992)*, p.28; M.L., 'sDB otvara krug; Milanovic and Loza, 'Nas niko nije pitao'.

the region. The SDB documents, however, failed to mention that he had died a year earlier.³¹⁸ The press also targeted Nedžad Selmanagic, the municipal secretary for economic affairs, and Sabit Begic, the director of the hospital (and later vice-president of the Social-Democrat Party). Selmanagic had never been a member of the League of Communists, and was known to be a regular visitor at the mosque. This made him an easy target. Muslim schoolteachers in Srebrenica and Bratunac were also mentioned as fundamentalist activists.³¹⁹ Several local Serb communist officials were criticised as well (particularly the president of the local branch of the League of Communists of Srebrenica, Miloje Simic) for opposing Milosevic's policies and attacking Serbian nationalism.³²⁰

After these reports were published, the Communist authorities of Bratunac and Srebrenica denied that Serb emigration was the result of Muslim pressure. They claimed socio-economic factors to be the main cause. Even some Serb officials, including Pavle 'Bato' Beatovic, Mayor of Bratunac, and Miloje Simic, president of the local branch of the League of Communists of Srebrenica, supported this point of view.³²¹ All of them denied that Muslim fundamentalism was to blame for the exodus of the Serbs. All the same, ethnic tensions were undeniably on the rise by this point and the nationalist press in Serbia was clearly adding fuel to the fire. This trend manifested itself in a dramatic increase in convictions for verbal offences, especially of Muslims, who had dared to criticise Milosevic and had taken a stand against Serbian nationalism. Among those sentenced was Malik Meholic, who was later to become the SDA leader and mayor of Srebrenica. In his case, the offence was having cursed Slobodan Milosevic in a café in the village of Bjelovac in July 1989.³²² Other local Muslims spent several weeks in Serbian prisons after making similar remarks about Milosevic in Serbia itself.³²³ Mounting ethnic tensions were also visible in the increasing number of café fights and other incidents. In December 1989, a group of local Muslims wrote a petition, protesting against nationalist provocations, including those by Orthodox priest, Todor Tomic and future SDS activist, Delivoje Sorak. Some Muslims were said to have been beaten up by Serb nationalists. The Communist authorities were criticised for doing too little to curb the rise of such incidents.³²⁴

The Serb village of Crvica (a few kilometres east of Skelani) played a particularly prominent role in Serbian press reports.³²⁵ The inhabitants complained to journalists that their village was completely isolated, that no roads had been built, and that the municipal authorities had refused to invest money in improving facilities and living conditions. They had already voiced their protest in December 1983, when the leaders of the local commune of Crvica called on the Bosnian presidency to do something

³¹⁸ Between 1975 and 1985, Smajlovic was President of the Bosnian branch of the Islamic Community. He participated in the purges against 'fundamentalists' in 1979, taking control over the main Islamic newspaper, *Preporod*. He also became editor-in-chief of *Islamska misao*, the mouthpiece of the Bosnian branch of the Islamic community. In 1985, he himself came under attack, after the publication of an article in *Preporod* (Smajlovic, 'Podvale umjesto zahvale'). He was removed from his position, and became a professor at the Islamic theological faculty in Sarajevo. Smajlovic had been a student at the well-known Al-Azhar university in Egypt, where he became the first Yugoslav Muslim to earn a doctorate. Because of his good connections in Egypt, where he had lived for twelve years, he played an important role during Tito's visits to Egypt. These visits took place at a time when Yugoslavia and Egypt were the two leading members of the Conference of Non-aligned States. He was a prolific author, publishing numerous articles on Islamic theology and the Muslim community in Bosnia and Yugoslavia. (See, for instance, Smajlovic 'Muslims in Yugoslavia'). He died in August 1988. (See the special issue of *Islamska misao*, 10(116), August 1988, which provides biographic data and a complete bibliography).

³¹⁹ Masic, *Srebrenica*, pp.21-2.

³²⁰ See also Ibisevic, *Srebrenica (1987-1992)*, p.27; Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, pp.12-13.

³²¹ Ignja, 'srebrenica - Bratunac'; Milanovic and Loza, 'Nas niko nije pitao', p.18. Muslim authors have rightly - or wrongly - 'unmasked' these Communist officials as Serb nationalists. For example, according to Masic, Pavle 'Bato' Beatovic was merely a crypto-nationalist who made every effort to ensure that Serbs would not lose their grip on power. He is said to have done this by nurturing a public image of himself as a friend of the Muslims (Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, pp.19-20).

³²² Another was Ejub Golic, from Glogova, who became one of the most prominent commanders in the Srebrenica enclave during the war. For the names of those convicted, see Nesic, 'O čemu se telalilo'.

³²³ Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, p.15.

³²⁴ Cosovic 'Prijetnje s udarcima'.

³²⁵ See, for instance, Reljic 'Nasi reporteri'; Caric, 'Akcija "Muslimanskog" socijalizma'; Nesic, 'O čemu se telalilo'.

about the road between Bratunac and Skelani.³²⁶ In August 1989, a group of World War Two veterans from the area re-addressed these matters in a letter of protest to the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Bosnia. "Serbian villages are easily recognisable: they have no telephones, no roads, no factories, nothing". They claimed that, since the war, hardly anything had been done for these villages, and that the old road between Bratunac and Skelani in particular, which had been built by the Austrians, was still in deplorable condition. It was said that Serbs were forced in this way to send their children to Serbia to be educated or to find jobs. They held the local authorities of Srebrenica responsible for this, and also accused them of doing nothing against the pressures of Muslim 'nationalists' and 'fundamentalists'.³²⁷

They warned against a Serb exodus due to what they called a deliberate policy of demoralisation by Muslim authorities. Hundreds of Serbs were said to have already immigrated to Serbia due to Muslim pressure.³²⁸ In one press report, published in *Duga*, Miodrag Jokic, a local Serb from Srebrenica, (who later proved to be one of the worst Serb extremists in town), claimed that because of this, he was leaving Srebrenica and selling all his property. He claimed that the town was controlled by a few Muslim families, who had the power to give their friends anything they wanted (a strip of land, a job, a scholarship, or credits).³²⁹ Many other stories of anti-Serb harassment appeared in Serbian newspapers. Most of these presented the truth in a very distorting light. The Muslim police were accused of entering Serb homes to demand the removal of Milosevic's portrait from the walls, and of issuing fines to people for having small photos of Milosevic in their cars. Windows of houses, shops and cars featuring photos of Slobodan Milosevic or Cyrillic inscriptions were said to be smashed. The reports claimed that Serbs could not buy pork in Srebrenican butcher shops and that music was banned in the *gradska kafana* (the town café) during Ramazan.³³⁰ They also alleged that verbal offences against Serbs and President Milosevic were commonplace, and that Muslim cafes refused entry to Serb customers. Muslim supporters of the FC Guber football club were reported to have shouted such anti-Serbian slogans as, 'This is Turkey,' especially during football games against teams from Serbia or Montenegro. The press also ran stories on Muslims raping Serb girls and attacking Serbian Orthodox priests.³³¹ Most of the accusations in the press grossly misrepresented the facts.

The contents and timing of these press reports show a clear parallel with Kosovo. During the late 1980s, such stories had been commonplace in Kosovo in the Serbian nationalist press. Eastern Bosnia was now presented as a second Kosovo, 'a special copy of Kosovo'. One press report drew a picture of a slow, but undeniable, process of 'Muslimification' in Srebrenica. According to the journalist, the handrails of the stairs in the municipal building were as green as the seats of the Culture

³²⁶ See also: *Srebreničke novine*, 7(60), 1984, p.3.

³²⁷ See also Ibisevic, *Srebrenica (1987-1992)*, pp.26-27. Some articles refer to non-ethnic and economic reasons for the lack of development in villages along the Drina. Before the onset of the war, rumours persisted that a new dam and hydroelectric power station was being planned here. As a result, banks refused to issue loans for the development of this region, as they expected the area to be flooded at some point in the future (Drazic 'srbin Vidoje Radovic'; Elez, 'Cele-kula na Drni').

³²⁸ One report cites a figure of two thousand Serbs who immigrated to Serbia during the 1980s (M.L., 'sDB otvara krug'). The last three censuses do indeed show a steady decline of the Serb population. The village of Crvica counted 992 inhabitants in 1971, 717 in 1981, and only 473 in 1991. In the municipality of Srebrenica as a whole, the number of Serbs dropped from 10,294 in 1981 to 8,315 in 1991 (*Stanovništvo Bosne i Hercegovine. Narodnosni sastav po naseljima*. Zagreb: Državni zavod za statistiku, 1995, pp.226-27).

³²⁹ Malisic, 'Masovni pojedinačni slučajeve'.

³³⁰ The press reports do not mention that Miloje Simic, a Serb, was the director of the UPI firm that owned the *gradska kafana*. Interview: Sefkija Hadziarapovic 22/05/1998; conversation: Boban and Bedrija Vasic 14/12/2001.

³³¹ The priest who was allegedly attacked by Muslims was Mitar Krsmanovic in Fakovici. Muslim author, Nijaz Masic, writes that Krsmanovic provoked a conflict in a local café to polarise his village. He then organised a protest meeting against 'Bosniacs who beat up Orthodox priests'. He was criticised for this by Srbislav ('Bato') Blazic, the Serbian Orthodox priest for Bratunac. Blazic told him that what he was doing was wrong and that his place was not in the café (Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, pp.15-16). Later, Bratunac's priest seems to have come into conflict with other Serb nationalists as well, as implied by Miroslav Deronjic, the SDS president for Bratunac, in an interview with local newspaper, *Nasa Rijec* (Anonymous, 'Neka mi neko od vas pokaze').

House (*Dom Kulture*), and local Muslims had just built a new mosque facing the Culture House. Local townspeople reacted with dismay to these reports, which infused them with nationalist fervour from the outside by describing incidents completely out of context, and creating an atmosphere of insecurity and suspicion. In the villages, these tendencies were even more divisive. Serbs were well advised not show up at any Muslim village celebrations, as that could cause problems. Slogans from a distant past re-emerged, and it became commonplace to brand members of the opposite group as 'Chetniks' and 'Ustashe'.

Moderate opinions were more or less marginalized, or, if represented in the press reports, were rendered as naive, unrealistic, or even insincere, voices. This happened, for instance, with Salih Sehomerovic, the Mayor of Srebrenica, who was presented as being out of touch with reality. He was quoted as saying that ethnic relations in Srebrenica were among the best in Bosnia; the fact that Radio Srebrenica could not reach the villages was to blame for the deterioration of ethnic relations there.³³² In another interview, Sehomerovic showed his goodwill towards Serbs, by stating, "There is no better Serb among the Muslims than me!".³³³ He did his utmost to convince the public that there was no anti-Serbian feeling in Srebrenica. He told journalists that Muslims in Srebrenica read Serbian newspapers, watched Serbian TV, and supported Serbian football clubs.³³⁴ Another communist official, Adib Djozic, also stressed that relations in Srebrenica were good: local Serbs had contributed to the building of the new mosque, while the Muslim municipal authorities had assisted with the restoration of a Serbian Orthodox church in the village of Medja.³³⁵ Others, such as the Muslim president of the local commune of Fakovici, told the press that there was no pressure on Serbs to leave and that relations had always been good, even during World War Two.³³⁶

Another well-known local communist official and 'Yugoslav', Mustafa Djozic 'Egber' ('the Mighty') from Bratunac, told one journalist stories of a past that seemed to have become obsolete. Many of his family members had married non-Muslims. Moreover, his father, a Muslim clergyman and local politician in the first decades of the twentieth century, had been good friends with the Serbian Orthodox priest. On major religious Serb and Muslim holidays, they paid mutual visits, and welcomed one another as the most honourable guests. He also pointed out that Serbs and Muslims had protected each other during World War Two, and that consequently, relations had been always good after the war. He admitted, however, that he himself had made enemies in Bratunac when, after the war, as director of the catastro of Bratunac, he had signed many decisions to usurp and collectivise private land. People, even some of his relatives, were still angry with him and did not want to talk to him. In the same press article, however, a local Serb policeman accused Djozic of being a Muslim nationalist, despite his communist and Yugoslav credentials. He claimed that Djozic was helping Muslim friends and family and refusing Serb requests for allotments of land.³³⁷

These press reports caused unrest in Bosnia as well as in Serbia. In Srebrenica, communist officials protested against the released SDB documents and the fact that no local official was ever contacted to verify the allegations made there.³³⁸ Local Serb officials, such as Miloje Simic and Boban Vasic, also denounced the contents of the documents.³³⁹ Boban Vasic showed that Serb directors of firms controlled most of the workforce in the municipality (5,000 out of a total 7,000). With this

³³² Malisic, 'Masovni pojedinaèni sluèajevi'.

³³³ Elez, 'Cele-kula na Drni'.

³³⁴ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica (1987-1992)*, p.33. Salih Sehomerovic was arrested and executed at the bridge over the Drina near Bratunac at the beginning of the war (Masic, *Srebrenica*, p.16).

³³⁵ Malisic, 'Masovni pojedinaèni sluèajevi'.

³³⁶ Ignja, 'srebrenica - Bratunac'.

³³⁷ Drazic 'srbin Vidoje Radovic'.

³³⁸ Even the head of the local police, Savo Aleksic (a Serb), was not informed about these investigations of the Serbian SDB. See: Milanovic and Loza, 'Nas niko nije pitao', p.16.

³³⁹ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica (1987-1992)*, p.35. See, for instance, Malenica, 'Narod'.

knowledge, it was difficult to sustain that the Serbs were under Muslim threat in Srebrenica.³⁴⁰ In the Bosnian media, there was much talk about 'serbian agents infiltrating Bosnia'.³⁴¹ One of the fiercest critics of Serbian propaganda was the Muslim journalist, Salih Brkic, who pointed out, among other things, that Serbs were over-represented in Srebrenica's police force (even the Police Chief was a Serb). He produced a TV programme titled 'Black on White' in which he took the edge off most Serbian allegations.³⁴² The Bosnian authorities accused the Serbian SDB and Slobodan Milosevic of trying to destabilise Bosnia. They drew comparisons with the situation on the eve of World War One, when the Serbian state security was active on Bosnian territory. Serbia was accused of interference in Bosnian affairs and of 'Apis' methods.³⁴³ Similar comparisons to World War One were drawn on the other side of the Drina. Serbian authorities spoke of an anti-Serbian campaign in Bosnia comparable to that launched by Austria at the onset of World War One.³⁴⁴

Clearly, political temperatures were running high at the local level. Moderate people, such as Boban Vasic, received anonymous threats by phone.³⁴⁵ In their efforts to rein in these growing tensions, the authorities organised public meetings at Srebrenica's Culture House, where Serbs and Muslims exchanged bitter words.³⁴⁶ In his memoirs, Ibisevic describes one such meeting in November 1989, which was attended by a large number of Muslims and a minority of Serbs. Among those present were Serbs from villages near Skelani, as well as several high Communist officials from Sarajevo: Muhamed Besic, the republican Minister of Interior, and Edina Residovic, president of the Socialist League of the Working People of Bosnia. During the meeting, Ibisevic writes, the Muslim president of the local Association of War Veterans was accused by a Serb of having been an Ustashe during the war and of having an 'U' (the Ustase symbol) tattooed under his armpit. While some Muslims, boiling with rage, geared up for a fight, the official accused jumped on the stage, took off his clothes and asked people to judge for themselves. Afterwards, he had to be taken to hospital as the stress of the incident had given him a heart attack.³⁴⁷

Miodrag Jokic, a Serb hardliner, also spoke at this meeting.³⁴⁸ He claimed that the Serbs were under-represented in cadre positions, and that the municipality of Srebrenica was run like some sort of feudal estate by one Muslim family. Hamed 'sado' Salihovic, the Muslim president of the local commune of Potočari, warned those present that statements such as these were merely the harbinger of greater Serbian aspirations. His assessment went too far for most urban Muslims, who hissed at him. Yet Muslims from the villages endorsed his point. After the meeting, various municipal officials and the guests from Sarajevo went to Crvica, where they were threatened and humiliated by these 'imperilled' Serbs, as Ibisevic put it. The police had to intervene to protect certain members of the delegation from the anger of the Serb mob. After these incidents, Miloje Simic became a *persona non grata* in Serb villages in the municipality, and received death threats. As he openly criticised the wave of nationalist

³⁴⁰ Interview: Boban Vasic 06/07/1998. Boban Vasic was the son of Veljko Vasic, a local Partisan who became a Communist official and well-respected figure in Srebrenica after the war. He died only a few years before Communist rule collapsed. During World War Two, he lost most of his family members in the Ustashe raid on Srebrenica in June 1943. Interview: Boban Vasic 15/07/1998. During the Bosnian war, Boban Vasic's mother, Dragica, remained in the Srebrenica enclave together with the Muslim population. She is one of the main characters in Sudetic's book. See, for instance, Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, pp.137-38.

³⁴¹ See, for instance, Milanovic and Loza, 'Nas niko nije pitao', pp.16-17; Anonymous, 'sta su agenti'.

³⁴² Conversation with Salih Brkic 02/02/1998, 10/11/1998.

³⁴³ The SDB of Serbia claims to have based its reports on interviews held in Serbia, i.e. Bajina Basta and other locations, where Serbs from the municipalities of Bratunac and Srebrenica had settled.

³⁴⁴ Nikolic, 'strogo poverljiva rezija'.

³⁴⁵ Interview: Boban Vasic 06/07/1998.

³⁴⁶ See, for instance, Nesic, 'O èemu se telalilo'.

³⁴⁷ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica (1987-1992)*, pp.30-31.

³⁴⁸ Miodrag Jokic had been a salesman for the Feros company. Ibisevic writes that he was given early retirement because he was suspected of financial malversations. After that, "he had enough time to read the 'objective' Serbian press and look for Muslim fundamentalists in his community" (Ibisevic, *Srebrenica (1987-1992)*, p.32). Jokic publicly distanced himself from his own daughter who married a Muslim. Interview: Besim Ibisevic 24/05/1998.

propaganda from Serbia, he was regarded as a traitor, a Muslim vassal.³⁴⁹ In Bratunac, a similar large public meeting was organised in a cinema. Serb nationalists, including Miroslav Deronjic, claimed that Serbs were being expelled by Muslim fundamentalists. However, others countered these claims, saying that these were primarily cases of economic migration.³⁵⁰ During 1990, the attacks against so-called Muslim fundamentalists in Srebrenica and Bratunac continued, including by well-known Kravica notable, Jovan Nikolic, who was also president of the Socialist League of the Working People of Bratunac at the time. He released new 'confidential information' that fundamentalist intellectuals were active in Srebrenica's Health Centre (*Dom Zdravlje*) and in the 'Djuro Pucar Stari' secondary school in Bratunac. Although no names were mentioned, in cafes and on the street, everybody knew exactly whom he meant.³⁵¹

³⁴⁹ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica (1987-1992)*, pp.32-4.

³⁵⁰ Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, p.16.

³⁵¹ Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, pp.13, 19.

Chapter 5

The Nationalist Take-Over

“Six hundred years ago, we stopped the advance of Islam, defending Europe but also sacrificing in Kosovo our great and glorious state, which during the Middle Ages was one of the most advanced states in Europe. Today, we again defend Europe, both from Germany and from Islamic fundamentalism [...] One day Europe will be grateful to us because we stood up in the defence of Christian values and Christian culture.”

Bosnian Serb leader, Radovan Karadzic, in an interview with Pogledi, 12 November 1993, p.17-18.³⁵²

Election year 1990

The fall of Communism in Eastern Europe in 1989 also put an end to one-party rule in Yugoslavia. The country entered a period of political pluralisation. In January 1990, Yugoslavia's League of Communists (LCY) crumbled when the Slovenes and Croats walked out of the fourteenth extraordinary LCY congress. The rivalries between the various republican leaderships – particularly between the ‘centralists’ of Serbia and the ‘confederalists’ of Croatia and Slovenia – surfaced with a vengeance. Slovenia and Croatia favoured reforms, while the Serbian regime opposed party pluralism and the introduction of a market economy. The conflicts occurred after a long period of growing internal division within the LC. Republican party leaders were concerned primarily with protecting the economic interests of their own republics in times of economic crisis. By late 1987, they had started seeking allies *outside* Yugoslavia's League of Communists, but *within* their respective republics. In some republics, relations with the nationalist opposition improved and were often better than they were with sister branches of the League of Communists in other republics. Slobodan Milosevic was not the only one to find common ground with the nationalist intelligentsia. A very similar rapprochement occurred between Communist officials and nationalists in Croatia and Slovenia not much later. In multi-ethnic Bosnia, where such developments were potentially very dangerous and disruptive, the authorities tried to hang on to the old Yugoslav ideal of Brotherhood and Unity, frantically suppressing all forms of nationalism.³⁵³

After the LCY fell apart, however, the Bosnian leadership was forced to accept the inevitability of political liberalisation and democratisation. In March 1990, it agreed to the introduction of a multi-party system, even though it initially proscribed associations based on ethnic and religious affiliation. Many Bosnians, particularly in towns, supported the idea of prohibiting ethnic parties. According to a May 1990 opinion poll by the Zagreb weekly, *Danas*, a large majority of the inhabitants of Sarajevo, Banja Luka and Mostar favoured the ban and expressed support for the economic reforms of Yugoslavia's prime minister, Ante Markovic. The memories of ethnic warfare during World War Two probably played an important role in this.³⁵⁴ In Srebrenica, Muslim and Serb nationalists discussed the creation of a joint peasant party as a possible and viable option if ethno-nationalist parties were to be banned from political life.³⁵⁵ The idea was that a peasant party of that nature could put an end to Communist hegemony by uniting rural populations against those in urban areas. It was clear to them

³⁵² Simonjan, ‘Zapad ce nam biti zahvalan’, pp.17-18.

³⁵³ Goati, ‘Politički život Bosne’, pp.49-52.

³⁵⁴ *Danas*, 22/05/1990, pp.24-26; Goati, ‘Politički život Bosne’, pp.52-53; Bougarel, *Islam et politique*, p.181.

³⁵⁵ Conversation: Besim Ibisevic 17/08/1999.

that the rural masses were the key to power. After all, they formed the majority of the electorate in Srebrenica (as they did in most other Bosnian municipalities).

Despite the Communists' wish to keep such developments at bay, ethnic politics made soon headway after the Slovenian and Croatian elections in the spring of 1990. When the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina formally lifted the ban on ethno-national parties, Bosnian Muslims, Serbs, and Croats finally gained a free hand to establish such parties.³⁵⁶ Ethnic parties then began to dominate the political landscape, just as they had under the Austrians in the first decade of the twentieth century. As Bosnian political scientist, Suad Arnautovic, observes, these parties were characterised by a conspicuous lack of any political profile or programme, although they had unquestionably rightist and ethnically exclusivist tendencies. As one former Communist official in Srebrenica noted, these parties had no programme; all they were banners, slogans, and flag bearers.³⁵⁷ The Muslim *Stranka Demokratske Akcije* (Party of Democratic Action) was the first of these parties to emerge in Bosnia, in May 1990. Alija Izetbegovic, a retired lawyer and prominent former member of the Young Muslims, who had spent several years in prison for political activities, became its leader. At this stage, liberal and secularly minded 'Bosniac' intellectuals, such as Adil Zulfikarpasic, an émigré, and Muhamed Filipovic, also joined the SDA. Later during the election year, they left the party again because of the predominance of traditionalists and conservative clericalists in it. Zulfikarpasic's idea of a secular Bosniac party did not find broad support in the SDA's leadership. The latter favoured a religiously oriented 'Muslim' party that mobilised the rural masses through the Muslim village clerics.³⁵⁸ This traditionalist faction within the SDA centred around a group of Bosnian 'fundamentalists' and 'nationalists,' who were convicted during the 1983 trial, especially Alija Izetbegovic, Omer Behmen, Dzemailudin Latic, and Muhamed Èengic.³⁵⁹ As former political prisoners, they enjoyed a great deal of authority in the party's upper ranks, particularly in the SDA's Executive Board. Although few in number, they were able to control internal developments within the SDA at the expense of the liberals, such as Zulfikarpasic and Filipovic.

As he later told Milovan Djilas, Adil Zulfikarpasic abhorred the excessive use of nationalist symbols, religious banners, and bizarre populist slogans during SDA mass gatherings, such as those held in Novi Pazar (29 July), Foča (25 August), and Velika Kladusa (15 September 1990). These meetings reflect the efforts of SDA traditionalists to rally support from: the rural masses; urban inhabitants of peasant backgrounds, who had profited little, if at all, from modernisation; and the Muslim populations of marginalized regions, such as the Sandzak and eastern Bosnia. Undoubtedly, it is no coincidence that the first huge mass gatherings during the 1990 election campaign were held in these two peripheral and underdeveloped regions. Only after the SDA secured support from the most traditional segments of Bosnian society did they begin targeting Muslim communities in Bosnia's major

³⁵⁶ Bougarel, *Islam et politique*, p.177. Burg and Shoup, *The war in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, p.46.

³⁵⁷ Arnautovic, *Izbori*, p.40; Interview: Sefkija Hadzizarapovic 22/05/1998.

³⁵⁸ For these divisions within the SDA, see Zulfikarpasic, *The Bosniak*, particularly pp.135-145. See also Burg and Shoup, *The war in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, p.47, 68; Borogovac and Rustempasic, *The White Paper on Alija Izetbegovic*.

³⁵⁹ French political scientist, Xavier Bougarel, describes how this relatively small and peripheral group of pan-Islamists succeeded in taking control of the SDA, thus influencing the way Bosnian Muslim nationalism was defined. Their activities dated back to their student days in the 1930s. They came from well-educated, but socially disoriented and politically deprived families, who had been part of the Muslim elite before the establishment of Yugoslavia. They embraced the ideals of an Islamic revival and the establishment of a Muslim state, and opposed the ideas of modernism and communism that appealed to other Muslim youth from similar backgrounds (such as Zulfikarpasic). During the 1940s, they established an organization called *Mladi Muslimani* (Young Muslims). After the war, the communists suppressed this organisation. Many of its members received prison sentences, and some were even sentenced to death. Almost half of the Muslim intellectuals indicted during the 1983 trial in Sarajevo had been original members of this organisation. Bougarel describes in great detail the longstanding opposition between two currents in Bosnian Islam. These are the conservative, religiously oriented traditionalists (supported by the lower clergy and the ulema) and the liberal, secularly minded modernists (consisting of intellectuals and higher religious leaders, such as Dzemailudin Èausevic, leader of the Islamic community in Bosnia between 1913 and 1930.). (Bougarel, *Islam et politique*, see particularly pp.170-213).

urban centres with mass meetings such as that in Sarajevo on 6 October 1990. There, the SDA's popularity and success was much more limited.³⁶⁰

Zulfikarpasic left the SDA in October, just weeks before the elections because of its strong traditionalist and populist tendencies. He publicly denounced the conservative and traditionalist attitudes of leading figures in the SDA's Executive Board. Together with other SDA dissidents, he formed the *Muslimanska Bosnjačka Organizacija*, the Muslim Bosniac Organisation (MBO), which attracted only a small minority of urban intellectuals. The semi-literate Muslim masses all rallied behind Izetbegovic's SDA, which formed a coalition with Serb and Croat nationalists in a bid to put an end to Communist rule. Bougarel notes that the SDA propagated a religiously inspired brand of nationalism very similar to that of other (Serb and Croat) nationalist parties. While Islam served as the most important marker of Bosnian Muslim identity, and pan-Islamists ranked among the SDA's leaders, the party's objective at this stage was certainly not to impose an Islamic religious order. As Bougarel notes, the sweeping support for the SDA during the November 1990 elections cannot and should not be interpreted as pan-Islamist support contrary to the Serb nationalist presentation of it. Votes for the party stemmed primarily from feelings of nationalism and not Islamic zeal, focusing above all on supporting Bosnian Muslim identity.³⁶¹

After the SDA's establishment in May 1990, the Bosnian Serbs and Croats soon followed suit, creating new branches of already existing nationalist parties in Croatia. In July 1990, The Bosnian branch of the *Srpska Demokratska Stranka*, or Serb Democratic Party (SDS), held its inaugural meeting in Sarajevo. It met with full support from Milosevic and the Belgrade leadership. Its goal was to make the Serb regions of Croatia and Bosnia either part of a reduced Yugoslavia or to include them into a Greater Serbia. These two main options were formulated during the pan-Serbian congress that took place in Banja Luka in October of that year. The SDS was a religiously inspired party with strong ties to the Serbian Orthodox church. The main party leaders were Radovan Karadzic, a psychiatrist and poet, and Momčilo Krajisnik, a manager of the 'Energoinvest' mining company. Sudetic points out that Karadzic and Krajisnik were once partners in crime in the mid 1980s when they took out a loan from an agricultural development fund and used the money to build themselves houses in Pale. They were arrested for fraud and spent almost a year in prison before they were bailed out by Nikola Koljevic, a professor of English literature at Sarajevo university. These three men became the key figures in the SDS.³⁶² Finally, the *Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica* (HDZ), the Croatian Democratic Union, was the third main nationalist party created in Bosnia. It was established in September 1990 as an off-split of Tudjman's HDZ, but played no significant role in eastern Bosnia. Aside from the three main ethno-nationalist parties, a number of non-ethnic parties participated in the Bosnian elections. These were: the former Communists and Social Democrats, who formed one bloc (SK-SDP), and the Reformists (SRSJ), who were led by Yugoslavian prime minister, Ante Markovic. Both favoured civil society and the introduction of a market economy.

Barring the HDZ, most nationalist, as well as non-ethnic, parties were represented in the municipality of Srebrenica. In mid June 1990, a few weeks after the SDA's inaugural meeting, a group of Muslims gathered in Potočari to establish a local branch of the SDA.³⁶³ Among those present were Malik Meholic, his brother Hakija Meholic, and Ibran Mustafic. Malik Meholic was chosen as the

³⁶⁰ Bougarel, *Islam et politique*, pp.187 and 190.

³⁶¹ Bougarel, *Islam et politique*, pp.207-208.

³⁶² Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, p.83. Burg and Shoup, *The war in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, p.47. As one interlocutor has pointed out, before the SDS became a broad Bosnian Serb movement there were intensive contacts between Bosnian Serb politicians and the Democratic Party in Serbia, led by Dragoljub Micunovic and Zoran Djindjic. They wanted to establish a Bosnian Serb party that was democratic and moderate in approach. They were, however, overruled by Milosevic, who steered the SDS into a tough nationalist course. Interview: Boban Tomic 11/11/1999.

³⁶³ In Bratunac too, the first local SDA meeting took place in June 1990. Among the founders was Mustafa Mujkanovic, the imam of Bratunac who was brutally murdered by Serb paramilitaries at the beginning of the war. Dzemail Becirovic was the chairman of the SDA steering committee. SDA branches were soon established in most Muslim villages throughout the municipality (Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, pp.59-60).

president of a steering committee to establish a local branch of the SDA. Several weeks later, a number of other people entered the local steering committee. Among them was Besim Ibisevic, who later became Mayor of Srebrenica.³⁶⁴ At this stage, local SDA meetings were overseen by Ibrahim Džananović, a native of the town who worked at the Muslim theological faculty in Sarajevo and represented the SDA *centrala*.³⁶⁵

Initially, the SDA in Srebrenica was divided into two factions, replicating the higher-level divisions in the party. Locally, these differences crystallised into what were called the ‘urban’ and ‘village’ factions. The former was more liberal and moderate, while the latter was nationalist and anti-communist.³⁶⁶ This internal division first surfaced during the pre-election period, when Malik Mehuljic (the main representative of the urban faction) put a large number of townspeople on the local SDA election list. The main representatives of the village faction, Besim Ibisevic and Ibran Mustafic, strongly objected, pointing out that 85% of all potential SDA voters in the municipality were Muslim peasants living in villages. As a compromise, Ibisevic was placed second on the list, while Ibran Mustafic became the SDA’s candidate for the Bosnian Parliament’s Council of Municipalities. Sadik Begic (a doctor) was appointed the SDA’s candidate for the Bosnian Parliament’s Council of Citizens.³⁶⁷

Similar – though less pronounced – divisions seem to have existed between members of the local SDS branch. Goran Zekic, a Srebrenican district court judge, who was a moderate and well respected by the town’s Serbs and Muslims alike, was made head of the party. At the same time, two extremists, Miodrag Jokic, a retired salesman from Srebrenica, and Milenko Ćanic, a former teacher from Skelani, were placed next on the electoral list.³⁶⁸ As with the SDA, support for the SDS generally came from village populations. Most urban Serbs rallied behind the former Communists. The main party in urban areas was the SDP, whose president, Miloje Simic, was a former Communist official. Having taken a strong position against Milosevic in 1989, he was quite popular among Muslims, though many Serbs regarded him as a traitor. The SDP’s main slogan was ‘We will live together’ (Zivcemo zajedno). It was clearly an urban list, consisting of ‘pale intellectuals’ and ‘eternal directors’ as Ibisevic writes in his memoirs. Their programme was tailored to Srebrenica’s urban community, and not to the villages, where the SDP had a hard time conveying its message.³⁶⁹

The local branch of the Reformist Party in Srebrenica was led by Saban Mehmedovic, a Muslim married to a Serb woman from Serbia. As Ibisevic writes, his wife wished to join the SDA, but was obstructed by the local steering committee, which felt they could never defend the move to their Muslim constituency. The Reformists worked more or less in conjunction with the SDA, and sought support among urban voters at the expense of the former communists. Like the SDP, the Reformists

³⁶⁴ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.41-42. Throughout this chapter and the next, I drew extensively on Ibisevic’s book *Srebrenica*, which is an invaluable source of information on the period immediately preceding the war. It was written from the perspective of a local Muslim politician and contains a wealth of inside information unparalleled in any other work. The book should be read as Ibisevic’s political testimony. For that same reason, however, it is necessarily biased (despite the author’s insistence that it is the work of a trained historian). What makes the book interesting is that Ibisevic, an SDA hardliner, tries to justify himself in the light of the accusations of ‘cowardice’ launched against him by other Muslims, who lived through the siege of the Srebrenica enclave. In their view, Ibisevic’s biggest mistake was to ‘run away’ at the very time the town and its Muslim population needed him most, while others took up arms. Although steeped at times in nationalist rhetoric, the book discloses, often down to the minutest detail, the rivalries, the factionalism and the alliances that existed between and among local politicians, particularly within the Muslim camp. It also offers insight into the divisions between rural and urban populations. Aside from its very critical view of people, such as Oric and Muslim politicians, who became crucial figures during the war, the book is also astonishingly frank at times in describing political intrigues and the (illegal) methods that nationalist politicians, such as Ibisevic himself, used to achieve their goals.

³⁶⁵ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, p.45.

³⁶⁶ Interview: Sefkija Hadžiarapović 22/05/1998. Similar divisions within the SDA existed, for instance, in Zvornik (Oric, *Srebrenica*, p.79).

³⁶⁷ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, p.76

³⁶⁸ Conversation: Zdravko Novčić, 09/06/1998; Boban Vasić 06/07/1998; Boban Tomić 11/11/1999, Marinko Sekulić 10/11/1998.

³⁶⁹ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.72-3. Interview: Sefkija Hadžiarapović 22/05/1998.

did not campaign in the villages. Finally, there was the Democratic Socialist Alliance (DSS), a small, non-ethnic party led by Bosko Milovanovic, the Serb director of the local Culture House. The party's vice-president was Adib Djozic, a Muslim and former communist who had been once president of the local branch of Srebrenica's Socialist League of the Working People (SSRN). Djozic was placed first on the list in order to draw as many Muslim voters as possible to the party. Ibisevic writes that activists of these leftist and non-ethnic parties were unable to campaign, or even to enter, villages. Muslim villages rallied behind the SDA en masse, while all Serb villages sided with the SDS. The town of Srebrenica supported the non-ethnic parties SDP, SRSJ and DSS.³⁷⁰

August 1990 witnessed the first series of election meetings. On 5 August 1990, a meeting took place in the Serb stronghold of Milici. It was attended by Serbs from Kravica, who travelled there in a convoy of cars and buses, decorated with Serb flags and other national symbols. "This will open their eyes so they will not see green colours only" was the caption local Serb nationalists placed under this still fairly unusual and provocative scene.³⁷¹ The SDA also started to prepare for election campaign meetings. Ibisevic's office at the museum in Srebrenica's Culture House became the SDA's local nerve centre, where he met regularly with two local SDA party leaders, Malik Meholic and Ibran Mustafic. Both men saw Ibisevic as the party ideologist, at least according to Ibisevic himself, who claims to have devised local party strategy for the elections and the immediate post-election period. He felt it was futile to fight the SDS at this early stage: the top priority was to eliminate the communists, if necessary in collaboration with the SDS. Ibisevic claims to have edited Meholic's first public speech for the SDA's inaugural meeting in Srebrenica, a speech that reflects this strategy.³⁷² This meeting was planned for 19 August 1990, at 2:00 PM in front of the Culture House in the town's centre. It was soon discovered, however, that the local SDS had planned its own inaugural meeting on the very same day at 10:00 AM in the yard of the Serbian Orthodox church only two hundred meters away. Although Ibisevic notes that this was sheer coincidence, neither party was willing to change the date of its inaugural meeting for fear that the move might be interpreted as a sign of weakness. The local SDA leader, Malik Meholic, tried to quieten the situation by talking to the local SDS leader, Goran Zekic. Both claimed that they, as two old school friends and respectable gentlemen, would be able to solve any problem that occurred in Srebrenica. In this case, their solution was to invite one another as honorary guests at their meetings.³⁷³

Although Zekic reassured his friend that he did not expect many people at the SDS meeting ("nothing to be afraid of"), the number of Serbs that turned up was higher than anticipated. They also arrived from the neighbouring towns of Bratunac, Kravica, Vlasenica, and Milici. The Serbs from Milici, in particular, made a nationalist road show of the event. As they passed through Muslim villages, they brandished knives, filling the local people with fear. Wearing Chetnik symbols, they entered Srebrenica in a boisterous and provocative manner, on open vans, holding up raised three fingers. In Potoèari, Muslims threw stones at the vans and buses on their way to Srebrenica from Kravica. As one eyewitness put it, "the air smelled of worse to come". During the meeting, Goran Zekic was chosen as the local SDS president, and Miodrag Jokic as vice-president. Malik Meholic, Zekic's honorary guest, was booed. He was unable to address the crowd. The most extreme and populist speech came from Miodrag Jokic, who claimed that Srebrenica was inalienable Serb territory and that the Serbs had historical rights to the town. Unrest spread through the Muslim community as a result of the SDS meeting and the arrival of the 'Chetniks', and Muslim villagers flocked to Srebrenica en masse to attend the SDA meeting there.

Roughly ten thousand Muslims soon gathered in front of the Culture House. Some even carried Tito's image and the Yugoslav flag, still not completely aware of the new era that had begun. Others, however, carried green Muslim banners, shouting, "we want arms!" Many inhabitants of Srebrenica stayed in their houses or left town during the day for fear of the trouble the Serb and Muslim village

³⁷⁰ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.73-74.

³⁷¹ Miljanovic, *Krvavi Božić*, p.38.

³⁷² Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.42-44.

³⁷³ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, p.46.

mobs might cause in town. At the meeting, Ibran Mustafic and Malik Meholjic held speeches. Muhamed Filipovic and Muhamed Èengic, two SDA leaders who had come from Sarajevo, also addressed the crowd. Goran Zekic was hissed at, as was Salih 'Tale' Sehomerovic, the Communist mayor of Srebrenica. An eleven-member Executive Board was appointed during the meeting. Among them were Besim Ibisevic, Ibran Mustafic, and Malik Meholjic.³⁷⁴ Meholjic represented the SDA's urban faction and Ibisevic and Mustafic, its village faction. The latter two worked together almost daily. They knew each other from their student days in Sarajevo in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Both had been supporters of the FK Sarajevo football club. Ibisevic writes that they liked to yell anti-Yugoslav and anti-communist slogans when their club played against a team from Serbia, while he composed 'pro-Bosnian' and 'pro-democratic' songs for the supporters of his team. Ibisevic and Mustafic had much in common. Both were intellectuals from rural backgrounds. Both were of the same age and had similar ideological leanings. And both came from villages that the Serbs had considered 'Ustashe' strongholds during World War Two.³⁷⁵

The election campaign, the viciousness of which was echoed in the Bosnian and Serbian press, created a volatile situation that could easily end in ethnic violence. Anticipating such violence, the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) launched preparations to prevent Yugoslavia's disintegration and to rally to the rescue of the Serb population in Croatia and Bosnia if the two republics broke away. One morning in June 1990, JNA units emptied the arms and ammunition storerooms of the Territorial Defence (TO) of Srebrenica, whose chief commander was local Serb, Miodrag Stanisavljevic. Stanisavljevic presented the move as a routine army procedure, even though it was obvious to everybody that this was not the case. The Army removed 1,300 long barrels, 7 light anti-aircraft weapons, and the complete rolling stock of Srebrenica's TO.³⁷⁶ The JNA also emptied the stores of the Territorial Defence in Bratunac. There too, the local Serb commander aided in carrying out the operation smoothly.³⁷⁷ These actions were part of a wider campaign. Led by General Kadijevic, the Federal Minister of Defence and Commander-in-Chief of the Yugoslav People's Army, this campaign focused on seizing all arms and ammunition from TO storehouses in predominantly non-Serb areas.³⁷⁸ At the same time, the army provided the Serb population in such areas with arms. According to Masic, arms taken from the TO in Bratunac went via SDS channels to the Serbs in Kravica.³⁷⁹

A number of incidents showed that violence was becoming imminent. On the afternoon of very same day that the local SDS and SDA organised their inaugural meetings in Srebrenica, makeshift barricades were erected, first in Kravica, and then in various Muslim villages. In Kravica, Serb militants

³⁷⁴ In Bratunac, the SDA held a large election meeting on 1 September. Mirsad Kavazbasic was elected as the first president of the SDA in Bratunac (Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, p.60). For the situation affecting the election meetings, see: Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.46-49. Interviews and conversations with Besim Ibisevic 24/05/1998, Hasan Nuhanovic 16/06/1998, Momèilo Cvjetinovic 10/06/1998; Becir Hasanovic 17/05/1998.

³⁷⁵ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.43-44.

³⁷⁶ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.39-40.

³⁷⁷ Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, pp.20-21.

³⁷⁸ The concept of Territorial Defence (*Teritorijalna Odbrana*) was central to Yugoslav military doctrine. According to this concept, the country would defend itself against foreign invasion or occupation by means of mobilising the entire population. This doctrine was introduced after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. It relied on partisan tactics and local territorial forces, which could, if necessary, operate independently under the command of local authorities. Weapon and ammunition stores were dispersed throughout the country, in municipal buildings and factories. Bosnia-Herzegovina was the centre of gravity in the Territorial Defence, as its mountainous, inaccessible terrain made it the most difficult to overrun. During World War Two, Tito's Partisan resistance was most successful there. The republic became the favoured location for storing arms and supplies and building arms and ammunition factories. The Territorial Defence forces reflected the ethnic make-up of their respective municipalities. For that reason, they could pose a threat to the JNA if their local municipalities came under non-Communist (and nationalist) control after the elections (Bassiouni, *Final report*, Annex III, pp.11-16). Even as early as 1989, General Kadijevic declared Tito's concept of Total National Defence to be 'a fraud' (Arnautovic, *Izbori*, p.42). See also, Vasic, 'The Yugoslav Army', p.122.

³⁷⁹ Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, p.21; see also Arnautovic, *Izbori*, p.42; Bassiouni *Final report*, Annex summaries and Conclusions, p.17 and Annex IV.

stopped Muslim cars, and in Potočari, Muslims threw stones at Serb cars returning home from the meeting in Srebrenica. In other Muslim villages along the road from Bratunac to Konjevic Polje, Muslims set up roadblocks to check Serb cars and buses returning to such places as Milici.³⁸⁰ As in a chain reaction, barricades set up by one side provoked the immediate erection of new barricades by the other side. The next day, authorities in the eastern Bosnian municipalities (Srebrenica, Bratunac, Vlasenica, Zvornik) held meetings to discuss the new situation, which was growing increasingly tense. Officials with Serb sympathies proposed that the JNA intervene.³⁸¹

One week later, on 25 August 1990, the SDA organised a mass meeting in Foča. Its aim was to commemorate the massacres that Chetnik forces had committed there against the Muslim population during World War Two, and to pay tribute to the dead. Over 100,000 people attended, including Jakub Selimoski, the *Reis-ul-ulema* (the Head of the Islamic Community of Yugoslavia) with a following of a hundred Muslim clerics. All major SDA leaders, such as Alija Izetbegovic, Adil Zulfikarpasic, and Muhamed Filipovic, were present. Representatives of the SDS and HDZ were also invited. The Serbs were invited to a ceremony, where flowers were to be thrown by both sides into the Drina as a sign of reconciliation. The SDS, however, refused to participate. The tone of the meeting was set by extremist elements from within the SDA as well as from the HDZ. These elements stirred up passions and referred to the 'serb genocide' of the Muslim population in Foča during World War Two.³⁸² Aside from a large contingent of Muslims from the Sandzak, there were three buses with SDA sympathisers from the municipality of Srebrenica. On the road to Foča, buses waving green flags and other nationalist symbols were stoned in Serb villages and towns, such as Kravica, Milici, and Han Pijesak.³⁸³

In early September 1990, not long after these events, Miroslav Deronjic (the SDS president of Bratunac) and Momčilo Cvjetinovic (an SDS activist from Srebrenica) visited Ibisevic. Their purpose was to invite him to a meeting in Bratunac, in order to discuss the situation in the two municipalities. They hoped especially to soothe tensions between Serbs from Kravica and Muslims from Potočari. Relations between these two communities had deteriorated after the SDA and SDS election meetings in Srebrenica. Muslims were afraid to travel through Kravica and Serbs through Potočari because of roadblocks erected in both villages. This situation had lasted for days and could explode into a major conflict at any time. Cvjetinovic, a journalist for the local Srebrenica radio station, promised to publicize this attempt at reconciliation so that it would have the desired defusing effect. They also made it clear that both the SDA and SDS could benefit politically, if the attempt succeeded. Ibisevic accepted their invitation. Joined by another SDA activist, he left for Bratunac, where they met SDS delegations from Bratunac and Srebrenica in Hotel Fontana. Although the Serbs were not encouraged by the small Muslim delegation that came to participate in the meeting, both sides agreed to provide freedom of movement in Kravica and Potočari. On his return to Srebrenica, Ibisevic was criticised by Ibran Mustafic for entering into talks with the Serbs.³⁸⁴

The Bosnian electoral campaign officially started on 15 September 1990. The SDA began its campaign in Velika Kladusa with a large mass gathering, attended by Muslims from all over Yugoslavia. According to Ibisevic some 400,000 people attended, "the largest meeting of Bosniacs ever in their 1000 year history".³⁸⁵ Thousands of boisterous, fanatic Muslims were there from the Sandzak, waving green flags and shouting "Sandzak is ours!" Other chants from the crowd included: "We want arms," "We'll kill Vuk [Draskovic]," and "Long live Saddam Hussein". People held up images of the Iraqi dictator, wore Arab dresses, and carried hundreds of green flags with Islamic inscriptions. Izetbegovic spoke out a warning against the possibility of civil war, declaring that the Muslim nation would defend

³⁸⁰ Miljanovic, *Krvavi Božić*, p.32.

³⁸¹ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, p.49.

³⁸² Zulfikarpasic, *The Bosniaks*, p.138; Bougarel, *Islam et politique*, p.180. See also the reports in *Preporod*, 1 September 1990.

³⁸³ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.50-51.

³⁸⁴ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.51-53.

³⁸⁵ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, p.54.

Bosnia at any cost necessary, including with arms.³⁸⁶ In Srebrenica, Besim Ibisevic and Ibran Mustafic immediately launched a local campaign with a meeting in Pusmulici (a Muslim village between Srebrenica and Zeleni Jadar). Together, they went to address the villagers, who seemed to be impressed by the fact that two politicians were taking the trouble to talk to them at all. Communists had never done this. Photos of Tito were removed from public places, and party membership books and other communist symbols were thrown into a brook. Feeling very satisfied with their performance, Ibisevic and Mustafic joked on their walk back to Srebrenica, “Wherever Besim and Ibran go, Communism will die!”³⁸⁷

Local SDA campaign leaders made plans to visit Muslim villages, first in order to recruit villagers to the party, then to establish local party branches, and finally, to organise a few large meetings. They divided the territory of the municipality among SDA members, who were usually appointed to the villages where they were born. Ibisevic covered the border region with Serbia near Skelani, i.e. the Muslim villages in the southern part of the municipality along the Drina. SDA activists usually campaigned during the weekends, trying to find local sympathisers willing to spread the campaign. One of them was Ahmo Tihic from Lijesce (a Muslim village near the Drina), who became a military commander during the war. A charismatic figure, he was extremely successful in recruiting people to the SDA. For that reason, the Serbs also saw him as a dangerous extremist.³⁸⁸ In Skelani, activists of the first hour were Fahrudin ‘Bijeli’ Salihovic and Nesib Mandzic, who became well-known Muslim officials during the war. (The former climbed the ranks to Head of Administration in Srebrenica, while the latter went on to become a Muslim representative in the negotiations with Mladic in July 1995). Ibran Mustafic, Hamed Efendic and Hamed Salihovic were active in the greater Potocari area, while the local SDA president Malik Meholic covered the town of Srebrenica and the remote village of Luka.³⁸⁹ Religious gatherings, such as the opening of mosques, were ideal occasions for spreading propaganda. One such occasion was the inauguration of a mosque in a suburb of Srebrenica, on 14 October 1990, which drew thousands.³⁹⁰

In late September 1990, SDA leaders from eastern Bosnia held a meeting in Nova Kasaba. Among the issues addressed there was the region’s complicated security situation. According to Ibisevic, the SDA leaders agreed to develop plans to arm the Muslim population as they recognized the danger of a coup attempt by the JNA or a Serbian attack on Bosnia. They also agreed to organise night vigils in Muslim settlements and to plan sabotage operations, for instance at important bridges over the Drina, in case of aggression from Serbia. Ibisevic, who was present at the meeting, proposed a coordinated defence plan for eastern Bosnia (under the code name *Štit*, ‘shield’). Coordination of the plan was to be assigned to a member of the SDA’s crisis staff. However, none of these plans ever materialised. As Ibisevic observes, this was due to petty rivalries and local chauvinism, which kept everyone from looking beyond the boundaries of their own municipalities. Contact between SDA leaders of various eastern Bosnian municipalities became less and less frequent. Nonetheless, the meeting highlighted what was perhaps the most important issue at stake in the elections, both for the SDA and the SDS: control over the local economy. The SDA representative from Zvornik complained that all the income generated by the local aluminium plant, ‘Glinice,’ went to Serbia. He promised that the first thing he would do after winning the elections was to bring the company under his control, so he could start financing the arms needed to fight the Serbs.³⁹¹

³⁸⁶ Arnautovic, *Izbori*, p.9.

³⁸⁷ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, p.56.

³⁸⁸ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.59-60.

³⁸⁹ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, p.63.

³⁹⁰ The mosque had been financed by Azem Begic, a wealthy local businessman, SDA sympathizer, and fanatic horse lover. Begic enjoyed more than local fame for having given a pedigree horse to Libyan leader, Colonel Gadafi, when he visited Yugoslavia (*Preporod*, 1 November 1990, p.4).

³⁹¹ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.64-66.

The fact that economics played no insignificant role also emerged clearly in the case of Skelani, a village that occupied a special position along the border with Serbia. It had formed a separate municipality during the 1950s and was now part of Srebrenica. Its inhabitants, Serbs and Muslims alike, were disgruntled about Skelani's inclusion into Srebrenica as they felt that the Srebrenican municipal authorities discriminated against them.³⁹² Muslims lived mainly in the hills, whereas the population in the low-lying areas along the Drina River was mixed. Since job opportunities were limited in Skelani itself, many people worked in Bajina Basta. Most of the Muslims there looked to Serbia for their economic needs and education, which made it difficult for the SDA to recruit new people and gain support among them. Muslims in Skelani shared the criticisms local Serbs had of Srebrenica's municipal authorities. Moreover, they were not particularly willing to embark on anti-Serbian ventures, as they were completely dependent on Serbia. Ibisevic tried to explain to them that Srebrenica was unable to do much for them, and that Serbia was entirely to blame for this problem. Serbia exploited this region. The hydroelectric plant near Perucac was in Serbian hands, which is why all the revenues went to Serbia and not to Bosnia.³⁹³ Skelani was a peculiar place, one that had figured prominently in police and intelligence reports during the communist era. There were no churches or mosques there. It was an 'atheist' oasis, where it was hard for the SDA to gain any ground. Ibisevic saw Skelani as a hotbed of Serbian nationalism and a source of Bosniac disunity.³⁹⁴ At the same time, it was strategically and militarily vital due to its position near the border and the bridge over the Drina.

The election campaign continued into the autumn. The Social-Democratic SDP organised a meeting in the Culture House, which was attended by former leading communist politicians, Mirko Pejanovic and Nijaz Durakovic.³⁹⁵ The SDA organised several large meetings in villages. The first took place near Sucevka on Sunday, 23 September during the traditional local autumn fair. Some 1,500 to 2,000 people were present. Among them was Ibisevic, who waved a document he had found in the Tuzla archives about the Serb war crimes committed in Sucevka at the beginning of World War One. He announced that, if the SDA were to win the November elections, the local school would be renamed the 'Osman Gabeljic' school after the youngest victim of the 1914 massacres. A second meeting was held on 21 October 1990, in the village of Peci next to Lake Perucac. The speeches by local SDA leaders were followed by a religious ceremony led by Muslim clerics: a commemoration of the Muslim victims of World War Two for whom the Drina had been the last resting place.³⁹⁶ The imam of Srebrenica gave a speech, as did the popular village imam, Abdurahman 'Dulan' Abdurahmanovic. Almost all imams from the Srebrenica municipality attended the ceremony.

According to Ibisevic's account, Ibran Mustafic began to demonstrate his demagoguery and megalomania for the first time at this meeting. Relations between the two leaders were deteriorating by this stage. Mustafic was campaigning ferociously against the communists as well as against Serbia, shouting that he would destroy the Perucac dam if Serbia refused to share its revenues with the municipalities on the Bosnian side of the river. Mustafic's threats sparked off rumours among the Serbs in Bajina Basta that Muslims were planning to destroy the dam. Srebrenica's communist authorities also felt that the SDA had declared war on them. The third large SDA village meeting was held in Osmace, on Sunday, 4 November 1990. It was attended by numerous Muslims from Vlasenica, Tuzla, Bijeljina, and the Sandzak, including Sulejman Ugljanin, SDA leader of the Sandzak. As Ibisevic observes, the meeting was of huge symbolic importance. During World War Two, the village of Osmace had been a centre of Muslim 'resistance' against the Chetniks as well as the Partisans. Moreover, the resistance had fought until the bitter end: the story goes that Osmace continued to fight even after Berlin had already

³⁹² Interview: Sefkija Hadziarapovic 22/05/1998.

³⁹³ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, p.60.

³⁹⁴ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, p.79.

³⁹⁵ Interview: Veselin Stevanovic 23/06/1998.

³⁹⁶ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.67-68.

surrendered.³⁹⁷ At the meeting, people sang the old and previously prohibited song, 'Berlin has fallen, Berlin has fallen, but Osmace hasn't [fallen] yet!'.³⁹⁸

As the elections drew near, the SDA distributed copies of filled-out voting forms to Muslim peasants to show them how to vote. The SDA feared that many people would not know how to go about voting, and they were right. During the elections, people took the very copies they had received from the SDA with them to place them in the ballot box.³⁹⁹ In the countryside, where the majority of the electorate was concentrated, people submitted to nationalist voting patterns, whereas the non-ethnic parties won in towns. Although it is often said that the elections were a demonstration of almost complete ethnic loyalty, the non-nationalist parties still won roughly one quarter of all votes. This was not reflected, however, in the number of seats because both the Presidency and the Chamber of Municipalities (one of the two chambers of the National Assembly) were elected on the basis of majoritarian rules. Only the Chamber of Citizens was elected according to proportionality, and there, the non-ethnic parties gained 21.5% of the seats.³⁹⁹ The SDA won most seats (86) in both chambers of the Bosnian parliament, followed by the SDS (72) and HDZ (44). In terms of the number of seats, the (former) Communists were completely marginalized. Izetbegovic became Bosnia's president, and he formed a coalition government of all three main nationalist parties.⁴⁰⁰ At the Yugoslav level, he did his best, together with President Kiro Gligorov of Macedonia, to save the entire country, proposing a loose and 'assymetrical' confederation, leaving Croatia and Slovenia virtually independent. These plans were rejected by the Serbian, Croatian and Slovene leaderships. Izetbegovic tried to plead with world leaders not to recognise Croatia and Slovenia until an overall settlement of the Yugoslav conflict was negotiated. In the meantime, Milosevic's propaganda machine continued to threaten violence. The JNA said it would go to war to preserve Yugoslavia's 'unity' and defend the Serbs against 'resurgent fascism' in Croatia.⁴⁰¹

The nationalist parties also won in the municipality of Srebrenica, except in the town itself. The SDA won almost 100% of Muslim votes in the villages. Skelani was the only exception. But even there, the SDA won twice as many votes as the SDS. SDA leaders were euphoric, as they were now in a position to take power according to the election results. The formal transfer of power took place at the inaugural meeting of the new Municipal Council of Srebrenica, which was held on 21 December 1990. The new Council counted seventy seats, almost two thirds of which (45) were occupied by the SDA. The rest of the seats were divided among the SDS (15), the SDP (6), the SRSJ (2), and the DSS (2). In terms of ethnic backgrounds, fifty-one of the municipal councillors were Muslims, and only nineteen were Serbs. Muslims and Serbs were both represented in the three non-ethnic parties (SDP, SRSJ, and DSS). Malik Meholic (SDA) was elected president of the Municipal Council and Miodrag Jokic (SDS) vice-president.⁴⁰² In Bratunac, the ratios between the SDA and SDS were more balanced. Of the sixty seats in Bratunac's Municipal Council, thirty-one went to the SDA, twenty-four to the SDS, and five to the other parties. After the elections, some SDA members left the party to form the MBO. However, this party soon fell apart, and most of its members returned to the SDA.⁴⁰³ The local branch of the Democratic Alliance - Alliance of the Socialist Youth (DS-SSO) also fell apart, and its members joined the SDA as well. The only non-ethnic party of any significance to remain active in Bratunac was the SDP.

³⁹⁷ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.69-71. Conversation: Ilija Miladinovic 10/06/1998.

³⁹⁸ Interview: Boban Vasic.

³⁹⁹ For a detailed account of the November 1990 elections see: Arnautovic, *Izbori*. See also Burg and Shoup, *The war in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, pp.49-56.

⁴⁰⁰ All important positions were divided among the SDA, SDS, and HDZ. While Izetbegovic became president of the Presidency, Momčilo Krajišnik (SDS) became president of the National Assembly, and Jure Pelivan (HDZ) prime minister. The new Bosnian government consisted of twenty-two ministers, ten of whom came from the ranks of the SDA, seven from the SDS and five from the HDZ. See: Burg and Shoup, *The war in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, pp.49-56.

⁴⁰¹ Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, pp.84-87.

⁴⁰² Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, p.81; see also, Masic, *Srebrenica*, p.24.

⁴⁰³ Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, p.23.

Nationalist parties in power

On the eve of the elections, the SDA, SDS and HDZ signed a coalition agreement to ensure that the (former) communists, most of whom were now Social Democrats, would not remain in power. And indeed, the nationalist parties won the elections hands down, after which they entered into a period of mutual 'partnership'. They removed the communist officials from their positions and tried subsequently to divide the power amongst themselves. This took place at the republic, as well as at the local levels.⁴⁰⁴ Their attempts to divide power along ethno-national lines could actually be seen as a continuation of the ethnic quota system that existed under communism. In their efforts to share power, the nationalist parties referred to, and in fact twisted, the well-known Bosnian concept of *komsiluk*, which stands for good neighbourly relations. They presented the coalition as a guarantee for further coexistence: the three nations would continue to live together as good neighbours. The concept of *komsiluk* was now used not only to refer to the grass-roots level, i.e. to the everyday life of ordinary citizens living in the same buildings, streets or city districts, but also to that of separate ethnic and national entities within the state.⁴⁰⁵

As could be expected, ethnic coexistence fell under immediate threat when the three nationalist parties began to carve up Bosnia. At the municipal level, the party with the majority vote started to monopolise all important local positions. This sparked off a process of ethnic homogenisation of the political cadres on the municipal levels, which was the first step towards ethnic segmentation in Bosnian society. The battle for strategic positions and other economic and political resources started immediately after the elections. Its development unfolded almost simultaneously with that of the deteriorating economy. In early 1991, production fell drastically, inflation soared once again to astronomical heights and unemployment spread.⁴⁰⁶ Aside from causing tensions *between* the nationalist parties, the competition for resources and positions also produced a great deal of factionalism *within* these parties, often turning moderates against hardliners, or urban populations against village communities.

Initially, the three parties agreed that they would divide power proportionally, at the republic, as well as at the local level. In Srebrenica, this meant that power was to be shared between the SDA and the SDS on a 75-25% basis. The non-nationalist parties were excluded. Despite these arrangements, however, problems soon arose between the SDA and the SDS.⁴⁰⁷ According to Ibisevic, the SDS demanded a larger number of posts in Srebrenica. Local SDS leader, Goran Zekic, claimed that he was not bound to the proportionality agreement as it conflicted with the existing municipal statute in which the Serbs were entitled to three of the eight most important cadre positions in the municipality. In an effort to resolve these problems, SDA leader, Malik Meholic, began negotiating with Zekic without consulting others in his party. The move soon created a great sense of dissatisfaction. Rumours spread that Meholic would even accept a fifty-fifty percent deal with the Serbs. During a local SDA meeting in late December, Meholic (the leader of the town faction) was openly attacked by Ibran Mustafic (one of the leaders of the village faction) for his tendency to monopolise the negotiations with his old school friend, Zekic. Meholic was subsequently forced to agree to negotiations with the Serbs through delegations. This set off a fierce internal struggle, in which Meholic began lobbying to have Ibran Mustafic and Hamed Efendic expelled from the party, efforts that met with the support of the majority of the SDA's Executive Board.⁴⁰⁸

Mustafic and Efendic were ultimately excluded from the SDA. As both were from the nationalist stronghold of Potočari, they began to mobilise support among the rural population. While most village communities opposed Meholic and supported the Mustafic faction, urban Muslims

⁴⁰⁴ Goati, 'Politički život Bosne', p.57. Burg and Shoup, *The war in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, pp.52-53, 62-63.

⁴⁰⁵ See Bougarel, *Bosnie*, pp.81-100.

⁴⁰⁶ Goati, 'Politički život Bosne', pp.57-58. Zulfikarpasic, *The Bosniaks*, p.157.

⁴⁰⁷ Burg and Shoup, *The war in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, pp.52-56.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.82-83.

favoured the Meholic faction. Serbs also supported Meholic because of his readiness to compromise. The struggle remained undecided until Ibisevic returned from a trip abroad in January 1991. Ibisevic lent his support to Mustafic even though the Meholic faction tried to win him over to its side by offering him the director's post at the Culture House if they remained in power. A hardliner, Ibisevic dryly comments that he considered Malik Meholic an unacceptable ally for the simple reason that he was an 'acceptable figure' to the Serbs. These divisions led to rapid polarisation between 'village hardliners' and 'urban moderates'. The hardliners gathered in Ibisevic's office or Hamed Efendic's home in Potocari, while the moderates established themselves in the new SDA office. Urban Serbs sided with the latter group. They considered the villages to be hotbeds of extremism and felt certain that their position would come under much further threat if SDA hardliners were to rise to power in Srebrenica.⁴⁰⁹

The SDA party headquarters in Sarajevo tried hard to reconcile the two factions. Omer Behmen, Osman Brka, and later also, Mehmed Kavazbasic (SDA leader in Vlasenica), came to Srebrenica to mediate. Local SDA leaders shuttled between Srebrenica and Sarajevo for talks. When the first SDA delegation from Sarajevo visited Srebrenica, the situation escalated immediately. Peasants came to the town to demonstrate in front of the SDA office. Village hardliners forced themselves into the office and almost started a fight with Meholic. Furious, Behmen accused Ibran Mustafic of resorting to street methods similar to those used by Milosevic in Serbia. At this juncture, the hardliners shifted their strategy. They started to organise the countryside by establishing local village committees, who would send representatives to the SDA municipal assembly to be held in Srebrenica. The moderates, in turn, used Srebrenica's radio station to attack SDA hardliners, and Serb journalists provided them with radio airtime. This period was marked by mutual accusations and mud slinging through Srebrenica's local media. Behmen put an end to the local media war, intervening on behalf of the SDA party headquarters.⁴¹⁰

Yet it was clear that the hardliners were in a much better position to win this internal battle. In late January 1991, the SDA organised an extraordinary municipal assembly. It was attended by over a hundred delegates, most of whom represented the SDA village committees. To secure their victory even more, the hardliners mobilised village mobs, who entered Srebrenica to attend the meeting. A new 45-member local SDA Council was chosen, along with a 22-member Executive Board. The newly established Executive Board pushed hard-line policy forward by appointing 'village faction' leaders to the posts of local SDA president (Hamed Efendic), and vice-presidents (Besim Ibisevic and Ibran Mustafic). The assembly ratified these candidates by acclamation. Moderates, such as Malik Meholic, were expelled from the party and were summoned to resign their posts in the town's administration.⁴¹¹

Apparently, similar processes were taking place within the SDS, although these are not as well documented. Serb villagers accused their leaders in town, including Zekic, of being too lenient towards the SDA and of having surrendered too much power to the Muslims. To placate these critics, the local SDS leadership proposed appointing Milenko Eanic, a village 'hardliner' as the new vice-president of the Municipal Council instead of Miodrag Jokic, a hardliner from the town of Srebrenica. The SDA accepted this proposal in a show of willingness to 'compromise' with the SDS despite their alleged extremism. In return, Zekic and the other SDS members of the Municipal Council promised to vote with SDA hardliners to remove Meholic and other moderates from their official posts, and nominate village candidates instead. SDA hardliners did not trust Zekic's promises, however, as he and Meholic were good friends. Moreover, other Serbs in town, who were Zekic's main support base, clearly favoured Meholic. For this reason, SDA hardliners hoped they would not need the SDS votes, but could rely on a majority within their own ranks, and possibly, on the support of a few odd councillors from other parties.⁴¹²

⁴⁰⁹ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.85-86.

⁴¹⁰ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.86-89.

⁴¹¹ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.89-91. Interview Besim Ibisevic 24/05/1998.

⁴¹² Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.91-92.

The Municipal Council, which was intended to cast a vote of no confidence to the present municipal officials, met on 23 February 1991. It was immediately adjourned, however, because of the unexpected absence of Malik Meholic, Goran Zekic and Miodrag Jokic. They had gone to a meeting in Sarajevo where a working party of SDA, SDS and HDZ representatives was discussing the practical issues involved in dividing up local power throughout the republic. Ibisevic claims that they had gone to the meeting to strike a deal for Srebrenica, which would have given them sufficient political credit to remain in power. A small group of SDA hardliners sprang into immediate action. Ibran Mustafic, Besim Ibisevic, Hamed Efendic and others rushed off to Sarajevo in Ahmo Tihic's Mercedes, vowing to remove Meholic at all cost, if necessary by non-democratic means, as Ibisevic recounts. They ran straight into the meeting at the parliament building, where SDA, SDS, and HDZ leaders were negotiating local power arrangements case by case. As Srebrenica had not yet been discussed, Mustafic and his following were in time to intervene. Meholic was deprived of the opportunity to represent the SDA in Srebrenica during these negotiations. At the same time, Radovan Karadzic summoned Goran Zekic and Miodrag Jokic to accept a deal based on 75% Muslim (SDA) and 25% Serb (SDS) participation, which they finally did despite previous objections.⁴¹³

Meholic's role was finished even though he remained in place as president of Srebrenica's Municipal Council. The SDA party headquarters still tried to bring about a reconciliation between the two factions. The battle was decided, however, on 28 February 1990, during a Municipal Council meeting. Many villagers gathered on the streets of Srebrenica to support Hamed Efendic's bid for power, while urban Muslims rallied in favour of Malik Meholic. The latter expressed their opposition loudly to 'a peasant' as mayor of Srebrenica: "Peasants will not be allowed to govern Srebrenica, we will chase them back to their villages!" This led to vicious verbal exchanges between villagers and townspeople. As could be expected, Hamed Efendic's faction emerged as the victors. The 'Malikovci' were removed from their official positions and hardliners were appointed instead. Even so, Efendic had faced a very close call with only thirty-six out of seventy votes. Nine SDA councillors voted in favour of Meholic, along with almost all other councillors from various parties (the SDS, the SDP, the DSS and the SRSJ). The SDS did not keep its promises to support the SDA hardliners and voted for Meholic because of 'higher' Serbian interests. Efendic actually won thanks to the support of Milenko Eanic, the SDS hardliner who was promised the position of vice-mayor if Efendic were to win, and one other SDS councillor from Skelani. Both were very critical of Zekic and the SDS leadership of Srebrenica, accusing them of ignoring the interests of Skelani.⁴¹⁴

As a result of the voting, all municipal posts were divided up among SDA and SDS hardliners, and members of the SDP lost all their influence. Besim Ibisevic became President of the Municipal Council (Mayor) and Milenko Eanic its Vice President. Ibran Mustafic stepped up as Chairman of the Executive Board of the municipality of Srebrenica. Hamed 'sado' Salihovic (SDA) was made Head of Police, and Miodrag Stanisavljevic (SDS) kept his position as Commander of the Territorial Defence of Srebrenica.⁴¹⁵ A handful of SDA moderates in the Municipal Council went over to the hard-line faction. Others, such as Malik Meholic, founded the local branch of the Muslim Bosniac Organisation (MBO). Before long, a number of freshly appointed municipal officials proved to be incompetent for their jobs. One of these was Salih Siruëic, the municipal secretary for the economy, who resigned just a few months after his appointment. As the SDA was unable to find any qualified people within its own ranks, they asked Cazim Salimovic, a former communist and member of the SDP, to take over the post. Ibisevic writes that this appointment was also meant to demonstrate the SDA hardliners' willingness to bridge the gap between town and countryside, and to signal the need for unity among all Muslims, regardless of party loyalties.⁴¹⁶

⁴¹³ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.93-94.

⁴¹⁴ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.97-98.

⁴¹⁵ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.95-97; see also Masic, *Srebrenica*, p.24.

⁴¹⁶ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.109-110. Interview: Sefkija Hadziarapovic 22/05/1998.

SDA hardliners govern Srebrenica

On 25 March 1991, Slobodan Milosevic and Franjo Tudjman met secretly at one of Tito's grand old villas in Karadjordjevo, where they agreed to carve up Bosnia. They appointed a working party to draw up new borders.⁴¹⁷ In late June, Slovenia and Croatia declared their independence. Two days later, the ten-day war began in Slovenia. Croatia also witnessed clashes in Slavonia and the Krajina. By autumn, the conflict had escalated into a full-fledged and brutal war. Serbian-Croatian negotiations about carving up Bosnia and organising population transfers continued in Austria. At the same time, Milosevic tried to persuade Bosnia's Muslim leadership to support Serbia and remain within Yugoslavia. But Izetbegovic declared Bosnia neutral in the Croatian conflict. Moreover, he objected to the mobilisation of Bosnians by the Yugoslav army to fight the war in Croatia.⁴¹⁸ Milosevic responded by placing Bosnia under an economic blockade. He blocked supplies of food and agricultural products. Srebrenica's population, which depended on these imports, was hard hit as a result. These sanctions became even more effective by early 1992. On more than one occasion, Serb officials, politicians and company directors from both sides of the Drina met in towns, such as Ljubovija and Bajina Basta, to discuss how to continue the blockade without affecting the Bosnian Serb population.⁴¹⁹

While the town of Srebrenica was now governed by SDA hardliners, Ibisevic and Mustafic, tensions and fear of the future encroached increasingly on daily life. The fabric of society was disintegrating, a fact clearly reflected in the tug-of-war that developed over Srebrenica's local dumping site. At the heart of the conflict was the question of where to dump the town's wastes. The SDS wanted to close down the main collection point near the Serb village of Zalazje, which the SDA was willing to accept as a sign of goodwill. Yet an alternative site was not easily found without antagonising other Muslim or Serb villages. Because it took some time to resolve the issue, Srebrenica continued to dump its waste in Zalazje. Serbs in the village then blocked the entrance. By early April, barricades appeared making it impossible transport waste out of the town. The waste then began to pile up in the town itself. Ibisevic writes that although Mustafic was responsible, as chairman of the Executive Board, to respond to the problem, he left it to Ibisevic to solve. Attempts to find new locations failed due to protests by every Serb and Muslim village near the different dumpsites proposed. Nobody was willing to accept Srebrenica's waste. Instead, they all preferred to see it end up in "one of the other side's" villages. The entire operation became an exercise in manoeuvring – literally and figuratively – between Muslim and Serb villages. The solution was to find a site at an acceptable distance from any village and one located at a more or less equal distance from a Serb *and* a Muslim village. When the craters of the bauxite mines in Podravanje were eliminated as an option due to protests from the local Serb population, the authorities were forced to dump waste illegally at night in forbidden sites, such as in Zalazje. This prompted the Serb inhabitants there to begin guarding the old dumpsite again.⁴²⁰

The next cause of tension was the Yugoslav census, which took place in April 1991. People objected to the fact that the census takers were not local people, as was the case in previous censuses. Ibran Mustafic had chosen his own people from Potočari to carry out the census in the Muslim villages. Another source of criticism was the fact that Serbs were allowed to carry out the census in their villages, which, according to Ibisevic, was a recipe for malversations. He claims that many Serbs who had left Srebrenica and had gone to live in Serbia were included.⁴²¹ This problem existed, for instance, in the commune of Osat, where the number of Serbs was much inflated according to local Muslims.

⁴¹⁷ Silber and Little, *The death of Yugoslavia*, pp.143-44; Burg and Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, p.82; Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, p.85.

⁴¹⁸ Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, p.86.

⁴¹⁹ Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, pp.13-14; Masic, *Srebrenica*, p.22; Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, p.147.

⁴²⁰ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.98-100.

⁴²¹ In an interview for this report, Ibisevic admitted that Muslims also manipulated the census results, for instance by statistically 'assimilating' the 500 to 600 Romani living in the municipality of Srebrenica. Muslim census takers tried to convince these Romani to identify themselves as Muslims, which most of them did. Interview: Ibisevic 24/05/1998.

Mustafic undertook no action to conduct another census in these Serb villages. At this stage, Ibisevic (president of the Municipal Council) and Mustafic (chairman of the Executive Board) became more rivals than colleagues. According to Ibisevic, Ibran Mustafic liked nothing more than showing his face 'among the people' in the villages and holding nationalist speeches aimed at advancing his ambitions of becoming the leading local SDA politician. He neglected his executive duties, which included solving such practical problems as bad roads, local companies teetering on bankruptcy, and the deplorable condition of the water supply system.⁴²²

One of the major problems facing the municipality was the sudden unwillingness of the majority of citizens to pay communal taxes. Serbs as well as Muslims refused to pay these taxes for different reasons. In fact, several SDA and SDS politicians even instructed their constituents not to pay them. Ibisevic tried to turn the tide in this respect, pointing out to local Muslims that the municipality could never fulfil its communal duties if they failed to pay these taxes. The Muslims resumed paying taxes, but the Serbs continued to refuse. In villages near Skelani, the Muslim inhabitants refused to pay the taxes. Even worse, they threatened the Serb tax collector, whom they considered a nationalist 'Chetnik'. In the village of Dobrak, Muslim women threw stones at him, after which he refused to ever return to any Muslim villages.⁴²³ Srebrenica's overstuffed municipal bureaucracy was another problem Ibisevic tried to solve. It employed some one hundred and fifty people where seventy would have sufficed. By discharging forty people on early retirement, the number of employees working in the local bureaucracy was reduced by over twenty-five percent.

What Ibisevic does not mention is that most of these early pensioners were Serbs. Among them were directors of firms and of other institutions, such as the primary schools and the hospital. Moreover, they were replaced by Muslims loyal to the SDA. This process was carried out not without deliberately humiliating the Serbs. As one former Serb official, Veselin Stevanovic, put it during an interview, Ibran Mustafic ran into his office requesting the very desk at which he was working at the time.⁴²⁴ All of these developments nourished Serb fears that Muslims were using their political supremacy to take over the local economy and administration, and to take control of important firms and institutions as soon as they were privatised.⁴²⁵ And this process did indeed unfold throughout most of Bosnia, as well as in Serbia, where nationalist parties expelled members of the 'other' group from their jobs and positions as soon as they won the elections and took over local power. In this context, Serb authors refer to the 'process of Islamicisation' in SDA-dominated municipalities, such as those in eastern Bosnia.⁴²⁶ However, the same happened in Serbia: just across the border, in Ljubovija, numerous Muslims from Bratunac were dismissed from their jobs. Among them was Nijaz Dubiëic, the director of a firm, who later became the SDA mayor of Bratunac.⁴²⁷

Relations also worsened due to nationalist incidents and forms of symbolic warfare. These included the conspicuous use of nationalist banners and flags, and the practice of displaying photos of extremist leaders and other paraphernalia on cars and buses, as well as in cafés and restaurants, etc. Many Serbs, including moderates, became annoyed when Muslims hung two long banners across the road in Potoëari, a green Muslim banner and another featuring the nationalist Croatian *sahovnica* (chessboard). The banners were left to hang indefinitely.⁴²⁸ In the village of Glogova, it became fashionable for young men to shave their heads, dress in black, and call themselves Ustashe. The justifying rationale was: "If they can be Chetniks, we can be Ustashe just as easily".⁴²⁹ Occasional incidents and conflicts between individuals of different ethnic backgrounds also exacerbated the

⁴²² Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.100-102.

⁴²³ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.104-105.

⁴²⁴ Interviews and conversations with Veselin Stevanovic 23/06/1998, Zdravko Noviëic 09/06/1998.

⁴²⁵ Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, pp.146-147.

⁴²⁶ See Miljanovic, *Krvavi Božic*, pp.29-30.

⁴²⁷ Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, pp.16-17.

⁴²⁸ Interview: Veselin Stevanovic, 23/06/1998.

⁴²⁹ Z.B., 'Majka Srbija'.

situation. Such problems occurred in Lijesce (a Serb village near Skelani) where a dispute escalated between Serb peasants and SDA activist, Ahmo Tihic, about the use of a small path over Tihic's land. Tihic blocked the path out of fear that it would develop into a permanent road, used not only by pedestrians, but also by vehicles. In May 1991, a mixed SDA-SDS delegation tried in vain to solve the conflict. The issue tended to polarise the entire community and to poison relations between local Serbs and Muslims. When the district court in Srebrenica decided in favour of the Serb peasants, the town's SDA government (supporting Tihic) refused to implement the judge's decision. The move gave new impetus to Serb complaints that they were living under a constant Muslim threat. Local Muslims, on the other hand, saw the demands of the Serb peasants in Lijesce as an expression of 'Great Serbian expansionism'. Ibisevic claims that the SDS thrived on such conflicts and that it was not really willing to solve them. However, he also ignores the fact that SDA leaders probably had just as little interest in ending this conflict. SDA officials refused to issue orders to the police to implement a court order.⁴³⁰

A similar problem arose concerning the building site of a Serbian Orthodox church in Skelani. The Serbs wanted a small piece of extra land belonging to the municipality next to the building site. The Muslims interpreted this as political provocation, a symbolic expression of Greater Serbian aspirations. The inhabitants of Skelani, Serbs and Muslims alike, had a reputation for not being particularly religious. Consequently, the common reaction among Muslims was: "why would they need a church in the first place?" Serbs justified it by pointing out that Muslims had built fifteen mosques in the municipality in the last two decades, while Serbs had built no churches at all. According to Ibisevic's rather one-sided perspective, the SDS used this conflict once again to reinforce the image of threatened Serbdom under Muslim domination. In the end, the Serbs simply took the three- metre wide strip of extra land and started to lay foundations for the church building without permission. When the foundations were completed, the Serbs organised a celebration to consecrate them. The bishop of Zvornik, as well as various other priests, took this opportunity to hold nationalist speeches and propagate slogans, adding extra fuel to the fire. Ibisevic was present at the event, as he was invited by Milenko Ćanic, but decided it was wiser not to address the crowd himself. Instead, he left the task to Cazim Salimovic, an old Communist who called for reason and self-restraint. In a small, but unfortunate slip of the tongue, Salimovic referred to the 'green' Drina river. This provoked an angry reaction from the Serbs: "Look, he talks about the green Drina! Fuck his fundamentalist mother! Because he's a communist, we thought he was a decent Muslim, but hear this!". Both Ibisevic and Salimovic felt intimidated and left, accompanied by gunshots from the Serb mob.⁴³¹

War was drawing close in Slovenia and even more so in Croatia, where the first armed clashes occurred between Serb paramilitaries and the Croatian police. In May and June, the extremist leader of one of these groups, Vojislav Seselj, incited panic in Bratunac and Srebrenica. Touring eastern Bosnia and areas across the border in Serbia, Seselj organised promotional meetings for his Radical Party. The Bosnian police set up checkpoints along the Drina, and on one occasion it sealed off the bridge near Skelani to prevent Seselj from crossing into Bosnia. Both Seselj's tour and the new Bosnian police checkpoints at the bridges crossing the Drina caused great unrest among Serbs and Muslims.⁴³² At this stage, Ibisevic and Mustafic persuaded Muslim men to stop responding to the mobilisation calls of the JNA. Ibisevic told them to go home, assuring them that the Srebrenican police had orders not to arrest them. He advised them to take refuge in the forests to hide from any military police that might come to fetch them. Some men left in order not to be mobilised by the JNA.⁴³³ SDA leaders also wrote to Muslim officers actively serving in the JNA, who had been born in the municipality of Srebrenica, calling on them to leave the JNA.⁴³⁴ As the first series of incidents unfolded along the Drina – shots were fired at Muslim villages from the territory of Serbia – the idea arose within the local SDA

⁴³⁰ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.107-109.

⁴³¹ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.112-114. See also, Radulovic 'sve spremno za sukob'.

⁴³² Z.B. 'Majka Srbija'; Radulovic 'sve spremno za sukob'.

⁴³³ Interview: Becir Hasanovic 17/05/1998.

⁴³⁴ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, p.109.

leadership to establish a crisis staff to organise the local defence and arm the Muslim population. Ibran Mustafic and Hamed Efendic, however, opposed the establishment of SDA crisis staff, claiming that they could supply arms much more efficiently and discretely through their contacts in Sarajevo. After some discussion, most SDA Executive Council members accepted Mustafic's and Efendic's proposal, leaving the acquisition and further distribution of arms in their hands.⁴³⁵

Instead of keeping their promises, Mustafic and Efendic left the Muslims of Srebrenica completely unprepared for any armed conflict. In the villages, especially, many grew restless when the promised weapons were not delivered. In response, Ibisevic set up a number of local crisis staff units, who laid the groundwork for future Muslim resistance. However, the lack of arms proved to be an enormous problem. In early August, Mustafic and Efendic met with the Muslim directors of local firms to discuss the purchase of arms. They devised a plan to usurp municipal funds and to channel the money via a number of firms to the SDA, who was to buy the arms. One of the Muslim directors present at the meeting was also head of the municipal commission responsible for making decisions about these funds. The money was to be transferred to the bank accounts of three firms in Srebrenica. They would then pass it on via a Sarajevo bank account to Hamed Efendic, president of the SDA in Srebrenica. This method was intended to glean 1,400,000 dinars from municipal funds in order to purchase seventy rifles.⁴³⁶

During the summer of 1991, Naser Oric, the famous commander of the Muslim forces in Srebrenica during the war, entered on stage as Ibran Mustafic's confidant. He was born in 1967 in Potočari, Ibran Mustafic's home village. They were related through Oric's mother whose maiden name was Mustafic. During the 1980s, Oric had done several jobs in Serbia, after which he followed a police course in Zemun. He applied for a job as a policeman in Srebrenica, but he was rejected because his grandfather had been a member of the Ustashe during World War Two. They accepted him in Belgrade, however, where he was soon recruited into a special police unit set up by Serbia's Ministry of Internal Affairs. Oric participated in actions against Albanian miners in Kosovo, during 1989 and 1990, as well as against the Serbian opposition in 1991. His extraordinary performance in these operations helped him to climb the ranks to one of Milosevic's bodyguards. He later fell into trouble when he was suspected of involvement in the murder of one of his colleagues, who was found dead a few days after a fight with Oric.

When the war in Croatia started, Oric returned to Bosnia and worked half a year as a police officer in Ilidza near Sarajevo. There, he was approached by an officer of Bosnia's Ministry of Internal Affairs, who asked him to go to Belgrade and try to persuade Muslim police officers working there to transfer to Bosnia. Oric claims to have responded to this request and recruited 150 Muslim policemen back to Bosnia. In the meantime, he moved back to Srebrenica, where he set up a small local militia of about thirty men, whom he trained in the hills near Potočari.⁴³⁷ Serb sources claim that he and Adnan Karovic, another Muslim from Potočari, were involved in the arms trade. Incidentally, Karovic was also the deputy commander of the police station in Zvornik. Together, the two are said to have organised several weapon transports from Croatia, via Tuzla and Zvornik, to Potočari, where they sold these arms among the Muslim population. As soon as Adnan Karovic left for Croatia, Oric took over the entire organisation of this arms trade, at least according to Serb sources.⁴³⁸ Ibisevic writes, however, that it was Ibran Mustafic who was the key figure in these arms dealings and that Oric was merely his right

⁴³⁵ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.115-116; see also, Ibisevic 'Nisam pobjegao'.

⁴³⁶ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.117-118; see also Ibisevic 'Nisam pobjegao'.

⁴³⁷ For this short biography of Naser Oric I used: Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, pp.77-78, 150-151; Kamemica, 'U Kakanj'; Kamenica 'Zasto se nije vratio'; Maljukan, 'srebrenički kapo'; Pargan 'Od legende'; *Dutchbat Srebrenica / Lukavac / Tuzla Milinfo*; July 1994 (MIDKL Dossier 1589); Chapter 1, Section D6; Westerman and Rijs, *Het zwartste scenario*, pp.51-53; Conversations: Naser Oric 23/10/2000, Momčilo Cvjetinovic 11/06/1998, Ibran Mustafic 16/04/1998.

⁴³⁸ Excerpts from police reports and interrogation records published in Serb sources seem to offer evidence of this. See Jovanovic et al, *Iskorenjivanje Srba*, pp.31-35. Miljanovic, *Krvavi Božić*, pp.34-35. See also Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, pp.150-151.

hand, i.e. Mustafic's personal driver and bodyguard. They had their own local network and figureheads, such as Ahmo Tihic in Lijesce and the Muslim priest, Aziz Hasanovic, in Osmace, who sold the arms in their villages. Since Oric was employed as a local police officer, frictions occurred between Mustafic and Head of Police, Hamed Salihovic, who complained that Oric never showed up at work. Mustafic defended Oric against attacks by his boss, claiming that Naser was serving the broader interests of the Muslim people.⁴³⁹

During the summer, tensions mounted between Muslims and Serbs as a result of the war in Slovenia and Croatia. A number of local Serbs and Muslims went to Croatia to fight as volunteers on different sides. In the weekends, they would return, parading in their new uniforms. Others were recruited into the Yugoslav army and mobilised to the frontlines. Tensions also rose when JNA troops and paramilitaries were transferred to Bosnia, the base from which they carried out their operations on Croatian territory. Serb soldiers and paramilitaries often created small incidents, targeting Muslims or Islamic buildings, and adding fuel to the fire. In Skelani, a local Muslim primary school teacher was molested at this time. The perpetrator, a local Serb, fled to Serbia and was never arrested. This led to embitterment on the part of the Muslim population in the commune of Skelani.⁴⁴⁰ The schools now became part of the Serb-Muslim struggle. The SDA appointed Muslim directors at six of the seven primary schools in the municipality – the molested teacher being one of them. The SDS, in turn, began to boycott municipal council meetings in protest of these appointments. Incidentally, Serbs were not the ones to oppose these appointments. They were also opposed by quite a few Muslim teachers, who had been devoted communists and now sympathised with the SDP. In the primary school of Osat, for instance, both Muslim and Serb teachers defended their Muslim director, opposing the nomination of an SDA candidate to the position. In the end, however, the appointment went through.⁴⁴¹

Once the Serb-Muslim conflict began touching on the issue of who controlled the police and the army, the situation took a grave turn for the worse. In July 1991, Srebrenican authorities selected twenty-six Muslim boys for a three-month police course in Croatia, organised and sponsored by the SDA. The Belgrade press (particularly *Politika Ekspres*, a daily newspaper) now claimed that 'Ustashe' from Srebrenica were being trained in Croatia, to prepare them to partake in the massacres of Serb children. Lists of the trainees' names were also published. As a result of these reports, local Serbs started to see the Bosnian police as a Muslim militia, whom they refused to recognise as a legitimate police force. This led to tense incidents. In Skelani, for instance, a local SDS politician ignored a Muslim reservist policeman, who signalled him to stop. The policeman then stopped the man at gunpoint, which reinforced rumours of 'serbs being under threat'. Serbs in Skelani demanded that the Muslim reservist be dismissed. Trying to calm the situation, Hamed Salihovic gave in to the demand.

Nonetheless, tensions continued to mount as a result of such incidents. One of these occurred in the village of Zgunje, near Skelani. One night, a drunken Serb policeman there began a shooting spree. Terrified, the Muslim inhabitants fled to the forests. The next day, the Muslims responded by protesting at the police station in Skelani and erecting barricades at the bridge over the Drina. Local Serbs, in turn, set up barricades on the road to a Serb village. Ibisevic and Mustafic convinced the Muslim militants to remove their barricade, and thus managed to prevent the outbreak of a potentially very serious conflict. With tensions soaring rapidly at this point, Muslims in the villages along the Drina started to demand arms. Hamed Salihovic, Head of Police, saw to it that some weapons did indeed remain in Muslim hands. Fearing that Serbs would try to empty the weapon and ammunition stores of the police station in Skelani, he removed these weapons and transported them to Srebrenica in the

⁴³⁹ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.118-119. Later, Mustafic reproached Salihovic for his hesitance about accepting Naser Oric into the police service (Ibisevic, 'Nisam pobegao'). Oric immediately removed Salihovic from his position as Head of Police when the war started. In May 1995, Salihovic was assassinated in the enclave, probably by Oric's men. Both Hamed Efendic (still the SDA president) and Ibran Mustafic survived the attack, which apparently targeted all three of them. Interview: Ibran Mustafic 16/04/1998, Besim Ibisevic 24/05/1998.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.119-120.

⁴⁴¹ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.130-31; Komlenovic and Ivanisevic, 'sa Drine nema vedrine'.

middle of the night. The news soon spread among the Serb population in Skelani, triggering a new wave of protests: again a barricade was erected in Kalimanici.

These recurring incidents led to the activation of a local body called the National Defence Council on 17 July 1991. Set up to overtake the most urgent duties of the municipal council in times of crisis, this body's powers included introducing special measures to protect citizens and their properties. The new council consisted of twelve local officials. Eight of these were Muslims, including Besim Ibisevic, Ibran Mustafic, Hamed Efendic, and Ramiz Becirovic. The other four were Serbs: Milenko Èanic, Goran Zekic, Miloje Simic, and Miodrag Stanisavljevic. Ibisevic and Èanic agreed to organise a meeting in Skelani to discuss the situation with local Muslims and Serbs. This meeting took place in late July. Ibran Mustafic also attended, as did Desimir Mitrovic, a doctor at a hospital in Uzice, who was also the main local SDS 'ideologist'. It was at this meeting that the Serbs first put forth their demand to make Skelani a separate Serb municipality. This was unacceptable to the Muslims and led to fierce exchanges and mutual accusations. The meeting ended in dissension and the situation polarised even further.⁴⁴²

In August, the JNA arrived on the local scene for the first time. Two army officers from the Tuzla Second Corps and a number of soldiers entered Srebrenica in two vans. They had come to confiscate the local army card files in order to mobilise recruits and reservists. Muslims quickly gathered in and around the municipal building to prevent this. Besim Ibisevic removed the uninvited guests from the building with the help of two policemen. The news that the army had been chased out of town spread like wildfire. That afternoon, thousands of Muslims from surrounding villages and the town of Srebrenica itself gathered in front of the warehouse. Ibisevic addressed the crowd, saying that he refused to allow the army to recruit local Muslims and use them as cannon fodder to defend Serbian interests in Croatia. They were needed here, said Ibisevic, to defend their own town and to defend Bosnia. Most local Serbs regarded this Muslim protest meeting as an expression of growing anti-Serbian, anti-Yugoslav and anti-JNA sentiment. A number even interpreted it as a declaration of war against Serbia and the Serbian people. Some Serbs felt they that they needed leave Srebrenica.⁴⁴³

At the end of August 1991, the JNA Second Corps also attempted to confiscate the army card files in Bratunac. In the morning, Miroslav Deronjic and various other SDS officials entered the municipal building, demanding that the army card files be handed over. The Muslim caretaker refused. In the meantime, thousands of Serbs and Muslims gathered in front of the building. It was Friday, which was market day in Bratunac. The streets were already full of people, and many more – Serbs and Muslims alike – were mobilised from the villages over the next few hours. The Serb demonstrators urged the army to take the card files by force, if necessary, shouting "Armija", "Jugoslavija", and "Srbija". The Muslims, in turn, tried to prevent the army from taking such action. The chants on their side included: "Murderers", "Fascists", "This is Bosnia!" and "This is not Kosovo". Threats were exchanged. According to one Serb source, Mevludin 'Mevko' Sinanovic, a Muslim extremist, pulled out a dagger, kissed it and screamed: "The Vlachs [pejorative term for Serbs gd] will not live here, and this will teach them...!".⁴⁴⁴ A local SDS official reportedly videotaped the entire event from the roof of a building in the main street. Later, local Serb officials used the tape to identify Muslim 'extremists' when the war started.⁴⁴⁵

The mayor, Nijaz Dubièic, as well as the SDA president of Bratunac, Mirsad Kavazbasic, both tried to calm the situation, urging people to go home. They failed however, and the danger at hand began to rise to a boiling point, especially when the first army units arrived around 3:00 p.m. Around 10,000 Muslims and 5,000 Serbs had gathered. The Bosnian police sided with the Muslims, while the JNA joined forces with the Serbs. JNA soldiers pointed their guns at the Muslims, but shot in the air. When the Muslim police commander ordered his men to point their guns as well, Serb police officers

⁴⁴² Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.122-26.

⁴⁴³ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.129-30.

⁴⁴⁴ Miljanovic, *Krvavi Božić*, pp.32-33. Komlenovic and Ivanisevic, 'sa Drine', p.10.

⁴⁴⁵ See Omeragic, *Satanski sinovi*, p.9.

deserted their ranks to join the other side. Fortunately, the army decided to retreat, which prevented what would almost certainly have ended in bloodshed.⁴⁴⁶ Thinking Muslims were planning an attack on their village, Serbs in Kravica set up barricades and took some thirty Muslim young people hostage. They were released after one night.⁴⁴⁷ After these events, the SDA leaders in Srebrenica decided to transfer the local army card files from the municipal building to Potočari.⁴⁴⁸

In August 1991, it became clear that the JNA's efforts to prepare Bosnian Serbs for war were well underway. Yugoslav Prime Minister, Ante Markovic, disclosed the existence of a secret army operation entitled 'RAM', which called for covert deliveries of weapons from JNA arsenals to local Serb forces in Croatia and Bosnia. Coordinated from Belgrade, the operation resulted in the delivery of hundreds of thousands of weapons to Serbs in several parts of Bosnia during 1990 and 1991. Markovic also released a telephone conversation, in which Milosevic instructed Karadzic to accept the arms delivered.⁴⁴⁹ According to the Slovene newspaper *Delo*, operation RAM was supplemented by plan for psychological warfare. This second plan was intended to tear down Muslim resistance if war broke out through the rape of girls and women and executions of Muslims in mosques.⁴⁵⁰ It became increasingly clear that the JNA's main objective after the disintegration of Yugoslavia was to protect the Serb population outside Serbia proper. One way it tried to ensure such protection was by supporting paramilitary forces and providing them with weaponry that the JNA had written off.⁴⁵¹ As a result of these activities, Kravica soon became a centre for arming and training Serbs from towns and villages from the municipalities of Bratunac, Srebrenica, Zvornik and Vlasenica. The JNA also built a new heliport in Bratunac, which was used for the delivery of weapons.⁴⁵² In November 1991, the JNA forces that had withdrawn from Croatia were redeployed in Bosnia. Some units were stationed in eastern Bosnia, such as in Zvornik and in Milici. The JNA strengthened its positions along the Drina, placing artillery on the mountains just across the border in Serbia and aiming it at Srebrenica.⁴⁵³

Alarmed by these developments, the Bosnian government decided to strengthen the police force by recruiting young men and training them in a six-month crash course. The police was the only armed force that the government could build up if the Serbs launched an assault on Bosnian territory.⁴⁵⁴ The authorities also started to form their own paramilitary units, called the 'Green Berets'. As compared to the (Bosnian) Serbs, however, the Bosnian government lagged far behind in its war preparations. The most important paramilitary force then became the so-called Patriotic League, which was created under the auspices of the Bosnian government. It had a reported strength of 3,500 troops. After the war started, it became the nucleus of the new Bosnian army.⁴⁵⁵ The first series of initiatives to create units of the Patriotic League in eastern Bosnia date to mid July 1991, when a regional steering committee met in Srebrenica. Dominated by the SDA, that meeting became known as the 'Podrinje initiative'. In it, the committee established the following action priorities: to retake possession of the weapons and other equipment belonging to the Territorial Defence, to prevent further disarmament, to start training members of the Patriotic League, and to prevent the JNA from seizing army archives.

⁴⁴⁶ For these events in Bratunac see: Omeragic, *Satanski sinovi*, p.9; Komlenovic and Ivanisevic, 'sa Drine nema vedrine'; Ibrahimovic, 'Pakleni vikend'; Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, pp.147-148; Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, pp.21-22; Miljanovic, *Krvavi Bozic*, p.32; Oric, *Srebrenica*, pp.37-38. Interviews and conversations with Mirsada Bakalovic 15/06/1998, 17/06/1998 and 19/06/1998; Mitko and Mevla Kadric 25/04/98.

⁴⁴⁷ Bosnjak, 'Da li je policija umijesena?'; Ibrahimovic, 'Pakleni vikend'.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.132-33. Komlenovic and Ivanisevic, 'sa Drine', pp.10-11. The JNA only succeeded in confiscating the card files in Zvornik. In Vlasenica, Srebrenica, and Bratunac, however, they were obstructed by the SDA's formidable resistance (Oric, *Srebrenica*, p.37).

⁴⁴⁹ Glenny, *The Fall of Yugoslavia*, pp.149-50.

⁴⁵⁰ Bassiouni *Final report*, Annex III, p.21; Annex IV, p.27; Glenny, *The Fall of Yugoslavia*, pp.149-50.

⁴⁵¹ Bassiouni *Final report*, Annex III, p.24.

⁴⁵² Oric, *Srebrenica*, p.36; Ćekic, *The aggression on Bosnia*, p.66; interview: Boban Vasic 15/07/1998.

⁴⁵³ Bassiouni *Final report*, Annex III, p.22; Oric, *Srebrenica*, p.60; Masic, *Srebrenica*, p.23, 30.

⁴⁵⁴ Interview: Becir Hasanovic 17/05/1998, Ibran Mustafic 16/04/1998.

⁴⁵⁵ Bassiouni *Final report*, Annex III, p.29; III.a, p.44. The Patriotic League (the original Green Berets) was a paramilitary organisation consisting largely of former JNA officers of Muslim backgrounds. See also, Vasic, 'The Yugoslav Army', p.135.

Even after this first step was taken, it took months to establish a military organisation. This task reached completion in early 1992 with the creation of the Patriotic League for the Tuzla region. Most of the staff consisted of former Muslim members of the Territorial Defence and JNA officers, who had deserted the army after the war in Croatia began. Although its core organisation was in place, the Patriotic League encountered numerous problems as it continued to develop. It faced a deplorable lack of arms and ammunition, causing some army officers to resign. One of these was Nedzib Husic, the commander for the region of Bratunac, Zvornik, and Vlasenica. In Bratunac, the SDA acquired only six automatic rifles and twenty-five pistols. Eventually, it was forced to rely on weapons in the possession of Muslim policemen and other licensed people. The Patriotic League in Bratunac also succeeded in seizing a considerable number of explosives from the Sase mines. However, despite all the signs of preparations for war among the Serbs, Muslims were generally not particularly eager, or willing, to organise resistance. Some Muslims accused SDA activists of contributing to the outbreak of a war in which Muslims stood no chance.⁴⁵⁶

Aside from the police and the Patriotic League, (a semi-official undertaking by the authorities), other Muslim paramilitary groups were created. However, these were usually little more than poorly armed village militia. There was one exception in Bratunac. In February 1991, Nurif Rizvanovic, a former JNA officer and undercover agent, established the *Muslimansko Nacionalno Vijeće* (MNV) or Muslim National Council. This was a militant organisation that tried to unite Muslims dissatisfied with the policies of the SDA and MBO. Rizvanovic was born in Glogova, had worked in Slovenia, and had served some years in prison for espionage for western intelligence services. Soon after his release, he returned to Glogova, where he was often seen together with Mevludin 'Mevko' Sinanovic.⁴⁵⁷ In press reports, Rizvanovic declared that his objective was to mobilise all Muslims of Yugoslavia, regardless of their ethnic backgrounds (including Bosnian Muslims, Muslims from the Sandzak, and Albanians from Kosovo and Macedonia). He also announced the creation of units of volunteers. He established a steering committee in Glogova, and then set up similar committees in Konjevic Polje and Voljavica during the summer of 1991. Plans were made to establish a fourth MNV committee in Bratunac, but local SDA authorities prohibited its work, saying that the formation of paramilitary units would accelerate the break-up of Bosnia-Herzegovina. In early September 1991, Rizvanovic attended the celebrations of the first anniversary of the formation of the SDA. Held in the Bratunac stadium, the celebrations drew thousands of people. An embittered Rizvanovic addressed the crowd there, speaking out a prophecy that would later prove true: "We will see each other next year on the battlefield!" Within a few days, Rizvanovic returned to Slovenia, putting an end to his aspirations as a politician and paramilitary leader.⁴⁵⁸

The Kravica killing

Daily life in the municipalities of Srebrenica and Bratunac became punctuated by incidents, provocations, quarrels and café brawls. Certain cafés became gathering places for Serb or Muslim nationalists, who regularly burst into 'enemy' cafés to start fights. Serb and Muslim youth from villages infamous as hotbeds of nationalism, including Kravica and Potočari, came to Bratunac every night to cause trouble.⁴⁵⁹ Kravica had an especially notorious history as a source of trouble. Feuds and

⁴⁵⁶ Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, pp.60-62.

⁴⁵⁷ Komlenovic and Ivanisevic, 'sa Drine', p.10.

⁴⁵⁸ See the interview with Nurif Rizvanovic in the Serbian magazine, *Duga* (Vasovic, 'Privatni dzihad'). See also, Delalic, 'Rizvanoviceva majka i brat tvrde', p.20; Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, pp.63-64; and Miljanovic, *Krvavi Božić*, p.36. For reprints and translations of MNV documents, including a public invitation of the MNV to all Muslims to come to Bratunac on the first day of Bajram, see Jovanovic et al, *Iskorenjivanje Srba*, pp.15-19. See also, Ivanisevic, *Hronika*, p.136.

⁴⁵⁹ Interview: Becir Hasanovic 17/05/1998. A Serb chronicler describes how the authorities took little action against such provocations. See Miljanovic, *Krvavi Božić*, p.39.

vengeance were a fairly normal part of village life.⁴⁶⁰ In light of this, no one was surprised when two Muslims were killed in an ambush near Kravica on 3 September 1991, the region's first victims of ethnic violence. Travelling by car, the Muslims ignored a group of Serb policemen, who signalled them to stop in the centre of Kravica. Instead, they drove full speed ahead, straight into an ambush prepared by Serb nationalists. The shooting was so heavy that it could be heard in Bratunac. As one of the perpetrators later declared, they wanted to put an end to Muslim provocations in Kravica. In the weeks preceding the incident, Muslim men had driven up and down the road through Kravica, yelling and insulting the local Serb population, waving green flags, and playing 'oriental' music. The Serbs wanted to teach these Muslims a lesson, especially Mevludin 'Mevko' Sinanovic, an extremist from Glogova, who had been in the car, but had managed to escape and survive the attack. Although the attack was carried out by two Serbs from Kravica and Ljubovija, Muslims thought that it had been orchestrated by the SDS and a Chetnik paramilitary group led by Radomir 'Raso' Milosevic. The perpetrators escaped to Croatia, where they fought as volunteers before returning to eastern Bosnia once the war started.⁴⁶¹

The next day, Muslims filled the streets of Bratunac, and tensions between Serbs and Muslims soared to unprecedented heights. Many Serbs and Muslims fled to Ljubovija (Serbia) for fear that the situation might explode. Schools and businesses closed down, and the authorities feared Muslims would start a general revolt. Muslims gathered in front of the police station, demanding an investigation to find the perpetrators of the Kravica killings. Their demonstrations continued throughout the night and following day. The demonstrators demanded the immediate resignation of Nezir Muratovic, Head of Police in Bratunac, and of Nikola Mandic, Police Commander. And indeed, both turned in their resignations after two days. Police troops from elsewhere were deployed in the town to keep the situation under control. The police also set up checkpoints throughout the municipality, which were manned twenty-four hours a day. Despite these measures, Muslims from the village of Voljavica witnessed Serbs crossing the Drina in small boats during the night; they were transporting arms into eastern Bosnia to distribute among the Serb inhabitants.⁴⁶² On the afternoon of 4 September, several police officials from Tuzla visited Bratunac. The next day, two prominent politicians, Ejup Ganic (SDA) and Nikola Koljevic (SDS), both members of the Bosnian presidency, arrived to urge their Muslim and Serb constituencies to stay calm. Ganic called on the Muslims not to take revenge for the attack, promising a thorough investigation. Koljevic, in turn, went to Kravica to inform local Serbs that the Bosnian police would not be entering their village. According to Muslim sources, police inquiries into the incident also revealed the involvement of three Bratunac police officers in the attack over and above the two perpetrators. One of these officers was Luka Bogdanovic, the future commander of Bratunac's Serbian police. None of the Serb perpetrators and accomplices in the attack were ever brought to trial, let alone convicted.⁴⁶³

After the Kravica incident, Muslims started to organise armed patrols in their villages and settlements with the few arms they had. Serbs did the same in their villages. However, they also evacuated women, children and the elderly to Serbia.⁴⁶⁴ Feelings of insecurity intensified, among other things, because clashes were occurring elsewhere, such as in the Visegrad area.⁴⁶⁵ Ibisevic's account clearly reveals how very difficult it was under the circumstances to maintain any degree of law and order, including in Srebrenica. The social fabric had more or less disintegrated. One of the main

⁴⁶⁰ Conversation: Zdravko Novicic 09/06/1998, Becir Hasanovic 17/05/1998, Boban Vasic 15/07/1998.

⁴⁶¹ For the Kravica incident, see Oric, *Srebrenica*, pp.36-37; Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, p.25; Masic, *Srebrenica*, p.11; Miljanovic, *Krvavi Bozic*, pp.39-41; Bosnjak, 'Da li je policija umijesena?'; Komlenovic and Ivanisevic, 'sa Drine'. Interviews: Mitko and Mevla Kadric, 17/01/1998, Becir Hasanovic 17/05/1998.

⁴⁶² Bosnjak, 'Da li je policija umijesena?'; Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, p.26.

⁴⁶³ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.134-35. See also, Oric, *Srebrenica*, pp.36-37; Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, pp.25-26. Interview: Ibro Verlasevic 01/06/1998. Luka Bogdanovic was arrested by the police and subjected to interrogations and lie detector tests. He was released after four days because - as he claims - they found no evidence against him. Conversation: Luka Bogdanovic, 15/09/1999.

⁴⁶⁴ Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, p.60; Oric, *Srebrenica*, p.37; Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, p.26. Miljanovic, *Krvavi Bozic*, p.41.

⁴⁶⁵ Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, pp.90-91.

problems was the enormous rise in economic crime, such as the widespread theft of electricity in the villages and illegal chopping of trees in forests around Srebrenica. Muslim foresters accepted bribes to keep silent about the illegal transport of timber into Serbia. Measures to stop such practices failed. It was impossible to take any action against the trade, or the widespread corruption among foresters, road guards and policemen at the bridge in Skelani. Ibisevic writes that local Muslims were especially to blame for this. Many of them, having lost their incomes, needed money. Consequently, they resorted to chopping down walnut trees en masse, which were transported off to Serbia for a few hundred German marks per truckload. The theft of equipment from companies also became more common. As Ibisevic observes, everybody was stealing and it had become virtually impossible to protect state and communal property. The people appointed to protect the property were often corrupt. In fact, they were the ones who stole the most.⁴⁶⁶

After the Kravica killings, more incidents occurred near the Perucac dam. Serb gunmen shot at Muslim villages from the Serbian side of the Drina on 5 September 1991. The firing continued throughout most of the night. The next day, the inhabitants came to Srebrenica to demand protection. According to Ibisevic, the leader of the paramilitary forces who had organised the shootings was the brother of Bajina Basta's police chief. And he, in his turn, had provided the paramilitaries with arms and explosives. The JNA was also strengthening its positions along the Drina. Miodrag Jokic, the SDS extremist from Srebrenica, boasted to Ibisevic that the army had installed twenty-three cannons in the Tara mountains, which could scorch the municipality of Srebrenica within a few hours.⁴⁶⁷ The situation grew so tense that every village quarrel had the potential to escalate into a much larger-scale conflict. At this stage, municipal authorities and SDA and SDS party leaders were constantly moving from one locality to the next to extinguish the beginnings of would-be bonfires. To reduce tensions, local Muslim and Serb leaders called for a meeting on 24 September 1991 to discuss all contentious issues. Serbs put all their complaints on the agenda: the alleged discrimination of Serbs in the allotment of private building sites, the dismissal of Serb workers, the appointment of Muslim directors in primary schools, the removal of the army card files by the Muslim authorities, as well as the latter's refusal to forward regular calls for the army to Serb conscripts and reservists. The SDA added several other items: Serb obstruction of the work of local companies and that of the newly appointed officials in local communes, the excessive prolongation of negotiations regarding the distribution of directors' positions, the systematic absence of SDS members at municipal council meetings, and the refusal of Serbs to pay taxes.⁴⁶⁸

The coalition of nationalist parties that had replaced communist power after the elections was also disintegrating completely throughout the rest of Bosnia. In September 1991, the SDS began to create Serb Autonomous Areas or SAO-s, as it had previously done in Croatia.⁴⁶⁹ The SAO of Biraè was formed in eastern Bosnia, encompassing the municipalities of Bratunac, Srebrenica, Zvornik, Vlasenica, Sekovici, Kalesija, Zivinice, and Kladanj. Its assembly met regularly in Sekovici and Milici. At a meeting of the Bosnian parliament in mid October, the Muslim and Croat parties voted for a proposal that would make Bosnia a 'sovereign republic', formally part of Yugoslavia, but independent in practice. Radovan Karadzic, who attended the meeting, warned those present that this decision would lead Bosnia to war, and that Muslims might disappear as a people. The SDS delegation demonstratively left the parliamentary session. Only ten days later, the Bosnian Serbs created their own assembly, thereby underlining their determination to remain in Yugoslavia. This position was reinforced

⁴⁶⁶ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp. 135, 138, 172-173.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, p.136.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, p.137.

⁴⁶⁹ SOA stands for Srpska Autonomna Oblast (Serb Autonomous Area). See Burg and Shoup, *The war in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, p.73; Gow, 'After the flood', p.455.

by the Serbian referendum on 9 November, in which Bosnian Serbs voted against a sovereign Bosnia. Even in Srebrenica and Bratunac, many local Serbs took part in this referendum.⁴⁷⁰

Unwilling to cooperate any further with the Croats and Muslims who were heading for independence, the SDS stepped back from the state institutions – parliament, presidium and government – regarding the decisions taken by them as illegitimate. At the same time, the SDS started to carve out new ‘serb’ municipalities, such as Skelani and Milici, from the Muslim-dominated municipalities of Srebrenica, Vlasenica and Bratunac. The director of the Milici bauxite mines, Rajko Dukic, was one of the instigators of these plans.⁴⁷¹ As chairman of the SDS Executive Council, he held one of the highest positions within the party hierarchy in Bosnia as a whole. As such, he is still seen by many as the main mastermind behind the program of ethnic cleansing in eastern Bosnia. Dukic’s business empire was one of the main sponsors of the SDS. According to Muslim sources, his primary objective was to acquire full control over the economic resources and assets in eastern Bosnia. The main partners in this project were Jevto Subotic, director of ‘Biraè’, a large aluminium plant in Zvornik and Djordje Jovièic, the director of the Zvornik bank.⁴⁷² The hydroelectric plants on the Drina, near Zvornik and Bajina Basta, were already under Serbian control (i.e. they were owned by Serbia), securing the enormous energy resources needed for processing bauxite into aluminium.

In November 1991, the Yugoslav Army returned to the scene. At the start of the month, Hamed Salihovic, Head of Police, received a dispatch from the Second Army Corps in Tuzla, announcing the passage of JNA troops and vehicles through Srebrenica. Rumours spread that the JNA was planning to position its forces and heavy and light artillery in Brezani. A Serb village, Brezani lies southeast of Srebrenica on a plateau of great strategic importance. The JNA did exactly the same around Sarajevo and other Bosnian towns. Ibisevic protested to the commander of the Tuzla Army Corps, informing him that JNA forces were not welcome in Srebrenica. He even threatened with Muslim resistance (barricades) and acts of sabotage (destruction of roads and bridges). Milenko Gavric, the commander of the Tuzla Army Corps, threatened to arrest Ibisevic. Ibran Mustafic added fuel to the fire by telling Gavric that the only army welcome in Srebrenica was a Muslim one. Ibisevic called Izetbegovic to ask him whether he would support acts of direct resistance. Izetbegovic told him that he felt Muslims should put up resistance if they had enough weapons and stood a chance of defending themselves.⁴⁷³ In the face growing unrest among the town’s leadership, the command of the Second Army Corps abandoned its plans. At this stage, the JNA’s strategy was to take control silently of positions in eastern Bosnia, without attracting too much attention or provoking Muslim resistance. According to Muslim sources, between late 1991 and early 1992, the JNA supplied arms to many Serb villages, including Brezani, Podravanje, Orahovica and Ratkovici. Allegedly, every Serb in the region of Srebrenica was armed.⁴⁷⁴ It has also been reported that Serbs held army exercises in the area of Fakovici in early 1992.⁴⁷⁵

A year had passed since the elections, and the SDA and SDS had still failed to reached any agreement about the distribution of directors’ posts in various firms in Srebrenica. At this stage,

⁴⁷⁰ Burg and Shoup, *The war in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, pp.73-79; Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, p.87; Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, p.24; Masic, *Srebrenica*, p.27; Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, p.87.

⁴⁷¹ Masic, *Srebrenica*, pp.26-7; Oric, *Srebrenica*, p.36. Several SDS activists from Srebrenica and Bratunac were involved in establishing and administering the Autonomous Region of Biraè, such as Goran Zekic, Miroslav Deronjic, Miodrag Stanisavljevic, and Milenko Èanic. Oric’s book contains the minutes of the SAO Biraè meeting on 5 February 1992 in Milici, where the discussion focused on closer ties to Serbia in economic policy as well as in the media (Oric, *Srebrenica*, pp.28-34).

⁴⁷² See Oric, *Srebrenica*, pp.12-13. Interview: Boban Tomic 11/11/1999. During the war, Dukic made huge profits by circumventing the sanctions imposed on Serbia, trafficking oil and expensive western consumer goods. Republika Srpska was exempted from the embargo and Boksit Milici, which also had an office in the centre of Belgrade, could freely buy oil and other products abroad. See Cohen, *Hearts grown brutal*, pp.178-82.

⁴⁷³ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, p.141.

⁴⁷⁴ Some Serbs refused to take up arms against their Muslim neighbours. Muslim sources report cases of Serbs, who gave the weapons they had received from the JNA to Muslims when the war first broke out. See Masic, *Srebrenica*, pp.23,27.

⁴⁷⁵ Interview: Becir Hasanovic 17/05/1998.

divisions deepened within the SDA, with Mustafic and Efendic on one side and Ibisevic on the other. In his book, Ibisevic accuses Mustafic and Efendic of trafficking in arms and other dubious activities. This entire situation caused great dissatisfaction among the Muslim population in the villages along the Drina, as Efendic did not deliver the arms he had promised to them. Evidence of the abuse of the arms monopoly was piling up: Efendic and Tihic were selling arms only to those who had money, and not to those who needed them. Efendic also abused his position as local SDA President by opening a newsstand in Potocari called 'sDA'. Initially, many people thought it was an SDA party booth, but it was merely Efendic's private stand. Ibisevic claims that Efendic, unwilling to face growing criticism of his doings, refused to call any further meetings of the SDA's local Executive Council, thus paralysing the party's work.⁴⁷⁶

Radio Srebrenica was another bone of contention, in this case between Serbs and Muslims. As the director of the Culture House, Bosko Milovanovic, a Serb, was officially in charge of the station. And he employed only Serb journalists (including Momèilo Cvjetinovic and Marinko 'Kokeza' Sekulic). One Muslim was employed as a technician. Muslim nationalists claimed that Radio Srebrenica followed a pro-Serbian policy, and that it had become a propaganda instrument. In response, Ibisevic decided to bring it under SDA control. The municipal council suspended work at the radio station until a new, Muslim team was nominated. In late November 1991, all Serb journalists were dismissed and a Muslim became the chief editor. This decision was communicated to Milovanovic, who simply ignored it. In the end, the police closed the station down and sealed it.⁴⁷⁷ In his crusade against Bosko Milovanovic, Ibisevic also accused him of financial embezzlement and theft, which he claims was later proven during an investigation. SDS leaders, Goran Zekic and Milenko Èanic, begged Ibisevic to stop his campaign, but Ibisevic refused. Zekic admitted that Milovanovic was a thief, but pointed out that he was not the only one in Srebrenica, and that it would be unfair to persecute only him.⁴⁷⁸

In December 1991, Bosnia-Herzegovina applied for diplomatic recognition by the European Community. The EC stipulated that a referendum, which was to be held on 29 February and 1 March 1992, was to settle the question of independence. The Bosnian Serbs, in their turn, proclaimed their own Republic on 9 January 1992, and declared that it was to remain part of Yugoslavia if Bosnia's independence was to be recognised by the international community. On the local level, Serbs were still in the process of forming new 'serb' municipalities. The Serb municipality of Skelani was created in December 1991. At a meeting in Kravica in early 1992, the SDS of Bratunac formed the new Serb municipality of Bratunac. Ljubisav Simic (a Serbian literature teacher) became the 'Mayor' of this Serb municipality. Rodoljub Djukanovic was appointed as the President of the Executive Council, and Milutin Milosevic as the Head of Police. With the formation of these parallel Serb institutions, the existing municipal organs, which were dominated by the SDA, were completely paralysed.⁴⁷⁹ The same happened in Vlasenica, where, in March 1992, the Serb municipality of Milici was created. The final tug-of-war between Serb and Muslim nationalists over the territories, resources, and economic assets of eastern Bosnia had started.

In January 1992, the economic factor in the Serb-Muslim conflict surfaced during a strike at the bauxite mine of Podravanje. The mine, which was located on the territory of the municipality of Srebrenica, had been opened and developed by 'Boksit Milici', but was now controlled by Muslims and run by a director who became a prominent SDA leader. According to Serb sources, he recruited Muslim employees only, completely excluding local Serbs from Podravanje from jobs in the mine.⁴⁸⁰ After JNA units arrived in Milici in late 1991, Serb miners commandeered the machines and equipment

⁴⁷⁶ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.144-45.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.165-66; conversations Momèilo Cvjetinovic 23/06/1998 and 14-15/09/1999, Marinko Sekulic 10/11/1998 and 14/11/1998. Ibisevic claims he dismissed Serb journalists in January 1992, while Cvjetinovic has stated that this happened on 21 November 1991.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.165-169.

⁴⁷⁹ Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, p.17. See also, Miljanovic, *Krvavi Božić*, p.30.

⁴⁸⁰ Interviews: Dukic 14/06/2000, Cvjetinovic 11/06/1998.

of the Podravanje mine in order to end what they felt was the 'Muslim' exploitation of 'serb' bauxite reserves.⁴⁸¹ Muslim workers showed up at the municipal office in Srebrenica to demand the return of the mine's equipment. However, the authorities felt it too risky to send in the local police to retake possession. It was commonly known that the JNA had distributed weapons among local Serbs, and that additional paramilitary troops had arrived in Podravanje from other places.

The Serb workers of 'Boksit' Srebrenica formed a strike committee, demanding the resignation of the Muslim director, Mirsad Kavazbasic (who was also president of the SDA in Bratunac at the time). The committee pointed out that the ratio of Muslims to Serbs among the employees had once been fairly equal (55% to 45%), but that this had changed after Kavazbasic's appointment as director some six years earlier. Several meetings were organised in Srebrenica and Sarajevo, but nothing helped to solve the problem. Ibisevic writes that the Serbs from Podravanje had been incited by the SDS, and that the JNA was lying in wait to intervene if things escalated. In February 1992, Serbs proposed dividing the firm and its machines and equipment. Despite attempts at a compromise solution, however, the situation remained unresolved.⁴⁸² The mine did not resume operations in the three months before the war broke out. Similar divisions emerged in the Sase mine, albeit without the far-reaching consequences seen in Podravanje. There, the Serb miners established a separate Serb trade union.⁴⁸³

On 29 January 1992, the local SDA party held its first regular assembly in Srebrenica's Culture House. As Ibisevic observes, instead of discussing how to defend the town in the ever-approaching war, the delegates were much more preoccupied with fighting enemies among their own people. Avdo Hasanovic, a Muslim doctor and SDA Executive Board member, tried to ban his colleague, Sabit Begic, from Srebrenica's Health Centre, as Begic was vice-president of the Social-Democratic SDP. Hasanovic proposed that the SDA assembly bar Begic from treating members of the SDA, which it accepted by acclamation. Muslim unity also fell under serious threat elsewhere. In Ljesce, tensions mounted between Ahmo Tihic and inhabitants of villages along the Drina, who complained that only a limited number of families were able to obtain weapon licenses. They claimed that Tihic ensured that others would be prevented from obtaining these licenses. Tihic's involvement in the secret arms dealings of Hamed Efendic and Ibran Mustafic dealt yet another blow to his reputation.⁴⁸⁴ Faced with defending themselves against growing criticism from the population, these men now claimed that the worst was over, that 'there would be no war'. They told people that it was unnecessary "to throw away money on weapons", even though they had been selling weapons before. Ibisevic accused Mustafic and Efendic of lulling people to sleep, and of delivering all the arms available into the hands of a select few in Potocari.⁴⁸⁵

Late February 1992 witnessed the referendum on Bosnia's independence. The SDA Mayor of Srebrenica, Ibisevic, saw this as a historical opportunity for Bosnia to acquire its own sovereign state. To achieve this higher goal, he admits his involvement in small irregularities, such as collecting the

⁴⁸¹ This was not the only case in which villages claimed 'their' natural resources. During the summer of 1991, the Muslim villagers of Luka stood up to the SIP 'Drina' forestry company, as they felt the company was exploiting local forests without giving the local population anything in return. Similar protests occurred in the Serb village of Brezani six months later. In the newly created Serb municipality of Bratunac, 'Drina' was also banned from chopping 'serbian forests'. Serbs from Kravica obstructed the firm's activities and attacked its employees. Most workers had to be discharged on involuntary leave. Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.161-62; Oric, *Srebrenica*, p.15. Interview: Hasan Nuhanovic 16/06/1998.

⁴⁸² Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.148-55.

⁴⁸³ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, p.162; Oric, *Srebrenica*, p.15.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.156-58.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibisevic himself, however, had also contributed to this – at least to some extent. One small episode is worth mentioning here. In February 1992, a 22 mm anti-aircraft gun disappeared at the battery factory in Potočari. In June 1990, when local Territorial Defence arsenals were emptied by the JNA, the army left the gun because it had been unable to transport it. When Stanislavljevic (head of the Territorial Defence) told Ibisevic that the JNA was going to take it, Ibisevic informed Mustafic and Efendic, who removed it. See: Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.162-63; Mandzic, 'Zlatni Ljiljani', p.37. Interviews Besim Ibisevic 24/05/1998, Momčilo Cvjetinovic 11/06/1998.

votes of “dead souls”, i.e. of Muslims who had died but had not been removed from the list of voters.⁴⁸⁶ He also campaigned in the villages, explaining to peasants the importance of their participation in the referendum. As he recounts, he urged them “to register all people present and absent, all those dead and alive: let all of them vote for an independent Bosnia-Herzegovina - so history will not find fault with us!”⁴⁸⁷ The municipality’s Muslim population voted almost unanimously for Bosnia’s independence, while the Serbs boycotted the referendum. In Sarajevo, the referendum sent tensions between Serbs and Muslims soaring to unprecedented heights, culminating in the killing of a Serb wedding guest in the town’s old centre, and the erection of barricades by Serb gunmen. Rajko Dukic, who had become president of the SDS Crisis Committee, was closely involved with these barricades, negotiating directly with Izetbegovic and setting the conditions for their removal.⁴⁸⁸

Although war was now drawing near, the SDA Executive Board of Srebrenica did not call a meeting to discuss the situation. As no meeting had taken place for almost two months, Ibisevic went on 24 March 1992 to the SDA headquarters in Sarajevo. He discussed the situation with Omer Behmen, who bore primary responsibility for SDA problems at the municipal level. Ibisevic also met with Hasan Èengic, who was surprised to hear from Ibisevic that Srebrenica was unprepared for war. He had been informed by Hamed Efendic that the SDA in Srebrenica was ready. They also discovered that Ibisevic had not received the gun sent to him by SDA headquarters. Other weapon deliveries from the SDA Headquarters to Srebrenica had ended up in the hands of people who traded them away on the black market. Èengic then gave instructions to Ibisevic to organise the town’s defence. In a telephone conversation the very same day, he urged Efendic to call a meeting of the SDA Executive Board immediately. Efendic set up a five-member SDA crisis committee, which never met again simply because it was too late and events accelerated rapidly out of control.⁴⁸⁹

At this stage, the local security situation worsened by the day. At a meeting for workers of the SIP ‘Drina’ forestry company in Zeleni Jadar, Ibran Mustafic demonstrated his talent for demagoguery once again. He told everyone present that the time had finally come to settle accounts with the Serbs, whom he accused of all kinds of economic crime and sabotage. He did not realise that Serb workers were present at the meeting. Naturally, they informed Miodrag Jokic about the matter. Jokic, in turn, passed on the information to the Serbian press, which published stories of Muslims in Srebrenica preparing for a massacre of Serbs on the Muslim holiday of Bajram.⁴⁹⁰ Many Serbs decided to flee from Srebrenica. Parents took their children out of school, and many abandoned their jobs and left town. SDS leaders, such as Miodrag Jokic, urged Serbs to take refuge in Serbia in order to avoid the Bajram ‘massacre’ that Muslims were allegedly preparing for the Serbs.⁴⁹¹ The Muslims of Srebrenica watched with growing alarm as their Serb neighbours packed their belongings and left for Serbia, loading furniture, electrical equipment, and even windows, doors and posts onto trucks. These developments struck fear in the hearts of the Muslim population, as they felt they had nowhere to go.⁴⁹²

⁴⁸⁶ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, p.159.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, p.163.

⁴⁸⁸ Dukic’s company, Boksit Milici had a branch office in the Holiday Inn hotel in Sarajevo, which became the SDS nerve centre at the start of the war. Mirko Krajisnik, brother of SDS heavyweight, Momèilo Krajisnik, was head of the Boksit Milici office in Sarajevo. In interviews, Dukic has minimised his role, claiming that the barricades were erected entirely spontaneously. He also denies widespread accusations that his company played a crucial role in financing the SDS, embezzling oil from the republican reserves of BiH in early 1992, and purchasing weapons. For Dukic’s role, see: Andjelic, ‘Poplacen je bio spreman’; Burg and Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, p.118; Cohen, *Hearts grown brutal*, p.193; documents from the Rajko Dukic collection: *Obavjestenje kriznog stabla srpskog naroda BiH*, dated 02/03/1992, and *Magnetofonski snimak 56. sjednice Predsjedništva SRBiH, održane 2. marta 1992. godine*, dated 02/03/1992; interviews: Mitko and Mevla Kadric 17/01/1998; Hasan Nuhanovic 16/06/1998.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.170-72.

⁴⁹⁰ Interviews: Marinko Sekulic 10/11/1998, Sefkija Hadziarapovic 22/05/1998. Later, in May, in an interview with *Ilustrovana politika*, Jokic claimed that Muslims intended to kill all Serbs during a joint SDA-SDS meeting in Hotel Domavija, which was planned for 6 April, the first day of the Bajram celebrations (Milanovic ‘Ubice su medju nama!’).

⁴⁹¹ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp.173-74. Ivanisevic, *Hronika*, pp.334-336.

⁴⁹² Interview: Abdulah Purkovic, 04/02/1998.

Chapter 6

War In Eastern Bosnia

“Novi borci, novi praznici, novi sveci”

(New fighters, new holidays, new saints)

Dobrisav Koëevic, former Communist official of Srebrenica, in NIOD interview 26/06/1998

[Interviewer:] Do you believe in the church and in God?

[Arkan:] Yes I believe. Didn't you see my cross?

[Interviewer:] No, I didn't.

[Arkan:] Here, I will show you, this is the cross of the Serbian Volunteer Guard made of 34.5 grams of gold. I take it always with me. Here, you see the date when the guard was created. I can tell you, there are quite a few bishops who are envious of my cross.

Zeljko Raznjatovic 'Arkan' in an interview with journalist Dusica Milanovic, November 1992⁴⁹³

Recognition of Bosnia's independence and fights in Bijeljina

In late March 1992, just days before the European Community recognised Bosnia's independence (on 6 April), heavy fighting broke out in Bijeljina. Situated in northeastern Bosnia not far from the Serbian and Croatian border, this small town had a mixed population (the majority of which were Muslim). Even during 1991, when war was sweeping across Croatia, Bijeljina had been strategically important because of its location on the transit route between Serbia and the Krajina, from which Serbs in Croatia were supplied with arms. From the very onset of the war in Croatia in August 1991, the situation in Bijeljina was very tense. Serb gunmen established roadblocks and checkpoints and by the end of the year, they were levying tolls on vehicles passing through Bijeljina. Once the war in Croatia ended, in January 1992, Serb paramilitary forces crossed over into Bosnia, further exacerbating the situation. These forces were scattered around Serb-dominated areas, at the flashpoints of possible future conflicts, mainly in the northern and eastern parts of the country. Among them were the Arkan Tigers who established their presence in Bijeljina several weeks before the outbreak of the war.

On 31 March 1992, Arkan sent more troops from Serbia across the Drina. He attacked Bijeljina, making short work of a small Muslim militia that had been organized by the SDA. The SDA forces consisted partly of what were called *muhadžeri*, i.e. new settlers in Bijeljina who came from much more backward areas, such as Srebrenica and Bratunac.⁴⁹⁴ These Muslim militants fought back for about three days, erecting barricades and placing snipers on several high buildings in the town's centre. By 2 April, however, almost all barricades and sniper nests had been eliminated, and the next day, Bijeljina fell under full Serb control. JNA troops stationed not far from Bijeljina stayed inside their barracks on

⁴⁹³ Milanovic, 'Arkanov srpski san'.

⁴⁹⁴ *Borba*, 1992-04-03, p. 3.

receiving orders from Belgrade not to intervene. The local police, who had formed mixed Serb-Muslim patrols to keep the situation in check, also decided not to intervene in what was basically a battle between Muslim and Serb nationalist paramilitary forces. Once the Muslim militia fled Bijeljina, the Tigers and other local militia went from house to house, looting the Muslim homes and killing some of the inhabitants. According to press reports, at least forty-two people, almost all Muslims, died during these events. (Other sources place the death tolls in the several hundreds, though these figures appear to be grossly overestimated). Bodies were left lying in the streets, and were only removed when the fighting stopped. An SDS crisis committee took control of the local government with assurances that 'loyal' Muslims would not be harmed. Serb and Muslim inhabitants, who had fled the town to surrounding villages or to Serbia, began returning to their homes. During the following weekend, local Muslims celebrated the feast of *bajram*. Tensions diminished after Arkan's announcement on the local radio that everyone who had not participated in the fighting would be safe. "Let honourable Muslims," said Arkan, "freely make their famous pita-s at home today, and let them invite us. We will be their guests, because we have been their liberators as well. To Mr. Izetbegovic we want to say that he has bad advisors and that there will be no chance to establish a *mujahedin* state in this part of Europe".⁴⁹⁵

The Serb attack on Bijeljina prompted the Bosnian presidency to call for a general mobilisation. It decided to allow municipalities that were under Serb threat to raise Territorial Defence forces and to arm the population. In Sarajevo, paramilitary groups of both sides appeared on the streets. The Serbian media, in turn, accused the Bosnian presidency of being "selective" in its concern, saying it responded only to the clashes in Bijeljina yet ignored similar events in Kupres, Bosanski Brod and in the Neretva valley, where the main victims were Serbs.⁴⁹⁶ Unlike other eastern Bosnian towns, Bijeljina was not immediately cleansed of its Muslim population. Most Muslims were allowed to stay, and tried to establish a *modus vivendi* with the new SDS authorities. To avoid trouble, many Muslims decided to change their names into Serbian ones. Some Muslims converted to Orthodoxy to ensure they would not be expelled from their homes. (Others were forcibly 'baptised' in mock rituals by Serb paramilitaries, as documented in film footage of Bijeljina). Most Muslims remained in the town until the Serb SDS authorities started to expel its non-Serb inhabitants in 1993 and 1994.⁴⁹⁷

Three days after the Serbs took Bijeljina, the European Community recognised Bosnia's independence. This triggered the beginning of a full-scale war. Sarajevo became the focus of world attention. On 5 April, Serb snipers opened fire from the Holiday Inn hotel in Sarajevo, killing half a dozen people demonstrating for peace in the streets of the Bosnian capital. The Holiday Inn was the seat of the SDS crisis committee, which was headed by Boksit Milici, director Rajko Dukic.⁴⁹⁸ On 6 April 1992, after the SDS left its Sarajevo headquarters, the shelling of the town began. Izetbegovic declared a state of emergency. The next day, the Bosnian Serbs proclaimed the Serb Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina (SRBiH), later to be renamed Republika Srpska. Immediately, they claimed two thirds of Bosnia's territory. In what appears to have been one massive military effort coordinated from Belgrade, local Serb militia, paramilitary forces from Serbia, and JNA forces took control of seventy percent of Bosnian territory in just a few weeks. Eastern Bosnia was invaded by paramilitary troops and the JNA, who launched an assault on towns along the Drina. SDS crisis committees were established all

⁴⁹⁵ *Borba*, 1992-04-06, p. 4. For the events in Bijeljina see: Silber and Little, *The death of Yugoslavia*, pp. 247-48; Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, pp. 96-97; Burg and Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, p. 119; Bassiouni, *Final report*, Annex III.a: 136-138; Zafirovic, 'susret'. I also consulted press reports in *Politika* and *Borba*.

⁴⁹⁶ For these other clashes, see: Burg and Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, p. 119; Jovanovic et al, *Iskorenjivanje Srba*, pp. 42-51.

⁴⁹⁷ For the situation in Bijeljina in 1993 and 1994, see the Humanitarian Law Center reports, 'Bijeljina' and 'Banja Luka and Bijeljina'. See also Williams and Cigar, *A prima facie case*, p. 15. Conversation with: Slavica Stanëic 09/11/1999.

⁴⁹⁸ Dukic played a crucial role on the eve and during the beginning of the war. Trucks from 'Boksit' were used to erect barricades in Zvornik before the town was attacked and run over by Serb paramilitaries and the JNA (Bassiouni, *Final report*, Annex IV, pp. 45-46). At the ICTY, in the Dragan Nikolic case, two Muslim witnesses named him as one of the main organisers of the take-over of Vlasenica in April 1992 (ICTY 12-10-95). See also Stamenkovic, 'Opet ce se Dukic pitati'.

over Serb-held Bosnia to plan and carry out the ethnic cleansing of non-Serbs. These committees were assisted in this by the JNA and various paramilitary forces from Serbia and Montenegro.⁴⁹⁹

The UN *Final Report of the Commission of Experts established pursuant to Security Council Resolution 780 (1992)*, published by the head of that commission, Cherif Bassiouni, provides a detailed picture of the organization of this campaign of ethnic cleansing and the almost symbiotic nature of the cooperation between the army, local militia and paramilitary groups.⁵⁰⁰ Typically, the JNA took possession of strategic positions and then proceeded to shell Muslim settlements, after which the paramilitaries entered. In many cases, Serb inhabitants would receive notice in advance to leave the area. Once the paramilitaries took control of a town or village, they began terrorizing the non-Serb population, killing innocent civilians and looting their homes. They did this with help from members of the local SDS crisis committees, who pointed out which houses to target. Local administration was taken over by the SDS crisis committees, often in conjunction with the paramilitary groups. Finally, non-Serbs were detained and evicted, and their property confiscated.⁵⁰¹

As the Bassiouni report notes, Serb combatants, including those in the regular army, usually did not wear distinctive uniforms, recognisable emblems or insignias of rank. Officers freely moved from army to militia and from one unit to another, and the command structures were unclear even to insiders. What had emerged was “a multiplicity of combatant forces” operating within different command structures or without any structure at all, merging and cooperating in ad hoc combinations during specific operations. Although local Serb TO forces had a separate command structure, they frequently operated within the framework of the regular army and under regular army command. At times, however, they also operated independently of the army. According to the report, the unclear and hazy chains of command helped to conceal responsibility, and provided a shield of plausible deniability. This situation “seems to have been purposely kept that way for essential political reasons”.⁵⁰²

A crucial role was reserved for various paramilitary groups. These consisted of armed bands and ‘special (police) forces’ from Serbia, as well as local (police) forces augmented by small groups of armed civilians. The latter groups were active in their own towns and villages under local SDS leadership. The former groups, however, were mobile forces operating throughout all of what was once Yugoslavia, springing into action as soon as war swept over a particular region. (This was mainly the case in Croatia and Bosnia, and later also in Kosovo). They received weapons from and were trained by the Serbian Ministry of the Interior, yet these links were not always publicly known and they were usually denied both by government officials and paramilitary leaders.⁵⁰³ The first paramilitary units were established towards the end of 1990, at a time when non-Serbs were still recruited into the JNA. As it was unclear what the JNA’s role would be in the case of future armed conflicts, many nationalist politicians in Serbia (but also in Croatia and Bosnia) decided to create their own armed forces.⁵⁰⁴ Only after the war broke out in Slovenia and Croatia did the JNA transform itself into a Serbian army. And instead of defending the integrity and constitutional order of Yugoslavia, that army now served the interests of Serbs outside Serbia in republics that wanted independence. During this period, non-Serbs were walking out on the army en masse, leaving the JNA with serious personnel and recruitment problems. Unsuccessful efforts to mobilise reservists only added to the recruitment problem. By and large, Serb reservists had little inclination to join the army and morale was at an historic low after the JNA’s

⁴⁹⁹ Human Rights Watch, *Bosnia and Herzegovina*, pp. 4-5.

⁵⁰⁰ The ‘Bassiouni report’ is a study of the first years of the Bosnian war, and includes several annexes on, among other things, the military structure of the ‘warring factions’ and the strategies and tactics employed by them, the policy of ethnic cleansing, the establishment of prison and concentration camps, and the destruction of public and cultural property. The report also gives a day-to-day account of the siege of Sarajevo (until 1994) and includes case studies of ethnic cleansing in the towns of Prijedor and Zvornik (by Serb forces), and in the Medak pocket (by Croat forces).

⁵⁰¹ See also Williams and Cigar, *A prima facie case*, p. 9-10.

⁵⁰² Bassiouni, *Final report*, pp. 30-32.

⁵⁰³ Bassiouni, *Final report*, pp. 31-32. For the intimate links between the paramilitaries and Milosevic’s regime (particularly the Serbian Ministry of the Interior) and the Yugoslav Army, see Williams and Cigar, *A prima facie case* (especially pp. 34-54).

⁵⁰⁴ Bassiouni, *Final report*, Annex summaries and conclusions, p. 11.

humiliating military defeat in Slovenia in June 1991. The army needed the paramilitaries, and in July 1991, the JNA High Command took the (secret) decision to grant volunteers full status as members of the armed forces. With this decision, the JNA opened its gates to the paramilitaries, as well as to extreme nationalist 'believers', right-wing militants, and ordinary criminals.⁵⁰⁵

Aside from the plethora of small bands, the most well-known and notorious of the paramilitary groups were the Serbian Volunteer Guard, better known as the Arkan Tigers, Seselj's Chetnik Movement, and the White Eagles. The Arkan Tigers were established in October 1990 by Zeljko Raznjatovic, alias 'Arkan'. A former bank robber, Raznjatovic had also carried out assassinations for the Yugoslav secret police abroad. Initially, the Arkan Tigers operated illegally. In August 1991, however, Arkan became the commander of a paramilitary training centre in Erdut (Slavonia) under the auspices of the Serbian Ministry of the Interior – particularly Radovan 'Badza' Stojić, a former policeman and confidant of Milosevic. Arkan recruited his men mainly from the Red Star Belgrade supporters club, of which he was president.⁵⁰⁶ The Arkan Tigers fought in Croatia and later also in Bosnia. They were armed with tanks, mortars, sniper guns, machine guns and other modern infantry arms, and were also highly mobile.⁵⁰⁷ During their operations they often received artillery and logistic support from the JNA. The Tigers had a reputation for being extremely ruthless, and as they formed the vanguard of the attacking forces, they were first in line to loot. In general, all paramilitary groups sustained themselves primarily through looting, theft, ransom and trafficking.

Vojislav Seselj, the leader of the extreme rightwing, nationalist Serbian Radical Party, created his own paramilitary forces in late 1990. In April 1991, he carried out his first operation in Borovo Selo near Vukovar in Croatia, attacking a police patrol and killing several Croatian policemen. Later, Seselj participated in the ethnic cleansing operations in Bosnia and in Serb actions against Muslim forces around Srebrenica in late 1992.⁵⁰⁸ The third major paramilitary group was the White Eagles, led by ultra-nationalist intellectual, Dragoslav Bokan. Initially, the White Eagles had ties with Mirko Jovic's SNO (Serbian National Renewal). A rightwing party, the SNO had played an active role in stirring up Serb nationalist sentiment in eastern Bosnia (for instance, in Milici) before the war.⁵⁰⁹ During the war, they participated in the killing and looting in Vukovar, the counties of Zvornik and Visegrad, and other Bosnian and Croatian counties. They also worked together with the JNA, Serb TO forces and local police, as well as other paramilitary groups.⁵¹⁰ The Bassiouni report estimates the total number of paramilitaries that fought in Bosnia and Croatia during the first years of the war to fall between 20,000 to 40,000.⁵¹¹

Although these forces usually fell under the army's chain of command, the JNA failed to restrain them from committing war crimes against civilians. The lack of effective control over the army is among the factors contributing to the numerous excesses. However, as Bassiouni points out, it was probably also part of a deliberate policy of ethnic cleansing aimed at ridding strategic areas – linking Serbia proper with Serb-inhabited areas in Bosnia and Croatia – of their non-Serb populations as

⁵⁰⁵ See Ciric, 'svi smo mi dobrovoljci'; Vasic, 'The Yugoslav Army', p. 128, 134; Williams and Cigar, *A prima facie case*, pp. 29-30. Some sources say that only fifty percent of Serb reservists obeyed summons to report for army duty. In Belgrade, this figure was a mere fifteen. Many men of military age went into hiding. Moreover, thousands of those who were involuntarily mobilised (particularly from the province of Vojvodina) deserted, usually ending up in Hungary or other European countries. See: Burg and Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, p. 84.

⁵⁰⁶ For Arkan, see also Bassiouni, *Final report*, p. 76; Annex III.A, p. 31; Annex IV, p. 33; Williams and Cigar, *A prima facie case*, p. 14-15, 68-69, 80; Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, pp. 97-98; Vujasinovic, 'Ratnik', 'Pedagoska poema'; Komlenovic, 'Arkanzas'; Nerazzini, 'Ko stiti'; Thomas, *Serbia*, pp. 94-95.

⁵⁰⁷ Bassiouni, *Final report*, Annex III.a: 24.

⁵⁰⁸ Bassiouni, *Final report*, Annex III.a, p. 23; Andonovski 'Odmah bih isao u Hag'; Thomas, *Serbia*, pp. 96-98; Williams and Cigar, *A prima facie case*, pp. 13, 15-16.

⁵⁰⁹ Malenica, 'Pustite nas'.

⁵¹⁰ For Dragoslav Bokan's White Eagles, see Glenny, *The Fall of Yugoslavia*, p. 39; Thomas, *Serbia*, pp. 95-96; Anastasijevic, 'Èerupanje orlova'; Williams and Cigar, *A prima facie case*, p. 16; Bassiouni, *Final report*, Annex III.a, pp. 130-32.

⁵¹¹ Bassiouni, *Final report*, Annex Summaries and Conclusions, p. 14. For an overview of paramilitary groups, see Bassiouni, *Final report*, Annex III.a - Special Forces.

swiftly and efficiently as possible.⁵¹² Instead of organising ‘decent’ deportations of unwanted populations, Serb officials relied on terror and brutality to drive Muslims away and strip them of any desire to ever return.⁵¹³ An unbridled army also permitted senior military and political leaders to claim they were unaware of such brutal violence or were unable to control it, as it was carried out largely by criminals, former prisoners, urban dropouts, uneducated young people from rural areas, and other individuals in the margins of society for some reason or other. Acts of brutality and savagery were publicized by the perpetrators to maximize the effect of the terror. This not only caused Muslims to flee, but also had another convenient side-effect: it intimidated other Serbs into submission. No one in his right mind would dream of confronting these people, or even worse, of reaping the material benefits of ethnic cleansing, of dipping into the booty once the dirty part of the whole job had been done.⁵¹⁴ All of these developments and circumstances appear to have been part of a deliberate policy that was planned and coordinated by Bosnian Serb politicians with the support and direct and indirect involvement of the Yugoslav government and the JNA.⁵¹⁵ As Cornelia Sorabji writes, although much of the violence was neither bureaucratic nor centralised, and although it appeared to be the disorganised work of ‘out-of-control’ extremists, the context *was in fact* organised. The violence stemmed from a kind of ‘franchise organisation,’ in which general aims were established at the top, and specific details were left to local initiative. Small politicians and commanders were free to organize the violence in their respective regions, allowing local ‘freelancers’ to inject their own individual sadistic methods.⁵¹⁶

In spite of the regional variation, patterns and practices were similar in the separate theatres of operation. As noted in Bassiouni’s report, the existence of a deliberate policy of ethnic cleansing was also indicated by the wholesale and surreptitious departure of Serb populations living in areas soon up for ‘ethnic cleansing’. In light of the facts, the report observes the following: “There is sufficient evidence to conclude that the practices of ‘ethnic cleansing’ were not coincidental, sporadic or carried out by disorganized groups or bands of civilians who could not be controlled by the Bosnian-Serb leadership. Indeed, the patterns of conduct, the manner in which these acts were carried out, the length of time over which they took place and the areas in which they occurred combine to reveal a purpose, systematicity and some planning and coordination from higher authorities. Furthermore, these practices are carried out by persons from all segments of the Serbian population in the areas described: members of the army, militias, special forces, the police and civilians. Lastly, the Commission notes that these unlawful acts are often heralded by the perpetrators as positive, patriotic accomplishments”.⁵¹⁷

The Drina valley campaign

[Interviewer:] Where did you get this [martial] talent?

[Arkan:] I am from a warrior house. I have an ancestor, called Jokelj Raznjatovic, who once, during the Serbo-Turkish war, cut seventeen Turkish heads off and seized two Turkish banners

⁵¹² Bassiouni, *Final report*, pp. 33-34. The term ‘ethnic cleansing’ is defined here as: rendering an area ethnically homogenous by using force or intimidation to remove from a given area persons from another ethnic or religious group. This definition was presented by Bassiouni, *Final report*, Annex IV.

⁵¹³ Bassiouni, *Final report*, Annex summaries and conclusions, p. 21; Annex IV, p. 9. See also Vasic, ‘The Yugoslav Army’, p. 134.

⁵¹⁴ Interview: Filip Svarm, Dejan Anastasijevic and Aleksandar Ciric, 03/11/1997; Bassiouni, *Final report*, p. 34.

⁵¹⁵ Bassiouni, *Final report*, Annex IV, p. 21.

⁵¹⁶ Sorabji, ‘A very modern war’, pp. 86-87.

⁵¹⁷ Bassiouni, *Final report*, p. 35.

Zeljko Raznjatovic 'Arkan' in an interview with journalist, Dusica Milanovic, November 1992.⁵¹⁸

"The present generation of Serbs is conscious of the fact that they are predestined and obliged to accomplish the centuries-old dreams of their ancestors, and to finally bring the old myths, ideals, and aspirations to life".

BSA General, Milan Gvero quoted in the local Serb newspaper of Bratunac, Nasa Rijec, 12/01/1993, p.1.

When the Bosnian war first started, one of the main objectives of the Serb campaign was to take control of the border areas along the Drina. Eastern Bosnia formed a vital link between the Serb-inhabited lands of Bosnia, it was part of this arch of 'serb' territory (from Foča, via Visegrad, Bratunac, Zvornik, and Bijeljina, to Banja Luka and Prijedor) that the Serbs wanted to include in a Greater Serbia. As in the first Serbian uprising, Serbs wanted to create a continuous territory, linking eastern Hercegovina and Romanija with the Bosnian Krajina, and both areas with Serbia proper. Not surprisingly, therefore, the first major Serb military campaign, the Drina campaign, focused on seizing full control over eastern Bosnia. The Arkan Tigers carried out this campaign, with the help of other paramilitary groups and the government of Serbia (particularly the Ministry of the Interior). The authorities in Belgrade supplied the paramilitary groups and special forces with weapons, equipment, uniforms, army maps, and vehicles.⁵¹⁹ The JNA was directly involved in the operations, providing support in various ways, including by bombarding and shelling Muslim areas.⁵²⁰

Once Bijeljina was taken, Serb forces moved southward along the Drina to the Muslim town of Janja, and then to Zvornik. At around the same time, Visegrad and Foča, two other major towns along the Drina, were attacked by forces from Serbia. Strategically, Zvornik was almost as crucial as Bijeljina, because of its rail and road bridges over the Drina, linking Bosnia and Serbia, and connecting Belgrade and Sarajevo. It was also economically vital due to the large hydroelectric dam a few kilometres south of the town and the huge alumina plant, which processed bauxite from Milici. On 6 April, the Zvornik branch of the SDS established a separate Serb police station in Karakaj, from where they blocked the entrance into town. On 7 April, TV Belgrade broadcast the news of an impending attack by Muslim extremists. Then, on 8 April, the Arkan Tigers, joined by JNA forces and special commando units of Serbia's Ministry of the Interior positioned themselves on the Serbian side of the Drina. They gave the town's Muslims an ultimatum to surrender, but received no response. As a result, the Yugoslav artillery opened fire on Zvornik from Serbia that same evening. Most Muslim leaders, including Asim Jazbasic, leader of the moderate SDA 'town' faction, fled to Tuzla. At the same time, two hundred Muslim fighters retreated to Kulagrad, the old Turkish castle above Zvornik, from where they fought a long battle against Serb forces.⁵²¹

The next day, the Arkan Tigers, special police units of the Serbian Ministry of Interior, and various other paramilitary groups (Seselj's Chetniks, the White Eagles, the Yellow Ants, and the Panthers of Ljubisa Savic 'Mauzer' from Bijeljina), entered Zvornik. Thousands of civilians fled to the forests, while the paramilitaries searched every house and apartment, stealing money and other valuables and killing any Muslims they encountered. For days, life in Zvornik was dominated by marauding, uncontrolled groups of paramilitaries. Some sources claim that during the assault on

⁵¹⁸ Milanovic, 'Arkanov srpski san'

⁵¹⁹ Bassiouni, *Final report*, Annex summaries and conclusions, p. 15.

⁵²⁰ Bassiouni, *Final report*, Annex Summaries and Conclusions, p. 4-5.

⁵²¹ Hamzic, *Zvornik*, pp. 193-223.

Zvornik, several hundred Muslims were murdered, and 42,000 were expelled from their homes.⁵²² Among the victims were the deputy director of the spa resort, 'Guber' in Srebrenica, Boban Vasic (a Serb) and his two Muslim drivers. On 11 April, after having returned patients to Zvornik, they were arrested by paramilitaries at a roadblock on their way back to Srebrenica. The paramilitaries imprisoned, interrogated and tortured them for the next two days. Vasic was released and brought to Serbia, while his two Muslim drivers were killed.⁵²³ Fights continued in Kulagrad, where Muslims managed to hold out until 26 April 1992. When the situation calmed down, the SDS called on Muslims to return. Although this appeared to be a good sign, it was in fact the beginning of a process of administrative ethnic cleansing: those who came back were arrested and forced to sign their property over to the Serb District of Zvornik as a precondition for their release. Moreover, from May on, the entire Muslim population of villages surrounding Zvornik were deported, many of them to Hungary, through Serbia, and others to Tuzla.⁵²⁴

The attacks on Foča and Visegrad occurred almost simultaneously with the one on Zvornik, though it took more effort to seize control of Visegrad. On 6 April 1992, Serbs started to shell the town. JNA tanks and artillery pieces were moved in from Serbia. Muslim villages on the right side of the Drina were torched and Muslim refugees streamed into town. The Muslim defenders of the town held out for some three days before their commander, Murat Sabanovic, withdrew and retreated to the hydroelectric dam with sixty of his men and several Serb hostages.⁵²⁵ In an attempt to stop the army's advance towards the town, he threatened to blow up the dam, which would cause massive, devastating floods that could wash away whole villages downstream. For several days, the inhabitants of the Drina valley remained anxious of a possible torrent that could also affect major towns such as Bajina Basta, Bratunac and Zvornik. Peasants living along the Drina packed their things and headed for higher ground, taking most of their cattle with them. Serbian television brought the hysteria to a boil in an effort to convince Serbs in Serbia that Muslims intended to commit genocide against the Bosnian Serbs.

After Serb commandos took the dam, the JNA entered Visegrad's suburbs on 13 April, together with special police forces and various paramilitary groups. One or two days later, they took control of the town. The head of the local SDS was appointed as President of the new Serb district. Once the fighting stopped, the JNA called on the numerous Muslims who had fled in the direction of Gorazde to return home, which most did. The ethnic cleansing of the Muslim population started in earnest only a month later, when the army left as part of the general 'withdrawal' of JNA forces from Bosnia. (These forces were replaced by the newly established Bosnian Serb Army). Under the command of local Serb, Milan Lukic, paramilitaries from Serbia and local irregulars started to expel and kill the Muslim inhabitants and plunder their homes. Many Muslims were deported to central Bosnia, or to Macedonia via Bajina Basta (where Lukic's distant cousin, Mikailo, commanded a special police unit). The killing continued for the next two months. So many dead bodies floated down the Drina that people gave up trout fishing in the river for the next three summers.⁵²⁶ Foča saw similar gruesome scenes. Here, Serbs established a network of detention centres, where many Muslim civilians were detained and tortured. Foča became particularly notorious for its rape camps.⁵²⁷

⁵²² Bassiouni, *Final report*, Annex IV, pp. 36-62; Annex III.a, pp. 70,76-77,80; Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, pp. 100-01).

⁵²³ Interview: Boban Vasic 06/07/1998. See also Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, pp. 148-49.

⁵²⁴ Bassiouni, *Final report*, Annex summaries and conclusions, pp. 22-23; Annex IV.

⁵²⁵ Sabanovic had made himself a hero among nationalist Muslims as early on as 1991. In his home town of Visegrad, he destroyed the monument to Ivo Andric, the Nobel prize winning Bosnian writer, who was unpopular among Muslims because his portrayals of them in his writings (Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, p. 90).

⁵²⁶ For a detailed account of the events in Visegrad, see Kljun, *Visegrad*, pp. 246-305; Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, pp. 101-04 and 120-25. See also Oric, *Srebrenica*, pp. 74-78.

⁵²⁷ Human Rights Watch, *Bosnia and Herzegovina*, p. 4.

Srebrenica on the brink of war

“When I was young, I really loved cowboy films. From them I learned my first lessons about morale. I particularly liked the endings, when the main hero kills all bad guys, various plunderers, vagabonds and other communists, and when the town’s population gathers and offers him the sheriff’s star; he smiles, mounts his horse, and leaves. I think I will know to choose the right moment to climb my horse”.

Miroslav Deronjic, President of the SDS in Bratunac, in an interview for the local newspaper *Nasa Rijec*, May 1994.⁵²⁸

All major towns along the Drina were taken by the Serb forces, making the Drina valley campaign a major success. Even so, there were still several towns and numerous villages with a majority Muslim population that Serb forces had bypassed. (These included Srebrenica, Zepa, and Cerska). The geographic characteristics and settlement patterns of the area are significant in understanding why this happened.⁵²⁹ Eastern Bosnia is very hilly and rugged. Road connections only exist between major towns, whereas villages and hamlets often lie hidden away in isolation in the mountains. Paved roads in this region are few and far between. As a result, these settlements are difficult to reach, especially in bad weather (e.g. during winter or heavy rains). While distances between settlements may be technically small when viewed as a straight line on the map, actual travel times can be considerable. This is due to the inevitable detours along inferior mountain roads and narrow, winding and unpaved tracks. In addition, as discussed before, settlements are relatively small in size. Before the war began, villages usually contained no more than a few hundred inhabitants. Moreover, they were ethnically homogenous for the most part, which explains why it was easy for most combatants born in the region to discriminate between Serb and Muslim settlements. The small size of rural settlements also made it difficult to organise an effective defence against outside attacks. Enemy villages were usually easy targets for armed groups on each side. Srebrenica itself is located at the end of a narrow valley, surrounded by high, heavily forested hills. Approaching the town, the valley narrows and the surrounding hills rise ever higher and steeper. The highest hill, Kvarac, towers above the town at 1014 metres and lies only two to three kilometres from the town’s centre.

After the Serbs took control over the major towns, they began consolidating their grip over the rest of eastern Bosnia by clearing out these more isolated patches. The war started to affect Bratunac and Srebrenica only after the Drina valley campaign was complete. Muslim chroniclers, Nijaz Masic and Besim Ibisevic, describe these events in great detail.⁵³⁰ In early April, bad news from Bijeljina and Zvornik prompted Muslims in Bratunac and Srebrenica to flee towards Tuzla. Most Serbs went to friends or relatives in nearby Serbia, as did a number of Muslims. Some returned during the day to go to work. On the instigation of the SDS, local Serb children, women and elderly people were transferred en masse, which served to clear the schools of any Serb children. This situation continued for almost a week.⁵³¹ The local economy, as well as municipal services, ground to a halt as increasingly fewer people showed up to work. Ibisevic writes that people simply left without giving any notice. They just disappeared. By 11 April, only 20 out of a staff of over 110 civil servants at the municipality of

⁵²⁸ Pilovanovic, ‘Mi udaramo’.

⁵²⁹ I would like to thank Endre Bojtár who first pointed this out to me (conversation 28/05/1997).

⁵³⁰ During the war, Masic was head of the Commission for the Investigation of War Crimes in Srebrenica, as well as Assistant Commander for morale in the Srebrenica division of the ABiH. He is a historian by profession. The information compiled by this commission were included in Naser Oric’s as well as in both of Masic’s books.

⁵³¹ Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, pp. 31-32.

Srebrenica were still in town.⁵³² Some Muslims returned after a few days. Those who tried to come back later, encountered great difficulties passing the Serb lines.

Members of the urban elite in Bratunac and Srebrenica regarded the attempts to resist the Serb advance as futile and hopeless. In Bratunac, the SDA's efforts to set up the defence were even considered counterproductive. Some felt that the SDA was contributing in this way to a war, which Muslims were certain to lose. Popular support for organising resistance disintegrated further when Muslims from the neighbouring village of Glogova returned from Bijeljina. They came with reports of how many houses had been destroyed there because the town's Muslims had refused to surrender, while the small town of Janja was left untouched because most of its Muslims had handed over all their weapons.⁵³³ Near Srebrenica, the population of several Muslim villages felt so threatened by the sporadic gunfire that they spent nights outside, organising guards to protect their houses and villages. Rumours spread that the Serbs in Fakovici kept arms and ammunition in an old school building. On 3 April, the mayor of Srebrenica, Ibisevic, went to check the location together with Miodrag Stanisavljevic, the Serb commander of the local TO. As they approached the school, they were stopped by half a dozen armed men, who confirmed that it was full of arms. But they were not allowed to inspect the building. Serb peasants were already driving their tractors and other vehicles to safety in Serbia in fear that war would soon break out. As Ibisevic observed, rumours were circulating in Bajina Basta that Muslim and Croat forces in Srebrenica were preparing for genocide against the Serbs. The commander of the local TO told Ibisevic that he had information that Muslim forces were being trained in the remote village of Luka and were preparing to attack Serbia. The JNA took positions on the Tara mountains pointing its guns at Bosnian territory. By this point, efforts to mobilise the army were underway in Bajina Basta and other Serbian towns along the border.⁵³⁴

Muslims from villages near Srebrenica came down to the town almost daily to 'besiege' the SDA office, asking for the arms that Ibran Mustafic and Hamed Efendic had once promised. Ibisevic accused Mustafic of not honouring his promises and of sacrificing Muslim villages along the Drina, keeping most of the weapons in Potočari. Many Serbs also felt threatened. Along the Drina, villagers crossed over into Serbia in little boats every evening, to spend the night in Serbia and return in the morning to work the fields or take care of their animals. In many other Muslim and Serb villages, men organized guards at night with improvised checkpoints. In Podravanje, for instance, Serbs organised armed patrols, blocking the road between Zeleni Jadar and Milici, as well as the road to the two Muslim villages of Luka and Krusev Do, which were now practically cut off from Srebrenica. Other villages to the south and southeast of Srebrenica that depended on the road connection through Zeleni Jadar, were also affected by these armed Serb patrols. During this period, SDS and SDA leaders formed mixed teams that went to villages where the tensions ran highest. Ibran Mustafic went together with SDS hardliner, Miodrag Jokic. Besim Ibisevic paired up with Miloje Simic. They advised Serb and Muslim villagers to follow their example and form mixed patrols as well.⁵³⁵

On 6 April, Ibisevic sent out official summons to all members of the Anti-Sabotage Platoon to mobilise in preparation to defend the town. He pointed out to the unit's commander, Asim Redzic, that this also provided an opportunity to demand arms and ammunition from the Bosnian Ministry of Interior. He claimed he had received promises to that effect. He also told Redzic that he wanted him to be the commander of the future army in Srebrenica and his platoon to become the nucleus of that army. On 8 April, the Muslim members of the platoon reported for duty; the Serb members failed to appear. Redzic sent everyone back home, because, as he told Ibisevic, he did not want to become the commander of a purely Muslim unit. This earned him the grudge of the Mayor, who told him "You better go home to grow flowers of brotherhood and unity!" Ibisevic assumed that this 'indoctrinated communist' did not want to listen to orders of SDA politicians. On Monday, 6 April, Ibran Mustafic

⁵³² Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, p. 192.

⁵³³ Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, p. 29-30, 62-63.

⁵³⁴ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp. 175-78; Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, p. 95.

⁵³⁵ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp. 180-84. Masic, *Srebrenica*, p. 31. Interview: Momcilo Cvjetinovic 10/06/1998.

travelled to Sarajevo to attend a meeting of the Bosnian parliament. As Ibisevic writes, however, the purpose of this trip was more to escape Muslim resentment regarding his unfulfilled promises to arm the population. Later that day, Mustafic pretended it was impossible to return to Srebrenica because the buses were no longer running.⁵³⁶

The situation in Skelani was also reaching a very critical point. On 7 April, SDA activist, Ahmo Tihic, urged Ibisevic to come to Skelani, where representatives of both the Muslim and the Serb sides were waiting in a restaurant. SDS politicians demanded a separate municipality from Skelani, and warned that 250 Bosnian Serb volunteers were waiting in Bajina Basta to cross the Drina to help them achieve this. At this point, Ibisevic walked out of the talks. Milenko Ćanic, who was present at the meeting, warned Ibisevic that he and four other SDS leaders (Goran Zekic, Miodrag Jokic, Desimir Mitrovic, and Blagomir Jovanovic) could call for immediate assistance from Serbian paramilitaries at the other side of the Drina if they felt that Serbs were under threat. As Ibisevic notes, these SDS politicians became the key figures in deciding about war and peace in that part of the municipality of Srebrenica. The next day, they took control of Skelani, paving the way for the establishment of a separate Serb municipality and a local Serb police force.⁵³⁷

Similar steps were taken in Bratunac. There, in a meeting held on 3 April, the SDS and several Serb policemen decided to create a Serb police force. In the days that followed, they began talking to individual Serb policemen to convince them to join the force. On 8 April, the SDS demanded the division of the MUP. The creation of a Serb police force was presented as a necessary measure to guarantee the security of Serb civilians. SDA leaders gave in to the enormous pressure, and legalised the formation of such a force in a meeting of the Bratunac municipal council on 9 April 1992. After the meeting, SDA and SDS politicians went for a drink in Hotel Fontana to celebrate the agreement, which they said 'saved peace' in the municipality. The next day, the Serb police set up its headquarters in the Vuk Karadzic school. Two Serbs from Bratunac living and working in Berlin, Miodrag Stevic and Sredo Aleksic, were particularly helpful in providing the equipment for the new police force.⁵³⁸ For the next eight days, before the SDS took over completely, Bratunac had two police forces. Serb policemen who had been against the creation of a separate Serb police had no choice and were pressured into joining the new force. In some cases, they were threatened by SDS members and by other newly appointed Serb policemen, some of whom had received no police training at all (but had sufficient nationalist credentials).⁵³⁹ Policemen from Srebrenica joined the Serb police in Bratunac as well, while others joined the Serb police in Skelani as soon as the SDS took over the police station there. Milutin Milosevic (from Kravica) stepped up as head of the Serb police in Bratunac, and Luka Bogdanovic was appointed as police commander. The Serb police in Bratunac immediately received new uniforms from Serbia.

Starting in early April 1992, meetings of the National Defence Secretariat (SNO) were held daily and attended by SDA as well as SDS members of the municipal council.⁵⁴⁰ Sometimes, the directors of the most important firms were present as well. In emergencies, the SNO was authorized to serve as a crisis committee and take over the town's civil administration. Under these provisions, Ibisevic – mayor and head of the SNO – would become the commander of all armed police and territorial defence forces in Srebrenica. In its meeting of 8 April, the SNO decided that six additional 'war' police stations were needed - over and above Srebrenica's police station - to maintain control in important villages. (These were the villages of Suceška, Potocari, Podravanje, Skelani, Sase and Osat).⁵⁴¹ On 9 April 1992, Ibisevic went to Ljubovija, where he noticed many paramilitaries and volunteers in JNA uniforms. Some people (unaware of his identity) told him that the JNA had placed heavy artillery on a hill above

⁵³⁶ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, p. 185-189.

⁵³⁷ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, p. 186-188; Masic, *Srebrenica*, p. 36.

⁵³⁸ K. Ć. 'Prava srpska milicija'; interview: Miroslav Deronjic 03/11/1999; Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, p. 30-31.

⁵³⁹ Interview: Becir Hasanovic 17/05/1998.

⁵⁴⁰ Interview: Sefkija Hadziarapovic 22/05/1998

⁵⁴¹ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, p. 188; Masic, *Srebrenica*, p. 32.

the town. He then went to Milos Mihajlovic, the mayor of Ljubovija, to ask him what was happening. Mihajlovic told him that he had received information that several buses with Croatian paramilitaries had arrived in Glogova (a Muslim village between Kravica and Bratunac), to create a Muslim Drina brigade. The JNA and volunteers had come to protect the town and its industrial zone near the Drina. Ibisevic then invited him and the mayors of Bratunac (Nijaz Dubiëic) and Bajina Basta (Milos Jelisavëic) to attend a public meeting in Srebrenica the next day. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss actions against the wild rumours and growing war fever. Despite promises, nobody showed up, which was a bad omen and clear sign that war was imminent.⁵⁴²

Anxiety increased as the last reliable source of information had disappeared at the very beginning of the war when Serb extremists blew up the television mast on Kvarac mountain above Srebrenica. As a result, the inhabitants of Bratunac and Srebrenica had no access to the Yugoslav federal Yutel and the Bosnian channels, only to Serbian television. Similar Serb attempts to inactivate broadcasting or take control of television relays were reported in many other parts of Bosnia, including in the county of Prijedor.⁵⁴³ One or two days after the town's television access was cut, its water system was mined as well. Left with blank screens and dry faucets, the inhabitants grew increasingly aware that worse was still to come. Ibisevic warned people over Radio Srebrenica that the radio mast on the Bojna hill, just one kilometre outside the town, could be the next target. He called on the population to protect the mast. No action was taken, however, and on the night of 9 April the radio mast was indeed mined. Hamed Salihovic confided in Ibisevic that he knew who the perpetrators were, but did not dare arrest them due to the explosive situation in town.⁵⁴⁴ The action cut off the population even from Radio Sarajevo.

In April, Hakija Meholic, a local policeman, started organising an armed Muslim militia in the Petrica and Klisa quarters of the town. He had stayed on sick leave for over a year, because he refused to accept the new head of police, Hamed Salihovic. He was also furious with SDA hardliners, who had removed his brother, Malik Meholic, from his post as mayor of Srebrenica. Malik formed the local branch of the MBO, of which also Hakija had become a member. This moderate party had many supporters in Petrica and Klisa. Relations between members of the SDA and MBO were unfriendly. According to Ibisevic, members of the MBO were quite impudent, arrogant and hostile to local SDA officials.⁵⁴⁵ Hakija Meholic attacked the SDA for having failed to organise defence for the town. Instead, he gathered his own people around him, people from Petrica and Klisa and MBO members, and established a checkpoint in Petrica on the road to Zeleni Jadar. He also managed to take a certain amount of arms from the police station. Serbs complained about this 'wild' checkpoint by a Muslim policeman, who had slipped away from the municipal police commander's authority. However, on the SNO meeting of 8 April (when six additional police stations were created) Meholic's role was formalized. He became the commander of the seventh additional 'war' police station of Srebrenica. Four days later, Ibisevic tried to re-establish relations with Meholic. He went to Meholic's 'headquarters' in Motel Lovac, located on a hill beneath the old Turkish fortress of Srebrenica. Meeting with a very cold welcome from Meholic when he entered the motel, Ibisevic left immediately.⁵⁴⁶

In the meantime, Serbs forged ahead with the establishment of the Serb municipality of Skelani. Blagomir Jovanovic, a former communist, who joined the SDS after the first elections in 1990, stepped up as president. On 11 April, Serbs in Skelani took control of the local police station, an operation coordinated from Serbia. Using arms transported over the Drina into Bosnia with little boats, they surrounded the police station and forced Muslim policemen to surrender. After allowing the policemen to leave unharmed, the Serbs proceeded to establish a Serb crisis committee in the building. On 13 April, Ibisevic went to Skelani to meet with Milenko Èanic in the new Serb police station. Èanic was

⁵⁴² Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, p. 189-192.

⁵⁴³ Bassiouni, *Final report*, pp. 38-39; Burg and Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, p. 65; Cohen, *Hearts grown brutal*, p. 193.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp. 190-191. Masic, *Srebrenica*, p. 32.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp. 193-94.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp. 194-95.

wearing a camouflage uniform and was busy disassembling and re-assembling a new scorpion gun. In a corner of the building, Ibisevic saw a pile of hand grenades and dynamite. Èanic refused to talk to Ibisevic, referring him to Marko Milovanovic, commander of the Serb crisis committee for Skelani. Ibisevic asked him to identify the boundaries of this self-proclaimed municipality. Milovanovic then informed him that the border ran from Fakovici, over Bjelovac, Brezani, Osmace, and Kragljivoda, to Sjedaci, carving out a large piece of the southeastern section of the municipality of Srebrenica. Ibisevic objected, pointing out that the majority of the population in that territory was Muslim. Milovanovic responded simply by reminding him that 2,000 Serb volunteers were waiting in Bajina Basta to cross over into Bosnia. Milovanovic also claimed to have received information about the formation of a Muslim paramilitary unit in Kragljivoda and Osat, set up by Ahmo Tihic, an affiliate of Hamed Efendic and Ibran Mustafic.⁵⁴⁷

Ibisevic left Skelani and tried to find Ahmo Tihic to inform him that the Serbs were after him. He found him in Osat, where Tihic had organised a group of some twenty armed men. Ibisevic writes that, as Tihic's unit was 'the first armed Bosniac unit' in this part of the municipality, he promised to do his utmost to help him with food, blankets, and equipment, which he thought he could acquire from the TO's stores in Srebrenica. Ibisevic went to Srebrenica and managed to send one truckload of supplies to Tihic and one to Sukeska.⁵⁴⁸ The next day, a couple of Muslims were found dead on the road between Skelani and Srebrenica, near the village of Jezero. These were the first casualties of the war in Srebrenica. According to Muslim sources, they were killed the day before by a group of Serb paramilitaries, who had been out to attack Ahmo Tihic's unit but were unable to locate it. In frustration, they killed the two Muslims as their car passed by. The victims were driving back from Bajina Basta, where they had gone to buy gasoline.⁵⁴⁹

On 14 April, an extraordinary meeting of the municipal council was scheduled to discuss Serb proposals to divide the municipality along ethnic lines. Although the SDA initially opposed the idea of dividing Srebrenica into Muslim and Serb sections, it yielded to Serb pressure and agreed to discuss the issue. Many Muslims from the town, who were desperate for a solution, gathered in front of the Culture House to demand anything but war. According to Ibisevic, some shouted out pleas to give the Serbs whatever they wanted. Only sixteen councillors (of the seventy) showed up for the meeting, mostly SDA members. SDS leader, Goran Zekic was the only Serb present. During the meeting, the SDA approved the principle of territorial division for the municipality. A mixed commission of Serbs and Muslims was established to lay the groundwork. Besim Ibisevic and five other Muslims, including non-SDA members, Sabit Begic and Cazim Salimovic, were appointed to the commission. The Serb appointees were Milenko Èanic, Momèilo Cvjetinovic, Desimir Mitrovic, and two other individuals. They agreed to meet twice daily to discuss further details. Ibisevic ordered topographic maps of the municipality and lists of communal assets.⁵⁵⁰ Apparently, the general objective was to make the upper section of the town 'Muslim', and allot the lower section to the Serbs. As Oric writes, even though the Serbs had already appropriated a large portion of the municipality's territory near Skelani, they now also demanded a share of what remained.⁵⁵¹

Muslims had gathered outside the venue where the meeting was held, eager to hear the decision. For that reason, Goran Zekic, Hamed Efendic, and Besim Ibisevic decided to address the population in the hall of the Culture House. Zekic declared that they had reached a basic agreement about the territorial division of Srebrenica, which he presented as a step towards peace. Some Muslims applauded. As Ibisevic writes, many Muslim townspeople – particularly MBO and SDP supporters – wanted Zekic, even as mayor of Srebrenica, if that would avoid war. It seems that they had confidence in Zekic. Compared to such figures as Milenko Èanic in Skelani, Miodrag Jokic in Srebrenica, and Miroslav

⁵⁴⁷ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp. 195-96.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp. 198-200.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp. 208-209; Masic, *Srebrenica*, p. 32-33.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp. 200-02; Masic, *Srebrenica*, p. 33.

⁵⁵¹ Interview: Momèilo Cvjetinovic, 10/06/1998. Oric, *Srebrenica*, p. 20.

Deronjic in Bratunac, Zekic was certainly considered a more moderate politician.⁵⁵² In closing his short speech, Zekic tried to leave, but was stopped by Ahmo Tihic, who had come from Osat to discuss events in Skelani. He attacked Zekic, who defended himself saying that he had no influence in Skelani, because they did not recognize him there as president of the SDS. A group of Srebrenicans ended the conversation by removing Tihic from the room, giving Zekic free passage. A number of Muslim Srebrenicans yelled at Tihic, accusing him of creating a mess in the town after having done the same in Skelani. Tihic was accused of antagonising the Serbs and of jeopardising good community relations in town.

After Zekic, it was Hamed Efendic's turn to address the crowd. According to Ibisevic's account, he had hardly any chance to speak at all, as Muslim townspeople began shouting 'Thieves, thieves!' at him. A very heavily built man ran from the back of the hall to the speaker's platform and pushed Efendic away amidst loud applause from the crowd. The same happened to Besim Ibisevic, who was attacked by a group of MBO sympathisers. They shouted that there was no place for peasants in Srebrenica. "Go back to your village! Go plough your field! You peasants stirred up all of this by coming to Srebrenica! If it weren't for you, we wouldn't have had a war. If you'd allowed Goran Zekic to become mayor, it wouldn't have come to all of this!" At this point, someone actually physically attacked Ibisevic, forcing him to end his speech. Clearly, Ibisevic was no longer welcome. Similar voices were raised against him in Potocari, where Naser Oric had seized power after local SDA leader, Ibran Mustafic had left to Sarajevo. Ibisevic was warned not to show his face in Potočari under any circumstances whatsoever. SDA leaders had clearly lost most of their support among the population. Many wanted to see Hamed Efendic removed as SDA leader, and Ibisevic as town mayor. Ibisevic writes that he received anonymous phone calls, from both sides: Serbs, who cursed his Muslim mother, and Muslims, who cursed his peasant mother. At this stage, the exodus of the Muslim population from the town intensified. Most people went in the direction of Tuzla, while others went to Serbia. Guards and night porters of factories and other public premises abandoned their posts, leaving these buildings unprotected.⁵⁵³

Due to his constant involvement in managing the growing political crisis in town, Ibisevic had not been able to buy food for his wife and son. As shops were closed or empty, he asked Momčilo Cvjetinovic to accompany him to Ljubovija just across the Drina to buy some basic food items.⁵⁵⁴ For security reasons, they drove in Cvjetinovic's car. When they finished shopping, they went to look for the SDS vice-president of Srebrenica, Miodrag Jokic, who had taken refuge in a motel in Ljubovija. They hoped that by talking to him they might be able to decrease tensions. Cvjetinovic advised Ibisevic not to be too rash and to talk to him in a jovial, non-confrontational way, "as peace depends on these kind of idiots". They found Jokic in a JNA officer's uniform, carrying a Scorpion on his waist belt. Cvjetinovic, who knew that Jokic had not served in the army, asked him whether he knew his rank. "How is it possible that you don't know! This is the rank of captain first class", said Jokic pointing at the insignia on his shirt. Cvjetinovic, who had great difficulties suppressing his laughter, told him: "How is it possible you do not see it! This is the rank of major. Whoever told you this stands for the rank of captain lied." Jokic, angry, said it did not matter: "Captain or major, it's all the same to me!" And to intimidate Ibisevic, Jokic showed him the receipts of two arms deliveries by the JNA from Tuzla and Belgrade, both which he had personally signed. They agreed to meet next day in Bratunac for further talks. On their way back to Srebrenica, Cvjetinovic complained to Ibisevic that the JNA gave its weapons to the biggest fools in town.⁵⁵⁵

The next day, on 16 April 1992, Serb and Muslim leaders met in Hotel Fontana in Bratunac. The Serb representatives there included Goran Zekic and Miroslav Deronjic. Ibisevic represented the

⁵⁵² This undermines Miodrag Jokic's claims during an interview with *Ilustrovana politika* that Goran Zekic had been the main target of Muslim attacks (Milanovic, 'Ubice su medju nama', p. 14).

⁵⁵³ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, p. 202-7; Ibisevic, 'Nisam pobjegao'; Masic, *Srebrenica*, p. 25.

⁵⁵⁴ This was confirmed by Momčilo Cvjetinovic; interview: 10/06/1998.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp. 206-07.

Muslim side, together with a few others whom he had gathered at random, as he had been unable to find anyone else. Among those who joined him was Sabit Begic, a former communist and member of the SDP. As Ibisevic writes, Begic, a 'moderate,' was useful in negotiations with the Serbs. With that in mind, the Muslim delegation left most of the talking to Begic, who tried to bide for time and divert the discussion from political to humanitarian issues. He pointed out that peasants were without food, because villages, such as Luka and Krusev Do, were completely cut off by Serbian barricades and checkpoints. He also mentioned the refugees streaming into the town from Bijeljina and Zvornik. Begic asked the Serbs to show a sign of goodwill and bring food to these people. Goran Zekic promised to do that. They agreed to meet again the next day in Srebrenica. On that same day, Goran Zekic also had a meeting with the head of police, Hamed Salihovic, in order to legalise a number of Serb checkpoints in villages. During that meeting, they signed an agreement sanctioning the formation of Serb police stations in Vijogor, Orahovica, and Sase, as well as in the main police office in the town of Srebrenica. The agreement stipulated that Serb police stations were to cooperate and coordinate their actions with the Bosnian police. It was signed by ten people, including Ibisevic, Zekic, Begic, Cvjetinovic, Perendic, and Salihovic.⁵⁵⁶

Bratunac and Srebrenica are taken by Serbs

A new SDS and SDA meeting was planned for the morning of 17 April. Moments before it was scheduled to start, Miodrag Jokic called Ibisevic to say that he and his SDS colleagues were not coming to Srebrenica, as they lacked sufficient guarantees of safety. He proposed holding the meeting in Bratunac that very same day. Once again, Ibisevic gathered several people, including Sabit Begic. When they arrived in Bratunac, they noticed various military units and paramilitary groups roaming the town's streets. Among these were regular army units from the Novi Sad corps, the Arkan Tigers, White Eagles, and Seselj's Chetnik forces. It was Friday, which was market day in Bratunac, and many people had been on the streets when these armed units entered the town. They met with no resistance, as the Muslim defence or Patriotic League was taken by surprise and completely unprepared for action. Even though the SDA had established a crisis committee days before the event, most Patriotic League commanders fled to Tuzla as soon as the Serbs entered the town. The crisis committee did not even have a chance to meet.⁵⁵⁷ Bratunac's SDS leaders issued an ultimatum to the Muslim authorities to surrender power, and also ordered the Head of Police to relinquish all weapons and leave the police station. This put an end to the existence of the two parallel (Muslim and Serb) police forces in Bratunac. The mayor of Bratunac, Nijaz Dubićić, was forced to hand over the municipal building. The Head of Police and the Mayor left immediately for Tuzla. Most other Muslims stayed in town, feeling intimidated and terrorised by the presence of the JNA and paramilitary forces.⁵⁵⁸

Units of the JNA Novi Sad corps, commanded by Colonel Svetozar Milosevic, set up headquarters in Hotel Fontana. The SDS crisis committee also sent out invitations to local Serb reservists and officers. Miroslav Deronjic, the head of the Serb crisis committee, coordinated the entire operation. According to a Muslim source, he met with Radovan Karadzic in Pale just days before the take-over of Bratunac to receive instructions.⁵⁵⁹ Ljubisav Simic was appointed as the new SDS mayor of Bratunac, and Rodoljub Djukanovic became chairman of the municipal Executive Board. Milutin Milosevic and Luka Bogdanovic remained head of the police and police commander, respectively. The Arkan Tigers played an important role in the Serb take-over of Bratunac. Sreten Radic, a wealthy local businessman, is said to have paid them 100,000 DM to come to Bratunac.⁵⁶⁰ Based in Café Jasen in the town's centre, the Arkan Tigers organised plunder expeditions to Muslim villages. They sped through

⁵⁵⁶ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp. 207-209, 249. Masic, *Srebrenica*, p. 33.

⁵⁵⁷ Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, pp. 62-63.

⁵⁵⁸ Omeragic, *Satanski sinovi*; Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp. 211-12; Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, pp. 33-39.

⁵⁵⁹ Omeragic, *Satanski sinovi*, p. 11.

⁵⁶⁰ Omeragic, *Satanski sinovi*, p.14 and p. 120; interview: Becir Hasanovic 17/05/1998.

town in cars and jeeps equipped with special sirens that frightened local residents even more than the incidental shots fired.⁵⁶¹ They also entered the mosque and played Chetnik songs from the loudspeakers of the minaret. The wife of the Serbian Orthodox priest of Bratunac, Bata Blazevic, who had died not long before, stopped them and threw them out of the mosque.⁵⁶² Paramilitaries controlled the town at night, plundering shops of Muslims and 'disloyal' Serbs. Explosions blasted through the night. Various Muslim shops were blown up or burned down. Muslims stayed inside their houses, turning off their lights. Some men slept in their gardens so they could escape if paramilitaries tried to take them from their beds.⁵⁶³

When Ibisevic arrived in Bratunac, he was welcomed by Miodrag Jokic, who pompously introduced various paramilitary leaders to Ibisevic and his company. They presented themselves as the commanders of the TO of Vukovar, the TO of Knin, the Yellow Ants, White Eagles, and Arkan Tigers. Those present also included local SDS leaders, such as Goran Zekic, Delivoje Sorak, and Miroslav Deronjic, as well as Miloje Simic, the former president of the League of Communists of Srebrenica. Goran Zekic began to address the meeting. Miodrag Jokic soon interrupted, however, laying down the terms in no uncertain terms: "All previous agreements between the SDA and SDS of Srebrenica are void. The borders of Yugoslavia (or Great-Serbia as you call it) have been redrawn and this area is part of it now. We want you to collect all your arms and hand them over to us in Srebrenica by 8:00 A.M. tomorrow. If not, we will destroy everything with our artillery. You Muslims have two options: you can either leave quietly or we will kill you!" The Muslim delegation asked for extra time to consult members of the Executive Board of the SDA, and promised to come back at five p.m. This proposal was accepted.⁵⁶⁴

The Muslim delegation denied the presence of any organised armed units in Srebrenica. However, they did promise to talk to those who had a certain number of arms at their disposal or those in a position to form militia, such as the police and the TO. They returned to Srebrenica, where they informed the townspeople about the Serb occupation of Bratunac and the ultimatum the SDS had issued Srebrenican authorities. On hearing the news, the population began to flee, mostly to Tuzla. A meeting was then held to discuss the Serb's ultimatum to hand over all weapons. Among those present were Hakija Meholic, Hamed Salihovic, Hamed Efendic, and Suljo Hasanovic, Deputy Commander of the TO in Srebrenica. Meholic refused to comply and announced that he would rather escape to the forests, inviting others to join him. Hamed Salihovic said he would first need to contact the Bosnian Ministry of Internal Affairs for further instructions. The discussion prompted Ibisevic and several other members of the Muslim delegation, who had gone to Bratunac, to take their families and leave Srebrenica.⁵⁶⁵ Begic remained behind to wait for Zekic, while almost all inhabitants left the town. By around five o'clock that afternoon, only 300 to 400 Muslims remained, waiting to see what would happen. When Zekic failed to show up, Sabit Begic also left for Sarajevo. In the meantime, two Muslim policemen returned to Bratunac on their own initiative to gain time. Thanks to them, the ultimatum was postponed for two hours, from 8:00 until 10:00 A.M. the next day.⁵⁶⁶

Later, both during and after the war, the town's elite came under fierce criticism by resistance organisers for having all fled on 17 April 1992. According to Naser Oric, the future commander of Muslim forces in Srebrenica, almost all Muslim leaders and intellectuals were unprepared and incapable of coping with the situation, and had responded indifferently and irresponsibly. Some SDA leaders

⁵⁶¹ Omeragic, *Satanski sinovi*, p. 13.

⁵⁶² Omeragic, *Satanski sinovi*, p. 25. Interview: Ibro Verlasevic 01/06/1998.

⁵⁶³ Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, p. 39; Omeragic, *Satanski sinovi*, pp. 14-16. Interviews: Mirsada Bakalovic 15/06/1998, 17/06/1998 and 19/06/1998.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp. 212-213.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibisevic claims to have contemplated evacuating the population en masse, but did not do so because it no longer seemed feasible. As Ibisevic writes, 'newly composed commanders', 'political dilettantes', and 'war adventurers' had given people false hope that they could do something against the Serb onslaught. In his view, it was much more realistic to go to Tuzla and try to re-conquer the town from there. Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp. 214-15.

⁵⁶⁶ Masic, *Srebrenica*, p. 34-35; Oric, *Srebrenica*, pp. 21,41; Ibisevic, *Srebrenica*, pp. 214-16

were trading arms instead of preparing the people for armed resistance. Although Oric does not mention any names here, he is clearly referring to his former patrons, Ibran Mustafic and Hamed Efendic. Oric also blames Muslim intellectuals for supporting the 'pro-Serb' oriented parties before the war began, which he felt had contributed to the establishment of Serb hegemony. According to Oric, all of them left town at the start of the war, including some with large foreign bank accounts. Abandoned by their leaders, ordinary people handed over their weapons to the Serbs, a pattern that repeated itself all over eastern Bosnia. The worst case was probably Vlasenica, where local Muslims handed over some 2,000 rifles to the Serbs. Oric provides lists of SDA leaders, local officials, heads of police and territorial defence, and directors of firms and other public institutions, who are said to have 'betrayed' their nation and to have left just before the start of the war. His list of Srebrenican leaders includes Besim Ibisevic, Cazim Salimovic, Ibran Mustafic, Sabit Begic, and Adib Djozic.⁵⁶⁷

The JNA and various paramilitary groups, commanded by Captain Reljic of the Novi Sad corps, entered Srebrenica in the afternoon of 18 April. Goran Zekic and other SDS politicians paraded through what had almost become a ghost town that offered no resistance whatsoever. The Serb flag was raised above the police station and other public buildings. In the meantime, paramilitaries ransacked the town, searching for weapons among the remaining Muslims, and seizing money and jewellery. Then they began plundering, assisted by local Serbs who pointed out which houses and shops to target. Numerous truckloads of livestock, machinery, equipment, and personal possessions (televisions, electric appliances, furniture, etc.) were transported to Serbia. The most popular commodity, however, were cars. Hotels, factories and the hospital were also plundered. X-ray and ultrasound equipment were removed from the hospital. The catastrophe was transferred to Skelani to leave the Muslims without any documentation to claim back their properties. Local Serb women participated in plundering the houses of their former Muslim neighbours, pilfering jewellery, Gobelins, carpets and fur coats. There was, however, one area where the paramilitaries and plunderers did not dare enter: the industrial complexes in Potočari where Oric was hiding. Once the Serb forces captured the town, Serb inhabitants who had fled returned to their houses. A small number of Muslims also remained behind. Most of them stayed in their homes the entire time or hid with Serb neighbours. None were killed until ten days later, on 28 April, when Serb plunderers killed a Muslim man who tried to resist them. He was the first Muslim killed in town. Other Muslims were now waiting for the first available opportunity to flee the town. On 3 May 1992, Serbs evacuated a busload of Muslims to Bratunac, and took some the police station for further interrogation. Many ended up in the Vuk Karadzic school, where some of them were tortured and killed.⁵⁶⁸

The last town to fall into Serb hands was Vlasenica, on 21 April 1992. Serbs arrested prominent Muslims and burned their houses, using lists they had previously prepared. Arrests continued during the next few months, when numerous Muslims were still hiding in their homes unable to leave the town. Many ended up in the Susica camp. Commanded by Dragan Nikolic, alias 'Jenki,' the Susica camp continued operating until the end of September (long after other concentration camps in north-western Bosnia had been discovered and closed down). Hundreds of Muslims, including from areas outside the municipality of Vlasenica (e.g. from villages near Bratunac) were tortured and killed in the camp.⁵⁶⁹ Others managed to escape through the forests in the direction of Srebrenica, and many ended up in the Muslim-held enclave. The Vlasenica municipality was soon divided in two, Vlasenica proper and Milici, which then became a separate (Serb) municipality. The SDS's final objective was also to abolish the Srebrenica municipality and divide it between Bratunac and the newly established Serb

⁵⁶⁷ Oric, *Srebrenica*, pp. 15-21.

⁵⁶⁸ For accounts of the Serb take-over of Srebrenica, see: Oric, *Srebrenica*, pp. 139; Masic, *Srebrenica*, p. 35-37; Rifatbegovic, *Ratni mir*, pp. 52-57; Omeragic, *Satanski sinovi*, p. 15; Bassiouni, *Final report*, Annex III.a, p. 161; Interviews: Hasa Selmanagic 07/08/1997, Damir Skaler 06/02/1998, Abdulah Purkovic 04/02/1998; Sefkija Hadziarapovic 22/05/1998.

⁵⁶⁹ For the events in Vlasenica, see Oric, *Srebrenica*, pp. 59-67; Cohen, *Hearts grown brutal*, pp. 195-198. For the Susica camp, see Cohen, *Hearts grown brutal*, pp. 203-209, 214-216.

municipalities of Skelani and Milici. According to these plans, Bratunac was to become the main Serb centre of the region.

Ethnic cleansing by Serbs and first acts of Muslim resistance

“Before this summer ends, we will have driven the Turkish army out of the city, just as they drove us from the field of Kossovo in 1389. That was the beginning of Turkish domination of our lands. This will be the end of it, after all these cruel centuries [...] We Serbs are saving Europe, even if Europe does not appreciate our efforts, even if it condemns them”.

Serb soldier besieging Sarajevo, at the beginning of the war, quoted in: Rieff, *Slaughterhouse*, p. 103

After taking over the towns of Bratunac and Srebrenica, the Serbs launched large-scale ethnic cleansing operations. This period also marked the beginning of active armed resistance by small, improvised groups of Muslims located in the hills and villages. They consisted of peasants and Muslim townspeople who had fled their homes and had tried to survive in the forests, in the snow, cold and rain, without proper food and shelter. Some Muslims from Srebrenica carried automatic rifles with them, which had been taken from police stores. Others made handmade rifles from water pipes. In the municipality of Srebrenica, two main centres of resistance emerged initially. One of these was in the village of Potočari, where Naser Oric had been organising and training Muslim militia. The other developed in Stari grad (the upper part of town near the ancient Turkish fortress), where Hakija Meholic and Akif Ustic commanded a group of local armed men who were able to stave off the Serbs. Meholic and Ustic also protected some three hundred civilians who had taken refuge in the hills and forests above the town.⁵⁷⁰ Other resistance groups formed in the Muslim villages of Suceska (led by Ramiz Becirovic and Zulfo Tursunovic), Bajramovici (Hamdija Fejzic), Tokoljaci (Hedib Smajlovic), Biljeg near Osmace (Ahmo Tihic), Kragljivoda (Nedžad Bektic and Sefik Mandzic), Skenderovici (Senahid Tabakovic), Poznanovici (Dzevad Malkic) and Luka (Samir Habibovic). Although part of the municipality of Srebrenica, Luka was actually closer to Zepa than to the town of Srebrenica.⁵⁷¹ Similar centres appeared throughout the Bratunac municipality, including in Konjevic Polje (Velid Sabic), Blječeva (Ejub Golic), and in Muslim villages along the Drina, such as Poloznik (Osman Malagic). They often consisted of Muslims who had fled their homes in Serb assaults on their home villages.⁵⁷²

The first successful Muslim action against the Serb forces occurred on 20 April 1992, in Potočari, where Oric attacked a group of Arkan Tigers only two days after the Serbs took Srebrenica. Seventeen armed Muslims blocked the road to Bratunac and ambushed several (police) cars and other vehicles returning from Srebrenica. At least four Serbs were killed in the attack.⁵⁷³ Local radio stations just across the border in Serbia began broadcasting reports that thousands of Green Berets were active around Srebrenica, leaving many local Serbs too terrified to go through Potočari.⁵⁷⁴ Immediately, the JNA started shelling Potočari and various other Muslim villages from artillery positions near Bratunac.

⁵⁷⁰ Masic, *Srebrenica*, p. 44. Conversation: Meho Ustic 13/11/1998.

⁵⁷¹ Oric, *Srebrenica*, Srebrenica, pp. 142-44. See also Masic, *Srebrenica*, p. 48.

⁵⁷² Golic's group in Blječeva consisted of refugees from Glogova. His group soon linked up with Oric's forces in Potočari (Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, pp. 69-71). Malagic led a group of some two hundred men, who had fled from Voljavica (Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, pp. 71-74; Omeragic, *Satanski sinovi*, pp. 22-24).

⁵⁷³ Although Muslim sources usually cite more casualties, Ivanisevic mentions only four names of Serbs killed in Potočari on 20 April 1992. (Ivanisevic, *Hronika*, p. 71). For the Muslim version of the attack see: Oric, *Srebrenica*, pp. 140-141. See also: Mandzic, 'Zlatni Ljiljani', p. 37; Interview: Mitko and Mevlâ Kadric 17/01/1998.

⁵⁷⁴ Interviews: Mitko and Mevlâ Kadric 17/01/1998; 25/04/1998.

The shelling forced the villagers to flee their homes. The first village destroyed and taken by the Serbs was one of vital strategic importance: Likari. Due to its location, Likari was eminently suited to monitoring and shelling the Muslim stronghold of Potoèari. Serbs also entered the nearby Muslim village of Peèista. According to some Muslim sources, however, they left the village again after one Serb was killed during internal clashes. In Vlasenica, Serb forces attacked and burned the Muslim villages of Nedjelista, Zaklopaèa, Pomol, and Djile, one day after they established control over the town. According to a Muslim source, over three hundred Muslims were killed during Serb actions around Vlasenica.⁵⁷⁵

Although they attacked Potoèari and various villages near Vlasenica, the Serbs usually issued ultimatums first to the inhabitants of Muslim strongholds before attacking them. The three most important Muslim strongholds that threatened to block Serb communications were Voljavica (on the road from Bratunac to Fakovici and Skelani), Glogova (between Bratunac and Kravica), and Konjevic Polje (on the road junction linking Bratunac to Zvornik, Milici, and Vlasenica). First, the head of the SDS crisis committee of Bratunac, Miroslav Deronjic, issued an ultimatum to the Muslims in Voljavica and Glogova. In it, he asked them to hand over all their weapons. On 20 April, Voljavica was surrounded by Serb forces. During the afternoon, SDS leaders entered the village, confiscating a limited number of arms. Voljavica was crucial to the Serbs because it was the only road connection linking Bratunac to Srebrenica after the Muslim attack in Potoèari. Since the Serbs were still seriously engaged in countering Muslim actions in Potoèari, they extended the deadlines for Glogova and Konjevic Polje by another week. Finally, when the SDS leaders entered Glogova on 27 April, most Muslims handed over their weapons. In Konjevic Polje, however, the head of the local Muslim crisis committee, Velid Sabic, refused to comply with the Serb demands.⁵⁷⁶

The SDS sent out a last ultimatum to hand over all weapons before 1 May, at which time 'peaceful' attempts to disarm the Muslim population ended. From then on, Serb leaders resorted to other methods. They began massive ethnic cleansing operations, expelling the Muslim inhabitants of the town of Bratunac and most other villages in the municipalities of Bratunac, Srebrenica and Vlasenica. Only a few Muslim strongholds held out against the general Serb assault, and these became the places of refuge for the displaced. The operations finally took off on 29 April, when Colonel Svetozar Milosevic, commander of the 'Drina' operative unit of the JNA, posted an official proclamation on all public buildings in Bratunac, ordering all Muslims to sign a declaration of loyalty to the Serb authorities in the municipal building. In effect, Muslims were given only a few hours to sign, which almost nobody did. The next day, the SDS authorities of Bratunac placed an official announcement on public display calling on all men aged 18 to 60 to join the army. Muslim men, who were also subject to this measure, fled to the forests to avoid being recruited into the army. By this stage, telephone service to most Muslim homes had already been disconnected.⁵⁷⁷

Then, on 1 May, a long series of armed attacks were launched against Muslim villages. They were carried out from the two main Serb operating bases in the area: Milici and Bratunac. This time, instead of SDS delegations, the Serbs sent out armed bands and paramilitary groups to the Muslim villages, who expelled and killed the inhabitants and plundered and burned their houses. Bands from Milici attacked most Muslim villages located south of the road to Podravanje between 1 and 4 May. All were burned to the ground. Some inhabitants were killed or taken to the Susica camp in Vlasenica, but most others through the forests to the Muslim-controlled villages of Krivaèe (municipality of Vlasenica) and Sucasca (municipality of Srebrenica).⁵⁷⁸ Serb forces also tried to take Sucasca, north of that same road, but failed due to fierce Muslim resistance.⁵⁷⁹ On 4 and 5 May, Serb forces took control

⁵⁷⁵ Masic, *Srebrenica*, pp. 39 and 54.

⁵⁷⁶ Oric, *Srebrenica*, pp. 44-45; Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, pp. 36-38, 64-5.

⁵⁷⁷ Masic, *Srebrenica*, pp. 35-6; Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, p. 36-41; Oric, *Srebrenica*, pp. 48; Omeragic, *Satanski sinovi*, pp. 26-27.

⁵⁷⁸ Oric, *Srebrenica*, pp. 62, 66, 118-121, 134. Interviews with: Hasan Nuhanovic 16/06/1998 and Omer Subasic 17/06/1998.

⁵⁷⁹ Oric, *Srebrenica*, pp. 141-42; Masic, *Srebrenica*, p. 39, 43

of Zeleni Jadar, an important and strategic road junction south of Srebrenica.⁵⁸⁰ In the municipality of Bratunac, the village of Hranèa was the first to be attacked. On 2 May, masked Serb gunmen set fire to numerous Muslim houses in the village, killing five people and abducting nine men.⁵⁸¹ British journalist, Tim Judah, visited Hranèa two days later. He found local Muslims keeping vigil next to the dead bodies of their relatives (including the body of seven-year-old, Selma Hodzic). The villagers told him that it was hard for them to recognise whether the perpetrators had been army reservists, police, or paramilitaries. Yet they were convinced that some had been from the neighbouring village of Repovac (a Serb suburb of Bratunac) and the Serb part of Hranèa.⁵⁸²

While the attacks on Muslim villages continued, the SDS consolidated its power in both Bratunac and Srebrenica. The SDS leaders replaced all Muslim directors, and ordered the Muslim population to report to work, which made it easier to exert control over them. Few Muslims returned to work, however. In the Sase mine, which was now part of the new Serb municipality of Bratunac, Muslim employees were also required to show up to work. The Serb authorities tried in this way to prevent them from starting any form of resistance and to block the road between Srebrenica and Bratunac. They were also paid bonuses to ensure loyalty.⁵⁸³ Many other Muslims in Bratunac and Srebrenica, however, were arrested and killed. In the town of Srebrenica, which had been abandoned by most of its Muslim population, gunmen killed Muslims hiding in their homes as soon as they appeared on the streets. Their bodies were left lying on the streets for days. Other Muslims were discovered inside their homes and murdered there. Several elderly Muslim inhabitants were burned alive when Serb paramilitaries set fire to Muslim houses in the centre of Srebrenica. Some Muslim families, however, found refuge with their Serb friends or neighbours. At least one Serb was forced to flee from Srebrenica after Serb gunmen discovered that he was hiding two Muslim families in his house.⁵⁸⁴

In Bratunac, the new Serb authorities started rounding up prominent Muslims, particularly political leaders, former officials and intellectuals. The objective was to eliminate existing non-Serb leadership. Some received summons to go to the police station, where they were interrogated and released - if they were lucky. Most, however, were carted off to makeshift prisons set up in such facilities as the Vuk Karadzic school and the cellars of local hotels, restaurants and firms. Once in prison, they were interrogated about who they knew to possess arms or to have been members of the Patriotic League.⁵⁸⁵ Many of those arrested or summoned to the police station disappeared, or were found dead later. The first to be liquidated were a father and two sons, whose bodies were found near the Krizevica river in Bratunac on 29 April 1992. According to the Serbs, the two sons had fought in Croatia for the Croatian National Guard (ZNG). They were also suspected of having participated in the Muslim ambush in Potoèari, in which several Arkan Tigers had been killed. The next day, Serb authorities issued permission to bury their bodies. The small funeral held was attended by close relatives only and was among the last few Muslim burials to take place in Bratunac.⁵⁸⁶

After these initial killings, the Serbs added new victims to the list almost daily. Among them were the local chemist, a police inspector, several managers of firms, the former head of the police of Bratunac, a teacher, and the former mayor of Srebrenica, Salih 'Tale' Sehomerovic. Following his arrest, Sehomerovic was executed at the bridge over the Drina. A number of other people were also liquidated there and thrown into the river. Others disappeared and were never found again.⁵⁸⁷ Between 18 April and 9 May 1992, seventy-four Muslims from Srebrenica were killed or disappeared. Various local

⁵⁸⁰ Masic, *Srebrenica*, p. 39; Oric, *Srebrenica*, p. 57.

⁵⁸¹ Omeragic, *Satanski sinovi*, p. 31; Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, p. 41.

⁵⁸² Judah, 'Women keep tearful vigil'; interview: Tim Judah 09/12/1997.

⁵⁸³ Oric, *Srebrenica*, p. 44; Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, p. 35; Omeragic, *Satanski sinovi*, p. 27.

⁵⁸⁴ Interviews: Abdulah Purkovic 04/02/1998; Boban Vasic 06/07/1998; Damir Skaler 06/02/1998.

⁵⁸⁵ See Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, p. 34.

⁵⁸⁶ Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, p. 34-35; Omeragic, *Satanski sinovi*, pp. 17-28. Interviews: Mehmed Malagic 14/06/1998 and Mirsada Bakalovic on 15/06/1998, 17/06/1998 and 19/06/1998

⁵⁸⁷ Masic, *Srebrenica*, p. 16; Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, p. 57; Oric, *Srebrenica*, pp. 46-47; Omeragic, *Satanski sinovi*: 17-28. Interview Mirsada Bakalovic 15/06/1998, 17/06/1998 and 19/06/1998.

Muslim politicians went missing in far-away places in Serbia and Montenegro, where they had taken refuge after the Serbs took Srebrenica.⁵⁸⁸ Saban Mehmedovic (president of the local Reformist Party SRSJ) was arrested near Sabac, where his Serbian wife had a house. He too disappeared. Malik Meholic (MBO) and Azem Begic (SDA) were arrested by the Montenegrin police in the port of Bar and disappeared thereafter. At least seven other Muslims leaders from the municipality of Srebrenica also disappeared in Bar.⁵⁸⁹ Before this development, local SDS hardliner, Miodrag Jokic, issued an almost open invitation to eliminate the so-called Muslim 'extremists' who had fled Srebrenica, during his interview with the Belgrade weekly, *Ilustrovana politika*. "The murderers are among us," he declared and subsequently cited the names and places of residence of various Muslims hiding in Serbia. Among those he mentioned were Malik Meholic as well as Sabit Begic, member of the Social-Democrat Party (SDP), whom Jokic labeled a tough fundamentalist.⁵⁹⁰

These people, however, had played no role whatsoever in the now ever-increasing Muslim ambushes or (counter) attacks on Serb villages. On 6 May 1992, Muslims attacked the Serb hamlet of Gniona (north of the town of Srebrenica). Gniona was the first Serb village in the municipalities of Srebrenica and Bratunac to be attacked and burned down by Naser Oric's forces. The village was strategically important because it gave Muslim forces free passage to Sukeska, another centre of Muslim resistance. On the same day, Muslim forces also attacked Serb houses in the village of Bljeèeva (Bratunac municipality); after they took the village, they abandoned it again because it was so close to Potoèari. Several Muslims and Serbs were killed during these attacks.⁵⁹¹ Muslim forces also began striking back in Srebrenica, especially after Serb paramilitaries burned down Muslim houses in the town's centre on 4 and 5 May. Eighty houses were destroyed and thirty Muslim inhabitants were killed during these actions. One or two days later, Serb paramilitaries tried to do the same in Stari grad, the upper part of town, which led to the first open clashes with local Muslim militia. This became known as the 'Battle of Srebrenica'. On 7 May, several Serbs were killed in these actions. The Serbs were prevented from entering Stari grad, and three days later, they were completely expelled from the town. Muslims then took control of the town.⁵⁹²

Other events prepared the way for this major Muslim success. On 7 May, they ambushed a Serb truck near Osmace (on the road between Zeleni Jadar and Skelani). According to Muslim sources, the truck was loaded with Serb plunderers from Srebrenica. Serb sources, by contrast, claim these were civilians. At least seven were killed (Muslim sources claim two or three Muslim casualties and dozens of Serb victims). Wherever the truth lies, the event was crucial because the road connection between Srebrenica and Skelani was now considered unsafe by the Serbs. After blocking the main road connection through Potoèari, on 20 April, Muslims now cut off a second important road linking Srebrenica to the outside world. Serbs in town felt that Srebrenica was being isolated and encircled by Muslim forces.⁵⁹³ The ambush in Osmace, however, also marked the beginning of a huge series of attacks on Muslim villages, which were part of the new Serb 'municipality' of Skelani. Organised by the local branch of the SDS and its president Dane Katanic, the attacks began on 8 May and continued for several days. Two dozen Muslim settlements were attacked, almost eight hundred houses were burned down, and the entire Muslim population was expelled. Over 1,300 Muslims were transported off to Serbia and Macedonia, and almost 900 fled to Muslim villages in the direction of Srebrenica. Seven Muslim men were shot in the presence of women and children. Near the bridge in Skelani, seventeen

⁵⁸⁸ For a list, see Masic, *Srebrenica*, pp. 37-38.

⁵⁸⁹ Masic, *Srebrenica*, p. 24, 37-38, 57. Interview: Sefkija Hadziarapovic 22/05/1998.

⁵⁹⁰ Milanovic, 'Ubice su medju nama', p. 15.

⁵⁹¹ Masic, *Srebrenica*, p. 45; Oric, *Srebrenica*, pp. 50, 57, 144-145; Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, pp. 43, 69-71; Ivanisevic, *Hronika*, p. 42-43, 71, 200, 258-61; Jovanovic et al, *Iskorenjivanje Srba*, pp. 93-94.

⁵⁹² Ivanisevic, *Hronika*, p. 71

⁵⁹³ Masic, *Srebrenica*, p. 46; Oric, *Srebrenica*, p. 143; Ivanisevic, *Hronika*, pp. 41, 59, 71.

Muslims were taken out of a bus and also executed. According to Muslim sources, a total of fifty-five Muslims died during Serb actions in and around Skelani.⁵⁹⁴

⁵⁹⁴ Oric, *Srebrenica*, pp. 57-58, 84-87; Masic, *Srebrenica*, pp. 39-40. Human Rights Watch, *War Crimes*, pp. 60-62.

Chapter 7

The Rise of the Muslim Enclave of Srebrenica



Photo of Goran Zekic (1956-1992), in army uniform, on his gravestone in Srebrenica

The assassination of Goran Zekic

Despite the massive military force mobilised by the Serbs in their attempts to ethnically cleanse eastern Bosnia, the morale of Muslim fighters in and around Srebrenica received a major boost with the death of Srebrenica's SDS president, Goran Zekic, on 8 May 1992. The official version of the event, which is confirmed by Muslim and Serb publications alike, is that Zekic was killed in a Muslim ambush near Vidikovac (between Srebrenica and Zalazje).⁵⁹⁵ According to this version, Zekic had been to the funeral of a Serb soldier who was killed during clashes in Srebrenica the day before. On his way back to Bratunac, he drove into a Muslim trap. However rumours have also persisted that Zekic was not killed by Muslims, but by SDS hardliner, Delivoje Sorak, commander of the Serb Territorial Defence. Sorak travelled together with Zekic in the same car. Although he was injured in the incident, he survived it, giving rise to speculations that he might have actually carried out the assassination. Speculations have it that a private dispute or argument over money lay behind the murder.⁵⁹⁶ This 'unofficial' version is corroborated by the statements that both Delivoje Sorak and Miodrag Jokic, the other major SDS hardliner in Srebrenica, gave to the press. For one thing, these statements were issued immediately following Zekic's death. What is more, they contained major inconsistencies and are, therefore, not entirely credible.⁵⁹⁷ Two informants claim that both Sorak and Jokic were arrested after the incident and

⁵⁹⁵ Ivanisevic, *Hronika*, p. 72, 165, 203; Toholj, *Crna knjiga*, vol. 2, p. 210; Masic, *Srebrenica*, p. 47; Oric, *Srebrenica*, p. 145. Interview: Miroslav Deronjic 03/11/1999.

⁵⁹⁶ Interviews: Boban Vasic 06/07/1998; Mirsada Bakalovic 15/06/1998, 17/06/1998 and 19/06/1998; Mitko Kadric 17/01/1998; Munib Hasanovic 14/09/1999. Apparently, Zekic's assassination was a taboo subject in discussions with Sorak. Interview: Delivoje Sorak 20/10/2000. If the rumours are correct, then this case is similar to that of Stanko Pecikoza in Visegrad, a wealthy sawmill owner and SDS official, who was assassinated by Serb gunmen in an ambush in June 1992. He was reportedly killed because he did not pay the 'blood money' he had promised as a compensation for the executions of Muslims by Milan Lukic's paramilitary gang (Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, p. 355).

⁵⁹⁷ In an interview with *Ilustrovana politika*, Jokic claims to have thrown a hand grenade at the Muslim attackers, killing two of them. He claims (inaccurately as we have seen from Ibisevic's account) that Zekic had been always the target of Muslims in

placed in pre-trial detention in Bijeljina, only to be released again.⁵⁹⁸ Muslim spokesmen never contradicted the official Serb account because they could trumpet Zekic's assassination as a major Muslim victory to boost their troops' morale.

Whatever the truth may be, the fact that most Serbs believed that Zekic was killed in a Muslim ambush meant that a third major road connection, that between Srebrenica and Bratunac (via Sase), was now off limits to them. Zekic's death shocked the Serbs by demonstrating that even their main leader was not invulnerable. What is more, it spread panic because the town was now almost isolated and surrounded by Muslim forces. In the night between 8 and 9 May, they fled the town en masse. All that remained behind were some thirty people (some Serbs, Macedonians, Croats, and a few individuals from mixed marriages).⁵⁹⁹ Fearing Serb vengeance, most Muslims also fled the town the morning after the killing. Soon, dozens of Muslim houses were, in fact, burned down, and some of the occupants who had decided to stay were shot or burned alive in their homes. By this stage, the town was almost completely abandoned. In the afternoon of the next day, Akuf Ustic entered the town and took control. In the days that followed, Muslim inhabitants, who had spent several weeks in the forests, returned to Srebrenica, where they stayed for the next three years. They removed bodies from the streets and buried them near the mosque.⁶⁰⁰

The Muslims of Bratunac and surrounding villages immediately suffered the consequences of Goran Zekic's assassination and the humiliating defeat of the Serbs in Srebrenica. On 9 May, the Muslim village of Glogova, which lies between Kravica and Bratunac, was surrounded. The Serbs then carried out a pogrom on the population. About sixty Muslim men were executed in a field near the village mosque.⁶⁰¹ On Sunday 10 May, thousands of Muslims from Bratunac and various suburbs and villages to the west and north of the town were rounded up in one huge operation and brought together in the FC 'Bratstvo' (Brotherhood) sports stadium in Bratunac. On the previous evening, several had been warned by Serb neighbours that something bad was going to happen the next day, and that it was better to leave. Some Muslims decided to flee into the forests. This entire population of Muslims were rounded up by Serbs from Bratunac and Srebrenica, who searched the streets and drove people out of their homes. Muslims were given almost no time to collect their personal belongings. They were taken to the stadium, where they ordered to hand over money, other valuables, ID cards and car keys. Using megaphones, they called the names of well-known, prominent Muslim men and summoned them to step forward and identify themselves. The men were then taken to the gym of the Vuk Karadzic elementary school. The school, which was located near the stadium, was now used as a Serb drumhead court.⁶⁰² After the Serb takeover of Bratunac, on 17 April, several prominent Muslims were sentenced and executed there. According to Muslim sources, the head of the court was Veljko Macesic, the hospital paediatrician from Bratunac.⁶⁰³

Srebrenica (Milanovic, 'Ubice su medju nama', p. 14). In *Revija 92*, Sorak claims to have shot at the Muslim attackers, but makes no mention whatsoever of the fact that he killed two of them. The writer of this article also emphasises (and rightly so) that Zekic was quite well respected among ('honest') Muslims in Srebrenica. He spoke to Zekic just a few days before his death, and at that time, Muslims from Srebrenica who had fled to Tuzla were calling him, begging him to help them return and to join forces against the extremists (Mitric, 'Otac zamenio sina junaka'). Zekic made an appearance on TV Novi Sad in which he invited Muslims to discuss their return. Interview: Marinko Sekulic 10/11/1998.

⁵⁹⁸ Interviews: Boban Vasic 06/07/1998; Marinko Sekulic 10/11/1998.

⁵⁹⁹ Ivanisevic, *Hronika*, p. 41.

⁶⁰⁰ Masic, *Srebrenica*, p. 47; Oric, *Srebrenica*, p. 145; Rifatbegovic, *Ratni mir*, pp. 54-56. Interview: Damir Skaler 06/02/1998.

⁶⁰¹ For the events in Glogova, see: Masic, *Srebrenica*, pp. 53, 79; Oric, *Srebrenica*, pp. 50-51, 90-91; Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, pp. 43-44, 68, 70; Omeragic, *Satanski sinovi*, pp. 34-38; Bassiouni, *Final report*, Annex III.a, pp. 74, 141. Interview: Miroslav Deronjic 03/11/1999.

⁶⁰² Throughout the rest of Bosnia, public places, such as schools, factories, sports arenas, mines, and warehouses were also converted into camps and prisons, where the civilian populations were detained before being displaced. Control of these camps lay in the hands of different parties. Some were run by the army, and others by local authorities, the police, various paramilitary groups and local armed militias, or combinations of these. (Bassiouni, *Final report*, pp. 51-55).

⁶⁰³ Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, p. 33. See also the eyewitness account of Mehmedalija Hadziarapovic in Oric, *Srebrenica*, pp. 92-97.

By late afternoon, four to five thousand Muslim civilians gathered in the sports stadium.⁶⁰⁴ In the early evening, they were taken outside to transported elsewhere. At this point, all men of military age were separated from the women and children at the entrance of the stadium. Women and children were put on buses and transported to Tisce, from where they walked to Muslim-held territory. The men, about six to seven hundred of them, were lined up in rows guarded by soldiers and paramilitaries. They were brought to the gym of the Vuk Karadzic School, where one of the cruellest and bloodiest episodes of the war took place.⁶⁰⁵ Many of them later recounted that when they entered the gym, they saw the dead and mutilated bodies of those who had gone before. The dressing rooms to the left and right were covered in blood. Some thirty to fifty people were lying on the floor of the gym itself, many of them unconscious. They were asked to stand up and move. Those who could not comply were shot in the neck. After the dead were removed, all the men were pressed inside and forced to stand in one half of the gym, which was too small for them to breath. During the first night, nine people died of suffocation. The prisoners were offered extremely salty food without any water to drink. Then, on the second day they received nothing to eat or drink at all.

On the first evening, paramilitaries, most of whom had come from elsewhere, started to kick and beat the Muslim prisoners. The first victim was a priest, Mustafa Mujkanovic, who was killed in front of the other prisoners. He was forced to cross himself, to lift his hand and raise three fingers in the Serb manner (he lifted only two) and to drink beer (which he refused). Then he was beaten with various objects until he lost consciousness. He was finally killed off by a gunshot through the head.⁶⁰⁶ This orgy of violence continued for the next three days until 13 May at midnight. In the gym were also Muslim men from Srebrenica and Potočari who had ended up in Bratunac. They were personally targeted in order to avenge the attack on the Arkan 'Tigers' and the murder of Goran Zekic. Zekic's father reportedly entered the gym to order the murder of all men from Srebrenica as retribution for the killing of his son.⁶⁰⁷ Others, who also had private accounts to settle, entered and selected their own candidates to be assaulted. In most other cases, however, the victims were chosen more or less at random through certain 'games' the Serbs played. Men wearing green shirts (the colour symbolising the Islamic faith) were certain to be selected. Prisoners had to sing Chetnik songs, and those who refused to do so were killed. Basketballs were thrown into the air, and any prisoner hit in the head by one would be sentenced death. Some prisoners were taken into an 'investigation' room, one of the dressing rooms in the gym, where they were interrogated and tortured. Another dressing room was used to kill people off. Others who were already half dead were carried outside in front of a hangar behind the school building to be killed there.

There, the dead bodies of Muslim prisoners were collected, and trucks came to transport them away. Prisoners were forced to carry bodies out of the school to the hangar, and throw them into a ditch or load them on the trucks. In some cases, those who had carried the bodies were then killed themselves and thrown on top of the pile. Others were put to work removing bloodstains and human remains. Most prisoners who were brought to the school later, and who did not belong to the first group of six to seven hundred men, were killed in front of the hangar. The bodies of all those killed were dumped in mass graves or thrown into the Drina.⁶⁰⁸ According to eyewitnesses, at least three hundred Muslims were liquidated in the school. Several of the perpetrators were not from Bratunac and for that reason were often known by their nicknames only: 'Bane' (reportedly a paramilitary and member of the White Eagles, who was said to be from Sabac in Serbia), 'Makedonac' (probably from Vranje), Dragan Maric (who was from Milici), Novak 'Krke' Stjepanovic (originally from Vukovar but

⁶⁰⁴ At least one Muslim family was allowed to go back home. They hid for the next twelve days before they acquired a permit to leave the town. Mirsada Bakalovic 15/06/1998, 17/06/1998 and 19/06/1998.

⁶⁰⁵ Omeragic, *Satanski sinovi*, pp. 61-196; Oric, *Srebrenica*, pp. 51-53, 102-107, 122-127; Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, pp. 44-52; Bassiouni, *Final report*, Annex III.a, pp. 140-141; Mazowiecki, *Situation of human rights*, par. 65.

⁶⁰⁶ Omeragic, *Satanski sinovi*, pp. 95-98.

⁶⁰⁷ Omeragic, *Satanski sinovi*, pp. 159-161; Oric, *Srebrenica*, p. 126.

⁶⁰⁸ Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, pp. 48-52.

living as a miner in Sase), and Milan 'Rocko' Trisic (who was from Bratunac).⁶⁰⁹ They also used mock Muslim nicknames among themselves such as Huso, Haso, and Mujo.

According to one Muslim account, they used lists of people to be liquidated, which they received from the local SDS. They were said to have been paid by Sreten Radic, who reportedly gave them 500 Deutsch marks for every Muslim they killed. They also had a video of the Muslim demonstration on the streets of Bratunac in late August 1991 when the Yugoslav Army attempted to confiscate the army card files. Using that video, they were able to identify Muslims who had been on the forefront of these demonstrations.⁶¹⁰ One of their victims was a local Serb, Milutin 'Moler' Vuksic, who was taken into the school and killed because he had been hiding a Muslim family.⁶¹¹ He was one of the very few local Serbs who helped Muslims and resisted the massive expulsion of the Muslim population. Many other Serbs took part in it, becoming complicit in the act of ethnic cleansing without fully anticipating the brutality with which it was carried out. Many were convinced that Muslims would not suffer much harm, and that most of them would be transported to Kladanj as part of an exchange between Muslim and Serb territories. They were told, "Muslims have to go and Serbs will come here". The paramilitaries, however, made sure that things were much worse than anyone could imagine. There were some Serbs, including individuals participating in these actions, who tried to assist or rescue former Muslim friends. They did this, for instance, by trying to help them to flee, giving them money, or making sure that they escaped any harm from extremists. Some were horrified and very distressed about what was happening.⁶¹²

At midnight on 13 May, the torturing in the gym of the Vuk Karadzic School stopped. All remaining prisoners were put on buses to Pale to be exchanged for Serb prisoners. The exchange took place a few days later. In the other parts of the municipality of Bratunac, Serbs continued to round up Muslims, including in the villages along the main road to Konjevic Polje. The Muslim populations of these villages were taken to Kravica. Polom served as the main collection point for villages north of Bratunac. Some men ended up in the prison camp Susica, while women were deported to Muslim-held central Bosnia. Several dozen Muslims from the villages of Gradina and Sase were imprisoned in a building of the Sase mine, from which most disappeared.⁶¹³ Muslim villages south of Bratunac along the Drina (such as Bjelovac, Voljavica, and Sikiric) came under attack from Bratunac and the Serb stronghold of Fakovici.⁶¹⁴ Instead of surrendering to the Serbs, most villagers took refuge in the hills and forests or went to Muslim villages near Srebrenica that had not yet been assaulted. These people were to form the first large group of refugees to enter the enclave. They received help from Muslim fighters (including the group led by Osman Malagic), who had taken refuge in the hills as early on as April. These fighters assisted Muslim civilians to flee to safer territory, and also helped them return to their villages during the night to collect food and other belongings. Almost all of these Muslims ended up in the town of Srebrenica, where they were accommodated in apartments and houses that had been abandoned by their previous occupants.⁶¹⁵

These large-scale Serb operations raged from the beginning up through the end of May. During that time, over three quarters of the entire Muslim population in the Bratunac municipality (seventeen thousand people) was cleansed from the area. At least five hundred people were killed. Almost five

⁶⁰⁹ Omeragic, *Satanski sinovi*, pp. 101-107, 116-120.

⁶¹⁰ Omeragic, *Satanski sinovi*, pp. 18-119.

⁶¹¹ Omeragic, *Satanski sinovi*, pp. 166-167.

⁶¹² Interviews: Mitko and Mevla Kadric 17/01/1998; Mirsada Bakalovic 15/06/1998, 17/06/1998 and 19/06/1998.

⁶¹³ Probably most prisoners were killed and buried in an earthen dam near the mine. Only eleven people survived. Girls were raped. For an eyewitness account, see Oric, *Srebrenica*, pp. 98-101. See also Masic, *Srebrenica*, pp. 55-57. Interview: Edina Karic 20/10/1997.

⁶¹⁴ Masic, *Srebrenica*, pp. 53-55; Oric, *Srebrenica*, pp. 51-54; Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, pp. 53-57, 74-75; Omeragic, *Satanski sinovi*, pp. 57-59. Orlica, a Roma settlement near Tegare, was also attacked and cleansed by Serb forces on 16 May 1992 (Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, p. 56).

⁶¹⁵ See Oric, *Srebrenica*, pp. 51-56; Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, pp. 115-16. Interviews: Mehmed Malagic 22/10/1997 and 14/06/1998.

thousand people (less than a quarter of the Muslim population) stayed in their own villages. This was because those villages were under Muslim control; about 3,300 in and around Konjevic Polje, as well as 1,500 Muslims in Blječeva, Joseva and Jagodnja. Of those displaced, about nine thousand were deported to central Bosnia. Another eight thousand fled to villages that were part of the Muslim-held territory of Srebrenica.⁶¹⁶ Although these large population movements were the result of massive expulsions, local SDS leaders made it appear in the Serbian press as though these people had left their homes out of free choice. On 14 May 1992, *Vjèernje novosti*, a daily newspaper, quoted Miroslav Deronjic as claiming that many Muslims had fled the area on their own initiative. According to Deronjic, they did this out of fear of Serb reprisals after Muslim extremists had killed Zekic and carried out massacres against the Serb population. He claimed that roughly one hundred Serbs had been slaughtered in Srebrenica.⁶¹⁷

First wave of coordinated Muslim attacks on Serb villages



Naser Oric, main commander of the Muslim forces in the Srebrenica enclave.

Groups of armed Muslims in and around Srebrenica responded to these massive ethnic cleansing operations with a wave of coordinated attacks on Serb villages, which started in all earnest on 15 May. The villages initially targeted were Viogor, Orahovica and Osredak. These first operations were intended to link up various centres of Muslim resistance and create a compact Muslim-controlled territory in a semi-circle west of Srebrenica (at the perimeters of which lay Potocari, Srebrenica, Sucaska, and Zeleni Jadar).⁶¹⁸ During these attacks, Serb villages were plundered and burned down, and several Serbs were killed. Generally, however, the number of Serb casualties was low because most of the population (particularly women and children) had already taken refuge in Bratunac or elsewhere. On 16 May, Serb forces carried out a counterattack from Milici, trying to raid the Muslim stronghold of Sucaska west of Srebrenica. But local commander, Zulfo Tursunovic, managed to overcome the Serbs, a victory that cost both Serb and Muslim casualties.⁶¹⁹ Serb forces retaliated by encircling the village of Zaklopača, a few miles west of the town of Milici. There, they carried out a massacre the very same day,

⁶¹⁶ Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, pp. 57-58, 113.

⁶¹⁷ Sobot, 'U Srebrenici pobijeno sto Srba'.

⁶¹⁸ Masic, *Srebrenica*, pp. 88-89; Oric, *Srebrenica*, p. 145; Ivanisevic, *Hronika*, pp. 72, 162, 172-3.

⁶¹⁹ Masic, *Srebrenica*, p. 59; Oric, *Srebrenica*, p. 142.

killing at least eighty-three Muslims.⁶²⁰ A second series of Muslim attacks on Serb villages and hamlets was carried out between 16 and 18 May. These attacks were launched from strongholds near Kragljivoda and Osmace, in the hills between Zeleni Jadar and Skelani. Several armed Muslim groups had emerged there, who still had no ties to similar groups in and around Srebrenica. In the following days, Serb forces carried out a counterattack from Skelani, raiding a number of Muslim settlements and killing several Muslims.⁶²¹

Soon, Muslim forces in Potočari, Srebrenica and Sućeska succeeded in linking up. On 20 May 1992, at a meeting in the village of Bajramovici, all groups in the municipality were brought under the command of Naser Oric. Akif Ustic became the deputy commander. The headquarters of what was now called the Territorial Defence of Srebrenica was located in Srebrenica's post office in. Despite these measures to organise and coordinate the resistance, however, the situation remained chaotic due to the enormous lack of trained and experienced officers.⁶²² In May, the military authorities opened a war hospital in the town of Srebrenica, where a handful of doctors did their best to revive healthcare. They collected medicines from people's houses.⁶²³ The post office also returned to operating; fortunately the Serbs had not destroyed the telecommunication system, which was soon restored. For security reasons, all private telephone service was cut off. Military leaders, however, retained one phone and one fax line to the outside world for army purposes. In addition, a radio link in the PTT building was used to transmit official and codified messages as well as to exchange private messages.⁶²⁴ Ordinary people depended mainly on radio amateurs to help them contact relatives outside the Srebrenica enclave. The police force, which was reinstalled, introduced a curfew that lasted from sunset to dawn. The only factory in operation during the first months of war was the 'Vezionica' textile factory. It produced clothes for the army and the civil defence. It took several weeks to re-install some form of civil administration. On 1 July, the War Presidency of the Municipality of Srebrenica was established in the PTT building. Hajrudin Avdic stepped up as its president, and Hamdija Fejzic as chairman of its Executive Board. Oric's position as commander of the Armed Forces of Srebrenica was confirmed.⁶²⁵

In late May 1992, many Muslim refugees who had been hiding in the forests started to flood into the enclave, bringing cows and everything else they had managed to take with them. Others ended up in the nearby Muslim pockets of Zepa, Konjevic Polje, and Cerska, to the southwest and northwest of Srebrenica. They came from all sides, from Muslim villages near Bratunac, Milici, Skelani, and Vlasenica. In Srebrenica, only three to four hundred original inhabitants remained in town; the rest had left.⁶²⁶ Even though most of Muslims in the municipalities of Bratunac, Srebrenica and Vlasenica were on the move, cleansing operations in the area had not achieved what the Serbs expected. They were now confronted with the threat of an ever-expanding Muslim enclave, which was joining forces with other pockets of Muslim resistance in Konjevic Polje, Cerska, Luka, Zepa, and villages to the south-east of Srebrenica. Serb frustration over this state of affairs expressed itself in acts of revenge, which were carried out mainly when Muslims achieved military successes. These acts of revenge were often

⁶²⁰ Oric, *Srebrenica*, pp. 62-63. Human Rights Watch, *War Crimes*, pp. 50-55. Mazowiecki, *Situation of human rights*, par.37. Interviews and conversations with Hasan Nuhanovic 16/06/1998 and Omer Subasic 17/06/1998. The massacre in Zaklopača was included in the indictments against Momčilo Krajišnik and Biljana Plavšić at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), under case numbers IT-00-39-I and IT-00-40-I, respectively.

⁶²¹ Masic, *Srebrenica*, pp. 58-9,96; Oric, *Srebrenica*, p. 58; Ivanisevic, *Hronika*, pp. 72, 160, 165, 266-7.

⁶²² Interview: Damir Skaler 31/01/1998.

⁶²³ Interview: Abdulah Purkovic 94/02/1998.

⁶²⁴ Interview: Hasan Nuhanovic, 19/06/1998.

⁶²⁵ Masic, *Srebrenica*, pp. 49-52. The War Presidency, a council of seventeen members, replaced the municipal council. Because the municipal council could not meet regularly (as most councillors were outside the enclave) and many decisions had to be made quickly, the council's work was suspended. The War Presidency continued to exist until August 1994, when the municipal council was reinstalled, albeit without including its SDS members. Interview: Fahrudin Salihovic 04/02/1998.

⁶²⁶ According to Boban Vasic, a list was drawn up of all original inhabitants who had returned to the town. The list contained 366 names. This information was provided by his mother, Dragica Vasic, who stayed in Muslim-held Srebrenica throughout most of the war. Interview: Boban Vasic 06/07/1998.

disproportionate in terms of their scale and intensity of violence. On 21 May 1992, Serbs took thirty-two inmates from the Susica camp and executed them after they had failed to seize Nova Kasaba (part of the pocket of Konjevic Polje). Of these prisoners, all of whom originated from villages north of Bratunac, three survived.⁶²⁷ The executions in Glogova (9 May) and Zaklopača (16 May), which were discussed earlier, were also part of this pattern. Moreover, in Bratunac, the death of Srebrenica's local SDS leader, Goran Zekic, was used as pretext to start a wholesale assault on the town's Muslim population (10 May).

We should not forget, however, that the Serbs suffered important losses during the first two months of the war. Several of their leaders were injured or killed. Aside from Zekic, some Serb leaders and commanders were killed in Konjevic Polje and Kravica. There, Serbs tried continually to take control of the road junction linking the towns of Bratunac, Zvornik, and Vlasenica. Muslim forces in Konjevic Polje had managed to block these connections. All Serb attacks were unsuccessful and they led to serious casualties. For instance, Raso Milanovic (commander of the local defence in Kravica) was heavily injured on 26 May. The next day, Serbs attempted to open up the road to Milici with a convoy of trucks from Boksit Milici. Five drivers were killed during this operation, and all the trucks were burned. Two days later, on 29 May, Golub Eric (World War Two veteran and member of the Serb crisis committee of Kravica) and Milutin Milosevic (police commander of Bratunac) were also killed in heavy fighting near Konjevic Polje as they tried to remove Muslim barricades. The Serbs retaliated by executing almost ninety men of military age in Drinjača the following day.⁶²⁸ Finally, Radomir 'Raso' Milosevic (one of the commanders of the Serb defence in Kravica) was killed in an ambush in Glogova on 1 June. These losses formed a serious blow to defence in Kravica. The morale of local Serb forces improved only after two buses with volunteers from Nova Pazova in Serbia arrived.⁶²⁹

In early June, the Serbs were also hit hard near Zepa, where a Serb army convoy was ambushed and completely destroyed by Muslim forces, killing at least thirty-nine soldiers. Dozens of Serbs were taken prisoner. The Bosnian Serb leadership was shocked, because most soldiers who had been killed were actually from Pale, the seat of the war-time government of the Republika Srpska (Radovan Karadzic was later present at the funeral). In the days that followed, Zepa was pounded by Serb artillery, while Yugoslav Army jets bombarded Muslim hamlets in the enclave.⁶³⁰ During the summer of 1992, Muslim attacks on Serb-held territory only intensified, including from the enclave of Srebrenica. This was partly due to the fact that Muslims who had taken refuge in the hills near Srebrenica were now returning to their villages to take food and other belongings. Starting in July, they were joined by many other refugees who had ended up in Srebrenica and who were suffering increasingly from hunger. The villages along the Drina were often targeted by groups of refugees since they possessed the most fertile land in the region. That is where most people went to look for food.

Initially, only men went to these villages in search of food. Women and children soon joined, however, to carry back as much as possible in bags. At times long columns were formed of several thousand people. People gathered at the usual locations, such as Mocevici, Pirici, and Jagodnja. Serbs tried to prevent these raids by ambushing them or by putting mines along the tracks used by these so-called *torbari* ('bag-people'). Several people were killed. In June, for instance, four Muslim *torbari* were shot in Zalazje. In July, eleven people died in a minefield near Magasici. And in September, thirteen people were killed and twelve were taken hostage in Tegare and never seen again. Serbs also carried out ambushes on tracks leading to Konjevic Polje and Zepa, for instance, in Podravanje where dozens of

⁶²⁷ Masic, *Srebrenica*, p. 80; Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, pp. 55-56,66; Oric, *Srebrenica*, pp. 55-56,108-110,146.

⁶²⁸ Oric, *Srebrenica*, pp. 80-82

⁶²⁹ For details on the clashes around Konjevic Polje and Nova Kasaba, see Miljanovic, *Krvavi Božić sela Kravice*, pp. 45-49,161; Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, pp. 57,66-68,77-78,80-82; Oric, *Srebrenica*, pp. 146-147,161-64,166; Masic, *Srebrenica*, pp. 73,126; Ivanisevic, *Hronika*, pp. 60-61, 330-332.

⁶³⁰ Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, pp. 115-117. Masic, *Srebrenica*, p. 72; Oric, *Srebrenica*, pp. 68-69. Interview: Omer Subasic 17/06/1998, Hasan Nuhanovic 16/06/1998.

Muslims were killed during the war. The road to Konjevic Polje was also dangerous. Muslims usually tried to bring homemade tobacco from there to exchange for corn and other foods.⁶³¹

Military forays into Serb territory continued, the main aim of which was to eliminate Serb positions around the town and link up various pockets of Muslim resistance. The attacks were often carried out on Serbian-Orthodox holidays, such as Sveta Trojica (8 June) and Vidovdan (28 June), when the Serb defences were usually less alert because of the celebrations. Another well-known example of this pattern was the attack on Zalazje on Petrovdan (12 July). During June and early July, Muslim forces tried repeatedly, but unsuccessfully, to take this Serb outpost, which was located on a hill overseeing Srebrenica town. On that particular day, however, Oric carried out a surprise attack. After one day of fighting, he succeeded in taking the village, killing at least forty Serbs, some of whom were burned alive in their homes. Among the victims were three members of the Rakic family, one of whom had been best friends with Naser Oric (Mile Rakic). As the story goes, Oric desperately tried to convince his friend to surrender. He stubbornly refused, killing himself with a hand grenade.⁶³² Another victim of the battle at Zalazje was army officer and commander of the prison camp in Sase, Miroljub Todorovic. At least six Serbs, including Mile's uncle Miodrag, were taken hostage. They were then transported to the prison in Srebrenica, never to be seen again. According to Ivanisevic, a unit of Gypsies from the Srebrenica suburb of Kazani was among the attackers. In Voljavica, Muslims ambushed and killed a large number of Serb reinforcements, which were on their way to Zalazje and never arrived at their destination.⁶³³

The Muslim territory expands



The terrible, salvation-bringing truth

⁶³¹ Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, pp. 116-118. Oric, *Srebrenica*, pp. 128, 132-133, 135, 166.

⁶³² Before the war, Mile Rakic ran a café in Bratunac. In November 1991, on the family's *slava* (the family's patron saint day), a group of Muslim hoodlums entered the café and demolished it. Oric later forced them to pay back the damage. After the battle in Zalazje, Mile's body was the only that was exchanged with the Serbs. Conversations with Goran Rakic 20/06/1998 and 25/06/1998.

⁶³³ For the battle in the village of Zalazje, see: Ivanisevic, *Hronika*, pp. 49, 68, 78-79, 145, 172-3, 201, 285-88; Jovanovic et al, *Iskorenjivanje Srba*, pp. 107-110, 268-69; Miljanovic, *Krvavi Božić sela Kravice*, pp. 51-52; Toholj, *Crna knjiga*, vol.2, p. 216. Masic, *Srebrenica*, pp. 80, 86; Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, p. 86. Oric, *Srebrenica*, p. 161. Westerman and Rijs, *Het zwartste scenario*, pp. 73-75; Interviews and conversations with Ljubo Rakic 09/06/1998, Goran Rakic 20/06/1998 and 25/06/1998, Momčilo Cvjetinovic 11/06/1998, Staka Cvjetinovic 10/06/1998, Mile Stanojevic 15-16/09/1999; Miroslav Deronjic 03/11/1999. One Muslim document found by the Serbs after they took Srebrenica in July 1995 mentions that ninety-six Serbs were killed and nine taken prisoner during actions in Zalazje, Spat and Sase. NIOD, Coll Momčilo Cvjetinovic, War diary of Vahded Huseinovic.

Map of Serb villages in the district of Srebrenica destroyed by Naser Oric's Muslim forces, printed on the front page of *Nasa Rijec*, Bratunac, June 1995.

The Muslim attacks on Serb villages continued throughout the summer and autumn of 1992. On 30 June, Muslims took Brezani, a Serb stronghold in the hills southeast of Srebrenica (near Zeleni Jadar). Nineteen Serbs were killed during this attack. This victory enabled Oric's forces in the Srebrenican enclave to link up with armed Muslim groups in Osmace and other Muslim villages to the east. According to Serb sources, Muslims took all livestock (over two hundred cows) and mutilated the bodies of the Serbs killed. One of the victims had his ear cut off, another was crucified, and several others burned in their homes. At the time of the attack, some sixty men were present in the village, thirty of which were capable of fighting. Women and children had already left Brezani.⁶³⁴ In July and August, attacks on Serb villages between Kravica and Bratunac intensified, and there were frequent Muslim ambushes in Glogova. On 25 July, Muslims took Hranèa and subsequently blocked the road connection between Kravica and Bratunac. Cut off from the ten-kilometre asphalt road, Serbs now had to make a thirty-kilometre detour to get from Kravica via Sopotnik and take the macadam road along the Drina to Bratunac, or vice-versa. After three days, Serbs re-conquered Hranèa. Nonetheless, the fact that the Muslims had been able to take control of it made it all too clear that Kravica and Bratunac were now in an extremely precarious position.⁶³⁵ Serb authorities in Bratunac pushed for negotiations with Muslims in Srebrenica in order to bring about a cease-fire and an exchange of prisoners. Initially, the Serbs held talks with Zulfo Tursunovic. When Naser Oric was expected in Bratunac to continue the discussions and negotiate a deal, he failed to appear.⁶³⁶

In late July, the Muslims received reinforcements from outside. Nurif Rizvanovic, who, as mentioned earlier, had tried to set up a paramilitary group in Bratunac the year before, returned to the scene. Before his return, however, Nijaz Dubièic, the former mayor of Bratunac, had talked to him in Tuzla to engage him in the war. Rizvanovic formed a Muslim Brigade of 450 men, consisting of refugees from Bratunac and the Podrinje area. They walked through the Serb lines to Konjevic Polje and Srebrenica. One of his companies, well equipped and in ABiH uniforms, arrived in Srebrenica on 7 August. They received an enthusiastic welcome from the population of Srebrenica, who saw the ABiH uniforms for the first time.⁶³⁷ The next major Muslim operations took place in autumn 1992, when Muslims attacked the Serb stronghold of Poddravanje and villages along the Drina, burning numerous houses and killing dozens of Serbs. The attack on Poddravanje occurred on 24 September and was carried out by a force of two to three thousand Muslims. It cost the lives of at least thirty-one Serbs, many of whom died brutal deaths. Some were burned alive; others were decapitated or dismembered. Poddravanje was taken by the Muslims. As a result, Srebrenica was linked with Zepa, as well as with the villages of Luka and Krusev Do. The Muslim forces captured two T55 tanks and other weaponry, and took huge numbers of cattle with them. They also attacked the nearby surface mine of Bracan, where they eliminated a Serb artillery post located there. Muslims used a tank in this attack, during which seven Serbs were killed. Two days later, Muslim forces carried out attacks on villages near Milici and

⁶³⁴ Masic, *Srebrenica*, pp. 94-95; Oric, *Srebrenica*, p. 160; Ivanisevic, *Hronika*, pp. 47, 76, 172-3, 191, 272-277; Jovanovic et al, *Iskorenjivanje Srba*, pp. 110-112, 267; Toholj, *Crna knjiga*, vol.2, p. 215.

⁶³⁵ Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, p. 83; Miljanovic, *Krvavi Božić sela Kravice*, p. 53-62.

⁶³⁶ Interview: Miroslav Deronjic 03/11/1999. Deronjic also refers to these negotiations in an interview he gave to the local paper, *Nasa Rijec*. He defends himself against accusations that he was trading off Bratunac. Anonymous, 'Neka mi neko od vas pokaze'.

⁶³⁷ Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, pp. 79-80, 86-87. Nurif Rizvanovic, who was based in Konjevic Polje, was assassinated in November 1992. It is rumoured that he was killed by Oric's men. Oric may have feared Rizvanovic's influence. See: Delalic, 'Rizvanoviceva majka'; Mrkic, 'Predsjedništvo', p. 8. Interviews: Almir and Zahira Ramic 6-10/11/1999, Ibran Mustafic 16/04/1998 and 18/09/2001. After the war, ABiH commanders from Srebrenica denied that Oric was behind the assassination of Rizvanovic. See: Mandzic, 'Zlatni Ljiljani', p. 37.

Konjevic Polje, killing thirty-seven Serbs. Serbs retaliated with air raids on Srebrenica, causing huge material damage though no casualties.⁶³⁸

On 5 October 1992, Muslims launched massive attacks on Fakovici and other Serb villages along the Drina, killing at least twenty-four Serbs and burning down 120 houses. The villages were looted, and in Fakovici the church was desecrated. The attackers seized huge amounts of food, and also shot at Serbs at the other (i.e. Serbian) side of the Drina. Serbs fled with small boats over to Serbia. Muslims now controlled most villages along the Drina River, from where they could shell Bratunac.⁶³⁹ At this stage, the attacks on Serb villages became increasingly brutal. Soldiers were joined by hundreds of hungry civilians in search of food and revenge. This proved to be an extremely effective tactic, as Serbs could not defend themselves against such overwhelming numbers. They were terrified by such attacks, which usually started with the deafening noise of baking utensils being banged by women to create panic among the Serb defenders. The Serbs could take on small groups of armed soldiers, but hundreds, or even thousands, of *torbari* were invincible. They set up mines and booby-traps in fields, but were unable to stop the massive raids. Because such staggering numbers of *torbari* took part in the attacks, there were no real civilians in Srebrenica as far the Serbs were concerned.⁶⁴⁰

Most Muslim commanders were unable to keep this overwhelming force in check. The result was often acts of uninhibited violence and cruelty. Bodies of Serbs killed in battle became the object of deliberate mutilation by the *torbari*. Ivanisevic gives details of this: bodies of Serbs were found which bore the marks of torture and burnings, with cut throats, heads cut off, eyes cut out, skulls smashed, arms and legs broken, and men castrated or circumcised. Sometimes, a capital 'U' (the symbol of the Ustashe) was carved into bodies.⁶⁴¹ One of the most notorious perpetrators of such acts was Kemal 'Kemo' Mehmedovic, who is said to have decapitated Serbs and carried their heads through the town of Srebrenica. According to Ivanisevic, a few dozen psychopaths of this calibre lived in the enclave. During the first year of the war, almost ten percent of Serb victims were not simply killed, but were also tortured, burned or mutilated in various ways.⁶⁴²

Most civilians were refugees. Not only were they suffering from hunger, they were also driven by a thirst for revenge. Many had been expelled from their homes when the war began. One Muslim document, a war diary of a local ABiH soldier, clearly demonstrates that revenge played a role. Found when the Srebrenica enclave was taken by the Serbs, this diary describes the soldier's thoughts. Watching his unsuspecting Serb victims working the fields from the hills near Fakovici, just before his unit attacks them, he writes: "Now a terrible and bloody revenge will come over them, carried out by people whose possessions have been taken away and destroyed".⁶⁴³ The numbers of hungry, embittered civilians only increased after a new wave of refugees entered Srebrenica in September 1992. These were people displaced after Zepa came under relentless shelling, attacks and bombardments by the Yugoslav Army. In mid September, Zepa seemed to lie at the brink of falling. At that point, many Muslims refugees decided to go to Konjevic Polje, Cerska and Srebrenica, from where they hoped to continue to Tuzla. On 9 September 1992, a large column of about six thousand refugees were ambushed and shelled by the Serbs. They killed many of them and captured several hundred. An even greater tragedy was averted when Muslim forces intervened the next day. The refugees were forced to go back to Konjevic Polje, Cerska, and Srebrenica. In the Srebrenica enclave, they roamed through villages in

⁶³⁸ Ivanisevic, *Hronika*, pp. 51-53, 82-83, 160, 172-3, 179-80, 213, 294-305; Toholj, *Crna knjiga*, vol.2, p. 218-19; Jovanovic et al, *Iskorenjivanje Srba*, pp. 112-117, 275. Oric, *Srebrenica*, pp. 164-65; Masic, *Srebrenica*, pp. 72, 100, 124.

⁶³⁹ Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, pp. 85, 88; Oric, *Srebrenica*, pp. 166-67; Masic, *Srebrenica*, pp. 102-03; Ivanisevic, *Hronika*, pp. 53-54, 84, 173, 199, 305-313; Jovanovic et al, *Iskorenjivanje Srba*, pp. 276; Anonymous, 'Ustaski pir u Fakovicima'; Cvjetinovic, 'Granatama po djeci'. NIOD, Coll Momčilo Cvjetinovic, War diary of Vahded Huseinovic.

⁶⁴⁰ Interviews and conversations: Mile Stanojevic 15-16/09/1999, Muhamed Durakovic, 21/11/1999, Milivoje Ivanisevic 03/02/1998.

⁶⁴¹ Ivanisevic, *Hronika*, pp. 96-101.

⁶⁴² Ivanisevic, *Hronika*, p. 102. Mehmedovic was taken out of the enclave and brought to Tuzla at the beginning of 1993. Conversation: Luka Bogdanovic 15/09/1999.

⁶⁴³ NIOD, Coll Momčilo Cvjetinovic, War diary of Vahded Huseinovic.

search of food. While some peasants shared the little food they had, others did not for fear they too would soon go hungry.⁶⁴⁴

The need for food raids grew more pressing. It would have been difficult for the Muslim commanders to prevent the worst of the violence even if they had wanted to. (Moreover, it is unlikely that they would have had any such desire since they could make good use of the *torbari*). Usually, the news of impending attacks spread quickly from the mouths of soldiers, most of whom stayed with their families. They told their relatives to follow the army at a short distance and to take as much food as they could. It was impossible to keep military actions secret for long.⁶⁴⁵ Yet some Muslims refused to participate in the raids on Serb villages out of fear that they would lead to Serb retaliations. Nobody was allowed to say that openly, and anyone who did express concern was told in no uncertain terms to keep silent.⁶⁴⁶ The attacks were led by Naser Oric, Zulfo Tursunovic, Akif Ustic and Hakija Meholic, although Meholic did not always participate. According to one Muslim document, he decided, for instance, not to take part in the attack against Serb villages along the Drina (the Fakovici area) in early October 1992.⁶⁴⁷

On 3 November 1992, the forces of the Muslim-held enclaves of Srebrenica, Konjevic Polje, and Cerska were brought under one unified command. Once again, Oric stepped up as commander-in-chief.⁶⁴⁸ Although all groups were under Oric's command, it is clear that he was not always able to impose his decisions on other commanders. This was especially true of Zulfo Tursunovic and Hakija Meholic. Some units wanted to remain more or less independent, such as Meholic's company. Initially, he called his unit the HVO (Croat Council of Defence), but was forced to drop the name by the War Presidency.⁶⁴⁹ During the first year of the war, Meholic commanded a unit of fifty soldiers, who were much more disciplined than other units. Unlike members of other units in the enclave, they did not sleep at home but stayed in Hotel Domavija. The Hotel was their *kasarna*, and they had their own kitchen. From there, they provided their own families with food, which was usually taken from Serb villages during the raids. They had two trucks to transport whatever they seized during raids.⁶⁵⁰ Tensions between Oric and Meholic continued throughout the war, partly due to their very different views on the objectives of their armed struggle. Oric was fighting for the Muslim cause and also wanted to expand his territory at the cost of the Serbs. Meholic wanted to protect the town and did not exclude future cooperation and coexistence with Serbs. Later during the war, Meholic was appointed head of police. In that capacity, he did his best to fight crime and the mafia, to protect the very few Serbs and Croats left in the town, and to save the Orthodox church from destruction. This placed yet another strain on relations between Oric and Meholic.

Aside from these frictions, political opposition was developing in the enclave. It was led by Ibran Mustafic as soon as he returned to Srebrenica in December 1992. Mustafic had been in Sarajevo when the war broke out, and stayed there until November. He managed to leave Sarajevo and walked to Gorazde through the forests. From there, he continued on to besieged Srebrenica, where he arrived on 12 December 1992.⁶⁵¹ At the time, the SDA was completely marginalized in the enclave. Since most SDA leaders left Srebrenica at the beginning of the war, Oric dissolved the party. This situation was not unique. Often, in parts of Bosnia most affected the war, the SDA lost its power to local warlords, who managed to organise the defence that the SDA had failed to establish before the war started.⁶⁵² Local SDA leader, Hamed Efendic, lost all his influence. Moreover, once Srebrenica was proclaimed a safe

⁶⁴⁴ Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, pp. 132-134; Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, p. 81; Masic, *Srebrenica*, pp. 72, 98; Oric, *Srebrenica*, pp. 69, 70, 137, 163-64; Ćekic, *The aggression on Bosnia*, p. 170.

⁶⁴⁵ Interview: Hasan Nuhanovic 19/06/1998.

⁶⁴⁶ Interviews and conversations with Omer Subasic 19/10/1997 and 20/10/1997, and Vahid Hodzic 04-05/07/1997.

⁶⁴⁷ NIOD, Coll Momčilo Cvjetinovic, War diary of Vahded Huseinovic.

⁶⁴⁸ Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, pp. 88-89.

⁶⁴⁹ Masic, *Srebrenica*, pp. 139-42.

⁶⁵⁰ Interview: Hasan Nuhanovic 19/06/1998, Damir Skaler 31/01/1998.

⁶⁵¹ Interviews: Ibran Mustafic 16/04/1998 and 18/09/2001. Anonymous, 'Glasna sutnja'.

⁶⁵² Interviews: Mehmed Pargan 16/06/1998, Almir and Zahira Ramic 6-10/11/1999.

area, he was even imprisoned several times. Mustafic claimed a special position as the only locally elected Muslim representative in the Bosnian parliament. However, he was ignored by all the military and civil leaders in the enclave. Mustafic survived two assassination attempts, the first of which took place in April 1993 and the second in May 1995. During the second attempt, Mustafic was seriously injured, but his close SDA affiliate, Hamed Salihovic, was killed.⁶⁵³ A third attempt to kill him occurred right after the fall of Srebrenica in July 1995, when he claims he was attacked again by political opponents.⁶⁵⁴

Mustafic arrived in the enclave during Srebrenica's first – and harshest – winter in the war. Many were starving due to the constant lack of food and humanitarian aid. The first UNHCR convoy entered the enclave only after seven months of war, on 28 November 1992. Several previous attempts had failed due to Serb obstruction. It took three days of negotiations with the Serbs for the first convoy to get through. Tim Judah, who joined the convoy, wrote, “[p]eople tumbled down the hills to greet the first United Nations aid convoy to breach Serbian lines since the war began. Cheering and waving, crying and laughing, thousands lined the roads as the UN convoy rolled in. (...) The joyous reception was in stark contrast to that given to the convoy as it passed through Serb-held Bratunac where locals spat and jeered”. Judah described how the inhabitants of Srebrenica were without electricity, running water or communications. He also sketched an impression of the appalling conditions in the hospital: “[...] torch bulbs have been taped to the walls, powered by lorry batteries. [...] old alcohol [is] still being used to distil water. Operations are carried out without anaesthetic, and the hospital has no medicines”. A local doctor told Judah they had no disinfectants, bandages, infusions, power, or antibiotics, and informed him that medicines were even more urgently needed than food. Over three hundred people had died in the hospital, who could have survived had the proper medicines been available. To the astonishment of the hospital staff as well as the journalists accompanying it, the convoy carried no medical supplies. After just one hour, the UN lorries rolled back into Serb-held territory. A second convoy arrived on 5 December, carrying medicines, blankets and detergents.⁶⁵⁵

Inspired by previous military successes, and driven by hunger and the will to survive, Oric's forces and auxiliary troops of *torbari* launched a new offensive along the Drina in December. Once again, they captured a number of villages. The Serbs countered these attacks using aviation and artillery from Serbia. Despite these efforts, however, Muslims succeeded in expelling the Serb populations of the villages of Bjelovac, Voljavica, Loznica, and Sikiric on 14 December 1992. Almost seventy Serbs were slaughtered in these attacks; many others fled across the Drina. Serbs who witnessed the attacks also saw women carrying guns and shooting Serb civilians, and others carrying large bags in which to haul plundered goods. After being shot, some victims were hacked with knives or blunt objects. Pigs were slaughtered and carried away in pieces, which was a clear indication of how desperate Muslim refugees were for food. Oric's forces were now in control of all villages on the left side of the Drina, from Voljavica to Zlijebac. They also seized a considerable supply of arms, ammunition, and food. They also commandeered another tank, pieces of artillery, and a few hundred rifles. They paraded these war trophies through the centre of Srebrenica, where the population went wild in jubilation.⁶⁵⁶ Ten days later, Glogova was also taken by the Muslims, i.e. by Ejub Golic's unit (consisting of Muslims expelled from Glogova in May). As a result, the road between Kravica and Bratunac was completely blocked to the Serbs. During the heavy fighting, at least eighteen Serbs and twelve Muslims were killed. In

⁶⁵³ Interviews: Ibran Mustafic 16/04/1998 and 18/09/2001, Besim Ibisevic 24/05/1998.

⁶⁵⁴ Anonymous, 'Glasna sutnja'.

⁶⁵⁵ NIOD, Coll UNHCR, Mission report on convoy (Jolles) 30/11/1992; Report on second humanitarian convoy (Jolles) 06/12/1992; Judah, 'UN brings hope'. See also the report on the first convoy in *Nasa Rijec*, 22/12/1992, p. 3. Interviews: Tim Judah 09/12/1997 and Zoran Kusovac 01/11/1997.

⁶⁵⁶ Ivanisevic, *Hronika*, pp. 46-47, 54-55, 174, 90, 267-272, 282-283, 313-323; Jevtic, 'Ponovo ustasko pirovanje'; Jovanovic et al, *Iskorenjivanje Srba*, pp. 101-104, 277-78. Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, p. 89; Oric, *Srebrenica*, pp. 164, 168; Masic, *Srebrenica*, pp. 73, 105-110; Judah 'serb forces move south'. See also Mazowiecki, *Situation of human rights*, par. 42. NIOD, Coll Momčilo Cvjetinovic, War diary of Vahded Huseinovic.

addition, Jovan 'Jole' Nikolic, one of Kravica's commanders, was seriously injured. Although the Serbs received reinforcements from Milici, they generally suffered from a lack of manpower.⁶⁵⁷

Bratunac comes under Muslim threat



Graves of Serb victims of the Muslim assault on the village of Fakovici, October 1992

Now, Muslim forces had virtually reached the perimeters of Bratunac. The town's situation was clearly becoming extremely precarious. Militarily, the situation deteriorated to such an extent that many Serbs feared that Bratunac might fall into Muslim hands. Bratunac was surrounded from three sides and the town's defenders were pushed into a corner.⁶⁵⁸ When journalist, Tim Judah, visited Bratunac in late December, the Bosnian Serb Army was bringing in reinforcements from the Krajina (north-western Bosnia). The Panthers, a paramilitary group led by Ljubisa Savic 'Mauzer', were also brought in from Bijeljina. They were shocked by the state of Bratunac's defences, which were in serious disarray, and had little regard for the disorganised locals. They said that they were not really willing to die for Bratunac if the locals were not prepared to fight for it. As one soldier told Judah, "The Serbs aren't fighting hard enough because they have got somewhere to run to" [over the Drina into Serbia - gd].⁶⁵⁹

Various sources confirm that morale among local Serbs was at a historical low point. Soldiers felt demoralised by the fact that many local Serbs had gone to Serbia (or remained in Serbia if they had jobs there) to avoid being drafted. Those who refused to take part in the defence undermined the morale of those who did. The soldiers felt they were now risking their lives and that those hiding in Serbia were among the people who stood to benefit. The local press ran a good deal of bitter commentary about these 'deserters' and 'traitors.' Among the commentators was Momèilo Cvjetinovic in *Nasa Rijec*, a local newspaper. According to Cvjetinovic, many of these 'career Serbs' went to Serbia before the war even started, and had given their arms to Muslims who were now killing Serbs with them. He mentioned some by name, including Major Miodrag Stanisavljevic, the former head of Srebrenica's Territorial Defence, and Savo Aleksic, the former head of police. He also criticised

⁶⁵⁷ Ivanisevic, *Hronika*, pp. 61-62; Miljanovic, *Krvavi Božić sela Kravice*, pp. 64-72, 101; Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, p. 90; Oric, *Srebrenica*, p. 169; Masic, *Srebrenica*, pp. 110-111.

⁶⁵⁸ Interviews and conversation with Miodrag Josipovic, 14/09/1999, Miroslav Deronjic 03/11/1999, Momèilo Cvjetinovic 10/06/1998.

⁶⁵⁹ Judah, 'serb forces move south' and Judah, 'Hardline Serb Generals'. For the Panthers see the local paper, *Nasa Rijec*: Jovanovic 'Mi ratujemo'; M.Dj. 'Mi idemo'; Cirkovic, 'Pjesmom'.

Srebrenica's urban youth, who were now living safely in large towns in Serbia, while young people from villages, such as Podravanje and Skelani, were risking their lives to fight the enemy.⁶⁶⁰ In his opinion, these draft dodgers added insult to injury by boasting about their nationalist credentials in Serbia's cafés after having put the lives of their fellow Serbs in jeopardy. Kravica had similar problems. There, local Serbs expelled several deserters who had had the audacity to return to their village in December 1992, after several months of absence.⁶⁶¹

Despite their enormous contempt for deserters, the authorities called on Serbs living in Serbia to return to Bratunac to defend their town. In December 1992, Rodoljub Djukanovic, Chairman of the Executive Board of the Municipality of Bratunac, made such an appeal in *Nasa Rijec*. Interestingly enough, he added that they would be recruited as regular army soldiers into a regular army unit. He also promised that they would no longer be commanded by unprofessional people as had happened before, but by the best officers the Serb nation had.⁶⁶² This statement indicates that at least some Serbs were critical about the way military operations had been conducted before. When the war began, Serb defences were structured according to the territorial principle, i.e. on the basis of TO units placed under the authority of local branches of the SDS and the SDS crisis committees. Local SDS leaders, some of whom had little or no army experience, were appointed to commanding posts (as was the case with Miodrag Jokic). Although unqualified for these posts, they were able to conceal their incompetence by relying on the Yugoslav Army and scores of paramilitary forces. However, when these forces pulled out in spring 1992, the local TO forces were left on their own. At this stage, the Bosnian Serb Army had yet to form. There was also a huge dearth of trained army officers capable of organising the town's defence. Consequently, most of the responsibility lay in the hands of dilettantes. Subsequent fights during the summer and autumn of 1992 clearly showed that they were incompetent for the task at hand. Local Serbs struggled with a tremendous sense of frustration about the way local defence forces functioned.⁶⁶³ Some people held the SDS responsible for this state of affairs, and refused to enlist in units led by SDS party officials and SDS crisis committees.⁶⁶⁴

Aside from the loss of confidence in the SDS, there were also clear signs of popular discontent with the paramilitaries. They had entered the place and plundered it, taking all the booty they were able to. (The fact that Muslims had been expelled in the process was less of a concern). Local Serbs were left with nothing, and although the town was now under firm SDS control, Muslims were still there in great numbers as refugees in the nearby Muslim enclaves. Even at the time Goran Zekic was killed, there were tensions between the local Serbs and the paramilitaries from Serbia.⁶⁶⁵ This discontent shines through in a small portrait of everyday life in Bratunac, which *Nasa Rijec*, a local newspaper, published in October 1992. The author, who wrote anonymously, describes the terrors of war that reigned at night in Bratunac:

The days are bearable to some extent, although there is shooting on all sides. The inhabitants are able to discriminate between the sounds of arms, and they recognise precisely when and from which positions our fighters are shooting. They know when soldiers are testing their arms and when they are engaged in fighting. The alarm sirens cause general chaos and panic among the people, yet somehow, this is still bearable during the daytime. But when night falls, and the first evening hours begin ... [p]eople hurriedly rush into their houses, because the police curfew starts. Everything becomes quiet, and then the numerous barking stray dogs start to make a deafening noise. The noise is excessive

⁶⁶⁰ Cvjetinovic, 'Bjezi, ne okreci se' and Cvjetinovic, 'Pobjegli od naroda'.

⁶⁶¹ Djukanovic, 'Takvi nam ne trebaju'; For Kravica's problems with recruitment and desertion, see also Djukanovic, 'Nas tri brata'; M.Dj. 'Dobrovoljci i dezerteri'; Miljanovic, *Krvavi Božić sela Kravice*, pp. 106, 123. Kravica's situation improved when volunteers, arrived from Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia. Among them was at least one (former) *Arkanovac*.

⁶⁶² Anonymous, 'Narod treba da zna', p. 3.

⁶⁶³ B.S. and M.P. 'A Drina teče'. Conversation: Novak 'Krke' Stjepanovic 19/10/2000.

⁶⁶⁴ A reference was made to this during an interview with Miroslav Deronjic in *Nasa Rijec*, where he defends himself against criticisms about the SDS's role. Anonymous, 'Neka mi neko od vas pokaze'.

⁶⁶⁵ Interview: Munib Hasanovic 14/09/1999.

because these dogs became stray dogs only recently, abandoned by the people who left their homes. Their barking sound also signals the beginning of the frequent noise of motors, cars, and 'nightly campaigns'. People lock themselves up in their homes, while the war profiteers do their work. They contemplate whether to switch on the light or to sit in the dark, because the surrounding hills are bristling above the town, which gives them the feeling that the enemy can follow every detail of their movements from the nearby hills. The next day, the small thieves will also find something for themselves on the remaining trash heaps.⁶⁶⁶

Popular discontent about this state of affairs was aggravated by the great sense of dissatisfaction among the troops. Ordinary soldiers experienced problems because of their ill-defined status. Republika Srpska had not declared a state of war, which meant that soldiers were not recognised as being on active combat duty. Consequently, their rights and those of their families would not be guaranteed in case of invalidity or death. For all practical purposes, they had nothing to rely on. On the other hand, they saw many petty and major war profiteers, paramilitaries as well as RS politicians, who were profiting shamelessly, while they themselves were forced to survive on meagre wages.⁶⁶⁷

This situation changed only gradually after Mladic was appointed as chief commander of the Bosnian Serb Army in early May 1992. He moved the BSA headquarters to Han Pijesak, and started to reshuffle the Bosnian JNA troops into new BSA structures.⁶⁶⁸ During the summer of 1992, when most of Bosnian territory had come under Serb control, the leaders of Republika Srpska pressured paramilitary groups from Serbia to leave Bosnia. They had outworn their usefulness and, even worse, they were poisoning the political situation for the SDS.⁶⁶⁹ Local paramilitary groups and other 'special forces' were integrated into the regular army. In Bratunac, the army did not begin organising the town's local defence until after the devastating attack on Zalazje on 12 July 1992. Svetozar 'Ceto' Andric, commander of the Birac brigade, played a particularly pivotal role in this. In November 1992, the Bratunac brigade was established. It was part of the Drina corps, which was commanded by General Milenko Zivanovic.⁶⁷⁰ It was not until 1993 that the BSA as a whole developed a more centralised command structure.

Despite these efforts, continuing recruitment problems formed a major obstacle in building up local defence in Bratunac. Local Serb forces were unable to ward off assaults by Muslim troops, who outnumbered them by far. These assaults culminated in the attack on Kravica during the Orthodox Christmas, on 7 January 1993. It was carried out by several thousand Muslims. (Some estimates place the figure at as high as three to four thousand attackers, including *torbani*). Serb defenders, by contrast, numbered no more than a few hundred. At least forty-six Serbs were killed in the attack and over five hundred houses were burned down. Since the attack took place during Christmas, Serb defenders of Kravica received no help or reinforcements from Bratunac or Milici. In the end, they were forced to retreat.⁶⁷¹ Local commander, Lazar Ostojic, ordered soldiers and civilians to abandon their homes and retreat towards the Drina. They went through the snow via a small forest road to Sopotnik. The column of Serb refugees arrived in Sopotnik in the middle of the night. Some elderly people stayed behind in their homes. Most were killed next day, while Muslims plundered Kravica and other nearby

⁶⁶⁶ Anonymous, 'Besane noci ratne'.

⁶⁶⁷ B.S. and M.P. 'A Drina teèe'.

⁶⁶⁸ JNA personnel born in Bosnia were redeployed into the BSA, and huge supplies of arms and equipment were transferred from the JNA to the BSA. See: Burg and Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, p. 101.

⁶⁶⁹ Interview: Filip Svrm, Dejan Anastasijevic and Aleksandar Ciric 03/11/1997; conversation: Dejan Anastasijevic 06/02/1998.

⁶⁷⁰ See articles about the Bratunac brigade in local newspaper, *Nasa Rijec*: R.J. 'Formirana Bratunaèka brigada'; B.M. 'sad Srbi gledaju'; Cirkovic 'Za postignute rezultate'. See also Miljanovic, *Krvavi Božić sela Kravice*, p. 52. Interview: Miroslav Deronjic 03/11/1999.

⁶⁷¹ Serbs from Kravica have defended themselves against suggestions made by others that Kravica fell because the population was celebrating Christmas and many were drunk. Miljanovic writes that it was not the Serbs from Kravica, but those from Bratunac who were celebrating, and who failed to come to Kravica's rescue (Miljanovic, *Krvavi Božić sela Kravice*, p. 106).

settlements. According to Miljanovic, a chronicler of local events in Kravica during the war, the Muslims even opened up fresh graves in search of cloth, cigarettes and rakija. Some Serbs returned to their houses in the days that followed, but were expelled, killed, or arrested and taken to the prison in Srebrenica.⁶⁷²

The fall of Kravica produced a shockwave among Serbs in eastern Bosnia and beyond, particularly because the village was seen as a symbol of Serb national perseverance. Panic broke out in Bratunac, and the authorities were forced to close down the bridge over the Drina and introduce other measures to prevent the population from fleeing en masse to Serbia.⁶⁷³ For the Muslims, the take-over of Kravica was a crucial victory. Oric could now link up directly with Muslim forces in Konjevic Polje and Cerska, which was a serious blow to Serb war efforts in eastern Bosnia. The enclaves of Srebrenica, Zepa, Konjevic Polje and Cerska were now linked into one huge Muslim-controlled territory. The call for revenge was strong among the Serbs. As Miljanovic writes, Serbs were awaiting their moment to avenge this humiliating defeat and to finally settle accounts with the Muslims. And they firmly believed that it would happen one day. They retaliated with an air raid on Srebrenica, hitting the mosque in the town's centre and killing three Muslims. Among the victims was Dr. Nijaz Džanic, the head of the war hospital.⁶⁷⁴

The Muslim attacks still continued, however. Instead of taking Bratunac, which was his ultimate ambition, Oric decided to carry out an attack on Skelani. His aim was to destroy the bridge over the Drina river and to prevent Serbs from sending reinforcements from Serbia. Two Muslim attempts to mine the bridge had already failed in November.⁶⁷⁵ The attack on Skelani took place on 16 January 1993. It resulted in at least forty-eight Serb deaths, including those of some civilians trying to escape over the bridge to the other side of the Drina. Once again, however, the Muslim plan failed, and Skelani remained in Serb hands.⁶⁷⁶ After heavy fighting and huge personal losses in the days that followed, Muslim forces took the strategic height of Jezero, which overlooks the Perućac hydroelectric plant and Serbia on the other side of the Drina.⁶⁷⁷ Oric's forces now controlled the largest area ever (nine hundred square kilometres), encompassing most of the territory of the municipalities of Srebrenica and Bratunac as well as parts of Vlasenica, Zvornik, Han Pijesak and Rogatica.⁶⁷⁸ On 20 January, new front lines were established. Only Skelani and a few other villages along the Drina remained in Serb hands. Hopes were increasing that Srebrenica could be linked up with Tuzla and the rest of central Bosnia in a matter of days. Serb public sentiment in Republika Srpska and in Serbia was in a state of alarm. The Bosnian Serb Army as well as the Yugoslav Army prepared for massive intervention. The attack on the bridge in Skelani was a welcome pretext for the Yugoslav Army to justify military operations on Bosnian territory. January witnessed the launching of a large-scale military campaign. Led by Ratko Mladić, this campaign marked the beginning of the collapse of Oric's forces and almost the end of the existence of the enclave.

On the Serb side, the numerous Muslim attacks became a source of deep humiliation and indignation. The Serbs viewed these attacks as yet another confirmation of their lot as a nation of continual 'suffering', a nation threatened with genocide and extinction. Although this view took absolutely no account of the immeasurable suffering the Serbs themselves had inflicted on the Muslim population when the war first began, it was somehow understandable. After nine months of Muslim attacks, the Serbs were completely pushed back in a corner. Only around ten Serb villages in the area of

⁶⁷² Ivanisevic, *Hronika*, pp. 50,55-56,88-89,160,172-3,323-329; Miljanovic, *Krvavi Božić sela Kravice*, pp. 73-90, 99-106; Jovanovic et al, *Iskorenjivanje Srba*, pp. 279; Masic, *Srebrenica*, pp. 72,112-113; Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, pp. 90; Oric, *Srebrenica*, p. 169. See also the reports and interviews in the local Serb newspaper, *Nasa Rijec*, 05/02/1993, pp. 1 and 5.

⁶⁷³ Petrovic, 'Ono malo života'.

⁶⁷⁴ Masic, *Srebrenica*, pp. 72,73; Oric, *Srebrenica*, p. 164

⁶⁷⁵ Cvjetinovic, 'Most je siguran'. NIOD, Coll Momčilo Cvjetinovic, War diary of Vahded Huseinovic.

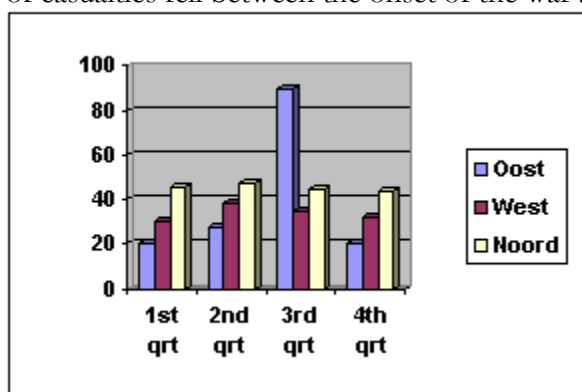
⁶⁷⁶ Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, p. 91; Masic, *Srebrenica*, p. 115; Ivanisevic, *Hronika*, pp. 56-57,161.

⁶⁷⁷ Masic, *Istina o Bratuncu*, p. 91; Masic, *Srebrenica*, pp. 114-117

⁶⁷⁸ Sudetic, *Blood and vengeance*, p. 136.

Srebrenica and Bratunac had remained in Serb hands. Another thirty Serb villages and seventy hamlets had fallen under Muslim control. By January 1993, over one hundred Serb settlements had been attacked. Only Bratunac, Skelani, and a few villages along the Drina were still in Serb hands.⁶⁷⁹ In addition, Serbs had suffered enormous material damage. Ivanisevic estimates that 5,400 out of a rough total of 8,000 Serb households in the municipalities of Srebrenica and Bratunac lost part or all of their property. Most of their houses were plundered, burned, and destroyed. Huge numbers of livestock (cows, goats, and poultry) were also taken away.⁶⁸⁰ Bratunac and Milici accommodated thousands of refugees from Srebrenica as well as from central Bosnia (particularly Zenica). They destroyed the surrounding Serb villages. Living conditions for these refugees were usually bad, and they received little help from humanitarian relief organisations. Most had to solve their own housing problems. Many Serb refugees, including those from Srebrenica, were not very satisfied with their reception in Bratunac.⁶⁸¹ For that reason, some who had friends or relatives in Serbia decided to go there and join them. In early 1993, thirteen thousand Serbs from the municipalities of Srebrenica, Bratunac, Skelani and Milici were registered as refugees in Serbia, mainly women and children (comprising 45% of the total Serb population of these municipalities).⁶⁸²

Most bitterness, however, was caused by the high number of casualties that the Serbs suffered during the first year of the war. According to Ivanisevic, who has documented all cases, at least one thousand Serb civilians were killed between April 1992 and January 1994.⁶⁸³ By far, the largest number of casualties fell between the onset of the war and the creation of the Safe Area; see the chart below:



Source: Ivanisevic, *Hronika nasseg groblja*, p. 102.

After April 1993, the number of casualties dropped drastically. Serb sources estimate the total number of Serbs killed in the area between April 1993 and July 1995 (i.e. throughout the over two-year period of war) at roughly one hundred to one hundred and fifty.⁶⁸⁴ The Muslim attacks during the first year of the war appear to have caused the most resentment among the Serbs, who felt deeply humiliated by Oric. It is primarily defeats in places such as Zalazje, Podravanje, Fakovici and Kravica that Serbs wanted to avenge. Probably, that thirst for vengeance was one of the main driving forces behind the

⁶⁷⁹ Ivanisevic, *Hronika*, pp. 40-42.

⁶⁸⁰ Ivanisevic, *Hronika*, pp. 106.

⁶⁸¹ Conversation Stevo Milivojevic, 11/11/1998.

⁶⁸² Ivanisevic, *Hronika*, pp. 109-111.

⁶⁸³ Ivanisevic, *Hronika*, p. 67. In an earlier draft of the text published in the local newspaper, *Nasa Riječ*, Ivanisevic mentions 1,200 Serb victims (Ivanisevic, 'Genocid kao sudbina'). Ivanisevic's information is probably misleading, as he appears to include not only civilians, but also soldiers and paramilitaries who died in combat or during plundering expeditions. He includes, for instance, the names of four Serbs killed in Potočari on 20 April 1992. In all probability, these four were members of the Arkan Tigers or policemen who were ambushed there by Oric (Ivanisevic, *Hronika*, p. 71). Ivanisevic's work has been widely publicised in the Serbian and Bosnian Serb press, e.g. in *Borba* (from 26/05/1993 to 04/06/1993) and *Vieernje Novosti* (from 13/06/1994 to 26/06/1994). The articles he published in *Nasa Riječ* (between July and December 1993) contain the lists of names of victims and perpetrators for every Serb village attacked by Muslims. See also the interview in *Nasa Riječ* in April 1993 (Jovanovic, 'Genocid').

⁶⁸⁴ Interview: Milivoje Ivanisevic 03/02/1998. See also: *Srpska vojska*, 25/08/1995, pp. 24-25.

massacres in July 1995. It should be noted, however, that while the Serbs suffered high casualties during the war, the number of Muslim casualties in Srebrenica and Bratunac, even before the July massacre, was probably considerably higher. Most Muslim sources claim that by July 1995, some two thousand Muslims had been killed in and around the enclave.⁶⁸⁵

⁶⁸⁵ Oric has claimed that between April 1992 and April 1993, 1,860 Muslims were killed in Srebrenica (Kamenica, 'Predali pokvareno oruzje'; see also Masic, *Srebrenica*, p. 215). His book presents a list of 1,912 victims, who died between April 1992 and September 1994 (Oric, *Srebrenica*, pp. 195-251). Hazim Osmanovic, one of the Muslim commanders in the enclave, claimed in an interview with *Ljiljan* that some two thousand Muslim soldiers were killed before July 1995 along with a similar number of civilians (Rizvanovic, 'Ubijanje zrtve'). Fahrudin Salihovic, former President of the War Presidency in Srebrenica, cites the following figures: 1,860 soldiers and 3,500 civilians died, and around 150 people disappeared before July 1995 (Omeragic, 'Nakon 10 hiljada ubijenih', p. 13).

Final Remarks

“...I am very much inclined to a kind of relativism, i.e. to the notion that things did not really depend on us so much. These are historical sways, the movement of nature and of physical and spiritual matter...”

Miroslav Deronjic, president of the SDS of Bratunac, in an interview in *Nasa Riječ*, 6 October 1992.

This book seeks primarily to present an historical and anthropological background account of eastern Bosnia, devoting special attention to the municipality of Srebrenica and surrounding areas. As explained at the beginning of this report, this book was not intended as a comprehensive history. Rather, its focus lies on highlighting certain episodes, as well as investigating the social and cultural realities of the region that are important in understanding the events of July 1995. I have concentrated especially on certain historical episodes. These are the episodes actively remembered and used by the actors in the July 1995 events in their efforts to understand their world and what happened during the late 1980s and early 1990s. In fact, some even exploited these episodes in justifying their political aims and actions. In this respect, the emphasis in this report was bound to lie on the violence and turbulence in the region's history, i.e. on events etched deeper in historic memory. Despite the prominence of violent events, it is remarkable how much periods of relative peace and coexistence have become 'blank spaces' in present-day collective memories, and even in official historiography. They only seem to have been retained in vague remnants of people's private accounts.

So as to avoid ignoring these elements of peaceful coexistence entirely, I have included a chapter on the communist period, which still fresh in people's minds. As a corollary, I have invested much effort in trying to describe the process of transformation from the relatively peaceful conditions under socialism to the outbreak of ethnic and nationalist violence in the 1990s. A major problem in describing this recent period has been the existing multiplicity of 'histories' and 'memories', which are often at odds with one another. Views differ radically between the members of different groups, including ethnic groups, supporters of different political ideologies (e.g. communists and nationalists), and the 'traditionalist' rural and 'modernist' urban layers of society. The most remarkable finding, however, was that views even conflict within the self-same individuals in their attempts to resolve all these contradictions and construct coherent stories for themselves. The different views on Srebrenica's history appear to be incompatible, particularly with regard to events during World War Two and the most recent war. Although I do not wish to claim that there is only one single historical truth, I have done my best to shape a more inclusive and 'truthful' interpretation of events, which does justice to all sides.

It is clear that memories, often welded into historical interpretations of the past, have played a prominent role during the war. I need only to refer to Ratko Mladic's reference to the first Serbian uprising when he entered Srebrenica in July 1995, to his Kosovo speech just days before the attack was launched, and to the numerous statements included here as vignettes at the beginning of most chapters. My efforts to gain an understanding of the recent conflict have departed from the premise that we cannot fully understand the war, and such events as the Srebrenica massacre, by leaving history aside, or more especially, by ignoring the fact that people live and perceive their place in history in their own unique ways. As I noted in the beginning, historical narratives shape people's cognition and perceptions. Consequently, those narratives help to motivate and justify actions, as well as to place them in context. People 'make' history by imagining and constructing the past in ways that are relevant to the present and by acting accordingly. It is important to acknowledge that 'history' (i.e. the historical facts) as such does not necessarily have a direct impact. It is through their culturally elaborated and mediated representations that historical facts influence people's actions.

Thus, claims (such as the one above by local SDS politician, Miroslav Deronjic) that the brutalities of the war were the product of inevitable historical forces, like ‘movements of nature’, are in effect, denials of personal involvement and responsibility. I have tried to demonstrate that, even if events and developments are beyond people’s actual control, they are always based on the choices and decisions of individuals, who should always bear responsibility for their actions. A major undercurrent in my account is that there is no historical inevitability in the way the recent conflict developed. Although this view may seem compelling when we examine all the evidence of repeated violence and brutality in the region, I think that history is never decided in advance. As I observed earlier, history is the work of people, who act and interact with different motives and interests in mind, the chemistry of which leads to results that are often unintended in their final outcome. I have tried to demonstrate that people in eastern Bosnia have justified their actions by pointing to the past in ways simplistic and unrefined. I also have attempted to juxtapose these crude versions of the past with alternative understandings that are more inclusive and try to do justice to the complexities of historical processes.

Let me leave these programmatic statements behind, and try to highlight some of the issues that have come light in this study. For one thing, this study appears to have demonstrated that historical consciousness is considerably stronger among the Serbs than among Muslims. Over the last two decades, the Serbs have drawn on and made use of history much more than have other groups. The memories of the centuries-old struggle against the Turks, symbolised in the Kosovo myth and the epics about the first Serbian uprising, have played a crucial role in the Serb perception of the recent war. That war was often seen as one waged between Christians and Muslims, between Serbs and ‘Turks’. Related to this is the theme of continuous national suffering, under the Ottomans, the Austrians, the Ustashe, Tito, the Albanians and the Bosnian Muslims. The Drina is one of the key nationalist symbols that represents this history of constant struggle and suffering. The Serb’s enemies – the 19th-century Ottoman Turks, the Austrians between 1878 and 1914, and the Ustashe during World War Two – are seen to have turned the Drina River into a frontier to divide the Serbs as a nation. During the first Serbian uprising and World War One, the Serbs fought their enemies at the Drina in heroic battles meant to rectify what they saw as the injustices of history.

The recent conflicts have been perceived in very similar terms. For Serb nationalists, the border at the Drina has been an important symbol of the lack of Serb unity, of the division of the Serbian people, and of the oppression the Serbs have suffered in Bosnia under the Muslims. Serbian war efforts in eastern Bosnia – particularly the 1992 Drina offensive and subsequent actions against Muslim enclaves – were meant to redress this situation and to return eastern Bosnia to Serbian territory once and for all. A member of a special VRS unit, who participated in the July 1995 attack on Srebrenica, recalled Mladic’s address to his unit before the attack. In it, he told them, “The Drina must become our own, internal river, and not a border. The main obstacle today is Srebrenica with which the Germans and Americans, who defend it, want to fix Serbia’s border at the Drina... It is your task to prevent this....”.⁶⁸⁶ Serb nationalists have seen eastern Bosnia’s return to Serbian territory as a matter of national survival. The feeling has been that the Drina should be a river that flows through Serbian lands – ‘the spine of Serbia’ – instead of a border with territories under foreign power.⁶⁸⁷ Serb nationalists have regarded it as their sacred duty to avenge the injustices of Kosovo, and re-conquer the territories once lost to the Turks. It is no coincidence that the myth of Kosovo has been a major source of inspiration for Ratko Mladic and the Bosnian Serb Army, who were in the forefront of this struggle. The parallels between the first Serbian uprising at the dawn of the nineteenth century and the recent war in Bosnia, and the similarity in objectives and aims, and even in the methods on the ground, have reinforced this almost mythical perception of history.

Looking at history and the politics of memory is just one way to understand the recent conflicts in eastern Bosnia. Another is by examining the realities of today, even if they are also understood in

⁶⁸⁶ Kolendic, ‘Milan iz Drvara’, p.61.

⁶⁸⁷ Interview: Boban Tomic, 11/11/1999.

terms of the past. History does not explain very much, it is only important to the extent it is transmitted, mediated and made relevant to the present-day context. For this reason, my analysis has focused largely on contemporary developments themselves, the dramatic economic and political crisis of the 1980s after Tito's death and the ways these affected the situation on the ground in a small area, such as Srebrenica. In all practical terms, the economic crisis was dramatic, reducing salaries to a fraction of what they were only a decade earlier, and leaving people unemployed and deeply insecure about their existence and future. From the Serb perspective, the economic crisis was exacerbated by the threat of political marginalisation resulting from the demographic growth and social and political emancipation of the Bosnian Muslim nation. Local Serbs were highly susceptible to propaganda from Belgrade, which subsumed all these processes under the label 'Islamic fundamentalism'. However, it was the fight over the economic assets, in times of uncertainty and economic crisis, which formed the crucial background to many of the conflicts. History was a symbolic resource. Retrieved from nationalist folklore, it was the most effective tool in mobilising the population.

If any period in the region's modern history left real traces in people's personal and collective memories, it is probably World War Two. The history of that war is vivid and part of people's actual experiences in ways that cannot be claimed of other periods, where history consists primarily of clichés. But since the war was a bloody and complicated civil war, with various groups fighting each other along different and shifting lines of division, the Communists decided that it was better to forget what had happened and to focus on a bright, socialist future. Most of the chaotic wartime experiences were suppressed and simplified in terms of the fight between the good guys, the Partisans, and the bad guys, the Ustashe, Chetnik and Fascist forces. Consequently, World War Two history was not addressed properly in public debate. What is worse, the victims were probably right in feeling that their persecution had gone unrecognised and the perpetrators unpunished. The non-addressed traumas of the former and the legal impunity of the latter placed the future under a heavy strain. Some of the memories of what happened during World War Two, memories that no one had been allowed to discuss, resurfaced with a vengeance during the 1990s. The Ustashe massacres against the Serb population and the Chetnik massacres against the Muslims became the focus of nationalist commemorations that did little to relieve the traumas, but much to foster new conflict.

Some have argued that the violence and massacres in the most recent war were driven by the desire for historical revenge for the events of World War Two. It has been said that Serbs, in Srebrenica for instance, were only waiting for their opportunity to avenge the suffering they felt the Muslims ('the Ustashe') had inflicted on them two generations ago. In my opinion, this is too simplistic a view. It is also one that has been advocated by Serb nationalists, who needed historical justification for the ethnic cleansing campaigns they planned and carried out against the Muslim population. Although I do believe that experiences in World War Two hold a very prominent place in the perceptions of Serb suffering in Bosnia, I believe that this in itself was not sufficient to make ordinary Serbs kill their Muslim neighbours. In the beginning, the architects of a greater-Serbia were forced to rely primarily on other methods. Before the onset of the war, their methods included the unremitting spread of propaganda and speeches inciting people to hatred. Once the war began, they resorted to paramilitary force with its potential for unspeakable violence. These methods made it possible to drive a wedge between groups that had been living in a relative - though not always easy - peace since World War Two. As anthropologist, Cornelia Sorabji, noted, the forms of personalised violence that occurred at the beginning of the war helped to deconstruct and disentangle the legacies of shared life and common existence in the minds of victims and perpetrators alike, and to establish unambiguous identities and undivided loyalties.⁶⁸⁸

If we were to try to understand the July 1995 massacre of Muslim men in Srebrenica, we would probably agree that there are certain historical legacies and memories of similar violence in the past. However, those are not sufficient to explain the orgy of violence and revenge that took place. Most

⁶⁸⁸ Sorabji, 'A very modern war'.

importantly, I feel we need to focus on contemporary events themselves, especially when the war first broke out and Serb attempts to conquer eastern Bosnia and cleanse it of its Muslim population marked the beginning of a vicious cycle of violence, revenge, and retribution. The Serbs' drive for revenge in 1995 was inspired primarily by events in 1992 and 1993, when over a thousand Serbs were killed by Muslim forces. Despite Serb nationalist plans for ethnic cleansing in eastern Bosnia, Muslims who had been expelled from their homes and had already suffered tremendously, managed to resist the Serb onslaught and to carve out a territory under their own control. They started attacking and looting Serb villages. These attacks intensified in frequency and violence during the autumn and winter of 1992-1993. As a result, many Serbs were killed or driven from their homes. Numerous Serb villages were also destroyed. This left the Serbs feeling victimised and deeply humiliated, particularly after the fall of Kravica in January 1993. Largely blind to what Serb politicians and militiamen had inflicted on the Muslim population when the war began, most Serbs felt Srebrenica had become 'an epicentre of genocide'. They had already suffered genocide once, and were determined to settle the accounts as soon as the opportunity presented itself.