

**DID SARAJEVO'S MULTIETHNIC SPATIALITY SURVIVE?  
A STUDY OF A RESIDENTIAL BUILDING IN THE CITY  
THROUGH WAR AND PEACE**

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**(ABSTRACT)**

Sarajevo's longstanding image has been one of a functioning multiethnic spatiality where diverse identities harmoniously co-exist and share common public spaces in their everyday life. The ethnically mixed urban population of prewar Sarajevo lived multiethnic spatiality as '*zajednicki zivot*' (common life). This notion referred to neighborliness, cooperation and trust within and across groups. The structural factors which fostered this condition of neighborly spatiality are assessed through a study of a residential building in central Sarajevo. The thesis argues that the apartment building under study was a concrete manifestation of the ideology and political economy of Tito's Yugoslavia. It was a space made possible by an authoritarian political system and an economic order subordinated to the interest of the Yugoslav League of Communists. However, the war shattered this world and dispersed the multiethnic spatiality that characterized it. The ensuing disruption of the social, institutional and economic fabric marked the state's transition from a socialist to a capitalist society. It led to heightened ethnic awareness as well as isolation and alienation that altered the prewar multiethnic spatiality of the city in ways that are still unfolding.

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## Table of Contents

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Abstract .....  | ii  |
| Acknowledgments.....  | iii |
| List of Figures .....   | v   |
| Abbreviations.....  | vi  |
| <br>  |     |
| <b>Sarajevo in War and Peace</b> .....  | 1   |
| 1.1 Sarajevo's Changing Spatiality.....   | 3   |
| 1.2 Research Question .....   | 5   |
| 1.3 Sources and Methodology.....  | 7   |
| 1.4 Chapter Outline.....  | 9   |
| <br>  |     |
| <b>Prewar Sarajevo</b> .....  | 11  |
| 2.1 The many faces of Sarajevo: conceptualizing the city's spatiality .....                               | 11  |
| 2.2 Re-conceptualizing the city's spatiality: deconstructing 'the Sarajevo myth'.....                     | 14  |
| 2.3 The <i>zajednički život</i> (common life) of Alipašina's residents.....                               | 16  |
| 2.4 Defining features of Yugoslav socialism: self-management and social ownership .....                   | 20  |
| 2.5 Distribution of socially owned apartments: the case of Energoinvest.....                              | 21  |
| 2.6 Building solidarity through local level government institutions.....                                  | 22  |
| <br>  |     |
| <b>Wartime Sarajevo</b> .....   | 25  |
| 3.1 Disintegration of Yugoslavia and the outbreak of war in B-H .....                                     | 25  |
| 3.2 Sarajevo descends into war.....   | 26  |
| 3.3 Understanding Sarajevo's physical destruction: urbicide and the assault on heterogeneity.....         | 29  |
| 3.4 Living amidst absurdity: how locals coped with war .....  | 32  |
| 3.5 Conceptualizing common life during time of war .....  | 36  |
| 3.6 Political economy / governance: Wartime Sarajevo.....   | 40  |
| <br>  |     |
| <b>Postwar Sarajevo</b> .....   | 43  |
| 4.1 Sarajevo awakens from the siege.....  | 43  |
| 4.2 Moving towards a market economy? Privatization and its challenges .....                               | 44  |
| 4.3 Rebuilding Sarajevo in whose image?.....  | 47  |
| 4.4 Postwar 'common life'.....  | 52  |
| 4.5 "New people, new atmosphere": how building residents conceptualize Sarajevo's changed spatiality..... | 55  |
| <br>  |     |
| <b>Conclusion: Is Sarajevo a Muslim City?</b> .....   | 57  |
| <br>  |     |
| <b>References</b> .....   | 62  |
| List of Interviews .....  | 63  |

## List of Figures

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Fig. 2.1. Commemoration plaque .....                             | 12 |
| Fig. 2.2. Commemorating the '84 Winter Olympic Games.....        | 12 |
| Fig. 2.3. Alipašina Ulica .....                                  | 16 |
| Fig. 3.1. Sarajevo Surrounded City.....                          | 29 |
| Fig. 3.2. Building in the midst of war (1993) .....              | 31 |
| Fig. 3.3. Building's Courtyard .....                             | 31 |
| Fig. 3.4. 'Careful Sniper' Alipašina street during the war ..... | 33 |
| Fig. 3.5. Alipašina street following the war.....                | 33 |
| Fig. 3.6. Sarajevans going to work .....                         | 34 |
| Fig. 3.7. Maintaining normality in times of war .....            | 34 |
| Fig. 3.8. Sarajevans Common life.....                            | 38 |
| Fig. 4.1. <i>Ulica Zelenih Beretki</i> .....                     | 47 |
| Fig. 4.2. Baščarsija.....  | 48 |
| Fig. 4.3. Stadium atmosphere .....                               | 49 |

## Abbreviations

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| ABiH  | <i>Armija Bosne i Hercegovina</i> , Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina           |
| BiH   | <i>Bosna i Hercegovina</i> , Bosnia and Herzegovina                          |
| DPA   | Dayton Peace Accords   |
| EC    | European Community   |
| FBiH  | <i>Federacija Bosne i Hercegovine</i> , Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina |
| HVO   | <i>Hrvatsko Vijeće Odbrane</i> , Croat Defense Council                       |
| JNA   | <i>Jugoslovenska Narodna Armija</i> , Yugoslav People's Army                 |
| KS    | <i>Kućni Savjet</i> , house council  |
| MZ    | <i>Mjesna Zajednica</i> , Local or Neighborhood Committee                    |
| RS    | <i>Republika Srpska</i>  |
| SDA   | <i>Stranka Demokratske Akcije</i> , Party of Democratic Action               |
| SDP   | <i>Socialdemokratska Partija</i> , Social Democratic Party                   |
| SDS   | <i>Srpska Demokratska Stranka</i> , Serbian Democratic Party                 |
| UNHCR | United Nations High Commission for Refugees                                  |
| VRS   | <i>Vojska Republike Srpske</i> , Army of Republika Srpska                    |

# Chapter 1

## Sarajevo in War and Peace

In a relatively short period of time and in a very abrupt manner, Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereinafter Bosnia or B-H) made the transition from a former Yugoslav republic to a sovereign state; socialism to capitalism; authoritarianism to democracy; peace to war to uneasy peace. Each transition was accompanied by a new set of ideas, policies and practices that transformed existing institutions and organizations and dramatically altered the everyday way in which people within Bosnia live. The ensuing (and ongoing) political and economic developments influenced and shaped both social relations and culture. Their effects are evident on a very local and even personal level. Political and economic processes, framed by the transitions, have reconstituted places and spaces. They have altered the way people think about a place, behave in it and expect others to behave. Through a critical reading of everyday spatiality, it is possible to study the dynamic impacts of Bosnia's triple transition.

The term spatiality refers to "socially produced space, the created forms and relations of a broadly defined human geography" (Dictionary of Human Geography 1994, 584). Spaces construct and reproduce social relations, but are also products of the working out, both mundane and dramatic, banal and violent, of them. They are active agents in their own right and not mere products or reflections of the ongoing relationship between people and place. They reflect, embody and channel changes in a distinctive way. On the one hand, as the cultural geographer Don Mitchell writes, spaces attest to human efforts that fortify 'the dreams, desires and all the injustices of the people and social systems that make it' (Mitchell 2000, 94). On the other hand, they 'act as social agents in the further development of a place' (Mitchell 2000, 94). They do so in an unobvious manner.

Spaces promote development by providing a clearly defined and delimited, but not impenetrable or uncontested, context within which people work and remake themselves. According to another cultural geographer Edward Soja:

Spatiality and temporality, human geography and human history, intersect in a complex social process which creates a constantly evolving sequence of spatialities, a spatio-temporal structuration of social life which gives form not only to the grand movements of social development but also to the recursive practices of day-to-day activity (Dictionary of Human Geography 1994, 584). Meaning is made manifest through spaces. They maintain and produce the needs and desires of some set of social actors. Therefore, they embody and advance a complex of beliefs, habits, assumptions, representations and practices.

At the heart of Bosnia's triple transition over the last decade and a half is the city of Sarajevo. Its spatiality is of particular interest for several reasons. First, Sarajevo is the third largest city of the former Yugoslavia and the largest urban center of Bosnia and Herzegovina. As an urban center it is the site of development, order, progress, modernization, heterogeneity, cultural diversities and symbolic meanings. It once was the capital of a republic; now it is the capital of an independent state. Second, Sarajevo personified Tito's slogan of 'brotherhood and unity' (*bratstvo i jedinstvo*) perhaps more so than any other city in the former Yugoslavia. Despite its Muslim plurality and thin majority (at 50.1% according to the 1991 census), it was home to a significant number of Serbs (27.7%) and Croats (7.1%) (Filipović 1997, 38). Approximately twelve percent of the city's inhabitants identified as Yugoslav, a percentage comparable to that of Tuzla, Banja Luka and Mostar but relatively high in relation to other Yugoslav republics. Sarajevo also had an elevated percentage of mixed marriages compared to the rest of Bosnia and many regions of Yugoslavia. These demographic realities made Sarajevo a city of multiethnicity that rose above ethnonational boundaries. Third, Sarajevo's history and culture as a place of multiethnic spatiality is central to its identity. The city has a symbolic image of tolerance and coexistence that is recognized both regionally and globally. Even authors like Robert Kaplan, who infamously described Bosnia as 'full of savage hatreds, leavened by poverty and alcoholism,' presented Sarajevo as the state's 'only sophisticated urban center; where Croats, Serbs, Muslims and Jews had traditionally lived together in reasonable harmony' (Kaplan 1993, 22). Fourth, Sarajevo symbolizes Bosnia. As noted by Amna Whiston, "Sarajevo is surely a more idealistic place than other towns in the country, but nevertheless represents what this thousand-

year-old country was and is striving to be: an entity where people of different ethnic and religious backgrounds coexisted for centuries” (Whiston 2002, 29). Many have argued that precisely because of its reputation for tolerance, Sarajevo was singled out for destruction during the Bosnian war of 1992 to December 1995. Lastly, Sarajevo is the capital of the deeply divided state in seemingly perpetual state of legitimation crisis.

According to Sumantra Bose:

The Bosnian state’s chronic legitimacy crisis, while rooted in the failure of the Titoist formula of Yugoslav coexistence throughout its regional neighborhood, is perpetuated by the fact that in the post-Yugoslav era, Bosnia’s three communities have very different preferences on fundamental issues of allegiance and identity (Bose 2002, 47-48).

If Bosnia is to survive as a state, it requires a distinctive national identity that supersedes present divides. It must overcome the complexity of its present political framework characterized by what Bose terms its ‘layered sovereignty’ to promote a collective political and cultural identity. As the capital of the state-in-crisis, Sarajevo has a unique role to play in the production of a Bosnian identity and spatiality that unites rather than divides Bosnia’s different sectional communities.

As argued by Don Mitchell, “Landscape is an important ingredient in constructing consent and identity—in organizing a receptive audience—for the projects and desires of powerful social interest” (Mitchell 2000, 100). Because of its history, reputation and present status, Sarajevo’s spatiality over the last 15 years serves as a vantage point charting the state’s progress in (re)establishing a multi-ethnic society that embraces a collective political and cultural identity while protecting its constituents freedoms. What does the changing nature of Sarajevo’s spatiality over the last decade and a half tell us about the city, the new state of Bosnia and about the ‘powerful social interest’ that are at work in reconstituting the city as the capital of a crisis-torn independent state?

### **1.1 Sarajevo’s Changing Spatiality**

Decades of communist rule in Sarajevo created a social order in which a citizens’ place was predictable and their economic welfare was guaranteed at a basic level.

Immediately after the city's liberation, political, economic and social structures reorganized, not only to secure citizens' basic needs, but also to create and maintain a multiethnic spatiality. Communism instilled a sense of collective responsibility and solidarity that superseded more parochial identities. The ideology of 'brotherhood and unity' was invoked to overcome animosity amongst national groups and to invite the participation of all nationalities in Sarajevo's public life. The different faiths and nationalities that made up Sarajevo's population lived and worked together to create a Bosnia that forgot the wartime division, atrocities and bitterness. All city spaces were truly mixed. Workers' brigades, councils, and even sports clubs reflected collective responsibility and solidarity. Institutions, organizations, associations and enterprises were reformulated to articulate and buttress the official creed of 'brotherhood and unity.' The historian Robert Donia, in a newly published history of the city, writes of this post-World War II period that new organizations were created to promote 'cultural life, leisure activities, educational advancement, propaganda dissemination, health, fitness, and efforts to build the new socialist order' (Donia 2006, 220). All ethno-religious organizations were abolished.

In 1992 Sarajevo's (much like rest of Bosnia's) multiethnic character was attacked and fractured by prolonged warfare. Elements of attack came from within the city. Tensions along ethnic lines crystallized and escalated during the war, but were evident long before the first shots were fired. Many people abandoned the city early on. Many rallied behind the nationalist rhetoric of Radovan Karadžić. To ethno-nationalists multiethnic Sarajevo was an illusion, a myth, which throughout the years was papered over by the slogan of 'brotherhood and unity,' but whose quick dissolution reflected its artificial nature. To them there was nothing genuine about multiethnic multicultural Sarajevo. Their unease and hatred of the multiethnic spatiality of the city, where identities were not clear and contained, was genuine.

War drastically changed the character and spatiality of the city, doing serious damage to its multiethnic spaces and spirit. First, Serb nationalists implemented policies aimed at physically segregating the city's populace. Their wartime goal was to divide the city, and place a wall between its different nationalities, much like Nicosia in Cyprus. When this was not possible, they encouraged all Serbs to emigrate from Sarajevo and

helped them in their efforts. The flight of Serbs made many Sarajevans reassess their belief in a '*zajednički život*' (common life). Second, local political formations along nationalist lines reinforced separateness. Third, religious and other institutions emblematic of a multicultural and multiethnic Sarajevo were deliberately targeted. Lastly, criminal gangs' strategies and conflicting interests of multiple defense committees imposed further divisions. Yet, despite this concerted attack on the supposedly artificial character of the city, the multiethnic spirit of Sarajevo survived. Different ethnicities fought for a Bosnia that was not ethnically divided and for their city as a place of multiethnic encounter and community. As argued by Robert Donia, "every Sarajevan became part of an epic struggle to preserve a treasured way of life" (Donia 2006, 287).

The aftermath of the war left the demographics of the city radically different. The percentage of Serbs and Croats plummeted. The city's Jewish community almost disappeared. Conversely, the percentage of Bosniacs rose by 37% according to 1997 estimates. Many contend that the city's undeniably Muslim majority has altered Sarajevo's spatiality—its prewar identity and culture. To some Sarajevo has become more 'oriental,' as is evident through the construction of new mosques, atmosphere at stadiums, presence of veiled women, attendance at mosques, changes in music and absence of pork products. Furthermore, the Bosniac ruling parties have been accused of utilizing recent events to strengthen ethnic consciousness and separateness. The Italian cultural geographer Elena Dell'Agnese describes the resultant situation as one where "social memories tend to be selective, or are selectively re-built, and post-war Sarajevo is becoming more Muslim and less multi-ethnic than before" (Dell'Agnese 2006).

## **1.2 Research Question**

These developments raise important questions: how can Sarajevo be multiethnic if over 80% of its populace is Muslim? Has the brute facts of population segregation during the war undermined the 'spirit of Sarajevo'? Can a city have a multiethnic spatiality if it is largely dominated by one ethnicity? Did the multiethnic spatiality of Sarajevo survive? This thesis sets out to examine these questions through an examination of what has happened to Sarajevo over the last decade and a half. To give the research

question some precision and intimate focus, this thesis undertakes to chart the changing spatiality of Sarajevo through an in-depth examination of a residential apartment building close to the very center of the city. An apartment building was chosen because it is both a public and private space, a collective enterprise embedded in the spatial networks of the city and also an intimate home space for its residents. It allows reflection on the relationship between city and home, community and personal identity. As an economic asset, it also provides a point of entry into economic processes and structures delimiting how people can live and create a home amidst the city as a real estate market and economy. The residential building serves as a unique vantage point to chart the state's various transitions at the core of its urban space. Numerous other authors have noted the significance of buildings to the very identity and culture of Sarajevo. Donia and Fine note how during the socialist period high-rise apartment buildings presented 'ethnonational conglomerates' (Donia and Fine 1994, 186). More philosophically, Martin Coward has written how residential buildings represent urbanity and therefore heterogeneity. The violent attack and destruction of mixed community residential buildings, therefore, is an attack on the very possibility of heterogeneity. A collective of Bosnian architects from Mostar have termed this 'urbicide.' This term was used widely by many people in Sarajevo to describe the siege of the city at the time of the war.

Through in-depth interviews with residents and former residents of the central building where I conducted my research, the thesis provides a point of evaluation of Sarajevo's transition from multiethnic spatiality to a contemporary condition where one ethnicity predominates yet the spirit of Sarajevo lingers. In what follows I document the residents and former resident's perceptions and attitudes concerning questions of transition, ownership and culture. I attempt to expose the trends within a state that is now at 'peace' and no longer in the global media's spotlight. In my interviews I sought to find answers to a set of questions: How have relations between people changed as a consequence of the war and the political and economic transition? How do people conceptualize multiculturalism, ethnicities and Sarajevo itself? Who constitutes the 'other' for them today? How has the building been impacted by the larger processes at work? What is the relative significance of continuity to change in the building over a span of circa 15 years?

### 1.3 Sources and Methodology

The thesis has three main data sources. The first is the historical record of what happened to Sarajevo over the period 1991 to 2006. The sources that I drew upon included, firstly, academic studies like *Sarajevo: a Biography* by Robert Donia, *Bosnia: A Cultural History* by Ivan Lovrenović and *Bosnia After Dayton* by Sumatra Bose. I also used the study by the Bosniac academic Muhamed Filipović, *Bosna i Hercegovina, najvažnije geografske, demografske, historijske, kulturne I političke činjenice* (Bosnia and Herzegovina: Most Important Geographic, Demographic, Historical, Cultural and Political Facts), and Mehmedalija Huremović's *Danas Stanar Sutra Vlasnik Stan* (*Today's Tenant Tomorrow's Apartment Owner*). Additional literary works provided insight into questions of culture, identity, ethnic relations such as the Bosniac writer Dzevad Karahasan (who lived but was not born in Sarajevo) *Sarajevo, Exodus of a City* and the Bosnian Serb and Sarajevo born writer Gojko Berić's *Letters to the Celestial Serbs* and by Kemal Kurspahić (former editor of *Oslobodenje*) *As Long as Sarajevo Exists*. I also used 'outsider' studies such as those by New York Times journalist Roger Cohen *Hearts Grown Brutal*, the social anthropologist's, Tone Bringa, *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way*, and Susan Woodward's *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution after the Cold War*.

The second is standard census data, estimates of population and state laws. Data was obtained from various agencies and institutions including but not limited to: *Federalni Zavod za Statistiku* (Federal Institute for Statistics); *Kantonalno Ministarstvo za Rad, Socialnu Politiku, Raseljena Lica i Izbjeglice* (Cantonal Ministry for Work, Social Politics, Internal Displacement and Refugees); *Agencija za privatizaciju u federaciji Bosne i Hercegovine* (Agency for privatization in B-H); *Zakon o vraćanju dodjeli I prodaji stanova* (Law on the return, allocation and sale of apartments); *Istrazivacko Dokumentacioni Centar* (Research and Documentation Center); United Nations High Commission for Refugees; United Nations Development Program.

The third is a series of in-depth personal interviews I conducted with the residents of the building in summer of 2006. It should be noted that it was not possible to track

down all of the residents from 1990 as some had left the country, deceased, or sold their property. Most of the interviewees were asked the same or similar questions. However, lack of sufficient understanding of events hindered the design of a highly structured survey instrument. This form of the personal interview was also adopted because of an interest in the interviewee's interpretation of events. It gave them the room and freedom to address matters they personally deemed important.

Fifteen interviews were conducted with residents and former residents of the building. Specifically, ten women and five men were interviewed (there were no children in the building). The women ranged in age from 20 to 50 plus. Two of the men were in their 20s and the remaining three in late 30s to early 50s. Fourteen of the interviewed were Bosniac. There was only one Bosnian Serb and no Bosnian Croats. The only Serb resident is married to a Bosniac. Two female interviewees were married to Bosnian Serbs. Thirteen of the interviewees are from Sarajevo and two from Gorazde. Six interviews were conducted with residents that no longer live in the building. I was not able to interview one prewar resident because of her age and medical condition and I received nominal information from the employees that work for the Swedish Helsinki Committee that now occupies one of the apartments. Prewar residents occupy only three of the total sixteen apartments. New residents occupy the remaining five.

Some of the interviews were not 'one-on-one'. For instance, a family of four was asked questions to which everyone contributed. They either expanded on an already articulated argument of a family member or gave their own interpretation. Differences of opinion generally varied between different generations and genders. Older residents did not regret having stayed in Sarajevo during the war and if given the opportunity would not leave. Younger residents expressed a desire to leave the country. Whereas male interviewees tended to talk more about political issues and the rise of nationalism, female interviewees focused on social problems and safety concerns. Most of the interviewees were eager to talk and the interviews tended to be lengthy. The majority of interviews were tape-recorded. There were series of concerns they all wanted to address and similarities of opinion were not uncommon.

## 1.4 Chapter Outline

The thesis is divided into five chapters: Introduction; Prewar Sarajevo; Wartime Sarajevo; Postwar Sarajevo; Summary and concluding remarks. Chapters corresponding to pre-war Sarajevo, Sarajevo during the war and post-war Sarajevo, address issues of ownership and culture first from a city scale perspective and then from the more localized scale of the apartment building. Chapter two begins by presenting a range of conceptualizations of Sarajevo's prewar spatiality. The purpose of the multiple perspectives is to reveal the concepts dynamic nature. On the one hand, the city's spatiality is conceptualized as a multiethnic haven. On the other hand, the presence of ethnic antagonisms failed to generate true integration. Out of several competing conceptualizations of the city, one especially resonates with the interviewees' stories and is therefore applied to the building under study. The conceptualization suggests that despite ethnic diversity, relations between residents were characterized by contact, communication, respect, cooperation, trust and solidarity. All the elements defined and grounded notions of 'neighborly relations' and 'common life'. The term 'common life' is in this case synonymous to multiethnic spatiality. It is used because terms such as ethnicity and multiethnicity do not reflect common conceptualizations and have been relatively recently introduced to the mainstream discourse. The resident's stories are then used to give concrete meaning to the terms. They also reveal how the residents of this one building in Sarajevo lived and what mattered to them.

Following the personal accounts, the focus shifts towards the political and economic structures that helped sustain Sarajevo's multiethnic spatiality and 'common life.' Specifically, attention is given to two essential features of Yugoslav socialism: workers' self-management and social property. Arguably, both features helped implant the ideology of 'brotherhood and unity.' Furthermore, the features are operationalized in an assessment of the Sarajevo Energy Investment Corporation (Energoinvest). The particular enterprise was chosen because of its ties to the building under study. Lastly, the role of local government institutions is assessed and applied to the residents.

Chapter three offers a significantly simplified explanation of the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the outbreak of war in Bosnia. It addresses the rise of virulent forms of

nationalisms that found expression even in Sarajevo. Firstly, the focus is on the ethno-nationalist discourses that paved the way to concrete policies and practices. Secondly, Sarajevans' reactions to the unfolding events are discussed. Thirdly, the author explains why the strangulation of Sarajevo was integral to the realization of ethno-nationalist goals. Following the city scale perspective, the author traces the impacts on Sarajevans by presenting the resident's stories. Through their accounts the author attempts to answer whether and how interpersonal relations between residents (and nonresidents) changed. In other words, did a common life typify their relations in time of war? The discussion includes their initial reactions, perceptions of change, and conceptualization of an enemy. It also illustrates how they coped with the large-scale developments. The chapter concludes with a discussion of local level government institutions. The author's research suggests that particular institutions played a vital role in ensuring the residents' survival and establishing a degree of order. Likewise, they played a role in the allocation of housing.

In chapter four Sarajevo's new realities are documented. Sarajevo is a territorially, demographically, politically and socially changed city. New forces and social actors have reconstituted its spatiality. The chapter concentrates on the forces that are undermining social inclusion (as for example does the process of privatization). Arguments are presented which suggest that Sarajevo's spatiality reflects a mono-ethnic identity. The arguments are followed by an analysis of the residents' perceptions to the changed circumstances. The section illustrates how they conceptualize their new spatiality and what they think of diversity. The concluding chapter develops an argument to capture and explain the present state of Sarajevo's spatiality.

## Chapter 2

### Prewar Sarajevo

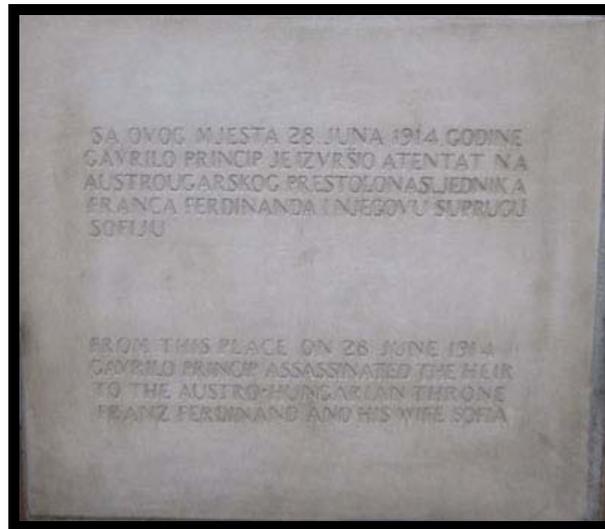
#### 2.1 The many faces of Sarajevo: conceptualizing the city's spatiality

The view of the city and the valley from the old fortress placed on one of the plateaus, is mystical; the view towards the south is especially beautiful where the hill of Trebević, covered by green woods, rises up to the height of 5,100 feet. Small, white houses stand in gardens, and above the houses hundreds of minarets stand out... The bazaar is unusually varied and on market day represents a colorful mass of men and women in the most diverse costumes... (24 August 1878 *The Illustrated London News*; cited in The Best of B-H 2004, 43).

Sarajevo, like Istanbul and Jerusalem, is a place of confluence, imbued by the slow interaction of man and nature and the creeping ebb and flow of civilizations, with a strange fascination (Roger Cohen 1998, 114-115).

Dubbed 'European Jerusalem,' Sarajevo is home to four distinct religious communities: Eastern Orthodox Serbs, Roman Catholic Croats, Muslims and Sephardic Jews. Even before the twentieth century, it had an international reputation for its religious diversity and tradition of tolerance. From the city's foundation in the fifteenth century (to present-day) various national identities have sought and found refuge in Sarajevo. Whereas in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Sephardic Jews came to secure and preserve their cultural and ethnic identity, in more recent times war-scarred Sarajevo provided shelter to Bosniacs from neighboring villages and towns. Each community left an undeniable imprint that enriched the city both culturally and physically. The city's landscape was dotted with diverse houses of worship as disparate customs and traditions collaborated to give the city its unique character. The many mosques, orthodox and catholic churches and synagogues, all in close proximity in the historic urban core of the city, attest to a longstanding tradition of connection, co-mingling and religious cooperation.

Sarajevo acquired a more dubious fame in the early part of the twentieth century as the site of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand (Figure 2.1).



**Figure 2.1. Commemoration plaque.**  
Photograph taken by author (2006)

It was also at the center of the turmoil of World War II in the Balkans. After its liberation in 1945, the city's older multiethnic image came once again to the fore. Under the slogan 'brotherhood and unity' the city's national groups joined forces to resurrect its multiethnic public life. Urbanization and a post-war population boom meant that the city expanded several times its prewar size. The culmination of Sarajevo's long post-war rebirth was in 1984 when it played host to the Winter Olympic Games. Throughout the city today one can still see memorials and commemorations of the moment when, according to Sarajevans, they "showed their spirit to the world" (Figure 2.2).



**Figure 2.2. Commemorating the '84 Winter Olympic Games.**  
The five Olympic rings stand above the snowflake that along with Vucko (the Wolf) was chosen to represent the '84 Olympic Games (photograph taken by author 2004).

Yet, just eight years later they city was the site of fierce fighting as Bosnia and Herzegovina descended into warfare, with Sarajevo subject to a well televised three and half year siege. Historian Eric Hobsbawn's portrait of the 'short twentieth century is bookended by the geopolitical events that unfolded in Sarajevo (Hobsbawn 1994).

According to Dževad Karahasan, Bosnian writer, dramaturg and author of *Sarajevo, Exodus of a City*, an amalgam of people, traditions and faiths, helped develop a distinctly Bosnian cultural system that crystallized in Sarajevo. While Karahasan argues that most cultural systems are dialectical, he describes the Bosnian system as dramatic and subsequently pluralist. It is distinct in that its consisting elements encounter and define each other. The complex elements retain their 'primordial nature' and attain new properties by binding to an opposite. Consequently, "Every member of a dramatic cultural system needs the Other as proof of his or her own identity, because one's own particularity is being proven and articulated in relationship to the particularities of the Other" (Karahasan 1994, 7). Aside from grounding one's identity, the relationships influence and shape the city's spatiality and internal organization. This is pronounced and evident through the everyday encounters of Sarajevans.

Sarajevo, Karahasan believes, is an 'internal' city enclosed by its particularities emanating in the *mahalas*. The Muslims from the Vratnik *mahala*, the Jews from Bjelave, the Catholics from Latinluk, all abandon their particularities in the city center—the *čarsija*. It is there—the *čarsija*—that cultural differences (particularities) are left behind and each culture's universal components are realized. The *čarsija* "equalizes them in that which is common to them, what is universally human—in work, the need for material goods, love and envy, solidarity" (Karahasan 1994, 9). Upon abandoning the *čarsija* they return to their culture's particularities conscious of an Other in whom they recognize their own particularities and identity. The constant interplay between the center and the periphery is precisely what makes Sarajevo unique and governs its daily life.

Robert Donia maintains that prior to the 1990s Sarajevans did not think of their city as multiethnic and multicultural but rather thought of it in terms of neighborliness and common life (*zajednički život*). Donia states, "They envisioned their ethnically diverse city as a 'neighborhood' (*komšiluk*), spoke of those from other ethnonational

groups as ‘neighbours’ (*komšije*), and valued their association with others as ‘neighborly relations’ (*komšijski odnosi*)” (Donia 2006, 4). Sarajevans did not thrust aside their ethnic identities nor did they assimilate into an ‘undifferentiated homogenous whole.’ They held on to their distinct identities while performing the routine traditions and practices characteristic of their common life. Sarajevans expressed their embrace of diversity and tolerance through traditions such as coffee visitations and holiday well-wishing.

## **2.2 Re-conceptualizing the city’s spatiality: deconstructing ‘the Sarajevo myth’**

Some authors who speak of the 'Sarajevo myth' rather than a 'Sarajevo spirit' contest the positive reading of Sarajevo's spatiality. Two distinct contestations can be discerned. One interpretation of its multiculturalism mirrors a primordial account of the region’s history. It supposes that hate is endemic in the Balkans, contributing to a fragmented society, ethnic tension and frequent outbreaks of violence. Sarajevo, as a part of the region, is not immune to the particular trends. It harbors its own enemies. The depiction of the city as an idyllic microcosm of ‘brotherhood and unity’ is nothing more but a myth (a façade) that crystallized during Tito’s Yugoslavia and because of Tito’s iron fist rule. Hate, fear and a desire to avenge past wrongs essentially simmer underneath the city’s mythical appearance.

This somewhat reductionist and simplistic explanation of the outbreak of disorder and interpretation of Bosnia’s multiculturalism—including Sarajevo’s—circulated in the early 1990s in the press and political discourses. However, it was not an image (explanation/discourse) crafted and affixed solely by the outside (i.e. the first world). Yugoslav writers and intellectuals such as the Nobel laureate Ivo Andrić who received the prize for “the epic force with which he has depicted themes and human destinies from the history of his country,” wrote passages which projected a vision of endemic hatred ravaging Bosnia long before the 1992 war (cited in Andrić 1993, v). For example, in *A Letter Dated 1920* Andrić writes, “In a country such as Bosnia today, anyone to whom it doesn’t occur to hate, or, which is even more difficult, who consciously refuses to hate, is always to some extent an alien, a misfit, and often the victim of persecution” (cited in

Berić 2002, 29). Selective passages from Andrić's work were particularly popular during the 1990s war, appearing as citations confirming the truly Balkanist character of Bosnia and Sarajevo. It was utilized to both explain the war's absurdity and to motivate forces. Adopting this reasoning, the events that unfolded in the early 1990s are conceptualized as another atrocious episode in an unending series.

In the article "Urbicide and the Myth of Sarajevo," the American scholar Cynthia Simmons offers yet another interpretation of Sarajevo's multiculturalism (imagined spatiality). She does not embrace what she terms the 'Sarajevo myth' nor does she argue that violence is an inevitable and common characteristic of the South Slavs of Bosnia. Instead, she explains:

If we attempt any generalization, it would most likely describe neither a state of separation and enmity (balkanization) nor a condition of 'brotherhood and unity.' Research from the interwar period suggests that for centuries the inhabitants of the Balkan Peninsula lived generally peacefully, in 'brotherhood' if you will, but in disunity (Simmons 2001, 624).

To support this particular claim she synthesizes a set of arguments countering Sarajevo's image as the embodiment of an ideal. The primary focus is on the experiences of ethnic groups at specific times in history. Specifically, Simmons notes that Sephardic Jews did not have equal status, and along with Christians were forbidden from wearing the same attire as Muslims. The city's council members were determined by ethnicity and there were no laws protecting non-Muslims. Furthermore, neighborhoods were homogenous and only the city center was truly multicultural.

Clearly Sarajevo's spatiality (multiculturalism) has been variously conceptualized. To some its reality is a myth, to others an ideal; and while some uphold it, others scrutinize it. What drives these varying conceptualizations is perhaps best summed up by Elena Dell'Agnese:

Often reverberating from the outside in, as well as vice-versa, Sarajevo's image-creation process has been influenced through time by different cultural attitudes, political interests and historical myths – the fascination of the city being variously fuelled by geopolitical ambitions, humanitarian solidarity and the morbid curiosity of tourists (Dell'Agnese 2007).

The image of Sarajevo as an eloquent symbol of a harmonious coexistence is particularly important at this time. Sarajevo, as Bosnia and Herzegovina's capital city, stands as an emblem legitimating a fragile state's existence. Nevertheless, the city's spatiality ('image') is highly contested. As some ethnonationalist forces are attempting to make the city representative of one ethnic group (i.e., impose a singular and exclusivist vision), others are using the city's changed character to legitimate further separateness.

### 2.3 The *zajednički život* (common life) of Alipašina's residents

Although a generalization, Robert Donia's description of the common life of Sarajevans best captures the stories of the residents living in the Alipašina 7 Street in a property owned previously by the industrial conglomerate Energoinvest (Figure 2.3).



Located in central Sarajevo, the duplex six-story building with sixteen apartments was built in 1948. It was home to the diversity that characterized the inner core of Sarajevo:

Jews, Croats, Serbs, Muslims and Slovenes. The residents, most who were employed at Energoinvest, came from varying backgrounds. For instance, Morisset Begić, wife of the prominent Bosnian academic Muhamed Begić, was originally from France. She lived alongside Srajbner Marko (Jewish), Save Krčmar (Serb), Amra Kurtagić (Bosniac), Miroslava Bučar (Slovene), Josip Simunović (a Croat) and many others. Classification based on one's ethnicity and nationality, while now useful to depict heterogeneity of the building, was according to the interviewed residents of secondary importance. In other words, Amra Kurtagić was not labeled as the Muslim or worse *balija* (a derogatory term for a Bosnian Muslim) by her neighbors, but as the first floor resident; the daughter of Ibrahim; the house council president and even more frequently, the Magros employee. One's occupation was particularly important. Citizens relied on 'connections' to get things done, not because they were impossible to do but simply because it was more convenient and less time consuming.

Sarajevo along with other urban centers within Bosnia upheld a model of collective identification that was ostensibly designed by the Titoist system to undermine any parochial allegiance or subscription to the exclusivist nationalisms that had torn Yugoslavia apart during World War II. As noted by *Oslobodenje's* (liberation) political columnist Gojko Berić: "Prior to this war, Bosnia was an attractive model for collective identification. A large number of her people felt primarily Bosnian and Herzegovinian. They were identified and accepted as such—and only seldom as Serbs, Croats, or Muslims—in other Yugoslav republics" (Berić 2002, 30-31). Similarly, Donia and Fine, historians of medieval and early modern Bosnia, assert: "For the vast majority of Bosnian urbanites, loyalty to Bosnia overrode ethnocentric sentiments" (Donia & Fine 1994, 186). For them the inexorable process of urbanization was central to this process. The division that did characterize Bosnian society was between urbanites and villagers. It was more common for the urban-educated to abandoned ethnic and religious allegiances than for the villagers. Whereas for the former the socioeconomic echelon was of outmost importance, the latter's interactions with other ethnonational groups were limited and restricted.

Various efforts aimed at obscuring ethnonational differences during Tito's socialist Yugoslavia predominantly took root in urban centers. The city's spaces were

truly multiethnic: schools were mixed, apartment blocks were mixed, cafes were mixed, cinemas were mixed, bars and clubs were mixed, sports stadiums were mixed. One out of four marriages was mixed. Even though urbanites abstained from categorizations based on one's ethnicity and/or nationality, residents were expansively familiar with another neighbor's background and family history. A person's last name (and even first) often times indicated one's ethnoreligious background. Last names were also associated with particular regions. Generally a person was able to tell what nationality someone was and where they came from.

For most Sarajevans, including the interviewed residents, the "Other" was not someone of a different ethnonational background but an uncultured peasant whose behavior, mannerism and speech differed from their own. Aside from identifying as Bosnian, and occasionally as Serb, Croat or Muslim, Sarajevans took great pride in their localized identity, namely, being *Sarajlije*. Deeply attached to their city, they expressed their devotion and affirmed their identities in and through poems, songs, jokes and cheers. To be a *Sarajlija* implied being 'cultured', well educated, open-minded, witty and superb in ways of dressing, acting and speaking. It also involved remoteness from all elements representative of rural areas. For instance, an interviewee recalls that peers from school who lived in houses and not high-rise apartment buildings were occasionally mocked. Those who did not embody the ways of Sarajevans (including Sarajevans) were frequently labeled *papci* (literal meaning, 'pig feet,' also, bumpkins) and *seljaci* (villagers). Subsequently, a conceptualization of self (as *Sarajlija*) was defined by the relation to a perceived 'Other' who was not a Serb, Croat or Bosniac but a villager. Although it most often found only verbal expression, it exerted pressure on outsiders to assimilate to accustomed ways and normative ideals of urbanity and sophistication. For this reason and as observed by Bringa, many peasants would replace their traditional attire (e.g. the *dimije*) for a more 'suitable' one when visiting the city (Bringa 1995, 62).

The residents conceptualization of oneself and an 'other' underpinned their understanding of a common life and neighborly relations. However, the conceptualizations are fluid and historically contingent. They are neither 'easily constructed' nor 'effortlessly maintained' (Donia 2006, 5). Their meanings change in different contexts and places. To an American 'neighborly relations' might be summed

up as customary greetings and occasional calls for assistance. To a Sarajevan the meaning of neighborly relations has undergone, from the time of socialist Yugoslavia to present day, considerable changes that reflected the different necessities and survival requirements in the changing political economy of these years. Interviews suggest that prior to the war relations between residents transcended everyday customary greetings and were more than merely cordial. Residents, particularly those of the same age group, socialized outside of their immediate environment. Through their interactions they reared tight-knit bonds amongst fellow neighbors irrespective of ethnic and national backgrounds. Parents encouraged their children (at instances even against their will) to befriend those of neighbors with whom they had sound relations. In certain respects their interactions cultivated cross-generational bonds.

Underlying these neighborly relations was a great degree of trust. Neighbors felt they could turn to each other in time of need for very basic to more complex necessities. From borrowing cooking ingredients to watching over kids, it was not unimaginable to ask for assistance. Favors were reciprocated and gratitude was expressed through visitations and gift giving that frequently included coffee, sugar, fruit, chocolate, and alcohol.

The notion of home extended outside of an actual dwelling unit. Common areas were used and cared for by the residents. The stairwell was always clean and well lit. The courtyard and rooftop were used to dry laundry. Children as well as young adults gathered on hot summer days to sunbathe and cool off under the outdoor shower situated on the rooftop. The courtyard was the site of the children's imaginary kingdom for which they even had a name and currency. Senada who grew up in the building and has many fond memories of it, thought of the whole building as a 'family home'. Both her grandparents and parents lived at one point in the building. She claims she is emotionally attached to both her apartment and the complex as a whole.

In many ways resident's relations appear to have (loosely) typified 'brotherhood and unity.' In times of need there was no shortage of help and ethnonational differences carried no meaning. As equals they worked on improving their shared space while treating each other with respect and consideration.

## 2.4 Defining features of Yugoslav socialism: self-management and social ownership

Following expulsion from the eastern block in 1948, Yugoslavia developed a new ideology—Titoism—and a distinctly Yugoslav way of organizing the economy and political life. Economic as well as political circumstances forced Yugoslavia to change course. It (de)parted from the Soviet model that according to Tito's advisors imprecisely interpreted and applied Marxist-Leninist ideology. The Soviet model (under Stalin), they argued, had expanded the bureaucracy and consolidated all power within the state. The highly centralized bureaucratic system of the Soviet Union alienated the workers from the means of production. Edvard Kardelj, Tito's most trusted and loyal advisor until the end, and Milovan Djilas sought to correct the authoritarian centralism of the Soviet system. Channeling Yugoslavia in a new direction, their plan intended to give more power to the workers and less to the state. What ensued was the doctrine of 'workers self-management,' a characteristic feature of Yugoslav socialism.

In theory, the objective of workers' self-management was to create greater individual and community involvement in the management of public goods and services and eventually lead to the state withering away. The *Basic Law on the Management of State Economic Enterprises and Higher Economic Associations by Work Collectivities* translated the objective into policy and set the concept of self-management in motion. At the very outset, attention was on enterprises and the devolution of power within them through workers' councils. Elected workers' councils were assigned to manage each enterprise and all major enterprises became 'social property'. Put differently, property like houses and buildings were to be neither state nor privately owned. The law triggered immediate changes and was fully implemented by the end of 1950. However, it also paved the way to more profound political, economic and even social changes.

Workers' self-management exemplified the embeddedness of the economic in the Yugoslav political system. As an economically relevant but nevertheless political phenomenon, it pressed for changes of responsibility within the government. Specifically, it decentralized political power by giving lower units of government more authority. Following the 1953 constitutional reforms, municipalities had the right to taxation and participation in affairs of enterprises (Allcock 2000, 77). The relationship

between municipalities and enterprises became one of interdependence in which the former was particularly important (Allcock 2000, 77). The fusion of local politics and economics characterized the Yugoslav system.

According to Dobrica Ćosić, former President of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, it was precisely the ideology of self-management that led to Yugoslavia's collapse. The ideology concealed nationalist agendas particularly once ideas of self-management were raised to the national level. According to Ćosić: "All these things logically led to the primacy of national interests in the economy, the metamorphosis into a confederation, and the collapse of the idea of Yugoslavia" (FBIS 8 June 1993, 29). Whether the implementation of the ideology was the cause of Yugoslavia's collapse is highly arguable. What is most important to note is the embeddedness of the economic realm in the Yugoslav system and the considerable authority of local level institutions.

## **2.5 Distribution of socially owned apartments: the case of Energoinvest**

The Sarajevo Energy Investment Corporation (Energoinvest and prior to that Elektroprenos) was one of the first major enterprises in Yugoslavia to form workers' councils and introduce the system of self-management. In its heyday it was the country's largest exporter, earning 61 % of the total income of the Federal Republic and employing over 54,000 employees (Short profile of the company Energoinvest d.d. 2006). It had over 120 working organizations throughout Yugoslavia, multiple research institutes, and considerable presence outside of the country.

As the republic's largest single commercial enterprise, Energoinvest owned a significant share of the city's socially owned housing stock. I attempted to find out the exact number or percentage of the company's share and although the figures exist I was not given the needed information. Presently, Energoinvest's managers are attempting to privatize 51% of the company. Allegedly, they have used their 'networks' to reduce its worth in order to buy it out at an unreasonably low price. The entire matter is said to lack transparency.

All socially owned apartments belonged to the state or a state-owned company like Energoinvest. The ratio of socially to privately owned apartments in 1990 was

80:20% from a total of 1,294.896 (Hogić 1992, 5). Apartments belonging to state owned companies were distributed through a housing commission (*Komisija Za Stambena Pitanja*) that was appointed by the workers' council of a company. All employees were entitled to file a claim for the allocation of housing. In turn, the housing commission used a point-based system to finalize a decision. Points were allotted on the basis of one's position, length of tenure, level of education, family size, performance, health, etc. Ranked accordingly, primacy was given to the employee with the most number of points. Nevertheless, a number of apartments were set-aside for the company's leading cadre. In this sense, personnel valuable to the company were from the start at an advantage. Residents that received occupancy rights, which could be inherited by a family member, paid every month an insignificant amount of money to the company's housing fund. The money from the Housing Contribution Fund was in turn used for the construction of more apartment buildings.

According to former and present Energoinvest employees and interviewed residents, employee ranking and allocation of housing units were ostensibly done without regard to ethno-religious background or nationality. As with the building under discussion, most apartment buildings were very heterogeneous. It could happen that two employees from different nationalities worked in the same department, lived in the same building, and were part of the same council.

## **2.6 Building solidarity through local level government institutions**

Shortly after the 1945 liberation local level government institutions throughout Yugoslavia assumed a vital and active role in efforts to establish the new Communist order in Yugoslavia. They geared popular enthusiasm in the desired direction and helped eliminate what were represented as "counter-revolutionary" sentiments. Essentially, the Federal government effectively utilized local governments to implement an ideology that aimed to transform both 'Man and society' (Donia 2006, 215). Some of their responsibilities included 'eliminating all forms of inequality and achieving mass participation in public life' (Donia 2006, 215). Initially this was done by 'organizing work brigades, reordering associational life, building an educational system, and

constructing residential settlements following egalitarian principles' (Donia 2006, 215). However, once the principles of workers' self-management were raised from the enterprise level to the national level, eventually incorporating all sectors of society, the authority of local level government institutions was further augmented.

The *opština* (municipality), as the fundamental governing unit, attained considerable political independence and authority. It became in the 1950s "the fundamental political-territorial organization of self-management of working people and fundamental social-economic unit of the population on its territory" (cited in Donia 2006, 235). The responsibilities of municipalities were numerous. Municipalities established and maintained daycare centers, kindergartens, primary schools, hospitals, employment offices, cultural, sports and arts institutions. They developed and executed local development strategies, mobilized residents and enterprises in community efforts and generally sought opportunities to improve life of the community. Even the maintenance of peace, order, morality and public decency was under their responsibility. However, in order to execute and fulfill their duties municipalities depended on local committees.

The *mjesna zajednica*, neighborhood or local committee (hereafter MZ), was the smallest administrative unit that rapidly developed and spread throughout Yugoslavia in the 1970s. It served as a community governance institution representing local interest and an intermediary between citizens and the municipal administration. Although their effectiveness was most pronounced in rural areas, MZ's played a crucial role in organizing and implementing local infrastructure projects. Established on a territorial basis and highlighting local concerns, MZ's dealt with everything from the restoration of streetlights to distribution of gas masks and development of an evacuation plan in the event of a Soviet invasion. Each MZ relied heavily on the corresponding municipality for approval of projects, funds, resources etc.

The residents of the building under discussion belonged to *Opština Centar*, MZ *Koševo I*. According to the residents, the MZ was utilized as a direct participation mechanism. It placed neighborhood's needs to the forefront, ensuring its constituents representation on the municipal level. The MZ sought to develop the community in various ways aside from physical improvement. For instance, it organized social activities such as chess tournaments and field trips. Although citizens referred to

participation as a 'citizens' duty', it was voluntary. During weekly meetings attendance was, according to the recollections of those I interviewed, high and citizens were voluntarily very involved in all matters relating to the community.

Aside from the MZ there was also the *kućni savjet* (house council hereafter KS). The house council assumed responsibilities pertaining to a particular building. Monthly responsibilities of the house council included basic maintenance and the purchase of coal and water. In addition, they dealt with problems as they arose (e.g., roof repairs, maintenance of courtyard, etc.). Residents would vote on a president of the KS whose appointment was reported to the MZ. To make matters official the MZ assigned seals to each KS. As the spokesperson for the building, the president's job was to collect money from the residents and represent their interests on the MZ level. All decisions were reached through consensus and they collectively met only when needed. When asked whether anyone ever refused to give money for decided on improvements, a resident informed me '...everyone always paid, it was shameful not to.'

In sum, the residential apartment building Alipašina 7 was a typical concrete manifestation of the Yugoslav system of 'workers self management' and 'brotherhood and unity.' The intimate domestic spaces of the apartments and common hallways of the building reflected not only the lives of the residents of the apartments but a multiethnic spatiality made concrete and a common life lived in normal and routine ways by residents who called themselves neighbors before anything else. That was to change as war engulfed Yugoslavia and shells descended upon the urban fabric of Sarajevo.

## Chapter 3

### Wartime Sarajevo

#### 3.1 Disintegration of Yugoslavia and the outbreak of war in B-H

The Serb people warn you that you will not be able to negotiate at The Hague with any kind of document on sovereignty. The Serb people know what you want, and what you want to say at The Hague—that this is the third or fourth republic that does not want to remain in Yugoslavia. The path you have chosen is the same highway that led Croatia to hell, only that hell will be even worse in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where the Muslims could cease to exist (Speech by the Serbian nationalist leader Radovan Karadzic to a Bosnian assembly parliamentary session, 14 October 1991, cited in Berić 2000, 41).

The psychiatrist from Sarajevo and now indicted war criminal, Radovan Karadžić, confidently voiced his threat on the floor of the B-H parliament in autumn of 1991. His message was clear and prophetic: Bosnia was on a highway to hell and its Muslim population faced annihilation! With Slovenia and Croatia independent, the multiethnic republic found itself in the most precarious position ever. Whether it opted to remain in a rump Yugoslavia or claimed independence, either alternative would prove problematic and costly. Just how costly many did not know or foresee.

Militant forms of ethno-nationalisms had replaced socialist Yugoslavia's hallmark slogan of 'brotherhood and unity'. Innovative ethnocentric ideologies fashioned a new understanding of national identity and championed the idea that it was no longer possible for different national groups to live together. Intellectuals, mythologists and political entrepreneurs drew on untenable and egocentric interpretation of national histories to revive and exacerbate notions of fear, danger, oppression and annihilation. Appropriate imagery, symbolism and discourses were hypnotically invoked to advance individual agendas. Histories were recontextualized to reflect periods of suffering and persecution in order to legitimate an array of nation-building projects. With each side advocating their

victimization, the presence of ethnic ‘others’ was unwelcome and threatening. By playing on people’s fears the discourse helped mobilize Serb forces into what they saw as a preemptive strike against the establishment of an independent ‘Muslim Bosnia.’ The geopolitical objective of what became the Bosnian Serb army was articulated by Karadzic in a speech before the self-styled ‘Assembly of Republika Srpska’ in May 1992: the separation of the ‘national communities’ in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The persistent and prolonged exposure to emotionally driven ethnocentric discourses led many to believe that indeed Yugoslavia was an artificial creation consisting of antagonistic national communities. Nationalism coupled with a decade long political and economic crisis helped sharpen a new (and exclusivist) sense of identity and consciousness to which poorer and ethnically mixed communities were particularly vulnerable. With the breakdown of the old order and new nationalist consciousness being promoted by the media, longstanding grievances were transformed into orchestrated acts of aggression. Politics gave way to violence and warfare.

### **3.2 Sarajevo descends into war**

In an interview with *Gazeta Wyborcza*’s correspondent Adam Michnik, Dobrica Ćosić, the former President of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, made the following statement: “How did the war in Bosnia begin? It began in the middle of Sarajevo itself, when the bridegroom’s father was shot at a Serb wedding” (FBIS 8 June 1993). Ćosić’s conceptualization of the event and the outbreak of war helped sustain a particularly important storyline. Story lines serve as “devices through which actors are positioned, and through which specific ideas of ‘blame’ and ‘responsibility’ and of ‘urgency’ and ‘responsible behaviour’ are attributed” (Hajer 1995, 65). Although only two sentences, the implications of Ćosić’s statement are manifold. First, the war is conceptualized as an internal affair. Second, the death of Nikola Gardović (the bridegroom’s father) on a Serb wedding in the republic’s capital, sustains the SDS’ storyline of Serb victimization and endangerment. Even in a city like Sarajevo, known for its multiethnic spatiality, Serbian existence is threatened. Third, by specifying that the wedding was ‘Serb’ and not simply a wedding, Ćosić participates within and encourages ethnonational categorization. The

meaning of the event is ethnicized beyond its local causes and circumstances. Lastly, by attributing a single event to the outbreak of war he drastically simplifies the problem. The articulated conceptualization may not reflect his true understanding of reality but to an outsider it is simple to understand, logical and moving. Furthermore, the emotional appeal of the storyline cannot be undermined, as a joyous event turns tragic for the “Serbian nation.”

The Serbian Democratic Party (*Srpska demokratska partija* SDS) led by Radovan Karadzic was the leading ethno-political organization which promoted the narrative of Serb victimization as a justification for the violence they helped coordinate against non-Serbs across Bosnia. After the decision to seek a republic-wide referendum on whether Bosnia should become an independent state or not (widely opposed by Bosnian Serbs at the urging of the Belgrade-based Yugoslav media), SDS members erected barricades and checkpoints throughout the city of Sarajevo. They justified their actions by citing Serbian victimization as another Serb died without the alleged gunman being held accountable. In response to the SDS’ actions, SDA members erected their own set of barricades. An emergency meeting was held to resolve the issue.

Sarajevans, not feeling represented by any party, refused to stand idly as their future was being decided. Local radio and television stations made emotional appeals encouraging people to get out on the streets in a nonviolent protest. In one of the first out of many protests to come, thousands of people assembled on the opposite sides of the city. Their goal was to dismantle the barricades and unite at the Assembly Building. Fortunately, an agreement had already been reached by the expanded presidency to dismantle the barricades. Pleased demonstrators proceeded by celebrating the outcome on the streets of Sarajevo in cheer and song. Encouraged by the people’s enthusiasm, the multiethnic Social Democratic Party (*Socijaldemokratska partija*, SDP) party organized more rallies throughout the month of March, some of which I personally attended.

April proved not to be as peaceful of a month. In anticipation of the European Community’s decision on Bosnia’s sovereignty, the SDS party established a separate Serb police force. They began their attacks on civilians and significant institutions before a decision was passed. Civilians, once again, set out to the streets hoping to convey that Sarajevo stood united. As some entered the Assembly Building demanding the

resignation of nationalist leaders, others attempted to dismantle the barricades. This time the unarmed civilians were fired upon. The sporadic but, nevertheless, intentional gunshots failed to discourage the brave crowds from proceeding.

Suada Dilberović, originally from Dubrovnik but studying at the University of Sarajevo, had joined the crowds in their efforts. As she was crossing the Vrbanja Bridge she came under sniper fire. The bullet coming from the direction of the Holiday Inn took Suada's life. Five more people were killed immediately after her. The second victim was a Croat woman by the name of Olga Sučić. Following the incident Suada was recognized as the first victim of the war (though scores of Bosniacs had been killed the day previously in the northwest town of Bijeljina). In her honor the bridge on which she was killed was renamed after her.

Despite the demonstrators' courageous efforts they were unable to deter the military formations aligned with the SDS. Serb forces along with units of the JNA expanded their assaults and seized total control over parts of the city. Sarajevo was surrounded and cut off from rest of the country and world. Nevertheless, Serb forces pressed on with their campaign to partition the city using policies of systematic terror, looting and purging for forty-three months. Throughout the siege dozens, if not hundreds, of stories of interethnic camaraderie materialized. Stories emblematic of Sarajevans 'common life', courage, solidarity, multiethnic spatiality made headlines locally and globally. One such story was that of Admira Ismić and Boško Brkić, later represented in the media as 'Sarajevo's Romeo and Juliet.' Admira a Muslim and Boško a Serb professed that only a bullet could keep them from being together. While crossing the Vrbanja Bridge a sniper instantaneously killed Boško and wounded Admira. She crawled over to his dead body, placed her arms around him and died. Their bodies lay on the bridge for five days due to the fierce fighting.

A second story is a testimony to the endurance of Sarajevo's traditions of multiethnicity amidst the most difficult circumstances of the siege. *Oslobodjenje*, the Sarajevo daily, with its multiethnic staff worked from a basement bomb shelter to continue publishing the everyday realities of besieged Sarajevo. Despite deplorable circumstances their determination failed to wane. According to a Pulitzer Prize winning American journalist Roy Gutman: "It is a miracle that the city, the state, the newspaper,

and the ideals they held in common, survived. *Oslobodjenje* made its contribution to this miracle, and at war's end remains what it had been at the start: the voice of multiethnic Bosnia" (cited in Kurspahic 1997, xxii).

### 3.3 Understanding Sarajevo's physical destruction: uricide and the assault on heterogeneity

Sarajevo means more than appears to the outsider. The death of Sarajevo would be the death of an idea; if Sarajevo falls or is partitioned, then something dies psychologically as well as physically. We developed a way of life here through who our friends were and the kind of conversations we had. And suddenly we realize what that way of life was: we were going to shut out the historical hatreds. Quite unconsciously, this city was living what Bosnia is all about. But people are now conscious of this. Without it, we would be going mad, or would have opted for easy life and surrendered. Under siege, the city has suddenly recognized itself (cited in Vulliamy, 1994; 79-80).



Figure 3.1. Sarajevo Surrounded City. Photograph of poster taken by author (2006).

A siege, according to Michael Walzer, is 'the oldest form of total war' (Walzer 2000, 160). Its principal aim is surrender; achieved through 'the fearful spectacle of the civilian dead' and not 'the defeat of the enemy army' (Walzer 2000, 161). It is a war in which

noncombatants are preferred targets. Conceptualized as such, the outcome of siege warfare is more dependent on civilian morale than military victory. Distinguishing between political and nonpolitical forms of resistance, Walzer argues that the “greater resistance is nonpolitical in character, deeply rooted in feelings of place and kin: the unwillingness to leave one’s home, to separate from friends and family, to become a refugee” (Walzer 2000, 165). The feelings mentioned by Walzer signify our attachment to a way of life characteristic of a place. As the enemy aims to destroy a ‘way of life’, the victims resist to preserve it.

A ‘way of life’ is also broadly conceptualized as culture. Culture, as the embodiment of a way of life, is inevitably spatial. According to Don Mitchell, culture is ‘constituted through space and as a space.’ Places and spaces reflect our conceptualization of ourselves. They shape identity and adjudicate cultural power. Places and spaces comprise material artifacts that are representational of our ideas and values. Material artifacts help create and sustain myths and beliefs and are thus indispensable from understanding the constitution of culture.

This conceptualization can clearly be applied to Sarajevo. The city as site of multiethnic community and spatiality was especially targeted for destruction. Whereas in many rural parts of Bosnia people lived together but separately, Sarajevo’s urban culture was characterized by heterogeneity and solidarity. Various traditions and influences amalgamated to define its spatiality. Sarajevo as a symbol of urban culture, progress and coexistence, had to be destroyed in order for the aggressor to legitimate and naturalize ethnic separateness. As noted earlier, the subsequent destruction of the city’s buildings and its urban fabric has been termed “urbicide.”

For Martin Coward urbicide is a phenomenon that needs to be understood in its own right. The city’s destruction can be conceptualized in various ways. The most obvious argument proposes that destruction is an unfortunate but, nevertheless, necessary and strategic byproduct of war. Destruction of material artifacts was caused either out of military necessity or as collateral damage (i.e., unintentionally). Coward argues that both conceptualizations are unsatisfactory. According to information reports on war damage, there is enough evidence to conclude that symbolic buildings (e.g. houses of worship, National Library, Oriental Institute) were deliberately targeted, while buildings of no

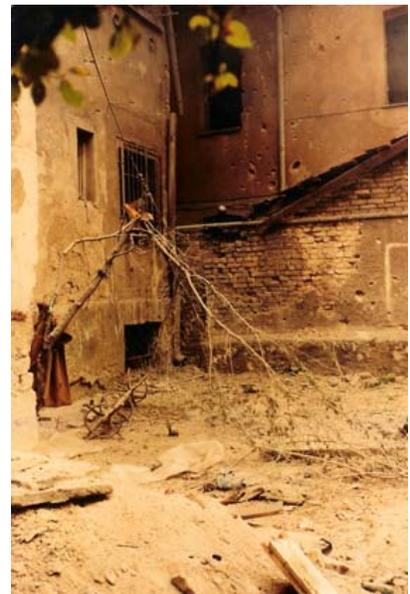
military significance were likewise under relentless attack. For this reason, neither ‘collateral damage’ nor military necessity suffices to explain the widespread destruction of urban fabric.

A second conceptualization stresses cultural loss through the destruction of emblematic buildings representational of a cultural heritage. The ethnonationalists’ objective is to destroy all symbolic buildings of a cultural heritage in order to achieve ethnic purity and naturalize the impossibility of coexistence. Although a logical argument in the Bosnian context, it fails to account for the destruction of buildings of no distinct cultural value.

The shortfalls of the conceptualizations lead Martin Coward to argue that ‘the destruction of urban fabric in Bosnia should be treated as a conceptual problematic in its own right’ (Coward 2004, 165). Buildings of no strategic or symbolic significance were targeted during the war (Figure 3.2-3.3).



**Figure 3.2. Building in the midst of war (1993).**  
Picture of the Alipašina 7 building (the rear view). During the course of the war the building sustained over 13 direct hits (photograph courtesy of Amra Kurtagic, 1993).



**Figure 3.3. Building's Courtyard.**  
Picture of the courtyard that was once the site of the children's imaginary kingdom (photograph courtesy of Amra Kurtagic, 1993).

At stake in their destruction was the city's urban fabric: ideas, sentiments, practices and, above all, heterogeneity. For ethnonationalists the destruction of heterogeneity and the possibility of heterogeneity is integral to the establishment of ethnic separateness and

homogeneity. Thus, “the destruction of urban fabric transforms agonistic heterogeneity into the antagonism of separate ethnicities” (Coward 2004, 168).

### **3.4 Living amidst absurdity: how locals coped with war**

Despite their awareness of the situation in Slovenia and Croatia, the residents of Alipasina 7, like most other Sarajevan residents (myself included), did not foresee the tragic events awaiting them. Even as they watched the events unfolding in towns like Vukovar, a collective sense of disbelief, even denial, was prevalent. While many have written about Sarajevans’ state of shock and disbelief at the outbreak of war, the description I found most comparable to the stories of the residents was that of Kemal Kurspahić (editor-in-chief of *Oslobodenje*). Kurspahic writes:

The war did not come to Sarajevo completely without warning. But loving that marvelous city the way we did, serene in the belief that its diversity of cultures, traditions, and religions was a special blessing, a gift, and entirely secure in the respect that each one of us was raised to give to his neighbor, we refused to consider the possibility that something as devastating as a fratricidal war could ever happen to us. Our city and those who dwelt there, we thought, led a charmed life (Kurspahic 1997, 105).

Those that foresaw conflict were convinced it would not last and play itself out as it did in Croatia. After all, they reasoned, Sarajevo was famous for its tradition of coexistence and tolerance. Its inhabitants had strongly mobilized against the onset of war.

Demonstrations and peace rallies, most believed, signified that divisions along national lines and war were unwelcome. But war came nevertheless and irrespective of their initial convictions, with almost half the city’s original inhabitants gone, no electricity and water, shortage of food and relentless shelling, most came to terms with the grim reality.

Conceptualizing what was happening was particularly difficult for those who never identified or thought along ethno-religious lines (as was the case with all of the interviewees). Somewhat abruptly categories/labels that theretofore carried no meaning were now of outmost importance. As noted by Beric, “I grew up in a multi-ethnic community, I am a cosmopolitan by conviction, but now others had a new role in mind

for me. That meant it was up to me to behave according, which meant like a Serb” (Beric 2002, 17). Yet, despite the atrocious events and imposition of ethno-national categorization, many Sarajevans failed to look at their longtime neighbors, colleagues, and friends through a ‘nationalist lens.’ The war was conceptualized as a product of primitivisms and ignorance, Serbian hegemony and lust, political elites individual agendas and manipulation. According to one resident, Sarajevo was the ‘thorn in everyone’s eye’. It carried a symbolic significance that simply had to be destroyed. It represented a way of life that clashed with the primitive and chauvinist mentalities of individuals like Radovan Karadžić, a peasant boy from Durmitor (a small rural part of Montenegro) who received his education in Sarajevo and worked as a psychiatrist but never adapted to the Sarajevan ways.

Feelings of disbelief and optimism were replaced by fear after electricity and water were cut off and the shelling failed to subside. At that point, Sanja explained, she realized it would last longer than initially thought. According to another resident, during the first six months everyone was in a state of shock. Disruption of normality (to) and daily routines was at first a major cause of distress and anxiety. Afterwards the reverse of peacetime conditions came to characterize that normality. The residents adapted to the changed circumstances, living on minimal amounts of food, with no water and electricity, and under constant fire.



**Figure 3.4. ‘Careful Sniper’ Alipašina street during the war.**  
Alipašina Street during the war (Spring 1993). Unlike in photograph 3.5 no trees can be seen. On the light pole it reads: Careful Sniper (photograph courtesy of Amra Kurtagic)



**Figure 3.5. Alipašina street following the war.**  
Alipašina Street (Summer 2004). View from the top of the building in the direction of Zetra (photograph taken by author).

Fear was their companion until the very end, but already few months into the war they tamed it through their adaptation to the changed circumstances. A resident explained to me: ‘when you hear the whistle of a mortar shell (what appeared to be above your head)

it was a good sign; it meant you are safe. When a few whiz over your head and the next one you do not hear, you fear for your life.’ Survival instincts came to predominate and everyone’s concerns revolved around the basics: food, water and heat. According to Sanja, no one thought about tomorrow or the next month; there was a general preoccupation with day-to-day existence.

Residents told me that they became immune to the noise, destruction, blood, rising death toll: they had to in order to preserve their sanity. Everyone sought out ways to ease their nerves. Some did so through writing, playing cards, daydreaming, and in Amra’s case sweeping. She swept to calm and distract herself whenever the city was under heavy attack. A few of the residents explained to me that living enclosed by four walls, without electricity and water and in fear, was not living at all. Their most basic needs were not met and powerlessness and hopelessness came to characterize their lives. They could not stand to be indoors any longer. News of civilians dying in apartments, houses even cellars, further encouraged them to step outside. There was the widespread belief that if you were destined to die, you would die. Thus, many returned to their prewar routines, pretending to lead a ‘normal’ life.

With all the absurdity surrounding them they attempted to lead a normal life by going to work, school, parties etc. (Figure 3.6-3.7).



**Figure 3.6. Sarajevans going to work.**  
In their attempt to lead a normal life many Sarajevans regularly went to work, as can be seen in this photograph (photograph courtesy of Amra Kurtagic, 1993).



**Figure 3.7. Maintaining normality in times of war.**  
Hot summer day - Ira Erić and Amela Festić ‘enjoying’ the day in the courtyard (photograph courtesy of Amra Kurtagic, 1992).

According to the residents, everyone also tried to look their best. Their attire represented their dignity, culturedness (i.e., urban culture) and resistance. They refused to be reduced to passive victims whose lives had been stolen. Dressing up was an act that characterized

their prewar ways and added at least a little more meaning to their otherwise traumatic lives.

Teenagers found ways to socialize and organize parties despite parental disapproval. Predominantly they gathered in apartments and basements. There they played music and occasionally shared Sarajevo beer and cigarettes when they could find them. Even though after the first year, 'underground' cafes and clubs opened, many continued to meet at apartments and on the street.

Residents also celebrated in the same spirit holidays such as New Years. For the first New Year's celebration in 1993, Amela and Sabrina managed to attain two canisters of beer from the Sarajevo Brewery. In light of the event residents also saved lunch parcels they received from the US Army. They welcomed the New Year completely inebriated and with a full stomach.

Apart from the shelling, police hours, and shortage of food, the most notable change within the building was the turnover of its residents due to war. The first family to leave the building was the Krčmar family (an all Bosnian Serb family). Save (head of the household) openly supported Milosević and decided to move to Belgrade early April of 1992. Aside from the Krčmar's departure, everyone remained until the situation got considerably worse. Most residents were older and not eager to leave their homes. Circumstances led them to reconsider. Over half of the original inhabitants left the building at different periods of the war. Some residents left their keys to family members who eventually came to occupy the vacant apartment. Others locked up and left not knowing when they would return. The Jewish family in the building, the Srajbers, managed to leave Sarajevo at the end of 1992 thanks to a rescue convey organized by Sarajevo's Jewish community with outside support. They left their keys to the community who then used the apartment to accommodate driven out families. By the end of 1992, five families had vacated their apartments and moved out of the country. Their departures were made possible by organized convoys. In 1993 two more families decided to leave. The Simunovic family believed they would be better off staying at a family house in Fojnica than in Sarajevo. According to the first floor resident, they thought their chances of survival were greater in Fojnica. Another resident left Sarajevo with a Slovenian organized convoy because of her health and lack of medical resources.

As long standing residents left, more than seven new families from the Sarajevo suburbs, predominantly from Grbavica, Ilidza, Hadžići and Dobrinja, found refuge in the building. The newcomers were either driven out of their prewar homes or fled because of the imminent danger. How they came to reside in the Alipasina 7 building varied. Jasmina, for instance, lived in Dobrinja but worked as a hairdresser next door to the building. She knew many of the residents and thus asked them for assistance. The residents informed her about an empty apartment into which she moved in with her two daughters. The Music family was informed and given permission to move into a vacant apartment by the ABiH. Similarly, Energoinvest secured housing for some of its employees who were assigned an empty apartment in the building. Both the army and firms usually relied on lists of vacant apartments provided by the MZ. Driven out families turned to the *opstina* and more frequently the MZ to request housing.

### **3.5 Conceptualizing common life during time of war**

The systematic and sustained attack was as much an assault on Sarajevans' socio-cultural norms as on human life. Interviews suggest that socio-cultural norms remained—to a great extent—intact during the war, but significantly changed following it. Residents, whether old or new, adapted their norms to war conditions, slightly altering prewar conceptualizations of common life and neighborly relations. Circumstances led residents to form stronger bonds of solidarity characteristic of the prewar period. Countless hours in the cellar and individual apartments were accompanied with a greater level of interaction. Similarly, with safety and basic sustenance concerns predominating, trust and cooperation amplified.

As the situation in Sarajevo rapidly deteriorated residents congregated to decide and implement security measures that might improve their chances of survival. Although few in number, the male residents were first to initiate meetings and discuss self-defense in the event enemy forces entered the city. They all feared the coming of enemy forces from Trebevic. Fears heightened once a warning was announced over the radio that Serb forces were about to enter Skenderija (location not too far from them). Collectively and consensually they decided to barricade the front door and assign a person to monitor the

surrounding. One resident who had in his possession a Kalashnikov made it available to all males in charge of monitoring. The cellar was cleaned and the windows were covered. Lights were not to be switched on. Residents that did not have a spouse or children usually volunteered to get water and other necessities. Later on, they collectively secured and eventually cut the trees in the front and rear of the building. They also attempted to do some gardening in the courtyard. A conscious effort was made by the residents to protect the vacant apartments and not permit just anyone from accessing them.

Once electricity and water were cut off, neighbors went to Amra, the first floor resident, to prepare their food. Unlike most residents, Amra had a proper wood-burning stove that she received from her employer, an export import firm that decided to distribute available merchandise amongst employees before it was looted. Knowing in what type of situation others were, Amra opened her door to all neighbors and visitors. Initially most came to cook their food. However, once winter arrived, in addition to cooking their meals, they came for warmth. While some came and went, others stayed the entire day. Special care was taken of the elderly who were usually brought in the morning to the apartment and picked up in the late afternoon. From sharing heat, they came to share all resources they had: food, water, wood, candles, books etc. Every so often, as many residents as could fit, slept in the same room or apartment. This was especially the case with neighbors from the sixth floor for whom it was not safe to remain in their unit due to the ever present danger of shelling.

The building's residents extended their hospitality to foreigners as well. Amongst the many that passed through was the celebrated photographer Annie Leibovitz, who at the time was working for the American magazine *Vanity Fair* and with the writer Susan Sontag. Miss Leibovitz specifically came to visit Velibor, an actor from the play *Waiting for Godot*. But she also took the time to socialize with most of the residents. Following her visit a small part of a short documentary movie (also entitled *Waiting for Godot*) about the play's actors was shot in the building.

Another group of foreigners that left a memorable impression were a few brave individuals from Strasbourg (Alsace), France. They voluntarily came to deliver aid packages to Sarajevans from the people of Alsace. Coincidentally, they came on the day

a young girl within the building was killed.<sup>1</sup> The visitors were deeply sympathetic. They shared with the residents their parents and grandparent's stories of struggle during WWII. Most had family members who fled Germany during that time.

No distinctions were drawn between newcomers, old residents and residents of different ethno-religious backgrounds (Figure 3.8).



**Figure 3.8. Sarajevans Common life**

Diversity during war.

Bottom Row: Velibor Topic (Croat from Mostar), Amela Festic (Bosniac), Sabrina Derberovic (Bosniac), Dejan Lemez (Serb from Rajlovac)

Top Row: Sanja Kurtagic (Bosniac), Amra Kurtagic (Bosniac), Maida Kurtagic (Bosniac)

Picture taken by Paul Moretta (Protestant) – British Journalist/Photographer for Daily Telegraph

According to Senada at some point during the war, while sitting in the cellar they attempted to figure out 'who was what'. As noted earlier, they were unaccustomed to ethno-religious categorization and with many mixed marriages and children of mixed marriages it was difficult to place a person into a single category (or assign a label). Those who joined the aggressors were perceived and labeled as traitors and 'Chetniks,' but not Serbs. Serbs did not only sit amongst them, they lost their lives while queuing for bread and fought alongside other Bosnians in defense of the city. Nevertheless, Serbs that remained in the building never denied that they shared the same ethno-religious background as the aggressors.

The residents' refusal to conceptualize all Serbs as 'others' or enemies led them to protect a young man that refused to enlist in the Army of Bosnia-Herzegovina (*Armija Bosne i Hercegovine*, ABiH). Dejan was originally from Rajlovac, a territory under Serbian control. Although his family remained in Rajlovac, he lived with his girlfriend Sabrina on the sixth floor. With his family on the opposite side he feared that by joining the military he would one day face a familiar face through a gun's scope. All residents knew about his situation. Dejan had no identification card; he was of a critical age and 'questionable' nationality. Yet, none of the residents had any problems with his decision

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<sup>1</sup> Aida Dizdar was instantaneously killed in January 1994 as she was trying to feed her dog. She lived with her mother Ajsa and sister Sanja on the third floor. They moved into the building in 1993 (after they were forced to leave their home in Grbavica).

(at least not openly). Instead they even helped to hide him during MZ organized checks (popis).

As good as the inter-personal relations between residents were, for many it was still a time of disappointments and confusion. Almost every resident had a friend, work colleagues or even family member who, as residents derisively put it, ‘went to *their* side’. According to *The Guardian* journalist Ed Vulliamy, there were 150,000 Serbs living in Sarajevo, “of whom 90,000 remained behind in the capital to endure the siege and fight alongside the Muslims and Croats” (Vulliamy 1994, 40). There is no way to independently verify this latter figure. That many had deliberately chosen to leave was material evidence of differences within Sarajevo and convinced many that it was no longer possible to peacefully coexist. This took a painful personal form for one resident of the building. Mrs Pita, in apartment number 3, was abandoned by her husband and left to care for their only son at the onset of war. According to her, her husband was a Serb from Čačak who ‘fled to his side’ once the war erupted. His actions came to her as a surprise for she claims ‘prior to the war nationalism was not pronounced’ (Mediha 2006). Many have come to believe that their longtime friends, acquaintances and family members were actually leading double lives. In my interviews with them, residents frequently drew a parallel between ethnonationalism and primitivism. Those who surrendered to ethnonationalism were conceptualized as primitive. As noted by Kurspahic:

Sarajevo and all that it symbolized was being attacked by barbarians, as it were, who had not been touched by the civilizing, life-affirming cosmopolitanism that had flourished in Bosnia’s urban centers and shaped the social ethos of its people. Born and raised in isolated, godforsaken regions, crushed by the burden of history in which the Serb was the eternal victim, they had never learned to coexist with “others.” Some of these men had acquired academic degrees, professions or political careers—and a patina of urbane sophistication—but they despised the hybrid culture that defined Bosnia (Kurspahic 1997, 116).

### **3.6 Political economy / governance: Wartime Sarajevo**

Yugoslavia's transition from a one party secular socialist system to a multiparty capitalist state gradually began, although unsuccessfully, in the 1980s. Political decentralization, an economic crisis and the advent of nationalism had led to the launching of major reforms. In an attempt to save Yugoslavia from complete economic ruin, the Federal Prime Minister, Ante Marković, made a few daring proposals that included austerity measures, trade and price liberalization, and a plan for privatization of social property. The implementation of Marković's proposals proved to be risky. Debates over constitutional changes, integral to further economic reforms, set republics on divergent paths. The pervasive tug of war between the federal government and the republics led to a breakdown of the old order and marked the beginning of political polarization and then warfare. For the British political scientist Susan Woodward, "The multiparty elections in Yugoslavia in 1990, rather than being a regular instrument of popular choice and expression of political freedom or the transition to a democratic system, became the critical turning point in the process of political disintegration over a decade of economic crisis and constitutional conflict" (Woodward 1995, 118).

Prior to the multiparty election in B-H, the economic crisis exposed the government's inability to effectively deal with the problems at hand. Popular discontent soared as economic hardships infringed upon collective and individual security. The government, unable to address citizen's grievances, acquired a reputation for making promises it had no capacity or means of keeping. With its weakness exposed, citizens resorted to older norms of reciprocity and mutuality. In light of these events multiparty elections were held, with political change on the minds of voters. Nationalist parties took the lead in highlighting socialism's failures while promising to work together. However, their promises of a better tomorrow applied, in the end, only to members of their ethnic group.

Unsurprisingly, the three nationalist parties came out victorious in the elections of November 1990. They won substantial number of seats at all levels of government across Bosnia. On the municipal level, they gained control over 107 (out of 109) municipal assemblies including a key presence in the ten opstina that made up greater

Sarajevo (Donia 2006, 262). In the city council they received enough seats (73 out of 120) to weaken the City of Sarajevo and change its political structure. Competition for funds and services amongst municipalities made divisions apparent and cooperation became strained and later impossible. Municipal leaders sought greater autonomy and some threatened to secede. Members of the SDS party, holding important positions, were particularly adamant about the need to divide the city. They steadily worked on establishing institutions parallel to existing ones in order to undermine their jurisdiction and assert their own power. The objective was translated into policy and through the creation of Serb institutions the City of Sarajevo was divided.

Throughout the war Sarajevo was a divided city split not only by competing armies and political parties but also rival criminal gangs. Serb paramilitaries and the VRS had complete control over parts of the city and the strategic heights that gave them an unassailable position. On the other hand, the Bosnian government's powers were very limited as disorder prevailed. Unauthorized checkpoints were stationed throughout the city. Each neighborhood established its own defense committee and even the city's chief defense unit, the ABiH, lacked cohesion. Cooperation between the Croatian Council of Defense (*Hrvatsko Vijeće Odbrane*, HVO) and the ABiH was limited and in 1993 broke into warfare (Donia 2006, 292). With the government politically and economically debilitated, local level institutions' responsibilities augmented. Subsequently, the MZ became a crucial political organ for citizens of Sarajevo.

At the very outset of the war no institution was prepared to handle the many governance and security problems that quickly arose. Most routine activities of municipal administration were accompanied by a great deal of ambiguity and disorder. Citizens relied on their own abilities and networks to secure for their most basic needs, including shelter. Sarajevans from occupied parts of the city or in close proximity to the frontlines relocated to areas where they could find safer housing. Some moved in with family members or used the vacant apartments of friends. Others broke into empty ones. In an effort to regulate the matter, the nominal state and municipal governance structures passed the *Law on Abandoned Apartments*. The law gave local authorities the right to declare apartments abandoned and assign new occupancy rights on a temporary basis. However, for apartments that belonged to the JNA, the Ministry of Defense assumed

responsibility. An apartment could be reported as abandoned to local authorities by a myriad of governmental agencies and bureaucracies. Upon their initiative the appropriate municipal governance body had seven days to pass a decision (Hogic 1992, 8). In the event they failed, the Ministry of Environmental Protection, Physical Planning and Construction would assume the responsibility (Hogic 1992, 9).

In practice the MZ's assumed most of the responsibilities, but in accordance with municipal and federal guidelines. Early on MZ's took a very proactive role, filling the vacuum created by the collapse of the state and its retreat from everyday life. They held informative lectures and training on protection, defense and even first aid. Efforts were made by MZ's to organize schooling for kids and teenagers. More importantly, they organized civil protection and distributed humanitarian aid. MZ's had a good record keeping system upon which many institutions relied. All citizens who wished to receive aid had to be registered at a MZ. In addition, they sent out officials to verify and document circumstances within buildings. MZ's were therefore best able to deal with housing allocations. Based on their lists many Sarajevans managed to relocate to other apartments. They were also in charge of granting temporary occupancy rights.

In sum, wartime was a time when the multiethnicity spatiality of Sarajevo was under bombardment while the cultural attitudes that sustained the ideology of 'brotherhood and unity' began to change. Wartime, however, strengthened local proximate bonds of neighborliness and of a 'common life' of suffering and endurance.

## Chapter 4

### Postwar Sarajevo

#### 4.1 Sarajevo awakens from the siege

On February 29, 1996, the Federation's Interior Minister, Avdo Hebib, formally declared the end of the Sarajevo siege. Deeply wounded, the city was out of a war that sought to destroy its every facet: populace, heterogeneity, infrastructure, history, urban fabric, common life—its multiethnic spatiality. It awoke from the dark, considerably altered, to face a new set of challenges. The war-induced changes were not only physical, but also territorial, political and demographic. First, the city's industrial and service facilities were destroyed. Most houses and buildings, if not all, needed some or major repairs. Twenty percent of socially-owned apartments were over 60 percent damaged (ICG, 1998: 5). Second, because of the formation of two entities, with parts of the region administered by the FBiH and others by the RS, Sarajevo lost 39% of its (prewar) territory. Its remaining part had a new name, 'Serb Sarajevo' (now East Sarajevo). Third, the city's prewar political structure was revised. No longer did the city of Sarajevo consist of ten municipalities; it now had an additional layer of authority, the Sarajevo Canton. The Sarajevo Canton consists of nine re-organized municipalities of which four comprise City of Sarajevo: *Stari grad*, *Centar*, *Novi grad* and *Novo Sarajevo*. In the City Council, Croats and other minorities were guaranteed a number of seats. In other words, an ethnic key was institutionalized to balance ethnic interests and to protect the status of minorities. Fourth, the concept of 'minority' is itself inevitably tied to the city's changed demographics. Sarajevo's overall population has declined. The exodus of prewar inhabitants and influx of newcomers have dramatically altered the city's multiethnic composition. According estimates by the Federal Statistics Institute for the year 2005, the City of Sarajevo was 77.4% Bosniac, 11.9% Serb and 7.5% Croat (Federalni zavod za statistiku 2006). Some estimates suggest there are less than 700 Jews in Sarajevo. Picking up the pieces after a destructive war, Sarajevo's progress was

inevitably going to be difficult and slow. Whether the city could re-constitute the multiethnic imaginings of the ‘spirit of Sarajevo’ was an open question.

#### **4.2 Moving towards a market economy? Privatization and its challenges**

One merit of the Dayton Peace Accords (DPA) was an agreement on the need to address the war induced demographic changes. Specifically, it was established that the return of refugees and internally displaced was necessary and even integral to reconstruction. The returns process, however, was (and continues to be) a sensitive matter for both ethnonationalist leaders and forcefully displaced victims (i.e., returnees). The former do not endorse the returns process nor do they appreciate international community’s intervention in such matters. They prefer a divided B-H with ethnically pure territories primarily because it serves their personal economic and political interests. Within ethnically pure territories ethnonationalists are better able to consolidate their own authority and amass personal profits. The process has enabled many elected political officials and parastate employees connected to them to move into ‘abandoned’ property, usually occupying more than one home. They have used their power to obstruct the return of minorities and reaped benefits for themselves, friends and allies through misallocations.

Returnees faced tougher dilemmas. Many felt unwelcome in their temporary places of residence and wished nothing more than to return to perhaps the only thing they ever had. Often times they confronted challenges from either the current occupants or authorities. While some were eager, others rightfully feared the return to ethnically cleansed regions in which they would constitute minorities. Furthermore, a number of returnees were openly discouraged from returning (i.e., they are threatened) and in certain cases wished not to return because of the lack of opportunities and services in the regions they ‘abandoned’.

Alongside the initiative to promote returns, the international community encouraged B-H to speed up its transition to a market economy. A rapid and successful transition, they argued, would ensure economic prosperity. An economically prosperous state would be better able to integrate all members of society and overcome ethnic

divisions and hatreds. Subsequently, privatization was envisaged as an integral part of the process for it ‘depoliticized economic life and provided a basis for economic recovery and growth’ (Donais 2005, 115). It also served as a precondition for foreign investment.

The simultaneous initiation of two different but partially interdependent processes, failed in many ways to advance the desired objectives. Initially, laws passed during the war presented the biggest problem. Under the *Law on Abandoned Apartments* pre-war occupants had 7 days (if in the state and 15 if abroad) to return to their prewar domicile following the declaration of *Cessation of the State of War*. In the event they failed, municipal authorities or state owned companies had the right to assign new occupancy rights on a temporary or permanent basis. Conversely, occupancy right holders had the right to purchase the apartment within which they resided under the *Law on the Sale of Socially-owned Apartments*. This effectively prevented the return of prewar occupants. It was only after a number of years that the Office of the High Representative imposed laws on Bosnia’s two entities which amended or annulled these discriminatory laws. Nevertheless the problems continue.

Robert Donia has rightfully described the process of privatization in Bosnia as “lengthy, complex, costly, and filled with opportunities for obstruction and corruption by local officials” (Donia 2006, 347). Many of the problems are tied to the state’s political framework and the process’s rapid initiation in the absence of a solid institutional structure. To begin with, Bosnia does not have a single statewide agency in command of the implementation of privatization. The state’s privatization infrastructure consists of a dozen agencies and involves all levels of government. Unsurprisingly, nationalist parties have a vested interest in the process and, thus, squabble over its control.

The ethnicization of the privatization process presents a major challenge to ethnic reintegration. According to the political scientist Timothy Donais, “Bosnia’s ruling nationalists have had no illusions about an orderly, apolitical and technocratic privatization process, and few reservations about manipulating the process for their own political ends” (Donais 2005, 117). With local governments in charge of implementation, ruling parties have utilized and exploited the process to obstruct minorities from acquiring ownership and to amass personal profit and retain hold over the economy.

In an effort to speed up the transfer of assets into private hands and because of the absence of a capitalist class, a voucher method of privatization was adopted. One intent of the voucher method was to settle citizen's claims against the state. Citizens who obtained vouchers had the right to use them for the purchase of socially owned apartments and shares. However, the authorities in charge of the distribution of vouchers created a criterion that privileged their constituents. In other words, minorities were marginalized from participation in the privatization process and the resulting benefits.

Another drawback of the implemented method was the sale of impoverished citizen's vouchers to able buyers. While voucher privatization enabled many citizens to buy a socially owned apartment, many desperate citizens sold their vouchers on the market for less than the face value. Such types of transactions created 'opportunities for the wealthy, the corrupt, and the politically connected to consolidate their power' (Donais 2005, 116). The practice enabled buyers to invest or purchase enterprises using the vouchers of face value.

In the case of the residents of the previously owned Energoinvest building, the procedure to buy the state-owned company apartments was relatively straightforward. Following March 6, 1998 all residents with occupancy rights were urged to file a written 'request for purchase' with the company's housing commission (*Komisija Za Stambena Pitanja*) (Huremovic 1998, 8; Huremovic 2005, 23). The commission had three months from the date of receipt to review the claim and grant a decision. In the event they failed, a fine ranging from 1,000 to 10,000KM could be assessed (Huremovic 2005, 35). Based on entity and cantonal guidelines, the Commission established the percentage of discounts a buyer was entitled to. For instance, for every year worked a buyer was entitled to receive a 1% discount (not to exceed 75%). A buyer could also receive a discount for specific home improvements completed during time of occupancy. Additional discounts were given to war veterans, invalids, members of the civil protection force etc.

Following the Commission's approval the buyer was able to pay for the property using vouchers and/or money. Buyers who paid the full amount in ready money were entitled to an additional discount. Most of the residents, however, made the purchase

using both vouchers and money. Once the purchase was sealed the cadastre was notified of the transaction.

The residents did not interact much during the privatization process. Some residents never actually returned but reclaimed and sold their property through a lawyer. Residents filed their claims at different time periods and for different reasons. Some who did not have the needed vouchers to finalize the purchase had to wait until they had the money (usually in the form of a bank loan but also remittances) to do so. Others experienced delays because of uncertain occupancy rights. Overall, it was a very individualized process that did not generate much interaction amongst the residents.

### 4.3 Rebuilding Sarajevo in whose image?

Sarajevo's longstanding image and spatiality have been undeniably affected by the political, economic and social transformations. The state and city's present realities are the basis of new conceptualizations. At least two noticeably dissimilar conceptualizations of its spatiality exist. One stresses demographic changes, namely the overwhelming presence of Bosnian Muslims. The other relies on the city's rich history and image of a tolerant and diverse place. The politics of spatial production equally underlie both conceptualizations.

First, let us consider the question of the 'Muslim' identity of Sarajevo and Bosnia more generally. Many scholars and commentators contend that "Bosnian Muslim identity is being actively and consciously developed by combining the invocation of selected events from the past with common recent experiences" (Robinson, Engelstoft and Pobric 2001, 963).



**Figure 4.1. Ulica Zelenih Beretki.**

On this corner Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated by Gavrilo Princip. During Tito's era Princip was hailed for the act but since then the event has been recontextualized. The small green plaque on the right hand side is the street sign. The street (and bridge which cannot be seen in the picture but was called Princip's bridge) was renamed *Ulica Zelenih Beretki* (The street of Green Berets). The color of the street signs has also been changed from a dark blue to a green (photograph taken by author 2004).

Ostensibly there is nothing groundbreaking about the observation. Every nation-state relies on the invocation of carefully chosen events and experiences to construct or affirm an identity. In this particular case an ethno-religious (i.e., Bosnian Muslim) identity is being constructed and its invocation is materialized in the making of space. According to Robinson et al: “In pursuing its own version of an ethno-nationalist agenda the Bosnian Muslim leadership in Sarajevo had endeavored to foster a distinctive group identity in response to the ongoing external threats and divisions of territory imposed by the Accord” (Robinson, Engelstoft & Pobric 2001, 975). Many Bosnian partitionists believe that Sarajevo’s spatiality has been intentionally altered to demarcate/represent an exclusively Bosnian Muslim identity. In this manner, the role and even history of other ethnic communities were (intended to be) marginalized.

During and immediately following the war, Sarajevo’s spatiality (predictably) did not embody its well-known tolerance towards other ethnic groups. Local authorities obstructed minorities from returning, reclaiming their properties and obtaining necessary documents. Explosive devices were planted in a few churches and one Orthodox Church was set on fire. There were several ethnically motivated murders and numerous incidents of attack, harassment and illegal arrests. International organizations also reported discrimination in employment and education as a major problem.

The immediate postwar backlash against minorities, while inexcusable, was perhaps expected. Yet, the city’s spatiality is still—at least by some—no longer conceived or experienced as multiethnic. Demographically it is dominated by one ethnic group—the Bosnian Muslims. The city’s landscape has been decorated with sixteen new mosques most of which were constructed in the municipalities of *Novo Sarajevo* and



**Figure 4.2. Baščaršija**  
(photograph taken by author 2006).

*Novi Grad* (Medzlis Islamske zajednice Sarajevo 2007). The imposing aspect and horizon dominating grandeur of some cannot be missed. At least three have been constructed at central locations with donations from Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Jordan. To some they signify Bosnia’s Muslims move towards an orthodox and more

virulent forms of Islam. Conversely, no new Orthodox Churches have been constructed

in the City of Sarajevo since the 1940s and only two Catholic Churches have been built following the war (*Vrhbosanska Nadbiskupija* and *Srpska Pravoslavna Crkva Mitropolija Dabrobbosanska* 2007). Many restaurants and stores do not provide pork products or dishes. There are more veiled women on the streets of Sarajevo and attendance at mosques has risen (Figure 4.2). Muslim greetings such as *selam alejkum*, *merhaba* and *Allah imanet* are also more commonly heard. This contrast with past prewar public speech where people would greet each other with ‘*Dobar Dan*’ (good day), *Dobro Vece* (good evening), *Laku Noc* (good night).

Sarajevo’s changed spatiality is perhaps most noticeable at sport events. Sports are organized on an all Bosnian basis but Bosnian territories are now much more homogeneous and teams ethnically affiliated in the popular mind. Games between ethnonationally-based clubs have often times turned violent. Security presence is particularly heavy during matches against teams from Croatia and Serbia. Generally, stadiums in Sarajevo are filled with national flags of the Republic of Turkey and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Figure 4.3).



**Figure 4.3. Stadium atmosphere.**  
Photo taken at a soccer game in Sarajevo (photograph courtesy of Edvin Lozic)

Some cheers are religiously oriented and make reference to Allah. Now and then *Allahu ekber* is repeatedly shouted. Ethnic slurs are used and derogatory, explicit and vulgar comments are yelled. ‘Our *avlija* would not shine this bright if it wasn’t for you Alija’ is a line from a song that is frequently sung at basketball and soccer games in Sarajevo. ‘No one will ever hate you as much as I,’ ‘we can do without you,’ and ‘better to be a drunk than a Vlah’ (the phrase is a conversion of a song ‘better to be drunk than old’ by

Plavi Orkestar, a popular Yugo band that was founded in Sarajevo) are frequently shouted phrases during games against Serbian teams. In cheers Serbs and Croats are all equated to Chetniks and Ustashas.<sup>2</sup>

Aside from these physically evident changes, more worrying is the exclusion of ethnic-minorities from landscape as part of a nation-building project. In the article “Remaking Sarajevo: Bosnian nationalism after the Dayton Accord,” the cultural geographers Guy Robinson, Sten Engelstoft and Alma Pobric analyze several aspects of Bosnian nationalism used in the process of remaking the city’s spatiality. Specifically, they focus on the renaming of Sarajevo streets, symbolic significance of banknotes and new national symbols. According to the authors:

The evocation of a shared heritage through the use of historical figures and events depicted on stamps and banknotes and in the street names of Sarajevo is reinforcing the bonds between the Muslim population and its occupation of Sarajevo and territory in the newly-created state of Bosnia-Hercegovina.

(Robinson, Engelstoft and Pobric 2001, 974).

Bosnia’s nation-building efforts appear to involve a hybrid of democratic and ethnocratic features. On the one hand, symbols are invoked that speak on behalf of all its constituent peoples in an effort to consolidate the state’s legitimacy. On the other hand, the revived myths and symbols serve the purpose of new political agendas that are, more often than not, intentionally exclusivist. Thus, the competing nationalisms within the state are, in various ways, endorsing and institutionalizing ethnocratic spatial practices. In so doing, they heighten each ethnic group’s distinctiveness.

Bosnia’s political framework makes the standardization of an overarching national-identity almost impossible to realize. The state’s ethnic groups do not imagine or even want to imagine the state in its totality as ‘homeland’. Pride in citizenship of BiH continues to drop and stands at a meager 51.1% at the end of 2006 (Early Warnings System 2006). The idea that there is a shared and unitary civic national sense uniting all Bosnians does not exist. Bosnia’s constituent peoples are more tied to their immediate

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that this type of environment is not specific to Sarajevo. Throughout B-H the atmosphere at games is the same if not worse. For instance, in a match between Borac and Zeljo, Serb fans held posters of Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic. They also made an enormous banner which read ‘knife, wire, Srebrenica’ (noz zica Srebrenica).

experience of place in which, thanks to the state's political framework, they live out their distinctiveness on a daily basis.

A national identity, as argued by Michael Billig, is more than self-definition. It is a daily-lived form of life that occurs without our conscious awareness because of the banal reproduction of nationalism (Billig 1995, 69). In the Bosnian context *ethno-national* categorization and identification are 'embedded in habits of thought and life' (Billig 1995, 63). Routines of life constantly remind ethnic-groups of their distinctiveness in relation to an 'other'. This takes various forms and is so ingrained in daily routines that it goes undetected.

Languages, according to Michael Billig, are 'invented permanencies' (i.e., historical creations that feel as though they have always existed). They are products of contingent processes marked by struggle, power, and accidents. The demarcation and classification of languages and dialects are part of the politics of state-making (Billig 1995, 33). Moreover, a language is often conceptualized as 'the central pillar of ethnic identity' (Billig 1995, 14). Prior to the war, Bosnia's official language was *srpskohrvatski* or *hrvatskosrpski* (Serbo-Croatian). At present, the state recognizes three languages: Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian. While they are variants of the same language each one speaks in defense of one's identity. Conscious efforts are made to separate them further from a standard realization in order to promote ethno-national particularism. In so doing the communicative aspect of language is undermined for its symbolic function. Once the linguistic particularities are inhabited they become so familiar (that) they fail to be consciously registered as reminders.

All Bosnians encounter their own and (each) other's particularities on a daily basis and in an array of ways. For instance, an official government document will have the word *opština* (municipality) written in three ways: *opština*, *općina* and *општина* in the Cyrillic script. As evident, variations between the words are diminutive. Whichever spelling used a citizen is able to understand. Nevertheless, the two different spellings and alphabets emphasize differences and reinforce a way of thinking about 'self' and community. The use another example, the word for coffee in Bosnian is *kahva*, Serbian *kafa* and Croatian *kava*. The differences are trivial but arguably are becoming more common with each day. The three languages—reminding each ethnic group of their

identity, distinctiveness and presence of an other—are maintained and advanced through textbooks, newspapers, official documents, literature and even TV.

A TV station in Bijeljina advocated the use of a dialect (*ekavski*) that is specific to the Republic of Serbia.<sup>3</sup> Arguably, the station promoted the use of the dialect to affirm the Bosnian Serb's ties to Serbia proper and to further detach from a Bosnian identity. It is also the case that depending on the channel watched the subtitles differ. Most Serbian stations use the Cyrillic script for subtitles. Subtitles reflect spelling variations of the same words that now define the three different languages. Even weather maps have been politicized. Most maps clearly demarcate the two entities (constantly serving as reminders to some that aggression was awarded). Some stations only provide a forecast for a particular entity. Other stations would show the weather of one neighboring country but not another.

#### **4.4 Postwar 'common life'**

The previously ethnically diverse building of Alipasina 7 in central part of Sarajevo is now over ninety percent Bosniac. Out of a total sixteen apartments only eight are permanently occupied. The same prewar residents occupy just three of the eight apartments. On the one hand, these specifics are surprising considering the building's history and prime location. On the other hand, they coincide with the demographics of the city and help explain many postwar political, economic and social developments.

Despite the fact that Sarajevo has progressed the most following the war, the dire economic situation in B-H has led many residents to exploit an aspect of market capitalism (i.e., privatization). The privatization package implemented in 1998 enabled most residents to purchase an apartment for a reasonable price. Upon purchasing, some residents chose to sell or exchange their property for various reasons. Save, who had left for Belgrade right before the war, came back to reclaim his property, purchase it and sell it. His reasons for selling are unknown. However, a neighbor I interviewed speculated that he wished to be 'amongst his own kind'.

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<sup>3</sup> There are now Serbs within Bosnia who have adopted the distinctly Serbian dialect.

A few residents have sold their property because of the economic circumstances. The lack of an income forced some to sell, while others did so to lead a more comfortable life. For instance, Nada sold her spacious apartment in the building to purchase a smaller one further away from the city center. Through the transaction she made a decent profit. Some of the money she then used to cover accumulated debts. At least two apartments have been reclaimed and purchased by prior residents that now live abroad. Although they occasionally come to visit, they do not plan to return any time soon. Allegedly, the residents intend to return once they secure a pension in the country they reside. There are also residents, although few, who think of their apartment as a 'family home'. Emotionally attached they refuse to sell it despite the economic hardships. Sabina serves as a case in point.

The relations amongst the few residents that live in the building are nominal. Prewar residents know each other well. Despite familiarity, their interactions have been reduced to greetings in passing. Some are unacquainted with the new residents and most of the new residents are unfamiliar with anyone in the building. Unsurprisingly the majority agrees they would not turn (first, if at all) to a neighbor for help. Their reasons vary. According to Mrs. Pita 'intimate relations amongst neighbors no longer exist' (2006).

Their perspectives on the changed circumstances are tied to the state's dismal economic situation. According to Senada, "It is not surprising that the residents do not know each other considering how we now live. Everyone is preoccupied with their own problems" (Berberovic 2006). Another resident expressed similar concerns: "people have become more isolated; even families do not spend as much time as they once did" (Vucinic 2006). The residents' quality of life has considerably declined. Concerns regarding low wages, staggering unemployment, and job insecurity predominate. Bojan is not able to make ends meet with his federal salary. He therefore continues to live with his parents. Maida works for a private firm for a minimal amount of money. She receives payments in arrears, sometimes two or three months overdue. Even then she does not get the promised amount or the promised benefits (i.e., medical insurance).

With so many people in desperate need for jobs and no enforced regulations, employers are taking advantage of the situation. Employees who complain are quickly

replaced. Employees who decide to take legal action spend a lot of time and money for minimal if any remuneration. Since most are aware of their limited options they come to terms with the circumstances, adopting the belief that ‘some pay is better than no pay’.

Most residents also find the level of corruption worrisome. They believe that with money and connections anything can be done. Some pay to obtain jobs (generally those who lived outside of the state during the time of war). Others acquire positions through the political parties in power. Mrs. Pita believes that “it is impossible to prosper on behalf of your abilities. Work is not appreciated, connections are.” This is particularly discouraging to younger generations who cannot do much with their university degrees. One resident described young people as “handicapped.” Furthermore, refugees that have returned from abroad fill a number of good positions within international organizations. Mihneta sees this as a problem. In her opinion preference is given to the newcomers and not those who stayed and struggled to survive. She feels disappointed that the state is not doing more to help those that stayed get back on their feet.

All residents believe that those in power (whether politicians or entrepreneurs) benefit from the present situation. Subsequently they are not too optimistic about the future. Most think that nothing will change any time soon. In fact they believe that the situation is considerably getting worse. The state is receiving less money in aid and many international organizations have left or are about to leave. No new factories have been constructed or reopened. No new jobs have been created. Prices have risen and incomes have declined with the introduction of VAT in 2006. Mihneta claims that she is paid less now than two years ago. In the residents’ opinion, money goes into the hands of those who already have it—the politicians and criminals (often times the two are equated). According to Nada, “In Bosnia, it is only profitable to be a politician” (Dzubur 2006).

Residents also attribute a series of social problems including a rising crime rate to economic hardship. Homicides, shootings, burglaries, theft and even bank robberies, they believe, have become more common. Unlike rest of the residents, Mihneta claims she does not feel safe even in the building. Two years ago her apartment was broken into. After she caught a glimpse of her front door wide open, she screamed. None of the residents reacted. No one came out to ask whether she was alright. The burglars took

everything of value including her inherited jewelry. She attempted to report the incident to the police and was informed that they will get back to her. They never called her back.

Hilmija's car was broken into more than once. It has been repeatedly vandalized. Parts of the car have been taken as well as his radio. He replaced his window and tires several times. Another resident witnessed a stabbing right in front of the building in the late afternoon. Four males had attacked a young man walking with his girlfriend. No one did anything to stop them. The attackers got back into their car and took off.

Some residents believe that the socio-economic situation coupled with the accessibility and cost of drugs has lured many teens and young adults. Drug abuse and dependency (including alcohol) are perceived as the underlying causes of many of the crimes. In some residents' eyes the discouraged teens have nothing better to do but cause trouble. However, one resident blames the increased crime rates on primitivism (*primitivizam*) and thievery (*lopovluk*) and another on post-traumatic stress.

#### **4.5 “New people, new atmosphere”: how building residents conceptualize Sarajevo's changed spatiality**

There is a general consensus amongst the interviewed that ‘Sarajevo has changed’ and that ‘it will never be what it once was’. The statement itself (‘Sarajevo has changed’) is quite expected and understandable, but also open to interpretation. When speaking of a ‘changed’ Sarajevo, the interviewees had a particular aspect in mind: the city's urban culture. Interestingly, in this regard the postwar economic situation does not take primacy. Instead, the focus is on the city's changed demographics, particularly the exodus of Sarajevans and influx of villagers. Although there does not appear to be an ethnic component underlying the urban/rural divide, it is widely recognized that Sarajevo was much richer because of its ethnic plurality. Even something as banal as a traditional food dish contributed to a conceptualization of the city's spatiality as ‘richer’. Particularities did exist but they complimented one another. The unwritten rules that governed urban life were embodied by all urbanites whether Serb, Croat, Bosniac, or Jew. Prior to the war, newcomers adopted the urban culture and assimilated into urban mores and what Billig terms embodied habits of practice.

Sarajevo's present spatiality is according to one resident characterized by "new people," which has given way to a "new atmosphere" (Berberovic 2006). All interviewees expressed a great deal of dissatisfaction with the 'new atmosphere'. They claim that primitivism in Sarajevo is pronounced. The uncultured and uneducated have introduced and imposed their ways (culture) on the long-term residents—on Sarajevans. Urbanites feel threatened for they see themselves as the minority. The unwritten rules that once governed urban-culture are on the verge of extinction. Newcomers, at least some, are accused of showing no courtesy in the trams or buses; defecating in open spaces; poor hygiene; incorrect enunciation and informal use of language; initiating turbo folk etc. Consequently, the two perceived cultures interact and clash on a daily basis.

Whereas in the past newcomers assimilated or acculturated to the ways of the urban-educated, the trend has reversed. Now there are more newcomers than old inhabitants. Although they understand and perceive the trend as 'natural', most are having a hard time adjusting to it. Urbanites face three options: assimilation, acculturation or isolation. Out of the three it appears that the majority of the interviewed are disinterested in establishing relations with the newcomers. They are, in part, forced to interact and accept them, but they predominantly socialize with long time friends (who generally are of various ethnicities). Interestingly, two of the residents who are not from Sarajevo shared the same feelings. The sixth floor resident, however, perceived the circumstances somewhat different. She believes that in 50 years or so the newcomers will adopt the urban ways. She also claims she is more accepting of the newcomers because of her personal experiences in Germany where she felt like a second class citizen.

Postwar Sarajevo inaugurated great uncertainties for the residents of Alipasina 7. While those that had survived and fled during the war were able to re-acquire their apartments and dispose of them as economic assets, those longterm residents that have remained in the building are now a minority within a dysfunctional privatized and more atomistic place that is not the home it once was. Further, many feel alienated from the city of their birth and distinguish themselves strongly from the rural primitivism they see as one of the distinguishing characteristics of contemporary Sarajevo.

## Chapter 5:

### Conclusion: Is Sarajevo a Muslim City?

Sarajevo's multiethnic spatiality, in the eyes of some, has not survived. In 2002 the Bosnian Serb writer and Sarajevan returnee Neven Andjelic wrote an essay in the Bosnian weekly magazine entitled 'Sarajevo is a Muslim city!' Andjelic's thesis was straightforward. The Sarajevo he had returned to was not the Sarajevo he grew up within and loved as a young man before he fled the warfare in 1993 for Britain. Sarajevo was now a predominately Muslim city demographically and also in its everyday cultural life.

Andjelic begins his essay by describing an 'abnormal and illogical,' but in his opinion, far too common event that occurred in the 'largest Bosniac city.' On the night of August 20<sup>th</sup> three teenage boys from families that typified the 'cosmopolitan spirit' participated in the desecration of multiple Christian cemeteries. Fortunately, the three drunken teenagers were caught and confessed to the crime. But to Andjelic their crime speaks about Sarajevo's changed spatiality. He believes the problem is not with the teenagers but with Sarajevo. The teenagers did only what nationalist leaders advocate and common people accept. "What is Sarajevo's problem, Sarajevo is a Muslim city!" (Andjelic 2002).

Andjelic states, "insofar as in one city at least three-fourths of residents belong to one nation; almost all observe Muslim religious holidays; newborn children are almost exclusively given traditionally Muslim names; the most popular daily, *Avaz*, overwhelmingly mention 'ascended to *Ahiret*' in their obituary pages, while only occasionally a name can be seen that reflects a Christian tradition in *Oslobodenje*; the rare few are buried as atheists; it is impossible to have a pizza with its original ingredients (which includes pork sausage); local soccer teams consist of players whose last names reveal the same religious orientation; then it is obvious that that city is not multiconfessional. Moreover, it is a Muslim city" (Andjelic 2002). In his opinion, such facts are not the problem even though he remembers a time when circumstances were different. The problem is unwillingness to recognize and accept Sarajevo's changed spatiality characterized by its 'Muslim-ness.'

Andjelic's essay prompted many to respond. Their posts present a range of arguments and conceptualizations of Sarajevo's spatiality. Most respondents, including Serbs and Jews, found his thesis superficial and insulting. They thought it was unreasonable of him to judge the Sarajevo he 'abandoned' and no longer lived in. According to one respondent, "We are idiots for having fought and defended this city from the aggressors and child-murderers. Those who left are 'cultured' and 'intelligent,' real internationalists, that have now returned to teach us about the multiculturalism that we wanted and fought to preserve. Or to teach us that it never existed and will never exist" (Novi 2007). Another respondent argued that Sarajevans do not define themselves by their ethno-national background but by their cosmopolitanism. If the city, as its known, disappears then we all become refugees and if its culture dies we all become orphans (Vladan 2007).

On many Sarajevans' minds are more pressing issues than the number of mosques or availability of pork products. In fact, they agree that money should be spent on the construction of new factories. While now hundreds of thousands of Bosnians are living in abject poverty, a few hundred are living the lives they never dreamed of having. They are the powerful and well connected that profit from the present situation. They are the ones that foster the idea that it is no longer possible for Serbs, Croats and Bosniacs to live together.

None of the respondents denied the fact that circumstances have changed or that Bosniacs constitute the majority group within the city. However, they found the facts underpinning Andjelic's argument (Sarajevo is a Muslim city) absurd. Many were wondering whether they should deny their identity (not attend mosques, given their children non Muslim names, eat pork) just to foster his conception of multiethnicity.

Nevertheless, there were also individuals who completely agreed with Andjelic's thesis. Some Serbs felt unwelcome in the city and therefore abandoned it. They expressed no desire to return. One woman claimed she feared to kiss her friend in public three times because she thought it would trigger a reaction. Another Sarajevan resident explained that Bosniacs made him feel less human because his ethno-religious background was the same as the aggressors. He felt like he needed to be unrightfully apologetic for the events they carried out.

Andjelic's observations pertaining to the practices that now characterize the daily life of the city's inhabitants are to a great extent valid. However, they are not sufficient to conclude that Sarajevo is a mono-ethnic, exclusively Muslim city. While he briefly recognizes the city's tragic fate, he does not give the fact sufficient weight. The city endured a forty-three month siege that specifically sought to destroy its inhabitant's morale and the possibility of heterogeneity. In Sarajevo alone 11,000 people were killed including 1,601 children. Over 50,000 of residents were injured during the war. Hundreds of thousands emigrated to and from Sarajevo. Just as in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the endangered and driven out sought and found refuge within the city (except this time the migrants were not Sephardic Jews but Bosnian Muslims). As all prior migrants the newcomers brought their own beliefs, habits, traditions and newfound frustrations with them. They brought with them the religiosity that was always more pronounced in rural areas than urban centers. Expectedly, loss and traumatic experiences made also many urbanites more religious. Whereas in Tito's Yugoslavia religiosity was not endorsed, nowadays residents are freer to express their convictions.

Sarajevo is still in the process of recovering as its citizens are adjusting to the dramatic, abrupt and extensive changes. They now live in a territorially, demographically, politically, economically and socially changed city and state. The rapid transitions have strained relations between citizens irrespective of ethnonational backgrounds. The socialist common life characterized by neighborliness and neighborly relations has been replaced by a capitalist common life. Common life has become a common struggle to adjust and find a place in the new social order.

The city's spatiality does reflect the beliefs and practices of the majority group but it does not exclude the expressions of its remaining inhabitants. Andjelic's own argument reveals this. As a Bosnian Serb he is able to express his views in one of the leading weekly news magazines, *Dani*. Aside from *Dani*, the newspaper *Oslobodenje* and *Slobodna Bosna* also have a multiethnic staff, are critical of all nationalist parties and speak on behalf of a multiethnic Bosnia. The fact that some are buried as atheists and that obituary notices do not always state 'ascended to *Ahoret*,' suggest that choices exist. Churches have not been turned into parking lots or commercial centers and Catholic schools have been opened. Legally, everyone has the right to property, education and

freedom of thought, religion and expression. Citizens have the right to peacefully assemble (as often times Jehovah's Witnesses do). All three ethnic groups' religious holidays are observed (Eid, Christmas, Orthodox Christmas, Orthodox New Year, Catholic Easter, Orthodox Easter etc.). Pork products are available in markets and grocery stores. However, in a demographically Muslim city such products are not particularly popular and since they do not generate profit tend not to be served. Also, while in the time of Andjelic's writing local teams may have been homogenous, today that is not the case. Sarajevan teams have Serb, Croat and other players. The soccer club 'Sarajevo' has even a Brazilian player. The coach of the basketball team 'Bosna' is a Serb and the team itself is very mixed.

Institutions such as the Croat National Council, Congress of Bosniac Intellectuals and Serb Civil Council represent the major ethnic groups. Moreover, the three have worked together to promote returns to the city (Donia 2006, 349). The Cantonal Ministry for Work, Social Politics, Internally Displaced and Refugees has registered the return of over 23,000 Serb, 12,000 Bosniac, 3,000 Croat and 1,000 other families since 1996. The United Nations High Commissions for Refugees has registered the return of 63,063 non-Bosniacs to the city from 1998 to 2005. Despite cases of obstruction many were able to return, reclaim and, if desired, sell their property. Minority ethnic groups are not concentrated or confined to certain neighborhoods or parts of the city. Apartment buildings, stadiums, cinemas, cafes, and schools continue to be mixed, though not to the same extent as before the war. No ethnic group has been wholly excluded from any sphere of society. Minorities are represented in administrative offices, schools, universities, health institutions, police force etc.

Finally, Sarajevo's new spatiality needs to be understood in its own right. Many have slipped into assessing it solely by demographics and placing it in relation to the prewar order. Oftentimes such assessments tend to disregard the role of the political economy in sustaining a particular spatiality. Just because Sarajevo's realities (its cultural life) do not reflect the prewar beliefs, assumptions, and practices, does not mean the city is no longer a multiethnic spatiality. As noted by Donia:

Our historical survey shows that the city's diversity has taken different forms and evolved considerably over the course of its historical development. Diversity has

never been unidimensional, and it should never be reduced to an exercise in demographic percentages... More important has been the city's common life, openness, response to cultural influences, and receptivity to outsiders. Although at no time have those values completely triumphed, they have distinctively characterized the city over its five centuries of existence (Donia 2006, 356).

Is Sarajevo as a city inevitably one that fosters multiethnic spatiality? Donia seems to suggest this and Sarajevo's experience during Bosnia's abrupt transitions over the last decade and a half confirms that the possibility of heterogeneity has not and cannot be destroyed. Sarajevo's spaces are still open to all.

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## List of Interviews

Pre and postwar Alipasina 7 residents:

- Multiple interviews with Amra and Sanja Kurtagic. Sarajevo. July 2006.
- Multiple interviews with Maida Softic. Sarajevo. July 2006.
- Author interview with Amela Festic. Sarajevo. 18 July 2006.
- Author interview with Nada Dzubur. Sarajevo. 20 July 2006.
- Author interview with Hilmija and Biljana Vucinic. Sarajevo. 25 July 2006.
- Author interview with Suad, Mediha, Vedran and Bojan Pita. Sarajevo. 26 July 2006.
- Author interview with Senada Berberovic. Sarajevo. 27 July 2006.
- Author interview with Mihneta and Safet Gojak. Sarajevo. 3 August 2006.
- Author interview with Ira Eric. Washington D.C.. September 2006.

Additional interviews

- Interview with representative from *Vrhbosanska Nadbiskupija*. Sarajevo. March 2007. (see also <http://www.bkbi.org/kta/JUSTICE%20AND%20PEACE/KAZALO.htm>)

Interview with representative from *Srpska Pravoslavna Crkva Mitropolija Dabrobosanska*. Sarajevo. March 2007. (see also <http://www.mitropolijadabrobosanska.org/>)

Interview with representative from *Federalni zavod za statistiku*. Sarajevo. December 2006.

Interview with representative from *Kantinalno Ministarstvo za Rad, Socialnu Politiku, Raseljena Lica i Izbjeglice*. Sarajevo. March 2007.

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